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Title: Speaking of politics in parliament : experiences of writing a book on the digitized Bundestag debates, 1949–2017

Year: 2022

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

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Please cite the original version:

Palonen, K. (2022). Speaking of politics in parliament : experiences of writing a book on the digitized Bundestag debates, 1949–2017. Parliaments, Estates and Representation, 42(3), 269-282. https://doi.org/10.1080/02606755.2022.2150364

Speaking of politics in parliament. Experiences of writing a book on the digitised *Bundestag* debates, 1949-2017

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ABSTRACT

This article consists of *ex post* methodological reflections on the procedures and practices that I applied in my monograph *Politik als parlamentarischer Begriff: Perspektiven aus den Plenardebatten des Deutschen Bundestags* (Leverkusen, 2021). The book analyses through 18 parliamentary terms the conceptualisation of politics in German *Bundestag* plenary debates from 1949 to 2017. The book was an illustration of my long-term aim of combining political theorising with the empirical analysis of debate. In writing the book, my guiding idea was to apply Ludwig Wittgenstein's point, that the meaning of a concept lies in its use, to an analysis of how parliamentary debates open a perspective on the conceptualization of politics closer to 'political life itself', to quote Quentin Skinner. Conversely, I also wanted to discuss how a focus on politics as a concept helps us to improve our understanding of the parliamentary style of politics, in which parliamentary voting forms the last step of a debate. To this purpose, the book assumes that every item on a parliamentary agenda has a political aspect to be debated. The book makes use of two interpretative approaches: the rhetoric of *topoi* and a typology of politics as an activity.

The verbatim documentation of parliamentary debates over long periods and across countries with politically powerful parliaments is an important political tradition. The practice was not created for scholarly purposes, and neither was the digitalisation of debates. Nonetheless, the digital documentation of parliamentary debates provides extraordinary resources for the analysis of political action from a conceptual, procedural and rhetorical perspective, especially for comparisons across time and space.[2] Such analysis supports a key insight of parliamentary politics, namely, that the process of debating is more important than the results. This approach brings the analysis of politics closer to the way politics is experienced by the actors.

I spent four years writing the book *Politik als parlamentarischer Begriff: Perspektiven aus den Plenardebatten des Deutschen Bundestags* (Leverkusen, 2021). Behind the book are my four decades of studies on the conceptual history of politics,[3]

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[2] As we emphasised in P. Ihalainen and K. Palonen, 'Parliamentary Sources in Comparative Conceptual History: Methodological Aspects and Illustrations of a Research Proposal', *Parliaments, Estates & Representation* 29, (2009), pp. 17-34.

[3] As the first major study see K. Palonen, *Politik als Handlungsbegriff. Horizontwandel des Politikbegriffs in Deutschland 1890-1933* (Helsinki,1985).

three decades on the political uses of rhetoric[4] and two decades on the parliamentary style of politics.[5] I applied these competences and experiences to a new kind of study, discussing the use of concepts as actually used in debates in a parliament. The period studied was long: from the beginnings of the German *Bundestag* plenary debates from its beginnings in September 1949 to the end of the eighteenth parliamentary term in September 2017. The book is a culmination of my long-term aim of combining political theorising with an empirical analysis of texts and debates.

Studying politics via the concepts used in debates

In the book, I followed Ludwig Wittgenstein's[6] principle that the meaning of concepts lies in their use. Quentin Skinner applied this principle in his major studies on conceptual change, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* and *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*.[7] He also programmatically linked concepts to debates and recommended that abstract scholarly works, such as Hobbes's *Leviathan*, be read as one would 'a speech in parliament', or as 'contributions to debate'.[8] More generally, Skinner wanted to break with the separation between political thought and practice by applying his principle that 'political life itself sets the problems for political theorist'.[9]

Still, studies of the conceptual history of politics – my own included – have rarely studied the actual use of concepts by the primary political actors in 'live debates'. During the preceding decade, I had been moving towards parliamentary studies using the Westminster Parliament and its history as an approximation of the Weberian ideal type, writing monographs on parliamentary procedure, on the parliamentary rhetoric of debate and on parliamentary thinking in general, including parliamentary government actors and their ways of dealing with time.[10] These studies provided a new ground for

[4] See for example K. Palonen, *Quentin Skinner. History, Politics, Rhetoric* (Cambridge, 2003).
[5] As a first exercise see K. Palonen, *The Politics of Limited Times* (Baden-Baden, 2008)
[6] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (Frankfurt, 1971 [1953]), § 43.
[7] Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1978), and *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996).
[8] See Q. Skinner, 'Rhetoric and Conceptual Change', *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought* 3, (1999), pp. 60-73; Quentin Skinner Interviewed by Alan Macfarline 10 January 2008, http//:www.alanmacfarline.com.anestors.skinner.com, 2008.
[9] Skinner, *The Foundations*, vol. 1, p. xi.
[10] See K. Palonen, *The Politics of Parliamentary Procedure. The Formation of the Westminster procedure as a parliamentary ideal type* (Leverkusen, 2014); *From Oratory to Debate. Parliamentarisation of deliberative rhetoric in Westminster* (Baden-Baden, 2016); *Parliamentary Thinking. Procedure, Rhetoric and Time* (London, 2018). See also the edited volumes, K.Palonen, J.M.

conceptual histories of politics, one focused on the vocabulary used in parliamentary debate. My repertoire of scholarly competences gave the new study a highly personal tone.

