What is a Decision?

Christopher Clark: I wanted to start with a letter, which was written on the 23rd of September 1887, the 25th anniversary of Otto von Bismarck's appointment as minister president or Prime Minister of Prussia, a letter from the 90-year-old emperor Wilhelm I thanking Bismarck for elevating Prussia, as he put it, to a rank in fame and honor unprecedented in world history. He added, I am sending you, in memory of the last 25 years, this image of the building in which we had to discuss and implement such decisive decisions and Seidener Buschles. May they always resound to the honor and benefit of Prussia and hopefully, of Germany. Now you can see entscheidende beschlusse. Helpfully highlighted in yellow. What caught my eye about this text when I first encountered it was the emphatic formulation entscheidende, decisive decisions. It looks like a pleansm.

It looks like a redundancy, but it isn't because the two words expose two quite different ideas. The first is that a political career, the career of a statesman or statesperson, can or perhaps even should be full of decisions, and the second is that these decisions should be decisive. Namely, in this context, consequential. They should be inflection points that mark a new departure. They should be milestones in something that the emperor here calls world history, interventions that inaugurate a new future. The letter can be found in the archive of the Otto Bismarck Schiftung in Karts. The photograph is not there, and it's not listed in the archive catalog. Bismarck may have moved it somewhere else in the house and put it on a mantelpiece or something like that. It appears to have been lost.

In all likelihood, the image was a view of the Altes Palais, Unter den Linden 9. This was the building where the Prussian king and later emperor received senior military men, ministers, and, of course, Bismarck Minister President of Prussia from 1862 and German Chancellor from 1871. The emperor saw fit to enclose a photo of an official building in his letter, the functional equivalent, if you like, of the White House, the place where the business of government got done, is part of the letter's semantic charge because it's a reminder that the decisions the monarch and his minister made together were not simply the product of an individual collaboration. They emanated from an official structure representing a power that transcended individual personalities, namely the Prussian German monarchical state.

That pleating together of high public office, an official building, and the act of decision delineates the subject matter of these lectures. Human beings, of course, take countless decisions that are political in their consequences, and we'll be talking about them in the course of some of the commentaries. They make choices around family planning. They vote in elections. They consume or don't consume certain products. They install solar panels or heat pumps or don't. They support charities. All of these decisions could be described as political in some sense or another. But what I had in mind when I proposed these lectures were those decisions whose consequences are amplified by the asymmetries of political power.

I stress this because if you take a look at previous Tanner lectures on decision related themes, it immediately becomes clear that political decision making is just one small domain of a much larger field of inquiry into decision making behavior in general. Thomas Scann's the significance of choice, lectures he gave in 1987, was a moral philosophical inquiry into how we might know when a decision is right in moral terms. Robert Nozick's Decisions of Principle principles of Decision used the word in a judicial sense to invoke the kind of appraisal invoked in the assignment of guilt and responsibility in judicial settings and how generalizations extrapolated from previous cases and expressed as principles might or might not inform such processes of adjudication. John Ester's randomization in individual and social decisions was about how to ascertain under what circumstances a randomized choice process might be preferable to one based on discernment.

In these lectures, I focus on the modern political decision understood as an engine of historical change and emanating from a powerful Office of State. I began to share my unformed thoughts on this topic with a few colleagues in Cambridge, and I received some discouraging responses. Decision making has been a core function of political authority since the emergence of states. One colleague told me. The ancient Babylonian state. Inevitably, there is Ashurbanipal with a basket. The ancient Babylonian state exhibited an elaborate decisional structure. The king managed external relations, decided on the waging of war, resolved legal appeals, and he acted within the confines of precedent and within a fabric of written law in accordance with judicial norms overseen by a wide range of other functionaries, city elders, governors, temple administrators, and judges.

Modernists, my colleague said, with his finger pointing menacingly at me, modernists were well advised not to assume that sophisticated and historically aware decision making was a modern invention. A classicist friend drew my attention to the sophisticated decision architecture of Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War. In Thucydides, she pointed out, decisions are not merely reported events. They are the primary narrative mechanism through which historical time, agency, and causation are made intelligible. Thucydides builds his narrative around moments of deliberation in which assemblies and councils debate and then foreclose alternative futures. It is the decisional nodes in the narrative that endow the flow of events with meaning, raising the book from mere chronicle to the dignity of history. Any serious reflection on the history of the political decision, she pointed out, would have to encompass these and other such antecedents.

For modernists, it's intellectually valuable and also character forming to experience chastening encounters of this kind. The narratives and even the book titles of modern history bristle with the birthing and making of new states of affairs. It's a terrible habit we have to the great irritation of medievalists and classicists and other students of the ancient world. Puncturing the infantile grandiosity of the modernists is important work, and our colleagues do it well. But a frisson of skepticism remained. The norm bound, constitutionally restrained and historically self conscious decision maker evoked by my Babylonian colleague didn't sound to me much like the Nebuchadnezzar I remembered from the book of Daniel. There he is there rendered by Blake, who ordered the execution of all the soothsayers and wise men of his kingdom because they were unable to divine the

content of one of his dreams.

As for Thucydides, he occupies such a central place in the decision making literature, especially in the field of international relations that I decided to read the history from start to finish, and that became one of the great pleasures of the last year. But marvelous and rich in political reflections as the book is, there seemed to me something presentest in some of the arguments of the exegetical literature. Yes, one can sustain the claim that decisions such as the Spartan decision to wage war against Athens, the Athenian decision to launch the doomed Sicilian expedition and other such resolutions, one can argue that they function in his history as a narrative hinge between contingency and necessity. One can say of the speeches that Thucydides uses to frame the deliberations that they are narrative engines that suspend action, multiply possible futures, and slow time, rendering history legible as a history of human action.

But these insights, which come from Paul Ricoeur, Hayden B. White, and other theorists are saturated with the preoccupations of late 20th century narratology and its ambient historicity. Anyone who reads these exeges first and then turns to Thucydides will be struck by the boldness and the open texture of his moments of decision. Opposing views are presented in speeches that Thucydides himself admits he made up. They project his own view of what the best arguments must have been in each case. The decisions that result are not, for the most part, acts of sovereign individual authority, but votes taken in assemblies or councils. Surprisingly little is said about how the choices between options are actually reached, and nothing at all is said about the place of these decisions in something larger that we could call history.

The style and the engines of the narrative also seems misplaced since they mirror the formal debates of Sophoclean and Euripidean drama, and their function in the text is actually to expose a deeper driver of events, namely the imperial Hubris of the Athenian pools, a theme that also situates the text in the neighborhood of tragedy. Some of the most interesting recent work on the history draws attention to its kinship with the narrative and language of tragedy, noting the presence at crucial moments in the text, such as the catastrophic denouement of the Sicilian expedition at Syracuse of iambic trimeters evoking the cadences of the spoken passages, the choral passages in particular, of tragic drama.

It's worth remembering the comment that Moses Finley made in Rex's his introduction to Rex Warner's translation of the history when he said, Nowhere in this entire book does Thucydides spend even a single word on explaining what he thinks history is or why it was worth spending so much of his time, so much of his life writing this coming to terms with what happened in these wars. This places Thucydides, it seems to me at some distance from the intuition articulated in Kaiser Wilhelm's note to Bismarck, namely that decisions of state are interventions in history. The presumption that the decision maker acts in and upon history seems to me central in the reasoning of modern decision makers, including President Donald Trump, who very frequently sets his own decisions and achievements in the largest possible historical context. I'm not going to speak about the history of decision making at all times and places.

My objective remains to trace the historicity of the modern political decision. I'm not interested in what makes for a good or bad decision. In fact, I'm not especially interested in the content or even the impact of specific decisions. I'm starting to sound a bit like my colleague Quentin Skinner, who was once asked by some students at a sort of big podium discussion, why did you choose to study history? He said, I'm probably the wrong person to ask. He said, because I'm not really very interested in people, and I'm not very interested in events.

[Laughter] In any case, I'm at risk of sort of emptying out the subject matter, but I'm not particularly interested in how to make good decisions or when they're good and when they're bad, but I am interested in the cultural, institutional, and political paraphernalia of the decision, the place it occupies in the consolidation and the legitimation of power. I focus first on a succession of moments in the history of modern Brandenburg Prussia, and I choose this approach mainly because I'm less ignorant of Brandenburg Prussia than of most other places. But I do also think there's something emblematic in the way that the history of the political decision unfolds in that particular setting.

We dip into the mid 17th century, the mid 18th century, the mid 19th, and the mid 20th centuries, and I draw here on the case studies explored in the book that Stephan mentioned Time and Power, a book which I felt always contained latently as a chain of thought on decision making that it might be interesting to unpack. Eventually, I hope to ask what may seem a preposterous question. What light can such a synopsis shed on the history of decision making unfolding in a mature 21st century democracy? This question seems to be more interesting or at least less ridiculous than it might have appeared some years ago. Was a time when many of us assumed a kind of ontological divide between the world of Aser regime monarchy and the desentered late capitalist world theorized by theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari, there you see Deleuze in a very characteristic pose.

He's thinking. [Laughter] The anti-Oedipus is of course, an extraordinary book, a very interesting one, in which the argument was that in contemporary America, meaning the America of the 1980s, all the arguments about centers and periperes, arboreal tropes about branches and roots and so on. They had to be thrown out the window because we are now dealing with a completely flattened, plateau like structure in which we were all just blips of energy on a massive grid, all equidistant from each other, no centers, no peripheries. But in the era of Donald Trump and the Donald Trump administration, that assumption seems less compelling, it seemed to me. I'll come back to that thought in due course. But I do think that situating it in the sequence of decisional moments can be an interesting exercise. It may not, in fact, it will not, I don't think, tell us.

