

# Modern Intellectual History

<http://journals.cambridge.org/MIH>

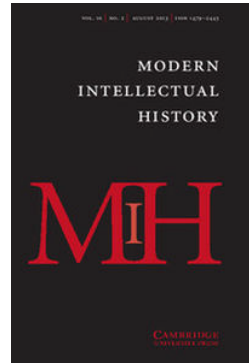
Additional services for *Modern Intellectual History*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

## THE STUDY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT IN THE IBERO-ATLANTIC WORLD DURING THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS

GABRIEL PAQUETTE

Modern Intellectual History / Volume 10 / Issue 02 / August 2013, pp 437 - 448

DOI: 10.1017/S1479244313000097, Published online: 11 July 2013

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S1479244313000097](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S1479244313000097)

### How to cite this article:

GABRIEL PAQUETTE (2013). THE STUDY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT IN THE IBERO-ATLANTIC WORLD DURING THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS. *Modern Intellectual History*, 10, pp 437-448 doi:10.1017/S1479244313000097

**Request Permissions :** [Click here](#)

# THE STUDY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT IN THE IBERO-ATLANTIC WORLD DURING THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS

GABRIEL PAQUETTE

Department of History, Johns Hopkins University

E-mail: gabriel.paquette@jhu.edu

---

José Carlos Chiaramonte, *Nation and State in Latin America: Political Language during Independence*, trans. Ian Barnett (Buenos Aires: Teseo, 2010, Colección Instituto Ravignani)

Javier Fernández Sebastián, dir., *Diccionario Político y Social del Mundo Iberoamericano: La Era de las Revoluciones, 1750–1850 (Iberconceptos- I)* (Madrid: Fundación Carolina/Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales/Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoraciones Culturales, 2009)

The Spanish and Portuguese empires in the Americas disintegrated in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The shards of these shattered transatlantic polities, previously sturdy and resilient entities for three centuries, morphed into nascent states, independent of their former European metropolises and of one another.<sup>1</sup> The unraveling of the Iberian empires and the fragmentation of previously coherent legal spaces occurred against the backdrop of revolutionary upheaval in both the Old World and the New. Their comparatively late occurrence vis-à-vis the Anglo-North American, French and Haitian Revolutions encouraged historians to comprehend the maelstrom into which the Ibero-American world was swept up as the last in a sequence of revolutions imbued with a stable, coherent set of ideas which destroyed the Old Regime in Western Europe and its ultramarine appendages.<sup>2</sup> Its triumphalism, all-too- neat symmetry, and presumed connections aside, this narrative perpetuated and enlivened a

---

<sup>1</sup> For magnificent treatments of the processes see Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton, 2006); and J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492–1830* (New Haven, 2006). For an overview of the historiography see Gabriel Paquette, “The Dissolution of the Spanish Atlantic Monarchy”, *Historical Journal* 52 (2009), 175–212.

<sup>2</sup> On this “Age of Democratic Revolution(s)” see R. R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800: The Challenge* (Princeton,

stereotype of the feeble, backward, and derivative character of Iberian and South American intellectual life. Painting with a broad brush, it might be said that earlier historians deemed Spanish American republicanism unoriginal, disparaged Iberian liberalism as a meek imitator of Anglo-French antecedents, and depicted the transition to political modernity in postimperial successor states as incomplete or failed. Since Spain and Portugal had lacked an indigenous Enlightenment, the story went, and Enlightenment underpinned revolution, then upheaval in the Iberian world necessarily had exogenous origins. Hispanic or Lusitanian intellectual history, in this view, could never be anything but an arcane subject, of interest solely to antiquarians or else those interested in the diffusion and reception of British, French, German and Anglo-North American revolutionary doctrines and ideologies. The long-entrenched preference for social, political, and economic history in Spanish and Portuguese-speaking academe did nothing to disturb such perceptions of stagnant intellectual life wholly dependent on foreign imports.