Parliaments provide the paradigmatic arena for debate: parliamentary debate not only allows but is built on the principle of the deliberative genre of rhetoric, of speaking *pro et contra*. Markku Peltonen has found that this principle of speaking *in utramque partem* was officially recognised by the English Parliament in 1593.[11] Moreover, the parliamentary mode of proceeding presupposes, as some nineteenth-century rhetoric scholars well understood, that unless the item on the agenda is regarded from opposite points of view, it will not be properly understood.[12] This parliamentary view of knowledge also shapes the thought of Max Weber and Quentin Skinner.[13]

Conversely, the focus on politics as a concept helps to improve our understanding of an important point in parliamentary practice: every question on a parliamentary agenda can be understood as political, or more precisely, the political aspect of the question is the main part of the debate. The members of a parliament are expected to take a political stand in the debate as well as to understand that politics is the *raison d'être* of their acting in parliament. To claim that an item currently on the agenda is 'not political' is, from this perspective, a political move to avoid debate, while insinuating that the opposition to one's move is also political.

After studies on Westminster as an approximation of the parliamentary ideal type, I wanted to study (West) German politics. Of course, the *Bundestag* has the reputation of being a working rather than a talking parliament, to use Max Weber's frequently misunderstood conceptual pair.[14] One consequence of this was that there are practically no studies related to the conceptualisation of politics in the *Bundestag* debates. So, I could avoid extensive comments on previous interpretations and study the plenary debates in terms of my own scholarly interests.

Rosales and T. Turkka (eds), *The Politics of Dissensus. Parliament in Debate* (Santander, 2014) and K. Palonen and J.M. Rosales (eds), *Parliamentarism and Democratic Theory* (Leverkusen, 2015)

[11] M. Peltonen, *Rhetoric, Politics and Popularity in Pre-revolutionary England* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 139.

[12] J. De Mille, *Elements of* Rhetoric (New York, 1878, p. 473); G. J. Holyoake, *Public Speaking and Debate* (London, 1897), p. 54.

[13] For Weber, see 'Die "Objektivität" sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis' (1904), in J. Winckelmann (ed.), *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tübingen, 1973), pp. 146-214. See also K. Palonen, *"Objektivität" als faires Spiel. Wissenschaft als Politik bei Max Weber* (Baden-Baden, 2010), for Skinner see footnote 7 and 8 above.

[14] M. Weber, 'Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland' (1918), in W. J. Mommsen and G. Hübinger (eds) *Max-Weber-Gesamtausgabe* I/15 (Tübingen), pp. 202-302.

I have regularly followed West German politics since my student days. I have spent several research visits in the Federal Republic since 1973, and it is my habit to travel there by train, listening to radio, reading German newspapers as well as buying a huge number of books from the trips. As a by-product, I have my political memory of the events, names, etc. to contextualise the debates, and this has become a tacit knowledge part of my 'methodology'.

My point of departure was, accordingly, to interpret the use of concepts as political moves in parliamentary debates with the triple register of conceptual history, political rhetoric and parliamentary studies as interpretative tools. At the start I had, however, only vague ideas of the problems and practices that I would encounter in my study, and still less of an idea of what kinds of 'results' I could expect from it.

When politics is everywhere, how does one study it?

From the initial aim of a reinterpretation of the conceptual history of politics by using parliamentary sources, the book turned into an exercise in making sense of the actual uses of the politics vocabulary[15] and interpreting the conceptual changes in the aspects of politics as an activity.[16] It was impossible to know in advance what would be the contribution of analysing parliamentary debate to the conceptualisation of politics as an activity. The options for searching the *Bundestag* debates led to focused, non-linear ways of reading the parliamentary debates politically.

Historically oriented political theorists sometimes face the problem that the sources are scarce, and therefore they may leave out interesting aspects. However, they could instead turn this vice into a virtue, a version of a rhetorical move called *paradiastole,* [17] and raise politically and historically interesting discussions and interpretations out of the scarce information by using the sources as thoroughly and consistently as possible.

Taru Haapala's studies on the debates of the Oxford and Cambridge Union Societies in nineteenth-century Britain, based on the titles of the public debates and the minutes of the internal procedural debates, offer an excellent example of such political

[15] See K. Palonen, *The Struggle with Time A conceptual history of 'politics' as an activity* (Münster, 2014).

[16] K. Palonen, 'Four Times of Politics: Policy, Polity, Politicking and Politicization', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 28, (2003), pp. 171–186.

[17] See Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, esp. chapter 4.

imagination.[18] In her analysis, she manages to present an overview of the debates and the changing trends within them, situated in the broader British political contexts, as well as a detailed analysis of the formulations of the debate titles and the single moves in the procedural debates.

My problem was the opposite one. The politics-vocabulary is everywhere in the *Bundestag* debates, when in a proper parliamentary agenda, 'everything' is political. However, such ubiquity can also prove amenable to analysis. The question was thus about how to use the plenary debates as primary sources for a conceptual study on politics.

