HELDA
HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

https://helda.helsinki.fi

Why Are Political Discussions with Fascists Impossible? Reflections on the Far-Right Politics of Silence

Suuronen, Ville

2022-08-31

Suuronen , V 2022 , ' Why Are Political Discussions with Fascists Impossible? Reflections on the Far-Right Politics of Silence ' , Frontiers in Political Science . https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2022.951236

http://hdl.handle.net/10138/349687
https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2022.951236

cc_by
publishedVersion

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.

This is an electronic reprint of the original article.

This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version.

Frontiers in Political Science

TYPE Original Research
PUBLISHED 31 August 2022
DOI 10.3389/fpos.2022.951236

Check for updates

OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY
Pedro T. Magalhães,
University of Minho, Portugal

REVIEWED BY
Stephen Turner,
University of South Florida,
United States
Edwin Bikundo,
Griffith University, Australia

*CORRESPONDENCE
Ville Suuronen
ville.suuronen@helsinki.fi

SPECIALTY SECTION
This article was submitted to Comparative Governance, a section of the journal Frontiers in Political Science

RECEIVED 23 May 2022
ACCEPTED 29 July 2022
PUBLISHED 31 August 2022

CITATION
Suuronen V (2022) Why are political discussions with fascists impossible? Reflections on the far-right politics of silence. *Front. Polit. Sci.* 4:951236.
doi: 10.3389/fpos.2022.951236

COPYRIGHT
© 2022 Suuronen. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

Why are political discussions with fascists impossible? Reflections on the far-right politics of silence

Ville Suuronen*

Centre of Excellence in Law, Identity and the European Narratives, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

This paper argues that twentieth-century fascist political theory is characterised by the systematic attempt to abolish communication from the public realm. By offering a novel reading of one the most systematic fascist thinkers, Carl Schmitt, who is compared with Søren Kierkegaard, Aristotle, Hannah Arendt, and Walter Benjamin as well as with the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, it is argued that Schmitt's Weimar era thought offers a many-sided challenge to the Western tradition of political thought. Against the Aristotelian notion of politics as rhetorical persuasion and speech, Schmitt mobilises the anti-Aristotelian political theorist, Thomas Hobbes, and an array of other thinkers for his own purposes in order to redefine "the political" as a realm of silence. For Schmitt, and for fascists more generally, the realm of the political appears as an arena in which absolute and non-negotiable existential truths collide—truths, which every political community must necessarily embody in both its constitution and spirit. Reinterpreting Schmitt's central works by relying on a broad array of rare materials, I maintain that Schmitt's famous criterion of the "the political" discloses the crucial moment in which communicative speech becomes impossible. It is argued that understanding the internal mechanics of twentieth century fascist political thought can be highly useful for grasping the momentum that especially far-right movements are experiencing today.

KEYWORDS

Carl Schmitt, discussion, fascism, far-right, political language

Introduction: When discussions become useless—The political moments?

In the early 1960s, a most unlikely correspondence took place between the life-long anti-fascist and Nobel-winning philosopher Bertrand Russell, and the founder of the British Union of Fascists, Sir Oswald Mosley, who wanted to debate the former about their political differences. In his response to Mosley, Russell pondered on "how to respond to people whose ethos is so alien and, in fact, repellent to one's own." Russell continued to describe how "every ounce of my energy has been devoted to an active opposition to cruel bigotry, compulsive violence, and the sadistic persecution which has characterised the philosophy and practise of fascism." Ultimately, it was the "intensity

of this conviction" that lead Russell to the decision that all further conversation with a fascist like Mosley would be absolutely futile: "I feel obliged to say that the emotional universes we inhabit are so distinct, and in deepest ways opposed, that nothing fruitful or sincere could ever emerge from association between us" (Russell, cited in Clark, 1976, p. 571)[1].

Why did Russell answer Mosley the way he did? How should we understand the nature of his moral outrage and rejection to engage in a discussion with a proud fascist like Mosley, whose views Russell obviously could not change no matter what he would say? The commonsensical way of understanding the nature of Russell's response would be to say that, as an ideology, fascism goes beyond the accepted and even legally set limits of discussion and values that any self-conscious liberal-democratic society must establish and cherish. Unlike liberal-democratic societies, fascism values the state over the individual, whose absolute subjugation to the state this ideology actively pursues, which then leads to what Russel describes as "cruel bigotry," "compulsive violence," and "sadistic persecution."

But from a fascist perspective, things look very different. A fascist not only understands the nature of politics but also the very nature of political language in a completely different manner. The aim of this essay is to examine this very particular way in which political language functions from a fascist perspective—a perspective which Russel understood at least well enough to deny any "association" with Mosley[2]. I approach this complex topic by offering a detailed reading of the writings of the German lawyer Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), whose Weimar era thought, it is argued, offers a systematic elaboration of what a fascist understanding of politics and language looks like[3]. By critically analysing and comparing Schmitt's ideas with those of Walter Benjamin, Aristotle, Hannah Arendt, Søren Kierkegaard, and Benito Mussolini, I will try to convince the reader that what Schmitt exemplifies and theorises with a particular lucidity is something that despite of crucial differences between various theorists and thinkers of fascism, defines early twentieth century far-right political thought generally: *the attempt to abolish communicative language from the public realm*[4].

My point of entry to Schmitt's work consists in offering a novel reading of Schmitt's central work, *The Concept of the Political* (1927/1932/1933)[5], which I revisit by using a plethora of Schmitt's lesser-known writings, journals, and correspondence from the 1920s and 1930s. My aim is to show that *The Concept of the Political* offers a theoretically ambitious and historically revolutionary redefinition of the political realm as a sphere of silence and unnegotiable existential conflicts. It is argued that in Schmitt's lexicon, "the political" denotes the moment after which political discussions, in a communicative sense, become impossible—the appearance of "the political" discloses a moment after which all language becomes distinctively "polemical" and loses all its communicative qualities; the more political something becomes, the less it can be discussed; the more something is discussed, the less political it is.

After reinterpreting Schmitt's theory of the political, I move on to analyze Schmitt's most important and systematic book, *Verfassungslehre* (1928), in which the basic theses of Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* are applied to the context of constitutional theory and legal history, and above all, to an analysis of the Weimar constitution that Schmitt uses as a typical example of a modern liberal-democratic state. Here Schmitt provides a general theory of the way a people (*Volk*) organises itself into a political entity, of which a nation-state is the dominating but certainly not the only example, in constitutional-political terms. My aim is to show that it is in *Verfassungslehre* that Schmitt answers a crucial question that *The Concept of the Political* had merely implied; the question of what it means for a *people* to become political, for a people to acquire a specific *status*, grounded in the right to

1 All these cited passages are found from Bertrand Russel's letter to Sir Oswald Mosley, dated 22nd January 1962, which is the final letter in a short correspondence. In the online catalogue of Russel's archives, which offers a short overview of the contents of the letters, it is noted that Mosley wished to "to lunch privately with BR about their differences"—a request that Russell is apparently answering here. (see https://bracers.mcmaster.ca/bracers-basic-search?search_api_views_fulltext_3=&search_api_views_fulltext_4=&search_api_views_fulltext_1=Mosley%2C$+$Oswald&search_api_views_fulltext_2=&search_api_views_fulltext=&search_api_views_fulltext_6=&sort_by=search_api_aggregation_2&sort_order=ASC, accessed 27.06.2022). On Russel's understanding of fascism, see Russell (1935, p. 82–120) and Lintott (2008).

2 Although Russell would note retrospectively that he always found the Nazis "cruel, bigoted, and stupid" and emphasized that they were both "morally and intellectually" nothing less than "odious" to him (Russell, 1971, p. 191), still in the 1930s his views on the ability to engage in compromises with fascists were influenced by his uncompromising and naive pacifism that he would only come to view somewhat more critically during WWII (Moorehead, 1993, p. 427–429).

3 For studies that connect Schmitt's Weimar-era thought with fascism from diverging perspectives: Wolin (1992), Koenen (1995), Faber (2001), Braun (2012), Ohana (2019), and Scheuerman (2020). For studies that sustain the often neglected and yet vitally important difference between Schmitt's (fascist) decisionism and his later (openly racist and Nazi) "concrete order thought," see among others Blasius (2002), Mehring (2009), and Suuronen (2021a,b).

4 A recent insightful essay argues that "ineffability" was a defining feature among the political language developed by the various German radical conservatives during the interwar era (Bures, 2020). A recent work also discovers similar tendencies from the work of Martin Heidegger (Knowles, 2019). For an interesting elaboration of silence as a political category, see Ferguson (2003). On totalitarian language in this context: Fuentes (2013).

