The Decision in History

Christopher Clark: Now, yesterday, I'm not going to summarize the whole thing, but I opened with a letter from Kaiser Wilhelm on the 1st to Bismarck, if you recall, a letter in which the Kaiser congratulated him on the 25th jubilee of his entry into office as minister president of Prussia. In this letter, he said, You and I have made world history together because we have made numerous decisive decisions in [inaudible] and He said, I'm including in this letter, a picture of the building where we made these decisions. From that, I developed a hasty sketch of what I mean by the modern political decision. It ought to emanate from an official site like a palace or the White House or somewhere like that.

What is it? Number what Downing Street? Number 10 Downing Street. There's Number 11, as well, Number 10, Downing Street or somewhere like that, that it ought that decisions are part of what being a statesperson or a politician is about. That's what a political career consists of the making of decisions. Finally, these decisions ought to be decisive. They ought to be inflection points in something that the Kaiser calls or the emperor calls world history or history tour cour. Then I went on to talk about two case studies, the great lecture of Brandenburg-Prussia and Frederick second of Prussia, having first done a hasty canter through the history of decision theory or parts of it.

If we fast forward now to the mid 19th century, we encounter a very different decisional style from either of the two I talked about yesterday, and I want to focus this time, not on a monarch, but on a powerful statesman. The Prussian parliamentarian, sometime parliamentarian, diplomat, sometime diplomat, and minister president, later German Imperial Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck. I want to begin with a speech that Bismarck gave near the beginning of his career in the immediate aftermath of the revolutions of 1848 when he first emerged as a public figure. It was the revolutions that enabled him to do that.

Before that, he was a completely unknown individual. In a speech of the 3rd of December 1850 to the Prussian parliament, one of the most famous in his career or it was to become one of the most famous in his career, Bismarck defended the Prussian decision to abandon something called the Erfurt Union and to accept the revival of the German Confederation, which had existed before the 1848 Revolutions, under Austrian leadership. Now, some clarification here will be helpful.

Erfurt Union, for those of you who haven't wasted your lives immersed in the details of 19th century German history, was a project to unify a project that failed, but it was a project to unify a number of the German states, the ones marked there in yellow, under a Prussian captaincy to form a German Union, which you can think of now as a precursor if you'd like to work with teology of the German state that would come about through the events of 1866 and 1870, 71. It was launched in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions in order to capitalize on the weakness of the Austrians. The Prussians knew that the Austrians would never allow a union of this happen, among other things, because it didn't include Austria. It was so dominated by Prussia.

They knew the Austrians wouldn't approve, but they thought now is the moment to seize the opportunity to create such a union, because during the 1848 revolutions, Austria was paralyzed by a huge insurrection in many parts of the patrimony of the Austrian monarchy, but in particular in the Hungarian lands of the monarchy, a Hungarian national uprising. They were incapable of intervening. In the first instance, intervening against this Prussian Unionist plan. It was a pet obsession of the Prussian monarch, Frederick William the IV, who hoped by these means to secure a stronger Prussian dominance over the lesser German states.

But most importantly, the Union Project, the Erfurt Union, was also passionately applauded by Prussian patriotic and German nationalist opinion. They weren't necessarily always the same people, but supporters of Prussia and supporters of Germany were absolutely out of their minds

with joy over this Erfurt Union, especially Protestant ones. Well, as soon as the Austrians recovered their confidence and defeated the Hungarian insurrection, they immediately swiveled, pivoted to focus on the Erfurt Union and demanded that Berlin drop this project immediately. Supported by Russia and the other powers, the Austrians even threatened Prussia with war unless its government signed an agreement known as the punctation of Olomouc, a town Olomouc which is now in the Czech Republic, undertaking to abandon forever its unionist plans and to join with Austria in re-habilitating or re-establishing the old German Confederation, an archaic political apparatus that by this time it seemed archaic that assigned a soft German supremacy to Austria.

For enthusiasts of the Unionist Project, and they include, as I said, many German nationalists, but also Prussian patriots, the punctation seemed or its acceptance by the Berlin government seemed a shocking defeat, a humiliation, a stain on the kingdom's honor that called out for vengeance. There were howls of indignation, and as Deusen, the great historian Deusen put it, tears rolled down the beards of many a doughty warrior. But Bismarck took a different view. In such weighty matters as Prussia's relationship with the rest of Germany, he argued, the decisions of the Prussian government ought to be swayed not by public emotion, but by cool and precise evaluation of the threats and exigencies of the moment.

Why should Prussia risk the recourse to war, as he put it, at a moment when our neighbors will stand in arms against us? That was in reference to the warnings from Russia, France and Britain that further unionist adventures might incur a conflict. Why Bismarck went on? Should we risk this venture at a moment when, and these are his words again, at a moment when every question touching on foreign policy could carry war in its belly. Prussia was not ready for such a standoff, he said. To add insult to injury, he went on to propose that it did not lie in Prussia's interest, and I quote, "to play Don Quixote all over Germany on behalf of disgruntled parliamentary celebrities.

Now, Bismarck's purpose was obviously not to win friends in the legislature. His speech had the opposite effect on the disgruntled celebrities in his audience. Rather, he was commending himself as a candidate for future high office. What's noteworthy is that he did this not by identifying himself as the advocate of a tendency or principle, but rather as a uniquely identifying himself or advertising himself as a uniquely skilled reader of the historical moment for decision. His point was not that a Prussian managed German Union was in itself a bad policy. He would himself later embrace exactly such a policy. Rather, it was that the time was not yet ripe for the decision to inaugurate such a union and second, his point was that the timing of that decision should not and would not be driven by public debate and media outrage, but by a cool appraisal of the risks and benefits. This was not a reactionary tirade, as it's sometimes been depicted.

It was, as Jonathan Steinberg put it. He wrote a wonderful book about Bismarck, it was a job application letter. It was not an appeal to his fellow parliamentarians about whom he had very mixed feelings, but to the king, and more importantly, his younger brother, the future king and later emperor William the 1st, who had become the political figure with whom he had the deepest and most abiding relationship, the relationship in some ways that defined the career, the Bismarckian career that we remember. The argument of this job application letter was not as one might have expected, I am a dependable conservative. It was, I am a competent maker of decisions because I know how to fit the decision to the moment.

Now, this separateness from a specific ideological coalition was central to Bismarck's decisional approach, both in domestic and in foreign policy. Bismarck adopted a posture of ideological detachment, distancing himself from his conservative allies and reserving the right to compact where it seemed opportune with liberals and even with social democrats. He met with LaSalle, for example, to the great horror and scandal of those who found out about these secret meetings. What this posture of detachment meant for Bismarck's understanding of decision making and foreign policy emerges very clearly from an exchange of letters in 1856 and 1857 with his well, not exactly friend Frenemy would probably be a better term, Leopold von Gerlach. There's Leopold Von Gerlach in his advanced years, an impressive looking figure, as you can see, a key figure in the conservative evangelical circle at the court of the Prussian king Frederick

William IV.

The background to the exchange between Gerlach and Bismarck was the Crimean War at the mid 1850s. This was a pivotal moment because Prussia had chosen to remain neutral in the Crimean War, not to join the group of nations, including France and Britain, Piedmont, and other states, attacking Russia and supporting the Ottoman Empire, but to remain neutral, not to support Russia, not to oppose it, but also not to support it. This horrified Leopold Von Gerlach. Gerlach objected to this policy. He argued that a conservative counter revolutionary like Bismarck ought always to align himself with the conservative powers against the progressive ones. He said, How can you be neutral when it's a choice between the progressive liberal West, and the conservative East? You must side with the East because you are a counter revolutionary. Napoleon the third of France, in particular, he argued ought to be anathema.

