7 Control and Protean Power in Small and Large Worlds

Roger Altman, former Deputy Secretary of the Treasury under President Bill Clinton, argued in 1996 that "unpredictability may be the new normal."[1] Twenty years later, James Clapper, then the Director of National Intelligence, told the Senate Committee on Armed Services that "unpredictable instability" is the new normal.[2] The new "new normal" appears to be the same as the old "new normal." Surprise marks world politics throughout the ages. Mere weeks before the outbreak of the October revolution, Lenin predicted that it would come only after his death. Unexpected peoples' revolutions have toppled regimes in Asia in the 1980s; ended the Cold War in 1989; led to the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991; and convulsed the Middle East during the Arab Spring of 2010–12. In 2016 voters in Britain and the United States handed the incumbent parties and their neoliberal programs stingingly unexpected defeats. And the world was similarly unprepared in recent years for the financial crises of 1997 and 2008; al Qaeda's and ISIS's entry onto the international security landscape; multitudes of migrants heading for the borders of developed regions; and social changes brought about by radical innovations in science and technology. How to make sense of the unexpected in world politics? In answering this question, scholars of world politics scramble to rethink power configurations and alignments, point to unobtrusive forms of control, such as soft power and discursive framing, or simply invoke exogenous shock as the sources of never-ending surprises.[3] Denying the complementarity of risk and uncertainty steadfastly, they hold to the view that the world is dominated by calculable risk. If only we could accurately map and measure all of the different components of power, we would know the probabilities of all important political outcomes.

Confronted with the recurrence of nice and nasty surprises, international relations scholarship holds that unexpected change is due to

[1] Altman 2016. [2] Garamone 2016.
[3] Nye 2011. Haas 2002. Price 1998. Krasner 1984. Streeck and Thelen 2005.

the diffusion of control power. Harvard professor and power theorist Joseph Nye restates the insights of liberals and realists from decades past: power is shifting from states to a kaleidoscope of non-state actors.[4] Repeating Henry Kissinger's arguments from the late 1960s, a former head of Policy Planning under President George W. Bush and a former president of the Council on Foreign Relations, Richard Haass, concurs: "Power is more distributed in more hands than at any time in history."[5] The diffusion of power is often not aligned with the interests of elites accustomed to exercising control. As a relatively orderly and predictable process creating a legible and linear history, diffusion lends itself to social scientific analysis.[6] In fact, the model of a "general linear reality," writes sociologist Andrew Abbott, "has come to influence our actual construing of social reality."[7] It is not self-evident, to say the least, why the sudden and unexpected is caused by the gradual and expected. No matter. Helpless in the face of uncertainty, we simply put the unexpected aside and pay the price when it trips us up time and time again.

An exclusive focus on existing control power in small risky worlds overlooks the actualization of protean power in large uncertain ones. Protean power frustrates a multitude of Leviathans. The assumption that the world is governed only by risk overlooks the risk-uncertainty conundrum. Unexpected shocks are exogenous not to how power relations unfold but to how our theories depict them. The actualization of potential power under conditions of uncertainty always looms. Machiavelli is not alone in reminding us of the importance of chance in the affairs of states and men. Actors at the front lines of financial, nuclear, environmental, and other crises routinely acknowledge the pervasive intermingling of the known and the unknown, and are attentive to potentialities in the shaping of power dynamics.[8] A source of discomfort, even fear to some, the fluidity of those dynamics is what prompted former President Obama to echo Thucydides by invoking "hope in the face of uncertainty."[9]

For the questions posed by the unexpected, scholars of world politics offer unsatisfactory answers, typically issued with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight. When pressed, they sound unconvincing, perhaps even to themselves, while claiming that momentous changes are just small data points in a very large universe of events. Alternatively, they concede that the causes of unexpected, large-scale change are exogenous to their theories of world politics, a fancy acknowledgment of the obvious: they

[4] Nye 2011: 118–22. [5] Haass 2017: 11.
[6] Diffusion has become an important subject of study. See Graham *et al.* 2014.
[7] Abbott 1988: 169. [8] Rumsfeld 2001. [9] Obama 2016.

are often blind-sided by the unexpected. Sidestepping the risk-uncertainty conundrum and accustomed to thinking about small worlds of risk, they get lost in large worlds filled with uncertainties.

Greek mythology offers a way out. The sea god Proteus had shape-changing capacities. Firstborn of Poseidon, legend has it, Proteus once captured was able to tell the future. Preferring freedom to servitude, Proteus changed his shape as soon as he was seen. He entered the world of English letters half a century before Hobbes wrote his analysis of the all-powerful *Leviathan*. In Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona* Proteus was famously inconstant with his affections. When it comes to the analysis of power Hobbes won out over Shakespeare. Operating in the large world of uncertainty, Proteus has been overshadowed by Leviathan's grip on the small world of risk. According to Google Books, the term "protean" is quite common in many fields of scholarship, but not in the analysis of world politics. With the risk-uncertainty conundrum omnipresent in financial, nuclear, and environmental crises, large world uncertainty is central also to how power dynamics unfold in the entanglement of control and protean power.

I define protean power as the improvisational and innovative responses of actors who take advantage of new openings. Protean power combines unusual agile capacities with new contexts.[10] In contrast to relatively predictable control power, protean power stems from processes that are "versatile" or "tending and able to change frequently and easily."[11] It emerges in uncertain contexts often experienced as such, when previous performance does not provide a reliable foundation for future moves. Although protean power is generated by intentional actions, the outcomes of those actions are unforeseen and often unforeseeable. They are lodged in the large world of uncertainty.

Besides its causal impact, protean power is also an outcome. Protean power deepens unanticipated change and often contributes to crises that catch everyone by surprise. Creative moves and their power effects can alter basic rules of the game and leap over or circumvent deeply grooved pathways of control power. Protean power reminds us of the importance of the unknown. It makes us focus on how actors handle the unexpected with improvisation and innovation, deepening uncertainty as they go along. "Viral" manifestations of protean power invite attentive actors to adopt and normalize emergent innovations, converting what was once a novelty into best practice, and eventually perhaps an attribute of control

[10] Katzenstein and Seybert 2018a. International Theory 2020. Guzzini 2020.
[11] *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/, accessed 02/05/24.

power operating in small worlds of risk. Often, control and protean power processes unfold in variegated and complex relationships that are difficult to disentangle empirically. Nothing about protean power is inevitable; all of it is unpredictable. Yet its signature in world politics is real. Committed to Newtonian humanism, scholars of world politics have simply been unable to recognize it.

World politics is often not determined by those in control. If it were, it would not be as full of surprises as it is. James Scott has alerted us to the often hidden and overlooked "weapons of the weak."[12] Those weapons become visible when decentralized improvisation and innovation help actualize unrecognized power potentials. Protean power feeds off political agility and the circulation of power potentialities in large, uncertain worlds rather than off specific attributes, like social position or the material capabilities and systems of rules central to the exercise of control power. In complementary relations, the two powers co-occur, co-evolve, and often co-constitute each other.

This chapter takes its departure from the views expressed by Newtonian humanism, post-Newtonianism, and para-humanism that shape different conceptualizations of power as an instrument of calculable control in small worlds and as a source of incalculable protean power in large ones (section 1). Ten case studies covering a diverse set of issues illustrate how control and protean power typically are closely related (section 2). As the main source of the modern conception of control power Thomas Hobbes articulates a rigid, authoritarian theory of language that fits into a Newtonianism formalized about forty years after Hobbes had published *Leviathan*. Niels Bohr's post-Newtonian perspective and its permissive core construct of complementarity differ profoundly from Hobbes's insistence on the necessity of a sovereign's total control of language. During the last half century, updates of these two positions by social theorist Michel Foucault and physicist-feminist Karen Barad have clarified further the yawning gap that separates them (section 3). The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of Machiavelli's understanding of *fortuna* and the potentialities of protean power (section 4).

1. Control and Protean Power

Many experience uncertainty as deeply threatening. The financial crisis of 2008 and the missiles of October 1962 illustrate how easily unforeseen or unforeseeable events can drive decision makers toward economic collapse or inadvertent nuclear war – prevented only by massive government

[12] Scott 1985.

Table 7.1 *Control and Protean Power*

	Small World / Risk	Large World / Uncertainty
Mode of operation	Direct and indirect	Indirect and direct
Agency	Capabilities deployed by identifiable agents calculating *ex ante* risks leading to probabilistic outcomes	Potential effects of actions by agile actors who improvise and innovate to find solutions to local problems with *ex ante* incalculably uncertain effects on others and the system at large
Primary focus	Actuality	Potentiality
Power operating through	Direction and diffusion	Creation and circulation

Source: Seybert and Katzenstein 2018: 10.

bailouts and the disobedience of people who mistrust malfunctioning technology. Or simply dumb luck.[13] The urge to exercise control is always held hostage by protean power. It can pass from potentiality to actuality in a flash, changing control power's terrain, often dramatically. The effects of actions in contexts of small world risk can be understood in terms of control power; effects of actions in contexts of large world uncertainty are best understood in terms of protean power. Control power directs; it penetrates and diffuses. Protean power creates; it flows and circulates. When the hope of controlling outcomes diminishes, the anticipation of new possibilities grows. Because they can create room for each other, the two types of power are not mutually exclusive. They coexist and co-evolve (Table 7.1).

Of all the modern theorists of power Robert Dahl has been most explicit about the close affinity between control power and risk, paying no attention to protean power and the unexpected. Dahl's approach to power is shaped by Newtonian humanism. Probabilities of an event, with and without the exercise of power, give Dahl the indispensable baseline for comparing the power of different actors.[14] Observation of the two different conditions may be difficult but is "not inherently impossible: they don't defy the laws of nature as we understand them."[15] Decades after the quantum revolution in physics, Dahl's appeal to the laws of nature was Newtonian. And he thought of probabilities in terms of numerical frequency rather than confidence in subjective beliefs. In contrast, forty years later Clarissa Hayward thinks like a post-Newtonian:

[13] Pelopidas 2020: 463. [14] Dahl 1957: 206–07, 210. [15] Dahl 1957: 214.

