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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of 'Concepts' in John Pocock's Methodology

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Abstract

The study of 'concepts' is one of the problematic issues in the methodology of the history of political thought. The different dimensions of the problem cannot be understood without following the discussions of the 'Cambridge School', of which John Pocock is recognised as one of the main figures, and its debates with approaches such as the 'history of concepts'. But, given that in Pocock's theory, 'language(s)' and linguistic structures such as 'discourse' and 'paradigm' are more important, the role of 'concepts' in his methodology has not been properly investigated. Melvin Richter even once declared that Pocock's approach lacks attention to the history of concepts. This article tries to demonstrate that not only does Pocock not neglect concepts theoretically, and in his research he investigates practically the history of concepts wherever needed, but also, the concepts in his methodology become more effective than he initially assumes.

Keywords: contextualism; migration of concepts; discourse; paradigm; diachronic

Introduction

In the aftermath of positivism's decline, the consequences of the linguistic turn and the development of the historical attitude were revealed in methodological approaches such as 'Hermeneutics', 'Genealogy', 'History of Concepts' and 'Cambridge School'. The new issues that arose from those transformations were quickly reflected in fields such as intellectual history and political thought, and continue to be the source of significant questions for researchers. One of the controversial issues in such a sphere has been the capacities and limitations of the study of 'concepts' in the methodology of historical studies in general and the history of political thoughts in particular. In this regard, we can see three basic and interconnected questions, all related to language and history. First, whether the concepts can be considered the main and separate units of research or should they be examined as a part of language, in connection with linguistic and socio-political contexts. Second, how concepts can play a role in systemic approaches that prioritise the structures of language. The third question is whether the concepts should be examined only synchronically or diachronic studies that seek the stability and transformations of concepts in short and long periods are necessary.

As it is well known, the 'history of concepts' – especially as articulated by Reinhart Koselleck – in which concepts are considered the main and separable units in historical research, is a pioneer in clarifying the capacities of the study of the role of socio-political concepts in historiography. In contrast, scholars such as Quentin Skinner and John Pocock,

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the major thinkers of the Cambridge School, have tried to demonstrate the conditions and limitations of the study of concepts in the methodology of political history.

Some scholars have rightly pointed out that Pocock, whom we sadly lost recently, is recognised today as one of the most prominent and influential contemporary figures in the community of historians of political thought (Nederman, 2024). Knowing Pocock's attitude and its differences with thinkers like Skinner and Koselleck can have a decisive impact on the work of political historians and theorists who need a deeper knowledge of the complexities of the role of concepts in socio-political thought. But, compared to Skinner, research about the components of Pocock's methodological approach, especially the place of 'concepts' in his theory, has been insufficient.

The inadequacy of the investigations into the subtleties of Pocock's theory can be seen even in the explanation of his work by a great scholar like Melvin Richter. In the closing years of the twentieth century, when Richter (1995, 126, 138) sought to introduce the achievements of German thinkers to the English-speaking world and simultaneously encouraged German scholars to pay more attention to Pocock's achievements in methodology, he attributed to Pocock a 'lack of attention to the history of concepts' which he believed it was a similarity between Pocock and Skinner. If we assume this statement to be correct, Pocock must have thoroughly ignored an important part of contemporary historical-political research or deemed it irrelevant. But that doesn't seem to be the case. Therefore, we need to examine that problematic statement by understanding the place of historical study of 'concepts' in Pocock's methodology. This is the aim of the article and two assumptions form the starting point of my research: First, not only theoretically Pocock is not indifferent to concepts, and many instructive points can be found in his remarks about the study of 'concepts' in the history of political thought, but we also find significant attention to the history of concepts in his actual research. It is true that Pocock's methodological focus is on 'political language(s)', 'linguistic context', and structural terms such as 'paradigm' and 'discourse'. But this does not mean a 'lack of attention' to the role of concepts in language and discourse. Second, resulting from some features of Pocock's methodological theory, the effectiveness of concepts goes beyond what he initially assumed. Because when Pocock perceives concepts not as entities separate from the context but as components of its construction, and due to what he calls the 'migration of concepts', the role of concepts extends beyond simply being elements within a discourse.

The "concepts" in the article's title do not refer to specific concepts but rather to concepts in general, and "concept", equivalent to "conceptus" and "Begriff", cannot be reduced to a simple "word" due to its polysemic and interpretable nature. Also, the historicity and language-dependency of "concept" distinguish it from "idea" in the history of ideas, which was assumed ahistorical. Terms such as "context" and "paradigm" are not defined in the introduction, since they will be examined from Pocock’s viewpoint in the subsequent sections. The article's theoretical framework is based on several negative and positive assumptions. The negative assumptions include the rejection of (1) the scientific approach to historical research; (2) those linguistic structuralist approaches that, claiming to be scientific, consider synchronic research to be sufficient; (3) the traditional approaches of the history of thoughts which by lining up the names of thinkers in a chronological manner, followed the same problems in their texts or connected ideas in a chain throughout history, without paying attention to the differences of the historical contexts.[1] The positive aspect of the theoretical framework includes these assumptions: (1)

[1] In criticising such approaches, including Lovejoy's 'History of Ideas', Skinner (2006, 21) notes that the main danger is 'anachronism'.

