Introduction: to study the idea of solidarity

There are many reasons for studying the idea of solidarity. Early social philosophers and sociologists in the nineteenth century observed that traditional feelings of togetherness and social bonds were torn apart in the process that gave birth to modern society, and they saw solidarity as a means for social cohesion and integration. The international labour movement made class solidarity a slogan and a weapon against social and political adversaries. The welfare state is often seen as the result of a struggle for solidarity and the institutional expression of solidarity. In Catholic social teaching and Protestant social ethics, solidarity gradually became more important than charity. Thus, solidarity is a key concept in the social theory and in the modern political discourse of two of the main political traditions within European politics – social democracy and Christian democracy. The key position of solidarity in social theory and modern political discourse is a compelling reason to make the concept an object of study.

In addition, solidarity is a key concept in social policy research. Predominant classifications of welfare states make the degree of solidarity in social benefits and structure a distinguishing criterion. In his path-breaking book *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* Gösta Esping-Andersen links universalism to the socialist idea of solidarity (1990). The two kinds of parties studied in this book – social democratic and Christian democratic – were the political protagonists in the development of generous welfare states. Esping-Andersen's thesis is supported by Evelyne Huber and John D. Stephens in their book *Development and Crisis of the Welfare State* (Huber and Stephens 2001). In *The Politics of Social Solidarity*, Peter Baldwin investigates how solidarity between the working class and farmers was conducive to the introduction of a universal pension system, and how the willingness to share risks was crucial for this expression of solidarity (Baldwin 1990). However, as this study will show, it is one thing to establish the fact that a social alliance developed that led to a universal welfare state, with institutions that we today might see as an expression of solidarity; it is another to establish the fact that

1

actors and parties saw this social alliance as an expression of solidarity. This book asks the question *to what extent did actors and parties formulate their politics in the language of solidarity?*

Third, we shall see that the concept of solidarity is applied in both social theory and politics with different meanings and connotations. This book concludes that solidarity can most fruitfully be defined as the preparedness to share resources with others by personal contribution to those in struggle or in need and through taxation and redistribution organised by the state. It is not an attitude that is narrowly based upon self-interest. The self and its identifications have expanded significantly here, and political altruism finds expression. Solidarity implies a readiness for collective action and a will to institutionalise that collective action through the establishment of rights and citizenship. However, this definition is only one of many possible definitions. *Solidarity* is sometimes used as a nebulous concept that is not defined at all. Its use may be a subterfuge in political rhetoric to hide the fact that the *phenomenon* of solidarity is missing or on the decline in the real world. This tendency and the central position of the concept in social theory and in political discourse make it imperative to explicate different views, definitions and implications. The unclear and sometimes deceptive use of the term solidarity in political rhetoric makes communication complicated, and often creates misunderstandings, unfounded agreement and disagreement in political discourse and in everyday language. One of the tasks of social science should be to assist citizens and politicians, by improving communication and the possibility for improved reciprocal understanding. A study of the idea of solidarity might make communication and critical understanding easier to foster.

Finally, in an age of individualism, the idea of solidarity seems to be threatened and on the defensive. The triumph of capitalism and the expansion of markets and market ideology make collective arrangements and the ideas on which they are founded more precarious. The discussion about the welfare state can be understood as an attempt to answer the question – to what extent and in what way should society impose institutions and arrangements built upon solidarity? The growing ethnic plurality of Western Europe, the increase in xenophobic attitudes and the huge gap between the rich and the poor nations makes solidarity a burning global issue. Increased individualism and, in particular, the emphasis placed on the personal freedom to choose and mould one's own way in the world, challenge the traditional value of solidarity. Globalisation of the world economy directs our attention to the lack of corresponding political and legal institutions that might ensure some kind of solidarity. These challenges to the practice of solidarity in modern society

are good reasons, in themselves, to make the concept of solidarity an object of closer inspection. Some might object that the implicit premise of this book is that solidarity is good. This is partly, but only partly, true. Although Leninist and fascist solidarity are briefly discussed, I do not discuss solidarity in deviant social groups, such as criminals and terrorists. Solidarity is not morally good *per se* – it is good only to the extent that its inclusiveness, goal and implications for the individual are morally acceptable.