There ought to be no communications with someone like Napoleon the 3rd because he was a piece of toxic sputum belched up from the guts of Satan. [Laughter] He explained that international politics was about the interplay among states. Sorry, Bismarck disagreed with this diagnosis. He said, This can't be the basis of a foreign policy. He explained, international politics is about the interplay among states. It was not a showdown between revolution and counter revolution. Of course, he added, of course, I detest the excesses of the revolution of 1848. He didn't go on to say, as he did later in his memoirs, that 1848 was the moment that made him that turned him into the man of history that he became.

But he did make it clear that he understood Gerlach's hostility to the revolutions. But he went on to say that decision making in international relations was a game of chess, not a game of whist. He said to Gerlach, you think it's a game of whist. You think that there is a trump's. There is a suit of cards that is Trump's, just like in Bridge. Whist operates the same way. If a particular suit is trump's, then even a two in that suit, even a two of hearts will trump an ace of diamonds. He said, But international decision making is not a game of whist. There are no trumps. It's a game of chess in which the free play of reason is what's involved. Here we see a very famous picture of Bismarck, which comes from the era of the Kulturkampf showing him and the Pope.

But what's interesting is the choice of the metaphor of chess. People often spoke of Bismarck as a chess player, and he himself often used chess, not just the metaphor of the chess player, but other chess metaphors like chess moves or where I place my forces on the board. Interestingly enough, the word for chess pieces in mid 19th century German was force. The pieces were called forces Gefte. When you talked about chess, it sometimes sounded as if you were talking about the domain of war.

But in any case, he said, international relations is a game of chess. It is not a game of whist. There are no trumps, and you've got to improvise. As each new situation comes up, you have to improvise in a way which enables you to use the maximum number of combinations of the maximum number of pieces. You can't exclude any square on the board. Everything must be possible. Politics must be the art of the possible. It could not be the pursuit of an ideological program. Bismarck, so I think, would have been horrified by JD Vance's speech to the Munich Security Conference. There he is there speaking to the conference in February 2025, in which the vice president aligned himself and his administration with a transnational coalition of rightist groups and parties and a vowed that he believed the threat posed by the woke left to be more urgent than the one posed by the Russians.

Whose invasion of Ukraine and unrelenting provocations, incursions and disruptions, and these happening all the time, overflights of Finnish and Norwegian Swedish airspace, attempts to work out where cables are so that you can disrupt them, arson attacks, cyberattacks and all kinds of other things. Vance spoke past the representatives of the sovereign states gathered in the room as if he were a Leninist addressing the workers of the world or a religious leader speaking for his co-religionists in all countries. Bismarck would have seen in this mode of address, a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the international system, and Vance underlined this by then going off to have a tête-à-tête with Alice Weidel one of the heads of the AfD. Central to Bismarck's conception of domestic and international politics was the notion that statesmanship

meant managing the relationship between forces whose relative strength and reciprocal relations were constantly in flux.

If that was the case, then success, by Bismarck's reading, depended upon acting at specific junctures when the current alignment happened, however, briefly, to favor a particular course of action. Moments of decision and decisive moments, the two are not exactly identical, were the joints from which his political ego narratives were constructed. The memoirs are a very interesting study in this, and because they are machine readable, or they're available in digital form now, you can actually check them. You can actually check, for example, the occurrence of terms like moment and, augenblick moment, [inaudible], and so on. You find that they really are the joists. They're the joints from which the architecture of his political thought is built.

What point was there in seeking a military showdown with Austria if the current constellation was inauspicious? The presentation of a new press law to the Reichstag should be delayed. He liked the content of the press law. He said it should be delayed. He told the emperor in May 1873, until the moment, bis P.u.N, when the harmonization of the German Penal Code created a consistent basis blah, blah, blah. During the political tensions in the summer of 1878, when there was talk of a dissolution of the Reichstag, Bismarck accepted the case for a dissolution in principle, but added, "I do not think that the correct moment for such a decision will arise this autumn." I could list countless such examples from the memoirs and the correspondence. You'll have to trust me on this. The underlying point here is simply that these references to decisive moments are not a stylistic feature or a metaphor.

They take us to the heart of Bismarck's understanding of politics. If politics at home and abroad meant managing the interactions of numerous variables whose mutual relations were constantly changing, then it followed that high office and the power that came with it belonged by rights to him who could anticipate, read, and exploit the conjunctures that provided opportunities for decisive action. The idea that political decisions might be conditioned by situations that created certain constraints and opportunities was not new, of course. We've seen how central it was to the reign of the Great Elector. He, too, spoke of Konjunkturen of conjunctures, and Sit Lester, sort of trends of the time. The difference was that in Bismarck's time, the constellation of current affairs appeared both to change much more rapidly and to be much harder to read or forecast. We come back to Christian List's comments about determinist or deterministic and non-deterministic systems.

Part because and they were hard to read, in part because there were so many more moving parts in play parliaments and the factions within them, the press with its followings, the quasi federal complexities of the community of German states, comparable in some ways with the unfinished federalism of today's EU, and the broad social coalitions that were starting to shape German politics, such as: nationalists, social democrat, liberal, and Catholic activist networks. The pressure to intervene, to choose and decide became an existential condition. The revolutions of 1848 had something to do with this. They complicated the environment in which the statesmen acted because as the historian Johann Gustav Droysen put it in an essay of 1851, they unleashed the masses as a factor of unpredictability in public life.

But 1848 was also important because the debacle of many of the great, not all, but many of the great political enterprises of that year ushered in a sober realist style, a preference for a form of politics grounded in a pragmatics of power, whose primary task was the evaluation of the balance of social and political forces. The term Realpolitik was coined in these years by the political scientist August Ludwig von Rochau. There he is, gazing soulfully at the viewer, who argued that the beginning of all political understanding lay no, that's Motley.

What am I talking about? It's not. I don't have a picture of Rochau. Sorry. That's somebody else entirely. So much more soulful, in fact, than Rochau. Rochau argued that the beginning of all political understanding, and I quote, "lay in the analysis of the forces that shape, form, and support the state." These were the words of a disenchanted liberal chastened by the turbulence of the revolution and by the complexity and ambivalence of their consequences.

But this style of thinking, which we've come to call realist, John Bew wrote a very good book about this, connected Rochau with the scientific humanism of Marx and Engels. Because after all, Marx and Engels wrote a marvelous article in 1850, just about the time Rochau was preparing this, he was actually writing the book at the time. They wrote an article in which they said, "Isn't it interesting how the great words of 1848 have been revealed to be completely empty: right, constitution, freedom.

What we need is not the empty words of revolutionary rhetoric. What we need is a science of the forces that drive social change." Something very similar can be found on the lips of the Italian moderate politician Massimo d'Azeglio who said, "The Italians must finally learn to understand the science of power." Bismarck's realism is part of a broader coinage. It's not just a conservative phenomenon. It's something that transcends those political categories. Perhaps no other statesman embodied as fully as Bismarck, the realist idea of what a political decision maker should be. It's interesting that in a lot of the writings, the literature on realism, Bismarck is often cited as a locus classicus of the realist decision maker. For the first time, one might argue the belief that political action should be grounded in a process of disinterested, multi-factorial appraisal became part of the decision making process itself.

In this moment, one could say the self-consciously rational actor in inverted commerce, of course, was born. The apotheosis of the decision that we encounter in Bismarck corresponded to a particular form of historical narrative. Among his favorite books was the History of the United Netherlands, and there we come finally to John Lothrop Motley. The man Bismarck loved more than any male non-relative. He loved him partly because Motley never posed a threat to Bismarck. There was never any competition between them. This was a book beautifully written, still actually very interesting to read today, thickly saturated. He was an American, a book thickly saturated with moments of decision. They had met as students, by the way, at the University of Bonn. In every chapter of this work, Motley situated the actions of his protagonists within unique envelopes of time.