5 On the three different versions, see Meier (1994).

self-determination. It is through this right that a constitution always expresses and reflects a people's decision to choose the "way and form of its own existence" (Schmitt, 2010, p. 71)[6]. I argue that *Concept of the Political* and *Verfassungslehre* offer a definition of "the political" as the realm of conflict where two, or more, irreconcilable existential truths collide—truths that are incarnated in the constitutions of these political unities themselves and which cannot be discussed, negotiated, or compromised on without losing the identity that defines the political existence and status of a people.

In the subsequent sections my aim is to show how the central theses of Schmitt's political-juridical thought in the Weimar era are underpinned by a distinctively fascist position—a claim that I substantiate by comparing Schmitt's ideas with those elaborated by Benito Mussolini. Ultimately, Schmitt's decisionist political thought not only emerges as a unique version of what a fascist and authoritarian political-juridical thought may look like, but precisely by understanding itself as a distinctive response to the crisis of the twentieth century,[7] it aims to offer a theoretically ambitious philosophical alternative to the whole Western tradition of political thought and its Aristotelian notion of politics as rhetorical persuasion and speech, in particular. To demonstrate this, I analyze how Schmitt aims to reconceptualize the very notion of political animality against Aristotle's famous definitions. In doing so, Schmitt relies on the works of Thomas Hobbes and on a large array of animal fables that he utilises as illustrative examples. For fascists, the political animal is not the animal in possession of *logos*, but rather, an animal that guards its existential silence in favour of the homogeneous community. To conclude, I will return to Russel's correspondence with Mosley, which we will be in a much better position to understand after our analysis of the way fascists comprehend the realm of the political as a realm of existential silence. Beyond offering a point of entry into the ideological world of fascism as such, Schmitt's political theory can serve as a very useful basis for understanding the contemporary rise of far-right movements in the West and their non-communicative way of using political concepts and language.

The political sphere as a realm of silence

Schmitt's political thought aims to systematically elaborate the following conviction: The more political something becomes, the less it can be discussed; the more something is discussed, the less political it is. But anyone familiar with *The Concept of the Political* will immediately protest. Is it not precisely Schmitt, who emphasises the political nature of all language by stating that all political concepts are by nature polemical, targeted towards a specific enemy? Is it not also Schmitt, who states that political battles are not only fought with arms, guns, and fists, but with words—with language itself? (cf., Schmitt, 2009, p. 29–30).

However, Schmitt's statements concerning political language are hardly ever understood with the radicality that actually characterises them. It is very easy to presume that with increasing "intensity" of the political, Schmitt would be referring to anything that *becomes* the topic and object of political discussions. But this is not at all what Schmitt means. It is, in fact, nothing less than the opposite that Schmitt intends with his "criterion" and "definition" of the political as a degree of intensity (cf., Schmitt, 2009, p. 88). As Schmitt explains the matter in his notebooks:

> You can come to a compromise (sich einigen) over matters related to business (geschäftliche Dinge); over metaphysical and moral questions you cannot... the moral neutrality of business objectivity (geschäftlichen Sachlichkeit); the superiority of the economic over the political: Over the political you cannot come to a common understanding (über das Politische kann man sich nicht verständigen); although this is very well possible concerning chances and calculable relations of force (Kräfteverhältnisse) (Schmitt, 2018, p. 340).

While the economic rival (*Konkurrent*) and the opponent in ethical discussions (*Diskussionsgegner*) "allow you to discuss anything with oneself" (Schmitt, 1933, p. 9), the moment something becomes political denotes the moment all such trivial discussion must cease. This is the reason why, as Schmitt clearly states, "there are no enemies in the sphere of the economical" (Schmitt, 1933, p. 9). It is in this same sense that Schmitt noted already in his early book *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form* (1923) that "no major social opposition (*sozialer Gegensatz*) can be solved economically" (Schmitt, 1984, p. 30), for major social oppositions do not reflect *mere* economic differences but rather *political* differences; metaphysical differences that, per definition, cannot be negotiated on. And as Schmitt emphasises, politics, and metaphysics are inseparable: every truly political movement and idea always reflects a certain "stance" (*Haltung*) towards the world, a conception of the meaningfulness and nature of human life as such (and this remains true, so Schmitt, even if this stance is not a conscious one) (Schmitt, 1982, p. 22–23).

As is commonly known, Schmitt argues that all those things that have the potentiality to develop into truly political matters are not simply political *per se*; if they do become political, they are then no longer characterised by a particular conflict of the aesthetic, moral, or economic kind, for instance, but then transform into the "*much more profound opposition* (*Gegensatz*) of friend and enemy" (Schmitt, 1933, p. 7, my emphasis). What is this much more "profound" area of opposition that Schmitt is referring to? As Schmitt explains, it denotes precisely those existential and metaphysical questions that cannot be

6 All translations in this article are my own, unless otherwise noted.

7 On the crisis mentality after WWI, see Miettinen (2020, p. 23–43).

negotiated: "The sphere of exchange has its own narrow limits and its specific area (*Gebiet*), and not all things have an exchange-value. For political freedom, for example, and political independence, there is no equivalent, no matter how large the bribe might be" (Schmitt, 2009, p. 76). What precisely is the *thing* that has no exchange-value and no numerical equivalent; why is political freedom devoid of precisely these things? What is the "concrete life" and the "*seinsmässige Ursprüglichkeit*" of the political sphere that Schmitt is trying to describe in this book? And what does it mean that in the realm of the political, "spirit battles against spirit, life against life" (Schmitt, 2009, p. 87); what are the contents of the kind of "plurality of spiritual life" that Schmitt defends against all forms of political universalism and the imperialistic endeavours that are often undertaken in this disguise? (Schmitt, 2009, p. 87).

Here Schmitt's answer is distinctively Hobbesian. In his famous debate with John Bramhall, Hobbes ultimately came to the following conclusion: "Arguments seldom work on men of wit and learning, when they have once engaged themselves in a contrary opinion" (Hobbes, 1999, p. 41). It is not an accident that Schmitt cites these words in a letter to his neo-fascist student Armin Mohler (1995, p. 383), who was also the author of the subterraneously influential work *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932* (1949). Throughout his life, Schmitt was radically critical towards the image of politics as "eternal talk" (*ewiges Gespräch*) (cf., Schmitt, 1985a, p. 69; 1985b, p. 58), which also explains his affinity with the thinkers of the counter-revolutionary tradition—de Maistre, Bonald, and Donoso Cortes, whom he analyzes in a separate section of his *Politische Theologie* (1922).

Schmitt's analysis of the existential philosopher Søren Kierkegaard offers further evidence to the meaning of Schmitt's arguments. While it is often correctly noted that in *Politische Theologie,* Kierkegaard is painted as *the* thinker of the exception, very few have noted that for Schmitt Kierkegaard was also *the* thinker of *existential silence*. In his lesser-known essay on the literature critic Franz Blei, Schmitt describes Kierkegaard as the incarnation of a writer who used language and speech in this particular manner:

> To the great writer of the nineteenth century belongs in the most striking way also the muteness (Stummheit). This is incarnated in the most intensive and extreme way by Kierkegaard. He is the writer of silent speech (schweigenden Redens) and therewith exemplifies the great form of a writer in the nineteenth century. All talkativeness (Gesprächigkeit) and versatility, ultimately, only has this meaning; to remain silent about the fundamentals (das Letzte) and to protect oneself within one's inner muteness. It is difficult to explain this to an age of empty talk (redenden Redens). God is silent silence (schweigendes Schweigen). Nature is silent speech (schweigendes Reden). The great writers speak silence (redendes Schweigen) (Schmitt, 1931a, p. 472).

All of this explains the way in which the state of exception and the realm of the political as a realm of silence are, in fact, inextricably connected with each other. In his postwar diaries Schmitt declares that he took Kierkegaard's existentialism to its political conclusion: With his theory of the political Schmitt had "found the only concrete category of existentialism: Friend and enemy" (Schmitt, 2015, p. 151; cf., 61). While Kierkegaard's pseudonymous individuals had incarnated different lived existential truths, Schmitt understood the plurality of the political-juridical world in this very same existential sense. It is here, in the categories of friends and enemies, in the plurality of peoples that silence acquires a specifically political and thus over-individual meaning, going beyond Kierkegaard's philosophy that, in Schmitt's reading, remained anchored in the notion of the sovereign individual (Schmitt, 2015, p. 255).

Just as Kierkegaard's individuals, who were only able to communicate with each other through "indirect communication" when confronted with an existential decision (see Lübcke, 1990), Schmitt describes the truly political moments as the ones in which political communities are forced to rely on a radically self-expressive language that reflects the basic metaphysical convictions of the political communities themselves. However, in contrast to Kierkegaard, in Schmitt's political theory it is not the individual that occupies the political realm, but rather the people, the *Volk*. Schmitt's approach to understanding politics was distinctively juridical (Neumann, 2015), and consequently, the realm of recognition that matters to him lies in the sphere of law—in the common rules, practises, and norms that were gradually established with the birth of the modern state, the *ius publicum Europaeum* born in the beginning of the modern era, the era of Occidental political rationalism, as Schmitt (2011a) called it. In what follows, I will move on to examine how the existential question concerning silence operates at the heart of Schmitt's constitutional theory.

