

Digital *Begriffsgeschichte* for early modern history of philosophy?

The history of concepts has its place within the history of philosophy. It allows for the investigation of the relation between philosophical theory and the vocabulary that is used to express it. Similarly, the history of concepts has reason to look at the history of philosophy; philosophy is one of the loci of conceptual innovation and/or precisification.

However, as Elias Palti has recently surveyed (Intellectual History and the Problem of Conceptual Change, 2024) the theoretical underpinnings for doing conceptual history and tracing conceptual change are not agreed upon. Multiple schools exist, and not all lead to similar methods of investigation. The most well known within early modern history of philosophy is Quentin Skinner's contextualism, but others include the history of ideas as it derives from Arthur Lovejoy's work, genealogy as it derives from Michel Foucault and *begriffsgeschichte* as it derives from the work of Reinhart Koselleck.

This last approach to the history of concepts focuses on both the heightened speed of conceptual change as an essential characteristic of modernity and on the power of words and concepts for popular political movement using the rapid spread of information through mass media. *Begriffsgeschichte* has had a recent resurgence of interest due to its amenability to digital large corpus analysis. This is because *begriffsgeschichte* is interested on the role concepts play in the development of modernity at large. As such, it opens up the possibility of tracing conceptual change not just through great thinker's productions, but also, for example, runs of newspapers, parliamentary debates, etc. Usually the large corpus techniques involved aim to pinpoint how, why and, how much concepts change or remain the same in their semantic content through the textual analysis of large swaths of text.

This renewed energy in the field of, let us call it *digital begriffsgeschichte* (Wevers and Koolen, 2020), raises a question with a related worry: might there be something to be gained for the history of early modern philosophy to *either* incorporate techniques from *digital begriffsgeschichte*, *or* to look at outcomes of *digital begriffsgeschichte*? And, the immediate worry; if *begriffsgeschichte* constitutes a theory of modernity and almost all current examples of *digital begriffsgeschichte* concern modernity, is there any hope for a positive answer to the above question?

In this talk I will firstly agree that there is a tension to doing *digital begriffsgeschichte* as, or for, early modern historians of philosophy. However, *digital begriffsgeschichte* provides a particularly effective approach to mapping out the interaction between usage of different social, professional or political groupings, showing how one way of speaking gave rise to another. For early modern philosophy, this can show the intermingling and borrowing of conceptual vocabulary from contexts outside of the scientific and philosophical one, as usually focused on. Is philosophy a motor of conceptual change in other forms of speech in early modernity or does it remain a professional language? Insofar as historians of early modern philosophy are interested in the relation between philosophy and semantic production at large, both the specific methods (computational modelling of meaning) as well as the outputs of *digital begriffsgeschichte* (quantified studies of the nature of the semantic relation between philosophy and other areas of textual production) will prove productive for early modern historians of philosophy. Or, so I will claim and illustrate.