

## *Editorial*

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This is the first issue of *Redescriptions* published by Manchester University Press, and also the first in the journal's new biannual format. *Redescriptions* has been published since 2003, and its history goes back to 1997 when it began first as *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought*. As one of those who have been involved with the journal since the beginning, I would like to express our gratitude to Kari Palonen, who has done remarkable work as editor-in-chief for most of the journal's existence. I will now be sharing the work of editor-in-chief with Kari, beginning with this issue. From its beginnings as a high quality peer reviewed regional journal in Northern Europe, we have witnessed it develop into an excellent international journal with an outstanding pool of writers, referees, and readers, and an active multinational team of editors.

*Redescriptions* is decidedly multidisciplinary. It gathers writers who take interest in both theory and politics, who often have a historical dimension in their work, and who think their material through with philosophical curiosity. A feminist aspect has been important within the journal throughout its history. Looking back to the 16 published volumes, the three themes that appear in the subtitle of the journal turn out to be distinctly accurate in describing the journal's content and focus: Political Thought, Conceptual History, and Feminist Theory. Looking ahead, we aim to continue to publish across a very wide area defined more by a common approach than with the disciplinary background of the writers.

The approach *Redescriptions* cultivates is thinking politically, which is different from a simple focus on the study of political theory. Although *Redescriptions* regularly publishes on democracy, rhetoric, and the history of political concepts, at its core, thinking politically in *Redescriptions* much more importantly adheres to the idea of contingency. This suggests comprehending the world, whether in the past or the present, as consisting of chance, opportunities of there being spaces for action, and of the possibility for change. This also involves paying attention to conflicts caused by contingency. Chantal Mouffe's agonistics is a good example of thinking politically in studying the present. In studying the past, politicizing is achieved through, for example, focusing on contestations about meanings and the use of concepts, as seen in Quentin

Skinner's work; by studying conceptual change, as seen in Reinhart Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte*; or by rendering the present contingent through historicizing key concepts, something that Michel Foucault and Judith Butler have done to the notions of sexuality and gender. Revealing conceptual contingency means political thinking since it results in expanding the terms and possibilities of transformation, alteration, change, and difference.

Feminist thought is a prime example of thinking politically. Anyone familiar with contemporary feminist theory recognizes that feminist scholarship often historicizes and politicizes what are often taken for granted concepts, regularly questioning the underlying assumptions upon which they are based. For quite a long time, within the contemporary academic debate, feminist theory has had the position of representing exactly what we in *Redescriptions* understand as thinking politically, and therefore along with political theory, and conceptual history, feminist thought has a special position in *Redescriptions*.

Another crucial dimension in the *Redescriptions* approach is taking language seriously. Concepts in this journal are not understood as being potentially abstractly universalizable, but as linguistically and historically specific and contextual. Rather than defining concepts, studying the use of concepts is therefore the focus; and rather than establishing the meanings of concepts, the interest is in their multiplicity and change. Names frequently encountered in *Redescriptions* therefore also include scholars, such as Jacques Derrida, who have consistently worked to point out the unstable meanings of concepts and to destabilize their assumed contents.

Most of the signature themes of *Redescriptions* are present in the articles and book reviews of the present issue: Frank Ankersmit, in the opening article writes on the relationship of two key political concepts, 'sovereignty' and 'representation', with a historical approach and a political accent that is characteristic to him; Anne-Emmanuelle Berger renders unstable a highly contested concept in feminist theory, 'sexual difference,' with a notable sensibility towards language; Dirk Jörke's article on interpretations of Aristotle emphasizes rhetorical dimension of politics, and Lena Halldenius evaluates the feminist potential of the concept of freedom in Quentin Skinner's republican theory.

Frank Ankersmit's exceptionally extensive article in this issue works by rendering modern democracy contingent through historical insight. His reflection on the notions of sovereignty and representation seek to inform us about "hidden cracks and fissures in the political walls of our present democratic home." With his characteristic comprehensive and rigorous approach, Ankersmit provides an analysis that strongly and clearly contrasts understanding of the notions of sovereignty and representation in the Western Middle Ages with those connected to the modern state. Unlike the modern unipolar idea of sovereignty, the medieval notion of sovereignty comprises a political hierarchy without there being a fixed point in that hierarchy to which all those included could be

related. The medieval notion of representation clearly distinguishes between the people's representatives and the prince. Bringing forward this very different idea of representation, Ankersmit shines a light on the specificity of the modern notion of representation and its fragility, which is caused by the tension in the notion of a modern democratic representative, who is both a representative and a legislator. This also sheds light on the present problems of representatives concerning their constituencies. In Ankersmit's view, contemporary democratic representatives may feel themselves to be ever more torn between their task of representing the people, on the one hand, and their role as legislator, on the other. Through this speculation, Ankersmit raises the question of "whether our representative democracies actually are elective aristocracies."