The sovereign is the one who decides on what may be discussed

Who decides when the moment has arrived that something can no longer be discussed and what are the political mechanics grounding such a decision? To answer these questions, we must turn to Schmitt's most important theoretical work, *Verfassungslehre* (1928), that operates on two different levels. On the one hand, Schmitt offers a historical-analytical survey of Western constitutions in order to theorise the construction of contemporary Occidental states. In doing so, Schmitt uses the Weimar Republic as an emblematic example of a modern liberal-democratic state (Schmitt, 2010, p. 13). On the other hand, *Verfassungslehre* also offers a kind of an encyclopaedic concretization of Schmitt's central theoretical theses he had developed by 1928 (cf., Böckenförde, 1988). Beyond being a

historical work of an astounding breadth, the work is also a condensation of Schmitt's attempt to distinguish liberalism and democracy and an attempt to apply his own theories of the political and sovereignty to the sphere of constitutional theory. In this section, my aim is to examine how the logic of silence operates at the heart of Schmitt's constitutional thought, especially in his definition of sovereignty as the power that decides on the limits of the discussable. After offering a short overview of Schmitt's constitutional thought, I examine Schmitt's analysis of article 48 of the Weimar Constitution in the context of his broader constitutional thought, arguing that Schmitt's politics of silence comes to the fore here with exceptional clarity.

Verfassungslehre is divided into four major sections. The book opens with an analysis of the notion of *Verfassung* (constitution) and the different meanings this concept entails. Drawing on this analysis, in the second and third sections of the book, Schmitt then moves on to analyze how modern liberal democratic states are constituted, arguing that every such state includes two opposing and conflicting fundamental parts in their constitutions: (1) the *liberal part* (that encompasses the basic rights of individuals, the division of powers, and the liberal principles of equality) and (2) the *political part* (that encompasses the fundamental existential and organisational decisions through which a people organises itself into a political unity) (Schmitt, 2010, p. 41; cf., 49). In the last section of the book, Schmitt then offers a sketch of what he calls the "*Verfassunglehre des Bundes,*" a constitutional theory of a federation that would encompass several states—a theme that I will not analyze here.

The theoretical starting point of Schmitt's constitutional thought is the idea that in the modern era, a constitution derives its legitimacy from the power of the people. A constitution is legitimate, when "the authority of the power that creates the constitution, on whose decision (the constitution) is based, is recognized" (Schmitt, 2010, p. 87; cf., 284). In contrast to the early modern period, when constitutions were based on the divine authority of the monarch, in modern times the legitimacy of a constitution is derived from the idea that the state is constituted by the political unity of a particular people (Schmitt, 2010, p. 87–90). Ever since the American and French Revolutions, the hegemonic way in which a people organises itself as a political unity has been the idea of the *nation*—modern states are thus essentially *nation-states* (Schmitt, 2010, p. 77–78; cf., 50).

For Schmitt, the constitution is based on a "onetime decision" (*einmalige Entscheidung*) that defines the "specific form of existence" of a given people as a political unity (Schmitt, 2010, p. 21, 24). The right to self-determination is an inextricable part of the political existence of any sovereign political unity and the constitution is an "expression of this possibility, through the power of a decision, to choose *one's own* way and form of existence" (Schmitt, 2010, p. 71, 121). It is from this fundamental decision that the legitimacy of every other constitutional norm must be derived (Schmitt, 2010, p. 75–76, 121).

While Schmitt clearly recognised the legitimacy of the Weimar constitution as an authentic decision of the German people (Schmitt, 1926, p. 27; Schmitt, 2010, p. 23–4, 73), Schmitt (2010, p. 15–16), he also emphasised the heterogeneity of the principles that defined the constitution, describing it as a complex compromise between different political powers, both domestic and international (e.g., the humiliating Versailles peace treaties) (Schmitt, 2010, p. 28–36, 72–74)[8]. Beyond analysing the contradictory nature of the different elements in the Weimar constitution, Schmitt also diagnosed a crucial issue in the fact that the "liberal" part of the constitution hindered the effective working of the political machinery through a subjugation of the guiding political principles, outlined in the "political" part of the constitution. It is precisely in this sense that Schmitt refers to the second, liberal part of the constitution in the following way in his diaries: "Nightmarish, despicable this II. part of the Weimar constitution" (Schmitt, 2011b, p. 117).

When Schmitt was writing his constitutional theory, he also exchanged a series of interesting letters with his fellow constitutional lawyer Rudolf Smend, who was simultaneously working on his magnum opus *Verfassung und Verfassungsrecht* (1928). In one of his letters to Smend, Schmitt emphasises that the basic intention underlying his constitutional theory was nothing less than to strip away the "death mask" (*Totenmaske*) of liberalism in Germany (Schmitt and Smend, 2012, p. 65)[9]. These statements must be understood as critiques of the fact that the Weimar Constitution itself was, so Schmitt, defined substantially and decisively by the ideology of liberalism, whose natural form of political organisation was the parliamentarian model (Schmitt, 2010, p. 315). Underlying this ideology was the liberal idea concerning the universal equality of all human beings as human beings that stood in contradiction with the democratic idea of the equality of a particular people as a specific, politically organised human group that would operate according to the friend/enemy distinction (Schmitt, 2010, p. 226–227).

For Schmitt, the universalistic metaphysical premises that underlie liberalism appear in contradiction to his own theory of friends and enemies; instead of forming a political unity, liberal premises only allow one to construct a theory of how to *restrict* and *limit* government (Schmitt, 2010, p. 110). For Schmitt, the very idea of "liberal politics" or that of a "liberal state" is, in fact, an oxymoron (Schmitt, 2009, p. 57, 64). Schmitt always

8 In a lesser-known presentation, Schmitt contrasts the Hegelian-Prussian state model of Germany with the different, more liberally oriented models of the United States, England, and France, arguing that World War I was, in fact, an ideological and also hypocritical war fought in the name of democracy, although imperial Germany had in fact been more "democratic" in many respects than the Allied Powers themselves (Schmitt, 1931b). For the broader historical context of Schmitt's central arguments, see Dyzenhaus (2003) and Breuer (2012).

9 Schmitt also notes his negative feelings against the "ongoing restauration of liberalism" (Schmitt and Smend, 2012, p. 49).

thought that "the principles of bourgeois freedom... transform forms-of-*state* into mere forms of legislation or government (*Gesetzsgebungs- oder Regierungsformen*)" (Schmitt, 2010, p. 200), and it is for this reason that he would argue that there is "no liberal politics *per se*, but only always a liberal critique of politics" (Schmitt, 2009, p. 64).

Above all, liberalism is guided by the naïve conviction that all conflicts could be settled *via* compromises and discussions, by the idea "that all imaginable antagonisms and conflicts could be set aside peacefully and justly by way of a *rational discussion*; that it is possible to discuss everything and to be reasonable about everything." For Schmitt this premise is nothing less than "the ideological foundation (*weltanschauungsmässige Grundlage*)" of liberal parliamentarism (Schmitt, 2010, p. 315). It is in this sense that Schmitt always described parliamentarism as "government by discussion" (Schmitt, 1985b, p. 13–14)[10]. This premise corresponds precisely with the liberal tendency to "repress the political" and to "ignore the sovereign" (Schmitt, 2010, p. 41, 244).

In the context of his constitutional theory, Schmitt's theory of sovereignty is deployed as an antidote to these premises (Schmitt, 2010, p. 14). For Schmitt, the criterion of sovereignty is precisely the ability to "break through" the status quo of the existing normative framework: "Who is licenced and capable of such actions, acts sovereignly" (Schmitt, 2010, p. 107). As Schmitt emphasises, "the executive shall not *discuss*, it shall act." (Schmitt, 2010, p. 315, my emphasis). Here it is crucial to note that for Schmitt sovereignty also implies the authority and the ability to use political concepts and language in a sovereign manner (Schmitt, 2014b, p. 45).

This contradiction between the liberal idea of discussion and sovereignty as the power to decide over silence comes to the fore most concretely in Schmitt's famous interpretation of article 48 of the Weimar constitution (cf., Schmitt, 2010, p. 26–27, 100–101). What article 48, in Schmitt's reading suspends or may suspend, is precisely the non-political and liberal second part of the Weimar constitution (this is explicitly stated in article 48 that enumerates the following articles 114, 115, 117, 118, 123, 124, and 153 of the constitution that enumerate the basic rights of German citizens). The reason this sovereign act takes place is precisely to shield and guard the first, political-existential part of the constitution. Schmitt's thesis is, in fact, not simply some general scheme that somehow abstractly theorises the state of exception, as it is often falsely claimed or implied (e.g., Agamben, 1998, p. 8–12), but rather an integral part of Schmitt's much broader, complex, and nuanced interpretation of what (1) constitutions are about generally and (2) how this generality is exemplified by the Weimar constitution as a typical liberal-democratic constitution.