"power defines fields of possibility."[16] Actors can change the shape and direction of power through practices that result not only from actor endowments but from structured fields of possibility. Power defines what is possible. Contrary to Dahl's strong rejection, for Hayward "action at a distance" is an identifiable and important site for tracking power effects.[17] To inquire into the workings of power we should not ask "How is power distributed?" We should ask instead "How do power's mechanisms define the (im)possible, the (im)probable, the natural, the normal?"[18] What matters is the mutability of asymmetries in power that defines the field of what is possible.[19] Arguably, today quantum physics and quantum probabilities define the laws of nature "as we understand them." They resonate deeply with the concepts of possibility and potentiality that are central to what I call protean power.[20] The conventional analysis of power and the denial of the central importance of uncertainty in the risk-uncertainty conundrum make students of world politics rest comfortably in their "deep Newtonian slumber."[21]

Plenty of books label power in different ways, signaling a widespread unease with Dahl's understanding. Among others, they include Hall's "deontic," Walker's "sharp," Heimans and Timms's "new," Forst's "noumenal," Markell's "momentary," and Jones's "elusive" power.[22] More than any other Joseph Nye's "soft" power concept has offered students of world politics an alternative to the conventional conceptual language of "hard" power. Soft power is an actor's ability to obtain a preferred outcome through attraction.[23] Widely utilized by scholars and in public discourse, soft power covers power dynamics in the relations among states as well as private organizations on issues of culture, social, and economic affairs as well as the environment. Despite its innovativeness, soft power terminology is vague and fraught with theoretical ambiguity that has not been diminished by a cottage industry of articles seeking clarification.[24] Nye's recent rebuttal of different criticisms

[16] Hayward and Lukes 2008: 10, 14, 16. Hayward 1998: 12; 2000.
[17] Dahl 1957: 204. Dahl argues that a necessary condition for the exercise of power is that "there is no action at a distance." Although he leaves the term "connection" undefined Dahl argues that "unless there is some 'connection' between A and α, then no power relation can be said to exist . . . One must always find out whether there is a connection, or an opportunity for a connection, and if there is not, then one need proceed no further." Protean power operates in the space that Dahl acknowledges opaquely by leaving the terms "connection" and "opportunity for a connection" undefined. Also see Hayward 1998: 17–18.
[18] Hayward 1998: 16. [19] Hayward 1998: 20–21. [20] Wendt 2015.
[21] Ruggie 1993: 170. Kavalski 2012.
[22] Hall 2018. Walker 2018. Heimans and Timms 2018. Forst 2015a, 2015b. Markell 2014. Jones 2009.
[23] Nye 2008: 94. [24] Brannagan and Giulianotti 2023: 1–2.

illustrates that soft power analysis rests on control power's conventional Newtonian foundation. He writes that "power implies causation and is like the word 'caused'. When we speak of causation, we choose to pick out the relation *between* two items in a long and complex chain of events ... Power is conveyed through resources, whether tangible or intangible. Power conversion – getting from resources to behavioral outcomes – is a crucial intervening variable."[25] Like control power, soft power is agentic. Success depends on the conversion of resources into outcomes. Though the fist of soft power is covered by a velvet glove, the logic informing its exercise and analysis does not differentiate it from control power. It is Newtonian.

Protean power differs. Its dynamics are captured better by post-Newtonianism. Out of sight, it thrives in the domain of potentialities and possibilities. Like wave functions in the physical world, it is unpredictable and omnidirectional. As in the quantum world, the effects of protean power exist and do not exist simultaneously in a state of superposition that requires the impossible in social analysis – the calculation of all potential forms of power outcomes. Starting with resources, as do analyses of hard and soft power, is like starting analysis with the collapse of the wave function when particles become visible. This reduces analysis to a preset range of actors, resources, conversions, and outcomes, linked in a linear process. It conceals the encompassing and preceding invisible, systemic aspects of protean power dynamics when the interests of actors are not yet actualized. The domain of potentialities through which protean power courses is not fixed in time and space. Actualized at unpredictable moments, potentialities are in a perpetual process of erratic, invisible movement.[26] Protean power operates in complex, often messy, emergent processes of entanglement that include past, present, and future. Memory politics and the power of the imagination are both protean. As is true of the physical universe, so in the political universe: there is no master plan. In this post-Newtonian, large world view of power, uncertainty reigns and the risk-uncertainty conundrum persists.

The incalculable provides the terrain for protean power. It can arise through direct relations between actors or indirectly in the follow-on effects that reconfigure complex systems. This type of power cannot be harnessed consciously. Unpredictably it is a creatively generated shift in accepted problem solving that circulates across different sites. Protean power has generative effects on the broader context. It can be entirely unanticipated and as such bypass all attempts to exert control. While the processes underlying the two types of power may co-occur and converge,

[25] Nye 2021: 197–98. [26] Brannagan and Giulianotti 2023: 6–8.

their relations to actor experiences of the world are diametrically opposed. From the perspective of those amassing control capabilities, the effects of protean power in settings of uncertainty, often but not always, result in frustration. In contrast, those lacking in control power, often, but not always, take advantage of new conditions to affect the world. The conventional notion of power, writes Bruno Latour, has "the dormitive virtue of the poppy which induces somnolence in the critics at just the moment when powerless princes ally themselves with others who are equally weak in order to become strong."[27] Unexpected power potentialities are an integral part of power dynamics. This means that we should add the concept of what is possible to what is probable and what is natural. The mutability of the world goes beyond the predictable effects that constitute control power. It includes convention-defying uncertainties that destabilize the world as a result of protean power.

Disagreements about the concept of power have been deepened by a questionable translation of Max Weber's German into English. A widely accepted view holds that Weber's definition of power operates only in the world of risk – power as the likelihood of achieving one's will while overcoming the resistance of others. The conventional view is based on a problematic translation of the capacious German concept of *Chance*. That term has two valid translations: probabilistic risk (*Wahrscheinlichkeit*), and possibilistic uncertainty (*Möglichkeit*).[28] Following Weber, I hold that power operates in the worlds of risk *and* uncertainty. Actors accomplish their objectives *over* others in dominating relations (*potestas*), as well as *with* others in enabling relations (*potentia*).[29] Weber's conceptualization of power thus invites us to look simultaneously at control power in terms of processes that connect capabilities with effects in relations that penetrate and diffuse and at protean power in terms of agilities that create and circulate. Despite these confusions, we should distinguish clearly between the concepts of risk and uncertainty. Both are relevant for an analysis of power and unexpected change.

[27] Latour 1988: 175.

[28] Weber 1925: 28. Although I develop it in a different direction than he does, I am indebted on this point to Felix Berenskoetter's important observation. Berenskoetter 2007: 21, fn 4. Talcott Parsons insisted in his translation of the German concept of *Chance* that the concept should be stripped of all mathematical or statistical connotations, suggesting that "chance" could be measured numerically, a caution which has been conspicuously absent in the quantitative and behavioralist tradition of American political science and international relations research. See also Guzzini 2016: 7, fn 8.

[29] As I discuss below, unlike Weber, Hobbes subsumes both *potestas* and *potentia* under the concept of control power, informed by a determinist rather than probabilistic vision of politics.

In its relationship to uncertainty and risk, control power can be compared to a game of billiards. There is room for strategy and there is no question about the rules that govern a player's decisions and constrain their execution. By contrast, protean power resembles a game of interactive fluidity, like tennis. It is about "being in the right place, at the right time" that extends well beyond coincidence. For the world's leading physicist of tennis, Howard Brody, there was nothing flighty about the game. Yet he would have acknowledged that individual ball control, motivation, mutual weakness recognition, and interaction with spectators produce so much uncertainty as to make the exact score of a match unpredictable.[30] Moving past equations of force, such is the world of protean power.

Even though an actor may be too weak to exercise "power over" (understood here as actual capability) the human or non-human world, she may nonetheless have "power to" or "power with" (understood here as the process of actualizing potentialities, without or with others) so as to navigate in that world successfully.[31] The world is made of power-as-cause and power-as-luck. Freakish serendipity is the constant companion of politics. One way of illustrating the operation of protean power is to focus on the effects of human action without design. Under conditions of uncertainty it is not necessarily strategic actions but their emerging byproducts that create the most consequential effects.[32] It is clear that actors *want* to do something in response to the uncertainty that surrounds them. What they *should* do, however, is typically unknown. Actors do their best, guessing and coping, uninformed by calculable probabilities and unknown determinants of success or failure. Once their actions have produced outcomes, ascribed power effects are linked to specific actors who are seen as having caused the outcomes. Who wins is therefore determined through traceable (*ex post*) but not predictable (*ex ante*) assessments. By enriching our conceptual vocabulary with protean power, we can gain a deeper understanding of the fragility and limits of control power, not a handbook of how to beat *fortuna* at her game.

The small world of risk and control power and the large world of uncertainty and protean power resemble the difference between clocks and clouds.[33] The French astronomer and mathematician Pierre-Simon Laplace was convinced that the world is a big, complicated clock. As science develops, more and better knowledge about the clock's inner workings will enable us to predict the future with deterministic or

[30] *The Economist* 2015. [31] Pansardi 2011. Göhler 2009. Slaughter 2017: 161–82.
[32] Dallas 2014.
[33] Almond and Genco 1977. McCloskey 1991. Tetlock and Gardner 2015: 8–10.

probabilistic equations. All that is needed is work and patience. The present state of the world is the effect of its past and the cause of its future. In the world of clocks, there is, at least in principle, no uncertainty. Like the past, the future is fully knowable to an omniscient present. Various insurance markets are clock-like in their predictability. And our experience confirms daily many of our predictions. We could not function in a world in which everything was possible. This is the risk-based world of control power.