The effect was to sharpen awareness of the contingent quality of every historical situation, the time limited character of opportunities, the suddenness of threats, the simultaneities, often hidden from the protagonists of the narrative that revealed the true meaning of events. We find exactly the same logic and texture in Bismarck's own correspondence and memoirs. Again, you could capture it with a picture. Among the many paintings that hung in Bismarck's estate at Friedrichsruh, Pride of Place went to the third version of Anton von Werner's history was painted for Bismarck for his birthday, history painting of the proclamation of the German Empire on the 18th of January 1871. There's a wonderful book by Thomas Gaehtgens by the way, about the various versions of this painting. It was commissioned by the emperor and presented to Bismarck as a birthday gift in 1885. This is a decisional painting, Par Excellence. The positioning of the chief personalities was manipulated to foreground Bismarck's centrality.

General von Roon or von Roon, who wasn't actually present, was inserted to the right of the Grand Duke of Baden because of his close collaboration with Bismarck over the military reforms that made victory in the war against France possible. Also, incidentally, the same reforms have precipitated the constitutional crisis that brought Bismarck into power in the first place. Bismarck was painted in a white mess uniform, which he wasn't wearing at the time. He was wearing a dark uniform. In the earliest version of this painting, which was destroyed during the Second World War, it's very hard to pick Bismarck out because he's just one dark uniform among many others.

But in this one, he glows at the center of the painting. The composition is centered on the gaze that connects Bismarck with the emperor, the two great decision makers. It's worth that relationship that is celebrated in the letter with which I began, is here rendered in paint, and it's backdated to the moment of the proclamation in 1871. It's worth noting here that over the last 18 months, there's actually been something of an upheaval in the world of Bismarck studies because two younger scholars, Jan Markert and Peter Startenberg have reappraised the relationship between the two men, suggesting that the emperor was a far more proactive part of the decision-making partnership between them than Bismarck's memoirs would lead us to

believe. They argue these young scholars argue that we've all been hoodwinked by Bismarck, and that, in fact, the emperor was a driving force.

There's been quite a lot of pushback on this from other scholars, but the arguments are cogent, and I think in the end, people will have to come to some compromise settlement. But the fact that the debate has flared up again in this way makes Anton von Werner's image even more interesting. If Bismarck's years in office marked the apotheosis of the political decision, the same cannot be said of the historically unique regime established by the National Socialists. The years of the Nazi dictatorship brought decisive interventions. I mean, the deciding continued. It's a constant. It's always happening. And they continued to be decisive interventions in virtually every domain of political, socialm, and cultural life. They were more invasive, of course, than the political decisions of any previous regime had been. There exists an enormous literature on decision-making structures in the so called Third Reich.

Ranging from early debates around the power of Hitler to the long running conflict between intentionalists who stressed the role, and that brings us back to the intentionalist model that Christian wherever he is, where's Christian sitting? Christian mentioned, ranging from the conflict between intentionalists who stressed the role of the most senior personnel and of Hitler in particular in generating the decisions that shaped the regime's policy, on the one hand and structuralists, on the other who insisted on the importance of pressures from below of institutional constraints and so on. The heat has gone out of this debate, partly thanks to Ian Kershaw's landmark Hitler biography, which nailed the case for an integrated view, incorporating elements of both perspectives, and he did that with tremendous skill, which I think is one reason for the great success and also the durable quality of that book, which is still widely read and very authoritative.

But the very existence of this debate around decision-making is interesting. Why was there so much mystery around the question of how decisions were made? Why has the quest for the decision to initiate the extermination of European Jewry been so beset by doubts and ambiguities? There have been debates about the power of Stalin, as Stephen Kotkin knows very well and about his regime, and about the power of Napoleon and virtually every other leader. There is debate about this, but nothing that resembles the long decisional wrangles among the historians of the Third Reich. The reasons for this are partly banal. Many key policy decisions were simply not minuteed or recorded. They have to be inferred from practice. The regime was inherently polycentric. This has long been established factional and competitive, not a leviathan, but a behemoth. The structuralist got that much right. Hitler muddied the waters, multiplying ad hoc agencies to pursue specific policies, and then stepping back from the resulting chaos.

But a deeper reason may also be that under the Nazis, the political decision shed the dignity it had enjoyed in the time of Bismarck. Nazi decision-making was embedded in a radically different kind of historical time. Bismarck had prided himself on the statesm's skillful management of the historical forces whose contention generated the churn and motion that history was made of. Hitler offered a much darker vision. In his universe, the interplay of forces took place under the iron rule of a struggle for existence. This was no chess game of the type often metaphorized by Bismarck, but a battle to the death. "Nature," Hitler wrote, "First puts living beings on this globe and watches the free game of energies. He who is strongest in courage and industry receives, as her favorite child, the right to be the master of existence." The fundamental choice in politics was always a binary one; to survive and triumph or to go under.

Hitler knew only one future, the preordained victory of Aryan forces over every opponent. Though, of course, he did, towards the end of the regime, also occasionally contemplate the opposite, namely the complete destruction of German civilization, which he regarded as just deserts for the Germans for failing to be strong enough in his support. The interplay of forces that had so enthralled the theorists of mid-19th century Realpolitik possessed no intrinsic legitimacy and certainly no charm in Hitler's mind. The decisional culture of Bismarck's time was now obsolete because this was a world in which the defining task of politics was no longer to balance interests or to mediate among them, but to pursue a single foreordained goal.

What Bismarck thought of as the forces of history were not to be contended with. They were simply to be mastered and permanently suppressed. Hitler was perfectly capable of working just as Stalin was, and this is one of the themes of Stephen Kotkin's biography of Stalin in an incremental and tactical way in the manner described by modern decision theorists. But he expressly rejected the notion, and he did so express these verba so important to Bismarck that politics was the art of the possible. His political calculus was not founded on probabilistic predictions that incorporated an element of contingency and presumed factors beyond the control of the calculator. Rather, it was articulated under the rubric of will and prophecy. Hitler often referred to himself as a prophet, most famously in that speech where he said, "I've been a prophet before. Now I'll be a prophet again."

He says, "If the Jews succeed in bringing America into the war and bringing about a world war, then the result will not be the triumph of Bolshevism. It will be the destruction of Jewry." But he was speaking as a prophet. Whereas prediction presents or represents the projection into the future of a historical time in which numerous possible risks and gains have to be weighed up, prophecy, as Reinhart Koselleck observed, "Draws no fundamental distinction between past, present, and future. It anticipates an end that is already given. It is posited upon the projection of millennial time into a promised future." That makes a huge difference to what you think you are doing when you make a decision. A further difference. In the time of the Great Elector, invoking the need for sovereign decisions was what helped to bring the beginnings of a central state into existence. The state argued itself decision by decision into existence.

Frederick II regarded the state as an already accomplished fact. He talked about it very often, lit in French, of course, but it remained the fixed point in his political cosmos. Its survival and enhancement were not just the primary purpose of his existence, they were also the only form of immortality to which he felt able to aspire. He wrote on several occasions when he imagined his own death, he said, "I will die, I will rejoin the universe, my molecules, coming back to Christian's metaphor yesterday, my molecules will merge with creation, but the state will persist, the state will live on." For Bismarck too, the state was a central category. The monarch was mortal. Bismarck saw three Prussian kings, two of them emperors to their graves during his career. But the state was not. It was a piece of eternity, and he often spoke of it as such. The turnover of individuals, he wrote in 1882 is irrelevant.

The state and its institutions are only possible if they are imagined as permanent, self-identical personalities. Bismarck always weighed his decisions against the interests of this abstract thing, the Prussian, later the Prussian German state. Against this background, the Nazis marked a dramatic departure. Having invoked the state of emergency at the outset by means of the Reichstag laws, Hitler never returned his regime to a condition of legal normality. More importantly, he denigrated the very category state. Already in Mein Kampf, the future dictator trashed the state focused historical narratives of the old German Empire. At the core of those narratives, Hitler argued, was a bogus legal theory, Jewish inspiration, whose central axiom was, and I quote, "Preservation at any price of the current monster of human mechanism called state."

