K: KEYWORDS

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Why 'Keywords'

What does the word 'co-operative' mean and to what uses – political, social, conceptual – has it, and its family of associated words, been put across its history? The central focus of this book is to consider the character and scope of the co-operative movement today, and to point to its future potential, as well as to future lines of enquiry in research into co-operatives. By contrast, the aim of this 'K' chapter is less horizontal than vertical, apparently more discrete and particular and yet in some ways more ambitious: to excavate the etymology of a term which has become part of the furniture of modern parlance, with the hope that the resulting defamilarization of an apparently everyday word will invite those who work in and on the world of co-operatives to reflect more explicitly henceforth on the values embodied by the term both today and in its past.

In this sense, the chapter is inspired by the seminal work to which this collection's title makes reference: *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, written by the Cambridge professor of English literature and drama, Raymond Williams (1921-1990), which was first published in 1976, had a second, enlarged edition in 1983, and has been reprinted numerous times, becoming a mainstay of methodological reading lists in disciplines across the social sciences, humanities, and the arts. The work consists of an alphabetized set of terms – what Williams describes as either 'binding words in certain activities and their interpretations' or 'binding words in certain forms of thought' – that notably cross disciplines and carry varied valences and resonances: Art; Bourgeois; Consumer; Culture; Democracy; Dialectic; Elite; Equality; Formalist; Generation; History; Ideology; Jargon; Literature; Media; Modern; Nationalist; Originality; Positivist; Progressive; Radical; Reform; Science; Society; Taste; Theory; Utilitarian; Violence; Work. Each term comes complete with cross-references and suggested 'clusters' of terms with which it is in productive, or conflicted, dialogue. Each entry offers a short essay that explores the etymology of the term but also, and crucially, analyses its uses – both in public life and in the domain of scholarship – and what Williams describes as 'the issues and problems that were there inside the vocabulary' (p. 15). It has no ambition to be a dictionary or a glossary of any one subject,

Williams explains in his introduction, nor else to complement any such existing dictionaries. It constitutes, rather, 'a record of an inquiry into a vocabulary; a shared body of words and meanings in our most general discussions, in English, of the practices and institutions which we group as culture and society' (p. 15). *Keywords* is a hybrid work, which wilfully resists disciplinary allegiances, combining cultural history with historical semantics. If its attention to detail speaks of the specialist labours of the philologist and literary critic, its aim, Williams tells us, was to provide a useful guide to questions that were live in the public arena, not cloistered in the Ivory Tower, issues that affected a broader population, to bring specialist knowledge into 'general availability' (p. 17). Its intention, in presenting 'the present as history', was not just to record – complex as that recording might be – but to effect change. Williams's work provoked critique, perhaps most famously from the intellectual historian Quentin Skinner, who witheringly accused him of offering 'portentous arm-waving' in place of rigorous methodology[1]. Yet its suggestive approach remains influential today, whether in providing a direct model for revised versions of the work itself, which replace obsolete terms and introduce others which have gained a hold since the 1970s, or in supplying the basis of a methodology – 'the cultural lexicon' – that has most recently been revised and embraced by literary and intellectual historians working in fields very different from those in which Williams began[2].

    The editors of this collection took inspiration from the spirit rather than the letter of Williams's seminal study. If they have borrowed 'Keywords' for their title, here the keywords of the alphabetized chapters constitute concepts and phenomena that have suggestive links to the central keyword 'Co-operative'; we might view them as sub-keywords, keys to unlocking our understanding – and the broader potential in society – of the concept and phenomenon of the co-operative. In the preface to his second edition Williams emphasized the open-ended nature of his project, explaining that revisions to the new edition should not detract from his strong sense 'of the work as unnecessarily unfinished and incomplete' (27). Like Williams, the editors here don't seek to exhaust the alphabet; and they openly admit that their selection of words is arbitrary, yet, as the editors of the *New Keywords* rightly note, 'To call a selection arbitrary does not mean that it is unmotivated'. Indeed, in the digital age, the arbitrariness is even more of an invitation to expansion, contestation, and

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[1] Skinner (1979), p. 205.
[2] See, respectively, *New Keywords: Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (2005) and Scholar (2013).

discussion than it was for Williams. The motivation of the twenty-three chapters that bring co-operatives into contact with issues such as China, New Media, Rural Development, Well-Being, University Textbooks, Productivity, United Nations is, true to Williams's intent, to invite a broader public – practitioners and consumers, as well as researchers – to reflect on the scope and significance of the co-operative sector in its varied forms and practices. Too often, especially in the worlds of business and politics, where talk can be cheap and jargon prolific, language is used uncritically, terms deployed with little heed to the complexities, disputes, and richness of their history. The term 'co-operative' is particularly prone to being appropriated to political and ethical ends. This chapter outlines the history of this keyword and helps its modern-day users to grasp the intricacies of its past. It offers a brief outlook of the history of the word from its origins to the beginning of the 19th century, when Robert Owen chose it to characterize his social-reform projects, effecting a robust, and enduring, semantic transformation. The other chapters of this book will be based on the modern notion of the word, as it emerged and has become familiar over the last two centuries.