Protean power operates in the world of clouds. Modern meteorology knows vastly more than in the past about the conditions under which clouds form, and its predictive ability about general weather patterns has improved greatly. Yet it is much less confident about making specific predictions about the shape of particular clouds. Historical probabilities summarize the possible ways the future could unfold – and the curve summarizing those possibilities looks nothing like a normal bell-shaped curve which makes possible the calculation of risks. It has fat tails that describe a much more volatile world than conventional risk models lead us to expect. Historians are among the first ones to understand intuitively and acknowledge explicitly that the world we experience as the only real one is the result of statistical distributions of once-possible worlds. So are playwrights such as Nick Payne.[34] "The past did not have to unfold as it did, the present did not have to be what it is, and the future is wide open."[35] The uncertainties that inhere in the field of power point to almost infinite alternative pasts and futures – the field of protean power possibilities.

The evolution of the universe, biology, geological patterning, climate, hurricanes, and other processes in the natural world are often modeled as a set of complex, open systems, governed not by universal laws and equilibria but by pervasive chaos and disequilibria. Within and across such systems volatility sets free protean power containing "the potential for creative evolution."[36] System trajectories can be made intelligible *ex post* but are not predictable *ex ante*. This is very similar to how control and protean power function in small and large worlds, and it is at odds with the assumption that the world is a closed system. The experimental method that seeks to uncover general laws has great difficulty chasing the emergent properties of open systems. And linear causality often does not capture such properties either. It is of course entirely possible that open systems contain simple rules that we should be able to decipher. But our predictive abilities in an open world are greatly limited by the time it

[34] Payne 2012. [35] Quoted in Tetlock and Gardner 2015: 248. [36] Connolly 2005: 83.

takes the system to run through enough iterations for us to watch how things map out.[37]

What distinguishes protean power from control power are the unknown outcomes it produces. Protean power operates in networks that are extensive, loosely coupled, and self-directed rather than intensive, tightly coupled, and authoritative.[38] Viewed as agility in response to uncertainty, in a world that often defies control, actors cannot know what exact effects protean power will produce. Without claiming to seek or to cause specific outcomes, they generate these effects through their creativity and local awareness and the creation of future potentialities as a result of new actualities.

Expressing a widely shared sentiment, Randall Schweller writes that "we are entering a jumbled world run by and for no one, in which the nature of power itself is changing, an ungovernable place . . . a chaotic realm of unknowable complexity."[39] Yet a complex world is not necessarily chaotic. Two advocates of complexity theory, Axelrod and Cohen, for example, argue that "while complex systems may be hard to predict, they may also have a good deal of structure and permit improvement by thoughtful intervention."[40] In politics, writes Hugh Heclo, "governments not only 'power' . . . they also puzzle."[41] Protean power covers the terrain that Schweller, Axelrod and Cohen, and Heclo allude to.

Scholars and policy makers occasionally compare international politics to a game of chess.[42] That game has fixed rules and calculates probability in a complex environment. Yet it also illustrates the limits of control. The most highly ranked champion in the game's history is Norwegian Magnus Carlsen.[43] In one of the most lop-sided matches in recent decades, he dethroned the defending world champion Viswanathan Anand in November 2013. This changing of the guard illustrated a broader trend. A handful of Russian grandmasters no longer dominate the sport. Today about 2,000 grandmasters play the game, compared to eighty-eight in 1972. The collapsing chess order shows a dialectical relation between high levels of conformity instilled by risk-based, computerized chess training manuals and the continued relevance of improvisation and innovation. Carlsen's genius lies in his unorthodox and surprising strategies that rely on his prodigious memory rather than the conventions of computer chess. Carlsen has an aptitude for playing many different styles of chess, adapting readily rather than searching like a scientist for the best

[37] Connolly 2005: 84–85. [38] Mann 1986: 27. [39] Schweller 2014: 16, 27.
[40] Axelrod and Cohen 1999: xv. [41] Heclo 1974: 305–06.
[42] Haass 2014. Nye 2011: xv.
[43] Naíim 2013: 1–2. Tetlock and Gardner 2015: 43–44. Carlsen declined to defend his title for a fifth time in 2023.

solution to a given problem.[44] His playing style confirms Adam Smith's insight: "in the great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own."[45] Carlsen's huge success shows that chess is a game where risk calculations based on computerized training manuals and uncertainty-prone adaptive and fluid strategies are both important.

The political world is more unfathomable than Newtonian notions of control power permit us to recognize. It is filled with more post-Newtonian potential for improvisation and innovation than false convictions and traditional practices concede.[46] Protean power can be creative and destructive at the same time as Silicon Valley's innovative start-ups, grown very quickly into social media giants, illustrate. Smart forecasts, prudence, and resilience offer some measure of protection in a world open to a staggering range of possibilities that the human mind, when oblivious to awe and wonderment, often meets with an anxious craving for predictability. A broader post-Newtonian concept of power provides needed protection and improved vision. The 9/11 attack on the United States and what some have called the "assault" on America by tens of thousands of children migrating illegally in the summer of 2014 serve as two simple reminders of one basic fact – focusing only on control power and overlooking the role of protean power makes the unfolding events in world politics an unending chain of unsettling surprises.

The idea of protean power is intuitively less easily grasped because causality is understood and works differently in the domains of protean power's actualization of potentialities and control power's capabilities. Explication provides a method to operate at the intersection of these two conceptions of cause and power. Explication differs from both "mere" description and "law-like" explanations.[47] It combines "how" questions, understanding, descriptive inference, and constitutive analysis on the one hand with "why" questions, explanation, causal inference, and causal analysis on the other.[48] Constitutive effects are productive and in practice difficult to distinguish from causal effects.[49] "Constitutive relations *are* causal, albeit not causal in the neopositivist sense," writes Patrick Jackson, constitutive explanation "is not a rival to causal explanation,

[44] Max 2011. [45] Smith 1853: 342–43. [46] Davidson 2015: 23.

[47] Finnemore 2004: 14–15. Tannenwald 2005: 33–40. Gerring 2012. Dray argues that explication addresses "how-possibly" questions that require explanations and that specify only necessary (rather than necessary and sufficient) conditions to rebut the presumption of impossibility. Such explanations differ from standard covering law explanations. "Explanations how-possibly are no more to be assimilated to how-probabilities than to why-necessarilies" (1968: 392).

[48] Wendt 1998: 101–03. Ylikoski 2013: 278.

[49] Laffey and Weldes 1997: 204–05. Barnett and Duval 2005.

but simply an alternative to the neopositivist focus on cross-case covariation."[50] The analysis of control and protean power politics benefits from, indeed requires, an Aristotelian notion of causality that includes but goes beyond Hume's concept of efficient cause.[51] On this point I follow Lévi-Strauss for whom a "mind in its untamed state is distinct from a mind cultivated or domesticated for the purpose of yielding a return ... it is possible for the two to co-exist and interpenetrate."[52] This resonates with Peter Digeser's characterization of the relationship between existing approaches to power's three faces and its fourth Foucaultian one: it "does not displace the other faces of power, but provides a different level of analysis."[53] And it echoes Dell's view of the compatibility between circular causality at the level of family systems and linear control systems in particular family subsystems.[54]

How do actors facing risk and uncertainty choose their practices? Risk-based models of power-as-control assume that they are playing the odds. Eager to apply statistical techniques he had learned on Wall Street, after three disappointing seasons in professional sports the general manager of the Philadelphia 76ers basketball team, Sam Hinkie, observed ruefully in his resignation letter that "the illusion of control is an opiate ... It is annoyingly necessary to get comfortable with many grades of maybe."[55] When frequencies and objective probabilities do not exist or are found wanting, actors can turn to prior beliefs (priors over priors in the language of Bayesian statistics) in order to make reasoned decisions based on subjective probabilities. Unfortunately, as I argued in Chapter 1, no plausible answers exist to the question which prior beliefs are chosen and why. Actors can also turn to imagined futures of the possible and impossible, something international relations scholarship tends to overlook. Hence most actors cope and muddle through, typically informed by standards of reasonableness rather than rationality. The assumption of rational decision making may of course be correct for some individuals and situations, for example some American traders on Wall Street or some American defense officials in the Pentagon. But what about Japanese traders in Tokyo or Japanese defense officials in the Self-Defense Forces? They do not differ from Americans because they adhere to inherently irrational beliefs. Instead, differences in institutional and intellectual settings suggest distinctive engagements with the theory and practice of arbitrage and coercion. This illustrates how much conceptual redefinition, extension, and ambiguity can occur in different settings.[56]

[50] Jackson 2011: 107–08. [51] Kurki 2008.
[52] Lévi-Strauss 1968: 219. I thank David Laitin for alerting me to Lévi-Strauss's distinction.
[53] Digeser 1992: 991. [54] Dell 1986. [55] Silverman 2016.
[56] Katzenstein 1996. Miyazaki 2013.

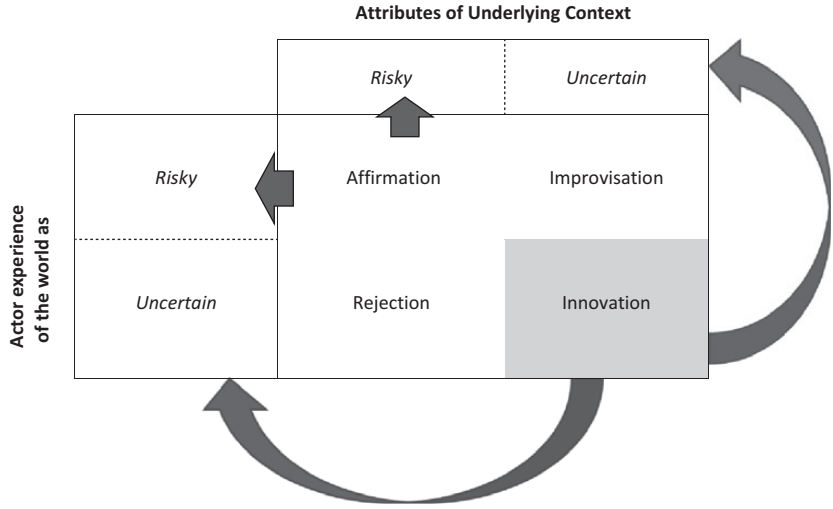

Figure 7.1 Context, Experience, and Power
Source: Adapted from Seybert and Katzenstein 2018: 13

To insist that the mix of risk and uncertainty will always and everywhere yield the same probability calculation does not help us understand better power dynamics in the domain of the unexpected. It seems more sensible to let go of the notion of invariant, omnipresent, rational probability calculations and to acknowledge the existence of variable standards of reasonableness and the complementarity of risk and uncertainty. By acknowledging it, control and protean power are thus brought into one analytical perspective. This makes the unexpected normal and endogenous to world politics rather than abnormal and exogenous.