For our purposes, the most crucial factor in all of the above is the fact that the sovereign decision that declares a state-of-exception ends all discussions. Schmitt (2014a, p. 419) also diagnoses this moment of silence in dictatorships, noting that in these political formations, there necessarily comes a point after which all general talk must cease, and one is left with nothing else than "*Diktieren oder Schweigen*" ("dictation or silence"). It is in this sense, guarding its own existence in the form of silence, that "a people that exists as a political unity" achieves a "higher and increased, more intensive way of being" (Schmitt, 2010, p. 210). Schmitt's notion of sovereignty as a power of silence operates not only against the premises of liberalism and parliamentarism but is also intended as a critique of the modern era more generally, the era of "neutralizations," as Schmitt (2009, p. 73–87) famously called it. Sovereignty shows that modern political concepts are secularised theological concepts; the ineffability of the divine retains itself in the realm of the ineffable that every true sovereign decision always sustains and recreates.

Instead of being a conservative and authoritarian liberal, as Schmitt is sometimes described (e.g., Schupmann, 2018), Schmitt was, at least in his own understanding, rather, *protecting democracy from liberalism* by trying to demonstrate that a functioning state cannot be based on the universalistic and idealistic metaphysical premises that guide liberal thought. That the Weimar Republic was cannibalising itself, was in Schmitt's opinion not because the liberal principles of the constitution had not been recognised widely enough, as argued by Schupmann (2018, p. 4, 24–25), but rather precisely because their wide recognition made the effective functioning of (any) state impossible (e.g., Schmitt, 1930). [11] It was because liberalism could not develop a politics of its own that Schmitt was trying to remove its "death mask," not because he would have been committed to the liberal principles of the constitution itself (contra Schupmann, 2018).

However, there is a crucial part of Schmitt's constitutional theory that I have left undiscussed in this section. This concerns Schmitt's description of the people as an entity that has the power to *acclamate*—an idea that Schmitt develops as a counterforce to the liberal image of discussion. What kind of a political animal is the singular citizen of Schmitt's *Volk*? Who is the political subject that does not discuss, but rather "acclamates"—demonstrates publicly an answer to a predefined set of questions? I will now turn to these questions.

10 In his constitutional theory, Schmitt, in turn, defines democracy as "government by public opinion," arguing that acclamation in its modern form *is* public opinion (Schmitt, 2010, p. 246). I will come back to the question of acclamation later in this essay.

11 It is only in the last years of the Weimar Republic that Schmitt turned his gaze towards a more comprehensive constitutional reform; see Dyzenhaus (2003) and Kennedy (2004).

With hobbes against aristotle: The animal with *phonē*, the political animal

The idea that the human being is inherently evil, dynamic, and untrustworthy, appears at a very early point in Schmitt's career. In a letter to his sister from 1911, Schmitt declares that

> every human being is a fierce egoist, and it is a pure wonder that they don't kill and poison one other, but rather ask about the weather, which, seen in this light, is an incredible progress of humanity. For the one who asks about the weather acknowledges therewith that he wants to discuss and is willing question the other about harmless matters (Schmitt, 2000, p. 116–117).

Similarly, in his diary from 1915, Schmitt declares that he sees only evil and vulgarity in this world, praising Machiavelli's insight that if all men in this world were good, it would be a horrible matter to lie and deceit—the opposite being true in a world defined by deception (Schmitt, 2003, p. 161–163). However, Schmitt's negative anthropology acquires a systematic interpretation only in *The Concept of the Political*, where Schmitt famously declares that all political ideas and theories of the state can be divided according to their anthropological premises—that every political theory either presupposes the goodness or evilness of human nature. But what is Schmitt actually saying when he enumerates the great names, who have supposedly realised, to different extents, that the human being is an "evil" and a "dynamical" creature? What is Schmitt saying when he names Machiavelli, Hobbes, Bossuet, Fichte ("as soon as he forgets his humanitarian idealism"), de Maistre, Donoso Cortés, H. Taine, Nietzsche, and Hegel ("who here also sometimes reveals his *Doppelantliz*")? (Schmitt, 2009, p. 55–57).

While it is very easy to point to the obvious incompatibility of these thinkers, there is an underlying logic underpinning Schmitt's list of names. He is naming, tracing, teasing out and discovering *a history of silence*. He is naming a list of thinkers who like him, have understood politics, although in very different ways, as a realm of silence. What we may call a *schematic of silences* penetrates all of Schmitt's thinking; a history of situations, markings, of canonical names, in which and through which the human being's nature as a political being, as a silent being, can be heard and recognised. These names aim to mark a series of thinkers who have recognised in different ways that "harmless" discussions concerning the weather are not enough to arrive at a criterion of the political in Schmitt's sense.

In his various works, Schmitt offers a metaphorical description of this silent political animal by utilising animal fables as illustrative examples of political enmity. As Schmitt notes in a letter to Ernst Jünger, he had always been searching for "examples of enmity between animals" (Jünger and Schmitt, 2012, p. 270; cf., Schmitt, 2018, p. 412). In a conversation that took place only a few years before his death, Schmitt described his life-long interest in animal fables in the following manner:

> … I always had a weakness for the heuristic and interpretative value of fables, [for they] can make the difficulties, human things, the humanly inexpressible things, how should I say this, more expressible, or make them accessible for language therewith that they give voice to animals that do not speak (Schmitt, 1981).

In both *The Concept of the Political* and *Der Leviathan* (1938) Schmitt expands on his political anthropology by relying on animal fables. He emphasises that political fables possess a particular interpretative power and notes that such fables can be applied to "almost all actual political situations" (Schmitt, 2009, p. 55). What explains their particular illustrative power is their connection with the political anthropologies of the seventeenth century, as developed by Hobbes, Spinoza, and Pufendorf, among others. In particular, they illuminate the image of sovereign states living among each other in a constant state of fear and danger that led these authors to describe the subjects of sovereign states as "evil"—as subjects driven by such basic instincts – "hunger, greed, angst, jealousy"—that also motivate animal behaviour (Schmitt, 2009, p. 55). It is in this sense that Schmitt notes that by relying on the fables of Jean de la Fontaine and Aesop, one could actually develop "a clear and illuminating theory of politics and of international law" (Schmitt, 1938, p. 77).

However, Schmitt also clearly recognises that these analogies to animal fables have their limits. He explicitly emphasises that the specifically political relation is only possible among human beings, whose rationality separates them from other animals. While war between human beings can never be "just" but is rather always a political instrument that can be used at will, among creatures of nature, wars are always "just," for animal conflicts are natural by definition (Rossello, 2021, p. 146–148). What I suggest here is that Schmitt's "political animal" is obviously not an "animal" *per se*, but rather a creature, whose political animality consists in a curious self-conscious negation of a specific kind of rationality concerning the willingness to actualize communicative speech—a negation that takes place when two politically and juridically organised political entities and their concrete realities collide with each other. Although it is well-known that Schmitt himself used a Hobbesian metaphorology to describe the modern state through the mythical image of the Leviathan, the fact that he also used this imagery as a description of the subjects who inhabit the sovereign states is much less often observed.[12]

It is in this sense that Schmitt's ambitious project aims to discover an alternative to the Western tradition of political

12 The only study that analyzes this question in detail is the insightful article by Rossello (2021).

thought and to the Aristotelian claim that man is "a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal," because as a *zoon logon echon*, as the animal that shares reason, word, and language with other human beings, he possesses something more than mere *phonē*, the voice that animals use to communicate their immanent desires, fears, and needs (Aristotle, 1932). Schmitt's enumeration of the canonical historical figures who share his "negative anthropology" is an attempt to formulate a radical counter history to this Aristotelian tradition.

As Günter Maschke rightly highlights, the mere distinction between friends and enemies as the criterion of the political itself was nothing very new or original. Schmitt actually derived this definition, almost word for word, from the Spanish thinker Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos (Maschke, 2012, p. 77). What, however, *is* original in Schmitt political thought, is precisely the attempt to define the realm of the political as a realm of silence. It is precisely the Aristotelian tradition that Schmitt aims to criticise by associating himself with Thomas Hobbes, whom Schmitt mobilises as his most important predecessor by describing him as the classical decisionist thinker (Schmitt, 1985a, p. 44)[13]. Hobbes, who can legitimately be described as "the first overtly anti-Aristotelian political thinker" (Ojakangas, 2016, p. 126), who famously attacked Aristotle's "vaine philosophy" at the end of his *Leviathan* (1651; Hobbes, 1985, p. 682–714), opens for Schmitt an alternative way for conceptualising the political realm as a realm of silence[14].