For him, the operative category was not state, but people, folk, a biomass that would ultimately inherit the European continent, extinguishing all forms of life, sorry, not its own life, but extinguishing all other forms of life. The notion of foreign policy as a form of communication and bargaining on an equal footing with other states struck him as meaningless, a throwback to a bygone world. State implied an inertia, a ballast inherited from the past, a hindrance to the fulfillment of his movement's objectives. The four regime movements that I've been visiting, that we've all been visiting were very different from each other.

But none of them resembles the landscape of a mature Western democracy of the contemporary type, not even Bismarck's Wilhelmin Empire, which was far from a democracy. It wasn't really even a parliamentarian system. It was a military monarchy propped onto a representative parliamentary structure. The world around Bismarck was undeniably very complex, but the constraints under which democratic leadership functions today are surely of a different order. The state is larger, it is deeper, it's more numerous in its personnel, it's more complexly structured. The media landscape is more fiserous and more volatile. The constitutional and legal

constraints on executive power are or at least have been more robust and complex, at least in the Western sphere. The political career of Angela Merkel Chancellor of the German Federal Republic 2005-2021, conveys a sense of what this might mean for a senior decision maker.

The chancellor has traditionally been the decision maker in chief of German politics with responsibility for setting the general orientation of policy. This is a responsibility described in German as Licht linen competence.. The competence to set the general contours of policy. And Merkel's memoirs are very revealing, those are the memoirs there, about what this meant for her. When Bismarck wanted to capture metaphorically the decisional role of his office, he reached in two quite different directions. In moments of philosophical resignation, he described himself as a helmsman, borne ceaselessly forward on the river of time, capable of making small alterations to the direction of his craft, but powerless to reverse the current.

When he wanted to foreground the activist dimension of his role and his capacity to shape events, he imagined himself, and we've talked about this already, as a chess player whose task was to rally his forces on the board and to dominate the game. The chess metaphor tended to dominate when he was focusing on adversarial struggles like the Couturkamp with the Pope, with the Catholic Church. We saw that metaphor deployed in a cartoon depicting Bismarck's struggle with Pope Pius. The Helmsman metaphor, on the other hand, cropped up when he was more detached from events and strove to take a broader view when he was, for example, on leave. He often went on leave back to his estate, but also when he was in retirement. References to the Helmsman metaphor came up again and again and again. Everyone remarks on this. Merkel's account of deliberation and decision making is more embedded and immersive than either of these metaphors would allow.

When she moved into her new office in the German chancelly in Berlin, she noted with approval that the architects had placed it on the same level as the floor of the plenary chamber of the parliament building opposite. I quote " I was in the hands of these elected representatives. As a directly elected member of the German Bundesttak, I was also one of them." Now, this, of course, is a point of contrast with Bismarck. No one could vote Bismarck in or out of office. It wasn't that system. He was in the hands of the monarch, not in the hands of a party or parliament. Merkel was at the center of the arduous process by which Europe's leaders hammered out a response to the crisis that threatened first to bankrupt Greece and then to consume the Euro zone economy.

But there were no standalone decisions. She worked closely with a group of like minded states or rather of their representatives. She pushed this way and that as the opportunities arose, trying to move the process in the direction she preferred, but never breaking ranks with her colleagues. In this respect, she was less a helmswoman or a chess player than a rugby forward in the heart of the scrum. Today, Merkel is remembered above all, because one of the interesting things about the scrum is that if you're an individual, I remember as a very young person, I had a brief experience with rugby, which is so painful that I ran away from that sport as soon as I could.

But I spent about a year and a half playing it. When you're in the scrum, there's very little you can do to the direction of the scrum. You can push as hard as you want, but it's only together as a group that you actually achieve something vectorial and linear. Today, Merkel is remembered above all, for one decision in particular, the decision to open Germany's borders to refugees amassing in Hungary and the Balkans in the autumn of 2015.

But when Merkel discusses this moment in the memoirs, the emphasis falls not on the bold initiative of the chancellor, but on the accumulation of causal pressures. The decision, as Merkel recalls it, did not spring fully formed from the forehead or the forehead of the political leader, it arrived as a necessity. This, I think, is interesting in light of the fact that she formed a particular liking for the god Kairos. She talks about this in the memoirs. And during a visit to the studio of a German sculptor by the name of Thomas stram, she bought this statue and put it in her office in the chancellery.

But in the office, it was wrapped in bubble wrap. You couldn't actually see what the statue was

of. She was embarrassed about, didn't want people to recognize it. But Kairos is the Greek god of auspicious opportunities, auspicious moments, lucky moments for action. You can see, if you look at, at least the copy of an ancient Greek original from the fourth century before the Christian era. I've just included that because there you can see Kairos has a long forelock, and hair. The idea was that as he rushed by, he was always in a hurry, as he rushed by, you had to grab his forelock, and then you could be pulled along behind him, and she said she liked this very much and that Kairos had always been her great friend.

Here, we see that once in retirement, you can see it up there in the rear at the right, the bubble wrapping came off, and Kairos was there in all his splendor. One could read this emphasis on necessity and the multiplication of factors, causal pressures, and so on, as an evasion. In fact, some reviewers of the memoirs did exactly that and said, Oh, she's refusing to acknowledge, she's refusing to get down on her knees and apologize for the terrible damage she's done to Germany. Those are people on the right, obviously. One could read, this is a form of evasion, a bid to downsize a political decision, and we discussed this yesterday in Q&A about what happens when people don't want to decide or when they pull away from responsibility for a decision, because, of course, centrality in any process of decision commutes quite directly into personal responsibility.

But it also reflects a view of the political process that corresponds with a particular temperament and outlook. In her first life, Merkel was a theoretical scientist. She was not an experimentalist. Whereas, she was a quantum chemist, if you like. Whereas experimentalists intervene proactively in the process of knowledge production by creating and monitoring controlled scenarios, experiments, in other words, theoretical scientists, including quantum chemists of her type, are focused on the rigorous tabulation of data and the discernment of patterns. Merkel would bring these habits and skills to her life in politics. Complexity gives rise to dependence. There are problems one simply cannot solve on one's own. In politics, the answers are usually not solutions in the mathematical sense. This is a point that Max Weber made, but provisional outcomes generated by processes of competitive tendering and distributed cognition.

In fact, if you revisit the decision to admit refugees into Germany in 2015. You look more closely at what came after, you can see that having made that decision in the following years, Merkel stamped on the brakes, turned the policy around, and cut the numbers of immigrants very swiftly, they came down. But that, of course, has been forgotten against the background of the sort of outrage over the decision of 2015. Of course, in complex decisions, competitive tendering, distributed cognition, a plurality of stakeholders and experts interact under conditions more or less pressurized by the threat of a systemic breakdown. That's how in complex systems, those are the circumstances under which decisions are usually made. Malcolm's memoirs register this deepening of complexity as a central feature of contemporary political life. It's the light motif of the entire book.

The refocusing of attention that results takes us a long way from the actionist narrative, for example, of Margaret Thatcher, in her Downing Street years, whose memoir documents countless acts of individual will. I was chiefly concerned. I did not share the common view, I was right and so on, and so it goes on, and it's always "I." Whereas Merkl's favorite pronoun is "We". It's always we. We together did this, we did that, we did not succeed in doing this, we did succeed in doing that, it was hard work, but we dot. Absent, too, is the visceral antagonism towards political enemies that drives Thatcher's story, and even more so Liz Truss' truly hallucinitry memoir. I mean, the title itself is fabulous. Ten Years to Save the West, I mean, it is actually a book well worth reading. I laughed aloud reading. I had tears in my eyes because she's actually a great humorist, a great comedian.