For me, the digitalisation of the *Bundestag* debates meant simply that I could use the entire corpus of 68 years, or 18 parliamentary terms, as the basis of my analysis. On the basis of the printed version, even with indexes, this would have been impossible. There were hardly any debates in which the politics-vocabulary as such was an item on the agenda; however, in a wider sense, politics could be thematised in almost any topic. To that end, using the parliament website's search options sufficed on the condition that the author had a historical knowledge and a conceptual imagination regarding the research topic as well as regarding the procedures, rhetoric and the uses of time in parliamentary politics.

On the *Bundestag* website, all the items of the day are linked together. The daily debates on the agenda, and from 1991 onwards, the speakers, are named on the first page of the daily debates. However, when using the search option, neither can be immediately identified; one must often go back several pages in order to identify them. Since 1991, speakers' first names are mentioned in the records and female members are no longer treated as exceptions. For the party affiliations at the time of the speech, one has to look at chapter 24 of the *Datenhandbuch des Bundestages*.[19] Unfortunately, I could not systematically study the differences between the types of debates on the agenda, such as those concerning legislation, treaties, the budget or parliamentarians' questions, but I did frequently mention them in the text.

For my problematics, the counting of word frequencies would have been extremely superficial, and I did not want to engage in a journalism-style cherry picking

[18] See T. Haapala, *Political Rhetoric in the Oxford and Cambridge Unions 1840*-1870 (London, 2016); C. Wiesner, T. Haapala and K. Palonen, *Debates, Rhetoric and Political Action* (London, 2017).
[19] *Datenhandbuch des Bundestages, Verzeichnis der Mitglieder des Deutschen Bundestages und Personenverzeichnis,* https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/parlamentsarchiv/datenhandbuch/24/kapitel-24-.

of the obvious. Furthermore, 'definitions' of politics or the political are rare and uninteresting in the *Bundestag* debates. I rather assume that when everything is view as political in parliamentary debates, the members understand their actions as political without saying. When members use the politics-vocabulary, they emphasise on the political quality of topic or controversy, and they always have a point to make. As plenary speeches are regarded as rhetorical moves in an ongoing debate with the parliamentary audience, I could limit my analysis to the explicit uses of the politics-vocabulary as the textual basis for my conceptualisations.

My study remains explorative and experimental, within the framework of the *Bundestag's* system of digitised plenary debates.[20] Parliamentary websites are not designed to serve scholarly purposes, but they can be useful for conceptual historians. While all such websites do have their weaknesses, we should not remain prisoners of web designs, but invent ways to use them. For my scholarly interests, the digital search of the Bundestag website frequently shows either too many or too few 'hits'. In practice, I could use the hints of polit-words indicated by the search engine, as well as imagine, on the basis of a knowledge of parliamentary procedure, which words or compounds could be expected. Leaving out rare expressions has not prevented me from focussing occasionally on those that have been used only once, in cases where they can be compared or contrasted with parallel or opposite concepts.

I had also difficulties with the overly frequent expressions, for example, those mentioned in over 500 of the day-based collections of debates. Unlike Hansard in Britain, the *Bundestag* makes no visual separation between distinct debates, which in practice excludes searching by single debates or by recurrent topics of debate, such as the annual budget. With regard to the very frequent expressions indispensable for my study, I searched by the date of the division between parliamentary terms, which allowed an indication of the trends that have occurred in the course of the 68 years. Occasionally, I had to restrict my search to a few parliamentary terms (as a rule lasting 4 years) representing different political constellations. The search engine includes a 'relevance' criterion, though this enigmatic term indicates neither the frequency of use nor the political weight of the issue on the agenda. For the expression *politische Auseinandersetzung*, for example, I chose the five 'most relevant' days of debate over

[20] *Drucksachen und Plenarprotokolle des Bundestages* – ab 1949, https://pdok.bundestag.de/. All references to the dates in the text allude to this database.

the 18 terms, assuming that the 90 units of debate therein in which the expression might occur would be sufficient for my purpose.

Consequently, my study does not aim at any statistical representativity. It would be easy to show that I have neglected a number of aspects that could be view as important according to my criteria. My principle of selection has instead been to look for what rhetoric scholar Kenneth Burke called 'representative anecdotes', corresponding to a *pars pro toto* representativity of the classical trope of *synecdoche*.[21]

Politics as an activity, not as a sphere

For the politics-vocabulary, no simple devices for identifying what is interesting for the scholar are available. The conventional, harmless-looking expressions may turn out interesting in specific contexts, for example, when they are disputed or when they have become obsolete, for example, due to a change in political constellations.

In my study, the first research strategy is as follows. When everything is political, I looked for the cases in which the political aspect of the question under debate has been specially emphasised and restricted the study to the explicit use of the politics-vocabulary in the debates. Perhaps the majority of uses still tends to present politics in spatial terms, as a sphere or sector, or more metaphorically, as a system of order or as a stage.[22] However, it is rather common for the same expression to contain allusions to both the sphere and the activity-concept of politics. When concentrating on the latter, a could also deal with such borderline cases as using *die Politik* as if it were an acting subject.