The study of ideas

The study of political ideas has long been seen as old-fashioned in modern political science. Neighbouring disciplines, such as philosophy, history and – to some extent – literature, have expanded to fill the resulting gap. The history of ideas, an offshoot of the history of philosophy, with Aristotle as the founding father, took the lead in this endeavour.[1] In the past decades, the field was renewed by Foucault's contributions within modern discourse analysis, by Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy of language, and by German conceptual history in the hermeneutic tradition. The study of political ideology, in the second part of this book, is inspired by the last two approaches.

The German historian Reinhart Koselleck is inspired by the hermeneutic tradition from Dilthey to Hans-Georg Gadamer. He has reached beyond this tradition as a historian preoccupied with social and political history and the analysis of conceptual change in political language. Koselleck, and his colleagues Ernst Brunner and Walter Conze, published an impressive seven-volume encyclopaedia, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* in 1972 (Brunner, Conze and Koselleck 1972).

Koselleck argues that a profound change within classic themes took place from the middle of the eighteenth century. Old words began to acquire new meanings, and, with the passing of time, no longer needed to be explained (Koselleck 1972). The question is how best to understand the dissolution of the old world and the birth of the new modern world, and the conceptual changes that this transition brought about. How did old words change their meaning? The *Begriffsgeschichte* – conceptual

---

[1] Arthur Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being* in 1936 had for a long time a strong influence on the study of ideas (Wilson 1987). Lovejoy suggested that particular unit-ideas should be the focus of study. Individual authors, particular texts, classic or canonised, about ideas, doctrines or '-ism' were to be highlighted, without any need for a contextual approach. The next decades were dominated by the study of the texts of great writers, key ideas, doctrines, theories and '-isms'. For a history of the history of ideas, see Kelley (1990).

4   Solidarity in Europe

history – of Koselleck, and his colleagues, includes concepts that grasp the process of change that accompanied the political and industrial revolution. The transformation of society, during the period from 1750 to 1850, brings forth numerous examples of words and concepts that fall out of usage or change their meaning in usage. New concepts emerge as well, establishing a new way of talking about politics and society (Koselleck 1996). Many concepts were *democratised* in the sense that new classes and social groups began using them. Concepts were *temporalised* and given meanings that were associated with the time in which they were applied. Old concepts lost their general meaning and acquired a meaning coined by the present. New concepts and *-isms* appeared, to characterise new phenomena or to describe society in a new way. Expressions were *ideologised*, became more abstract, and aggregates were expressed in the singular, what Koselleck calls *Kollektivsingulare*, i.e. the concept of freedom instead of many freedoms, progress instead of progresses, etc. Finally, concepts were *politicised*. Concepts such as *democracy, citizen, equality, society* and *progress* acquired a new meaning that is more in accordance with the usage today. *Solidarity* was among these concepts, but it is not included in the 115 extensive analyses of basic concepts in the encyclopaedia, even if we do find an exposition of the concept of *Brüderlichkeit* – brotherhood or fraternity.

The British historian and philosopher Quentin Skinner is a representative of the Anglo–Saxon analytical philosophy of language tradition and the so-called Cambridge School. Skinner published his path-breaking study *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* in 1980, but presented his methodological approach eleven years earlier, in the polemic article *Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas* (Skinner 1969; 1980). Another protagonist of the Cambridge School is J. G. A. Pocock. Skinner and Pocock have been inspired by one another, and both take John Austin's theory of speech-acts as their point of departure. Pocock has been preoccupied with the study of linguistics – how stable language structures and speech acts are repeated and modified in such a way that languages and vocabularies succeed one another. His objective is to study political language as a distinctive discourse, not in the Foucaultian sense, but as dynamic structures that are modified and changed. Words are given new meanings, taken out of one context and put into another (Pocock 1985; Richter 1995).

Four aspects of the debate about the study of concepts or ideas in the texts of Koselleck and Skinner are of interest for the study presented in this book. What should be the object of study? How should we conceive of the relationship between text and context? What should be the role (or possibility) of causal analysis? What is the relationship between the analysis of ideas and concepts and the analysis of discourses?