I mean, there's a marvelous moment when she says, we moved into Number 10. It's not very nice. If it were Airbnb, it would not get good reviews, and so on. She said her favorite character in Number 10, was the cat that she inherited, which has been there since Boris Johnson and had a terrible case of fleas, by the way, this cat. I've forgotten what it was called, something Dermot or something. She said, Dermot was very helpful because Dermot knew all the people we needed to hate. In any case, in her memoirs, Liz Truss identifies most of the members of her own party

as sworn enemies. In formulating assessments of Merkel's performance as a decision maker, the political scientists and the journalists have produced a cluster of overlapping characterizations. It's been noted on the one hand that Merkel's decision or practice placed her in close vicinity to the ideal type of the "Rational actor."

Scholars have noted an emphasis on information gathering, the consultation of experts, and meticulous evaluation of costs and benefits, as one would expect of someone with Merkel's training in scientific observation. It's perhaps significant that in this sense, she comes from the same world and embodies the same priorities and mental habits as the decision theorists do. She comes from that world of observational science and reasoning. But others have noted that this clarity and method is tempered by a tendency to delay the commitment to long term objectives. We had a very interesting question yesterday about what happens when people don't want to decide when they hesitate or postpone the process. They've noted that this clarity is tempered by a tendency to delay the commitment to long term objectives and to adjust the definition of goals to opportunities, pressures, and constraints.

In this context, commentators have characterized her as an incrementalist in the mode theorized by Brabrook and Lind Bloum in 1963. In 2015, the Langenscheid dictionary's neologism of the year was Melkon, meaning to merka meaning to sit on the fence, not to decide. In respect of a number of emotionally charged issues such as the withdrawal from nuclear power after the Fukushima disaster or the decision to admit refugees, scholars have reached instead for Hebert A. Simons bounded rationality model in which the rational appraisal of interests may come under pressure from moral and psychological factors, or from the appeal to overriding norms, or principles such as humanitarianism, in the case of asylum seekers, for example.

Efforts to make sense of the multiple procedures and logics that may have driven her decision making in different phases of its evolution have yielded a so called polyheuristic approach in which decisions are seen as maturing through distinct phases, in which different criteria and methodologies may be applied. In other words, no single decision or model works. You need a composite of different models to explain the different bits of the process that produces an individual decision. This last approach associated with Alex Mintz at the Lauder School of Government in Hetzea and J. Tyson Chtagner at the University of Houston has the advantage that it makes space both for the non negotiable commitments that the decision maker imposes on herself a priori, such as coalition stability, commitment to the EU, German interests, and for the pragmatic adjustments needed to optimize outcomes within the resulting constraints.

What emerges from this literature is how difficult it can be, among other things, is how difficult it can be to disaggregate decision making from broader questions about leadership or negotiation style, especially when the process of decision is so closely tied up, as it mostly is in democracies with political signaling and communication. Though I should add that Merkel, who was very aware of this relationship between decision making and signaling, whenever she could, she strove to separate decision making and signaling functions. She usually, for example, avoided offering press conferences when deliberation was still underway, and she disliked it intensely when her usually male colleagues raced off from meetings to offer press appearances in order to associate with themselves, to take the credit for all of or part of a decision, or for a decision that wasn't yet actually ready, wasn't yet finished.

It's interesting to be reflecting on these matters here in Berkeley right now because questions about how political decisions are made and who has the power to make them or to impede their implementation are at the heart of the commotion around President Donald Trump. The decision scientists have been hard at work on the Trump presidential style, and there's an enormous literature just on the two Trump administrations. They are quite separate literatures. The decisionists have noticed the deepening disconnect between this president and the deliberative bodies around him. As they become more experienced and confident, it's been argued all presidents have tended to move from formal to less formal processes as they get more comfortable in their role, and that's what one would expect.

But even against this background, it's been argued Trump stands out. During his first

administration, he hindered the development, as one analysis puts it, of a thoughtful and structured advisory process and triggered conflicts with advisory bodies that gave rise to one of the highest staff turnover rates in the history of the modern presidency. That's one key contrast between the first and the second administration, and I'll come back to the second in a moment. In previous administrations, one analysis of immigration policy observes the president, I'm quoting here, the president and his top advisors would identify their policy priorities and then put the bureaucracy to work refining and debating them before the president gave his final sign off.

But during the first Trump administration, the senior advisor and director of speech writing Steven Miller, inverted this process. He would come up with an idea, have the president approve it, and only then start a policy review. Miller established policy coordination committees to short circuit internal debates. But these were nothing like the methodically organized policy committees of administrations past. They were simply groups hastily assembled at the last moment. Miller would hand pick lower level bureaucrats within the agencies, and he would run the meetings himself. Invitees were often unable to speak on behalf of their agencies because they were too low in rank to even know what their line managers thought on each policy issue. There has been dramatic structural change in the sphere of foreign policy, ever the preeminent domain of sovereign decision making.

A report in the Financial Times in summer last year noted the drastic pairing back of the National Security Council established by President Truman in 1947, and the jettisoning of dozens of seasoned experts in foreign policy and national security. It cited an official who observed that the traditional Washington foreign policy process led by the NSC has largely broken down under this administration. In the context of the current administration, attention is naturally focused on the president's extravagant use of the executive order. The orders cover a wide range of policy domains, from the economy and trade, foreign policy and the military, energy and environment, health and science, DEI, and cultural policy, domestic policy, the retaliatory targeting of opponents, immigration and border policy, and the creation of new agencies such as the Department of Government Efficiency. These signings are not just a political fact, they are integrated into the spectacle, into the theater, if you like, of the presidency.

Here just a couple of examples. There's one there. I mean, you've all seen these, I know again and again. But when you look at them in a sort of sequence, it is striking. The flip side of this decisionist self-image of the office is the removal at Trump's behest of the photo portrait of his predecessor, President Joe Biden Junior, from the new presidential Walk of Fame in the White House and its replacement by a photograph of the auto-pen used when the president is unable personally to sign a document, a gag intended to establish a sharp decisional contrast between the incumbent and his predecessor.

What these orders will accomplish in terms of lasting change is hard to predict because so many of them have been challenged in the courts and not all of them, I must say, not all of them are really clearly defined decisions. But together with other communicative acts, including litigation, speeches, threats, and so on, they form part of a policy of flooding the zone, as it's often been put, with declarations and announcements issued, to borrow Steve Bannon's troubling metaphor , at muzzle velocity. The storm-like profusion of orders and announcements exposes a broad spectrum of executive activity whose decisional intensity varies greatly. Is an executive order a decision? Some are, some are not. Some of the ones that are are likely to remain hanging in the barbed wire of the courts.

What about statements of intent? We will own Gaza or we will take Greenland or we need Greenland or we will make peace between Russia and Ukraine, we will make peace in the Middle East, and so on. Are these decisions? The fact that they are made through what Mitch McConnell called the largest megaphone on planet Earth, backed up by the awe inspiring power of the United States, makes them consequential as utterances, at least in their capacity to generate reactions.

But they also expose the fuzziness of the boundary, which I think this is common to all democratic settings, between decision-making and political signaling. The president's appeals to

the notion of a national emergency, civil war in the cities, gang invasions, American carnage, and so on, distantly recall the appeal to emergency in the age of the great elector. The tariff orders are grounded formally, juridically in emergency powers. The current war against Iran has waged on the grounds that it was the only means of averting the emergency that would have arisen if Iran had succeeded in acquiring its own nuclear deterrent. The charge laid by the estates against the great elector that he was himself engineering the crises he claimed to be obliged to resolve has also been laid at the door of the president of the United States.

But whereas the great elector had used it to circumvent and undermine the operations. Sorry. Whereas the great elector had invoked the power of decision in order to build a state where there wasn't one, Trump has used it to circumvent and undermine the operations of the state, at least insofar as the state's tasks concern the monitoring and the regulation of executive power. Particularly interesting is the invocation of the state as the Kryptonite that undermines the decisional autonomy of the executive. The visceral hostility of the MAGA movement to what they call the deep state puts blue water between the Trump presidency and most of the antecedents I've been thinking about. The great elector, as I've pointed out, was the Prussian state builder par excellence. King Frederick II was a conservative and incremental decision-maker in domestic policy in large part because he admired and respected the state structure he had inherited from his father.