Regardless of whether we examine long or short periods, the diachronic study is an essential part of the historiography of thoughts; (2) either as the main unit (in Koselleck's 'Begriffsgeschichte') or as a part of larger units in the research programme (in the Cambridge School and historical semantics), it is not possible to properly recognise historical transformations without understanding the meanings, applications, functions, and implications of concepts; (3) an accurate understanding of the place of concepts in historical research requires scrutinising the methodological ideas of thinkers of different schools and their mutual criticisms.

Considering the latter assumption, I do not intend to prove a privilege for Pocock's approach over other approaches, nor to criticise his approach, but rather contribute to clarifying the dimensions and complexities of the role of concepts in the historiography of thoughts by shedding new light on Pocock's methodology. Hence, the appropriate research method to achieve the article's objectives is analytical-comparative. In this way, while focusing on analysing Pocock's works and relevant scholarly literature, I will also draw some comparisons between his approach and that of Skinner, who belongs to the same school, and with Koselleck, the main figure of an impressive rival approach.

To make it clear in what theoretical context Pocock initiated theorising, I will briefly draw the outlines of the Cambridge School, of which Pocock (2004, 538; 2009, viii) considers himself a member, and focus on the features that, from my point of view, have had the most relevance to his methodology.

Pocock as a Member of the Cambridge School, But Not Without Special Ideas

There are various responses to this question: in contrast with what approaches or currents the methodological framework of thinkers such as Quentin Skinner, John Pocock, and John Dunn was recognised as a 'school'? From Samuel Moyn's (2023, 54) point of view, as much as it was assumed that the Cambridge school was formed based on the 'insistence on historical context against the commitment to sempiternity of concepts, problems and unit-ideas' in the thought of Arthur Lovejoy and Leo Strauss, it was also an 'antagonist' of the approaches of Karl Marx and historians such as Lewis Namier. Terence Ball (2001, 128) has also mentioned the confrontation of 'Straussians, the 'epic theorists' of the Berkeley School and assorted postmodernists' with the Cambridge School. According to John Gunnell (2011, 15), the founders of the Cambridge School rejected what they characterised as 'philosophical and ideological renditions of past political thought, such as that pursued by Strauss and Wolin'; because they claimed that 'an authentic historical recovery of the meaning of texts' can only be achieved by a 'careful reconstruction of their political context'. But according to a different interpretation, when postmodern approaches such as poststructuralism and deconstruction were popular, the Cambridge school was considered a humanistic challenge to them due to its emphasis on 'human agency' and recovery of the purpose and programme of the authors of the texts (Vanheste, 2007, 11).

Members of the Cambridge School enhance the significance of the linguistic and historical context so much that many scholars call them 'contextualists'. (Bevir, 1992, 276; Blau, 2017: 11; Boucher, 1985, 217; Hampsher-Monk, 2001, 168; Shapiro, 1982, 572). However, it should be noted that they reject 'orthodox' textualism and contextualism. Because they believe that orthodox views seek to understand all utterances only based on the duality of text and context, while a text should be seen as the authors' 'linguistic actions' results. According to them, in examining the ideas of previous thinkers, it should not be neglected that their purpose was to influence the problems arising from the socio-political context of their time. Thus, the theoretical pivot of the Cambridge school is made from the merging of linguistic contextualism, philosophy of action, and historical attitude. Although

the emergence of a 'school' is always the result of the influence of many thinkers and intellectual currents, the ideas of three thinkers have been more effective in joining together the constitutive elements of the mentioned theoretical pivot of the Cambridge School: Robin Collingwood, Peter Laslett, and John Austin.

Skinner (1988, 103, 234) has declared that Collingwood, as the 'leading anti-positivist philosopher' in England, had a 'major intellectual influence' on him, and he, as an intellectual historian, was indebted to Collingwood for his 'fundamental assumptions'. Also, Pocock (2009, 27) has pointed to Collingwood's impact on his understanding of history and the history of thought, and John Dunn (1996, 22) has referred to Collingwood in his remark about the difference between the reading of classical texts of the history of political theory and the method of scientific proof in the work of physicists. For the sake of brevity, I will categorise the three principles of Collingwood's philosophy that have had a major impact on the Cambridge school: (1) Denying the same questions and 'eternal' problems throughout history. According to Collingwood (1939, 60), the belief in the same questions and eternal problems is a 'vulgar error, consequent on a kind of historical myopia' which leads to the neglect of 'profound differences'; (2) considering knowledge as 'the activity of knowing' based on the logic of question and answer. Collingwood (1939, 30) has stated that by reading Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* and Descartes' *Discours de la méthode*, he came to the 'principle' that knowledge does not consist only of propositions, statements, judgements (assertive acts of thought), 'but of these together with the questions they are meant to answer', because 'a logic in which the answers are attended to and the questions neglected is a false logic'; (3) integration of philosophy of history with philosophy of action and language. To the question of 'what kind of things does history find out?', Collingwood (1956, 9) answered: '*res gestae*: actions of human beings that have been done in the past'; and his response to 'How does history proceed?' was that 'by the interpretation of evidence'. Since human action is intentional and meaningful, the first answer combines the philosophy of history and the philosophy of action, and the second incorporates the linguistic element into that combination.