For Koselleck, the objects of study are basic concepts and their work-ings in history. These concepts are *indicators* and *factors*. They refer to (or indicate) specific historical phenomena, and they are factors in shaping and changing society. Examples of these basic concepts are central con-stitutional terms, key terms in the political and economic organisation of society, key concepts of political movements and their slogans, theo-retical and other ambitious core concepts, and ideologies that constitute the space of action and the world of work (Koselleck 1996). Although it is necessary to distinguish between words and concepts, Koselleck sees the difference between them as a pragmatic one and the transi-tion from word (or term) to concept operates on a sliding scale. Words and concepts are ambiguous, he argues. Words may become unambigu-ous, but concepts always remain ambiguous. 'A word becomes a con-cept when it implies the entire political and social context in which it is applied', he says. The materials used for the conceptual studies by Koselleck, and his colleagues, are encyclopaedias, dictionaries, hand-books and works of the language written during the period of time being studied.

Skinner, in his article *Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas*, argued that it is not possible to write about ideas without focusing upon the various agents who use the idea. Their various situations and their intentions are important elements for our understanding (Skinner 1969). Skinner seems to deny the utility of studying concepts over long time spans, as Koselleck has done and this study attempts to do. What should be studied is the political language of a defined and limited period, and to do this, it is necessary to analyse a range of political texts from that same period, he argues.

These different views about what should be the object of study seem less important when we come to the relationship between text and context. Skinner argues, that if we are to understand an idea, it will be neces-sary to understand the society in which the agent formulates that idea. The context is insufficiently understood when political, economic and other societal characteristics are not made clear. To speak (or write) is to perform a speech-act. We also need to understand what an agent is doing when he or she utters a statement. We need to know the inten-tion of the agent when performing a speech-act and the force of that performance. We must distinguish between the *locutionary* aspect of a speech-act – which refers to the meaning of words and sentences – and the *illocutionary* aspect, which refers to the force of the statement. The illocutionary aspect determines whether or not the statement is meant to be a threat, an assertion, a challenge, etc. Finally, the *perlocutionary* aspect is the effect of the statement upon the person who listens or reads the statement or text. In practice, this means studying political ideas in light

of their background in every relevant text that constitutes the linguistic context of an author, the texts to which the author relates, and the relevant social and political aspects of the society in which the author lives. This is an enormous ambition and makes it, as Skinner himself asserts, impossible to write the history of a concept in this strict sense. To take heed of this would mean to be restricted to in-depth studies of a limited time-period with few actors and make impossible comparative studies of long periods with many actors such as this study.

Koselleck argues in a similar but more careful way, that conceptual history should deal with the use of specific language in specific situations, within which concepts are developed and used by specific speakers. He insists that his main emphasis is more a history of the social structure than of linguistics. Concepts, of course, may be used and reused in varying ways. Variations in their use may be more or less frequent and more or less divergent from earlier meanings. Although these variations may be marginal or profound, linguistic recycling ensures a minimum degree of continuity. Conceptual history may resemble the history of ideas. Any assertion about continuity must be supported by evidence based upon concrete and repeated usage of the vocabulary (Koselleck 1989; 1996). Koselleck's project takes the middle ground *between* a history of words and a history of phenomena: it is neither one nor the other. 'Conceptual history has the convergence of concept and history as its theme', he says. The method includes an analysis of the different meanings of a concept (semasiological), a study of the different concepts that are used for the same phenomena (onomasiological), as well as a discussion of questions related to social and political phenomena and the human arts. His project avoids both seeing the history of ideas as an idealistic *Geistesgeschichte* and seeing it as merely a reflection of material processes. Here, Skinner and Koselleck seem to be close to each other.

Another issue to be discussed is the nature of explanation in the study of ideas. Koselleck is clearly more preoccupied with hermeneutic interpretation than with causal analysis and does not explicitly discuss causal explanation contra interpretive understanding. He emphasises that his method oscillates between semasiological and onomasiological questions and issues related to social and political phenomena and the human arts (Koselleck 1972). Skinner's preoccupation with the relationship between text and context does not imply a causal or determinative role for context. The social context is relevant only insofar as it conditions the interpreter's understanding of what constitutes the range of 'conventionally recognisable meanings' in that society. Thus, Skinner, too, shares a hermeneutic or interpretative stance rather than one professing causal explanation (Janssen 1985).