Bismarck, as we saw, regarded the monarchical state as a precious inheritance and a source of stability. By contrast, President Trump sees in the inherited structures of the American state or in parts of these inherited structures, the ballast of generations of misrule and the captured plaything of the woke left. The only statesman from our gallery of Brandenburg, Prussian, German case studies who resembles him in this hostility to the state is Adolf Hitler. I'm not saying, by the way, Stephen, I'm not saying that Trump is a Nazi. He is not a Nazi. He's not even a fascist.

But it's simply the case that this hostility to the state doesn't resonate with any of those other cases, except with the National Socialist, one where we do find a really principled hostility to the state as an accumulation of mischief from prior eras and generations. In an interesting reflection on the first Trump administration, the political scientists Stephen Skowronek, John Dearborn, and Desmond King suggest that we should take the standoff between the unitary executive and the deep state seriously, or at least try and inquire what it is telling us. The unitary executive, they write, may be an authoritarian fancy. It may be nothing more than a license for arbitrary action. The deep state, as a polemical trope, may be a conspiracy theory, a paranoid projection. Both, as they put it, are weaponized phantoms of the republic. This is the point that the three authors make.

They do at least draw our attention to issues that really do matter, the weakness of the institutional constraints on executive initiative on the one hand and the genuine depth and scale of the American state on the other, about which it's perfectly reasonable to have a debate. There may be good and bad things about the depth of the American state in its current incarnation. In setting the state up as the enemy, Trump and his associates are trading on one of the central tropes of Anglophone historical awareness. I'm aware that there is also a specifically American trajectory to this and the American background to this, but I'm not going to dwell on that now.

But they are also trading on a central trope of anglophone historical awareness, which relates interestingly, I think, to the German examples we've been looking at. Because in the anglophone world, it's been the sort of default setting to suggest that the history of liberty can be told as a story about the emancipation of society from the monarchical state. The picture has always been different in Germany, where the argument usually operates in reverse. The history of freedom, and this is particularly the argument of Hegel, but not only of Hegel, is told as the story of the emancipation of the state from society. It's the state that's the freedom machine.

But the American state is surely not, for the most part, an antagonist of society, even if it has sometimes been depicted as such. It's deeply interwoven with and present in American society. It doesn't exist simply to tax and administer or to constrain. It is, as the historian Wolfgang

Neugebauer remarked to the ministries of the Prussian state, it is, among other things, a societal agency in its own right. Large parts of it, such as the regulatory authorities and the bodies tasked with the administration of public assets, are institutional expressions of the public interest, vis-a-vis the executive.

So it's not that the state is in these senses representative. It is, in these senses, part of the democratic dimension of the polity. One thing that emerges from these reflections is that the history of the political decision is not a linear story, I'm coming to my close now, of evolution and improvement. The Trump presidency has cast that nonlinearity into sharp relief. Modernization theory was never particularly interested in decision-making, but among its central tenets was the claim that as a society becomes more modern, power expresses itself in ever more impersonal forms through laws, regulations, protocols, bureaucracy. There is some truth to the notion that the growth of the state has tended to involve a suppression or at least a depersonalization of decisional initiative, along the lines foreseen by the French physiocrat Francois Quesnay who observed that in the future, when the laws truly ruled, the sovereign no longer would.

What we have witnessed is modernization in reverse, the repersonalization of power and an assault on those state agencies designed to prevent it. I'm not suggesting this assault has been particularly successful, by the way, but it has taken place. This observation may sound odd to those who have been thinking about the impact of AI and related processes, we had a question about that yesterday, and related processes of digital automation on contemporary decision-making. In a study of the errors that led to the recent American strike on an Iranian girls school in the city of Minab, a strike that killed between 175 and 180 people, most of them girls between the age of seven and 12. The AI analyst Kevin Baker critiques the media coverage of the issue for overfocusing on the threats posed by AI. There was a speculation that the Anthropic chatbot Claude had targeted the school and about whether this chatbot could be trusted to follow orders.

None of this, Baker argued, bore any relation to what had actually happened. The Palantir Technologies Maven Smart System that managed the strike is not an AI of the LLM type, but a targeting infrastructure that pulls together satellite imagery, signals intelligent and sensor data, and executes every step from first detection to the auditor strike. The result is, as was intended, a huge gain in efficiency. Using Maven, 20 soldiers can now manage a targeting process for which 2,000 were acquired during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Of course, the system is not error-proof. The school building in question had originally been correctly classified as belonging to a revolutionary guards base in the Defense Intelligence Agency database.

But this database was not updated in 2016 when the building and the land around it were sold and converted into a school. As Baker puts it, a chat bot did not kill those children. People failed to update a database and other people built a system fast enough to make that failure lethal. But Baker had a further point to make, namely that the compression, and this is the point that bears on decision-making, that the compression of time and the reduction of personnel achieved through the new system actually amplified the risk of error. Because they removed the layers of fact checking and cost-benefit assessment that made an error of this gravity less probable. The latency period between target identification and strike turned out to contain more than just wasted time and resources. It turned out also to contain various forms of distributed decision or discretion that could work as buffers against error, so at least Baker's argument.

Two insights seem to me to arise from this. The first is that the personalization of decision-making power and the depersonalization of delivery systems in the name of efficiency are in fact mutually reinforcing phenomena. The second is that when technocratic entrepreneurs sweat administrative systems down to the bare minimum, they destroy more than just inefficiencies. They may also strip out processes of appraisal and adjudication. They justify this effect on the grounds that by removing human adjudication, you also reduce the probability of error.

In this case, the cybernetic dreams of the tech bros are rooted in the same imaginary as the decision science of the 1960s and '70s. If we want rational processes and humans stubbornly

fail, as they seem to do, to be rational actors, why not squeeze the humans, or all of them, except the one in command, out of the system? It goes without saying that the impact of this process on humans will be highly asymmetrical. It will disempower a great many and empower a very few. For those of us who would wish political decisions to be the fruit of transparent and accountable processes of deliberation, and I'm not saying incidentally, it's one of the interesting things about Merkel's memoirs is that it's not clear that the very submersive form of decision-making to which she was committed actually generated better decisions.

What her memoirs really tell us is how extremely difficult it is for decision makers to operate under the terms, under the conditions imposed by a modern pluralistic democracy. But if we do want decision-making processes to become more transparent and accountable, then these latest chapters in the history of the political decision are presumably not great news. The structures, yes, have got better, and historians are inclined by training to see structures as strong and enduring.

But what if, as the novelist Paul Auster asked in an interview shortly before his death, what if the structures of good governance are made not of granite, but of soap? What if structures are softer than we think? What if they can be washed away? Structures can be defunded, shrunk, marginalized, or simply destroyed. When that happens, it's astonishing how quickly we slip back into a primordial decisional condition that we believed we had transcended. I think this is really interesting because as historians we often think that structures are very robust and persons and actors and events are soft. Remember the famous metaphor of, I'm going to forget it. I'm blanking his name now. Braudel. Fernand Braudel when he said the structures in history are the great waves, the great ocean waves. Events are the soft flaccid foam carried on their shoulders.

But it may be that events are actually quite hard and structures quite soft. They may be like overboiled spaghetti, rather than like steel girders. Under these circumstances, a progressive style narrative of what has changed, may come to seem less compelling than an account of what has not changed, what never went away. In a way we might see this is a vindication of decision theory. With its formalism, which enables it to be decoupled from a narrative of institutional progress of enlightenment, civilization, or whatever you like. Decision theory can direct our attention to the underlying dynamics of the decision in a way that clarifies our thinking.