Schmitt's tentative list of thinkers who have acknowledged the untrustworthy nature of the human being in political terms is directed against the Aristotelian definition of man as a *zoon politikon*, against the animal who may realise its nature in actualizing this potentiality of speech and persuasion. This *telos* means nothing to Schmitt. Or rather, Schmitt forces us to ask: Why this *telos*? Why does speech, rhetorical persuasion, and debate—why should all of this deserve the great, valorized attribute of "the political" and not their opposite, silence, the refusal to engage in speech, the refusal to engage in compromises and the relentless defence of one's own premises, no matter what the cost, until someone may die? This is Schmitt's great question: Why should politics mean speech, discourse, and life; why should it not mean: silence, sovereignty, and death? This is the core of his "realism," and the simplistic and almost banal conviction that gives tremendous force to his writings. To examine this in more detail, let us take a closer look at Aristotle's words at the beginning of *Politics*:

> And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech. The mere voice, it is true, can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well (for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations of what is painful and pleasant and to indicate those sensations to one another), but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city-state (Aristotle, 1932).

Each of Aristotle's claims is negated, point by point, by Schmitt and his Hobbesian decisionism. First, a decisionist rejects Aristotelian teleological naturalism, the idea that "nature does nothing without purpose" as an outdated axiom for understanding politics—for the decisionist, nature does exactly nothing, and nature means nothing. Instead, the politically meaningful decisions, appear from a normative nothingness, as Schmitt (1985a, p. 42) famously puts it. Second, while it indeed might be true that man alone possesses *logos*, for a decisionist, this is a trivial remark that again proves nothing. Why should the actualization of speech be closer to the actual nature of man than his silence, especially once Aristotelian teleological naturalism is denounced? Schmitt argues in a different way: I may just as well actualize my "nature," by refusing to engage in discussions. This is, indeed, the one last step a modern decisionist must take after abandoning naturalistic teleology. It is in this sense that Schmitt praises the German philosopher Helmuth Plessner for realising that in the field of politics—in which "there is no philosophy and no anthropology that would not be politically relevant, just as, *vice versa*, there is no philosophically irrelevant politics"—irrational decisions must be seen just as legitimate as rational ones (Schmitt, 2009, p. 56).

Third, Schmitt also turns Aristotelian ethics to its head. For him it is not speech, but silence that indicates the difference between right and wrong. Extreme political events, when at least two visions of what is right and wrong collide with each other, denote the moments when communicative discourse must be renounced. From a decisionist perspective, justice can never be discussed, it may only be presumed, felt, sensed, experienced in a vital, almost in an irrational sense.

Fourth, the decisionist, who no longer believes in teleological conceptual hierarchies in defining human nature, can also no longer believe in the superiority of logos over "mere voice," the *phonē*. This precisely explains Schmitt's interest in animal

13 On Schmitt and Hobbes, see especially Meier (1994). For an excellent critique of Meier, see Mehring (2009, p. 380–97).

14 This is not to say that Schmitt would have always remained a Hobbesian, although such a continuity is quite often presumed (e.g., Meier, 1994; Rossello, 2021). After joining the Nazis in 1933 Schmitt modifies his decisionism towards "concrete order thought" and also distances himself from Hobbes, developing a much more positive relationship to Aristotle (Suuronen, 2021b).

fables. In a radically anti-Aristotelian gesture, Schmitt actually maintains that "the political" is a realm defined by voice, a realm, where speech becomes radically self-expressive, denoting the most basic needs and necessities of animal-like individuals. Schmitt has a specific term for this: *acclamation*. By definition, this animal *shouts* and by definition, it does not reason and judge in the form of rhetorical persuasion. In saying yes or no to the sovereign, the political animal may only deny or accept *an identity*. It is as if Schmitt's political subject would be forever faced with nothing more than trolley-problems, with a dualistic machinery that makes it impossible to discuss political matters in their plurality and contingency.

This logic of silence underpins Schmitt's famous claim that the real enemy is always experienced, in an existential sense, as "something else and strange" (Schmitt, 2009, p. 26). The enemy does not speak my language, the enemy does not belong to my political space, the enemy is, as if by nature, something different and strange. It is this affective experience of otherness and of active othering that according to Schmitt makes political enmity sensible, understandable, and acceptable (cf., Schmitt, 2009, p. 26).

All of this stands in an outstanding contradiction with the Aristotelian conception of politics as the sharing of words and deeds that numerous contemporary thinkers have sought to revive in various ways, perhaps most notably Hannah Arendt (cf., Arendt, 1998, p. 196–197; for context, see Backman, 2010). In noting that Schmitt was the most able and systematic defender of sovereignty—a concept one needed to abolish, according to Arendt, if men wanted to be free—Arendt saw how her own definition of action stood in contradiction to Schmitt's definition of "the political" (Arendt, 2006, p. 162–163, 289 endnote 21). For Arendt's thought remained inspired by the pre-philosophical *polis* in which "conducting all public matters through *peithein*, persuasion with words" had become established as a self-evident fact (Arendt, 2018, p. 270) and where "freedom in its essential sense is: *logon echoon*" (Arendt, 2002, p. 425).

It was in diametrical opposition to Arendt's concept of political power as a common undertaking enacted in words and deeds that Schmitt emphasised that "silence is power" (Schmitt, 2014a, p. 392). While Arendt portrays action as something that unique individuals undertake in concert, describing it metaphorically as a kind of a "second birth" that allowed individuals to reveal their identities in public (Arendt, 1998, p. 10–11, 176), Schmitt's political thought is defined by the provocative claim that when human beings act politically, they do not enact their individuality, but rather consciously make the decision to *lose* it; to display themselves *publicly* as parts of the basic political unit, the people, the nation-state. For Schmitt, political action is not discussion, but acclamation, a kind of a public vow that is taken precisely to show loyalty, homogeneity, and unity of opinion with others in a way that transcends unique individuality in the Arendtian-Aristotelian sense. In Schmitt, Arendt's unique individuals, natality, and new beginnings are replaced with the fictive imaginary of the people, with a politics of death, and with such beginnings, whose potentialities are always predefined by sovereign power. In short, for Schmitt, the very idea of individualism, in political terms, is nothing less than "a ridiculous fiction" (Schmitt, 2018, p. 422). It is, then, no wonder that in her copy of *The Concept of the Political*, Arendt would describe Schmitt's definition of the political as "barbaric" (Arendt, cited in Plaetzer, 2022, p. 14)—as being beyond the limits of comprehensible language, as reflected in the etymology of this word itself. In the following section, I place Schmitt's political theory of silence and death in a more comprehensive relation with other fascist theorists of the era.

How to kill and die meaningfully—On the logic of fascist political thought

Schmitt's Weimar era political thought was directly inspired by Italian fascism. In his 1923 book on the crisis of parliamentarism, Schmitt argued that modern dictatorial governments in fascist Italy and Bolshevist Russia could be described as much more "democratic" than liberal democracies, precisely because they suppress all liberal elements within them and thus enable the creation of a strong state. Schmitt also proclaimed that the nationalist model of Italy represented the stronger "myth" between these two (Schmitt, 1985b, p. 77–91; cf., Schmitt, 2010, p. 40). Also in his diaries Schmitt would laud the political practises of the fascist state, especially Mussolini's practise of instituting popular referendums, which gave him the feeling of a "real state" (Schmitt, 2018, p. 276)—a note that is by no means a mere remark, since Schmitt himself interpreted the Weimar constitution as having the potentiality for enacting a much broader direct democracy through popular referendums, which corresponded directly with his idea of acclamation as the true voice of the sovereign people (Schmitt, 2014b)[15]. However, Schmitt's most open valuation of the fascist state appears in a series of writings before the Nazi seizure of power in the early 1930s, in which he depicted the Italian state as a "qualitatively" strong state that had focused political power into the hands of a strong sovereign and compared it with the "quantitative total state" of the Weimar Republic that had lost political control of the society. As Reinhard Mehring notes, in this context, fascist Italy functioned as nothing less than Schmitt's model for the restauration of popular sovereignty in a more intensive form (Mehring, 2009, p. 242).

Schmitt's admiration of fascism was also commonly known among his fellow academics. One of Schmitt's closest students,

15 Schmitt also wrote a short book review of Ludwig Bernhard's *Das System Mussolini* (1924), in which Schmitt offers a short description Bernhard's admiring portrayal of Mussolini and his "ingenious technique of organization" (Schmitt, 1925).

Ernst Rudolf Huber, notes that in 1926, after a failed assassination attempt against Mussolini, Schmitt said that Mussolini's death would have been "the greatest imaginable disaster in the realm of the political." Similarly, the historian Wilhelm Neuss remembers Schmitt telling him that Mussolini's life was "the most valuable for the European humanity," to which Schmitt added that, for the sake of Europe, Mussolini's death would have shocked him more than the death of a close relative (Tommissen, 1988, p. 91–92, 106). Schmitt's close relationship to fascist Italy would see its pinnacle when Schmitt had a personal audience with Mussolini in Rome in 1936, an "unforgettable" event for Schmitt (Mohler, 1995, p. 418; for context, see Suuronen, 2021b, p. 344–47).