The publication of new works by José Carlos Chiaramonte and Javier Fernández Sebastián indicate the extent to which older views have been overturned and suggest political thought's grand reinsertion into the scholarly mainstream in Spanish- and Portuguese-language historiography. Before turning to the achievements of these two historians, two preliminary observations are required to place them in proper context. First, the years between 2008 and 2025 have been, and will continue to be, marked by the relentless commemorations and celebrations of the bicentenaries of the events culminating in the independence of the various states which formerly composed the Spanish and Portuguese empires. Great quantities of public and private funds have been lavished on conferences, symposia, and seminars devoted to the theme, all of which have generated a torrent of books, articles, and published proceedings. Nor have Spain and Portugal been disinclined from the nationalist party. On the contrary, 2008–14 are years in which the bicentenaries of popular and elite struggles to expel French armies from the Iberian Peninsula are observed, as well as the public birth of liberal constitutionalism, symbolized by the framing of the 1812 Constitution of Cádiz by the representative *Cortes*. 2020–23, too, will witness similar commemorations, for those years correspond to the bicentenaries of the implementation of that constitution in Spain and, with important modifications, in Portugal. In short, the bicentenaries appeal to partisans of groups of most political stripes in Spain and Portugal, from fervent nationalists to champions of the vibrant, if short-lived, proto-democratic culture, with robust civil-society institutions, which was eclipsed in the twentieth century by the

---

1959); for a reappraisal of the epoch see David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, 1760–1840* (London, 2010).

authoritarian regimes of Franco and Salazar. There is a similar appeal in Latin America where, to varying degrees, the bicentenaries afford an opportunity to reaffirm republican traditions stained by decades of military dictatorship, assert national sovereignty against the encroachment of US neo-imperial agents, and rejoice in the (purported) “birth” of the nation state. Second, though direct beneficiaries of great public (and political) interest in the bicentenaries, one of the remarkable transitions of recent decades is the internationalization of the largely self-contained national frameworks in which Iberian and Latin American scholars (like their counterparts everywhere) formerly operated, a change which has promoted a critique of nationalist historiography. There is a fresh interest in comparative history that decenters the nation and emphasizes transnational processes, that recognizes the continuities that survived colonial rule after political independence, and in the shared cultural and intellectual framework bequeathed by Iberian colonialism throughout Latin America previously obscured by nation-obsessed scholarship. Internationalization also has meant that, while legal, economic, social, and political history remain mainstays of Ibero-American scholarship, innovative methodologies in intellectual and cultural history in other national contexts (mainly French, German, US, and British) have been widely diffused, adopted, and employed, often in fruitful, hybrid combination with preexisting strengths. These trends make the present moment a propitious one for the study of the political ideas, attitudes, and ideologies animating the upheavals that resulted in the dissolution of the Iberian empires in the early nineteenth century.

The appearance of Chiaramonte’s *Nation and State in Latin America* makes accessible to an English-speaking readership the culmination of the author’s fruitful decades of scholarship on political thought and processes during the independence period.<sup>3</sup> While much of his earlier work deals specifically with Argentina, Chiaramonte’s recent book offers a good example of how engagement with the historiography of other Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries, as well as recent trends in intellectual history, serves to debunk nationalist myths and liberates Latin American scholars from national parochialism and myopia. In the traditional view, very broadly speaking, independence in each of the Latin American countries resulted from nationalist (or proto-nationalist) consciousness, an irrepressible yearning to free itself from a pernicious, repressive European yoke, animated by long-incubated grievances against an egregious colonial administration. Nation and state were thus born together, fully formed and armed, like Athena, in world history. The historical reality, recent historians have argued, was much more complicated, contingent, and nonlinear, urging the

---

<sup>3</sup> This 2010 book is the English translation of Chiaramonte’s *Nación y Estado en Iberoamérica: El Lenguaje Político en tiempos de las Independencias* (Buenos Aires, 2004).

suspending of post-dictive assumptions informing traditional historiography and limiting its usefulness. Among the transformed understandings are: the intellectual and cultural vibrancy of late colonial society, which was far from a backward wasteland; the robust efforts on both sides of the Atlantic to maintain intact the Iberian empires until the eve of independence, including the pervasiveness of loyalism and royalism in the Americas; the collaborative, conciliatory nature of some aspects of imperial administration; and the manner in which Latin American nations and states emerged unpredictably and unintentionally from the crucible of war and revolution, instead of preceding them.<sup>4</sup>

The importance of Chiaramonte's recent book lies in his recovery of the meanings of the terms "nation" and "state" during the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries in the Spanish-speaking world. There is an unmistakable polemical intent lurking behind Chiaramonte's insistent exegesis of the historically specific meanings of such ubiquitous terms. He claims that the "history of the term 'nation' [has been] heavily distorted by latter-day projected political concerns" (31) and advocates a historicist understanding of how the term was employed in texts of the period, urging that historians resist the temptation to use the concept of "nation" as a starting point, which leads them to an erroneous depiction of earlier history as an "explanatory teleology for it" (26, 32). He argues that

neither the present-day Latin American nations nor their relevant nationalities existed at the time of independence. The nations were not the foundations but the (frequently late) outcome of these movements. If we look at what really did exist, namely the sovereign nature of autonomous entities (cities or provinces) that formed the movements of autonomism [*sic*] and independence, the very substance of everything we have been accustomed to say about this movement and its consequences may be overturned.