But that doesn't need to mean that we abandon the quest to delineate a developmental history of the modern political decision, because now may precisely be the moment when we need to think about where the history of political decision-making is going. Where the history of this process is going and where we want it to go. For that some kind of teleios. It will be necessary for us to imagine some kind of teleios.

So we will need teleology if we start to think about what we want to happen rather than simply describing what has already happened. Teleology, the construction of narratives around an imagined endpoint, can narrow our field of vision, especially when we impose such futurities on a past that did not know them. But it may also be the key to plotting a path beyond the predicaments of the present. In a recent analysis of the US-Israeli war in Iran, the Tel Aviv based foreign policy analysis, Yonatan Touval, noted the unprecedented power of the targeting infrastructure available to those who are waging the current war.

But he went on to add, "Our leaders remain strikingly obtuse about human beings, about their pride, shame, convictions, and historical memory." Never, he wrote, has so much been seen by people who understood so little of what they are seeing. One effect of the current American administration is that it has had a collapsing effect on the developmental time built into modernist teleology. It has brought the past nearer. I think for historians, this is a very interesting moment. It has brought the past nearer, exposing commonalities and forms of kinship between this moment and other ones. This is what I was referring to when I said that some years ago I would not have dreamt of talking about some German cases like this and then leaping over to talk about a contemporary American one.

But it does seem to me that the Trump presidency has exposed issues around government and

the predicaments of people who are in power that are common to different eras and to different settings. By focusing on what is common from case to case under varying circumstances, decision theory uncouples the analysis from the teleology of modernism, exposing aspects of the process that were always there, but have acquired renewed salience.

Some of what is happening right now in the United States feels unprecedented, and probably is. The rank foul mouthed insults from the mouths of the most senior officials, these are the things, by the way, I was saying this to the chancellor last night at dinner, and I'm sure you're all aware of this, but just in case you're not, that if you're living in Britain, for example, or for that matter, in Germany or France, we are exposed 24/7 to American politics. It's not like where it's a very different situation for us from the one that you experience. The difference is that you have your friendship networks and your local environments and so on, which haven't changed very much.

So for you, there's a ballast of continuity and stability. But for people in Europe, who are also feeling the effects of world events in, for example, surging fuel prices, that's all we get. We don't have that ballasting effect of a local community, which remains tranquil and highly functional, as I know your communities are. We just get that fever pitch news feed. So we get the rank foul mouth insults, the gross misogyny, the denigration of decorated veterans, I'm thinking of John McCain, the crowing over the graves of dead opponents, the expletive ridden threats to extinguish civilizations, the fawning to foreign autocrats, and the disparagement of long standing allies. For me, I'm not a go-down-on-my-knees fan of Keir Starmer, but to hear him mimicking the voice of Keir Starmer in public and saying, I have to ask my team, and so on, as if it's somehow pathetic to have to ask for advice on a matter like joining a war.

That was one example. And I was reminded of Kaiser Wilhelm II, who had a meeting when he went to the birthday party of King Leopold of Belgium, and they were sitting chatting, as kings do at each other's birthday parties. And he said to Leopold, look, I've been thinking that if a war were to happen, the French were to attack Germany, we would need to go into Belgium. And you would need to let us in. And in that case, we'd be very grateful, and you can have the northern half of France, could be part of Belgium. Would that be nice? And the king began to perspire heavily and said, I would have to ask my ministers about this suggestion to which the Kaiser replied, I cannot possibly respect a king who has to ask his ministers. What's that about? So in any case, this mocking Keir Starmer because he said he would have to ask his team was extraordinary.

The servile Byzantinism, the racist smears, the corruption in every imaginable sense, the obsessive hacking at rivals and predecessors, the morbid narcissism, the hallucinatory gobbledygook of Vance, Hegseth, and the rest of them, these are outlandish and novel features of the incumbent and the milieu that is formed around him. It's understandable that they should attract attention. And I don't think it's wrong to be shocked by these things. But underlying these vexations are deeper questions, questions about the place of expertise in modern decision making, about the tension between policy control and flexibility in government and civil service management. Questions about the extraordinary weight that the complexity of decision making or the complexity of modern societies brings to bear on decision makers. I don't envy the people who have to do this. It's gotten more difficult. And finally, the enormous heft of a presidency established in what Eric Nelson, in a very powerful analysis of this tradition, has called the Royalist Revolution.

And finally, the place of that maligned, but seemingly indispensable thing, the state in modern American life. It's still too early to write the history of the political decision in the time of President Trump, but his administration and not least his approach to decision making, have at least had the merit, for which perhaps we should be ruefully thankful, of tearing away the shroud that concealed so many avoided questions at the heart of American power. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Sophia Rosenfeld: I'm going to pick up exactly where Chris just left off. When hostilities broke out between the United States and Iran in February of this year, newspapers were quick to label the net effect Trump's war of choice. The New York Times started using the phrase almost

immediately, calling the American attack on Iran the ultimate war of choice. The friendlier Wall Street Journal, without exactly endorsing this reading, claimed it marched that, quote, Americans have concluded that it is a war of choice. Media outlets around the world, from the Mond to India today have adopted the same phrasing.

The point has been to emphasize, one, this war's optionality rather than necessity or unavoidability. And two, the American president's ownership of the decision to pick this particular course of action from among the various possibilities or menu of options before him based on some combination of desires, values, and information, as well as formal and informal pressure and constraints. This sounds complicated, but it's, of course, a description of ordinary human behavior for all of us assembled here, even if none of us have the power to actually wage a war.

In fact, we make both consequential and inconsequential choices, which is what we generally call this constrained selecting from menus of options so often that we rarely pay much attention to the act itself. It seems, to me, at least, what humans do most of the time, sometimes well and sometimes not so well. However, many decision theorists, choice making does have a history, as we've started to learn this yesterday. Its quantity, nature, and significance have all evolved over time, and surely, will continue to do so. At the most basic level, both the number of options and the range of situations in which me, we, and I'm using we here in a very loose sense of, let's say, the people in this room for argument's sake, the number of options and the range of situations in which we are called upon to make a choice have expanded exponentially in the course of modern life.

But that's not the whole story. In addition, the very process has changed in form and meaning. And since Professor Clark started us illustrating his points with paintings, I'm going to do the same comparing two 18th century images to try to make clear what I have in mind. The first one is a rather typical rendition of The Choice of Hercules, which is a very familiar theme from poetry, opera, fiction, even garden design in the 17th and especially 18th centuries. Some of you may know that, for instance, John Adams suggested it would make a great seal for the New United States. This version is by the painter Paolo de' Matteis. And as you can see, this is very typical. Hercules stands in the center, and his body is torqued. He's going in two directions, which is typical of renditions of this scene. And he's contemplating two allegorical female figures.

Hercules is undecided between going with virtue on one side and vice on the other. But it's also clear to the viewer that he's ultimately turning towards virtue, meaning he's doing what's right according to and for others, as opposed to selecting her opposite, which would mean acting on one's own selfish desires. Freedom here means nothing less than making that decision, which is to say the correct decision or the decision to do what's correct of one's own volition.

So it's not free choice in our sense really. This is an old story and image, and it's widely repeated as an early modern behavioral model. I have just one more picture for you, but here we go. The second picture, dating from just a few years later, shows something newer. It's an engraving after a lost painting by Jean-Honore Fragonard, who was a contemporary [inaudible] we encountered last night, of a flirt or a coquette, who is also shown in the act of making up her mind, similarly leaning in two directions at once, though, also hinting at her final choice. There's very interesting bodily forms in both of these. Note, most obviously, the gender reversal in this non-allegorical rendition. This is a contemporary young woman, fashionably dressed as a shepherdess, don't ask, picking between two men or boys, both of whom are dressed also as shepherds. Then note the lack of moral weighting between her options.

Her choice is only a matter of personal preferences. That is, liking Option A more than Option B or vice versa. Her choice is what we might now call a value neutral one and thus, is also considerably less constrained by external factors. In the 18th century, being a coquette and using the traditional play of choice was not necessarily something celebrated. If you read literature this period, the coquette usually gets pretty badly punished by the end.