Speaking of the political aspect of action involves the political imagination and judgement of the speaker. A measure of the political literacy of speakers is their understanding of how political aspects can be present in a parliamentary debate. All this strengthened my decision to concentrate on analysing parliamentary speech acts that emphasised the political aspect of action by explicit mention or by drawing attention to less obvious political aspects of a matter. The members might have different reasons for emphasising the political aspect of a question: to speak didactically to the outside

[21] K. Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley, 1945 [1969]), pp. 59–61, 323–6.

[22] For the discussion, see P. Rosanvallon *Pour une histoire conceptuelle du politique* (Paris,2003); W. Steinmetz, 'The Political as Communicative Space in History' in W. Steinmetz, I. Gilcher-Holtey and H.-G. Haupt (eds), *Writing Political History Today* (Frankfurt, 2013), pp. 11-33; K. Palonen, 'Politics or the Political? An historical perspective on a contemporary non-debate'. *European Political Science* 6, (2007), pp. 69-78.

audience, or to persuade MPs, who deny or wish to conceal the political aspects of their own standpoints in a debate, to change their stand.

For understanding the political point, it is important to focus on the nuances in the vocabulary. An example I can mention the ways of speaking of *Politikum*, a distinctly German expression frequently used in the early *Bundestag* debates. Sometimes the question concerned the rhetorical tone of a speech act, the identifying of which at times required additional contextual information, for example, on similar topics debated in the past, on changes in the parliamentary constellation or on the procedural rules and the uses of parliamentary time.

Politics typology and rhetoric of *topoi*

I applied two interpretative devices, which I had already used in my previous work, to the subject matter and the sources, namely, a typology of politics and a rhetoric of *topoi*. These tools served to thematise occurrences of the concept. In narrative, the typology analysis serves for drawing conclusions from more empirical discussions, based on the rhetoric of *topoi*. In this section, I shall briefly present these instruments.

I constructed a set of *topoi*, that is, rhetorical nexuses around which I could expect interesting conceptualisations.[23] I sought to identify the typical contexts in which I expected that the politics vocabulary would be used, not in the sense of regular occasions of debate – which also would have been possible – but in terms of junctures likely to afford occasions for conceptualising politics.

In classical rhetoric, *topoi* refer to places to find support for arguments. When politics as an activity is understood as a temporal concept, *topoi* can be understood as junctures in the course of the activity. They should not be seen as 'commonplaces', or conventions that recur at different occasions. I applied the original sense, where the *topoi* referred to clusters of themes, figures or arguments used in debate, containing a broad set of different, even opposing views or arguments. In this sense, *topoi* are comparable to the ideal types of Weber.[24]

Whereas a typology of politics as an activity aims at a comprehensive interpretation of the main aspects, a narrative of the *topoi* of politics as an activity is open-ended. The *topoi* should not be too many in number; on the other hand, too few would result in an oversimplification. The set of *topoi* has been built up and named in

[23] As in Palonen, *The Struggle with Time*.
[24] Weber, 'Die "Objektivität"'.

the course of analysing the sources, which are revised when the source leads to unexpected findings, in line with Reinhart Koselleck's idea of the veto power of sources[25] or to changed judgements about their division and naming. For approaching the conceptualisation of politics, I have used two main types of *topoi*, which might be roughly called the grammatical and the parliamentary. They provide different types of junctures assumed for the study, and neither type has been much used in conceptual history studies.

A good example of a grammatical *topos* are compound words, which are more frequent in German than in English. When focusing on politics as an activity, the vocabulary and rhetoric around the politician (*Politiker*) is another obvious candidate. More complicated, but conceptually highly interesting *topoi* are those that include the paradigmatic use of verbs for acting politically and the use of adverbs that emphasise *politisch* qualities.

Another source for the *topoi* is the parliamentary language itself, including the procedural and rhetorical vocabulary around the distinctive activities of parliaments, such as debate, deliberation, negotiation and decision-making. These can be distinguished from personal dimensions of parliamentary adversity, such as controversy, struggle, dispute or confrontation. Jeremy Bentham, as early as 1824, accused William Georg Hamilton's view on parliament of being like a 'gaming-house'. [26] Nonetheless, for understanding the parliamentary quality of action, the vocabulary of games and playing, (such as *Spielraum, Spielregeln, eine Rolle spielen*) surely deserve closer attention.

Once the political quality of an issue on parliamentary agenda is recognised, the next question to ask is: *political in which respect*? In close connection with the other aspects discussed (rhetorical, procedural, the government vs. opposition divide, etc.), it is important to discuss the strictly conceptual aspect of the question. I applied my old politics-typology, dividing politics into the four aspects of *politicisation, polity, politicking* and *policy*,[27] as the main perspective for classifying the actual uses of the

[25] See R. Koselleck, 'Archivalien – Quellen – Geschichten' in *150 Jahre Staatsarchive in Düsseldorf und* Münster (Düsseldorf und Münster,1982), pp. 21-36.
[26] J. Bentham, The book of the fallacies [1824] in *Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham,* vol, 2. (Edinburgh, pp. 378-478, http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/1921/114937); W.G. Hamilton, *Parliamentary Logic* [1808], edited by C. S. Kenny (Cambridge,1927).
[27] Palonen, 'Four Times of Politics'.

politics-vocabulary and for providing a sketch, in each chapter, of a historical interpretation of the conceptual changes.