Chiaramonte's characterization of his enterprise is undoubtedly self-aggrandizing, but it is plausible. Of course, it is possible to argue for the inverse proposition: as scholarly understanding of Spanish colonialism and independence changes, the understanding of twin key concepts of "nation" and "state" is transformed. But Chiaramonte's insight is of immense value because it undermines a central pillar of the historiography, demonstrating that it is built on anachronism, and thus opening the entire historical epoch to reinterpretation. Chiaramonte's answer is that "nation" and "state" were largely synonymous in the late eighteenth-century Hispanic world, with "nation" divested of its ethnic connotations (43). In contemporary usage, this was

---

<sup>4</sup> On these themes see the essays in Gabriel Paquette, ed., *Enlightened Reform in Southern Europe and Its Atlantic Colonies, c.1750–1830* (Farnham, 2009).

a pre-national or even “a-national” period, in which objects of loyalty and allegiance were different from what they became from the mid-nineteenth century. As a result, Chiaramonte contends, historians must abandon the notion of nationalities striving for political independence and instead recognize that the “Latin American leaders pursuing the organization of new nations knew nothing of the concept of nationality, and approached the problem in contractarian terms typical of the natural law foundations of the period” (74–5). Chiaramonte then delves into a detailed, though often repetitive and dogmatic, reconstruction of the intellectual universe inhabited by those participants in the political struggles which resulted in the separation of the New World from the Old, focusing on luminaries from Grotius to Vitoria and Suárez. What emerges is a nuanced conception of the diverse usages of key political terms and concepts, clearly informed by the methodologies pioneered by Quentin Skinner and J. G. A. Pocock, though their influence is not acknowledged explicitly. More importantly, Chiaramonte debunks any notion of Ibero-American exceptionalism, difference, or isolation from the broader intellectual currents, demonstrating how leading political writers and actors were influenced by, and indebted to, non-Hispanic interlocutors. If not necessarily evidence for the common origins of the Atlantic revolutions, Chiaramonte’s book proves decisively the utility of intellectual history in the rewriting of political history, as well as Latin American historiography’s growing awareness of the advantage to be gained from positioning national history against the broader backdrop of European historiography, to say nothing of the perils of failing to do so.

Javier Fernández Sebastián’s *Diccionario Político y Social del Mundo Iberoamericano* is the fruit of a Herculean, and immensely exciting, collaborative scholarly undertaking. He has brought together seventy-five researchers, chiefly from the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking world, who have contributed chapters, amounting to almost 1,500 pages of small print, which collectively represent a systematic comparative study of the transformation of basic political concepts in the Ibero-Atlantic world in the Age of Revolutions, whose chronological parameters he generously (and perhaps mistakenly) sets between 1750 and 1850. There are undoubtedly weaker aspects and troublesome assumptions inherent in the project, which will be discussed later in this essay, but its ambition, scope, intention, and achievement deserve ample treatment and appreciation. The recent *Diccionario* is the latest offspring of a broader project which previously resulted in two earlier *Diccionarios* for nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Spain, respectively, codirected with Juan Francisco Fuentes. In the introduction to the nineteenth-century *Diccionario*, published in 2002, the codirectors describe the range of intellectual influences informing their project, noting the impact of Skinner, Pocock, Pierre Rosanvallon, and Reinhart Koselleck. To Pocock and Skinner, they owe the attention paid to “vocabulary and the

linguistic conventions” of a particular historical epoch, while from Koselleck and his co-progenitors of *Begriffsgeschichte* they learned the linguistic nature of historical experience and the historicity of political language. Taken together, they contend that “there is a sociopolitical dimension to conceptual and linguistic change and also a conceptual and discursive dimension to social and political change”.<sup>5</sup> In the 2009 *Diccionario*, Fernández Sebastián goes further, describing his aim as an effort to

understand better how subjects, in their respective contexts, made use of language in order to affect the political realities surrounding them and to fashion them in the manner most favorable to their goals, or to respond to the obstacles which the agitated nature of political life and intellectual debate put up. (43)

