Editorial: "Rectifying the Names" or "Newspeak"?

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Many of the articles in this issue of Redescriptions study, in their different ways, rhetorical redescriptions. Names, words and concepts play an integral role in shaping our moral evaluation of things and events as they frame the debate. Redescription is an essential tool in all fields of rhetoric. In forensic rhetoric, the aim is to alter the evaluative description of past events. In deliberative rhetoric, the aim is persuasion. Also in epideictic rhetoric it is easy to re-describe past actions because of the close proximity of virtues to their neighbouring vices. The practice of naming and renaming can also be used to attain similar effects.

Because of the moral ambivalence of rhetoric and its possible use to manipulative purposes in gulling the credulous, there is a long history of objection to rhetorical redescription. Although his opinions on the issue vary in different dialogues, Plato is among the most notable defenders of "true meaning of words" and thus an opponent of crafty use of rhetoric. He clearly opposed the Sophist use of rhetoric because through savvy use of rhetoric one can justify any courses of action, rational and irrational alike, and make untrue things seem true. Rhetoric

is focused on persuasion instead of truth, and thus lacks true notion of justice in Plato's view: due to rhetorical persuasion, *doxa* prevails over *episteme*. Still Thomas Hobbes sought to eliminate disagreements deriving from language by a sort of authoritative fiat. But also Confucius, for instance, called for a "rectification of names" as the primary task of a statesman. The view is expressed in the chapter III of the XIII book of the *Annalects*. When asked what is the first thing to do in order to administer government, the Master replied:

> What is necessary is to rectify names. … If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success. … Therefore a superior man considers it necessary that the names he uses may be spoken appropriately, and also that what he speaks may be carried out appropriately. What the superior man requires, is just that in his words there may be nothing incorrect.

For a relatively long period of time, the fulcrum of good government was seen to reside in correct use of language, words, names and concepts. When we arrive to the modern era and especially the contemporary political discourse, almost the opposite view seems to prevail. Current governmental practices are often more reminiscent of Orwellian newspeak rather than the Confucian practise of "rectifying the names". The mainstay of governing is not in the impeccable and proper use of language but is rather founded in the deceptive nature of rhetoric. Maybe even part of the disillusionment nowadays associated with traditional parties and politicians, the emergence of anti-system parties and populist politics, is partly attributable to vagueness of political language.

But of course, there are certain advantages in hollow and vague language. The creation of more accurate terms and concepts would limit the range of possibilities on the part of political actors. This was acutely observed by George Orwell immediately after the second world war. In 1946, Orwell argued in his famous essay *Politics and the English Language*:

> The word Fascism has now no meaning except insofar as it signifies "something not desirable." The words democracy, socialism, freedom,

> patriotic, realistic, justice, have each of them several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. In the case of a word like democracy, not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using the word if it were tied down to any one meaning.

Thus the aim of modern statesmen is often not to rectify the names but to use them loosely enough. Within the purview of contemporary politics, the current Eurozone tumult is especially interesting against the backdrop of rhetoric and conceptual change. What was arguably essentially a private sector debt problem was skilfully rhetorically transformed as a public sector debt problem. Austerity measures were called to curtail lavish public sector spending, although arguably the original problem resided more in the loose and high-risk spending of private banks that needed to be saved with public funding, as well as in the distortion of data concerning economic performance in some cases. After a populist backlash against the publicly funded bail-outs, bail-in (stakeholders and investors instead of taxpayers shouldering the losses of ailing banks) has been introduced as a "new" concept – as if the idea that bad investments result in losses would be new. Concepts like "limited liability" are sure to provide ample material for future conceptual historians in this respect. The economic debate more generally is often framed by rather dubious concepts and outright paradoxes like "negative growth".

