

POLITICAL THEORY

Concealed Silences and Inaudible Voices in Political Thinking. By Michael Freeden. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. 304p. \$110.00 cloth.
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A therapist asks his client, “So why did you respond that way?” Silence. A professor queries her class: “What is the author trying to do with this sentence?” Silence. In a crowded bar, a woman responds to a stranger’s crude pickup line, “What did you just say to me?” Silence.

Silence, it turns out, can operate in many ways. Michael Freeden’s *Concealed Silences and Inaudible Voices in Political Thinking* traces, categorizes, and organizes silence’s vast potentialities. Political science often overlooks, ignores, or marginalizes silence, seeing speech and action as the sole vehicles for politics. In contrast, Freeden traces and compiles a vast array of exemplary cases where silence does politics—there are so many examples, in fact, that the popular idea of silence as outside the political begins to appear absurd.

In some ways, this constitutes new territory for Freeden. One of political theory’s most trenchant analysts of ideology, he has long focused on carefully differentiating and classifying the widely divergent modes and methods in which ideological power functions. Silence—which is seemingly devoid of ideology—appears to be a considerable deviation from this interest. Unlike language, ideas, histories, or events, silence proves difficult, if not impossible, to trace and analyze across time and culture.

But Freeden draws on methods familiar from his previous work. His ultimate goal here, alongside showing *that* silence operates politically, is showing *how* silence operates politically. Freeden thus identifies and examines the distinct qualities and operations of diverse silences. Such an approach not only appeals instinctually but also entails extensive specification. The silence of a Chinese philosopher is not the silence of a Mirandized American detainee; the silence of an ostracized minority differs from the silence of a Quaker protest. Their distinctions identify their contrasting kinds of political intent, operation, and effect.

The familiarity of this approach reflects the central role of classification as a prototypical basis of political science. Science, of both the social and natural kinds, must act as a neutral arbiter. Taxonomy allows for the discovery of similarities, lines of descent, and divergences. Freeden’s contribution to political theory emerges from this vein. Even when he has hinted at a normative stance in his work—for example, in recurrent investigations of the histories of liberalism and progressivism in British thought—he has used methods far more surgical and comparative than

celebratory. Biology, grounded in Linnaean classification, does not falter in the face of the vast diversity of terrestrial life; instead, it finds increasingly minute features of similarity and difference for its syntaxonomic systems. Categorical political theory aims to do the same.

In silence, Freeden has found a challenging subject, and his methods reflect the multiple possibilities it allows. “The options for mapping silence are complex,” he argues, “presenting several plausible axes of classification that stand in a complementary relation one to another” (p. 35). Freeden does not kid. He develops four classificatory systems, which he terms “schemes,” for emphasizing the politics of silence. Each scheme has multiple subdivisions, typologizing silence in complementary ways. For example, Scheme A, which treats silences as sociological phenomena (or, less dramatically, as psychological dynamics), differentiates “aspirational silences,” “existential silences,” “solidaristic silences,” “positioning silences,” and “fear-inducing silences.” Silence as a semi-individualized moral or theological practice (e.g., meditative or monastic) slots into the first category; as a collective ceremonial interdependence (e.g., moments of silence) the third; as threatening, oppressive, and subjugating, the fourth.

He posits three other schemes. One analyzes silence as an epistemological structure, subdivided into four “constellations.” Another—somewhat confusingly conceptualized as an “elaboration” of the fourth constellation of Scheme B (38)—uncover how listeners interpret silence; this section consists of six subdivisions or “clusters.” The final scheme, which makes up the majority of the book, investigates those silences we often overlook or ignore and comprises seven “micro-modalities.”

To be clear, this is a massive and composite undertaking. Freeden’s point in these later chapters that the “unsayable” differs profoundly from the “ineffable” is not only right but also important in that each forecloses certain political articulations. The vastness of silence stretches to locales far beyond those usually considered by political theory. Freeden’s erudition also enlivens the book; throughout its pages, one is as likely to encounter Mies van der Rohe, Richard Nixon, or the Tao-te-Ching as Locke, Laclau, or Lacan. Far-ranging, substantive, and in intention, this volume covers as many kinds of silence as Freeden can imagine.

And that is undoubtedly the goal: to completely and definitively conceptualize the world of silence and politics. One tell: Freeden employs the term *vade mecum* twice (pp. 40, 246) to describe his method: the imperative to “walk with me” is embedded in the Latinate popular terminology for a guidebook from the 1760s to the end of the nineteenth century. He seeks to provide the most comprehensive classificatory system possible, a template through the dense and foreboding thickets of silences.

