

*Intellectual History and Democracy:
An Interview with Pierre Rosanvallon*

Introduction

In this wide-ranging interview with Javier Fernández Sebastián, Pierre Rosanvallon (1948–) provides a useful introduction to his trajectory over three decades and to his by now voluminous body of work.

A professor at the Collège de France for several years, Rosanvallon is hard to categorize. Is he a political theorist? If so, then why are his books chiefly historical in content? Is he then a historian? But the material he wants to study includes concepts like sovereignty and representation that, as he shows, cannot be understood without a vivid sense of their philosophical complexity, even if historians often assume that their meaning were obvious. (In recent histories of “American democracy,” for example, the concept has been treated as a metric of inclusion, even simple electoral inclusion, as if that were all there is to it.) All the same, Rosanvallon is very far from being an intellectual historian. Though elite thinkers occupy his attention from time to time, he is much more concerned with the way that the political consciousness and action of a populace as a whole is always and necessarily inflected by conceptual premises and commitments.

In this way, Rosanvallon’s “history of the political” (a phrase in the title of his chair) remains distinctive. This interview goes some distance towards showing how, and why, he has arrived at such an unusual blend of approaches, positioning himself athwart the current disciplines. As he recounts, he got his start in politics, and could well have embarked on a career as a political actor.¹ As a result, his life as an academic has always

¹ For an account of the political scene in Rosanvallon’s youth, and of his transition to academia, see my article with Andrew Jainchill, “French Democracy between Totalitari-

been oriented toward the present—without, he claims below, ever falling into the vice of “presentism.”

In a fascinating section of the discussion, Rosanvallon responds to the opportunity to distinguish his approach from that of Quentin Skinner, perhaps the most methodologically influential Anglophone intellectual historian of the past several decades. Interestingly enough, while rejecting the “antiquarianism” that launched Skinner’s career as a theorist, Rosanvallon’s language here comes close to endorsing the project of “re-enacting” the past most familiar from the work of R. G. Collingwood—one of Skinner’s own sources of inspiration.

But the contrast nonetheless remains instructive. In recent years, as Javier Fernández Sebastián rightly suggests below, Skinner has tried to move away from the strict antiquarianism on which he first insisted. Though he says that this move is faithful to his original stance, that claim fits ill with Skinner’s original attack on the “mythology of coherence”—the assumption that thinkers remain consistent over time. Salutary in its era for its response to various forms of presentism and perennialism, the historicist rhetoric of recent intellectual history will likely need to give way to some form of more explicitly present-minded interpretation, and Rosanvallon’s remarks to his questioner suggest one way that might happen. Later in the interview, Rosanvallon returns to this problem in his discussion of the role of the “intellectual,” which has changed over the century since the term was invented, but which Rosanvallon does not consider an exhausted pursuit.

Such an interview can convey but a sample of the wealth of information and insight to be found in the full studies of Pierre Rosanvallon, most of which, alas, are not available in the English language. This, however, is beginning to change, with the translation or forthcoming translation of a series of works. Increasingly recognized as a figure to read as much for his methods as for his conclusions, Rosanvallon is an important reference point for theorists and historians alike.

Samuel Moyn, Columbia University.

anism and Solidarity: Pierre Rosanvallon and Revisionist Historiography,” *Journal of Modern History* 76 (2004): 107–54.

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Javier Fernández Sebastián

1. J.F.S.: Over the course of nearly three decades, you have developed an impressive body of political and intellectual history, substantially contributing to the conceptualization of liberalism and democracy in France.

You began analyzing some of the key concepts of political modernity as far back as 1977 with the publication of your book *Pour une nouvelle culture politique* [*For a New Political Culture*, a collaboration with Patrick Viveret, published by Editions du Seuil, Paris], focusing particularly on French political life of the past two centuries. More recently, *Le modèle politique français* [*The French Political Model*, Paris, Seuil, 2004, translated as *The Demands of Liberty*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2007] along with the just-published *La contre-démocratie* [*Counter-Democracy*, Paris, Seuil, 2006] have continued to dissect topics such as the state, liberalism, the people, citizenship, representation, sovereignty, and so on. We would like to know whether your intellectual work has developed following a preconceived plan, or whether you selected your principal themes out of the need to clarify one or another point as the problems of day to day politics unfolded, which might well have led you to privilege analysis of certain concepts or aspects over others. For instance, has it ever happened that you modified your research agenda in order to clarify a question that you perceived as pressing? And in that sense, to what specific

¹ The interview was conducted in Madrid on September 28, 2006.

problematic does your new book respond, and how does it fit in the overall ensemble of your oeuvre?