Methodological insights aside, the structure, scope, chronological limits, organization, and title of Fernández Sebastián’s *Diccionarios* most closely resemble the massive *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, undertaken by Koselleck together with Otto Brunner and Werner Conze, for German political and social thought, published between 1972 and 1997. Fernández Sebastián’s effort to compile an Ibero-American history of concepts—“the basic elements of political language in a given epoch” (26)—is deeply informed by the earlier methodological efforts of Koselleck (and Melvin Richter) to write histories of concepts, but it is also deeply informed by the Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American historiographical traditions in which he and the contributors to the latest *Diccionario* operate. In the introduction to the 2009 *Diccionario*, he argues that the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed a “profound mutation in the lexical [and] semantic universe which had structured institutions and political practices” which amounted to a “political and conceptual earthquake” (28). Fernández Sebastián focuses on the speed, intensity, volume, and impact of debates in this period, which functioned as a hothouse, accelerating the pace of conceptual change. For the first volume of the *Iberconcepts* project, Fernández Sebastián chose the following concepts: America/Americans, Citizen (*Ciudadano/Vecino*), Constitution, Federation/Federalism, History, Liberal/Liberalism, Nation, Public Opinion, People[s] (*Pueblo[s]*), and Republic/Republican. A projected second volume will include the concepts Civilization, Democracy, State, Independence,

---

<sup>5</sup> Javier Fernández Sebastián and Juan Francisco Fuentes, “Introducción”, in Fernández Sebastián and Fuentes, dirs., *Diccionario Político y Social del Siglo XIX Español* (Madrid, 2002), 26–30 *passim*.

and Sovereignty.<sup>6</sup> Viewed as a whole, Fernández Sebastián argues, the *Iberconceptos* project offers a panorama of “some of the central concepts in the development of political modernity in the Ibero-American world” (34).

Political modernity is a central theme in Fernández Sebastián’s work and his polemical intent to reshape the understanding of it permeates the *Diccionario*. Fernández Sebastián rejects the entrenched view that Ibero-American modernity was “belated, frustrated, and inadequate” (37), arguing that it produces intolerable distortions. He balks at the insinuation that the Ibero-American world was “behind”, or a late-comer to, Anglo-American or French political modernity, arguing that judging Ibero-America according to a single standard inevitably perpetuates stereotypes of its intellectual life. Instead, he argues for the “plurality” or “multiplicity” of modernities and also for the need to recognize the validity of multiple paths, or “transitions”, to modernity, not all of which conform to the alleged monolithic model drawn from, or follow the single path trodden by, northern European countries. Until the plurality of political modernities is acknowledged, Fernández Sebastián contends, Ibero-American intellectual history will continue to be viewed as deviant, derivative, aberrant, anomalous, incomplete, and backward (37).<sup>7</sup>

If Fernández Sebastián stopped at this point, his *Iberconceptos* project could be accused of reverse cultural or linguistic chauvinism, privileging Spanish- and Portuguese-language texts and traditions over all others, and putting a positive gloss on Ibero-American “exceptionalism”. The insistence on pluralism and multiple modernities would enshrine difference, celebrate incommensurability, and justify a retreat from comparative history. Fortunately, Fernández Sebastián is chasing bigger game, though his efforts threaten to upset settled historiographical assumptions and the existing national-linguistic hierarchy of intellectual traditions. Fernández Sebastián hopes that *Iberconceptos*, by placing Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries on equal footing with northern European counterparts and presenting them in a favorable light, will serve as the foundation for a broader revision of European (and Euro-Atlantic) intellectual history. The Age of Revolutions is the first, but presumably not the last, target. In the *Diccionario* and in subsequent statements, Fernández Sebastián wants to integrate Ibero-American intellectual life into the broader historiography, which presumably would de-emphasize the Anglo-French-North American model and tilt the emphasis toward southern Europe and the south Atlantic world. He laments the “surprisingly limited space allotted to the

---

<sup>6</sup> Fernández Sebastián, in Gabriel Entin and Jeanne Moisand, “The Iberian-American Alphabet of Political Modernity: Interview with Javier Fernández Sebastián”, trans. Mark Hounsell, *Books and Ideas* (booksandideas.net), 10 June 2011, 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.