Traditional political theory plays a critical if not entirely central role in this project. For example, pages 181–94 develop an intriguing and wholly original thesis concerning the importance of silence for Locke and, by extension, for much of the contractarian tradition. Noting the importance of silence in the face of political postulation, Freeden draws from Locke an ontology of silence that allows its practitioner to toggle back and forth between the political and the prepolitical. It does not guarantee “a protest, even an unvoiced one, nor is it the abdication of political loyalty” (p. 188). Instead, it allows for a mode of simultaneity, of both belonging and opposition, that should be familiar to anyone engaged in policy, parties, or nations.

If the book has a failing then, it is not in its comprehensiveness. Nor is it a matter of engagement, importance, or capaciousness. My major criticism—or, more precisely, departure—concerns the possibility of its aspirations. Perhaps silence does not exist in multiplicities and variances at different times but in different registers simultaneously. If so, if it operates in multiple places with multiple meanings, all at once, neither an encyclopedia nor a *vade mecum* can make sense of it.

This review began with three exemplary silences from everyday life; even now I am unsure into which of Freeden’s categories they must fall. A classroom silence may involve various parts embarrassment, resentment, shyness, evocation, fear, and hangover. The silence between two people with different goals in a bar may include a mixture of bravado, anger, admiration, lust, disgust, and a desire to keep up appearances before others. If these examples may be so multiply comprised, so too might political silences. In that case, a classificatory system may be incapable of showing relations; their practices will always exceed their taxonomic place.

Thus, any taxonomic system remains incomplete, partial, and particular (as does any guidebook). Such limits, however, do not make them useless or dull their insights. To consider silence as central to politics and to recognize its manifold operations and themes, as Freeden does here, proves to be a considerable achievement.

Eco-Emancipation: An Earthly Politics of Freedom.

By Sharon R. Krause. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023.

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In *Eco-Emancipation*, Sharon Krause provides an innovative and wide-ranging account both of what is distinctively challenging about the ongoing ecological crisis and of the practical measures necessary to alleviate its worst consequences. The book offers original contributions not only to the study of environmental politics and ethics but also to theorizing complex political problems more generally.

Krause’s systematic ambitions are vast—to explain the root causes of the current malaise and devise workable antidotes to it—which are matched only by her admirably charitable practice of engaging with other voices and her exemplarily clear prose. There is, in short, a great deal to admire, learn from, and contend with in this superb book.

Chapter 1 sets the stage by identifying the book’s key aims in terms of understanding “the dynamics that sustain domination [of nature] and envision[ing] alternatives to them” (p. 4). Krause shows that this endeavor requires us to recognize the dual character of environmental domination. On the one hand, human beings are trying to rule over nonhuman nature in various, yet to be clarified, ways. On the other hand, she claims that not only marginalized but also privileged people suffer from the domination of nonhuman nature. *Eco-Emancipation* envisages domination as arising from a specific historical juncture in which power is exercised without effective constraints. This implies that we need a thoroughly political approach to respond to environmental domination, one that goes beyond the mere stipulation of abstract principles (as in much of climate ethics) and attends to the mobilization and institutionalization of concrete forms of freedom.

To defend this proposal, Krause constructs her argument from various conceptual building blocks. Chapter 2 begins with a clarification on the notion of agency. The “old exceptionalism” of human action remains tethered to an ideal of sovereignty that makes it appear as if our species were ontologically separate from, and inherently superior to, nonhuman nature. Because environmental domination results from, among other things, the perception of humankind’s separation and superiority, the author seeks to create an alternative vision of agency that forsakes detrimental images of human dominion over nature. Drawing on Hannah Arendt and Jane Bennett, the chapter holds that human action needs to be radically rethought in a nonsovereign direction. This move enables Krause to insist on our species having an exceptional responsibility for emancipation, which must not be equated, however, with delusional fantasies of complete control over nature.

Chapter 3 extends these reflections to outline the shape of environmental domination. Through a reinterpretation of contemporary republicanism and the work of Frankfurt School scholars, the author demonstrates that domination structurally affects both interpersonal and human–nature relations. We therefore require an intersectional approach that not only reveals the varied respects in which marginalized and privileged people are subject to unconstrained power, and thereby become exceedingly vulnerable to ecological harms, but that also shines a light on how the denigrated status of nature undermines the capacity of more-than-human beings to flourish on their own terms. At the heart of Krause’s comprehensive account of domination lies a thought about what is uniquely harmful