P. R.: Let me begin by recalling how my intellectual career was launched. My first book, which I published in 1976, was titled *L'âge de l'autogestion* [*The Age of Self-Management*]. At that point, I was still part of the national leadership of a union, the Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT), where I was in charge of economic analysis, and where I was also editor-in-chief of the union's journal of critical reflection. So it was as a social and political participant that I wrote this book reflecting on one of the central themes of the period, the idea of self-management, which was then being used to organize alternative ideas about the necessary transformations of representative democracy. Yet my considerations did not, for all that, veer in the direction of a completely utopia-like vision of democracy. In fact, the first stage of my intellectual work consisted in recognizing that it is precisely on the basis of its difficulties and material problems that life in democracy ought to be contemplated. While many people were content simply to oppose direct to representative democracy, I wanted to understand what I called the question of democratic entropy and hence the degradation of "democratic energy." To do so, I started to draw up, at about the same time that I was publishing *L'âge de l'autogestion*, a book that was more of a political manifesto, *Pour une nouvelle culture politique* [*For a New Political Culture*]. From that moment on, I undertook a program of work to come to a sociological and historical understanding of democracy's difficulties. To that end, I continued to revitalize all of the realist sociologists of democracy of the late nineteenth century. I contributed to having Roberto Michels' famous book on political parties republished in France, and I also directed an annotated edition of [Moisei] Ostrogorski's major book *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties*, published by Editions du Seuil in 1979. It's also in that same framework that I affiliated intellectually with Claude Lefort, who had just published *Le travail de l'oeuvre Machiavel*, a work written by a political philosopher with a very realistic and relevant optic on the difficulties of democracy in a society of dissensus.

So that was what had in some way reoriented my thinking and pointed me from an idealistic to a realistic analysis of politics. And from a certain point of view, I would say that in 1976–1977, my political engagement on behalf of a Michel Rocard was not separate from this intellectual aim—Rocard seemed to be the politician who hoped to unite social critique and a concern for governability with a realistic vision of politics. It's also at this

moment that I made up my mind for the life of an intellectual, against what could have seemed like the natural direction for me to take at that time—the career in politics that certain people like Michel Rocard would have wished me to undertake. At the time, I was also quite close with Jacques Delors, since when I left the CFDT in 1978, he and I had created a research center for economics and sociology of labor at the University of Paris-Dauphine. At the CFDT, many people likewise wanted to see me play a political role—indeed all the stars were aligned to open a political career to me! But, there being more to life than reasonable choices, I felt that I preferred to give it more originality, and to pass from political to intellectual life. It's during this period that I met François Furet, who encouraged me along this path. At the same time, my concern with considering politics in a realistic fashion had led me to write *Le capitalisme utopique* [*Utopian Capitalism*, Seuil, 1979], a work of historical and philosophical reflection on the utopias of transparency. It is precisely a certain naïve vision of politics that appeared to me to be one of the matrices of totalitarianism, a regime made possible precisely because it didn't have a realistic vision of political mechanisms. I wrote this third book, *Le capitalisme utopique*, to explore the origins of political idealism and of visions of social transparency. It was at this time that I began to devote myself to the study of the origins of liberalism, in order to grasp how liberalism had emerged as a form of the denial of politics, and how Adam Smith had established himself as a major opponent of Rousseau. Most basically, Adam Smith appeared to be someone who wanted to discover how to do without politics; he believed that there were means of organizing society and finding harmony without the trouble of the social contract. He thus wrote books focused on the opposition between the notion of the contract and that of the market. In 1979, when I published my book, *Le capitalisme utopique*, François Furet, as chance would have it, published some highly laudatory remarks about my work in the *Nouvel Observateur*. He also invited me to come to the École des Hautes Études, which confirmed my decision in favor of intellectual life.