Power is not only a cause of happenings in the world but also an effect. Figure 7.1 captures the connection between political practices and power outcomes. In terms of risk and uncertainty, it depicts two dimensions: attributes of the underlying context and actor experiences. The four cells in Figure 7.1 list four characteristic political practices. The broken lines between risk and uncertainty visualize the complementarity of risk and uncertainty. The absences of clearly separated cells within the figure illustrate the porous borders between the four practices. Each of the political practices generates power dynamics that feed back on uncertainty and risk. The context- and experience-altering impact captured by the arrows in Figure 7.1 thus makes control or protean power the effects of different political practices.

Affirmation, in the top left, is the recognition by actors that capabilities can be amassed and deliberately deployed to exercise power. From the perspective of those subject to such power, affirmation may take the form of acquiescence or compliance in the context of predictable risks. In the end, as the short arrows show, it enhances the utility of probability calculations concerning future outcomes; reliance on established power templates reinforces the risk-based nature of the world and is experienced by actors as such. This is the domain of control power. The discipline of international relations is replete with examples of authors assuming, mistakenly, that it is the only domain in which politics and power unfold.

Innovation, in the bottom right, is a response to a fundamentally uncertain situation. It generates protean power, shifting the goal post for exercising control in the process and necessitating more agility in the future. Protean power, then, is the effect of innovation that generates further uncertainty and at the same time underscores the futility of control power.

Improvisation and *rejection*, in the top right and bottom left, mix control and protean power under conditions of risk and uncertainty. During an emergent crisis, for example, actors improvise. Uncertainty has made probability calculations impossible, though actors may not yet realize it. This is the root of the disorienting nature of many crises. Actors assume "old ways" still apply when the ground has already shifted to make possible unexpected outcomes. When they discover that familiar solutions no longer work, they improvise to stay afloat in new contexts. Conversely, as previously earth-shattering solutions evolve into best practices and uncertainty is replaced by risk, actors' assumptions of pervasive uncertainty may persist. They continue to make decisions affecting only their immediate environment while refusing attempts at risk-based decision making seeking to control others directly. Success can transform protean into control power with actors lagging behind in their experience of a change in context.

The four cells in Figure 7.1 exemplify but do not exhaust the range of practices available. The labels focus on particular practices that relate actor experience and context attributes to the manifestations of power that reinforce or undermine the different constellations of risk and uncertainty. Power as either cause *or* effect is not coterminous with political practice. Illustrated by the two large arrows, innovation, the response to immediate experience of uncertainty in an uncertain world, generates protean power and so exacerbates further the uncertain conditions from which it arose. "The issue of power," Ulrich Beck thus argues, "is ignited especially by the knowledge that consequences cannot be predicted in advance ... The very power and characteristics that are supposed to

create a new quality of security and certainty simultaneously determine the extent of absolute uncontrollability that exists ... All attempts at minimizing or eliminating risk technologically simply multiply the uncertainty into which we are plunging the world."[57] It is therefore impossible to link protean power only with specific attributes or capabilities of actors. Instead protean power's agile nature evolves in contexts that jettison any semblance of regularity.

2. Power in Small and Large Worlds: Ten Case Studies

Why did the Cold War end peacefully? Why did the world economy come so close to falling off a cliff in 2008? Why did the Arab Spring of 2011 represent such surprise, hope, and disappointment? Why did so few predict the COVID pandemic of 2020 or the war between Hamas and Israel in October 2023? More generally, why is world politics so often upended by uncertainties that catch us by surprise? The reason lies, I argue, in the nature of power. I follow Stanley Hoffmann, always a teacher's teacher, who studied power "so as to understand the enemy, not so as better to be able to exert it."[58]

Protean power is an integral part of social and political life. This is illustrated by ten case studies that cover a broad range of issue areas: security (terrorism and counterterrorism, arms control), economy (finance, hydrocarbons, environment), society (migration, LGBT and human rights), high tech (knowledge frontier and bitcoin), and culture (film).[59]

In a few cases, the power story is relatively clear-cut. The history of *human rights*, for example, is understood best in terms of the protean power potentials that inhere in innovative practices shaped by the uncertainties generated by institutional conflicts and meaning contestations. The situation is interesting because imperial actors experienced the context as risk, subaltern actors as uncertainty. It is this divergence of experience that accounts for attempted (and failed) control on the part of the colonizers and system-transforming, protean-power-generating innovations by actors addressing the inadequacies of existing governance structures. Protean power explains the observed outcomes – the rapid collapse of the institution of empire after 1945 and the stunning victory of the anti-imperialist insurgents. The rights revolution, however, did not transform the formulation and promotion of all international norms. States have insisted that *arms control* was in their domain of operations. This,

[57] Beck 2005: 101–02. [58] Grimes 2015.
[59] These case studies are published in Katzenstein and Seybert 2018a.

however, did not stop a cycle of repeated norm revisions after the end of the Cold War that was not driven by states. The framing of the Mine Ban Treaty (1999) in terms of its humanitarian consequences was a sharp deviation from conventional arms control measures. It encouraged activists to push states to adopt subsequently the Convention on Cluster Munitions (2010) and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2021). The variable processes under which discursive contestations swing the balance toward protean or control power need to be established in specific contexts and rely on the use of language that modifies rather than mirrors the world. The salience of protean power for understanding vital aspects of world politics is, however, clear.

In the case of *Over-the-Counter derivatives* (OTC) and *sovereign debt* the story is a bit more complex as contexts and processes vary, as does the role of language. In derivative markets some actors develop conventions, such as risk models and ratings, that make it possible for them to experience an uncertain context as risk. At the same time other actors experience the same context as profoundly uncertain and respond with innovative products and strategies with unpredictable and power-generating effects. In moments of financial crisis or panic, all actors experience totally unpredictable markets for what they are. But soon after, post-crisis arrangements generate a renewed sense of control over governable risks. Thus, they set the stage for a new cycle of financial instability, where control remains an incomplete and elusive goal. In sovereign debt, comparable power dynamics are at play. States and large corporations experience markets for the most part as manageable risks, bordering only occasionally on uncertainty. This leads to a mixture of affirmation of established strategies and a dose of improvisation when needed. In contrast, so-called smaller distress debt funds, peripheral players compared to primary dealers and sovereigns, must cope with profound market uncertainties. Refusing to be sidelined, one of them, Elliott Associates, introduced innovative legal arbitrage strategies in the late 1990s that, unpredictably, set free protean power and changed the game for everybody.

The politics of *carbon sinks* shows great fluidity of power dynamics in the climate change mitigation discussed already in Chapter 6. This unfolds in a nested domain in which governments reformulate policy in terms of risk that is marked by radical, epistemic uncertainty. Power outcomes differ in different contexts, as the policy process varies at different stages and with it the deployment of language. This does not necessarily generate protean power. In the intergovernmental negotiations leading up to the Kyoto Protocol, for example, control power prevailed in a context of risk. NGOs had to accept this and failed to get governments to adopt new rules. In the post-Kyoto period of parallel

relations of government- and NGO-initiated rules, the rise of a voluntary market for carbon sinks was the result of improvisation as NGOs remained uncertain what would follow from their adoption of practices that were no longer constrained by intergovernmental negotiations. In the final phase, the context became more uncertain for governments that were now committed to taking some action on forest preservation but had no clue how their actions would play out. NGOs seized on this opening – in a circumscribed way they capitalized on their prior improvisation and translated their efforts into an evolving intergovernmental regime that, itself control-driven, still provided some room for protean power. In settings marked often by risk, protean power was at play and readily observable.

In other cases, evolving practices reveal different power dynamics over time, as the history of *LGBT rights* illustrates. Poland's LGBT activists and their opponents relied on improvisations and rejections that played out in risky and uncertain settings, generating different power dynamics. Most notably, the story of LGBT rights promotion in the context of EU enlargement illustrates the limits of control power. A short-lived period of EU and INGO policies in the run-up to and the wake of EU accession affirmed existing expectations. As the inadequacy and one-sidedness of membership conditionality became apparent, local activists found themselves readjusting to an unpredictable blending of external pressures with local sentiments which they met with different discursive strategies. In contrast, in a national context, unable to tap any external discourse for support, the original German LGBT movement in the 1960s was marked by more easily detectable innovation from the outset, with political processes changing over time together with the political landscape. The long-term evolution of LGBT rights is a story of the actualization of various power potentialities. Crucially, changing practices that result in adjustments in power outcomes can reconfirm existing constraints or challenge them through protean power and repeated shifts in the unknown unknowns.

Terrorism and counterterrorism show a complex picture marked by overlays of different contexts rather than a temporal sequence of different power constellations. Reinforced by political expedience and bureaucratic inertia, states encounter and describe uncertain security contexts as risky, relying heavily on language as a resource of reassurance. In their default response of enforcement governments remain tethered to the domain of imagined risk management and control power, even though political leaders may acknowledge in private the futility of their public promises to eradicate all terrorist threats. Terrorists, by contrast, experience and operate in a context of uncertainty requiring innovation and

generating protean power. The politics of terrorism and counterterrorism thus sets in motion complex mixtures of protean and control power.

What distinguishes the counterterrorism account of protean power is distinctive patterns of agency that impact on the interactive fluidity of the context and processes in which actors operate. In a similar way, the story of Hollywood's fluctuating prominence in the world of *film* also displays participants, variously endowed in terms of control power resources, opposed to yet interacting with and transforming the very landscape in which their competition unfolds. The co-dependence between producers and consumers of cultural content creates patterns seemingly amenable to profit making. Yet, as the limited reach of Hollywood's strengths illustrates in various contexts, the resulting control is short-lived at best and illusory at worst. Global audiences, as a whole and also in their cultural or regional sub-contexts, create volatile processes in markets and in politics that shape patterns of innovation. Sometimes film makers adopt established means of reaching their audiences and so reproduce risk-based assumptions about how the industry operates. Despite such measures, however, the fickleness and short half-life of best practices are apparent, and without seeking to dominate, participants carving out new paths prevail in the constantly changing world of film. The success of different actors, unexpected and often fleeting, shows protean power.