Peter Laslett, who, according to Pocock (2004, 535), was considered the 'protagonist' of the Cambridge School's methodology, with his research on John Locke and showing the practical efficiency of investigation in context, greatly influenced the establishment of 'contextualism' in methodology. Laslette's (1949, 1) methodological concern is quite clear in his introduction to Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*, where he claims that 'none, or almost none, of the thinkers or historians who have examined Filmerism... have known exactly who Sir Robert Filmer was, when he lived, what he did and what he wrote'. While, as Laslett articulates, placing Filmer in his historical context makes it easier to understand why he wrote as he did. It is evident that this combination of historical contextualism with an inclination to recover the 'author's intention' in Laslett's methodology has profoundly affected the Cambridge School, especially Skinner's ideas. However, also Pocock (2019a, 99) acknowledges that his shift from Butterfield's 'historisation' of political thought to its 'contextualisation' is indebted to Laslett.

The influence of John Austin on the Cambridge School, as Pocock (2009, 130) has pointed out, took place 'in a philosophical context dominated by Austin, Wittgenstein, and those who have responded to them'.[2] Austin's 'speech act' theory simply opened its way in the minds of thinkers who, following Collingwood, realised the importance of action in history and its relation to language. In addition to the distinction between the 'locutionary act' and the 'illocutionary act', one of the pillars of Austin's theory, his view on the

[2] In describing the history of thought in Britain at the time of the rise of the Cambridge School, Brian Young (2006, 41) declared that one might call it the product of 'the Wittgensteinian moment in English thought'.

'conventional' nature of the conditions of action and utterance was also notably influential. The joint impact of Collingwood's and Austin's ideas on the Cambridge School is evident in this description of Terence Ball:

> Skinner and his fellow Cambridge historians view works of political theory as forms of political action, grasping the point or meaning of which requires that one recover the intentions of the actor/author and the linguistic resources and conventions available to him or her. (Ball, 2007, 353)

As Pocock (2004, 538) declares, the thread connecting his work with other members of the Cambridge School is 'insisting that a certain branch of the study of politics [political history] be perceived as a history of activity'. He sees his own writings on methodology as attempts 'to find linguistic means of presenting an act of political theorising as an act performed in history'. Nevertheless, despite the mentioned intra-school links, Pocock has distinguishable views on issues such as the construction of context, the value of recovering the author's intention, and the range of historical periods under research.

From Pocock's point of view, language structures such as 'discourses' and 'paradigms' are in a more decisive position than the 'author's intention'. David Boucher (1985, 151), in a review of Pocock's arguments, has stated that for him 'the languages are the primary focus of attention' and 'individual authors are of importance because they use and modify them'; this is because for Pocock, 'a language of discourse is never the intentional or unintentional creation of any particular thinker', and 'the language is prior to the speaker'. However, Pocock's position is not that all intentions and actions at any time and situation should be assumed to be under the complete domination of structures. He does not ignore that linguistic transformations and conceptual innovations in normal conditions differ from those in critical situations during transitions and revolutions. Given the remarks of Terence Ball and Pocock (1988, 1) regarding situations such as the English Civil War, the Glorious Revolution, and the French Revolution, it seems there is no need for further explanation: 'At such times, conceptual innovations are brought about by action, practice, and intention, rather than by unintended structural change occurring in the historical context'.

Mark Bevir (2004, 35) has categorised Pocock into contextualists who see the role of linguistic structures as determining. In this sense, language functions paradigmatically predetermine what and how the writer should write. It is the language that gives the writer 'intention' by providing the tools for expression. Language determines not only the form but also the content of what we want to utter. Bevir acknowledges that Pocock insists that no single language can completely fix the author's intentions. However, according to Bevir's interpretation, Pocock ascribes it to the multiple languages in the context, 'not to the ability of authors to use language creatively to convey their particular ideas'. Bevir's interpretation is somewhat controversial. Because, although Pocock asserts that the units we trace are paradigms, he explicitly states, not entirely consistent with Bevir's interpretation, that 'if an author was what we call "creative", "seminal", or "revolutionary", we can ascribe to him a definite effect (and perhaps intention also) of changing the paradigm structure by some force which his utterances exerted' (Pocock, 1989, 25). Not only does Pocock recognise the possibility of partial 'modification' and 'transformation' in the existing paradigms because of the author's 'utterances', but he also accepts the possibility of changing the 'structure' of paradigms by the 'force' of those utterances. Therefore, when we point to the importance that Pocock gives to linguistic structures such as paradigms, we must keep in mind that at the same time, he insists that a political community is not a 'community of enquiry' and the function of paradigms in the political

field is different from the structure of scientific revolutions (Pocock, 1989, X).[3] In the following, as we examine the role of concepts in Pocock's methodology, what was mentioned about his positions will become clearer.

Research Unit: Language and Discourse, What Place for Concepts?

Unlike Skinner, for whom the recovery of the 'author's intention' is at the center of research, Pocock's (1996a, 51) main concern is a 'discourse or language' as 'a complex and living entity, a system, or even an organism'. Therefore, our primary task here is to explore the role that concepts may have in such a systemic approach.