I have constructed over the course of decades a typology of politics and I still agree with the 2003 version, which I have recently applied to Max Weber (to whom the typology is indebted).[28] Instead of the conventional distinction between politics, policy and polity,[29] I do not regard politicisation as an extension of the polity and politicking as a complication of policy. For me, politics as an activity is the umbrella concept, which contains the aspects of *politicisation, polity, politicking* and *policy***.**[30] As opposed to the convention, in my view politics arises from politicising moves that make visible the contingency of action, that question the limits of contingency in an existing polity, and that create new occasions for politicking (and that eventually lead to policy choices).

We can illustrate the applicability of the typology by looking at different types of questions that typically appear on a parliamentary agenda. A major part of the agenda consists of specific issues requiring a decision, which are in German often called *Sachfragen.* In typological terms, they are *policy* questions, including choices on the direction and coordination of moves and measures. *Polity* questions, for their part, deal with the 'rules of the game', the constitution, electoral system, the rights of members, the powers of the European Union and the member states, and so on.

Parliamentary agenda-setting is a model example of *politicisation*, while amendments that are put forward in the course of debates or allusions made to other topics worth being discussed can also open new aspects of contingency and controversy. *Politicking* refers to moves, tactics and strategies within a polity or the use made of occasions opened up by politicisation.

In the chapters, I started from the most common, frequently pejorative expressions, then moved via different formulae towards rather rare, but interesting cases where politics was the subject of praise. In doing so, I realised that my initial impression of the prevalence of politics-bashing was an illusion, and that the profile of the debates were more nuanced. This holds explicitly for the often-heard criticism of politics as a 'game'.

[28] K. Palonen, 'Aspects of Politics in Max Weber's *Politik als Beruf*', *Journal of Classical Sociology* 19, (2019), pp. 331-45.
[29] See for instance K. Rohe, *Politik. Begriffe und Wirklichkeiten* (Stuttgart, 1994[1978]).
[30] Palonen, 'Four Times of Politics'.

Topoi of politics in the *Bundestag*

I began the analysis of the politics vocabulary with single-component German compounds, which are easily identified by Bundestag search engine, while compounds written in separate words are not. Linguists have long noticed that compounds ending with *-politik* have greatly increased in the twentieth century.[31] Their main interest were the *Bindestrich-Politiken*, that is, policies understood as increasingly combinable with almost any field of action, in contrast to the old, Cameralistic usages involving a maximisation or optimisation of economic and social policies, which leave little choice regarding the policies.

The words beginning with *Politik* that put emphasis on the political quality of an action received my main attention. I focused on those words the search engine found to be used more than 40 times (occasionally several times in a single day). Among them I counted as most important: *Politikansatz* (approach to politics); *Politikfähigkeit* (competence in or mastery of politics) and its antonym *Politikunfähigkeit*, both of which were also used in adjectival form; *Politikgestaltung* (framing of politics or policies, occasionally used also as a translation of governance); *Politikkonzept* (drafting of politics); *Politikstil* (political style); and *Politikverständnis* (understanding of politics).[32]

These words in the *Bundestag* had close links to the aspects of politics. *Polity* was mainly thematised with *Politikgestaltung, Politikfähigkeit* and *Politikverständnis*; *policy* was connected with *Politikansatz* and *Politikkonzept*. The closest expression for *politicking* was *Politikstil*. It was striking to observe that these new compounds have been applied in the Bundestag debates only since the 1970s and the 1980s. The database of the weekly *Die Zeit* showed a similar profile of usage dates. This finding allowed me to hypothesise that the richer politics vocabulary in the Bundestag debates multiplied the linguistic resources for talking about politics and allowed more nuanced forms of its conceptualisation. I left the question open as to how far this might be linked to the growing appreciation of the role politics in human life since the late sixties, to the politics of the social-liberal coalition, or to the entry of the Greens to the *Bundestag* in 1983.

[31] H.-J. Kann, 'Zusammensetzungen mit "-politik"'. *Muttersprache* 83, (1973), pp. 263-9.
[32] See also K. Palonen, 'Conceptual Explorations around "Politics". Thematizing the Activity of Politics in the *Plenary* Debates of the German Bundestag'. *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 16, (2021), pp 16-39.

Another topic concerns the *Politiker*. Members of some parliaments have had reservations against being called politicians. In France, the paradigm of United States-style election campaigners and party functionaries has strongly marked the use of *le politicien*[33] while in the *Bundestag* as well, the popular contempt for politicians is not unknown. Nonetheless, *Bundestag* members' clear recognition of themselves as politicians is visible when they present themselves with the speech act *wir Politiker*, used cautiously at first, but since the mid-1960s increasingly accepted as an established convention across the political spectrum.

The *Berufspolitiker*, or professional full-time politicians, were harshly criticised in the early *Bundestag*, but supported by certain Social Democrats. After the judgement of the *Bundesverfassungsgericht* in 1975 that membership in the *Bundestag* required full-time politician status, their professionalisation became the rule also among the bourgeois parties. The doubts that *Bundestag* members expressed about the concept of 'politicians' concerned mainly their desire to restrict their work to 'mere' policy questions (*Sachfragen*), as distinct from *politicking*, to which the professionalisation of politics was strongly connected. However, the 1975 decision, their role in the *polity* of the republic was understood to require of them active *politicking* also in *policy* questions. A sign of the changing attitude towards politicians and politicking has been that, since the 1970s, the charge of being *politikunfähig* (incapable of doing politics) is one of the worst accusations that can be levelled against a *Bundestag* member.