Anne-Emmanuelle Berger's article engages with a particular concept, or 'idiom,' as she phrases it, of 'sexual difference.' This is one of the most debated concepts of contemporary feminist theory, and here, instead of focusing on the discussion about whether there is a fixed status of sexual difference, or on any agreed meaning of the phrase 'sexual difference', which are the most common approaches towards the issue, Berger emphasizes the obvious instability of the use of the phrase. She begins her fascinating exploration by recounting a farcical 'misunderstanding' in an exchange between Judith Butler and Gayle Rubin on what 'sexual difference' might mean, or what each of them might mean by it. "Language takes us on a ride" in Berger's article through some not so obvious users of the phrase 'sexual difference': Sigmund Freud; Hélène Cixous; Jacques Derrida; Gayle Rubin, and Judith Butler. Moving between the French and the Anglophone context of contemporary feminist theory, Berger makes a point that in feminist theory the key terms in the vocabulary are regularly disputed and consequently undergo a continuing process of re-signification. Most remarkably, she reminds us that instead of the male/female or masculine/feminine distinction, Freud attempted to conceptualize with 'sexuelle Differenzen' the variety of sexual behaviors, a use that Gayle Rubin relates to, as she uses "sexual difference" to refer to all sorts of sexual practices and identifications, which are understood to be historically contingent. The philosophico-philological mode of Derrida, or the poetic fashion of Hélène Cixous of using the term, also differ from Butler, who reflects on the various political aims or effects of its use within different contexts.

Rhetoric as a crucial dimension of politics is emphasized in Dirk Jörke's article on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, that thoroughly discussed classical work, which is here brought to contribute to contemporary understandings of political debate. Jörke argues that the role of emotions in political decision-making has been underestimated, and he shows that Aristotle does not speak for rational and unemotional way of political decision-making in that text. On the contrary, in Jörke's view, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* should be read as a manual for demagogues.

Jörke argues that Aristotle has been too often interpreted as addressing what

he calls the “current hegemony of deliberative approaches” towards understanding democracy, which emphasize rational argumentation. Holding onto quite a strong opposition between rationality and rhetoric, Jörke calls for more empirical approaches towards studying democratic processes, which would bring forward the rhetorical elements of argumentation and take into consideration the role of power and interests in shaping the hegemonic values and political ideas.

Lena Halldenius, in her article, takes on the task of evaluating the particular notion of freedom which is known as republican within political theory – and in particular, she considers Quentin Skinner’s conception of republican, neo-Roman freedom – from the perspective of whether it might be helpful in feminist understandings of gendered subordination. Republican theory focuses on institutions of law, forms of government, and rules of representation. The Skinnerian conception of neo-roman freedom involves the idea that a person is free only if s/he is not dependent on or subjected to the arbitrary will of another, and therefore only a republican constitution provides this kind of freedom. Halldenius points out three aspects which make the republican or neo-roman notion of freedom important for feminist thought. First, for a feminist the issue of whether a person is free or not is institutional in character. Second, freedom and unfreedom is, for Halldenius, a matter of status, not of choice. Third, unfreedom has to do with the experience of being dependent. The third issue, which Halldenius finds most interesting involves for Skinner the phenomenon of self-censorship, meaning that dependent persons will trim their desires, aspirations and behavior so as not to cause offence, and in the long run this will have psychological consequences. Halldenius concludes that there are good feminist reasons for being a republican about freedom. The most crucial of these is the issue of the experience of unfreedom and the psychological dynamic of inequality of power and subordination. Halldenius would shift this third aspect to the center of the attention, and she encourages for more complex theorizing on it than has been done thus far.

The Book Reviews cover much the same field of interest as the articles: the review article by Markku Hyrkkänen on the volume *Political Concepts and Time. New Approaches to Conceptual History* edited by Javier Fernández Sebastián’s and dedicated to Koselleck’s work on *Begriffsgeschichte*, brings together scholars interested in the language of politics, and addresses a wide range on issues in the study of the histories of particular political concepts. Hyrkkänen deeply explores various aspects of concepts, contexts, and experience within the Koselleckian tradition, which, as the review shows, are interpreted in multiple different ways.

The book reviews also include Taru Haapala’s review of Markku Peltonen’s *Rhetoric, Politics and Popularity in Pre-Revolutionary England*, which discusses the extent to which the teaching of classical rhetoric has been imbedded in the

British political culture. Julian Honkasalo reviews Judith Butler's *Parting Ways – Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* where Butler works with writings from Jewish and Palestinian thinkers as an author with a specific kind of Jewish education that constitutes a motivation to articulate an ethics of non-violence as a critique and response to Israel's State violence and its self-declaration as a Jewish State. Honkasalo points out that the book is in important ways related to Butler's ongoing inquiry into the relationship between law and violence. The reviews also include an interestingly original piece of writing on audible and sonorous Foucault by Chad Shomura who reviews Lauri Siisiäinen's *Foucault and the Politics of Hearing*. Siisiäinen makes us aware of the genealogies of various senses in Foucault's work, and of the fact that it is not only the panopticon and eyes, but also ears that are needed by modern power.

The articles and reviews in this issue are by authors from different disciplines and genders, and by both by senior and widely recognized writers and more junior ones. Paying attention to the multiplicity present in the journal in terms of discipline, gender and seniority is an aim of the editors. The journal is equally committed to publishing papers deriving from a wide geographical and linguistic area, and the present issue is a good example of this as the writers of the articles and reviews as well as the books reviewed derive both from Anglophone and a wide range of non-Anglophone countries. We hope to continue this multiplicity in both intellectual and other respects in future issues.

The transition to Manchester University Press is a further step in the course of our journal. As editors we are excited to work with MUP, and hope that this new phase makes it possible for us to reach a new range of readers and writers.

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