Ibero-American revolutions in Western historiography”, though he does not blame northern European chauvinism alone for the absence, but holds Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American historians accountable for failing to escape the narrow confines of national history in the attempt to produce more synthetic, transnational works (37–40 *passim*). Fernández Sebastián views the bicentenaries as a golden opportunity to redress the existing imbalance: “we would like to see the revolutionary splendors serve to definitively establish the Hispanic Revolutions as the third major revolutionary wave in the eyes of our colleagues from all over the world . . . marking the passage from the Old to the New Regime”.<sup>8</sup>

It is evident that Fernández Sebastián’s project seeks to overturn the unsatisfactory “center-to-periphery” model for understanding the diffusion of ideas. In a recent interview, though not in the *Diccionario* itself, he explained why he found accounts of Ibero-American intellectual history that relied on this model noisome: even where concepts derived from a foreign source, “re-appropriation and recreation” were always present. Political actors and writers do not simply “employ a set of pre-fabricated concepts, produced far from where they lived. The reductionist vision of a *prêt-à-porter* modernity has to be abandoned”.<sup>9</sup> If Ibero-American intellectual history is to be brought into the historiographical mainstream, however, the fragmentation caused by nationalist historiography after 1825 poses a major obstacle. Until recently there was surprisingly little communication or collaboration between historians of, say, Brazil and Portugal, Argentina and Mexico, or Spain and Paraguay. Across linguistic lines (e.g. Brazil and Mexico), there was practically no interaction, let alone substantive engagement. Balkanization long prevailed, in spite of the fact that historians in different countries studied overlapping themes, chronological periods, and historical phenomena. Perhaps the most ambitious aspect of *Iberconceitos*, then, is the attempt to recapture the linguistic unity existing in the Spanish and Portuguese empires and to explore its intellectual history collectively. Fernández Sebastián asserts that it is possible, and valuable, to study the basic political concepts in Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries on both sides of the Atlantic before 1850 in comparative perspective and believes that it is possible to overcome (“transcend”) the limits imposed by national history in order to write a “truly Atlantic History of political concepts” (25, 41). After all, he claims, this was a pre-national world: “for too long we have been retro-projecting the contemporary

---

<sup>8</sup> Fernández Sebastián [Javier Fernández Sebastián], “Intellectual History and Democracy: An Interview with Pierre Rosanvallon”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 68 (2007), 715.

<sup>9</sup> Fernández Sebastián, in Entin and Moisand, “The Iberian-American Alphabet of Political Modernity”, 5.

idea of nation upon earlier epochs”<sup>10</sup> which is certainly a conclusion Chiaramonte would endorse.

Fernández Sebastián claims that there are two historical justifications for bringing Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking historians together and writing a history of concepts for the Hispanic and Lusitanian world as a whole. First, he contends that the Age of Revolutions in the Ibero-Atlantic was necessarily transnational, marked by exchanges of ideas between both hemispheres and their wide diffusion, which meant that there was a shared common political vocabulary, which he denominates “Euro-Americanisms” or “Occidentalisms”, which multiplied and survived even amidst the processes that resulted in the dissolution of Spain’s empire into independent states (31). Fernández Sebastián has noted the paradox that this intensified intellectual interaction (“the cultural integration of the elites”) between two shores of the Atlantic occurred precisely when they were experiencing “rupture and political divorce”.<sup>11</sup> Second, Fernández Sebastián argues that the nature of the disintegration of the Iberian empires meant that there was a “great degree of the survival and reabsorption of diverse cultural, discursive, and institutional elements of the so-called ‘Old Regime’” in the successor entities; as a consequence, there was a great conceptual continuity, well after the demise of formal empire, between old order and new societies (29). Fernández Sebastián acknowledges, however, that concepts in these regions gradually underwent divergent historical evolution as each new polity, after 1825 or so, “developed different discursive styles, adapted to their particular political situation, and a [corpus of political writing] that was peculiarly national” (35). Thereafter, the coherent and cohesive conceptual framework bequeathed by empire decayed and collapsed, giving way to diverse and largely incommensurate national styles.

