



**UNIVERSITÄT
HEIDELBERG**
ZUKUNFT
SEIT 1386

Crisis and Renewal in the History of Political Thought

Fifth International Conference of the European Society for the History of Political Thought University of Heidelberg, 11-13 October 2018

The European Society for the History of Political Thought (ESHPT, <http://europoliticalthought.wordpress.com>) invites proposals for individual papers and panels for its next international conference.

Amongst the keywords that have shaped the language of media, public conversation, politico-economic discourse and academic debate in the last few years, 'crisis' holds a prominent place. The term is applied to a huge variety of domains: from the never-ending cries of a 'global economic crisis' to descriptions of war zones as 'crisis-torn', on to characterisations of professionals as 'crisis-experts' as well as references to governmental 'crisis-management' teams. The frequency with which the word is utilised though does not signify clarity of meaning, nor does it denote historical and theoretical accuracy with regard to its origins and usages. In fact, the wide range of uses makes it for much uncertainty: from indicating stark alternatives and non-negotiable decisions, it has assumed vague connotations, which might be seen as a sign that the current historical era is deeply marked by instability and lack of clear direction(s).

If the *Oxford English Dictionary* stresses that 'crisis' pointed, first and foremost, to the medical sense of 'the turning-point of a disease for better or worse', before the connotations closer to those normally referred to nowadays, that is of 'times of difficulty, insecurity, and suspense in politics or commerce', it is important to underline that plenty of historians have reflected on crisis from different angles. Economic and social historians (Eric Hobsbawm, Hugh Trevor-Roper, Roland Mousnier, Geoffrey Parker and others) have addressed the 'general crisis of the seventeenth century' as a series of calamities in Europe inaugurating the dynamic development of capitalism and the emergence of modern states. In a similar vein, Paul Hazard described the late seventeenth-century 'crisis of the European mind' as leading to the Enlightenment, while according to Reinhart Koselleck enlightened 'critique' represented a challenge (i.e. of the political by the social, ethical and cultural), and 'crisis' the moment of subversion. In each of these approaches the idea of 'crisis' comes across as a kind of 'testing time' that might give rise to new experimentation. As a matter of fact, this throws interesting light on the current, apparently 'critical'

predicament of liberal democracy and the agenda this might prescribe for political theorizing.

Whilst taking into consideration these approaches (which are just a sample), our conference at Heidelberg University, where Koselleck was a student and wrote *Kritik und Krise*, is shaped by the thematic and methodological preoccupations of the history of political thought. Our aim is to broaden some of these themes in new directions and investigate the notion of 'crisis and renewal' (also as a mirror image of work on 'decline and fall'). We ask papers to focus on the ways in which the self-reflection of innovative thinkers in critical times moulded their vocabularies and the modalities in which the 'critical' element of their contributions was articulated. We invite proposals that address, but are not confined to, the following questions:

- How does political thought react to critical moments in history?
- Does political thought produce 'crisis/es'?
- Are moments of 'crisis' also moments of creativity for the history of political thought and political theory?
- Are existing concepts at a given time suited to face crises or are established principles employed in different ways to respond and make sense of them?
- How can we theorise, indeed reflect both theoretically and historically, vis-à-vis (notions of) 'crisis'?
- How do we account for the complex changes and developments occurred in the meanings of 'crisis' from ancient Greece (where the word was coined) up to the last few decades?
- What trajectory/ies did ideas of crisis take in different contexts at different historical junctures?
- What are the relations between political ideas and material factors such as famine, war, weather etc. in conjunction with 'crisis'?

These questions need to be addressed by embracing the full geographical and chronological spectrum of 'European political thought' from antiquity to the present. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the ESHPT and of the discipline of the history of political thought, we welcome papers and panels seeking to cover some of the questions above from multiple methodological and historiographical perspectives (e.g., political thought, political theory, history, philosophy, law).

Keynote speakers: Erica Benner (Berlin)
Paschalis Kitromilides (Athens)
Katja Patzel-Mattern (Heidelberg)

Proposals for individual 20 minute papers should be no longer than 250 words, and proposals for panels should not exceed 500 words. Short CVs of the speakers should be added (name, institutional affiliations, major publications – no more than five). Panels at the conference will normally last 90 minutes, with 3 papers each. (Exceptionally, panel proposals consisting of more than 3 papers can be accommodated.)

Please send your proposals by 30 September 2017 to László Kontler, kontlerl@ceu.edu, cc to Gregor Stiebert, gregorstiebert@zegk.uni-heidelberg.de.

Authors will be notified of paper acceptance or non-acceptance by 15 December 2017.

Participation fee (provisional): 60 EUR. The fee is calculated to meet unavoidable expenses. The organizing committee is making efforts to secure external funding for the conference. In case these efforts are successful, the participation fee shall be waived and participants' travel and accommodation costs may be alleviated.

By ESHPT tradition (see <https://europolitalthought.wordpress.com/publications/>), we intend to publish an edited volume selected from papers read at the conference.

Organizing committee:
Cesare Cuttica, Erfurt / Helsinki
Xavier Gil, Barcelona
László Kontler, Budapest
Susan Richter, Heidelberg
Peter Schröder, London