The origins of the term 'co-operative'

The term 'co-operate' comes from the Latin word *cooperari*, a combination of the prefix *co-* (from *cum*), 'with, together', and the verb *operari*, 'to work'. This compound and its derivatives, including the noun/adjective *cooperator* were introduced into the Latin language by the Christians and, more specifically, originally responded to the need to convey, in the context of the process of translation of the New Testament from Greek, the meaning of the verb *synergéō* (a compound of *sýn-*, 'with', and *ergéō*, 'to work, to act') and the noun/adjective *synergós*, at least in some occurrences of these terms in the various New Testament writings.

Although it is technically a neologism with respect to classical Latin, the verb *cooperari* (and the group of words that derives from it) does not convey a specifically Christian concept[3] but captures a general idea, that of sharing an activity (not surprisingly, in the translations of New Testament books, there is a tendency to consider the terms *cooperarius* and *cooperator* as synonyms of *adiutor*, 'helper': indeed, they are both used to render the

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[3] Mohrmann (1961), pp. 58-59. The scholar classifies the terms *cooperari*, *cooperatio*, *cooperator* among the 'christianismes indirects ou médiats', p. 59.

Greek *synergós*)[4].

In the version of the New Testament written between the 4th and 5th centuries and then officially adopted by the Church, the *Vulgate*, there are only seven passages containing these terms. However, some of them (for example, the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, 8:28; the Epistle of James, 2:22) are of great theological importance (the concept of co-operation was rapidly linked to the specific terminology used to formulate the doctrine of Divine Grace, which in certain contexts takes on the attribute of 'co-operating'). The phrase *Domino cooperante* ('the Lord working with them'), which is found at the end of Mark (16:20), and destined to become a recurring formula in Christian rhetoric, is also worthy of note. Consequently, the group of words was widely diffused in Latin linguistic use in Western Europe, at least in theological and literary contexts, from Late Antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages, and was then transferred to modern languages.

If we limit our analysis to Italian, French and English, dictionaries[5] show that the first occurrences of the terms in the respective languages are found in theological texts, which expressed in the national languages concepts originally formulated in Latin. Gradually, however, the terms can also be found in different contexts, including scientific (medical)[6], legal and socio-political ones. Its use outside the religious context can likely be put down to the fact that, as mentioned above, the meaning of *cooperari* and related words is not intrinsically theological. This allows them to be used in a neutral sense in other contexts to express the general idea of sharing work or activities to achieve a common purpose. From a sociolinguistic point of view, the spread of the terms would appear to have been limited to a medium and high language register. In this regard it is noteworthy that, from the 16th century onwards, in the Protestant field the translators of the New Testament into the national languages generally avoided the solution based on the compound *cooperari*, adopted by

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[4] See *Thesaurus linguae Latinae*, vol. IV (1906-1909), entry words *cooperārius, cooperāria, cooperātio, cooperātīvus, cooperātor, cooperātrix, cooperor*, coll. 891-892, 894.

[5] See, for Italian, the *Dizionario degli Accademici della Crusca*, vol. III (1878); for French, Littré, t. Iᵉʳ (1873), p. 799, and the *Trésor de la langue française*, t. VIᵉ (1978), pp. 140-142; for English, the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

[6] For instance, in French the adjective *coopératif* appears in a treatise on surgery written in 1550: 'Hyppocrates faict mention de cause concause, adiutrice & co-operative, lesquelles coincidentalement concurrent avec les causes exterieures, internes, & conioinctes. (…) Cause adiutrice ou co-operative, est laquelle sans aide d'une autre ne pourroit faire maladie', Fierabras (1550), t. III, p. 253 (where we find the *adiutrice/co-operative* synonymy, typical of the original Latin word).

the first Latin translators for the Greek *synergéō*. This may be because of concerns over comprehension by the readership for which the translations were intended, who for the most part did not know Latin. This fact can also be seen, for English and French at least, as a sign of the process under which the lexical family moved away from its theological meaning.

From the 17th century onwards, numerous examples taken from English literature and technical writing are recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. These occurrences show how the term 'co-operate' and its derivatives were used in a socio-political context and that they had also taken on a specific socio-political meaning. The following extract, from the 1689 translation of the treatise *De Jure Regni apud Scotos*, written by George Buchanan and originally published in Latin in 1579, is telling:

Original text by Buchanan (ed. Edimburgi 1579, p. 11):	Translation by Philalethes [pseudonym] (ed. London 1689, p. 8):
[…] iuxta Ciceronis sententiam nihil quidem quod in terris fiat principi illi Deo, qui hunc mundum regit acceptius puto, quam caetus hominum iure sociatos, quae *civitates* appellantur. Harum civitatum partes similiter inter se iunctas esse volunt, atque cuncta corporis nostri membra inter se cohaerent, *mutuisque constare officijs,* & *in commune elaborare*, pericula communiter propellere, utilitates prospicere, eisque communicandis omnium inter se benevolentiam devincire.	[…] with Cicero, I think there is nothing done on Earth more acceptable to the great God, who rules the World, than the associations of men legally united, which are called *Civil Incorporations*, whose several parts must be as compactly joined together, as the several Members of our Body, and every one must have their proper function, *to the end there may be a mutual Cooperating for the good of the whole*, and a mutual propelling of injuries, and a foreseeing of advantages, and these to be Communicated for engaging the benevolence of all amongst themselves.