In 1981, as the left came into power, I received some new offers. My socialist friends would ask me, “Don't you regret not being in politics with us?” It was then that I definitively confirmed my intellectual choice. One can say that the dominant element in my intellectual life is the idea that in order for contemporary societies to enrich their democracy, they must arrive at a more realistic grasp of its difficulties. Besides, you have to respond to life's incitements. As a former member of the national leadership of the CFDT, I was always very attentive to economic and social questions, and I

continued to be interested in these same problems, as well as in questions concerning the establishment of the social contract. So I applied myself to the study of questions relating to the welfare state. My first book on the topic, *La crise de l'État-providence* [*The Crisis of the Welfare State*], was published in 1981; I returned to the theme in 1995 with *La nouvelle question sociale* [*The New Social Question: Rethinking the Welfare State*]. These works were essential for me because I think that any reflection on democracy is inseparable from a reflection on the material conditions of the social contract, conditions that in contemporary societies imply an agreement regarding social redistribution, and a compromise on problems of solidarity.

But beginning in the 1980s, my work moved in a different direction, because I felt that to proceed in my realist understanding of democracy, I had to better understand its history. So I decided to commit myself to an old-fashioned *thèse d'État*, whence originated my Guizot book. Indeed, I needed to more fully come to grips with liberal culture. And I wasn't the only one doing this at that very moment, as both François Furet and Michel Foucault had similar concerns; between 1978 and 1980 Foucault was giving his course on the history of liberalism, and notably on German Ordoliberalism, at the Collège de France. I thus discovered that if I truly wanted to carry out an in-depth intellectual undertaking, I needed to bring a certain historical and theoretical "depth perception" to the analysis of politics. I therefore chose to research comprehensively the founding tensions of democracy, while concentrating on the French case. It was to turn out that the approach of the French Revolution's bicentennial sparked widespread interest in French political culture, and I wanted to participate in this debate. I consequently focused on three principal themes in my considerations. I began by writing a book on citizenship—since citizenship isn't merely a form of belonging, it's a form of social power. The definitions of democracy are very broad, and at the heart of these definitions is the question of knowing whether democracy is a regime of political participation or simply a regime of equality in dignity. I also deepened my reflections on questions of representation and sovereignty, which led to the publication of my trilogy: *Le sacre du citoyen: Histoire du suffrage universel en France* (1992), *Le peuple introuvable: Histoire de la représentation démocratique en France* (1998), *La démocratie inachevée: Histoire de la souveraineté du peuple en France* (2000).¹

¹ Parts of all three of these books appear in English in Pierre Rosanvallon, *Democracy Past and Future*, ed. Samuel Moyn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

In the meantime, I also studied the French state for several years. Thus twenty years passed between the publication of *Le moment Guizot* in 1985, and that of *Le modèle politique français* in 2004 (although other works, like *La monarchie impossible : Histoire des chartes de 1814 et 1830*, had led up to the conclusion of this reflection on the French political model). I attempted to incorporate a comparative approach when writing on French democracy, notably in referring to American and English history. From that point on, I had built up a sufficient sort of capital to return to my original question. The book that I published very recently, *La contre-démocratie: La politique à l'âge de la défiance*, likewise resumes the direction of my work in the seventies. Better armed both intellectually and historically, I hope to go back to the different questions that I had been asking myself then. I'm also starting a new trilogy on the transformations of democratic activity. Currently, I am preparing a work on the transformations of legitimacy in contemporary societies. Another volume, on which I'm likewise working at the moment, will deal with the territory of democracy, in order to understand why the dimensions of democracies are reduced in today's world. The goal is to construct a political theory of secessions and separatism, not from the point of view of national ideas, but rather via a more radical reflection on the social dimension of the territory of democracy.

2. J.F.S.: It seems to me that at this latest stage in your work, you have adopted a far broader perspective that transcends the hexagonal cadre of France, engaging instead in a more and more comparative and transnational approach. . . . Moreover, your specific methodological approach, which situates your work at the disciplinary crossroads among history, philosophy, sociology, and political science, is likely to interest a wide variety of scholars, political actors, and specialists in the social sciences. Tell me, after all these years, where in this range of disciplines would you prefer to be situated? Or better yet, where would you situate yourself? Do you consider yourself first and foremost a historian, or a political theorist who understands history, as you like to say, in the sense of "the laboratory in which our present was produced"?