Actor awareness of "knowing how little we know" is pervasive on the technological frontiers in *science, start-ups,* and *bitcoin*. There are several layers to this uncertainty. First, it stems from the very questions asked and challenges tackled. Second, the recognition of the profound gaps in our knowledge creates ambiguity about the appropriateness of regulation, further altering the course of invention and innovation that are contextually specific, vary in their processes at different stages, and rely on different linguistic practices and strategies. Does it make sense to consider the relative risks and costs of pursuing specific changes in science and technology? How much of the resulting change is based on deliberate moves and how much of it is the outcome of creative improvisation? Are there ways in which inefficient regulations can be bypassed altogether? There exists a continuum of responses to such questions, mapping the degree to which actors allow their experience of uncertainty to guide their actions. Battles over intellectual property rights seek to fence in precious discoveries but at the same time increase incentives for the emergence of newer alternatives. In a different approach, scientists who make their findings readily available do so because they are reluctant to hold further advances hostage to narrow interests that might confine promising lines of inquiry. Start-ups take innovation still further. They not only seek to meet existing technological or other needs but create entirely new ones. Finally, in

explicit recognition of the failure of the formal banking system, especially at times of crisis, bitcoin offers an alternative currency, a fundamentally novel technology, and a transformed environment of unpredictability marked by diverse contexts, processes, and language uses. Construing these high-tech vignettes as attempts to stay ahead in the uncertainty game, we must not forget that those who succeed and briefly create protean power do not anticipate this at the outset. The decision to adopt bitcoin is deliberately disruptive and introduces new power potentialities. Depending on their position, actors exploit or bypass ever-changing unknowns. A scientist may dream of getting a Nobel Prize but she can hardly plan on doing so. No "win" is a guarantee of future success.

Hydrocarbons show sequenced and layered power complexities that conventional analyses of the control powers of large corporations and states largely miss. In the 1950s and 1960s innovations by European governments and the Soviet gas ministry created a new infrastructure of pipelines, practices, and market relations. Subsequently, improvisation and rejection created control and protean power dynamics that acted back on the experience of actors and the different contexts they faced, processes they sought to shape, and language uses. The break-up of the Soviet Union and a number of Ukrainian gas crises made Russian and European executives acutely aware of their mutual dependence, the geopolitical and contractual uncertainties of Ukrainian transit routes, and the advantage of developing joint innovative practices to reorganize gas transits from Russia to Western Europe. In sharp contrast, in the US several small gas producers experienced only uncertainties as, for more than two decades, they were searching for a commercially viable way of extracting gas from shale. Paradoxically, then, the less flexible gas market invited more radical innovation to bypass long-standing technological and market constraints. Improvisation in the face of a slowly unfolding crisis generated protean power dynamics and produced new uncertainties for all actors operating in global hydrocarbon markets. In reaction, European and Russian firms made still more changes to long-standing contractual practices that led to further unanticipated consequences. Finally, Western sanctions imposed on Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, a large Sino-Russian gas deal in 2021, and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 were, for the most part, improvising protean-power-producing moves adopted in the face of profound uncertainty about future price movements and the fog of the Ukraine war.

Migration, finally, generates a continuous blending of protean and control power. The account of migrants making their way through inhospitable landscapes points at every step along the way to complex power dynamics. Although protean power rests in the ability to find channels of

possibility where established means of control fail, it does not topple structures of domination by default. Protean power may be more visible if generated by actors who otherwise lack the attributes of control power. Yet *any* agents, not just weak ones, can find themselves responding to uncertainty in a shape-shifting way. In the setting of migration through Mexico, uncertainty mixes with risk and actors have to respond to both simultaneously. They convert innovations and improvised solutions into established and reproducible responses, only so these can be overturned again with the arrival of the next train, bus, or truck. The journeys are always changing sequences of sometimes fatal decisions, illustrating that neither protean nor control power will ever prevail and that they often operate concurrently.

The distinction between control and protean power is compatible with different strands of international relations scholarship.[60] Some empirical studies of world politics have developed arguments that incorporate power dynamics operating under uncertainty. Studies of global value chains, international knowledge creation, and social movements, for example, have pointed to conceptions of power that are not restricted exclusively to the concept of control. In his analysis of global value chains Mark Dallas argues that "the strategic-agentic actions of firms can create non-agentic economic structures ... which are both unintended and unpredictable ex ante ... power is simultaneously conceived of as agentic-strategic and non-agentic."[61] In a similar vein, Anna Lee Saxenian has observed changes in the creation of international knowledge that have shifted from diffusion or "brain drain" to "brain circulation."[62] Improvisation and creativity in social movements are also highly germane for organizationally or crowd-enabled connective actions that rely on social media to personalize political causes.[63] And in today's movement societies, the problem for the organizers of social movements is to create models strong enough to withstand the pressure of their opponents, creating space for spontaneous action by an energized base – protean and control power in action.[64] Like religion, all sciences offer strategies for making the material world in which we live appear more responsive to our effort to exercise control. Deep uncertainty is thus converted into provisional certainty. More generally, in our lives "there is a threshold of tolerance," Michael Jackson writes, "beyond which chance ceases to be a matter of gambles willingly taken and becomes oppressive or unbearable."[65] The risk-uncertainty conundrum as opportunity and threat.

[60] McCourt 2016. Fioretos 2011. [61] Dallas 2014: 317, 338–39. [62] Saxenian 2006.
[63] Bennett 2014. Bennett and Segerberg 2013. [64] Tarrow 2022: 112–14.
[65] Jackson 2021: 116.

Table 7.2 *Control and Protean Power in Selected Issue Areas*

	Control Power: Acquiescence	Overlay of Control and Protean Power: Rejection and Improvisation	Protean Power: Innovation
Human Rights	Requires meaning determinacy, institutional simplicity	Under uncertainty, control power exacerbates crises; protean power enhanced by improvisation	Creative interpretation of rights, acceptance of new actors
LGBT	Top-down diffusion and conditionality introduces regulations and resistance	Control power of norm promoters; local advocates improvise by translating norms	Activists engage with IOs/INGOs when states close access
Border Control	Criminals exert more control than state, both exercise control power at the expense of migrants	Protean power of migrant and smuggler refuse state and criminal control power; both powers are mutually reinforcing	Individuals create protean power, state agents implement border policing protocols, kidnappers and criminal enforcers patrol territory, and border-crossing migrants develop survival tactics
High Tech	Copyrights, patents, bitcoin, and blockchain as commercial opportunities	Desire to enhance knowledge, ensure safety, or prevent illegality; different regulators	Discovery of unknown needs, innovation bypasses governments and finance, self-organized
Hydrocarbons	Firms restrict production as punishment or to affect price; restriction of transport	Use of navy to protect liquidity; firm influence on policy; fiscal reliance on oil; negotiations over price, diversification	Trust and relations between firms; flexibility of small producers; disintermediation and redirection of flows
Finance	Standardization and categorization; regulatory capture	Authorized disruptive innovation; ambiguous sovereign debt clauses	Ratings rigged; OTC derivative markets unpredictable with creative adaptation; novel legal arbitrage strategies

Table 7.2 *(cont.)*

	Control Power: Acquiescence	Overlay of Control and Protean Power: Rejection and Improvisation	Protean Power: Innovation
Terrorism/Counterterrorism	T: spread geographically CT: Invading different failing states	T: Embedding terrorists among refugees CT: Building state capacity; adopting alternative policing and surveillance methods	T: Lone wolves; social media CT: Sow distrust through fear of spies
Film	Hollywood's control by few producers, protection of local markets	Incompleteness of Hollywood's power generates exchanges	National and regional hubs combine resources; global audience taste unpredictable
Arms Control	Voting rules; institutional blockage; state capacity	Changing debates; venue selection; variable content and compliance	Small states partner with NGOs; new venues; mobilization; shifting norms
Environment	Kyoto Protocol's carbon offset	Private regulators consulted in intergovernmental talks; private standards used	Non-state actors develop expertise and create standards; voluntary carbon market

Source: Katzenstein 2020: 483–84.

Besides empirical studies that resonate with the concept of protean power, a focus on uncertainty has an affinity with theoretical and methodological approaches that are open to its improvisational aspects. Karl Deutsch's cybernetic theory of politics emphasizes control and adaptation – and their limitations.[66] For Deutsch, control power is about the priority of output over intake, the ability to talk over the ability to listen, to act out rather than modify internalized routines and acquired traits. In stressing the importance of intake, the ability to listen, to modify routines and traits Deutsch's theory also encompasses the importance of empathy and love. In short, Deutsch has a dual vision of power. Control power is one side of the coin – the other side is the power of potentiality through learning.

Such learning can consist of observable, prospective individual or group practices recognized as such at the time. When describing the spread of revolutions and foreshadowing what Kurt Weyland would subsequently observe in the context of the Arab Spring,[67] Adam Przeworski works with a learning concept informed by Bayesian updating. He notes that "the entire event was one single snowball. I mean it in a technical sense: A development took place in one country, people elsewhere were updating their probabilities of success, and as the next country went over the brink, the calculation was becoming increasingly reassuring."[68] Beside Bayesian updating, which I discussed critically in Chapter 1, learning can take other forms. For example, it encompasses also the creation of agency through moral commitment, emotional engagement, and practical improvisation, recognized often only after the fact. In El Salvador's civil war, Elisabeth Wood writes, "pleasure in agency" was grounded in emotional processes, moral perceptions and values – all active parts in the making of one's own history.[69] Similarly, Silvana Toska's fieldwork during the Arab Spring reports the mobilizational effect of the "euphoria of the moment." James Scott calls these "rare moments of political electricity" that can push millions of people into the streets "in the teeth of power."[70] Although Wood, Toska, and Scott capture important aspects of the power I have called protean, this term does not have only positive connotations. In their many nefarious practices ISIS, al Qaeda, and Hamas also illustrate protean power.