As mentioned, the difference between Pocock's and Skinner's views on the main unit of research is obvious. But, Koselleck's idea might even seem utterly opposed to Pocock's. Koselleck (1994, 7; 2006, 86) was convinced that although theoretically it is possible to agree with contextualists, in the practice of research as soon as you move from the analysis of a single concept to the examination of the paragraph in which that concept is used there will be no boundaries and whole text and, then, the scientific language and everyday language of that period should also be investigated. Exactly in the opposite way, according to Pocock (2002, 9), the priority is to recognise 'language(s)' and 'discourse', and the historian should pursue 'his first goal by reading extensively in the literature of the time and by sensitising himself to the presence of diverse idioms'. From his point of view,

> It is a large part of our historian's practice to learn to read and recognise the diverse idioms of political discourse as they were available in the culture and at the time he is studying: to identify them as they appear in the linguistic texture of any one text, and to know what they would ordinarily have enabled that text's author to propound or 'say'. (Pocock, 2002, 9)

The speech act of the text's author and the concepts employed are taken into consideration according to the linguistic and discursive context in which the author has acted. But Pocock (1964, 193) once pointed out that some interpreters fail to note that 'to deny that concepts may be isolated and shown to play a determining role in politics is not to deny that they play any role whatever'. For example, the historian of Bodin's or Burke's thoughts deals with research in the 'relatively stable concepts which are regularly employed in the political thought of relatively stable societies'. However, since such a historian has to investigate the process of abstracting concepts from the tradition, he cannot choose the concepts arbitrarily and remains conditioned to the 'context' and society's linguistic tradition.

As noted in the introduction, to understand the role of concepts in Pocock's methodology, we need to investigate his actual research in addition to his theoretical details. An instance of conceptual assessments can be found in his critical commentary on *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, written at the request of Skinner and Nicholas Phillipson. Pocock (1993, 393) has demonstrated that to grasp how the 'concept of revolution' was perceived in seventeenth-century British thought, we need to examine the political conditions of the early modern era, for example, at the time of James Harrington. We should understand 'the responses of printed discourse' to the situation in which the 'anomic conditions' and the 'central trauma of English history' were being experienced, and, in Harrington's phrase, the 'people was a living thing in pain and misery'. This

[3] Pocock (1990, 21) even once noted that when we speak of 'languages' it may not be appropriate to use 'paradigm'. Melvin Richter (1995, 129) concluded from Pocock's statements that he regretted the use of the term 'paradigm' but not to the extent of abandoning it.

requires knowing the perception of the authors of that time about the 'collapsed' government and the circumstances that led to it. Thus, the historical investigation of the 'concept of revolution' forms a part of Pocock's research programme, but, as he notes, 'it does not follow that the search for this concept should dominate our enquiry'. He takes a further step and acknowledges the impact of 'vertical components' of concepts on discourses. As he put it in *Concepts and Discourses*:

> It is true that the history of discourse comes equipped with an already existing vertical component that formed by the changes and tensions set up by the actions, perceptions, and responses of the human agents acting within and upon the several languages. But it is also true that 'historians of discourse,' alert though they must constantly be for alterations of usage, assumption, nuance, and so on, are not systematically addicted to dissolving the languages they study into the 'concepts'... of which these languages are compounded or to tracing the history of change in each of these severally. (Pocock, 1996a, 50)

Pocock even considers the role of concepts in language and socio-political life as 'constitutive' and acknowledges the dependence of discourses on concepts. In another writing, which is the joint work of him and Trans Ball, we read that 'inasmuch as the concepts that constitute political life and language lose old meanings even as they acquire new ones, political discourse appears, in retrospect, to have been—and even now to remain—in a state of perpetual flux' (Ball & Pocock, 1988, 1).

From the above explanations, it can be inferred that Pocock not only does not neglect the history of concepts but even considers its impact on current political discourses and life profound. However, he maintains that the historical study of concepts separately might not be sufficient and should be included in a broader research programme on the languages and discourses of a historical period. In this sense, despite the differences between Pocock's approach and the 'history of concepts', they can be employed together in research programmes. Koselleck (1996, 65) declared too that he did not see any incompatibility or opposition between the 'history of concepts' and the 'history of discourse'; they are inevitably dependent on each other because, on the one hand, 'a discourse requires basic concepts in order to express what it is talking about' and, on the other hand, 'analysis of concepts requires command of both linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts, including those provided by discourses'.

'Concepts' and Open-multidimensional Context in Pocock's Approach

Pocock (2009, 67) defines a 'context' as a structure of relationships in which actors act; it gives meaning to actions, and 'half-metaphorically' can be called a 'space' that determines the conditions and rules of actions. I found 'open-multidimensional' appropriate to describe Pocock's 'context' for two reasons.[4] First, from his perspective, the context is not temporally and linguistically close, limited, and unidimensional, but rather includes a linguistical multiplicity and different temporalities. Before Pocock, in his formulation of the methodology of investigation in the historical context of a text, Laslett avoided single-time attitudes and considered the context to consist of three moments of composition, publication, and reception. While confirming that formulation, Pocock (2004, 536) finds it necessary to add 'a multiplicity of languages' to it. Because, as he perceives, the 'canonically accepted language' of each branch of human knowledge in a given context is only one of the enormous languages. Moreover, when he speaks of 'languages' he does not

[4] Pocock (2011, 1) once used the phrase 'plurality of contexts'.

mean closed and objectified systems, but 'sub-languages: idioms, rhetorics, ways of talking about politics, distinguishable language games of which each may have its own vocabulary, rules, preconditions and implications, tone and style' (Pocock, 1990, 21).