It certainly won't tell you anything new about Trump, but it may, that is, at least my hope, enable us to think about what kind of a history the history of the political decision is. Before I embark on that inquiry, we need to address an elephant in the room. There exists beyond the frontiers of my discipline, an enormous literature on decision making. I've touched on it very briefly already in the context of the tan of lectures, to which economists, philosophers,

political scientists, mathematicians, sociologists, psychologists, management scientists, system theorists, ethnographers, and other specialists have been contributing for generations. This is the literature, the oceanic literature on decision theory, and its cousin choice theory. It is very largely a phenomenon of the post war, which I mean the post Second World War era. Decision theoretical ideas existed before, in various forms in the form of dispersed intuitions.

You have Bernouilli's expected utility, Laplaceian and Bayesian probability theory, rational choice intuitions in economics, Frank P. Ramsey's decision theory, and strategic reasoning of the type theorized by Cornea. But these were fragmented and dispersed insights which lacked a shared language or axiomatic or disciplinary framework. It was the Second World War that catalyzed the emergence of decision science proper. The war placed decision makers under unprecedented pressure by generating high stakes, time pressured, quantifiable decisions on a massive scale. It brought together interdisciplinary teams of experts whose task was to rationalize the processes by which such decisions were made. The resulting collaborations in what was then called operations research formalized the notion that decisions were legitimate objects of study in themselves.

This momentum persisted beyond 1945, favored by a Cold War research ecosystem, including among other things, the Rand Corporation, the Office of Naval Research, and the National Science Foundation that supported work on decision making under conditions of uncertainty and financed efforts to model and theorize strategic choices and the perceptions of risk. These efforts were motivated, of course, in part by anxieties around the possibility of a nuclear exchange, and in part by the sense that in a time when the world order was being made anew, good decision making and good decision making architectures were at a premium. Born in the Second World War, this literature follows an interesting trajectory. I only started immersing myself in it when I was preparing for these lectures, and I had no idea. I'd clearly bitten off much more than I could chew. It is absolutely enormous.

The foundational 1944 text on Neumann and Morgenstern's theory of games and economic behavior proposed that economic decisions could be understood if one used mathematical game theory to model the strategic interaction between rational agents who behave as if they are maximizing expected utility. This was an assumption inherited from the decision rule formulated by Frank P. Ramsey. Namely that the decision making agent, and I quote from Ramsey, "acts to maximize the mathematical expectation of their utility". The critique of that presumption of rationality has been at the heart of much of the writing on the subject ever since. In a paper of 1955, Herbert A. Simon declared that he intended to, "replace the global rationality of economic man with the rational behavior that is compatible with the access to information and the computational capacities that are actually possessed by organisms, including man in the environments in which such organisms exist." I love that.

Organisms including man. There's a cosmic scope to that, a sci-fi energy. In further studies, he showed that business decision makers were people operating under time constraints with limited information, limited cognitive capacity, and organizational

pressures to contend with. Their bounded rationality, that was his term, was lensed by structures and processes. Irving L. Janis studied the distorting effects of group dynamics, for which he coined the term group think in decision making behavior, and one can discern here a habit of using this, runs throughout the literature, of using the rational actor presumption as a foil against which to work. Even after they had abandoned it, they seem to need to keep exercising it. As the political scientist John Bendor or Bender, a Berkeley alumnus and former professor at Stanford put it, the main challenges to rational choice theory adopted the incumbent program's reference point, namely the rational actor.

David Braybrooke and Charles Lindblom's 1963 study of Strategy of Decision showed that decision makers tended to prefer small adjustments to existing policy. Policy decisions were not driven by synoptic processes in which all possible alternatives were canvassed, and they did not respond to a coherent plan or long term design, but rather to processes of bargaining, compromise, and adaptation. John D. Steinbruner's Cybernetic Decision Making or Study of the Cybernetic Theory of Decision argued that in high risk environments such as national security, there are no fully rational optimizing actors.

The book's central claim was to integrate the insights generated by cognitive psychology into the study of international security policy, a domain that Steinbruner felt was still enthralled to the concept of deterrence, but the doctrine of deterrence Steinbruner suggested, and I quote from him, "derived from an idealized vision of human mental operations that basic psychology would suggest is regularly violated in everyday life." Glenn, so he was putting decisions as to misquote Raymond Chandler. He was putting decisions into the hands of people who actually make them. Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing's Conflict Among Nations argued that the misinterpretation of signals, cognitive biases, misplaced historical analogies, pre-existing beliefs, and escalatory interactions between one decision making entity and another shaped state behavior.

Graham Allison's Essence of Decision of 1971, a study of the Cuban missile crisis pushed back against the notion that states are unitary actors, proposing instead that foreign policy decisions or foreign policy outcomes very often result from complex, non-rational bargaining processes within government. None of this means that the presumption of rationality should be jettisoned altogether. In an elegant and nuanced critique of rational choice theory, Jon Elster observed in what I think was actually also a lecture, though I'm not sure or began life as a lecture, observed that the theory of the rational or is much less likely to produce irrational outcomes if its indeterminacy is acknowledged. Now, reading these writers, and this is not my natural stamping ground. I was sometimes reminded of the scene in the 1967 season of Star Trek, where an exchange of fire takes place between two spaceships, and Mr. Spock comments, a most illogical reaction, Captain.

When we demonstrated our superior weapons, they should have fled immediately. Or at the moment when after a heated argument, I was a bit of a fan, I have to admit, and in particular of Mr. Spock, or at the moment when after a heated argument between Captain Kirk and the ship's medic Bones McCoy, Mr. Spock turns to Kirk and remarks, Captain, your human emotions are thoroughly illogical. I tried that on my parents, and it didn't go

down well [Laughter] In the emotional economy of the Star Trek narrative, the half human, half Vulcan Spock functions as the surrogate, the proxy for Neumann and Morgenstern's rational actor, though even he struggles with his human half. In a study of decisions of various magnitude, the Israeli decision theorist Edna Ullmann-Margalit addressed the rational actor problem by means of a Tripartite decisional typology. She called these different kinds of decisions, picking, choosing, and opting.

I'm going to summarize a bit here. Picking decisions are the ones we make all the time every day, which sock to put on first, which, a toothpaste to choose from the shelf in the supermarket, those kinds of decisions, and choosing decisions are things like, should we buy an electric car or a petrol one? Should we get this mortgage or that mortgage, and so on. Finally, there are the opting decisions, the biggest ones of all, should I marry this man or woman? Should we have children? Should we switch off our mother's life support system? Those kinds of questions. She said she made the point that rational actor theory really only worked for the middling decisions. People are very rational when they think about which car to buy. They look at the pluses and the minuses.

They look at mileage and miles per gallon, and they look at the online reviews and all that thing. But when they do their picking decisions, they really don't think about them at all. They're largely unconscious. When opting decisions about marriage or children and so on, are decisions, naked movements of the will, which often are not mediated. Very few people sit down and do a complex price calculation of the implications of having a child. Maybe some people do. Maybe economists do, but I think most people don't. She said, in other words, like Newtonian theory, Newtonian physics, it works for middle sized objects between a single celled animal and the solar system, a planet or whatever, but doesn't work particularly well for Galactic scales where you need quantum, nor does it work at the level of subatomic particles.

Similarly, the rational act that you seem to work for that middling group, but not for the decisions on either side. In any case, it's a fascinating literature, especially for someone who's not familiar with it. Full of insights that can illuminate historical research into the great decisional crisis of the past. There are lots of examples of that. I found Allison's discussion of the non unitary character of state action, a very interesting way to think, and I wish I had read it before I wrote sleepwalks, a very interesting way to think about the decision making processes in 1949.

I thought that Steinbruner's comments and those of Braybrooke and Lindblom on the preference of most decision makers for incremental interventions rather than larger ones, programmatic ones was helpful in understanding what happened after 1989, where as Kristina Spohr has shown, leaders tended to adopt strategies that were conservative, adherent to existing routines, and oriented above all, towards the avoidance of risk for very readily understandable reasons. There was no recalibration of the international system commensurate with the magnitude of geopolitical change, and the Tripartite distinction that I mentioned from Ullmann-Margalit it seemed to me cast an interesting light on the decision for Brexit because it always one of the striking features of the Brexit election was that the

arguments for Brexit and the arguments against Brexit seemed to be asking for different kinds of decision.

People who wanted to remain in the EU tended to regard the question posed by the referendum as a choosing decision. Do the math. It's obvious. We've got the world's biggest market at our footsteps. Why wouldn't we stay? We'll be so much safer and better off, and so on and so forth. Whereas the leavers tended to see this as an opting decision. It wasn't a question about what is good for your material interests or what will pan out better for the British financial sector or whatever. It was a question about who you are. Are you a free Britain in a fortress state or are you a a nest, a sort of slave of Brussels, listening to incoming edicts from Europe? It was a question about identity. I think in lots of different ways, these theoretical perspectives can be helpful even for historians like ourselves who are bogged in the empirical.

Navigating the decision literature is not easy work, though, for an historian, even when the problems at its core are expressed in words, which they incidentally, which, by the way, are not always. This is a tabular representation, there's Ullmann-Margalit. This is a tabular representation of the so called a state event outcome distinction proposed by the decision theory set out in Leonard Savage's Foundations of Statistics in 1954. There you see here the decision in question is about whether to take an umbrella. You're going out for a stroll. It may rain or it may not rain. You stroll without your umbrella. If it doesn't rain, you have a very comfortable stroll. That's nice. If it does rain, you have a miserable wet stroll, but perhaps you choose to stroll with your umbrella.

In that case, if there's no rain, you have to carry this clunky umbrella. It's still a comfortable stroll. But if it rains, you can open the umbrella, and then you still have a comfortable stroll. Then comes the strange bit, which I'm afraid I couldn't follow constant act. It results in a miserable wet stroll, whether or not you take your umbrella. Now, I was confused by that. I looked it up in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, where Katie Steele and H. Orri Stefansson merely appeared to share my puzzlement. They conceded that the constant act is not, as they put it, it's not a sensible category because it assigns to both rain and no rain in the same outcome.