It should be clear from the discussion above that Skinner differs funda-
mentally from Foucault and his version of discourse analysis in asserting
that individual authors of texts *do* matter. He does not – like Foucault –
adopt an approach without subjects or agents, and he does not accept
the view that individuals are prisoners within a discourse or language.
Although Skinner recognises that we are all limited by the concepts avail-
able to us when we wish to communicate, he maintains that language
constitutes a resource as well as a constraint (Skinner 1988). How else
are we able to account for conceptual change? Conventions are chal-
lenged and concepts are either undermined or enriched and acquire new
meanings, and subjects or agents *do* count in this process. The idea of
discourse, in a more generic sense, is a necessary implication of Skinner's
approach. The historian should primarily study languages of discourse
and only secondarily the relationship between the individual contribu-
tions to those languages of discourse. Koselleck, too, sees his concep-
tual analysis as being compatible with discourse analysis in the generic
sense. Each depends inescapably upon the other, he asserts. A discourse
requires basic concepts in order to give expression to the content that is
to be communicated. An analysis of concepts requires an understanding
of linguistic and extralinguistic contexts, including those provided by dis-
courses. Only by such knowledge of context can the analyst determine the
multiple meanings of a concept, its content, importance and the extent
to which it is contested (Koselleck 1996).

Michael Freeden, professor of politics at Oxford, has sought to inte-
grate Anglo-Saxon analytical rigour with hermeneutics and *Begriff-
sgeschichte* and postmodern insights. He criticises Skinner for his
'individualist bias' and argues that insofar as tradition affects the for-
mation of human, and political, ideas, the role of tradition cannot be
rejected. Ideas as units do not need to be studied only in an idealistic way,
as units living their own lives, Freeden argues. What matters is the way
unit ideas are studied (Freeden 1996) – a view that this author endorses.

Freeden proposes an approach that he describes as eclectic and sug-
gests a set of analytical concepts for the study of political ideology. *Main*,
or *key* political concepts, as the one denoted here, are terms such as
liberty, rights, equality, justice, power and democracy. *Ideologies* are dis-
tinctive configurations of such political concepts, but these concepts can
be combined in indeterminate and unlimited configurations. *Morphology*
denotes the internal ideational arrangements of an ideology. Freeden
prefers morphology to *structure* because morphology is more apt to denote
the flexible and pliant aspects of ideology and because he wants to
evade the connotations of structure in modern social theory. Thus, mor-
phology implies that there are no absolute boundaries between many

ideologies so that ideologies may to a larger or lesser extent overlap one another.

Ideologies are three-tier formations: they consist of the components of a concept, a concept and a system of concepts. The building blocks of political ideologies are political concepts, and those consist of an inelim-inable core and other variable components that are associated with the core in a limited number of recognisable patterns. Concepts may be *core*, *adjacent* or *peripheral* concepts. Marginal concepts are those that have little significance and are intellectually emotionally marginal to the core concept. Concepts may move from the core to the margin and vice versa. Concepts at the perimeter are additional ideas that link ideology, core and adjacent concepts to the external reality and make them relevant for social and political practice.

Freeden's emphasis on the fluidity, flexibility and potential hybrid character of any ideology is closely associated with his ambition to learn from hermeneutics and postmodernism. Concepts, language and meaning are socially constructed, he argues, but he seeks to escape from strong relativism by insisting that empirical analysis and data set some limits for how concepts, language and ideologies may be understood.

The contribution of this book

What, then, is the relevance of the discussion above for the study of the concept of solidarity in this book? First, I presuppose the necessity of discussing the social and political context within which change takes place when studying the change of a basic political concept such as solidarity. According to Skinner, such a study, ideally, should include the intention of the agent, the meaning of statements, their force and their effects upon listeners and readers. Second, I recognise that my own approach does not meet Skinner's methodological demands. His requirements are too strict for a comparative study addressing changes over a longer time-span. Conducting a study of many nations over more than one hundred years requires me to resign myself to a less than complete study of contextual factors. The intentions of authors and the force of their statements – not to mention the effects upon others of different statements made at different times and places – are requirements far beyond what is possible in a comparative project that covers more than one hundred years. On this matter, my study more closely resembles those of Koselleck and Freeden than those of Skinner. Besides that, I simply do not agree with Skinner that it is impossible to trace the development and change of basic ideas over long time-spans. To assert this is certainly not to imply that concepts or ideas are immutable units that can be studied without reference to their

linguistic, social and political context, as Skinner maintains. However, I do agree that attempting to do so is an ambition that is not without its own risks. It will be necessary to limit the data to be studied and this will naturally entail the danger of misinterpretation. My defence for doing this is a pragmatic one. An exploratory approach, like my own, may be fruitful enough to yield something that others might criticise, revise or build upon.