The risk-uncertainty conundrum plays a big role in international conflicts. In her book on war Ann Hironaka writes that "in a startling number of cases, the seemingly more powerful state suffered unexpected catastrophic losses, while the ostensibly weaker state ended up

[66] Deutsch 1966. [67] Weyland 2012. [68] Przeworski 1991: 3–4.
[69] Wood 2003: 18, 20. [70] Toska 2024: 2–9, fn 126, 17–29. Scott 1990: xiii.

victorious."[71] Erik Gartzke offers an explanation that undercuts a risk-based view of the world. He argues that rationalist models of war must put war in the error term of their equations. "Our ability to predict which crises will become wars will probably prove little better than the naïve predictions of random chance . . . Important theoretical and empirical components of war are not knowable."[72] Stacie Goddard develops a theory of legitimation for political conflicts over indivisible territories.[73] It integrates disparate factors such as the material interests and strategies of elites, bargaining, and coalition building on the one hand and cultural resonance, rhetorical action, and legitimation processes on the other. Not reducible only to calculable probabilities, the interaction between the two sets of factors Goddard identifies leaves space for the play of both control and protean power. Similarly, on questions of political economy John Hobson and Leonard Seabrooke have underlined the constitutive effects of everyday political economy practices on states and markets.[74] Elites do not simply provide a script that other economic actors follow. Everyday political economy is also about the protean power that creates unexpected change and novelty. These studies insist that relational power is not controlled by one site but accessed in a dispersed manner. Power dynamics contain elements of creative entanglement and improvisation. If control power is a marching band, with predictable beat and little room for improvisation, protean power is a jazz band, working with the innovative and the impromptu.

3. Language and Power

None other than Donald Trump has reminded us of the power of language. The sheer volume of Trump's falsehoods and fabrications is legendary. The *Washington Post*'s daily count reached a total of 30,573 after four years of the first Trump Presidency.[75] To the astonishment of many, Trump's political career thrived not despite but because of this avalanche. It is impossible for any outsider to know whether Trump lies at any given moment. And it is possible that, like many, he does not know what he thinks until he speaks. But it is undoubtedly true that he is the greatest bullshitter in the history of American politics.[76] Someone who lies knows the truth and tries to gain an advantage by concealing it. A bullshitter disdains the very idea of truth. The only thing that matters is to impress and manipulate. To characterize the storming of the Capitol on January 6, 2020 as a "day of love" is to take bullshitting to its highest

[71] Hironaka 2017: 34. [72] Gartzke 1999: 567, 573. [73] Goddard 2010.
[74] Hobson and Seabrooke 2007. [75] Kessler *et al.* 2021.
[76] Frankfurt 2005. Zürn 2024. Collins 2024: 46–48.

level, at the cost of deeply corroding the very foundations on which democracy rests. Bullshitting is not only an individual performance. Many collective myths also have no resemblance to the truth. The conventional wisdom of the origin and resolution of the Cuban missile crisis, for example, is pure bullshit.[77] Told in staccato style, the story tells us: bad guys threaten; good guys stand firm; good guys win; bad guys lose. Told in more uplifting language, reason triumphs over brinkmanship. Chapter 5 has demonstrated that the historical record supports precious little of this soothing bullshit. For the most part it was dumb luck that made the world escape what looked like black Saturday, October 27, 1962.

Separated by four centuries and writing at the outset of the scientific and the quantum revolutions Thomas Hobbes and Niels Bohr each developed a theory of knowledge and language that distinguishes between things themselves and their appearances. With the English civil war very much on his mind, Hobbes was troubled by the fact that nothing in the natural world provides a secure ground for ontological security. To him clashing opinions and conflict were nefarious. Many contemporary realists who think of themselves as carrying on the Hobbesian tradition surprisingly pay no or little attention to language. In contrast to Hobbes, for Bohr, human observers were unavoidably implicated in the investigation of the natural world. The irresolvable contradictions of the quantum world can be accommodated only by accepting the complementarity of contradictions.[78] In recent decades these divergent perspectives have persisted, illustrated by the important writings of Michel Foucault and Karen Barad. A single, unified picture of the real world seems out of reach.

Power in international relations is typically thought of in Hobbesian and Newtonian terms, as actor capability. For Hobbes, sovereign power is unitary, homogeneous, unidirectional, and asymmetric. It is checked only by the power of other sovereigns. Hobbes's anarchic state of nature is marked by radical uncertainty ruled by passion.[79] Among all of man's passions fear is the most important. Unbridled quests for power make life unbearably hard. Individuals are thus ready to transfer all of their rights to one sovereign with unlimited power of control. In one magical moment subjects are thus transported from a condition of unpredictability and diffuse fear of everyone in the state of nature to a condition of predictability and concentrated fear of the sovereign in the commonwealth. The

[77] Blight and Lang 2018: 17, 33, 43–44, 96–103. On p. 96 Blight and Lang address my feared and revered teacher at Swarthmore College, Kenneth Waltz, as "Nuclear Bullshitter-in-Chief," on p. 141 Niall Ferguson as "Historian Bullshitter."
[78] Harrington 2023: 114.
[79] Hobbes 1996: 3–11, 24–46, 62, 86–129, 145–54, 183–94, 214–16, 483–91.

sovereign must always guard against the possibility that things can fall apart.[80] Two different ideas of power run through Hobbes's work: *potentia* and *potestas*.[81] *Potentia* refers to physical power, *potestas* to right and/or authority. One of Hobbes's primary concerns in *Leviathan* is to establish a sovereign to end the chaos of the state of nature with physical power and endowed with enough strength to assert authority.[82] Sovereign power creates conditions to go beyond the state of nature and create civil society. It does not, however, dissipate the pressure to increase power.[83]

The anarchical and violent Hobbesian state of nature results from the subjective and arbitrary use of language. All persons use language in their own ways, as people lie, deceive, and endlessly fight about definitions that are never precise or commonly shared.[84] The Hobbesian state of nature is its own Tower of Babel, a state of language madness, a "condition distraught by an anarchy of meanings."[85] The solution to the problem of language anarchy is to invent a way to have a clearly ordered set of meanings that applies to everyone.[86] The science of politics thus consists of linguistic purification, the right ordering of names which enables the sovereign to design a peaceful commonwealth. Sovereign power demands total control. It founds its power by establishing a pure language with uniform meanings.[87] In addition to "power, authority, law, and institutions," Wolin writes, Hobbes recognized that political order also involved "a sensitive system of communication dependent on a system of verbal signs, actions, and gestures bearing generally accepted meaning . . . one of the most important factors in establishing and maintaining the identity of a political society was a common political language."[88] Such language requires a mechanism for creating, sustaining, and enforcing it: Leviathan. As Hobbes writes, the "Common-peoples minds, unlesse they be tainted by dependance on the Potent, or scribbled over with the opinions of their Doctors, are like clean paper, fit to receive whatsoever by Publique Authority shall be imprinted in them."[89] Hobbes must control language philosophically so that he can control it socio-politically – and thus allow sovereign power to control civil society. In this way, language is a means of control power, first for the philosopher and then for the state.

The control of language enables the sovereign to police those seeking to challenge Leviathan's primacy. Absolute authority requires a single,

[80] Hobbes 1996: 221–30. [81] See Hoekstra 2004. Dunn 2010. Field 2014.
[82] Field 2014. [83] Dunn 2010. Hobbes 1996: 117–21 and 155–65.
[84] Hobbes 1996: 25–26. [85] Wolin 2016: 230.
[86] For the historical context shaping Hobbes's views on the "anarchy of meanings" in England's political battles see Tuck 1993: 279–348.
[87] Hobbes 1996: 45–46, 118–21, 123–25, 149–50. [88] Wolin 2016: 231–32.
[89] Hobbes 1996: 233.

authoritative language for the entire polity. As language is a convention that separates man from beast, Hobbes argues that there can be no thought without language.[90] Hobbes understands language by comparing it to mathematics. Names or labels can be added or subtracted like mathematical quantities.[91] And as in arithmetic and geometry, language can be maneuvered logically to yield proofs.[92] Language is a set of signs or names that people use so that they can express their thoughts to themselves and others. For Hobbes the truth of language consists in how words are put together. It lies in the intrinsic logic of language not in what language "reflects" or "re-flects" about the world.[93] Truth is well-ordered language, and language is a tool to impose order on the world. For Hobbes philosophy consists of giving us "conclusions about the 'names of things'."[94] Philosophy and political science are like the natural sciences, foremost among them geometry. If things are given proper names, then the causes and effects of all things can be identified, and the forces of motion of the socio-political world can be known just like physical laws.[95] A socio-political physics for a human-made world makes possible the deployment of irresistible control power. This is the project of *Leviathan*. Hobbes's heroic intellectual effort, argues Emily Nacol, failed.[96] His civil science was inadequate to cope with everything the future might bring. At times life's contingencies could not do without prudence and judgment. But his question has remained central. Can fear and suffering be truly overcome through the planning provided by an authoritative politics? Given the failure of his project of linguistic purification, down to modern times his successors have turned instead to calculable probability rather than certain knowledge.

Like Hobbes, Niels Bohr lived in perilous times. After winning the Nobel Prize in physics in 1922 he eventually became a scientific statesman, a staunch advocate for a peaceful, cooperative, and open world committed to cultural and scientific exchange.[97] He aided Jewish colleagues living in Nazi Germany who were stripped of all their rights and positions by Germany's 1935 race laws. In 1943 he escaped from Nazi-occupied Denmark to Sweden and then Britain. He became part of the British mission to the Manhattan Project. During World War II he pleaded with President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill to avoid a nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union, the unavoidable consequence, he thought, of not sharing nuclear technology among states. In 1950 he sent an Open Letter to the United Nations advocating a world with shared

[90] Petit 2008: 29. Hobbes 1996: 25. [91] Ploof 2018: 654–60.
[92] Hobbes 1996: 29–30, 31–34. [93] Hobbes 1996: 28. [94] Hobbes 1996: 28.
[95] Hobbes 1996: 28–29. See also Ploof 2018: 655–65 and Ball 1985.
[96] Nacol 2016: 3, 9–40. [97] Harrington 2023: 28–29, 123, 158–63.

knowledge and untrammeled opportunities for common enlightenment and mutual understanding. He was a cosmopolitan humanist doing his life's work in a nationalist and anti-humanist time.