They noted that the constant act is only, "a way of including sure outcomes within the preference ordering." Well, I hope that helps [Laughter] Anyway, the problem is that for someone with my background and training and all the limitations that implies, the decision literature can lurch all of a sudden from lambent clarity into near unintelligibility. Take these two diagrams from Snyder and Diesing. The first, which illustrates the phases of a typical international crisis, resembles a musical score. You can easily follow its sequence. Crisis threshold, challenge, resistance confrontation, war or resolution, and so on. What's not to like. On the other hand, this diagram from 20 pages later in the same book, which represents what the authors call the bargaining space, is a mathematically rendered abstraction.

All you need to know to make sense of this, and I know that there will be people in this room who have no difficulty making sense of it whatsoever, is to know that a movement eastward along the B axis represents a rise in utility for decision maker B, and a movement northwards on the A axis represents a rise in utility for decision maker A. The curved line, you see, there is a line beyond which the resources available for a common settlement have been exhausted and only conflict remains. It's not that the Snyder and Diesing study lacked an empirical foundation. Quite on the contrary, they and their collaborators undertook a long list of meticulous and sophisticated case studies. They even included executive summaries of these, and this is from their own list of the case studies appended at the end of the book.

The problem isn't the lack of empirical depth or anything like that. It's rather that from the perspective of an historian, the Hemanic vector seems to be pointing in the wrong direction. It does not run from the theory towards a better elucidation of a specific historical episode or even phenomenon, but in the other direction. As the authors put it, their purpose was, "to improve and integrate the theories, chiefly systems, bargaining, and decision making theories, this undertaking, the crisis served, as they put it themselves, as an empirical source for the testing, revision, augmentation, and synthesis of theory". The better the theory gets, of course, the clearer it becomes that we're dealing with something that transcends context. If it didn't, these operations wouldn't work. They would forfeit their utility.

The more refined and obstructed the theory becomes, the more that something that it describes will tend to be a residuum resistant to the operations of history, a thing that's always been there, an interplay between probability and utility in which all the things we call history are reduced to the status of variables. Viewed from that theory centered perspective, the decision ceases to be embedded in history and becomes a algorithm, a behavioral reflex, whose orientation and amplitude are determined by variables that are contingent and interchangeable. If we view the matter from that perspective, then the idea of writing a history of the political decision would make about as much sense as writing a history of the sneeze, a physical reflex we share with many mammals, but also with chickens and iguanas, oddly enough, and whose underlying biology has not changed in the course of recorded history.

Now, it turns out that the cultural history of the sneeze is in fact, much more interesting and promising. Don't worry, I'm not going to offer you one tonight than you might think, but Xenophon, who fancied himself as a successor to Thucydides records in Anabasis that as he was finishing a speech urging his fellow soldiers to fight the Persians, one of them underscored his conclusion with a loud sneeze. This made a favorable impression because the Greeks of that era believed that sneezes were a prophetic sign of divine favor. It's worth noting that in the Kresy Wschodnie, the eastern districts of Poland and next to the Soviet Union after 1939, sneezing is still believed, it certainly was well into the late 20th century to signify that your mother in law is speaking ill of you at the moment when you sneeze.

I daresay one could write a cultural history of the sneeze, but my point is that this would not be a history of the semi autonomous convulsive expulsion, sorry, not convulsion, the convulsive expulsion of droplet rich air into a 7-8 meter long turbulent multiphase plume that we call a sneeze. You can see I've been doing some research. It would be a history of what people have made of the sneeze. They have known and said about it, what they have understood it to mean, how they have tried to channel or master it. That is the history of the modern political decision that I'm interested in. This doesn't negate the value of decision theory, rather, I hope eventually to suggest that we need both narrative developmental and analytical perspectives in order to make sense of what has happened and is happening to the political decision.

My first case study, Frederick William, the elector of Brandenburg, the ruler known to history as the Great Elector, you see him there as a younger man with his own hair, is all about acquiring the power to make consequential decisions. In December 1640, when Frederick William acceded to the throne in the midst of the 30 years war, his lands were still largely under foreign occupation. Only in March 1643 did he even dare to go to the city of Berlin. The city of Berlin being, of course, there in the middle of the middling red bit, and over in the east that was relatively quiet, but basically, these areas in the west and center of Northern Germany were all overrun by troops, Croats, imperial troops, Swedes, you name it. The place was in a state of complete mayhem. Berlin itself was a city he found in ruins and so on.

The first thing he had to do when he came to the throne was to get rid of this menace. For that, he needed money and he needed men. But the creation of a standing army brought him into conflict with the powerful, noble dominated assemblies known as the estates and the individual provinces of his very dispersed realm, as you can see. When he asked them or told them he needed enlarged taxes and men and so on, they replied, I'm terribly sorry, but you don't have the right to demand any of these things. Our rights and privileges are protected by freedoms, treaties, princely exemptions, marital agreements, territorial contracts, recursions, ancient traditions, law and justice, and so on. There's an endless lexicon of words to describe the things that protected the traditional privileges of people in the provinces.

The arguments of the estates bore the imprint of a culture that was very respectful of things that were old and in which rights and law generally derived their value and respectability from having existed for a long time. Now, against these objections that the elector had no rights, vis vis these privileges, the elector and his men developed a counterargument. The most important of it was the most important strand of it was that the monarchy was in a state of emergency, a state that justified the suspension of traditional legal arrangements. His letters and those of his representatives spoke of need that cannot be circumvented. I know Unumgangliche Noth. The word need interestingly in German, there's a semantic nexus that connects the idea of need with the idea of emergency. A state of emergency is Naught stunt, a condition of need. He said, I have this extreme need, Ausserste Noth.

There's an unavoidable necessity, Unvermeidliche Nothwendigkeit. You see this linkage need emergency necessity. In 1657, when the electors chief representative in the Duchy of Clever off in the West pointed out to the estates that the monarch was now in a position where he could only pursue his foreign political projects with the support of his loyal estates and subjects. He went on to say, Really, you need to support him. Since the only true friend is a friend in need, it's a little bit like the godfather in Godfather one, saying, Are you the Godfather's friend? You my friend? If you're not my friend, maybe you're my enemy. It was like that. Since these are the arguments that were made.

To the rights and liberties of the estates, the elector opposed the necessitas the necessity of the central executive, a necessity granted in the condition of emergency, a condition that could only be resolved by consequential decisions on the part of the elector. This argument could be made in two different temporal modes. It might be a ad hoc argument, right now, you need to give me money and men because there's an emergency right now, or it could be extended into the future. That is indeed what happened. If you look at the different utterances in this debate that went back and forth throughout the entire reign between the local elites and the electoral administration, they had to keep on coming back and saying as we're articulating the argument in ever more radical forms, saying, for example, that necessity knows no law and dissolves all dissolves all obligations.

This, of course, raised the question of who had the right to determine what was when a state of necessity or a state of emergency existed, and when it didn't. In 1650, for example, with the return of peace after a period of conflict, the estates of Brandenburg wrote to the elector and said, Well, the war is over now. I think it's time, we shut down these special taxes that you needed for the emergency. We accepted they were necessary then, and so on, to which the elector replied, Ah, no, no, things are not so simple, my friends. You may think it's peace and quiet and tranquility, but from where I'm standing, I can see threats further away. Because I'm corresponding with all my fellow monarchs, I have better access to information. I can see these threats on the horizon before you can. You've got to simply trust me on this.

It went on right throughout the entire length of the reign. As the trope of emergency was radicalized, it was temporarily stretched. It became a permanent posture of readiness for possible future contingencies. Now, a connection suggests itself here and probably has in many of your minds, with the argument advanced by the reactionary 20th century jurist, Karl Schmidt, whose radical critique of liberal democracy has in recent years attracted the interest of intellectuals on the far left and the far right. He's had a very interesting new career in the last few years. Schmidt opened his essay of 1922 political theology with the sonorous announcement, and I quote, Sovereign is he who decides on the exception, by which he meant that the power to determine whether the state of exception applies is the crucial defining trait of sovereign power.

When it's not just a power among other powers, it is the determining power. One of it's a constitutive power, let's put it that way. One of the most absornt flaws, he argued, of liberal democratic orders, was that they suppressed and masked the question of sovereignty and

thus of power with the language of checks and balances and collective deliberation and so on. But he went on to say, the decision on a state of emergency was a decision unlike any other. Because the power to make it did not and could not derive from the laws that govern the life of the state in normal times. What fabric of norms could legislate its own suspension? It was not the constitution of the state, whether written or not that gave rise to the power to decide the state of emergency Schmidt argued, it was the other way round.

It was the power to decide that gave rise to the state and its legal order in the first place. The power of decision was at the same time the ultimate expression and the origin of sovereignty, both an antecedent and a consequence of sovereign power. In Schmidt, the decision was elevated to metaphysical status, an operation anticipated by the essay's title, Political theology, and expressed in the author's playful comparison of the sovereign's declaration of the state of exception with miracles worked from outside the natural order by the will of God. As Schmidt himself put it, the decision frees itself from all normative ties and becomes, in the true sense, absolute. We're a long way here from the processual rule and norm bound, institutionally saturated world of late 20th century decision theory. Schmidt was completely uninterested in the empirical study of situations in which actual decisions had played out.

His account of the linkage between the decisive power of the sovereign and the appeal to the state of emergency was not an historical description, it was a metaphysical claim. Yet it feels in some respects like an authoritarian philosophical distillation from the years of struggle between the great elector and his estates. There's a reason for that, and I'll return to this point in a moment. I began this lecture with a note from Emperor William I to Bismarck drawing the statements attention to the world historical character of the decisions that two men had made in common. This linkage between the decision and history was not a given. In the age of the great elector, it still had to be established, and there's abundant evidence that the elector became increasingly interested in how his reign would be historicized. He starts to talk about posterity more and more.

There are efforts from the 1650s to secure the services of a court historian. The first was a librarian by the name of Hopner who was dismissed fairly soon because he didn't go to church often enough. But I don't think there's anything about his activities that suggested that was a pity. In 1664, the elector appointed Martin Schoock a man from the Netherlands, of the University of Groning and paid him a handsome salary to write a history of Brandenburg. A first section of the projected historian March K was completed in manuscript in 1667, but its quality was so poor, one critic rather acidly remarked, and I quotes, that there is no reason to regret the fact that the work was cut short by Schoock's premature death. Two other candidates took up and abandoned the task without producing anything of note.