The most concise and influential description of the basic principles of fascist ideology can be found in an article that was included in one of the volumes of the comprehensive *Enciclopedia Italiana*, published in 1932. This article, "*La dottrina del fascismo,*" included two different parts, respectively titled "*Idee Fondamentali*" and "*Dottrina politica e sociale.*" Although this whole entry has often been attributed to Mussolini himself, in reality only the second part was written by him, while the first part, consisting of thirteen short theses formulating the "fundamental ideas" of fascism, was written by the fascist ideologist and neo-Hegelian philosopher Giovanni Gentile. As we will see, the contents of this interesting work disclose both systematic similarities and interesting divergences with Schmitt's thought.

In this text Mussolini describes the hard battles the fascists were drawn into before their revolutionary *Marcia su Roma* in October 1922. Mussolini mentions especially the importance of death, of dying for the cause, and the superiority of the sacredness of death over any doctrinal debates concerning the nature of fascism: "The years which preceded the march to Rome were years of great difficulty, during which the necessity for action did not permit of research or any complete elaboration of doctrine… There was much discussion, but – what was more important and more sacred—men died. *They knew how to die*" (Mussolini, 1933, p. 10, my emphasis). How can someone *know how to die*? And why is this more sacred than discussion or the development of doctrines? Mussolini highlights that fascism was primarily a movement of action, not of thought. But as he also notes, fascism did ultimately forge an original system of thought through concrete battles, in which the glory of death has a unique place:

> War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it. All other trials are substitutes, which never really put men into the position where they have to make the great decision – the alternative of life and death (Mussolini, 1933, p. 11).

What is this alternative between life and death that is above all other trials, described as mere "substitutes"? As Mussolini explains, both liberals and Marxists, although in different ways, reduce human life to mere economic activity, downgrading human life to a level where "men are no more than puppets" (Mussolini, 1933, p. 13). What Mussolini (1933, p. 14) loathes in particular is the "the equation, well-being-happiness" that takes all glory away from human life and reduces it to "a purely physical existence" – something mechanical, rationalistic, controllable, and predictable. It is in contrast to these doctrines that "Fascism… believes in holiness and heroism; that is to say, in actions influenced by no economic motive, direct or indirect" (Mussolini, 1933, p. 13). Dying for a cause cannot be explained through calculated, purely rationalistic motives.

To a substantial degree, Schmitt's political thought demonstrates interesting similarities with Mussolini's ideas. In his diaries, Schmitt declares that "to look life straight in the face means to look death straight in the face" (Schmitt, 2018, p. 419). This connection and even glorification of death also explains something essential about Schmitt's profound antisemitism. In a notebook entry from 1923, Schmitt describes the Jew as the arch-enemy of real politics precisely by noting that Jewish thought has no connection with death: "The idiosyncratic blandness and staleness of Jewish thought… is explained by the fact that is has not connection with death; not even the fear of death. The this-sidedness of this people is horrendous" (Schmitt, 2014a, p. 477).

For Schmitt, "the political" denotes a distinctive criterion for a certain type of human relationships, and in doing so, bears a dual insignia; the absence of communicative speech and the constant possibility of death, of killing, and of being killed. The uniqueness of "the political" is most clearly visible in the fact that only here can one, *sinnvollerweise* – logically, meaningfully, in a way that is *sinnvoll*, full of meaning—demand human beings to sacrifice their lives and to "shed blood and kill other human beings." Only here, in the realm of transcendent and non-negotiable existential absolutes can a "meaningful antithesis" be found that allows men to sacrifice life, to shed blood and to kill other human beings (Schmitt, 2009, p. 33–34). It is the awareness of this most extreme possibility that creates the "specifically *political* tension" and therewith always determines all human thought and action, in particular the "specifically political behavior" (Schmitt, 1933, p. 14; Schmitt, 2009, p. 33; cf.). Or as Schmitt puts it elsewhere: It is "only the consciousness of death that gives life a specific tension" (Schmitt, 2018, p. 54).

Schmitt (1933, p. 31) also agrees with Mussolini that the economic logic cannot confront death. By recognising the absolute value of human beings as human beings and thus their absolute equality as abstract beings, and not as politically, economically, or morally motivated beings, whose actions are always defined by political, economic, or moral categories, liberalism is left with nothing else than persuasion, discussion, and compromise. But what exactly is the problem with these measures? As Schmitt notes in his diaries: "The compromise is neglection of truth, not the relativization of truth, but something

else, a way to make truth neutral, a way of evading and going around" (Schmitt, 2018, p. 336). Only the political relationship creates a direct and sensible relationship to death, violence, and killing. If this is denied, then killing, violence and death do not disappear, but are simply lost under the disguise of universalistic arguments. The hypocrisy of liberalism is that it denies its own connection with death, and it is for this reason that for Schmitt, there is "ultimately, no liberal politics as such," but only a critique of real politics in its various forms (Schmitt, 2009, p. 64).

Perhaps the first author to understand the mechanics of these striking statements was Walter Benjamin, who was himself influenced by Schmitt's writings. In his classical essay "*Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*" (1936), Benjamin analysed how fascist ideology made death, even one's own death, not just one of the aesthetic pleasures, but rather the utmost aesthetic pleasure. As Benjamin notes, citing Marinetti's famous statements concerning war as the aesthetic ideal of the fascist movement, in contradiction to the Homeric-era during which the humanity (*Menschheit*) was an "object of display" (*Schauobjekt*) for the Olympian Gods, in the twentieth century this humanity has now turned into such an object of display for itself: "its self-alienation has reached the degree, at which it may experience [*erleben*] its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order" (Benjamin, 1963, p. 51). This idea penetrates Mussolini's thoughts on war, glory, and death.

However, Benjamin's description of fascist aestheticism only applies to Schmitt in a limited sense. Unlike Mussolini, Schmitt does not *reduce* political action and behaviour to physical killing as its ultimate and glorified apex, but rather aims to discover the forms in which such actions can be *limited*, without the intrusion of moral calculations—this, for him, was indeed the unique achievement of European political rationalism, which created the plurality of sovereign states and international law (cf., Schmitt, 2009, p. 35, 72; Schmitt, 2011a). As Schmitt himself states in a letter to his fellow constitutional lawyer Herman Heller, nothing was further from his theory of the political than the idea that extermination would be the necessary consequence of his thought (Schmitt, 2018, p. 503). For Schmitt, war and killing were the *exceptions*, in which "real life" breaks through the mechanised everydayness of life, but they were obviously not the complete *substance* of politics *per se* (cf., Schmitt, 1985a, p. 5).

There are also other significant differences. Schmitt, being a theorist, aimed to portray fascism as the most perfect form of *democracy* in the sense that it had the power to eliminate all liberal elements from within. It is in this sense that Schmitt aims to recapture and redefine the very notion of democracy by claiming that fascism is only possible on a democratic basis (cf., Schmitt, 1985b, p. 22; Schmitt, 2010, p. 237). Mussolini, on the contrary, never relied on such conceptually nuanced arguments, but rather criticised both liberalism and democracy as the eternal enemies of fascism. Moreover, while Mussolini and Italian fascist ideologists openly glorify fascism as the superior political ideology, Schmitt's presentation of these facts claims to be neutral—neither militaristic nor pacifist—and seeks to discover the "criterion" of the political (Schmitt, 2009, p. 32).

Although it must be left to another occasion to elaborate how the specifically fascist concept of death appears in relation to the various historical notions of death in the Western philosophical tradition (see Derrida, 1995), we can hint at two essential points here. First, the specifically *political* dimension of death in the fascist system of thought distinguishes it from the Platonic notion of philosophy as being the domain for the "practicing for death" (*meletē thanatou*) as well as from the Christian and neo-Platonic reconceptualizations of this notion, including the modern existentialist tradition and Heidegger's distinctly modern notion of *Dasein's* "being-towards-death" (cf., Derrida, 1995, p. 12–16). Instead of being a reflection on death that grounds individuality and makes a singular life meaningful, death is valued as a public sign, as a demonstration, as the ultimate sacrifice for the common good.

Second, the fascist concept of death operates with the specifically modern presupposition according to which the consciousness of death and the inextricably related notion of *Angst* stemming from this consciousness, is no longer seen as an issue that must be tamed in either philosophical or religious terms—as not only Greek philosophy, but much of the Western tradition as such had presumed—but rather as the unavoidable precondition of all politics as such (cf., Hadot, 2001, p. 171–172). By recognising death as a public matter and as an unavoidable consequence of life, the fascists transform death from a philosophical concept into a biological-political fact; death as death. What connects Schmitt's thought with fascism is the attempt to connect the exceptionality of politics with a regime of death; with the idea that exceptional situations reveal the meaning of life itself in a more powerful and intensive form. The production of enmity becomes coequal with the production of a meaningful human life, and the meaningfulness of a human life, in turn, reveals its fundamental value in the sacrificial act of dying for a greater cause.