P. R.: I would say that I had the good fortune to work with a group of people who hoped precisely to transcend overly narrow approaches. Two of these people, who were in a sense my collaborators, influenced me directly. The first of these was François Furet, who believed as a professor and a historian that to advance in history it was necessary to be closer to political theory. The second was Claude Lefort, who was a philosopher concerned with problems of contemporary politics, and at the same time, a

great reader of history. Both likewise thought that the social sciences, and especially political sociology, ought to be taken into consideration. From a certain point of view, what I'm trying to do is cross different approaches, and to strive—as an ideal—to find a way to write the kind of book that could go beyond the usual disciplinary divisions, to be read and considered not only by historians, but also by political philosophers and sociologists. If I consider the categorizations of international political science, one could say that I'm working in the domain of political theory. But my work is in fact broader. I'm trying to create the sort of political theory that would not be a simple amalgam, but rather a hybrid that would transcend different disciplinary approaches.

3. **J.F.S.:** In my opinion, one of the major contributions of your *œuvre*, and especially of the trilogy comprised of *Le sacre du citoyen*, *Le peuple introuvable* and *La démocratie inachevée*, is to have given prominence to the enormous difficulties, internal tensions, and even aporias necessarily implied by democracy in our societies—as actually practiced as opposed to in the disincarnated picture of ideal theory. If this is so, does it seem that in recent years partial solutions have been found to some of these structural problems, such as the alternative between number and reason, the incompatible choice between the representation of similarity and eminence, and the divide between populism and elitism, etc.? Or do you think that, on the contrary, the tensions have worsened?

P.R.: In developing my research as a historian, I've constantly been struck by the extent to which the questions and contradictions of democracy recur throughout its entire history. So it really is impossible to study the history of the French or American Revolutions, or of revolutions in the Latin American world, without seeing to what extent (to cite just one example) the question of representation has always been both a problem and a solution. One could likewise note how definitions of citizenship have always been at the center of struggles, controversies, and confusions. What interested me was locating and analyzing the contradictions and structuring tensions of democracy, and seeing how its history could be understood as a history of attempted responses to these contradictions, resulting from the experience of confronting them; hence the idea of a history that would be both intellectual and practical. The point is to explore the differences and similarities of these tensions, in order to compare experiences of democracy.

4. **J.F.S.:** In a recent interview with Quentin Skinner, I made a short observation comparing two ways of practicing politico-intellectual history, yours and his own. It seems that the two perspectives proposed by yourself

and Skinner are at odds with each other, although of course they could also appear complementary for that very reason. Whereas your own critical analyses of the French political model seek to reflect on your country's republican tradition and perhaps to correct certain traits of this statist model by strengthening the intermediary bodies of French society (and so in short, one could say that you've adopted a pro-liberal or socialist-liberal position), the work of Skinner and many of his colleagues at Cambridge criticizes some of the basic notions of the political liberalism dominant in the English-speaking world, while highlighting and emphasizing older, lost republican traditions. As far as you are concerned, what main criticisms or admonitions would you offer regarding the performance of liberal democracies in the West? And most importantly, would you say a few words about the prescriptively useful lessons that European citizens might draw from the study of the history of democracy in the last two hundred years?

P.R.: I'd say that today, democracy's situation seems to be characterized precisely by the addition of a completely original sort of dilemma to the older concerns of structural tensions in problems of citizenship or representation and sovereignty. Now, these problems have been compounded by the transformation of the landscape of what I've identified as the "counter-democratic" universe, that is to say, the universe composed of the various manifestations of the citizens' distrust of the authorities. The chief problems of contemporary democracy thus lead to a new cycle of questions.

J.F.S.: Speaking of Skinner—with whom I think you share some important views after all, such as the perception that ideas can only be grasped via a scrutiny of ordinary political struggles and contingencies, as well as your common aim of encouraging a greater rapprochement between political and intellectual history—you know that he has sometimes been criticized for a sort of "antiquarianism," that is for his professed desire to recuperate lost intellectual worlds. Nevertheless, perhaps in part as a response to those who accuse him of sterile erudition and historicism, Skinner has lately, or so it seems to me, adopted more engaged political positions. I've sometimes read criticisms on your account that on the contrary rebuke you for a certain "presentism," insofar as your explicit goal might be to "reconstruct the long genealogy of contemporary political questions." Confronted with Skinner's archeology and its excavation of hidden treasures, "Rosanvallonian" genealogy aspires rather to shed light on the present by means of the past,² if you will permit me this simplification. Would you be