Third, my ambition, but only to a limited extent, is that of Pocock; to study the full political language used by many political parties of the periods covered would represent too many actors over too long a period of time. Although I will comment on the different conceptual contexts of solidarity, my intention is not to analyse the conceptual changes of the other concepts within each context. My comments on the differing conceptual contexts of *solidarity* are made only to the extent necessary to understand the meaning of the different ideas of solidarity in the parties studied. In principle, it is necessary to study the existence or non-existence of languages that compete with or rival the language of solidarity in all periods. Again, because of the need to limit this work, this will be done solely for the last period under study in this book.

Fourth, this study might fill a lacuna in the work of Skinner, and those of his colleagues using a similar approach. Generally, as Melvin Richter has noted, they have concentrated on the ideas of individual theorists and have lacked interest in the political language of movements and parties, which is the focus of this study (Richter 1995). Besides that, most of their works have concentrated on periods before the nineteenth century, whereas my work seeks to map the development of the idea of solidarity and its relation to other key political concepts into our own time.

Fifth, as previously mentioned, the main source for what I consider to be the empirical part of this book – Part II – are party programmes, supported by party resolutions and articles and texts from party leaders and party theorists. The ambition is to identify semasiological and onomasiological aspects of the concept of solidarity in this material. Both Skinner and Koselleck have analysed a broader range of sources, although usually in a more restricted geographical area than the eight nations studied here. In the article in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* about fraternity, and elsewhere in that work, Koselleck and his colleagues apply a wide range of texts, but it is not easy to determine their criteria for selecting those texts. The advantage of the specific and delimited criteria used in this study is that we may be more confident that what is studied is the establishment and change of specific *institutionalised* political concepts of solidarity.

Finally, my study is limited to the two types of parties that have declared solidarity to be a basic value. Some would argue that a study of solidarity should include conservatism and liberalism as well as parties who have declared themselves as respectively conservative and liberal. Conservatism has naturally entailed ideas about community, sometimes based on the family, an organic conception of society, or the nation, or constituted by the adherence to common religion or culture. Even some versions of liberalism, the ideology that has most strongly emphasised the value of individual autonomy, have introduced concepts that are related to solidarity. Michael Freeden has demonstrated that John Stuart Mill was pre-occupied with concepts such as *sense of unity with mankind* and *feeling for the general good* (Freeden 1996). Even so, liberal and conservative parties have generally developed other political concepts and languages, and the need to delimit this work has made it impossible to include conservatism and liberalism as well.

In the first part of this book, I try to map the different concepts of solidarity that are found in the classic texts of sociology, in Marxist theory and in Christian religious doctrine. My intention here is to establish the structure of differing concepts of solidarity, as a heuristic device for the empirical study presented in Part II. References to contexts and intentions are few, and the danger of misinterpretation is greater here than in the second part. The authors selected are those who are generally considered to be protagonists within classic sociology, Marxist theory and Catholic and Protestant social ethics, in so far as they have contributed to the development of the concept of solidarity.

In the second part of this book, I trace the change in the ideas of solidarity in political parties in Western Europe. I try to better understand the changes that have occurred by discussing social and political contextual factors that may have contributed to such change. I seek to identify critical junctures in the process of change and contextual factors that influenced change. In the third part of this book, references to contexts are again few, except for general references to the shared political and social situation from the 1970s until today. My discussion here is concentrated upon the contributions made by established social theorists that have participated in the discussion about the concept of solidarity in the last few decades.

Method and material: parties and programmes

The study is about the history of an idea and not about the (perlocutionary) effects this idea has had on the political practice of these parties. Yet, the underlying and implicit premise for the choice of this research