Success came at last in 1686 when the political theorist Samuel Pufendorf, and you can see, among other things, Pufendorf has much better hair than Schoock and it was not until mid January 1688 after some wrangling with his current employers who was working in Sweden that he actually arrived in Berlin. By that time, the great elector, who was also to

be the subject of his history, had only a few months to live. Pufendorf was given free access to the electoral archives and provided with the services of a full time research assistant. He was quite a star higher. He was already one of the most widely read political theorists in Continental Europe, a German student of the British political theorist Hobbes. He grounded his arguments for the necessity of states and the powers that they embody in a dystopian vision of ambient violence and disorder, much as Hobbes had done.

The law of nature did not suffice to preserve the social life of man, he argued. It was the purpose of states, and I quote, that men should be safe against the harms and injuries they can and commonly do inflict upon one another. He went on to say that sovereigns have the right to attach income and revenues and even men from their subjects, from the body of their subject populations if necessity justifies it. These arguments must have resonated positively with the great elector and his advisors. Pufendorf's history of the elector's reign was the first sustained piece of research based historical writing on and in Brandenburg Prussia. It's an enormous chronicle de Rebus Gestz Fredrizi Wilhelm Magni, comprising over 1,300 enormous pages. There's page 13 and 14. It's a large one of the text proper, followed by an index. The German translation by Ertman Us is over 1,200 pages.

User cut some of the more tedious parts. I have to say, this book is not Vintage Pufendorf. He could write very interestingly, but by the time the Latin edition appeared in 16 95, Pufendorf too, was dead. Perhaps his labours in the lectures archives had ruined his health, or I remember once myself being told I couldn't use a particular body of sources in the Gems Staraf in Dallin in Berlin because they contained a poisonous fungus. Perhaps that was what had happened. Or perhaps he'd run into the shade of Por old's hawk. But in any case, the de Rebus Gests does not make easy or enjoyable reading. There's no broad sweep to the narrative. The people around the prince adjust cardboard cut arts. Even the elector himself is a cut art. It's not for nothing that we remember Pufendorf as a theorist and not as an historian.

Yet in two respects, Pufendorf did endow his narrative with impressive historical momentum, and I'm just going to touch on them very briefly and make the point that he first had quite a lot to say about the efforts invested in suppressing the independence of the estates and securing sovereign freedom of movement through that process. He focused very tightly, and this is, in fact, the only dynamic part of his account of the elector's reign, on decision making situations in which the elector found himself. Again and again, there are many examples, but again and again, he would place the elector in a situation where a threat was looming, and he would gather with his members of his privy council and other advisors brought in as well. He would often start by saying in the German in the Ozer translation, Anfang Wamannchlusi. At the beginning, one couldn't agree. They couldn't agree.

But then a discussion begins, and the participants in the discussion are never named. It's just the issues and options are thrashed out in great detail, all operative future scenarios. You could concentrate your troops to the West. Just to give you an example of the structure of these analyses, that would make the Dutch happy. That was important

because the Netherlands were a Calvinist power and the elector was a Calvinist. But that would expose you, on the other hand, to Swedish reprisals in the East, in Pomerania, in particular, and it would alienate the king of Denmark, which wasn't going to be very handy. Or you could concentrate eastwards, that would make Denmark happy. But it would expose you to French reprisals in the West, and it would alienate the Dutch. It went on, but in much more detail than that, long decision trees about how particular alternative options would pan out.

What's interesting about the decisional moments in Pufendorf's narrative, and they're very frequent is how they situate the decision maker within a threat map in which his task is to balance options, each of which implies a possible future. In this way, Pufendorf fashioned an unprecedentedly sophisticated account of the place of a sovereign decision maker within the European state system. Strikes the reader about his handling of international relations is the open endedness of the predicaments in which the state finds itself. The predicaments are open ended precisely because the future behavior of the other states in the system can never be predicted with uncertainty. There's a injection of uncertainty into reasoning about international relations, which is very characteristic of that and this brings us back to Karl Schmidt. Schmidt wrote admiringly of the 17th century writers on natural law.

They understood, he observed, that the decision making powers of the sovereign derived from the authority to suspend law. He was particularly warm in his praise for Samuel Pufendorf. Pufendorf and he read a great deal of Pufendorf Schmidt wrote and I quote, Understood that sovereignty and thus the state itself resides in determining what constitutes public order and security and in determining when these are disturbed. Pufendorf was a thinker in the decisionist mode, that's Schmidt's own word, established by Thomas Hobbes. There is some retro projection by Schmidt going on here, but the notion of the sovereign as the ultimate decider, whose power to discern the state of emergency was deployed in support of his power to operate as an autonomous political actor is present in the sources.

In that sense, the projection is working in both directions. We can find traces of Schmidt in his reading of Pufendorf, but we can also find a lot of Pufendorf in Schmidt. The most eloquent echo of the activist idea of monarchy embodied by the Great elector is the coronation of his son. I'm not going to say much about that except to say that what's interesting about this coronation is that it completely did without. It renounced any sense that there was a need to embed this coronation in a tradition to say that, we're crowning ourselves, the elector is becoming a king because this is the ancient the vandals, the crown of the vandals or something, and we're inheriting something from an ancient continuity.

That was absolutely the rule for coronations in Europe in the early modern period. But at this coronation, the advisers around the elector said, There's no need to embed this new crown in some continuity. We're just going to say, You made this yourself because you had the power to do it. That's what they did. The coronation became the celebration of a

decision, not the acknowledgment of a tradition. Now, if we fast forward to the reign of the the 1st King's grandson, let's say, the one who was crowned in January 1701, if we fast forward now to the reign of the first King's grandson, Frederick, sometimes known as Frederick G, though that name has gone out of fashion, it becomes clear that this virile, early modern decisionist moment that we've been looking at is superseded during the reign of Frederick second by something rather different.

In December 1740, Frederick second led the armies of Brandenburg and Brandenburg Prussia, over the border into what was then Habsburg Silesia. Despite the wintry conditions, the Brandenburg Army or the Brandenburg Russian Army succeeded in taking control of virtually all of South Asia within a few weeks. There was virtually no resistance. Invasion was the most important single action of Frederick's life. It was a decision taken by the king alone against the advice of his most senior advisors. It changed the political balance of German Europe, and it thrust Prussia into a dangerous new world of great power politics. Frederick would spend most of the rest of his reign living with the consequences of this moment.

He fought three wars, known to Prussian historiography as the three Silesian wars, though the third one is also called the seven years War, in order to hold on to the province that he had snatched from Austria in 1740. Consequences, in other words, were long lasting, and Frederick himself remarked in his political testament of 1752, We have brought on our heads with this conquest, the envy of all Europe, which has put all our neighbors on the alert. My life is too short to restore them to a sense of security advantageous to our interests. He understood only too well how deep the consequences were. Why he did it has been much discussed. Frederick offered an account himself of his own reasoning in which he sounds like a very cool headed synoptic and figure who considered comprehensively all the possible factors. He said that the province was wealthy, it was strategically situated.

The moment was right from the perspective of the advent of Maria Theresa, the new Empress of the Habsburg monarchy or the queen of the monarch of the Habsburg monarchy, whose title to the throne was to some of the territories of Austria was in question. All of these were reasons for proceeding and not letting the matter rest any further. Now, political actors tend in general to appraise themselves as rational. This is a habit known to psychology as naive realism. Frederick, there we see him there as a younger man, represented his own action as grounded in the scrupulous weighing of risks and opportunities, though it must be said that the opportunities were much more present to his thinking than the risks. He also acknowledged the place of emotion in his own decision making.

He noted, for example, that the fact of the coronation, the fact of the elevation of the electorate of Brandenburg to a monarchy, to a kingship, even though it was only the kingship in Prussia, as it was called. But nevertheless, it was still a royal crown, that that had, as he put it, planted a shoot of ambition in the bosom of his posterity, which sooner or later must fructify. He said, That sufficed to animate the vivacity of a youthful prince. The reign opened with a decision of enormous consequence, and the willingness to risk bold

decisions remained a feature of his rule, though I won't go into any further examples now. These moments, these momentous initiatives, and numerous other lesser interventions reflected his understanding of his sovereign office. It was necessary in a state like Prussia, he wrote, for the Prince to conduct the internal administration of his state himself.

If this were so, how much more necessary was it that he should direct his own foreign policy and make his own decisions and Schluss in delicate and difficult situations. Studies of this king have shown that his decision making processes were highly centralized, with the king as the final arbiter. The decisional environment was information rich but non collective. By contrast with the great elector, Frederick relied on memoranda rather than counsels. He preferred paper to people. In the Testament of 17952, he advised his successor in controversial or difficult questions, as he put it, to have the ministers set out the case for and against various options so that it would be possible, and I quote for the sovereign to take his decision at a glance, provided that he takes the trouble to read and to understand the matter in question.

A sound intellect, he observed, easily grasps the essential points of a question. This approach was preferable, he wrote, to large discursive meetings and councils, because the most senior officials tended to be divided by intrigues, private hatreds, and passions. The system of debating questions by dispute is often, these are his words, too lively, casting shadows instead of bringing light. But the muscular decisionism implied by these words was only part of the picture. Frederick's highly personalized system only worked because he was willing to trust the people and structures around him. His system combined bureaucratic preparation with sovereign discretion. The apparatus supporting him was much more sophisticated and extensive than the embryonic state structure the great elector had managed to assemble during his reign. The ministers and generals generated options and draft solutions.

We've already seen how a decisional impetus animated both the domestic policy of the Great elector and the embryonic historiography of his reign as sketched out in Pufendorf's de Rebus Gests. The decisional momentum of the reign fed into the dynamic historicity of a monarchy that seemed to lean away from the past and into the future. But the picture for Frederick second was different. Establishing historian of his reign and indeed of his country was the king himself. In that respect, he was rather like Winston Churchill. Churchill said, I'm going to write the history of my own times because I don't want anybody else to. Frederick the Great said exactly the same thing.