² Nevertheless, the question is more complex since, as Rosanvallon himself recognizes, "History enters the project not only out of the interest in recognizing the weight of tradition, in order to provide banal "enlightenment" of the present through the study of the

so kind as to explain to our readers how you succeed in reconciling your historical analyses with your civic concerns, while at the same time avoiding anachronistic interpretations (i.e., not attributing ideas or preoccupations of our times to historical agents who could not be familiar with these notions, considering their conceptual framework).

P.R.: My conception of history is neither antiquarian nor presentist. I haven't attempted to find the origins of our problems in history. I didn't try to write a genealogy of the present. I don't think that the present is solely the outcome of an evolution whose secret mechanism could be discovered by the historian in considering the past as the matrix of development. My interest in historical work on politics is very different. What interests me is restoring to the past the presentist character it had in its time. What interests me is understanding the political experience of the past all over again, making it come alive once more—and that would be impossible were I to conceive of it in a genealogical fashion. The past has to be envisioned on the basis of the experience of those who participated in it, and the systems of actions, representations, and contradictions that they held . . . Therefore, the point is to re-invest the past with its dimension of indeterminacy. Whereas a genealogical history has an opposing role: it always follows the thread of some necessity. Conversely, I want to restore to the past its one-time present. To me, the historian's role consists in giving the past back its present, so that this present of the past helps us to consider our own present more effectively, instead of merely expounding what might be the necessity of this present.

6. **J.F.S.:** There was another great historian from whose teachings and humanity we were lucky enough to benefit a little over a year ago, during his stay in Spain. Unfortunately, he disappeared last winter—I'm speaking of Reinhart Koselleck. Could you tell me whether Koselleck's rich theoretical reflection on temporality and historical semantics, and the methodology of the *Begriffsgeschichte* in general, was suggestive or useful to you when you were contemplating your own way of practicing and theorizing the "conceptual history of politics" (*histoire conceptuelle du politique*), as you did twenty years ago in *Revue de Synthèse*, and more recently in your inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in March of 2002? For in this last text I notice several reflections that are all indicative of positions that the

past. Rather, the point is to make the succession of presents live again as trials of experience that can inform our own." (*Leçon inaugurale faite le jeudi 28 mars 2002*, Paris, Collège de France, Chaire d'Histoire moderne et contemporaine, 2002, p. 14; in English in *Democracy Past and Future*, p. 38).

recently departed professor would no doubt have shared—a wish to avoid the traditional history of ideas, an insistence on the inexorable necessity of a historical and “empirical” approach to political concepts, and an emphasis on the structuring character of collective representations, as well as on the inevitably conflictual character of political language and on the permanent crisis of meanings.

P.R.: I knew Koselleck well personally. We met on several occasions; some of his studies, translated into French in the series of the *École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales* [where Rosanvallon has taught] by the *Édition de Minuit*, became touchstones for my generation. His *Begriffsgeschichte* was likewise a very important asset to me. But I wanted to go further, beyond a contextual and philological history of ideas, in order to develop an understanding of the rationality of political actors. I’ve never wanted to separate a renewed history of ideas from a strictly political history. You ask me whether there is a connection to Koselleck’s so-called normative approach. In fact, there I’m thinking in this regard mainly of those who have a purely normative approach to politics, of theoreticians like Rawls and Habermas. I’m not interested in rejecting the normative concern—political philosophy ought to include this dimension. Nevertheless, the normative approach should be redefined. We can’t be satisfied with a normative approach that yields merely an ideal version of politics and democracy. The normative approach must be redefined in order to eliminate the existing gap between history and theory. Thus, this approach should follow from renovation of historical and sociological understanding, not through disassociation from it. Such is my goal.

7. **J.F.S.:** In any case, aware as you are of the general outline of the task that some of us have undertaken, that is the development of dictionaries of comparative politico-conceptual history, starting via an examination of the evolution and “functioning” of ten or so fundamental political concepts in several European and Latin American countries (the *Iberconceptos* research project), we’d like to have your opinion on our approach. As it is rather syncretic, we haven’t hesitated to borrow all that seems most interesting and appropriate for the aims of our study from various methodological schools (so that we don’t shy away from combining the perspectives of the *Begriffsgeschichte* and of the Cambridge school with your own reflections and those of other French academics like Lucien Jaume or Jacques Guilhaumou).