There is little doubt that the 2009 *Diccionario*, and the *Iberconceptos* project as a whole, represents a major achievement. It makes unthinkable a retreat to national history and it has created a sprawling network of scholars from different countries poised to make further advances. Its publication and wide diffusion should debunk myths and misleading fables about Ibero-American intellectual life and force scholars in the French-, English-, and German-speaking worlds to take Spanish- and Portuguese-language texts of political thought much

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 9; nevertheless, Fernández Sebastián has organized the *Diccionario* along national lines. He laments this decision, but claims that there were few alternatives: “given that the academic world is divided by national borders, and historical archives as well, we had little option other than organize the project into countries”. Ibid., 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 3–4; for an overview of these “connections after colonialism” see Matthew Brown and Gabriel Paquette, “The Persistence of Mutual Influence: Europe and Latin America in the 1820s”, *European History Quarterly* 41 (2011), 387–96.

more seriously, if not compel them to integrate these oft-maligned provinces of intellectual history into the mainstream. It should have the further salutary effect of making scholars aware of the pernicious effects of separating European from American history in the period before 1850, for the intellectual (to say nothing of political, cultural, and economic) connections between the hemispheres survived the demise of empire and the legal recognition of new states.

These dazzling accomplishments notwithstanding, there are aspects of the *Diccionario*, and *Iberconceptos* in general, which deserve criticism or, at least, less-sanguine appraisal. The first of its potential weakness concerns method. In the *Diccionarios* and numerous other publications, Fernández Sebastián has made explicit his preference for eclectic blending of the methodologies pioneered by Koselleck, Skinner, and Pocock (usually treated together as the principal exponents of the “Cambridge school”, a dubious appellation), and, to a lesser degree, Rosanvallon, with whom he has conducted extended, remarkably erudite interviews in the past few years. As he explained to Rosanvallon, since the *Iberconceptos* project “is rather syncretic, we haven’t hesitated to borrow all that seems most interesting and appropriate for the aims of our study from various methodological schools”.<sup>12</sup> He made equivalent confessions during interviews with Skinner and Koselleck. In his interview with the latter, Fernández Sebastián noted that he was following the lead of Richter and Kari Palonen, both of whom maintained the possibility of combining the insights of the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*) with those of the “Cambridge school”.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, he suggested the possibility of combining Koselleck’s “historical semantic analysis . . . based on diachronic depth and internal temporality of concepts with [Skinner’s] methodology, which emphasizes rhetoric and the different languages at play at a given moment, paying more attention to the pragmatic aspects and persuasive strategies employed by agents”.<sup>14</sup> There has been a great amount of controversy about the mutual compatibility of these two approaches to the history of political thought. It has been chiefly from the “Cambridge” side that objections have been registered, questioning the viability of a history of concepts, and, were these to stand the test of scrutiny, the eclectic approach adopted by Fernández Sebastián would need to be reconsidered, if not revamped.<sup>15</sup> When interviewed by

---

<sup>12</sup> Fernández Sebastián, “Intellectual History and Democracy”, 711.

<sup>13</sup> For the most explicit effort to bring these two methodological approaches into dialogue see Melvin Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford, 1995), esp. chap. 6, “Pocock, Skinner and *Begriffsgeschichte*”.

<sup>14</sup> Fernández Sebastián, “Conceptual History, Memory and Identity: An Interview with Reinhart Koselleck”, *Contributions* 2 (2006), 108.

<sup>15</sup> This subject is beyond the scope of the present review essay. For Pocock’s discussion of “the danger of ascribing the same concept to the same word or cognates of the same

Fernández Sebastián, Skinner articulated the following concern about Koselleck's project:

There is something unhistorical about the lists of meanings and alleged changes of meanings that make up most of the entries. The approach is insensitive to the fact that some concepts (or rather, some terms used to express them) have gone in and out of use, and have been more or less widely used at different times. Koselleck's approach is not well attuned to capturing such gaps and alterations of emphasis. More important, it is hard to gain any sense from these dictionary entries of why these concepts mattered at particular periods, why they were discussed at all.<sup>16</sup>

Concepts, conceived as words and the usages they carry, cannot be separated, for Skinner and others, from the history of a political language and be treated as having independent histories. Similar objections could be raised against many of the essays in the *Diccionario*, notwithstanding Fernández Sebastián's efforts to preemptively, and sensitively, respond to them.