He said, I'm going to write the history of my times because I'm terrified that in the 19th century, a century, which, of course, he couldn't imagine, some Benedictine monk might write a history of Prussia instead, and that might, as it were, become the establishing narrative. He wanted to establish the narrative himself. It was he who wrote he did this with this book here, Memoir Pour servir boo, Memoirs to serve for memoirs to assist in the writing of a history of the House of Brandenburg, and his History of My Times, another book he wrote. They've had an enduring influence on the historiography of Brandenburg Prussia and bits of language from this book sort of bounce around in the whole Russian

historiography sense.

But Frederick, the historian, and he spent a lot of time on these historical works, was dismissive of his 17th century antecedents. Pufendorf and his fellows, he wrote, were mere workman, indiscriminately piling up material that remained useless until an architect could be found to shape them into the form they should have. That was naturally Frederick himself. Their works were historical dictionaries rather than histories as such. He went on to say that Pufendorf wrote a history of Frederick William, in which to be sure he omitted nothing, not even the names of his chancery clerks or even the chamber valets whose names he could find out. He shared the general thought, Frederick wrote, this is Pufendorf of German writers who I write as pedants rather than as men of genius. Apologies to Christian there.

In any case, this was not exactly fair, of course, but it was typical of an era in which Pufendorf was old hat, and philosophical historians in the manner of Montesquieu and Voltaire denounced their 17th century predecessors as mere antiquarians and dry as dust erudites. But the reality was, and I've hinted this already, that Pufendorf had actually endowed the history of the Great Elector's reign with real momentum, both by exposing the importance of the subordination of the elites to central authority, an important inaugurating move. Secondly, by highlighting his place as a sovereign decision maker in a complex international or interstate environment. Frederick's history, by contrast, neither possessed nor aspired to this dynamic historicity. In his history of Brandenburg, he evacuated the struggle with the estates entirely from the story. They simply don't appear at all.

The state ceased to be something that had to be decided into being and became instead a timeless logical necessity. Whereas for Pufendorf, the decision was a moment of choice amidst the uncertainties of a rapidly changing environment. For Frederick, the decision was an expression of will in support of an already clearly defined goal. His view was that if a prince was making decisions on the hop because if stuff was happening in a reactive way, then that was not good decision making. He wrote, The prince who rules on his own will not be caught off guard when there is a swift decision to be made for he links everything to his preconceived final objective.

This meant that the judgering fearful vibration of great events that we feel in the letters and memoranda of the Great Elector and also in Pufendorf's history is strangely absent from Frederick's reasoning about past, present, and future, although it was full enough of horrific events. Contingency is crowded out in his reading by will. Decisions are a function of systems resistant to short term shocks and disruptions. There are various reasons for this. I think one of them is that the traumatic memory of the 30 years war was fading. Wishful thinking and posturing were important too, I think. The man who called himself the Philosopher King was inclined to picture himself as detached from the turbulence of mere events, stoical in his emotional life, consistent in his pursuit of his objectives.

Drama of those scenes that Pufendorf viewed as so important, where the great elector gripped in a geopolitical dilemma, heard the divergent advice of his counselors, and

carefully weighed up the dangers of the various courses of action, possessed no charm at all for Frederick, who strove to embody absolute autonomy, both as a man and as a prince. Finally, Frederick's intuition, which was characteristic of the era, that history was subject to self repeating cyclical patterns, that it was like a natural system, a deterministic natural system rather than a system which was at the prey of decisions made by great men. His philosophical commitment to that view, which meant that he often described states as planets locked in circular orbits or as life forms, passing through a cycle of maturation and decay, meant that the decision shrank in significance. It was demoted to a marginal a piece of marginalia.

It's telling that the name he gave to his history, the Memoir pour servir was actually purloined from the title of Rene Antoine Houasse encyclopedic Memoir Pour servir which appeared some years before. Frederick actually wrote in the foreword to the memoirs that he wrote, he said, Well, look, the insects have had their history. Why shouldn't the Prussians? Well, ants don't make decisions. At least they don't make deliberative decisions. They do make decisions, it turns out, I actually did a bit of reading on that, but I'm not going to burden you with that now. The human, but they don't make deliberative decisions. The human decisions that produced victories and defeats might be quite important, but they would never acquire the philosophical weight they possessed for Pufendorf.

We can see here the imprint of an 18th century period style marked by a preference for civilizational narratives, measured out in eras, as exemplified by the Siecle de Louis artors a hugely influential work by his mentor, by Frederick's mentor and sometime friend Voltaire. In which Voltaire presented the time of Louis XV as an age in which the arts and philosophy, but also the skilled crafts and informed taste and consumption, among other things, of luxury goods, had achieved their highest pitch of perfection. It was that process of perfection which had, as it were, driven the progress of humankind, not the actions of great men or even of princes. Frederick deeply admired this work, and he strove to match it.

The resulting mismatch between the history of events and the ambient philosophical style of the era caught the attention of Carl Schmitt, who wrote admiringly of Frederick as a decisive and consequential monarch, but disparagingly of the 18th century, which he argued had lost, and I quote the vivid awareness of the meaning of the exception that had been so important to theorists like Pufendorf and Bodin. You could sum up the contrast, and I'm coming to a close now with two paintings commissioned or acquired by the Great Elector and Frederick respectively. The first is an idealized view of the Brandenburg fleet by the Netherlandish artist Leif Fischer, commissioned and purchased in 16 84. It shows the ships of the Electoral fleet at sea on choppy water. Among them, you can make out the vessel Frederick William on horseback, on the left side of the image.

The men on the decks of the two big frigates can be seen raising their hats and bowing to the elector, standing amidst his entourage on that little yacht in between the frigates and clearly marked out by his enormous white wig and his golden gown. You can't see it in this

resolution, but he could if I could blow it up. The elector can be seen inspecting his magnificent fleet. I mean, it's quite a beautiful painting. This is not a scene painted from the life. It wasn't painted, he wasn't sitting there with an easel on the shore. At the time when the painting was commissioned, most of these ships didn't exist. Some of them were under construction, others would never be constructed.

What it is, is the depiction of a decision, a decision to project power over the water by means of a fleet in the manner modeled by the Dutch Republic, a state that the elector deeply admired, envied, and hoped to emulate. In those days, it seemed to the elector that the future was Dutch, or perhaps you could put it more precisely, the future was orange. We're looking here not just at the consequence of a decision, but also the participation of a world created by that decision. Here, by contrast, is one of the favorite paintings of Frederick second, Love in the Italian Theatre by Antoine Waitau, the artist whose works the king spent more of his money and time collecting than any other painter. He wrote to various friends in his correspondence, there's lot of references to Witeau when he says things like, don't paint your existence in the brushstrokes of Rembrandt.

Paint them in the brushstrokes of Watteau. Live like a Watteau painting. That's the way for him, these paintings were a clue to how to exist as a human being. This particular image hung in the gallery connecting the reception area of Sans Souci, his pleasure palace in Potsdam. It hung in the in the hall which connected the main gallery with his own bedchamber. Nothing could be further from the brusque world of the political decision than this dreamy, timeless image composed in the fete gallant style for which Watteau was famous. It was not an anticipatory image. It was painted 24 years before Frederick came to the throne at a time when the Commedia dell Arte, whose stock figures can be seen here, was already in decline. 17 66, when the presence of this picture in the gallery at Sans Souci is first recorded, it evoked an indistinct and distant past.

More importantly, it evoked the vision of a refuge outside the turbulent time of history. I mean, nobody in this picture is making a decision. It's not the scene where a decision ever will be made or ever has been made, and all questions, what are they doing there anyway in the middle of the woods? Or is it a state decoration? There was actually a big contemporary debate about the timelessness and narrativelessness about this image. Frederick made decisions of great moment. There's no doubt about that, but he had no interest in seeing them on his walls. In the second lecture, we'll visit briefly with Bismarck and the Nazis and then touch on the decisional practice of Angela Merkel and Donald Trump before reflecting on what all of this means for the history of the political decision past and present. Thank you much.

Christian Lists: I'm particularly honored to be commenting on Chris Clark's wonderful lectures, and I've thoroughly enjoyed engaging with the material as I was preparing myself for this. Since I'm a philosopher and decision theorist and not a historian, I'm going to take this opportunity and offer some methodological reflections about the broader project that Chris Clark has presented to us. My comments today will have four parts. I'll first ask what is a moment of decision? Then I'll talk about two different modes of explanation and

comment a little bit on where the study of history fits. I'll then talk about the key assumption of intentional agency, and then finally, consider a key presupposition that I think underpins the centrality of moments of decision. Let's begin with the question of what is a moment of decision? Chris Clark introduces his object of inquiry through this very nice anecdote involving German Emperor William I.

William I thanked Otton Bismarck for his by then 25 years of service as Prime Minister of Prussia and for contributing to Prussia's place in history. As a sign of gratitude, as Chris mentioned, William gave Bismarck an image of the building in which they had jointly made many decisive decisions. Here, again, is the building. We've already seen a nice picture of it earlier on. What caught Clark's eye, he says, was this formulation of decisive decisions in Chien Buslusen, and he notes at first it looks very much like a pleonasm, but it does capture two distinct ideas. First of all, that a political career can and or perhaps should even be full of decisions, and secondly, that these decisions should be decisive, meaning consequential. There should be inflection points that mark a new departure, milestones in world history, interventions that inaugurate a new future.

We can think of a moment of decision as having these two characteristics. First of all, it involves a decision, and secondly, it is a turning point, a fork in the road. Things could go differently depending on the decision taken. That's a first characterization of the object of inquiry. Now, such moments are interesting from a historical perspective for at least two reasons. First of all, they may be drivers of history, milestones, interventions that inaugurate a new future, as Clark says, and of course, they may also be very important reference points in historical narratives. As Chris pointed out, moments of decision already play a central role. If we go all the way back to Thucydides and his history of the Peloponnesian War, where Thucydides builds his narrative around moments of deliberation, which assemblies and councils debate and then foreclose alternative futures.