In two chapters, I looked closer at the German adverbial uses of adjectives and the verbs related to the politics-vocabulary, both topics hardly dealt at all in previous studies of the conceptual history of politics, including my own. The search engine of the *Bundestag* had some difficulties in identifying the adverbial and verbal links to the politics vocabulary. With certain patience in experimenting, however, eliminating the cases not corresponding to my criteria. identifying interesting examples of them was possible. Also enabling the work to go forward was my willingness to settle for a smaller number of uses, as interesting formulations among them could be identified.

In its adverbial uses, *politisch* is unchanged by gender or number. I experimented with the search engine by looking for regular connections to a sufficient number of specific expressions. The adverbial use is connected to a few characteristic verbs, which I summarised under *politisch betrachtet* (politically considered), referring to meaning,

[33] L. Barthou, *Le Politique.* (Paris, 1923).

thinking and speaking politically. The former Chancellor Willy Brandt (Social Democratic Party [SPD]), for example, spoke of the stabilising role of the European Communities as *politisch gemeint*, containing a political meaning, an emphasis which was not obvious even in the *Bundestag* (24 June 1982).

Other expressions added to *politisch* (political) another qualifying word, such as *rein* (purely) or *offensichtlich* (obviously), even superlatives such as *höchst* (highly) and *äußerst* (extremely). The interesting and slightly surprising point was that, in these adverbial contexts, why something was understood to be *politisch* was not discussed at all but assumed to be obvious. This renders understandable their highest frequency of use during the Adenauer era. At that time (Konrad Adenauer resigned from the chancellorship in 1963), major controversies over interpretations of what is and is not political did not yet arise.

A different nuance of *politisch* concerns grammatical mood, with qualifications such as *politisch möglich* (possible), *unmöglich* (impossible), or *politisch notwendig* (necessary). *Politisch möglich* connects political action with contingency: when affirming the possibility to act otherwise, the political aspect is always present. In other words, there are political grounds to judge whether something is possible or not, and denial of the possible has a rhetorical tone connected to the political constellation, as have claims for political necessity, often favoured, as we might expect, by ministers of finance. The Bismarckian restrictive interpretation of politics as a *Kunst des Möglichen* (art of the possible) played a role only in the early years of the Bundestag,

What verbs does politics regularly connect to in the debates? A plurality of actors and outcomes that still unresolved clearly prevalent with verbs for acting politically, such as *Politik treiben* or *Politik betreiben*. Max Weber used both verbs in *Politik als Beruf*.[34] Whereas *Politik betreiben* continues to be used in, above all, policy contexts, *Politik treiben* almost disappears from the *Bundestag* debates after the 1980s – the hunting metaphor no longer sounds plausible (as Hubertus Buchstein suggested to me).

Key verbs refer to initiating politics or intervening in it, in the sense of Hannah Arendt's *initiation* or Albert O. Hirschman's *voice,*[35] with the expressions *Politik einleiten* (initiate politics or a policy), *in die Politik einmischen* or *eingreifen* (intervene

[34] M. Weber, Politik als Beruf (1919) in *Max-Weber-Studienausgabe* 1/17, W. Schluchter und W. J. Mommsen (eds), (Tübingen: Mohr 1994), pp. 35–88.
[35] See H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1998 [1958]); A. O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* (Cambridge/MA, 1970).

in politics). *Politik wenden* (changing the direction) refers in Germany both to Helmut Kohl's claim as the new chancellor in 1982, which was doubted or parodied by his adversaries, and to the events in East Germany 1989-90, 'the *Wende*'. Of major importance are the verbs of political judgement, *Politik (be-)urteilen*, as well as *Politik einschätzen* (estimate, evaluate) or *abwägen* (weigh). Perhaps it is no longer appropriate to search for a single word for doing politics: verbs referring to initiation, intervention, turning points and judgement might suffice while at the same time convey the complex and time-focused character of a politician's profile today.

The parliamentary dimension of politics became visible in many contexts, such as in discussions about the professionalisation of politics, and the verbs used to refer to different stages of debate. For the chapter 'Politik als Dissenshandeln', parliamentary terms provided a subtext, taking as a starting point that dissensus on agenda items is not only allowed, but expected in parliamentary procedure. The general term for dealing with motions in parliament is *Debatte*, which in its parliamentary sense refers to a series of debates in plenum and in committee. Debate also refers to the rhetorical quality of the deliberative genre, and parliaments form the paradigmatic situation where debate, as opposed to single speeches, is the main concern for both the actors in the debate and the scholars.[36]