He was also a post-Newtonian thinker. Central to Bohr's theory of knowledge is the concept of complementarity. He treats contradictory experimental findings and their interpretations as complementary rather than competing. Source of much confusion, his central point is captured by an old joke. Engaged in a quarrel over money, two neighbors take their case to the local rabbi. Hearing the first man make his claim, the rabbi nods his head in assent and says "You are right." After the second man makes his claim, the rabbi nods his head in assent and says "You are also right." The rabbi's attendant, justifiably confused, interrupts and blurts out "But rabbi, how can they *both* be right?" The rabbi thinks about this for a while, nods his head before replying, "And you are also right." In contrast to Hobbes, the experimental, quantum physicist Bohr, like the rabbi, accepts empirical contradictions, plurality, and multiplicity as a fact of life, not as problems that cause disorder and war. Contradictions are for him necessary for proper understanding. Bohr has no urge for a sovereign decider. He accepts the persistence of diverse interpretations as a heuristic solution and the best guarantor of more and better knowledge in the future. His complementarity principle is a conceptual and political alternative to Hobbes's sovereignty. Complementarity is necessary to mediate between investigators with their world-independent minds who perceive and interpret a mind-independent world. When humans arrive at mutually exclusive and independently valid descriptions, the natural world sends a signal: a single description is inadequate and the principle of complementarity holds. For Bohr uncertainty is not a governing principle, as it was for Heisenberg, but the product of deeply entangled relations that make subject, object, investigator, and measurement instrument inseparable. Complementarity is Bohr's concept for capturing a relational universe.[98] The complementarity of the risk-uncertainty principle, I have argued in this book, is a specific, foundational instance of this general insight.

For Bohr non-quantum concepts and conventional language are the tools through which unambiguous communication is achieved. Quantum objects reveal themselves only indirectly, through observing instruments. They have no direct, sensory effect on the observer; they do not generate objective knowledge in the conventional sense of that term; and they cannot be represented directly by language. Experiments are practical and work. Mathematical formalisms of quantum mechanics are confirmed through replication. And the results of experiments are

[98] Bohr 1963: 10. Harrington 2023: 9–10, 14, 30, 121.

communicated among scientists objectively, that is, unambiguously.[99] Language thus matters even though it does not represent reality.[100] It is guaranteeing the persistence of the most favorable conditions of a multiplicity of understandings.[101] And it is unambiguous in reporting the results of experiments. In the domain of experiments, language is for Bohr a neutral vessel.

Quantum objects themselves have no independent standing. The phenomena that scientists experience and record in experiments do. For Bohr all experience, in all domains of life – philosophy, art, science – must be "capable of being communicated by human means of expression . . . in the sense that it can be unambiguously communicated in the common human language."[102] He was not concerned with objective knowledge per se, rather with how knowledge can be communicated objectively, unambiguously, and comprehensibly. For Bohr the concept of "objectivity" is virtually the same as the concept of "unambiguous communication."[103] Bohr is interested "in the constraints *our* use of language imposes on *our* description of *our* experience of nature."[104] Communication is thus as central to Bohr's intellectual project as experimentation. Complementary to the concept of truth, clarity in expression and lack of ambiguity matter greatly to him. Yet his many pronouncements on this subject were delivered in what Jim Baggott calls "tortured Bohrish."[105] Unaddressed by Bohr is the fact that language resembles quantum phenomena. Speech acts turn potentiality into actuality. In doing so they collapse an infinite range of potential meanings into a smaller set, with more or less clarity, that informs decisions, actions, and reactions.[106] "Uneasy" is an apt encapsulation of the incomplete and undertheorized role of language in Bohr's thinking.[107]

The sharp difference between Hobbes's and Bohr's understanding has been updated but not resolved in recent decades, illustrated here by the work of Michel Foucault and Karen Barad. Michel Foucault updates and broadens Hobbes's theory of power and language. Hobbes focuses on the individual and "power over," Foucault on the system and "power through." Foucault analyzes the creation of self-controlling subjects through the diffusion of disciplinary control power that renders sovereign policing superfluous.[108] For Foucault, as for Hobbes, predictability rests in knowledge and scientific expertise.[109] Knowledge and expertise operate through the invention and acceptance of categories, such as social

[99] Bohr 1961. Harrington 2023: 114–15, 117–19. Barad 2007: 143, 174, 329.
[100] Barad 2007: 125, 205. [101] Harrington 2023: 27, 30. [102] Bohr 1963: 10.
[103] Katsumori 2011: 32. [104] Honner 1994: 143–44. Bohr 1963: 10.
[105] Baggott 2024. [106] Brannagan and Giulianotti 2023: 11.
[107] Harrington 2023: 126. [108] Guzzini and Neumann 2012.
[109] Foucault 1977: 202–05.

deviance. But disciplinary power is not centralized, unitary, homogeneous, and unidirectional. And it is not actor-centric, direct, and specific; it is structural, impersonal, indirect, and diffuse. It works through social complexes and epistemic regimes such as the family, medicine, psychiatry, education, and business.[110] For Foucault, we are all the products of power that moves through the capillaries of society.[111]

Foucault's theory of power entails a reconceptualization of the role of language in relation to power. He removes agency, desires, and intentions, and replaces them with systems of norms and rules that indirectly govern thought and behavior. Foucault recasts the study of language by focusing on "discourse," that is, historically constrained systems of statements, concepts, ideas, and norms that shape what can be said or thought in the first place.[112] Discourse is "the production of knowledge through language."[113] For Foucault, intentionality and purpose are set aside in the analysis of language.[114] In this way, the notion of discourse unites language and practice: discourse makes possible certain forms of knowledge through language which in turn guide and shape the practices of subjects – and, thus, subjects themselves. Nothing exists outside discourse.[115] Power takes shape within a given discourse.[116] This is productive power understood in terms of the topics, ideas, and concepts through and by which the social world is known, acted on, and reproduced. The world is produced through the lens of discourse. Power, understood this way, *produces* what is possible, the norms by which life is lived and understood.[117]

One of the "procedures" that Foucault says governs the production and operation of discourse in modernity is "the will to truth."[118] This will is embodied by various authorities, intellectual disciplines, the state, and other institutions. It defines what is true and, therefore, how subjects should think and behave. A discursive analysis, Foucault argues, would evaluate the mechanisms by which a particular conception of truth can be thought.[119] Hobbes, in his quest for a sovereign language to control civil society, perfectly encapsulates the "will to truth."[120] Language for Hobbes is providing shared meanings of terms so that individual reasoning can establish what is true by relying on a common terminology; language for Foucault is a part of and shaped by a discursive regime

[110] Guzzini 2010: 8–10. Hacking 2004: 279.
[111] Foucault 1980: 109–33; 2003: 29. Lipschutz 2007: 230. Debrix and Barder 2009: 404.
[112] Foucault 1972: 21–39. [113] Hall 2014: 346. [114] Said 1991: 188–89.
[115] Foucault 1980: 93. Miller 1990: 116–17. [116] Foucault 1980: 109–33.
[117] Foucault 1978: 41–49. [118] Foucault 1972: 218–19. [119] Foucault 1972.
[120] For Foucault's own evaluation of Hobbesian power, see Foucault 1980: 78–108, 121 and Foucault 1995.

that makes a particular conception of the idea of truth possible in the first place.

Inspired by Bohr, Karen Barad improves on his understanding of the role of language. Like Bohr, she develops an argument that pays attention to both "word" and "world." For Chomsky the world is small, made predictable by words. For Wittgenstein the world is large, created by unpredictable language games. Barad rejects both world-mirroring representation and world-making re-presenting language games as long as they separate representation and re-presentation from their practices. Instead, she leans on Foucault and other theorists' "material-discursive practices" to link world and word, nature and culture. Her focus is both on the performances of representation and on the effects of discursive practices and re-presentation. No God's eye separates the knower from the world. Instead, there is a direct material engagement with that world. In highlighting the importance of "naturalcultural practices" a generative discourse incorporates and moves beyond the world of representationalism.[121] Science and scientific language are not only nature's mirror.[122] Like Bohr, Barad thinks of empirical studies of experimenting and theorizing as material-discursive practices that intervene in the world.[123] These practices produce objects and subjects, matter and meaning.[124] The real is not an independently existing set of objects with inherent attributes. Instead, the stability and directness of entities is Barad's criterion for what is real. Theorizing and experimenting are not "interventions" from the "outside" but "intraventions" from the "inside," part of the phenomenon which is produced.[125]

Barad's argument draws on and clarifies Bohr's ideas. He had famously argued that the interaction between human observers and the quantum object shapes what can be said about the object. The resistance of quantum phenomena to sense perceptions and their entanglement with the observer favored mathematical prediction of experimental results and resisted Newtonian, conceptual representations. For pragmatic reasons Bohr insisted that conventional, unambiguous language was needed for communication and interpretation of the phenomena resulting from experiments, not as descriptions of the quantum objects themselves.[126] Barad pushes beyond post-Newtonianism. She writes, in the vein of para-humanism, that we "are part of that nature we seek to understand."[127] When humans,

[121] Barad 2007: 41–48. She develops the argument in what she calls an "ontoepistemological framework."
[122] Barad 2007: 41–43, 89–94. [123] Barad 2007: 50–56. Hacking 1983. Galison 2000.
[124] Barad 2007: 56. [125] Barad 2007: 56–57.
[126] Harrington 2023: 115, 119, 126, 132, 139–41, 152. See also Mermin 2016: 241–44 and Barad 2007 for different interpretations of Bohr's positions.
[127] Barad 2007: 67.

as part of nature, observe any other part of it, they create a condition in which nature is observing itself, and can see "itself" only in terms of the particular angle it is taking on itself. In their intra-actions humans are not grasping at a world "out there." Instead, they are folding the human part of nature onto itself. When humans observe or measure something, with or without language, they unroll a catalogue of effects that follow from the cuts of observation or measurement. Nassim Taleb calls this the Platonic fold, "the explosive boundary where the Platonic mind-set enters in contact with messy reality."[128]

As a constitutive part of the reality they record, humans cut into that reality and report it. The cuts are not on or of reality. They are perspectives that reality, via humans, is taking on itself. Barad thus rejects the notion that language, understood as material-discursive practice, performs a mediating function. Its role is generative.[129] She goes far beyond the Newtonian humanism informing conventional analyses of world politics. But her writings resonate with the practices of an Alan Greenspan nudging the financial world a bit away from uncertainty, the analysis of a Jairus Grove who looks at the President as a mascot in the Cuban missile crisis, and at the unfolding Augmented Intelligence that may or may not help humanity cope with a world of global warming. In short, her argument captures important aspects of world politics overlooked by Newtonian humanism with its preference for small risky worlds, neglect of the complementarity of risk and uncertainty, and disinterest in the productive role of language.