He continues, it's the decisional nodes in the narrative that endow the flow of events with meaning, raising the book from mere chronicle to the dignity of history. Key decisions, let's say the Spartan decision to wage war against Athens or the Athenian decision to launch the doomed Sicilian expedition, are used as a narrative hinge between contingency and necessity, and the reconstruction of the decision process here renders history legible as a history of human action. Okay. But Clark notes that Thucydides may also be interpreted in a different way, focusing less on decisions and more on broader structural drivers of history, suggesting that it's structural forces that are the deeper driver of events, for instance, the imperial hubris of the Athenian policy.

But Clark notes that the idea that history is driven by key decisions, is very much central to the reasoning of many modern decision makers, including Trump, who very frequently sets his own decisions and achievement in the largest possible historical context. What I'm going to argue is this, first of all, I'm going to suggest that it's no surprise that moments of decision play such an important role for historians, because in a nutshell, without recognizing the centrality of decision making, it's hard to make sense of history in the explanatory mode that we associate with humanities and many of the social sciences and

indeed history. In fact, I'm going to go so far as to suggest that historians must presuppose that the participants of history have a certain common sense, everyday life form of freewill, and I'll say a little bit more about this.

On Wednesday in the final session, I'll take this a little further and then ask whether historians should actually view history as indeterministic and what exactly is at stake in this debate. Let's look at these two distinct modes of explanation. I think it's helpful if we want to situate the study of history to distinguish between two fundamentally different modes of explanation that we associate very roughly speaking with natural scientific explanations on the one hand and humanistic and social scientific ones on the other. One is causal or dynamical, the other intentional or hermetic. Let's begin with causal or dynamical explanations. This mode of explanation is paradigmatically found in physics. How do physicists explain, for instance, how the planets revolve around the sun or how other physical systems behave? They usually assume two things. First of all, at any time, the given system is in a particular state.

This may be characterized, for instance, by the positions and momenta of all the entities making up that system. Then the system state evolves over time according to either deterministic or stochastic state change rules. This mode of explanation can be found in models of how the planets revolve around the sun, how chemical reactions work, how cells divide, how the climate responds to changes in greenhouse gases. In such explanations, earlier states of the system are set to cause or make probable later ones, and there is no room for choices, for reasons, for goals, purposes, or agency, or anything along those lines. The relevant systems evolve impersonally based on certain laws governing them. Now, this contrasts very much with intentional or hermeneutic explanations, which are paradigmatically found in the humanities and social sciences. Suppose we want to make sense of human behavior.

For instance, why have we gathered here to listen to Chris Clark's ton of lectures? Why did Brutus murder Caesar? Why do some people engage in religious rituals and others not? Why do some people vote for Trump? Why do consumers respond to price changes? What led Gunther Chapovsky, who was the spokesperson for the East German government, to announce on the 9th of November 1989, that new travel rules would come into immediate effect, which then triggered the fall of the Berlin Wall on the same day. Now, we make sense of those events or actions by formulating hypotheses about the relevant people's beliefs, desires, intentions, goals, convictions, motives, reasons, values, emotions, and so on. If we come up with a compelling account of those beliefs, desires, etc, then we will have made the events or actions intelligible.

Now, if we wish to explain, just to give a trivial example, why I got to participate in this event in Berkeley here today, our primary interest is not in how the collection of molecules making up my body got to Berkeley, but rather in why I as a person was invited, why I accepted the invitation, why this led me to rearrange other commitments, why I embarked upon the trip, and so on. An intentional or harmonic explanation answers such why questions, not by identifying a cause in the same way in which we identify a cause of a tidal

wave or of a disease outbreak, but by identifying the relevant agents' motives or mental states, reasons, rationales, beliefs, desires, and so on, which render the events or action intelligible or even rational or approximately rational.

Crucially, while those motivating factors help us understand people's actions, they allow, and that's very important, that they could have acted differently. Contingency is built into the very logic of the explanation. Intentional explanations can be found all across the human and social sciences, from economics and political science to sociology, from anthropology to social psychology, from war studies to international relations, and indeed in the study of history. Thucydides can be interpreted as offering intentional explanations in his history of the Peloponnesian War, for example. This now takes us to the assumption of intentional agency, which is at the core of the whole enterprise of intentional explanation, and therefore, I think, also at the core of the study of history. Intentional explanations come in many different shapes and sizes.

The ones that economists and rational choice theorists give, which Chris already very nicely introduced earlier on, they are radically different from the ones that anthropologists give, for instance, when they try to make cultural practices intelligible to outsiders. Economists attribute utility functions to agents, and then they assume, at least in the simplest case, utility-maximizing behavior. Anthropologists, on the other hand, perhaps try to provide an in-depth understanding of the beliefs and values motivating the participants of the relevant cultures. Clark notes that historians and decision theorists, to give just two examples, study decision making in radically different ways. Decision theorists seek to arrive at general theories of individual choice, whereas historians are more interested in the particularities of specific historical episodes or events. For them, specific events are not just data points for testing general theories, but they are objects of intrinsic interest themselves.

But despite all these big differences between different varieties of intentional explanation across these different humanities and social sciences, all the various approaches are united by one central assumption, namely, they take what Daniel Dennett calls an intentional stance towards their objects of explanation; they treat them as intentional agents. They assume that human beings are intentional agents, beings capable of acting in a goal-directed manner, of making choices to pursue goals, and of responding intelligibly to their environments. Causal and dynamical explanations, on the other hand, make no reference to intentional agency or anything along those lines. The importance of this agency assumption cannot be overstated. Or consider some of the earlier examples of questions that social scientists or scholars in the humanities might ask.

Why do people study at universities? Why did Brutus murder Caesar? Why do some people engage in religious rituals? Why do some people vote for Trump? Why do consumers respond to price changes, and so on and so on? We wouldn't know where to begin if we had to answer these questions without assuming that the people involved are intentional agents. As I noted earlier, if we wish to explain why I'm participating in this event, we're interested in the reasons and motives that led me to participate. Why I am

participating as an agent, not merely as a physical organism? In fact, we'd have no chance of giving a purely physical explanation. Why did this collection of cells travel to Berkeley, whereas lots of physically very similar collections of cells that were in Munich yesterday morning stayed put?

Pinpointing the difference in purely physical terms, without referring to anyone's goals and purposes, seems to be completely impossible in practice. Viewing people as intentional agents is basically explanatorily necessary. This is as true for the study of history as it is for the other human and social sciences. Once we see this, so history is one species of study of histories, one species of intentional explanation, then we will see that a key presupposition behind intentional explanations is also central for the study of history, and this is the crux. Once we recognize that we can make sense of people's behavior only by viewing them as intentional agents, we must acknowledge the centrality of decision making. The slogan that I'm going to very briefly argue for is that there's no agency without choice, without moments of decision, we might say in today's context.

Suppose we try to explain why someone acts in a particular way or why they do one thing rather than another. When we try to answer such questions, we typically go through three reasoning steps. First of all, we assume that this agent is faced with some options, which are his or her possible choices. They could take an action, for instance, or refrain from taking it. Secondly, we hypothesize that this agent engages with those possibilities in some way, and this could be a matter of explicit deliberation or a more spontaneous response. Thirdly, we interpret the agent as choosing one option among the possible ones where that choice is intelligible given the agent's beliefs, goals, and values. The choosing could also be replaced with picking or opting, as Chris aptly commented.

But these three steps are present irrespective of whether we are giving a picking explanation, a choosing explanation, or an opting explanation. This explanatory scheme is ubiquitous in the humanities and social sciences, even though it's often left implicit. This can be found when economists explain a firm's choice to invest in a particular market, when international relations scholars try to explain Kennedy's and Khrushchev's decisions during the Cuban missile crisis, when Thucydides discusses the Spartan decision to wage war against Athens, when Plutarch analyzes why Brutus killed Caesar, and also when Chris Clark reflects about Angela Merkel's style of decision making as Chancellor of Germany, as he will do in the next lecture. Now, of course, scholars in different disciplines in the humanities and social sciences will fill in the details very differently, but they all assume that the people whose actions they are trying to explain are agents who make choices.

The presupposition that is shared across all of these different areas of inquiries or literally from the study of market behavior all the way to the study of history, is alternative possibilities. Agents sometimes face choices between different courses of action, their options, which are, in principle, possible for them. Those are alternative possibilities of forks in the road, moments of decision. Without this presupposition, this three-step explanatory structure that I sketched could not get off the ground at all. To say that

someone faces a choice, of course, is not to say that the different options are equally likely to be chosen or equally plausible. Facing a choice is fully compatible with one option being more plausible or more attractive or more desirable from the agent's perspective.

Indeed, the explanatory goal is often to figure out which choice is most intelligible, rational, or boundedly rational, given the way the agent is situated in the world. But nonetheless, to give a trivial example of how even if some options are a lot more attractive to the agent than others, it doesn't take away the choice. Just take this simple case, I myself don't drink any alcohol. Whenever I go to a bar or restaurant, I won't choose an alcoholic drink. This is very predictable, but it doesn't take away the choice. The choice remains intact. Indeed, the picture that we're looking at when we give intentional explanations and presuppose alternative possibilities is really the picture of what decision theorists call an extensive form decision tree. Indeed, Chris Clark mentioned such decision trees, I think in the context of the discussion of Pufendorf earlier on.

The dots here represent choice nodes, moments of decision where the relevant agent could make a choice, and then lines moving from bottom to the top represent possible series of choices that the agent could take. Now let's suppose on a particular occasion, this agent whom we are studying takes this red line here, so this is the particular series of choices that they take. Now, even though only one series of choices ends up being actualized, obviously, the unchosen options are still viewed as alternative possibilities that could have been chosen. This model of an extensive form decision tree very much makes vivid the assumed contingency of human choices. Decision trees are a central methodological tool for decision and game theory as well.