Further anxieties about the *Iberconceptos* project merit brief mention. How unified and coherent was the conceptual framework in the Ibero-Atlantic world in the 1750–1850 period and does the *Diccionario* manage to encompass the heavy contestation over political vocabularies? Take, for example, Spanish and Portuguese intellectual history: did these share a sufficient number of cultural references, assumptions, and intellectual connections to justify their joint consideration? Certainly, there were many common features, but these were distinct, if sometimes overlapping, intellectual worlds. The rediscovery of national legal traditions, for example, tended to generate discrete and incommensurate debates over the meaning of “constitution” in each linguistic community, a factor which complicates their joint treatment, even if the 1812 Spanish constitution, for a time, was adopted throughout the Ibero-Atlantic sphere. As for its capacity to encompass the ferocity of the disputes over certain concepts, the *Diccionario* certainly strives to achieve this breadth (and depth), but with uneven results. Fernández Sebastián makes plain that he encouraged the use of many different sources from which the history of concepts were written—dictionaries, essays, treatises, pamphlets, proclamations, reports, letters, and more—in order to ascertain the extent to which “semantical consolidation” had occurred as well as comprehend the “modality of diverse usages” (35). This

---

word wherever they occur in the historical record”, and the difficulty of “isolating any concept in an uncontested or unambivalent condition”, see J. G. A. Pocock, “Concepts and Discourses: A Difference in Culture? Comments on a Paper by Melvin Richter”, in Hartmut Lehmann and Melvin Richter, eds., *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts: New Studies on Begriffsgeschichte* (Washington, DC, 1996), 47–54 *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> Skinner, in [Javier Fernández Sebastián], “Intellectual History, Liberty and Republicanism: An Interview with Quentin Skinner”, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 3 (2007), 115.

concern is laudable, but the *Diccionario*, in its selection of concepts and the exposition of them, may have a normative bias in favor of liberalism, leading to the neglect of pro-monarchical (royalist) and conservative writers who clung to older meanings of concepts. The selection of alternative concepts—“monarchy”, for example—might have counterbalanced this bias and revealed a very different Ibero-Atlantic conceptual world. Furthermore, from the opposite perspective, it is unclear whether the types of source favored by the contributors to the *Diccionario* exclude subaltern populations and classes (e.g. slaves, people of color, women) whose members rarely communicated in those media, but certainly participated in the transformation of the Ibero-Atlantic World. As Laurent Dubois has written concerning the Haitian Revolution, it is necessary to

destabilize the still-strong, at times seemingly unmovable, presumption that Europeans and European colonists were the exclusive agents of democratic theorizing . . . the crucial point is not that ideas from Europe might have inspired insurgents in Saint-Domingue, but that insurgents made use of, and profoundly transformed, the very meaning of republicanism.<sup>17</sup>

To the plurality of modernities advocated by Fernández Sebastián, a plurality of voices, especially those of the disenfranchised, should be included in the history of concepts. Their inclusion would, perhaps, modify the treatment of “liberalism” and “liberty” in the *Diccionario*. After all, as Domenico Losurdo recently has noted, the paradox is that the rise of liberalism and the spread of chattel slavery are products of a “twin birth”.<sup>18</sup> A final criticism concerns the chronological boundaries chosen. Certainly, Fernández Sebastián is correct to assert the survival, and flourishing, of a connected Ibero-Atlantic intellectual world after the independence of Latin American states from former metropolises and certainly the history of liberalism on both sides of the Atlantic remained entwined.<sup>19</sup> But 1850 seems too late; the shared intellectual–lexical–semantical milieu by the middle of the 1830s, though still surviving, was weak. The *Diccionario* would have benefited from narrowing the chronological parameters of the project. Criticism of such a magnificent work, however, would be a churlish note on which to conclude. Both Fernández Sebastián’s *Diccionario*, and Chiaramonte’s groundbreaking work on “nation” and “state”, provide ample evidence that the study of the history of political thought in the Ibero-Atlantic world is in the midst of a renaissance.

---

<sup>17</sup> Laurent Dubois, “An Enslaved Enlightenment: Rethinking the Intellectual History of the French Atlantic”, *Social History* 31 (2006), 1–14, 7, 12.

<sup>18</sup> Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History* (London and New York, 2011), 37; also see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Oxford, 1975).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Mónica Ricketts, “Together or Separate in the Fight against Oppression? Liberals in Peru and Spain in the 1820s”, *European History Quarterly* 41 (2011), 413–27.