

TIME AND HISTORY IN MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

WORKSHOP, SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES, TALLINN UNIVERSITY

The idea for the workshop emerges from the recognition that recent years have seen what could be characterized as the ‘temporal turn’ in the history of political thought – an interest in the ways in which different narrative schemes of time and history have been used as normative languages to pursue certain visions of politics.¹ This still fragmented interest can, however, draw on the broader historiographical setting prepared by the new wave of philosophies of history,² already classic scholarship on the socio-economic production of particular textures of temporal experience,³ as well as recent concurring shifts in political and cultural history,⁴ history of law and arts. In this context, we propose an expanded mapping of the ways in which modern political thinkers, historical actors and movements have constructed and lensed their political aims through unique, entangled and conflicting conceptions of time and historicity as vastly relevant and complementary to the more established approaches.

Varieties of temporalities and historicities, or ‘timescapes’, be it a forward-leaning progressivism, appeals to restoration of the days of glory, ends of History, or even apocalyptic visions of the Earth time ticking to its end, have not, until lately, been systematically defined as political concepts. Yet, they have significantly shaped and continue to shape our political

¹ See for example a recent issue of *Past and Present*, which deal with both a reconstruction of the current interest in temporalities and with a series of interesting case studies. *Past and Present* 243 (May 2019), pp. 247-327.

Also, Christopher Clarke, *Time and Power. Visions of history in German politics, from the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), pp. 4-6; Vittorio Morfino and Peter Thomas, *The Government of Time, Theories of Plural Temporality in the Marxist Tradition* (Brill, 2017); Dan Edelstein, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Natasha Wheatley (eds), *Power and Time: Temporalities in Conflict and the Making of History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2020).

² See Stefan Tanaka, *History without Chronology* (Amherst, MA: Lever Press, 2019); Zoltan B. Simon, *History in Times of Unprecedented Change: a theory for the 21st century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); Helge Jordheim, “Against periodization: Koselleck’s Theory of Multiple Temporalities”, *History and Theory* 51(2), 151-71; Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier (eds), *Rethinking Historical Time. New Approaches to Presentism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019) that makes the case for and builds on the delayed diffusion in the Anglophone world of the works of Reinhart Koselleck and François Hartog.

³ See the classic E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism”, *Past and Present* 38 (1967), pp. 56-97, as well as Jacques Le Goff, “Au Moyen Âge: temps de l’Église et temps du marchand”, *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 15 (1960), pp. 417-433, and later Bartky, I.R. (1989) ‘The adoption of standard time’ *Technology and Culture* 30, 25–56 and (2000) *Selling the True Time: Nineteenth-Century Timekeeping in America*. Stanford University Press.

⁴ For the most recent example, see Anne Fuchs, *Precarious Times. Temporality and History in Modern German Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

mentalities and imagination. The aim of the workshop is to reconstruct the aims and ways in which time and history as languages in the plural were used in political thought, speech and deed. This is something that has lately already been traced in a series of fascinating case studies in books, papers and workshops,⁵ yet reconstructing these connections more comprehensively than in the state of art would open diachronic and comparative perspectives on a variety of questions that have been hitherto only preliminarily explored. Some of these questions include:

- What are the moments and discourses in which history has been identified as indispensable to/in political thought and politics? What are the moments and aims of rendering it irrelevant? How have these seemingly contradictory languages interacted?
- What relationships can be identified between 1) speculative theorizing about history and time 2) the use of such languages in political thinking and argument and 3) the implicit presence of these notions in political and social life? What kind of ‘timescapes’ and in which ways have these been deployed to reconceptualise and remake (or attempt to maintain the status quo in) politics and social life in different contexts? In other words, what has been the co-constitution of temporal and political orders in concrete historical contexts?
- Is the “historicist” version of time an adequate paradigm to describe the main currents of 19th century temporal imagination? Or were there competing attempts to reorganise time and politics, and their concurrencies? What are the limits of Koselleck’s periodization?
- What relationships can be established between moments of historical rupture such as 1918 and 1989 and the construction of temporal imaginaries? Are such moments best characterized generically as moments of intense temporal re-elaboration or are there specific types of dynamics and ways in which time is re-imagined in these moments? To what kinds of time have economic, legal, political – but also literary, artistic, philosophical, environmental – and revolutionary practices appealed, and why?

While our initial intention is to focus on European political thought – perhaps to be challenged along the way -, our starting point is to acknowledge how political temporalities often are

⁵ See *Temps et temporalités sous la Révolution*, 10 mai 2019, Paris, Sorbonne, <http://www.ihmc.ens.fr/IMG/pdf/190510-temps-temporalites-sous-revolution-programme.pdf>, and Political Thought, Time and History, a conference at the Center for History of Political Thought, University of Cambridge, May 2018.

spatially contingent: this means not only extending the thematic geographical scope beyond the familiar ('major' Western European) traditions of political thought, but also laying a particular emphasis on authors representing a variety of European regions and languages. Secondly, emphasising that an innovative theme requires methodological innovation, we encourage contributions not only from historians of political thought, but also from cultural historians, literature and art historians, political and legal historians and thinkers.

Some examples of topics that we would be particularly interested in include:

- Revolutions/revolutionary thought
- Counter-revolutionary thought
- Romanticism
- Varieties of nationalism
- International law
- Varieties of liberalism
- Constitutionalisms
- Imperialism
- Secularisation
- The idea of the West
- Evolutionary theories
- Anarchism, Marxism, socialism
- Post-1870 reactionary thought
- New democracies in post-WW I Europe
- Racism/eugenics
- League of nations/internationalism
- Post-holocaust
- Decolonization
- Communism after WW II
- Globalism
- Human rights
- Christian democracy
- European unification
- Waves of feminisms
- Varieties of post-1989 'endism' and its critics in the East and West
- Environmentalism

One of the main aims of the workshop is to explore the scholarly horizons for an edited book or compendium on the topic. The workshop takes place in the framework of ERC Starting Grant "Between the Times: Embattled Temporalities and Political Imagination in Interwar Europe".

Please send your abstracts (max 500 words) to liisi.keedus@tlu.ee or tomaso.giordani@tlu.ee by the 15 of April 2022.