In conclusion: Why political discussions with fascists are impossible

The schematic of silences that defines Schmitt's political thought operates on multiple different levels. First, for Schmitt, the realm of the political is a sphere where all other contradictions—economic, aesthetic, or moral—reach such a point of intensity that they can no longer be discussed. Second, Schmitt also describes the domestic political space of a sovereign state as a realm in which a supreme instance must decide when all political discussions must cease. In the context of the Weimar Republic, Schmitt's theory of article 48 of the Weimar constitution denotes this aspect most clearly by revealing the sovereign as the instance who has the power to decide on the limits of the discussable. Third, Schmitt also imagines the

political subjects themselves, the people constituted by a distinct and homogeneous group of citizens, as a subject that has no capacity for discussion; instead the people acclamates, shows its agreement or disagreement with a particular suggestion given to it by the sovereign. In all these different moments, Schmitt understands sovereignty as the power that defines the limits of the discussable; as the state of exception sets in, all discussions must cease. As also shown above, this unintuitive definition of "the political" and sovereignty runs counter to the Aristotelian tradition of Western political thought as such. It is precisely this understanding of sovereignty as a power over silence (and over death) that creates a systematic affinity between Schmitt's political thought and fascism as a political ideology.

We must now try to answer the question posed at the beginning of this paper: why are political discussions with fascists impossible? To illustrate this let us come back to the exchange of letters between Russell and Mosley that I mentioned at the very beginning of this essay. What Russell understood well-enough was that Mosley's letters to him did not constitute a genuine "communicative act," but rather a conscious act of *provocation* and an act of relentless *self-expression*. It was this realisation that led Russell to conclude that "nothing fruitful or sincere" could ever emerge from an association between the two.

Political discussions with fascists should not be seen as questionable because their opinions go beyond the accepted limits of liberal-democratic societies, but rather due to the much more disturbing fact that fascists do not recognise the communicative elements of language. Fascists claim that "words are flags, symbols" that can be understood correctly only if one looks beyond the superficial "veil of language" and sees the fundamental "logic" and "metaphysics" that guides every specific way of thinking in a distinct manner (Schmitt, 2014a, p. 519). For fascists, all truly political language is by definition ideological and symbolical; for a language and a specific vocabulary to be political, it must always reflect some unchanging metaphysical engagements that cannot be compromised on.

What is so unintuitive about this notion is the fact that for fascists, there are no unchangeable, objective facts or factual truths—there are only "opinions," which themselves are always equally ideological, no matter what their factual content. This misrepresentation of reality operates with a distinctly ideological purpose. If it is true that the fascist political principle consists of making "politics from politics," as Schmitt (2018, p. 409) claims, then one can say that this principle depends on an ideological conflation of facts and opinions (cf., Arendt, 2006, p. 233–234). To express this matter in Arendtian terminology: If the survival of the rule of law always depends on a commonly shared trust in the objectivity of experience and reality, the success of fascism relies on the breakdown of this mutual background—the breakdown of that *sensus communis*, which allows for the complexity of human experience to appear in a meaningful plurality without either condemning it as mere senseless chaos or reducing it to a set of competing ideologies of equal value.

Unlike fascists themselves claim, fascism does not represent one political "opinion" among others, but rather the attempt to replace and eradicate the plurality of opinions—an attempt that is most often thinly veiled under a relativistic disguise or empty talk concerning freedom of speech. Discussion with far-right extremists is not impossible because their opinions represent unconventional or "non-hegemonical" views of understanding a particular political issue or event—discussions with fascists are impossible because they think that politics and discussions are, *by definition*, nothing less than opposites[16]. Therefore, public political discussions with fascists should not be avoided merely for the reason that they *apriori* profess their unwillingness to be persuaded by a better argument, but rather because for fascists, political discussions function as self-expressive platforms, which they use to ridicule the liberal-parliamentarian idea of "eternal discussions."

It is precisely this semantic machine, built around the inextricably related concepts of sovereignty and homogeneity that creates a certain lexicon of violence. Why violence? Although Schmitt himself always emphasised that the political has nothing to do with extermination, he always conceded that in exceptional situations, "the power of democracy" consists in its ability to destroy the heterogeneous elements within the political unity (Schmitt, 1985b, p. 13–14; cf., Schmitt, 2010, p. 226–238). In the name of the imagined identity between those who rule and those who are ruled, fascist politics operates on an all-comprehensive silencing that aims to suppress all diverging political opinions.

All of this is not to say that "silence" as a political category would be somehow one-sided or always necessarily tied with fascism or far-right political thought (here one may think of the broad and problematic reception of Schmitt's ideas among the political left). For instance, in contemporary feminist research, genealogical studies on how contemporary liberal European societies have operated and continue to operate in a fashion that not only disempowers the speech of certain marginalised groups, but in doing so, engages in what Spivak calls "epistemic violence," offer examples of counter-discourses to the fascist regime of death (e.g., Spivak, 1988; Hornsby, 1995). In an era defined by the birth of new forms of far-right political thought—very often inspired by Italian fascism, the tradition of German radical conservatism, and also Schmittian political language (e.g., Sedgwick, 2019)—understanding the logic of fascist political thought is essential. For understanding is not the same as accepting; rather, in the sense proposed by Arendt (1994, p. 307–327), it is the process of understanding that creates the possibility of resisting the distinctly new political regimes that redeploy fascist ideas and discourses in new historical and political contexts.

16 However, it is obvious that there are numerous occasions in which discussions with those who hold radically diverging opinions are most useful, as is for instance the case with combatting radicalization.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

Funding

This article was funded by the Academy of Finland funded Centre of Excellence in Law, Identity and the European Narratives, Funding Decision Number 312154.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

The handling editor PM declared a past collaboration with the author.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

References

Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Transl. by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Arendt, H. (1994). *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954. Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism.* New York, NY: Schocken.

Arendt, H. (1998). *The Human Condition*, *2nd Edn*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. doi: 10.7208/chicago/9780226924571.001.0001

Arendt, H. (2002). *Denktagebuch 1950–1973, Vol. 2,* eds I. Nordmann and U. Ludz (Munich: Piper).

Arendt, H. (2006). *Between Past and Future*. ed J. Kohn (London: Penguin).

Arendt, H. (2018). *Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Vol. 6: The Modern Challenge to Tradition: Fragmente eines Buchs.* ed B. Hahn and J. McFarland (Göttingen: Wallstein).

Aristotle. (1932). *Politics*. Transl. by H. Rackham. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. doi: 10.4159/DLCL.aristotle-politics.1932

Backman, J. (2010). "The end of action: an arendtian critique of aristotle's concept of praxis," in *COLLeGIUM: Studies across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol. 8: Hannah Arendt: Practice, Thought and Judgment*, ed M. Ojakangas (Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies), 28–47. http://hdl.handle.net/10138/25817

Benjamin, W. (1963). *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter Seiner Technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. Drei Studien zur Kunstsoziologie*. Frankurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Blasius, D. (2002). *Carl Schmitt. Preußischer Staatsrat in Hitlers Reich*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.

Böckenförde, E.-W. (1988). "Der begriff des politischen als schlüssel zum staatsrechtlichen werk Carl Schmitts," in *Complexio Oppositorum: Über Carl Schmitt*. ed H. Quaritsch (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot), 283–318.

Braun, K. (2012). From the body of christ to racial homogeneity: Carl Schmitt's mobilization of 'Life' against 'the Spirit of Technicity'. *European Legacy* 17, 1–17. doi: 10.1080/10848770.2011.640189

Breuer, S. (2012). *Carl Schmitt im Kontext. Intellektuellenpolitik in der Weimarer Republik.* Berlin: Akademie Verlag. doi: 10.1524/9783050060453

Bures, E. (2020). The ineffable conservative revolution: the crisis of language as a motive for weimar's radical right. *Modern Intellect. Hist.* doi: 10.1017/S1479244320000116. [Epub ahead of print].

Clark, R. W. (1976). *The Life of Bertrand Russell*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Derrida, J. (1995). *The Gift of Death.* Transl. by David Wills. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Dyzenhaus, D. (2003). *Legality and Legitimacy: Carl Schmitt, Hans Kelsen and Herman Heller in Weimar*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Faber, R. (2001). *Lateinischer Faschismus: Über Carl Schmitt den Römer und Katholiken*. Berlin: Philo.