The upshot is that to the extent that historians do not merely enumerate a series of events that happen, so you might say one thing after another, but that they seek to explain what happened or to make it intelligible. We want to have a narrative and not just a pure chronicle or record of events. To the extent that they seek to give these explanations, they engage in a form of intentional or hermeneutic explanation. Once they do this, they cannot escape the assumption that human beings are intentional agents who have alternative possibilities to choose from with some amount of contingency and openness of the future at the moment of decision.

Now, free will is a big word, but I think the assumption that is being made here implicitly boils down to a common sense everyday life free will assumption, which I'm suggesting is built into the study of those, for instance, historical moments of decision, namely the assumption that the participants of history, human beings, are intentional agents with the ability to choose between alternative possibilities and with some amount of control over their choices. I think historians shouldn't be in any way embarrassed if they're being told that there is a free will presupposition here, but they should make that assumption confidently. Although defending this point is beyond the scope of my comments here, I think the assumption is defensible as long as we avoid an unduly demanding understanding of free will, as I've argued elsewhere.

Now, to assume that people have free will in this down-to-earth sense is not to assume that people's actions and decisions take place in a vacuum, unconstrained by external factors. To the contrary, there are clearly myriads of factors that affect choices of people's background and upbringing, their environment, their culture, social, economic, and political context, their personal history, the weather, the time of the day, and so on. Indeed, historians are interested in studying those factors and their particularities. When Chris Clark compares and contrasts different decisional cultures, for example, he does precisely this. Studying the context moderating people's choices, but the context in which people exercise their free will, not the context that takes their free will away, but the context in which free will as a distinctly human capacity is being exercised. The indispensable assumption here is that despite all those influences, people are intentional agents who make choices.

They face situations where they could do one thing or another. A residuum of choice and contingency remains, and for this reason, moments of decision are ineliminable and that's also the reason moments of decision are so fascinating to study. Thank you [Applause] Christopher Clark: First of all, Christian, thank you so much for those fascinating words. I've been invited to respond very briefly, and I'm going to be very brief. I just wanted to make two points, two thoughts that came to me as you were speaking. One was that, one of the interesting contrasts between Frederick II and the Great Elector is that Frederick is very immersed in the natural sciences. He uses natural science as metaphors derived from the natural sciences.

You saw the fact that he pinches the title of his book from the title of the book about insects is typical, that he uses planetary metaphors and metaphors of natural growth and decay and so on. His philosophical commitment is to an idea where as to, how would you put it exactly, a metaphoric form of narrative or a narrative metaphors that plays down the impact of decision-making, despite the fact that he's at least as decisive an actor in terms of the consequentiality of his interventions as his predecessor, but two, the Great Elector. That was one point. The other one was that I suppose you make this very interesting point that historical narratives can't really work without the agent as a decider. I think that's true. Unless you're focusing on the non-human, which, of course, more and more people are doing now.

But if you are interested in a narrative which is about consequential interventions by human beings in states of affairs, then you do need that a gentle model. I think there's another way in which this model becomes necessary, and that is that you could say that the politics of a narrative manifests itself in the implicit platform that it offers the consumer of the narrative, the reader, as an imagined platform from which to act. In other words, when we read about decision makers, we are ourselves imaginatively inhabiting some situations that they find themselves in and imagining how we would deal with that. It's doing more than simply making sense. It's also offering a genial partnership to the reader while the reader is consuming the narrative.

But I thought that was extremely interesting. I hope we'll come back in the final discussion to these two levels of analysis that I know you've written a great deal about in your book, Why Free Will Is Real, about the different levels of resolution that allow us to either do without or free will or make it indispensable as a way of understanding what is going on, depending on what we focus on persons or atoms and processes. Speaker 2: We have about 20 minutes for discussion. If someone wants to ask the first question, now is the time. Speaker 3: I was wondering what are your thoughts on the availability of AI and cognitive superpower and whether that increases or decreases free will or makes decisions easier or harder for people to make going forward. Christopher Clark: I touched on this in a very amateurish way tomorrow.

There's, again, a huge emergent literature on this. There's a technical dimension to understanding the impact of AI that I'm not in control of. But my hunch would be from what I have, of course, in preparation for these lectures, been reading around, mainly in well it what I regard as the better informed journalism. My hunch is that AI is going to have both effects simultaneously. That, on the one hand, because it will make certain very complex, if you can call them decision-making or actional sequences much more efficient, it's going to squeeze out various forms of discretional intervention, which otherwise might have been there. When each stage in the process was being checked independently by different individuals or different agencies or whatever, that will tend to be less and less the case as this automation takes place, but it's not a consequence of LLM style emergent intelligence.

It's the consequence simply of the drastic increase in efficiency, and that that's likely to have a depressive effect. It will narrow down or suppress a certain amount of decision or distributed cognition, let's say, which otherwise distributed human cognition that might otherwise have been a part of these processes. On the other hand, those who are running an AI-driven process to resolve certain issues or to produce certain outcomes, their decisional discretion will not be diminished. It may be drastically increased. It may concentrate and suppress decisional discretion depending on where you are in the process. Speaker 2: Consensus, you wrote about AI and decisions. Do you want to add something? Christian Lists: Is this one? I'll just add one quick remark. I think one huge challenge that we're facing is that AI systems increasingly become decision-making agents that share our decision making environments with us humans.

In the past, it was primarily humans who were the loci of agency in the social world. Maybe then corporate entities also entered and they've become important and powerful loci of agency and decision making, but now increasingly, AI systems are stepping into the picture as well. Potentially we're dealing with a landscape where there is at least three distinct agential sources of decisions out there, humans, corporate entities, and AI entities, and that raises a whole bunch of new questions about who is responsible for what, what regulations kick in. At least in the corporate case, we've got a bit of a tradition of how to deal with these questions. But in the AI case, this is a completely uncharted terrain. I think there's tons of challenges for philosophers, for legal theorists, and for society at large, and historians, absolutely. Speaker 4: I wanted to come back to the sneeze.

When you showed this slide of the sneeze, I thought it a joke and it was at a very witty presentation. But obviously, there was something important behind it, namely, for a historian, we tell the history of a gesture, and we wind up not telling the history of the gesture, but really what the meanings that people assigned to the gesture over time. If we take that to an analysis of your analysis of decisions, the question isn't in your case, how do the people you're discussing make decisions? You're asking, how do they think about the decision making process and why is it at certain points in time that people even think that they have a decision to make at all?

In this regard, your lists of the key moments in the history of the 20th century, what it is that political scientists or historians even choose as moments in history that are worth deliberating on is an interesting subject in its own right. But I hear I think there's a little bit of a misunderstanding between the lecture and the commentary where the commentary isn't on or the lecture isn't about, do people have free will, but rather, what is it that they think that they're doing when they make a decision? But I wanted to take your comments and push you a little bit harder because you avoided the question of what difference it made to the Elector or to Frederick II, what difference it made to the decision-making process that they thought about their decisions in this way.

What did they do differently as a result of thinking in one way or another about the nature of decision-making? Maybe that's something you want to answer. Thank you. Christopher Clark: I think that's an extremely interesting decision question, rather. Sorry about that. This is going to start to happen. It's a very interesting question. I'm not sure I have a good answer to it yet. I'll think about it overnight, though, because we have another day. You're absolutely right, that I'm not so much interested in. I didn't say anything about the constraints on people's decision making, for example, what can people and can't people achieve in a certain situation. I was very interested in what they think they're doing and what they say they're doing.

I think what they say they're doing, in the case of the Great Elector, it's quite transparent that he actually , it's not just him, it's a whole bunch of mainly Calvinist advisers around him who have all read Pufendorf and they're feeding, language which comes from Pufendorf into these communications with the estate. The world of high theory we could call Pufendorf high theory, political theory, feeds into the behaviour of the Great Elector because the great elector sees in this good rationalization of his own claim to power and his own right to determine, to decide, in the Schmidtian sense, when the state of emergency is in place and when he is justified in suspending certain rights that impede his freedom of action.

In his case, it's quite clear. One thing you could say, if you one short quick answer would be that Frederick the Great makes decisions, it's not drastically different. It's slightly. It's consultative, but not conciliar. There are different styles. There's a different architecture around his decision-making from the one around the Great Elector. He's got a much more sophisticated state structure, much more sophisticated consultative organs, and so on. By and large, the literature about his decision making has shown that he was much more

consultative figure than people thought. But to what extent that actually one could in his case, I don't think I'm not sure that one can, it's quite so easy to show that an idea about what decision-making is feeds into what he does as a decision maker, partly because he's intellectually faced away from the decisive moment. It's not something that interests him philosophically.

For the Great Elector, the philosophical focus on the decision is right at the center of what he thinks it is to be who he is. But Frederick the Great makes decisions without thinking those decisions are really what he is about. On the contrary, when he writes about his own time as king, at the beginning of Histoire de mon temps, he says, "I will not be using the first-person pronoun. I will not say Jes, moi. I will say Le roi de Prusse did this and that." He becomes just another character in the drama. He conceals his own role as the mover of events. I think there's a relationship there, but it's of a very different kind from the relationship with the Great Elector to the decision making process. It's a relationship of negation and denial, turning away.

That's why his writings about his own time, which are so influential, read like some people thought they were written by Voltaire. They weren't, but they're very Voltairean because they're interested in this. He sees progress as something that's moved along by the general, in fact, in some ways, we're in the world of Sophia Rosenfeld's work on freedom of choice in consumption, the context of consumption and taste, that's what moves history along, is the hundreds of thousands of choices by people to buy better furniture, to have nicer clothes, to speak more politely to each other, and so on. That's what moves civilizations along, and that decision makers aren't very important to that process. There's a mismatch between the philosophical commitment and the gentle centrality of the king to what's actually happening. That's how I would answer your question, I think. Speaker 5: Thanks very much for this.

I had a question, I think, for Chris Clark. When I think about institutional decision-making today, I think about the stage setting for the decision-maker and the options that are presented. The military is very famous for presenting only one possible choice. Choice 1, do nothing, suffer humiliation. Choice 3, engage in all-out war and suffer a catastrophe. Choice 2, the reasonable, moderate position. Trump is unusual in choosing number 3. But that suggests that a lot of the decisional narrative is misplaced if it focuses only on the decision maker and not on the construction of the options. You mentioned that Frederick has a very bureaucratized and feedback-loopy decision-making system. Does that suggest that there was decisional authority in the option providers and the briefers and the [inaudible] who shaped the options? Christopher Clark: Another very interesting question.