Second, according to Pocock, the context itself has a conceptual aspect. Therefore, a dialectical relation between concepts and contexts might be assumed. By distinguishing a 'conceptual world' and a 'social world' and connecting them to 'human action' he even presents a shifting concept of context. In this view, human beings communicate through language systems and create their own conceptual and social world, each of which can serve as 'context' for the other. There is a multifaceted and complex relationship between shifting contexts, language, human action, and history in which language systems do not determine but *help* humans practice their constitutive actions. In Pocock's description of the complexity of context, we do not see rigid structuralism:

> Men think by communicating language systems; these systems help constitute both their conceptual worlds and the authority-structures, or social worlds, related to these; the conceptual and social worlds may each be seen as a context to the other, so that the picture gains in concreteness. The individual's thinking may now be viewed as a social event, an act of communication and of response within a paradigm-system, and as a historical event, a moment in a process of transformation of that system and of the interacting worlds which both system and act help to constitute and are constituted by. (Pocock, 1989, 15)

Another factor for the multidimensionality of the context in Pocock's theory is the influence of 'tradition', that is, what 'we inherit from a social past' (Pocock, 1964, 185). This characteristic separates his theory from theories that include the idea of historical discontinuity. As David Boucher (1985, 155) explains, for Pocock a thinker is a social being and the concepts he uses are part of a 'shared inheritance' that 'variously named as traditions, universes of discourse, languages of legitimation, vocabularies, and paradigms, which must provide the context in which individual thinkers perform their social actions'. The diachronic aspect of 'tradition' and 'heritage' makes the structure of the context, as well as our investigation into it, not limited to a synchronic dimension.

It is not accidental that in his commentary on Pocock, John Toews addresses the diachronic aspect of tradition exactly where he explains the multidimensionality of 'discourse' as one of the main constructive elements of the context in Pocock's theory. By examining what Pocock calls 'the history of political discourses', Toews concludes that 'discourse' has three 'dimensions' from his point of view. First, the 'structural' dimension – which Pocock calls 'languages' includes the 'relatively stable conventions of language, usages, idioms, rhetorics, or vocabularies' – and rules that define what is assumed to be reality and the communicative world. Second, 'speech acts' that have communicative and creative characteristics and should not be considered only as 'events in language', but 'actions on language' to modify and transform it. This dimension arises from the continuous interaction between speech and language, as well as between action and structure. Third, the experiential dimension or the link between experience and language, through which the historicity of "discourse" can be understood. The historicity and diachronic aspect of "discourse" is revealed since 'the past, as the inherited inventory of constituted patterns of meaning, weighs on the present of the linguistic actor'. Also, any impact that individual speech acts may have on linguistic heritage, including innovations and transformations, must 'be situated in a history of experience and related to it in a diachronous, ambivalent and problematic manner' (Toews, 1987, 891).

'Paradigm', another key element of 'context' in Pocock's theory, is defined in terms of 'concepts'; not separated concepts but a constellation of concepts. Paradigms are 'conceptual constellations' with various functions in the discursive milieu of society (Pocock, 1989, 277). In addition, the same diachronic aspect of the impact of linguistic tradition on discourses is also found in paradigms. Considering the role of tradition and linguistic inheritance in Pocock's theory, Joyce Appleby (2006, 129) has indicated its similarities to the ideas of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Referring to Gadamer's statement that the texts read by historians are themselves part of an interpretive tradition, Appleby has declared that 'successive paradigms' in Pocock's contextualism are hardly distinguishable from 'successive interpretations' that Gadamer has in mind.

Due to the multidimensionality and openness towards the diachronic aspect of languages in Pocock's attitude, it is difficult to place him, as Mark Bevir (1992, 277) did, among the 'hard linguistic contextualists'. One cannot say with certainty that in Pocock's theory, the [synchronic] structure of the context is the absolute determinant of the concepts' meaning and the actors' intentions. Despite expressing his tendency toward synchronic historiography, Pocock (1996a, 53) himself notes the similarity of 'the diachronic or vertical histories of particular language usages' to 'shafts or tunnels sunk vertically through the stratified deposits of recorded history'.

In sum, Pocock's interpretation of the relationship between concepts and contexts not only distances from dualistic attitudes but also leads to what Gary Browning (2016, 72) describes as the 'openness of conceptual contexts' in Pocock's methodology, which he evaluates as 'instructive'.