Political moves in parliaments can be studied through the stages of debate. *Debatte* includes *Agenda-Setting* (a loanword in German), where *Diskussion* tends to allude to the inclusion of topics that have not yet reached the parliamentary agenda. Deliberations (*Beratungen*) on items on the agenda are central political moves within the *Bundestag*, and *Beratung* is also the name for a round of plenary debates. Within the federal system, negotiations *(Verhandlungen)* between the *Bund* (federation) and the *Bundesländer* (federal states) are on the agenda. The decision *(Entscheidung*) by a vote can be regarded as the last move in the debate. Since the first decade, speaking about decisions has been de-dramatised and pluralised, marking its having become a regular part of politics. Despite the reputation of the *Bundestag* as being more a working versus a talking parliament, in a sense simplifying Weber's classical distinction,[37] the emphasis

[36] See Palonen, *From Oratory to Debate*.
[37] See Weber, Parlament.

on debate has been unexpectedly strong, at least since the procedural reform (*kleine Parliamentsreform*) initiated by the members in 1969.[38]

Conceptually it is important to distinguish the parliamentary activities themselves from their personal dimensions, characterised by the terminology of dispute (*kontrovers, umstritten, strittig* or *streitig*). The emphasis on political dispute (*politischer Streit*) in dissensus over political activities serves to highlight the quality of parliament as an arena where adversaries sit together in the same audience and and expect to be accorded parliamentary respect. The lacking of a parliamentary *Streitkultur* is a frequent accusation made against the *Bundestag*. As Kurt Mattick (SPD) pointed out, however, it has been difficult to distinguish between politics and person: 'Dieser Streit um den Kurs der Politik wird ausgetragen in einem Streit um Personen' (17 October 1974). However, the (West-)German parliamentarians understood themselves as superior to experts in dealing with disputes, and no expert bodies were allowed disregard the parliament.

The distinctly German term, *Auseinandersetzung*, a contest testing the strength of opposing forces, is frequently used synonymously with dispute. In the context of terrorist acts of the RAF *(Rote Armee Fraktion)* in the seventies, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)/Christian Social Union (CSU) hardliners, such as Alfred Dregger, gave the term a violent connotation when demanding hard measures against the extremists, whereas the SPD–Free Democratic Party (FDP) coalition looked for possibilities for a civilised, political *Auseinandersetzung*, although refusing to accept terrorist crimes as political.

A proto-parliamentary concept, although no official part of parliamentary language, is *Spiel*, the German concept containing the dimensions of play, game and match. Helmuth Plessner[39] accused in the 1920s the Germans of an inability to accept politics as a *Spiel*, of playing games. In the Federal Republic today, the anti-*Spiel* rhetoric continues, both accusing adversaries of playing games and denying that playing games is what one does oneself. When looking at the use of the vocabulary, a more nuanced picture of the heuristic value of *Spiel* for peaceful parliamentary controversies can be identified,

[38] See, M.-L. Recker, *Parlamentarismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der Deutsche Bundestag 1949-1969* (Düsseldorf, 2018).
[39] H. Plessner, Grenzen der Gemeinschaft (1924) in *Gesammelte Schriften* V. (Frankfurt, 1981), pp. 11-133.

Responding to fellow economist Karl Schiller (SPD), Chancellor Ludwig Erhard (CDU) admitted that both were engaged in playing games: 'Wir werden also, wie Sie so schön sagen, unser Spiel machen, und ich kann Sie nicht hindern, Ihr Spielchen weiter zu treiben' (17 February 1966). The practical acceptance of interpreting politics as playing games, combining the procedural and personal aspects, is visible in terms such as *Spielraum* (space for playing, also used in a temporal sense), *eine Rolle spielen* (play a role), *ins Spiel bringen* (bringing to the game or marking as playable) or understanding *Spielregeln* (rules of game), and *fair play* as a constitutive part of parliamentary politics. An ironic distance towards the conventional uses of the jargon – *das übliche Spiel* – and looking for alternative practices of playing have become visible, for example, among the Greens (see Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, Greens, 22 June 2001).

Applying the four aspects of politics

With the politics typology, I interpret the actual uses of the politics vocabulary by situating it against the four aspects, assuming that all references to the political action vocabulary can be analytically interpreted with the four English 'polit-' words. In each of the chapters, aspects of politics are discussed both with a view to their possible internal conceptual changes as well as to the shifting relationships between them. Including all uses of the politics vocabulary under the four aspects does not mean classifying every use of the vocabulary under just one of the aspects. On the contrary, the co-presence of several aspects is more often the rule.[40]

An example from the *Bundestag* can illustrate this: For Helmult Lippelt (Greens) 'Wissenschaft ist politisch: sie kann nicht mehr unpolitisch sein' (1 June 1995). This is not a factual statement affirming that science (which in German includes the humanities) has today a political aspect, but a rhetorical move against a naïve belief in the authority of science; it is also a demand to recognise and discuss *how* the political aspect manifests itself in science. In the second part of the quote from Lippelt, *politicisation* refers to a revised self-understanding among scholars. This change requires treating academic institutions themselves as a type of *polity* with its own rules and practices, which may be understood – in the results and presentation of research as well as in research itself – as a form of *politicking*. All of this also requires that *science policy* should not be treated as a *policy* field of specialists and bureaucrats, but as one that deserves a parliamentary-

[40] See Palonen, 'Four Aspects of Politics'.

type attention, also in contexts where the autonomy of scholars is affirmed against university and ministry bureaucrats and officials.