P.R.: I don’t think that there is a necessary gap between political history and political philosophy. I think that there are some interests and sensi-

bilities that have different modes of implementation, and that they must always be in debate. The differences of sensibility and approach also depend greatly on the background and origins of one's work. Working in 1970s Germany, one doesn't have the same preoccupations as someone working in England in the same period. True intellectual discussion consists in comparing the results of different approaches. I'm fond of the ideal, but there's also the practical, i.e., what to ask, what to grasp. There are even some histories of ideas that have, let's say, a traditional approach. For instance, you mention someone like Jacques Guilhaumou, who's written a history of certain concepts during the Revolution. It's a very episodic history, but I find that it can also be quite useful.

8. J.F.S.: In your recent works you have emphasized the exhaustion of certain concepts that have structured modern politics. In the French case, you have additionally argued for the existence of a "singular relationship between discourse and reality," of a growing "discrepancy of facts and representations," which mainly affects the problematic relations between the state and civil society. Naturally, you aren't the only one to point out the obsolescence of numerous political concepts, the same concepts that two centuries ago significantly anticipated reality and in that sense appeared imbued with the future. (Koselleck used to say that their "horizon of expectations" widely surpassed their "space of experience.") Today, however, they appear worn out and wavering, incapable of adequately accounting for the emerging new realities. Now I'd like to link this question with the famous "eclipse of the intellectuals," and also with the crisis of the left. You have at times suggested that a fair part of the problems of intelligibility in today's politics derives from this categorical sclerosis, from this analytical deficit, from this exhaustion of political concepts (including some concepts dear to the left, like *republic* or *socialism*, which seem to have lost their projective capacities). What might happen is that the likely lack of sufficiently new or flexible categories to adequately conceptualize new experiences, and in that sense the resulting knowledge and theory deficit would translate into a crisis of expectations. Political forces, including the socialists, constantly repeat the old ideological clichés, brandishing a handful of terms converted into slogans, like neoliberalism, *la pensée unique*, and other terms designed to stigmatize their opponents rather than establish a true discussion. In this day and age when so much is being said about the decline of the intellectuals, don't you think that one of their tasks as professionals of thought might consist in abandoning the beaten path in order to "discover," put forth, and discuss the new concepts we so desperately need?

In what way could historical disciplines contribute to the elaboration and “invention” of these new concepts and tools of analysis necessary to fix the political agenda of the immediate future?

P.R. For me, the role of intellectuals has always been a pivotal question, regardless of their academic functions. The academic function is producing research work. But what I call the intellectual function is the role that this research work plays in society. In France, the dominant model has been that of the individual who commits his academic legitimacy or his own academic projects in the public arena in order to take a stand. It’s a vision that I’ve never shared. I don’t see what special legitimacy an individual would have to interfere in a domain that is not his own. Granted, it’s acceptable in a society where the access to public speech is very limited. When Voltaire spoke out about a judicial affair in the eighteenth century, the number of voices that could be heard in that society was very limited; so his involvement made sense. And even at the time of the Dreyfus Affair in France, it was necessary for the voice of someone like Zola to be heard. Today, that is no longer as necessary. There are many other voices better capable of speaking about their problems; the public space is very open, the public space is plural, there’s no longer any function the intellectual can carry out in such archaic fashion. And as far as fame is concerned, the type of renown exemplified by all of these intellectuals of the past, like Sartre, Camus, or before that, Voltaire, has largely disappeared—just look at today’s media scene. Effective media images these days are those of great sportsmen, film actors, and artists of all sorts. The media capital of an intellectual is now far weaker. The role of the intellectual, however, can be plotted out by his work itself. Not that his work should be marked by a political bias—absolutely not—but rather because his work has and ought to have the function of rendering contemporary society’s difficulties more intelligible. For me, an intellectual is someone who makes Condorcet’s wager. A more lucid society that better understands its questions will perhaps be more rational, will be a society in which political deliberation will be able to be stronger and more active. Hence, I’ve defined the intellectual as someone who first and foremost possesses tools of comprehension, tools which may also become instruments of action.