Well, this is, by the way, a question which very much interested Schmidt, who wrote an essay called The Anti Chamber of Power in which he said he was thinking of men, of course, he who advises the sovereign participates in his power. There's no doubt that that happened in both of these reigns. I think it's inevitable, it's indispensable. People don't decide in a vacuum. Nobody does, everybody's getting options by one route or another. The differences are in how these options are being generated, I suppose. Whether it's the

same agency, whether a stable structure develops, which filters the development of options and also the flow of information to the key decision maker. There's a constant flux and something you can very easily write a history of.

That's not what I was talking about, the history in this case, but it's very important, and it's a complement with an E to the decision-making process, which is crucial, though I haven't spoken about it today. It is interesting, though, to note that the Great Electors' case it's very corporate, and they're always together. These people move around like a motorcycle gang. Pufendorf captures that when he says they got together, and at the beginning, they weren't agreed, but at the end, they were agreed. It's always this hive-like structure. Frederick the Great is a much more solitary figure, but he's dealing with getting a lot of paper from people, and he respects the advice. When he wrote these historical works, as well, he asked his ministers became research assistants and helped to write bits of the book, and so there's a lot of that going on as a warlord.

He developed something called the Of Tax Praxis, which is leaving the maximum amount of decisional discretion in the hands of the officer in situ because it was thought that officers in a sticky position on the front have a better basis for making good judgments than the Supreme Commander does. There's a complex history of how people apportion power within that relationship, but the relationship is always there in one form or another. Speaker 6: Thanks very much for this great first day. I think my question just goes back to the issue that Victoria Fredo was asking you about, and it just concerns whether there's anything interesting or general to be said about the relation between, on the one hand, the decisiveness of a decision, as you put it at the beginning, and the pathos with which the decision is made.

It seems like those two things can easily come apart, your own narrative of the electors compared to Frederick II seemed to bring this out. They were both making decisive decisions, but Frederick II wasn't really thinking of himself in those terms. There are lots of nodes in human history, maybe Christian's example of the decision that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall was certainly a decisive decision, but it may not have been made under the self-conception of oneself as a decisive actor in history as the decider, those things can easily obviously come apart. By the same token, someone could think of themselves in this very pompous way and just be making trivial decisions to keep people tweeting about him every day. I'm not going to name names.

I found this a really interesting nexus in the narrative you were telling today, and was just wondering if there's anything general to be said about the relation between these things. Christopher Clark: Well, that's another very interesting question. I think that in the two cases I've already talked about, it'll come up again tomorrow. There's an interesting inversion, that is, that the great elector is the person who thinks of himself as a decider. But actually, a lot of his decisive interventions, such as let's go, let's move into Pomerania and chase the Swedes turn out not to be very consequential because the Swedes keep on coming back. The Swedes are like that. You defeat them, and you seem to have beaten them into the ground, and then they just reappear, partly because they're being supported

by the perfidious French.

There's a lot of pruning things back, but then they grow back, so it's much less consequential than one might think. On the other hand, this very patrimony, which he inherits in 1640, which is a complete mess and overrun by soldiers and bandits, and militias, and so on, is a stabilized, peaceful state with an embryonic central administration by the time he dies in 1688. Something has been achieved, but the great decisions that Pufendorf placed at the center of the drama do we go with Denmark, against France, or with France, against Sweden, and so on. They weren't nearly as consequential as one might have thought. Much more consequential were the clever matrimonial politics of Brandenburg that gave them claims which they were able to keep on renewing until the moment was right to actually press the claim home. Whereas in Frederick's case, well, there you have exactly the opposite.

The invasion of Silesia is profoundly consequential. If you just think about what might have happened if they hadn't taken Silesia, probably the Saxons would have. Then we'd be looking at a very different history of Germany. There would be no Ba Rush in the school, there'd be a weird Saxon in Germany. I don't know if there are only Saxons in the audience, but it's interesting to think about that. That would also have changed the course of Polish history because the Saxons were in personal union with Poland. That is a truly consequential decision, but not one around which Frederick organized his philosophical understanding of who he was and what he'd achieved.

Speaker 7: I believe you had mentioned something about the historicity of the modern decision when the lecture opened, and I wanted to take the chance to ask more about the point of Hermeneutics that was raised as offering an alternative mode of explanation in comparison to a causal mode. Professor Clark, I wanted to ask whether you think, in a theory of the modern decision, that that is something like two different kinds of categories of explanation are needed, what role causality can have, and I wanted to ask, more generally, maybe a question to either of you, how to understand a non-causal?

If we think about intentions that describe motivations or beliefs or things like this, what it means to think about those as not having a causal force, but what then explains a motivating force when it comes to the link between the thing prior and what causes the action, and why not whether causality perhaps could not be thought of as having in a more capacious sense as maybe indirect causality or partial causality rather than something that needs to be put aside towards intentions as a separate category. Speaker 2: Shall we take a second question? Christopher Clark: Yes, Christian can maybe respond to that first, and then I'll say something because it touches on your question about different layers of causality. Christian Lists: Say something very quick on this.

Of course, there are many different notions of causation, which I didn't have a chance to disambiguate here, but I think the key difference between a causal explanation, a standard causal explanation, and an intentional explanation is this. In a causal explanation, you might say a particular, let's say, state of the system necessarily leads to that other state

that it causes, necessary relative to the laws governing that system, so there is no further contingency between the cause and the effect according to the model that we're given. In an intentional explanation, on the other hand, when you describe a particular set of beliefs or desires or other mental states, and then you say, well, this particular agent has acted in such and such a way because of those beliefs, desires, and intentions.

It's these mental states that, in a sense, rationalize this choice, so they make it rational or intelligible that the agent would choose in this particular way, but the possibility of doing otherwise or doing something else always remains there. Contingency is built into the logic of the explanation in a way in which it is not in the straight case of the causal explanation. You can think of an intentional explanation as a rationalizing explanation or an explanation that renders something intelligible, but with contingency built into the explanatory logic. I hope that addresses part of your point. Christopher Clark: I was thinking that was a very interesting comment. I think that you put me in mind of something interesting about the invasion of Silesia. One could downplay the causal impact of the invasion of Silesia by saying that the invasion is impossible unless a woman comes to the throne in the Habsburg monarchy.

There had been various efforts to prevent that from producing mayhem. The so-called pragmatic sanction was all about everybody agreeing, yes, we know you don't have any male offspring, and it's going to be in breach of certain laws of governing the inherited succession in various parts of the Habsburg patrimony. But we agree not to take advantage of that when your daughter becomes queen or becomes monarch. She wasn't actually queen. Maria Theresa becomes monarch, and then Frederick is not the only one to take advantage of this. There are numerous powers which leap on bits of the Habsburg patrimony. The Bavarians are very active in this, the Saxons, and so on. It's to preempt those others from taking an advantage that he wants to take for himself, namely, for example, seizing Silesia, Frederick goes on the march. It's just a very early move, it's already happening in December 1740.

It takes hardly any time for him to decide to do this, so it's the quickness of the decision which makes it appear bold and surprising and a major consequential intervention, but you could also simply say it's a consequence of biology. There is no male heir, and as a consequence, there's a woman. As a consequence, there are a female regent, there are questions about the succession. This is going to produce instability, as indeed it does. It happens to come at the same time as the death of a Tsar in Russia, which produces uncertainties about the succession there. That means Russia is not going to intervene, so the moment is, as it were, almost pressed on Frederick.

This is one of the interesting things that you can see him as seizing the moment in a very preemptive and aggressive way, and that's how contemporaries saw it. There was a wave of outrage and also excitement about this young prince, who nobody heard of, suddenly doing this extraordinary thing. But you could also tell it as you were hinting, you could say that causality works in a more complex way than that, and they're along causal chains, and he's just one blip on one of those sequences. Speaker 8: Thank you for all of this. I'm

interested in your thoughts on decision makers' efforts to avoid decision-making. Today, in armed conflicts and other human rights abuses, we see decision makers' attempts to avoid being in a position to make decisions, perhaps in order to avoid responsibility for those decisions.

One example of this that we might be seeing is targeting decisions in armed conflict. Unclear what the motivation for that is, but it may be that decision makers are trying to avoid being held accountable for undue targeting saved civilians, efforts on the part of state actors to push borders out so they don't have to deal with decisions when it comes to migrants. We see this in corporate crime as well, people at the top who are trying to avoid knowing about what's going on in the activities of those who are underneath them in the hierarchy. I'm interested in your thoughts on how we think about history differently, say, the history in the context of armed conflict, when we do see decision-makers making these efforts to avoid being in positions of making decisions. Thanks.

Christopher Clark: That's another extreme mutiny question, which I haven't really given any thought to, and I need more time to think about it, but it is self-evident, a very important feature of how people in power relate to and handle the problem for decision-making. The chief problem that you're drawing attention to is the nexus between decision-making authority and responsibility. If you make the decision, you're responsible for the consequences. This is something that quite often worries people. You can deal with that either by simply not making the decision or delegating it, too. One of the thing that often happens in Britain, for example, is a parliamentary subcommittee is appointed or an inquiry and so on, takes over the responsibility, or you hand over responsibility for setting interest rates to the Bank of England, or whatever. There are ways of, as it were, parking difficult decision-making processes in another place.

I think also, the other thing that happens is the situation where decision makers who clearly have played a role in the decision-making process then narrate it or justify it in terms which greatly diminish their own responsibility by saying, well, yes, I'm the one who said to do this, but there really was no alternative. If I tell you what situation we were in, you will see that I had to behave like this. I had to make this choice, but it's a large question, the question of people who avoid decision-making. As an indecisive person myself, I should have spent more time thinking about it, but certainly, you've set a hare running there, and I will start pondering on that. Thank you.