One of the unexpected insights which turned my attention to new direction concerned the different stages and ways of accepting politicisation in the *Bundestag*. where politicised matters were then presented as mere *Sachfragen.* Emphasising choices as being between *policy* alternatives made of them openly political, as did their links to the *polity* or to the *politicking* strategies. The idea of *politicking* itself gained an increased legitimacy as a part of the *polity*. The debates in the *Bundestag* also concerned the struggles between government and opposition, between the parties, between front and backbench members as well as the individual initiatives of members, which were linked frequently to their striving for advancement in their parliamentary careers.

The *politicisation* of the *polity* itself was manifested in multiple ways. However, *Politisierung* appeared as an active demand only by Green Party members since the late 1980s. *Politicisation* was realised in, for example, the self-affirmation of the *Bundestag* against the governmentalism of *Kanzlerdemokratie*, but even more so in the *polity* framework's extension from the Federal Republic to European integration, and in the debates on global issues. We can also speak of an increasing awareness of or sensitivity for politics as a concept among *Bundestag* members. This refers not only to the recognition that everything on the parliamentary agenda does have a political aspect, but also to the requirement for competencies in interpreting the different aspects and their interconnections and debating them as part of the political struggle in the *Bundestag*.

Conclusions

The richness of the vocabulary of German politics allowed me to present the thematisations of politics as broadly as possibly, referring to the speeches of almost 1000 members of the Bundestag, including leading politicians as well as backbenchers. The breadth of the politics vocabulary in the *Bundestag* is impressive, and the thematic and rhetorical variety of its uses is extensive.

The analysis turned up a number of unexpected results. I tried to make sense of these in line with Koselleck's principle of the 'veto power' of the sources. They concerned not only the history of (West-)German politics but also the status and quality of the ways in which politics itself can be conceptualised. The debate approach did not yield any major innovative understanding of politics; however, it did lead me to realise

better how seemingly harmless and frequently unintended formulae in debates could be worth a closer analysis as strategic or tactical moves in a situation.

In particular, the rhetoric of *topoi* has offered approaches to conceptualisation seldom used in conceptual history, such as the analysis of verbs and adverbs. My suggestion is that such rhetorical approaches form an inherent part of the use of concepts in live debates, as opposed to simple declarative speeches used in in pamphlets, party conferences, memoirs and so on. In this respect 'negative findings', such as the paradiastolic turning of *Politik treiben* into 'out of fashion', also deserve keen attention.

With such an analysis of debate, we can better understand how the status of 'politics' and 'political' has itself changed in the Bundestag. In the first two decades, it was tacitly assumed, especially among 'bourgeois' parties, that what is political depends on the 'nature of things', as if the subject matter would determine the concept. During the Brandt and Schmidt coalition governments, such naïve conceptual realism gradually disappeared, even among the Christian Democrats: all parties learnt to use the concept of politics rhetorically, depending on the political constellation, such as one characterised by a government vs. opposition divide. With the entrance of the Greens into the *Bundestag* in 1983, an expansion of parliamentary agenda-setting itself marked a further politicising element. Whereas intellectual history looks for 'roots' as early as possible, conceptual history looks for breaking moments, frequently as late as possible.

In another recent study, I compared the uses of 'politicisation' in Westminster, the Bundestag and the European Parliament.[41] Although most of the uses in all three parliaments may have given the word a negative connotation, this was much stronger in the British parliament than in the *Bundestag* or European Parliament. In the latter, British Conservatives and in particular the UKIP (United Kingdom's Independence Party) members formed an extreme end in the animosity towards politicisation. In contrast, *Bundestag* members have since the 1970s and 1980s been much more willing to uses the different nuances of the term, which might be linked to their willingness to enrich the vocabulary with compound words and with verbalising action-words in general.

Years ago I concluded that Skinner's thesis on the agenda-setting power of 'political life itself' not only made of theorists politicians but also of politicians a kind

[41] See K. Palonen, 'Politicisation as a Speech Act. A repertoire for analysing politicisation in parliamentary plenary debates' in T. Haapala and Á, Oleart (eds), *Tracing Politicisation in the EU.* (London, 2022), pp. 67-90.

of theorists.[42] In *Politik als parlamentarischer Begriff* I have for the first time applied this conclusion to a major study. This should not be understood in the sense of comparing the conceptions of politics among parliamentarians with theorists, such as Max Weber or Hannah Arendt. It suffices to understand that by debating a specific item on the parliamentary agenda politicians might as a by-product invent perspectives or formulations that the conceptual historian might regard as new and original. My experience with the analysis of *Bundestag* debates was that such 'innovations' exist.

Finally, I realised that it would be possible to study some non-thematised aspects of politics. In the early *Bundestag*, the unproblematic use of *politisch* referred either to expediency or to partisanship, later the emphasis included controversy and contingency. The history and rhetoric of such paradigms for political action might illustrate how important it is to replace the question 'political or not' by 'political in which sense'.[43]

Notes on contributor

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[42] K. Palonen, 'Political Theorizing as a Dimension of Political Life', *European Journal of Political theory* 4, (2005), pp. 351-67.

[43] As a step to this direction see K. Palonen, 'Paradigms for Political Action. A draft for a repertoire', forthcoming in *Redescriptions* 25, (2022).