9. **J.F.S.:** Since we’re speaking of the future, and as you’ve often emphasized the importance of temporality in politics and the prospect of this type of time (or times) management, how do you see the middle-term outlook of the European Union, after the French and Dutch “no” to the constitutional treaty? And leaving aside the motivations for this refusal (a refusal

that could perhaps be interpreted as an especially unfortunate example of the phenomenon you call “counter-democracy”), don’t you think that as an expression of various social fears, this refusal could be, apart from a major setback, a real turning point in the process of European construction?

P.R.: Certainly. It’s obvious that a sort of deconstruction of Europe is taking place. There’s a tension between a kind of historical utopia that dreamed of a new type of political construction, of a new type of relations between states, and the real historical function of Europe. Europe has had two essential historical functions: on the one hand, overcoming the divisions of World War II, and on the other registering the consequences of the dismantling of communism. There had been two ways of reconciling the political utopia of Europe with its historical function on the eve of World War II. But the project that could have led to a new kind of federalism was effectively pushed aside by the new imperative of expansion that established itself in the seventies, with the end of dictatorships in Portugal, Greece, and Spain. The same imperative was redoubled after the decomposition of communism in the late eighties. It’s the historical function that effectively gained the upper hand, eclipsing what could have been a political project. Besides, the question has never really been clearly formulated, whence the impression of a movement that took place without ever being justified. Because Europe as a political and constitutional subject is something that Europeans never really successfully understood in its entirety. They have continued to regard Europe according to the political and constitutional schema inherited either from the construction of the nation-state, or from the construction of the international order. They haven’t sufficiently reflected precisely upon the originality of this Europe, which was in a way deconstructing the organizing concepts of traditional constitutional visions as well as of ideas of regulation. Europe has run out of steam, the reason being that we haven’t proved capable of providing a satisfactory framework for understanding this construction.

10. J.F.S.: Finally, considering that this interview will probably be published in Latin America, I’d like to ask you a question regarding the bicentenaries that will soon be celebrated. A long and ample cycle commemorating the birth of new Ibero-American republics will begin in 2010 with the Argentinean Bicentenary of the May Revolution, followed by similar celebrations in Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, and so on. These closely linked Hispanic revolutions erupted following the general crisis of the Spanish monarchy—a crisis beginning on the peninsula with the war

against Napoleon and the liberal Revolution symbolized by the Constitution of Cadiz of 1812—and profoundly affected several million people on both sides of the Atlantic. Many of us historians think that our cultural milieu aside, historiography has definitely paid insufficient attention to this major revolutionary cycle. We would like to see the bicentenary splendors serve to definitively establish Hispanic Revolutions as the third major revolutionary wave in the eyes of our colleagues from all over the world, thus being acknowledged, along with the North American and the French revolutions, as marking the passage from the old to the new regime at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Yet this goal will not be obtained unless the celebrations are accompanied by a true methodological renewal. As you know, some French academics, and I'm thinking specifically of François-Xavier Guerra, have played and still play a fundamental role in this process of renewing the political and intellectual history of the region. My question is very simple and quite direct: can we count on Pierre Rosanvallon's support in the coming years in encouraging this insertion and comparative vision of the cycle of Hispanic revolutions in the Euro-American context?

P.R.: Indeed, reading François-Xavier Guerra sensitized me to the interest of the Hispanic revolutions. His book about Mexico absolutely enthralled me, and I then concluded that the comparison of the English, American, and French revolutions being done, the terrain of Hispanic revolutions needed to be considered—not only because they made up the third revolutionary cycle in the early nineteenth century, but also because the examination of Hispanic revolutions brings attention and a new light to an entire set of questions that appear less directly comprehensible in the framework of the American and French revolutions. I am fully persuaded of the intellectual importance of reintegrating the Hispanic revolutions into the field of our studies, beyond a simple comparative perspective of the period. The study of Hispanic revolutions opens the door to comprehending a new ensemble of problems: the question of the size and the demarcation of nations, the connection between the old and the new, the relationship between old social forms and liberal constitutionalism and between citizen and community, and the problems of constituting the polity. For these reasons, I am a reader of historical works on Latino-American politics and the ordeal of independence in the nineteenth century—I am quite interested and eager to discuss them.

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