Priority of 'Employment' and 'Function' over 'Meaning' and 'Usage'

In approaches such as 'history of concepts' and 'historical semantics', the focus is on the transformations of the 'meaning' of concepts and/or larger linguistic units in history. In the Cambridge School, Skinner (2002, 179) gives more weight to 'application' and 'use' concerning concepts. His phrase is famous 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 the terms by which our concepts are expressed'. Thus, he has established his method on the recovery of the 'author's intention' as the determinant factor of the application or use of concepts within linguistic conventions. In Pocock's theory, rather, wherever concepts are thematised, the focus is often on their 'function' and 'employment' in the language(s) and linguistic paradigms at a certain historical moment of political society.[5] Not only has Pocock moved away from Skinner's intentionalism, but he has tried to show that Skinner's own attention has gradually shifted from 'intention' to 'performance'. According to Pocock (2002, 5), Skinner's shift in the focus of attention is reflected in his remark that 'if we are to have a history of political thought constructed on authentically historical principles, we must have means of knowing what an author 'was doing' when he wrote, or published, a text'. Pointing out that in Pocock's methodology the author's intention 'plays a far less prominent' role, John Dunn (1996, 21) stated that for Pocock 'political thought is above all an aspect of the experience of a society in time', and the historian must recover this aspect of social experience. Of course, as I understand it, the lesser prominence of 'authorial intentionality' in Pocock's methodology does not equate to abandoning it. In his research on *Leviathan*, before addressing the elements of the historical context, he mentioned Hobbes' intention in writing that book (Pocock & Schochet, 1996, 161).

[5] Especially see Pocock, 1964, and 1989.

We should bear in mind that when Pocock uses 'employ' regarding 'concepts', he is talking more about their function in *collective* language than about their 'use' in individual applications. In fact, the 'employ' of concepts within the broader field of the 'function' of a language is imaginable. A clear statement of his conception can be found in his remark that 'the business of the historian of thought is to study the emergence and the role of the organising concepts employed by society, and the knowledge that this role has necessary limitations need not deter him' (Pocock, 1964, 198). We can also see this when his concern is whether all language users in a historical period did or did not 'employ' the concept of state (Pocock, 1996a, 55). According to Pocock (1987, 28), language is the context in which 'text' as 'event' emerges, and, therefore, our histories are more the history of languages or discourse continuities than the history of individual performances. The authors of the past also were 'operating in more continuities of discourse' than they knew at the time.

There is an enlightening description of Pocock regarding the inclusion of the 'employment' of concepts in the wider field of the 'function' of language and discourse and the preference of it over 'a priori meaning', where he speaks about the possibility of a shift in roles. As he argues, a philosophical statement can appear in the role of ideology, and a party slogan in the role of a heuristic device with scientific value. Similarly, political thoughts, which Pocock (1964, 186) sees in the form of discourses, can also perform different functions in different situations, and concepts and abstractions can 'move from one employment to another'. Therefore, the researcher's task is to follow the history of such changing functions and employments rather than assuming 'a priori' characteristics for thoughts and concepts. Also, he notes elsewhere that the pursuit of employment of the concepts should not be limited to theoretical writings. In praising Felix Gilbert's research methodology on the problems of the political milieu of Florence from 1494 to 1512, Pocock (2003, 117) evaluates his study as 'illuminating' because he has worked out both 'the institutional structure' of the regime and 'the conceptual vocabulary which was employed by those actually participant in it— not only in works of theory, but in speeches, resolutions, and public documents'.

From such a standpoint, for example, if we are to understand the concept of liberty in the political sphere of the Renaissance and the beginning of the modern era, we should turn to the investigation of the political discourses' functions at that time and the employments of the concept of liberty in them, not to 'meaning' of the word liberty or freedom; as Pocock himself has done in his research. In analysing the emergence of the discourse of republicanism and civic humanism in the age of Machiavelli and their lasting impact on the European political context, he examines the concept of liberty and tries to show that liberty in that discourse was relevant to the relationships between citizens and the role of citizens in city-states such as Florence. He concludes that in the political language of that situation, the concept of liberty meant the ascendancy of public laws and decrees and decisions of the state over the individual will and appetites (Pocock, 2003, 125).

Interdiscursive Migration of Concepts

One of Pocock's important attitudes about the place of concepts in political languages is the possibility of the 'migration' of concepts from one discourse to another. Melvin Richter once mentioned this feature in his description of Pocock's methodology. In response to why Pocock's programme is 'writing the history of political discourses', Richter (1995, 129) explained that he separates the components of different discourses in one text and shows how the constructive concepts of a particular discourse may migrate to another. Nevertheless, the significance of that feature in distinguishing Pocock's methodology from

Skinner's and distancing his approach from strict structuralism towards an interdiscursive theory has not been sufficiently considered.

In line with his view of the complexity of historical contexts, Pocock (1989, 22) points out that a complex society includes multiple specialised languages and many paradigmatic structures that appear simultaneously. Discussions proceed in the interaction space of these paradigmatic structures; and terms and concepts 'altering some of their implications and retaining others' while they 'migrate from one structure to another'. In Pocock's statements, the precedence of paradigmatic structures over the role of concepts is evident. However, attributing 'migration' and 'altering some of their implications and retaining others' to concepts makes it possible to recognise relative independence and spontaneity for concepts in his approach. It sounds from Pocock's declarations that concepts have the potential to carry and transfer some implications, which are dependent not necessarily on the intention of a particular user but on the various 'origins' of concepts in political discourses. He argues that political statements 'may convey more than one meaning... they are made up of terms of many origins, bearing many possible implications' (Pocock, 1989, 23). Pocock's attention to the 'implications' that arise from the origin of concepts and are carriable in them takes him beyond not only a mere preoccupation with 'meaning' and structuralist semantics, and from a focus on 'usage' in methodological intentionalism, but even from being confined to 'functions' in his discourse-oriented contextualism.[6]