Apart from the intrusion of the language of economics into politics, in the contemporary political parlance we notice clear conceptual changes of central political terms. Wars as we have come to known them (as inter-state activity proceeding after formal declaration of war) have basically vanished. Wars are no longer declared and increasingly involve non-state actors. War is no longer a clear-cut change vis-à-vis peace time, but a kind of paradoxical "continuous state of exception" prevails. Sovereignty, to take another example of a central political concept, has undergone a series of changes. In the original Westphal-

ian sense of the term, among the states of present international system maybe only North Korea remains sovereign. The member states of the European Union, for instance, no longer possess the Westphalian sovereignty, as part of their legislation comes from the EU and thus they can not wholly preside over the legislation of their own territory – a crucial prerequisite of the Westphalian sovereignty. Whereas in the Weberian sense statehood was connected to the legitimate monopoly of physical violence in a given area, statehood today has almost nothing to do with it. Instead, the recognition of other states is the primary (or even sole) criterion of statehood. Taiwan may have the de facto Weberian monopoly, and it may even be "more sovereign" than the EU member states as regards its legislation, but it lacks the widespread recognition of other states. Some states, like arguably Somalia, are held together only by that recognition of other states. Words, names, concepts, and their redescriptions, are now as ever a central part of politics.

One of the articles in this collection focuses on the conceptual change the concept of innovation has undergone. Originally a negative term associated with rabble-rousing and political upheaval is nowadays largely viewed as positive and one could even say an integral part of government policies. Many countries, Finland included, even have a national innovation system. There are also increasingly vociferous calls for "democratic innovations". Could it be that innovation passes as common currency in contemporary discourse because it was in a way depoliticized? The connotations of innovation are no longer associated with rabble-rousing because the word invokes the image of primarily technical innovations, revolutionary ideas that can be used to create new technologies. It should be noted that technical revolutions have almost always been viewed as positive, whereas political revolutions not always so. Political revolutions can be progressive or conservative, but they inherently threaten the stability of the polity and the powers-that-be. Machiavelli sought (in his *Discursus florentinarum rerum*) to devise a stable political order for Florence, a body politic in which no one needed to aspire "rinnovazione". But later the idea of innovation became

politically less revolutionary and was associated instead with utility and technical advance. The true difficulty of innovation, political and technical alike, is not in the act of innovating itself, i.e. inventing new ideas, but in getting those who benefit from the old system to accept the new ideas. And in this, as we know, rhetoric and conceptual redescriptions play an integral role. It would, however, be relatively safe to say that newspeak, rather than "rectifying the names", passes for general currency in contemporary politics.

In the first article of this issue of Redescriptions, Johan Strang focuses on the rhetorico-political construction of the tradition of analytical philosophy in Sweden. In a chain of rhetorical moves, the adherents of the analytical tradition described their opponents as politically dubious and bearing foreign influences, while at the same time they portrayed their own analytical tradition as already possessing deep roots in Sweden. Moving beyond the mere arguing whether or not a given thinker was within the confines of analytical tradition, Strang opens up the debate what people were trying to do by using labels such as "analytical philosophy". In the second article, Esther Abin discusses the tradition of political realism, pointing out that "realist" accounts of political life are not necessarily more objective or realistic than normative and "moralist" ones. Realism tends to emphasise contingent and autonomous sphere of politics, but at the same time remains bound to normative and prescriptive implications deriving from that autonomy of politics. The third article in the issue deals with the political role of artistic representation. Through reading of James Cameron's "Avatar", Annabel Herzog points to a representation of a new political subjectivity, "the network protester", deriving its existence from connectivity of rooted people against disconnectivity. The article also scrutinizes Cormack McCarthy's novel "The Road" as an example of artwork's capacity to bear witness of the fundamental but vanishing values of a political system.

Finally, there is a group of three articles that focus on three different concepts and their histories. Benoit Godin delves into the conceptual change of innovation, pointing out that whereas during the seventeenth

century the concept was largely polemical and served as a pejorative term with which to slander adversaries, since the nineteenth century the term has been more associated with utility and carries more positive connotations. Mika Ojakangas peruses the political role of conscience, compares the thoughts of Hobbes and Rousseau regarding this matter, and offers an interpretation of Rousseauian "religious" model for politics in which the liberty of conscience is eradicated from the political sphere. Henk te Velde offers a glimpse to the history of parliamentary obstruction, arguing that obstruction is not – despite the fact that contemporaries often interpreted it in such a way – a sign of degeneration of the parliamentary system, but instead fulfils certain important functions parliaments and parliamentary speech have.

Redescriptions is currently in a process of changing its publisher and the format. This is the last volume as a yearbook; the journal Redescriptions will be published by Manchester University Press biannually, beginning with Volume 17, Issue 1, 2014.