Ferguson, K. (2003). Silence: a politics. *Contemp. Polit. Theory* 2, 49–65. doi: 10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300054

Fuentes, J. F. (2013). Totalitarian language. creating symbols to destroy words. *Contrib. Hist. Conc.* 8, 45–66. doi: 10.3167/choc.2013.080203

Hadot, P. (2001). *La Philosophie Comme Manière de Vivre*. Paris: Albin Michel.

Hobbes, T. (1985). *Leviathan*. London: Penguin.

Hobbes, T. (1999). "Of liberty and necessity," in *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*, ed V. Chappell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 15–42. doi: 10.1017/CBO9781139164207

Hornsby, J. (1995). Disempowered speech. *Philos. Topics* 23, 127–147. doi: 10.5840/philtopics199523211

Jünger, E., and Schmitt, C. (2012). *Briefwechsel: Briefe 1930–1983,* ed H. Kiesel. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Kennedy, E. (2004). *Constitutional Failure: Carl Schmitt in Weimar*. Durham: Duke University Press. doi: 10.1515/9780822385578

Knowles, A. (2019). *Heidegger's Fascist Affinities: A Politics of Silence*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. doi: 10.1515/9781503608795

Koenen, A. (1995). *Der Fall Carl Schmitt. Sein Aufstieg zum "Kronjuristen des Dritten Reiches."* Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

Lintott, B. (2008). Russell's Aborted Book on Fascism. *Russell J. Bertrand Russell Stud.* 28, 39–64. doi: 10.15173/russell.v28i1.2132

Lübcke, P. (1990). Kierkegaard and indirect communication. *Hist. European Ideas* 12, 31–40. doi: 10.1016/0191-6599(90)90116-V

Maschke, G. (2012). *Der Tod des Carl Schmitt.* Wien: Karolinger Verlag.

Mehring, R. (2009). *Carl Schmitt. Aufstieg und Fall*. Munich: C.H. Beck.

Meier, H. (1994). *Die Lehre Carl Schmitts. Vier Kapitel zur Unterscheidung Politischer Theologie und Politischer Philosophie*. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler. doi: 10.1007/978-3-476-04427-3

Miettinen, T. (2020). *Husserl and the Idea of Europe*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. doi: 10.2307/j.ctvx0779x

Mohler, A. (1995). *Carl Schmitt. Briefwechsel mit einem seiner Schüler*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

Moorehead, C. (1993). *Bertrand Russell: A Life*. New York, NY: Penguin.

Mussolini, B. (1933). *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*. Transl. by Jane Soames. London: The Hogarth Press. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-923X.1933.tb02289.x

Neumann, V. (2015). *Carl Schmitt als Jurist*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Ohana, D. (2019). Carl schmitt's legal fascism. *Polit. Relig. Ideol.* 20, 273–300. doi: 10.1080/21567689.2019.1656073

Ojakangas, M. (2016). *On the Greek Origins of Biopolitics: A Reinterpretation of the History of Biopower*. London: Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9781315620237

Plaetzer, N. (2022). Eichmann in plettenberg: Carl Schmitt reads Hannah Arendt. *Mod. Intellect. Hist*. 1–28. doi: 10.1017/S1479244322000051

Rossello, D. (2021). La cuestión animal en el concepto de lo político de Carl Schmitt. Entre teología política y zoología política. *Ideas y Valores* 70, 137–155. doi: 10.15446/ideasyvalores.v70n176.74143

Russell, B. (1935). *In Praise of Idleness and Other Essays*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Russell, B. (1971). *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell. Vol. 2, 1914–1944*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Scheuerman, E. W. (2020). *The End of the Law: Carl Schmitt in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.

Schmitt, C. (1925). "Das system mussolini," in *Wirtschaftsdienst. Beilage Kritische Blätter. Literaturanzeiger für Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, No. 7 Vol. 3, S. 1191*.

Schmitt, C. (1926). *Unabhängigkeit der Richter, Gleichheit vor dem Gesetz und Gewährleistung des Privateigentums nach der Weimarer Verfassung. Ein Rechtsgutachten zu den Gesetzentwürfen über die Vermögensauseinandersetzung mit den früher regierenden Fürstenhäusern.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. doi: 10.1515/9783111645315

Schmitt, C. (1930). Beitrag zur aussprache der tagung 'Die deutsche Wirstschaftskrise, ihre Ursachen und die Möglichkeit zu ihrer Behebung'. *Mitteilungen des Vereins zur Wahrung der gemeinsamen wirtschaftlichen Interessen in Rheinland und Westfalen ("Langnamverein")* 19, 458–464.

Schmitt, C. (1931a). "Franz Blei," in *Frankfurter Zeitung, Literaturblatt*, *22 März, 1931*. Reprinted in Schmitt, C. (2011b) *Tagebücher 1930–1934*, ed W. Schuller (Berlin: Akademie Verlag), 471–473.

Schmitt, C. (1931b). Staatsideologie und Staatsrealität in Deutschland und Westeuropa. *Deutsche Richterzeitung* XXIII, 271–2.

Schmitt, C. (1933). *Der Begriff des Politischen*. Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt.

Schmitt, C. (1938). *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes. Sinn und Fehlschlag eines politischen Symbols*. Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt.

Schmitt, C. (1981). *Aus einem unveröffentlichten Gespräch im Sommer 1981. Gesprächspartner war der Historiker, Schriftsteller und Journalist Eberhard Straub*. Available online at http://www.carl-schmitt.de/tondokumente.php (accessed August 16, 2022).

Schmitt, C. (1982). *Politische Romantik*. Berlin: Duncker and Humblot.

Schmitt, C. (1984). *Römischer Katholizismus und Politische Form*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Schmitt, C. (1985a). *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*. Berlin: Duncker and Humblot.

Schmitt, C. (1985b). *Die Geistesgeschichtliche Lage des Heutigen Parlamentarismus*. Berlin: Duncker and Humblot.

Schmitt, C. (2000). *Jugendbriefe. Briefschaften an seine Schwester Auguste 1905 bis 1913,* ed E. Hüsmert. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

Schmitt, C. (2003). *Tagebücher: Oktober 1912 bis Februar 1915,* ed E. Hüsmert. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

Schmitt, C. (2009). *Der Begriff des Politischen. Text von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corollarien*. Berlin: Duncker and Humblot. doi: 10.3790/978-3-428-53116-5

Schmitt, C. (2010). *Verfassungslehre*. Berlin: Duncker and Humblot. doi: 10.3790/978-3-428-47603-9

Schmitt, C. (2011a). *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum*. Berlin: Duncker and Humblot. doi: 10.3790/978-3-428-48983-1

Schmitt, C. (2011b). *Tagebücher 1930–1934,* ed W. Schuller. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

Schmitt, C. (2014a). *Der Schatten Gottes. Introspektionen, Tagebücher und Briefe 1921 bis 1924*. Berlin: Duncker and Humblot.

Schmitt, C. (2014b). *Volksentscheid und Volksbegehren. Ein Beitrag zur Auslegung der Weimarer Verfassung und zur Lehre von der unmittelbaren Demokratie*. Berlin: Duncker and Humblot. doi: 10.3790/978-3-428-53958-1

Schmitt, C. (2015). *Glossarium. Aufzeichnungen aus den Jahren 1947 bis 1958*. Berlin: Duncker and Humblot. doi: 10.3790/978-3-428-54486-8

Schmitt, C. (2018). *Tagebücher 1925 bis 1929*. Berlin: Duncker and Humblot. doi: 10.3790/978-3-428-55296-2

Schmitt, C., and Smend, R. (2012). *Auf der gefahrenvollen Straße des öffentlichen Rechts. Briefwechsel 1921–1961*. Berlin: Duncker and Humblot.

Schupmann, B. (2018). *Carl Schmitt's State and Constitutional Theory: A Critical Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/oso/9780198791614.001.0001

Sedgwick, M. ed. (2019). *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/oso/9780190877583.001.0001

Spivak, G. C. (1988). "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan), 271–313. doi: 10.1007/978-1-349-19059-1_20

Suuronen, V. (2021a). Mobilizing the western tradition for present politics: Carl Schmitt's polemical uses of roman law, 1923–1945. *Hist. European Ideas* 47, 748–772. doi: 10.1080/01916599.2020.1818115

Suuronen, V. (2021b). Carl Schmitt as a theorist of the 1933 Nazi revolution: 'The difficult task of rethinking and recultivating traditional concepts'. *Contemp. Polit. Theory* 20, 341–363. doi: 10.1057/s41296-020-00417-1

Tommissen, P. (1988). "Bausteine zu einer wissenschaftlichen biographie," in *Complexio Oppositorum. Über Carl Schmitt,* ed H. Quaritsch (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot), 71–106.

Wolin, R. (1992). Carl Schmitt: the conservative revolutionary habitus and the aesthetics of horror. *Polit. Theory* 20, 424–447. doi: 10.1177/0090591792020003003