Where Pocock speaks of the migration of ideas and problems, his account also implicitly includes the migration of concepts. For example, in his tracing of the historical migration of 'ideas and problems' from Italy to England and the American colonies during the second half of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it does not require any effort to realise that the migration of concepts accompanied such migration. Apart from the conception of neo-Kantian thinkers, especially Nicolai Hartmann (1958, 6), who considered 'concept' in the strict sense a summarised problem or the content of a problem that has been reduced to its main defining elements, Pocock (1989, 80) himself has asserted that political societies create concepts of their existence in time to increase their historical awareness and critical ability to encounter problems.[7]

Besides the migration of concepts, according to Pocock (1989, 21), the migration of paradigms is also a part of the 'plural character of political society'. Just as the communication network can never be entirely closed in such a society, paradigms can migrate from contexts in which they are specialised for certain functions to contexts in which they are expected to perform other functions. In his investigation of Pocock's theoretical arguments and practical research, Boucher (1985, 167) has likewise addressed these two forms of migration. According to him, the first form is the migration of concepts from a specialised language to the sphere of politics, evident in 'common law', and the second occurs when a paradigm migrates from one geographic context to another. Boucher claims that 'a major pre-occupation of Pocock's works has been to show how the paradigm of civic republicanism, or republican humanism, operated in sixteenth century Italy, migrated to seventeenth century England and travelled on to the political life of America'. In such shifting contexts, the concepts that interact with each other are placed in different linguistic structures and 'bring about modifications'.

The migration of concepts also plays a crucial role in reinforcing the features of 'temporality', 'diachronicity', and 'processuality' in Pocock's methodology. Paying attention

[6] For a more detailed explanation, see Mossleh, 2023, 65.
[7] According to Hartmann, what Teichmüller called the 'history of concepts' (Geschichte der Begriffe) was nothing other than the pure history of problems/ Problemgeschichte.

to the temporality of socio-political concepts was increasingly developed in the methodological debates of the second half of the past century, the context in which Pocock was thinking. The continuation of that development has led some scholars to declare that in the light of understanding the temporality of concepts, the basic questions of politics should also be rewritten (Freeden & Fernández-Sebastián, 2019, 2). In Koselleck's (1995; 2000; 2006) theory of 'Begriffsgeschichte', the analysis of the temporality and temporalisation of concepts, which reveals the processual and historical nature of their emergence and transformation, underpins the foundations of the theory and method.[8] Koselleck (2002, 5) traces the origin of recognising the temporality of concepts and its connection with political transformations to the 'Sattelzeit', the second half of the eighteenth century, the time of 'the transformation of the premodern usage of language to our usage'.[9]

The integration of the element of 'time' into language and political knowledge is important for Pocock too; however, he considers it one of the characteristics of the transformations of the Renaissance and early modernity. According to his account, in the intellectual sphere of the Middle Ages dominated by scholasticism, what was regarded as rational and worthy of knowledge was 'universal' and timeless. Particular events, which are time-bound and contingent, were deemed of a lower level of rationality and importance. Since history is related to the temporal sequence of particular and contingent events, Pocock (2003, 5-8) argues, it can be said with evidence that scholastic thought did not have any special philosophy of history. In the Renaissance era, a new consciousness of temporality permeated the concepts and the whole language, and a kind of non-theological and secular historiography emerged. Besides such theoretical statements, Pocock's view on the decisive role of temporality and temporalisation of concepts in the history of political thought can be followed in his practical research. Just as an instance, in his study of Hobbes's political language, Pocock (1989, 186) tries to show that Hobbes using a 'radical temporalisation' of the concept of salvation distinguished it from previous conceptions in the Christian tradition. Thus, a historical and time-dependent concept of salvation replaced the 'a-historical' and timeless conception.

The closeness of Pocock's and Koselleck's views on the importance of the convergence of language and time in politics is remarkable in Richter's description (1995, 125). While acknowledging the differences between the two approaches, he claims that there are some surprising common historiographical concerns, to the extent that 'the title of Pocock's collection, *Politics, Language, and Time*, could have served as the title for the English translation of Reinhart Koselleck's *Vergangene Zukunft*'.[10] We should add to Richter's remark that where the issues of 'temporalisation' and 'migration' of concepts meet in Pocock's theory is the point where the distance between his methodology and the 'history of concepts' is less than anywhere else. It may be said that this closeness is even

[8] See, also, Lara, 2013, 6; Palonen, 2014, 31-33; Steinmetz & Freeden, 2017, 5.

[9] Margrit Pernau and Helge Jordheim (2015, 13) argue that, from Koselleck's point of view, modernity was essentially formed in connection with the process of temporalisation, which caused the concepts of Western socio-political language to be equipped with a temporal aspect that they lacked before. Reinhard Blänkner (2021, 128), who believes that the 'temporality' of concepts was not Koselleck's discovery, has explained the roots of his understanding of the temporality of concepts in the thought of Martin Heidegger, Karl Schmidt, and Karl Mannheim.