4. Protean Power and *Fortuna*

Hobbes and Machiavelli epitomize two strands of thinking. As a scientist and rigorous theorist, Hobbes focuses on what control power is and what it can cause. As an astute observer of practice, Machiavelli highlights how and what protean power affects.[130] Control power is central to Hobbes and his mechanical, scientific approach aiming at a socio-political physics. Protean power is the focus of Machiavelli and his insistence on historical contingency. Speaking in a distinct register, Machiavelli points to the limits large world potentialities and political imagination impose on small world control power. Thinking only of control power also overlooks

[128] Taleb 2007: xxv.

[129] Barad 2007: 127–28, 138. Wendt's (2015: 215–21, 230–37) discussion of quantum contextualism and quantum semantics differs from Barad's. But like Barad he concludes that language is an entirely indeterminate, deeply generative, emergent force of entanglement. Both Barad and Wendt thus move from the small to the large world.

[130] Clegg 1989: 5–7, 21–38, 202–07. See also Hindess 1996.

a distinguished lineage of political theorists, starting with Aristotle, who draw our attention to potential capacities and protean power. Since control power is often upended or evaded, these theorists expand the analysis beyond actual capabilities to include potentialities, understood both as the actualization of what is possible in the present and what may be possible in the future.

Machiavelli is often claimed as an advocate of an amoral power politics. He insists that all states rest on "good laws and good arms." Furthermore, war is the main business of rulers.[131] In *The Prince* Machiavelli uses the concept of *potestà* – but only once in the entire text – to describe the authority to exercise unrestricted physical domination that Cesare Borgia grants to Messer Remirro de Orco, "a cruel and ready man, to whom he gave the fullest power."[132] More typically, rather than focus on the common good, as does Hobbes, Machiavelli is interested in the art of the possible. Throughout *The Prince* he invokes numerous times a ruler's *potentia* – his capacity, ability, or strength exercised in many different contexts.[133] In contrast to Hobbes, for Machiavelli "might does not make right." *Potentia* is a dispositional capacity to do or not to do. It is activated by a prince's acquired, calculating, discretionary *virtù*, his political ability and physical strength. This is power-in-action and power-in-waiting rather than power-as-order.

Power derives from the opportunity that chance (*fortuna*) provides for the prince's seizing the moment in the actualization of *virtù*, a good characterization of what I call protean power.[134] Since the concept of risk had not yet been invented, Machiavelli is not interested in assessing the epistemic aspect of fortune in terms of risk and uncertainty.[135] This does not stop him, however, from theorizing about it. Fortune is like a destructive river. To protect against it requires strong dikes.[136] Precaution serves the ruler well in the domain of known unknowns. There will always be floods or foreign invasions. Prudent action guided by both resilience and partial control provides the best antidote for a world full of contingency. Not so in the domain of unknown unknowns; there caution or impetuousness is the proper response. And since there are no universal principles that govern a world of uncertainty, Machiavelli leaves it at that.[137] Man does not have to accept chance with passive

[131] Machiavelli 1998: 48, 124–25.
[132] Machiavelli 1998: 28. According to Harvey Mansfield, personal correspondence, 10/13/16, the same concept appears twenty-nine times in the *Discourses*.
[133] Machiavelli 1998: 12, 15, 16, 29, 138. In a few places Machiavelli refers also to two other kinds of power: *potentato* applied to a self-directed and self-enclosed agent or power holder, as in potentate, normally a government (pp. 45 and 72); and *potente* (p. 43), meaning one who is strong or powerful, not necessarily a prince or ruler.
[134] Pitkin 1999: 138–69. [135] Bernstein 1996. [136] Machiavelli 1998: 98–99.
[137] Lockwood 2013b: 16.

resignation. He is an agile dancer with an unpredictable partner. And thus he exercises power (*potentia*) in the face of uncertainty. "Fortune is arbiter of half of our actions . . . she leaves the other half, or close to it, for us to govern . . . the prince who leans entirely on his fortune comes to ruin as it varies."[138]

For conventional views of power, this is hard to accept. The concept of protean power requires us to let go of the notion that all types of power are exercised. The powerful grip of this convention is probably rooted in the dated, Newtonian laws of nature, invoked by Robert Dahl, "as we understand them." In Newtonian physics gravity controls. In quantum physics gravity is an observable effect in spacetime. Like gravity, protean power is not only a capacity for agility but also an observable effect in a social context.[139] Should we perhaps listen to Nobel Prize winning physicist Richard Feynman for whom the experimentally confirmed theory of quantum electrodynamics offers a description of Nature that is utterly absurd in terms of our common sense?[140] And should we perhaps, with Rovelli, entertain the possibility that *Reality Is Not What It Seems*?[141] Why should students of world politics and the social sciences more generally not be impelled by the same quest in their analysis of the political world that motivates physicists in their analysis of the natural one – to lift just a little the veil of our blurred vision and vast ignorance to gain a better sense of the fleeting richness and weirdness of life? "In the midst of hardship," writes psychologist Adam Grant, "embracing uncertainty proves liberating. At the worst of times, just as the best of times, it reminds us how quickly our fortune can change."[142] Enriching the conceptual terminology of power underscores the fickleness of politics.[143]

Protean power analysis offers an opportunity to re-examine an important assumption, common among scholars of world politics, the social sciences, and the public at large: the increasing control over the world we inhabit. Devotees of big data, for example, predict that machine learning may soon be able to predict the future evolution of chaotic systems, thus improving weather and earthquake forecasting or the monitoring of cardiac arrhythmias, solar storms, and neuronal firing patterns. In the words of chaos theorist Holger Kantz, "the machine-learning technique is almost as good as knowing the truth."[144] Similar hopes (and fears) also motivate burgeoning research programs in the social sciences and in international relations. In the political, economic, and social world, however, such gains in knowledge, predictability, and control simply push the

[138] Machiavelli 1998: 98. [139] Rovelli 2016: 8–10, 43. [140] Feynman 1985: 10.
[141] Rovelli 2017. [142] Grant 2024. [143] Rovelli 2016: 11–12.
[144] Quoted in Wolchover 2018.

unpredictable into new domains while concentrating and amplifying it in the process. The belief that we live only in a small world of manageable risk is for Richard Bookstaber sheer fantasy. We also inhabit a large world of radical uncertainty for which the probability of outcomes is simply unknowable.[145] Protean power dynamics will not disappear in the era of big data and AI. Advances in knowledge always create the potential for protean power in unexpected places and with surprising results.

How does this argument about the importance of protean power in large world uncertainties connect with two commonly accepted forms of power analyses in contemporary international relations? Realist approaches that borrow from Hobbes focus on power capabilities and the diffusion of mechanisms of control. Their analyses overlook the multidimensionality of power and the omnipresence of power dynamics that come into full view only when large world uncertainties are fully taken into account. Liberal institutional approaches, with their focus on imperfections in the flow of information, overlook the fact that different worldviews generate different models of how the world works. Indeterminacies in knowledge and meaning help create uncertainties where agile actors can develop innovative practices and stunning surprises. Realists and liberals are all too often upset and undermined by the unexpected. When these main approaches focus only on control power governed by risk, they shoulder the entire burden of accounting for unexplained, dramatic changes in world politics, a burden that existing scholarship has failed conspicuously to take on board. Keeping such changes exogenous, as is the going practice, is a poor second compared to making them endogenous by acknowledging protean power operating in the large world of uncertainty.

As in world politics, so in literature inflected by para-humanism. In Tournier's adaptation of Defoe's novel, Crusoe knows only one kind of force. Friday, his helper, can muster many more. As the only human on the island, Crusoe weeps from loneliness. Friday is surrounded by multitudes, and only one carries the name of man. Bruno Latour could have started one of his book's with the scientific revolution and reduced the island to Crusoe's will. Instead, Latour chose to start from Friday's point of view, making things "irreduced and free."[146] Similarly, control power evokes the image of a well-manicured garden, protean power that of a wild jungle. Which of the two is the normal condition of life? Does the jungle intrude on the garden or does the garden control the jungle? Hoping to build parks that incorporate elements of both, can we succeed

[145] Bookstaber 2017. [146] Latour 1988: 154.

by taking account only of gardens or do we not depend also on understanding jungles?

Protean power speaks to a world of potentialities that all too often escapes our dulled imagination. To the frequently posed question "How was this possible?" protean power offers fresh answers that open up new perspectives on world politics. Robert Musil believed that our sense "for what is real" (*Wirklichkeitssinn*) is matched by our sense "for what is possible" (*Möglichkeitssinn*).[147] As was true of Robert Kennedy, many political actors let a sense of the possible guide them in their actions. Kennedy's theme for his 1968 Presidential campaign was: "Some men see things as they are, and ask why. I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?" The pull of the world of potentialities on the world of reality never disappears. Even America's favorite realist, the late Henry Kissinger, concurs. In the formation of foreign policy, he muses, in the end "everything depends . . . on some conception of the future."[148]

[147] Musil 1953: 12. I thank James Conran for alerting me to Musil's observation.
[148] Noonan 2019.