To express in English the concept of mutual collaboration among members of civil society, likened to an organic structure, the translator moves away from the Latin text and introduces words (*Civil incorporations*; *mutual Cooperating*) which he feels fit the context.

Another example of the same kind can be found the following century in a passage from the Letters from a Citizen of the world by Oliver Goldsmith, written in 1762. When considering the disadvantages of the rational nature of the English people, Goldsmith says through the imaginary author of the letters: 'it is extremely difficult to induce a number of free beings to co-operate for their mutual benefit' (ed. London 1794, vol. II, pp. 186-187).

In the first half of the 19th century, Robert Owen assigned a new technical as well as economical and social meaning to the concept of co-operation

(Holyoake 1908, pp. 32-42). Within Owen's writings, the term 'co-opera-
tion' is given autonomous significance for the first time when it is linked to
a specific model of social and work organization in a letter sent to London
newspapers on 9 August 1817. Here Owen outlines 'some of the peculiar
advantages to be derived from the Arrangement of the Unemployed Working
Classes into «Agricultural and Manufacturing Villages of Unity and Mutual
Co-operation,» limited to a Population of from 500 to 1,500 Persons'[7].
The letter is part of a set of writings concerning the proposal presented
in the same year to the Committee of the Association for the Relief of
the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor, which strove to give dignity to
the nations' poor by placing them in communities organized according
to specific parameters which promoted collective work programmes. The
definition for the model that Owen proposed broadened terminologically
in the publications which followed that same year, yet retained the term
'co-operation' introduced in the letter mentioned above.

The term was officially adopted by Owen's followers ('the co-operative
movement was the creation of the Owenites, not of Owen', Garnett 1972,
pg. 41) and characterised the names of the initiatives they undertook in the
next few years with the aim of diffusing and applying the Owenite principles:
in January 1821, the Co-operative and Economical Society was established
in London with the ultimate aim of founding 'a Village of Unity and Mutual
Co-operation, combining Agriculture, Manufactures, and Trade, upon the
Plan projected by Mr Owen of New Lanark'[8] and began to publish the
periodical *The Economist* (with the eloquent subtitle: *A Periodical Paper,
Explanatory of the New System of Society Projected by Robert Owen Esq.; and of
a Plan of Association for Improving the Condition of the Working Classes, During
Their Continuance at Their Present Employment*). This contributed to the

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[7] See Owen (1858), pp. 83-92. It should be noted that specific words belonging to
the same lexical family are obviously also present in Owen's writings prior to this date,
though they have not yet assumed the technical meaning just mentioned. The context
in which they are used is the same as in the examples quoted for the 16th and 17th
centuries, confirming that those words belonged to the vocabulary used to describe
social relations and the organization of work. An interesting example in this sense can
be found in *A New View of Society*, written in 1813. Here Owen, talking about his work
as a businessman at New Lanark, states: 'from the commencement of my management I
viewed the population, with the mechanism and every other part of my establishment, as
a system composed of many parts, and which it was my duty and interest so to combine,
as that every hand, as well as every spring, lever, and wheel, should effectually co-operate
to produce the greatest pecuniary gain to the proprietors' (ed. London 1817, pp. 71-72).
[8] *Constitution of the Economical Society. Instituted January 23, 1821*, in *The Economist*, n. 39,
October 20, 1821, p. 205.

debate on the concept of co-operation, supporting detachment from that of communism[9], and promoting its practical application. *The Economist* ceased publication in 1822. In the next few years, additional co-operative societies were founded and several periodicals were established whose titles bore one of the terms belonging to the lexical family.

The Owenite meaning of the term 'co-operation' was introduced into the French language in 1828, when Joseph Rey disseminated the ideas of the English philanthropist[10].

As far as Italian is concerned, although the labour movement developed in Italy from the 1850s[11], it seems that the noun *cooperazione* and the adjective *cooperativo* did not appear as part of official titles for organizations before the following decade (in 1864 the Società cooperativa degli operai di Como was established; in 1867 the Associazione industriale italiana began publishing a newsletter entitled *Cooperazione e industria*). The 1878 third volume of the fifth edition of the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* – the dictionary that sets the standard for the Italian language – makes no reference to any social and politico-economic meaning for the group of words related to 'co-operation' and continues to record the theological meaning as the only technical one. Recent dictionaries indicate that the adjective *cooperativo* has been in use in Italian since 1859, the noun *cooperativa* since 1890[12].

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[9] 'The object sought to be obtained is not *equality* in rank or possession, – is not *community of goods*, – but full, complete, unrestrained CO-OPERATION, on the part of ALL the Members, for EVERY purpose of social life, whether as regards the means of subsistence, or of promoting the intellectual and moral improvement and happiness of the WHOLE BODY', *The Economist*, n. 29, August 11, 1821, p. 43.

[10] Ray (1828).

[11] Briganti (1976).

[12] Sabatini, Coletti (1997); De Mauro (2000).

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