[10] In his writings, Pocock himself has less mentioned the 'history of concepts' and Koselleck, but in *Concepts and Discourses*, which was originally written to contribute to a book about the 'history of concepts', he tried to compare his work with Koselleck's. However, in that article, he focused more on *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* and did not comprehensively examine the theory and method of the 'history of concepts'. Consequently, referring to some of Pocock's critical questions, Koselleck (1996, 64) noted that he had answered those questions long ago in his works.

further than what Pocock had in mind and saw in alignment with the main line of his approach. As evidence for this claim, one can refer to a historical study of the concept of barbarism, where researchers have shown that Koselleck and Pocock have similarly investigated the modern concept of 'barbarism' as the result of a process of 'temporalisation' in contrast to the Greek perception that based on the 'spatialisation' of that concept (Boletsi & Moser, 2015, 23).

Because of the connection between temporalisation and migration of concepts in Pocock's theory, the weight of diachronicity and vertical processes is greater than he initially intended. Due to Pocock's tendency to research in wider temporal periods, David Harlan (2006, 99), more than three decades ago, in his famous essay on the history of thought, supposed that Pocock was aligned with Fernand Braudel and François Furet and other members of the Anal school, who insisted on *la longue durée*. Also, Gary Browning (2016, 71) has pointed out that Pocock 'tends to trace long-term continuities in the history of political thought by following the continuing employment of particular languages or discourses of political theory'. Iain Hampsher-Monk (2001, 166) even goes so far as to claim that it is Pocock's emphasis on the diachronic aspect of languages and their transformations that originally differentiates his methodology from Skinner's, which emphasises the 'moment of linguistic action'. Hampsher-Monk's remark about Skinner's position refers to his expression regarding his main preoccupation with 'the pointillist study of sudden conceptual shifts', which, not coincidentally, is related to his assertion about the difference between his position and Koselleck (Skinner, 2002, 180). Acknowledging that 'concepts have a history' whose study requires long-term research, Skinner expresses that such long-term assessments are not his primary interests. Thus, his approach diverges markedly from Koselleck's, exactly where, as mentioned, Pocock's methodological tendency approaches Koselleck's method.

Considering the above explanation, Pocock's (1996a, 49) answer to how to relate the ideal historiography in the Anglophone world, especially his own manner, and the German 'history of concepts' becomes clearer. He imagines a research that, like a fabric with warp and woof, is made of the horizontal synchronic threads of the investigation of existing languages and discourses, and the vertical diachronic threads of the history of concepts. That is what Pocock has conducted in his research on the political thought of England in the second half of the eighteenth century which is an analytical and, at the same time, a meta-analytical study in which the diachronic process of the migration of concepts is linked to a synchronic investigation. To analyse the imperial crisis of that time, he naturally conducted a synchronic investigation of the socio-political context and the rhetoric within the political discourse. However, he also attached to that analysis a diachronic examination of the concept of 'empire', and its relation to (1) the Roman 'imperium' and other concepts such as 'realm' and 'sovereignty', (2) the difference between 'bellum sociale' and 'bellum civile'. By following the historical meaning of empire from sixteenth-century England, he could show how the eighteenth-century political activists' understanding of concepts such as 'federating unity' and 'integration' concerning the broader concept of 'imperium' had affected political conflicts. In the 1760s when the relationship between the North Atlantic and the American continent with the British state became problematic and Parliament sought to legislate for the entire 'empire', the deep ambiguities of that concept appeared. In this regard, Pocock (1996b, 259) has stated: 'Concepts of 'empire' and 'confederation' were about to force themselves on a debating public which lacked language capable of controlling them'. Even this brief quotation clearly illustrates the significance of the diachronic migration of concepts, tracing their origins, and examining their transferable implications and forceful impact on discourses. Furthermore, Pocock's expression, which grammatically puts concepts in the active subject

position, should not be underestimated. This somewhat implicitly, and perhaps unintentionally, brings his position closer to Koselleck (1974, XIV), who emphasised that concepts simultaneously play a role as 'indicators' and 'agents' of socio-political changes.

Conclusion

It is true that even in his last essays, Pocock (2019b), as a committed contextualist, was concerned with defending the concept of 'context' against those who consider globalisation as a justification for abandoning it. It is also evident that research in 'language(s)' and linguistic structural units such as 'discourses' were always a priority for him. However, this research demonstrated that the significance of the history of concepts in the research program, either in his methodological theory or in his practical investigations, was not neglected. He combined the diachronic study of concepts with the synchronic examination of the context wherever he found it necessary in his research. Nonetheless, paying attention to the concepts is not entirely dependent on a scholar's intentionality. It is partly due to the nature of the fundamental concepts, which are indispensable and retain their effectiveness to different degrees. The researchers find themselves in a situation in which they are unable to properly comprehend the socio-political problems without examining those concepts.

Given the openness and multidimensionality of 'context', as well as the interdiscursive capacities created by the migration of concepts in Pocock's theory, as revealed in this article, it remains valuable for advancing methodological development in the history of political thought. Our exploration of Pocock's works illuminates that even in a contextualist methodology the study of concepts holds its special place, which may be more effective than it first seems. But, on the other hand, this enquiry acknowledges the warning of Pocock and his fellow thinkers that it would be inadequate to focus on an isolated concept without considering its linguistic and socio-political context. Finally, for anyone who shares my interest in the 'study of concepts' in humanities and social science methodology, this article clarifies once again that a nuanced understanding of the complexities and innovation in arguments can only be realised by examining the debates between different approaches.

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