But this second originally feminine inflected form of choice has by now come to dominate both our behavior and our models from the way we pick a sandwich or a college course, to even the

way we vote in what is now known as our free time. Choosing in accordance with our personal preferences is thought to have two big advantages. It gets us what we want, or in the case of voting, there's some aggregation of all of our personal preferences that may or may not get us what we want. Choosing also gives us standing as full fledged, autonomous adult people in our own eyes and in the eyes of others. Our social sciences, still primarily rooted in the idea of the rational chooser or homo economicus, at the center, reflect that conception of the human.

Even if we now don't think of that person as necessarily a perfect chooser, that rational choice model remains so dominant in our analytic models, a nd so does it remain common to the way we narrate our own lives, whether we're powerful figures or not. Indeed, the celebration of choice is also where our economic and political ideals, or what you might call capitalism and democracy, most obviously run together from ad campaigns to human rights decrees. Choosing on the coquette model, or if we want to be a little more updated about it, we might call the supermarket model or even the Tinder model, is the modern form of freedom, whether the consequences are explicitly political or not. It gained steam in the 19th century and fully comes into its own, not really, I don't think, until around the Second World War.

Even those who push back against its premises, as many people around the world do to this day, cannot now easily evade it. That longer story is, in fact, the subject of this book that was just referred to The Age of Choice: A History of Freedom in Modern Life. But the choices of modern political leaders, Professor Clark's focus yesterday and today, necessarily take a slightly different form, even if those leaders also live in the modern age right along with the rest of us. Statesmen, rulers, elected officials, including female ones now like Angela Merkel, have long been expected both to operate like Hercules, taking into account the collective sentiments of their community and linking themselves to the public good whatever they decide and to be individuals with distinctive values, tastes, preferences, and more recently party and other kinds of allegiances, just like everyone else.

And as Clark shows, the particular decision making, which I see as a broader category than choosing, that we associate with these modern leaders has a particular history that can be reconstructed as well. It can be gleaned from leaders' actions, from their self descriptions, and even from histories written and paintings painted during their own reigns or mandates. And from these sources, which I should add are really very different from the kinds of sources one needs to use to construct or reconstruct the history of decision making or choosing among people who are not leaders, from these sources, a history of what Clark calls decision styles or decisional cultures can be outlined as a companion to decision science.

So what is a decision style? For Clark, it seems to encompass both the performance of political choice as a ritual activity occurring in specific settings and moments and conceptions or representations of political choice animating those performances or justifying them afterwards. And he suggests that German and especially Prussian leaders from the mid-17th to the mid-20th century offer prime examples and maybe even in the beginnings of a typology of these decisions styles. They allow us to see change over time as well, even if not directed towards any single Telos. Last night's talk began with the great elector who turned the state of emergency into a means to increase his power as executive and make decisions that would change rather than uphold the pattern of history, all as chronicled, especially by Pufendorf.

The evening ended with the great elector's grandson, Frederick the Great, who expanded this emergency power along with a bureaucracy focused on information into the foundation of absolute authority, illustrating how the status and significance of the ruler's decisions developed in Prussia right alongside that of the state. This afternoon, we started with Bismarck, a critical figure for Clark in so far as he comes closest to the now familiar model of the rational chooser, advertising himself as expert at both considering the options and engaging in dispassionate risk benefit analysis while still insisting on the power of his consequential decisions to shape the future. And we moved on to Hitler, who operated when it came to decisions out of a conviction about the correct direction for history that only allowed for binaries and a struggle to the death.

And that was all before, considering briefly as a coda, Merkel, an incrementalist and the only one

of these figures to function in a world defined by the separation of powers common to a modern democracy. Clark then suggested a use value for his historical examples in the present. They help us, he claims, to see Trump and potentially other leaders of democracies with populist and authoritarian tendencies now in the 21st century, not just as people who have seized the modern authority to choose, but as people whose style of choice is an important element of the way they wield power. Trump, according to Clark's analysis, has little in common with the model provided by Bismarck or even Merkel, despite the ostensibly similar democratic trappings of the American president's rule.

Instead, Trump resuscitates an early modern attachment to the idea of changing the course of history through his personal decisions or interventions. And here I might add, his seeming acquiescence to his critics' claim that he's engaged in a war of choice seems striking to me. He hasn't actually refuted that idea. But unlike his 17th century predecessors, he does this by reverting to a Hitler-like desire, if not ability, to dismantle the enormous and amorphous state at whose head he sits and whose laws he is sworn to follow, seeing it primarily as an unwelcome constraint on his powers. I hope that's a fair summary of things. This is ultimately a fascinating reading of a long history of leadership, not to mention Trump's relationship to it.

Still, there might be room for refinement of the larger argument about how to write the history of decision making when it comes to both the powerful and those not so powerful. I'd like to point to one possibility tonight how we might think more about the decision making of those with power, and tomorrow on my second response, about the less so. So let me return briefly then to our collection of political leaders. To fully account for the differences in decision-making that each of Professor Clark's statesmen represents, two additional factors might be worth adding to the mix. The first is consideration of the full range of powers as well as limits on them that each faced in their professional capacity, and not just in the execution of war and peace, which is really where we've been concentrating.

After all, before the idea of the formal separation of powers, statesmen at various moments acted not just as chief executives or as heads of state determining foreign policy, but also sort of all wrapped up in one as legislators, as judges, as keepers of tradition, and a variety of other roles, but they also faced a variety of constraints, formal and not. And it's very likely, I think that decision-making styles were adjusted to circumstances. Say the difference, and here's where I think somebody like Arent is very helpful : the difference between deciding and judging as not all simply one form of decision-making. Even when formal law didn't require those distinctions. I think that explains why most of the pictures that seem to illustrate decision-making, not mine, but the ones shown earlier, show ceremonies and spaces about the announcement of particular kinds of decisions as opposed to the mental or thought processes behind them.

Different kinds of power, in other words, require different kinds of rituals and different choice architecture in part, and the reason for that is to in some way clarify functional differences between different kinds of decision-making that rulers were called upon to make in different moments and circumstances. And from this vantage point, the distinctiveness of Trump stems not just from the personalization of rulership, evocative of early modern kings. It also stems from his refusal to limit his decision-making powers to any clearly demarcated sphere as required by the US Constitution. And it lies too in his unwillingness to abide by any existing protocols related to those decisions or even to invent new ones in the style of Napoleon. This is why it's near impossible for the rest of us to disentangle when Trump is acting as a statesman versus a private or self-interested person, or when he's acting as commander in chief versus judge versus legislature.

One could say this is just he's erratic, but it's also an unwillingness to recognize differences in occasion and obligation and thus style. This may, in fact, end up being the hallmark of this particular 20th-century authoritarian when it comes to the decision-making realm. I would say, first, to fully explore the history of decision-making among leaders, one would have to think a little bit more about the particular kinds of power and constraint and disaggregate the different functions that leaders confront.

But to fully account for differences in decision making, the historian, I think, has also to view each of them in the context of the larger climate of habits of mind in which he and very occasionally she resides. To make more concrete what I have in mind, Bismarck's attachment to imagining and presenting himself as choosing among discrete options based on his own assessments and moral compass cannot be seen as a possibility equally open to any of these men in their bids for increased power. On the contrary, it's worth taking seriously that Bismarck's decisional style coincides precisely with the historical moment in the 19th century when the new model of choice with which I began these remarks, along with an increased sense that engaging in choice was the path to self-realisation and autonomy, took off in everyday life and in philosophy alike.

You can think here of John Stuart Mill, essentially a contemporary arguing about freedom being the possibility of choosing one's own life path through a process of choice-making that really can't have come from a different historical moment. It's related to changes in the much larger context, not just in the political world. Of course, we also see the emergence of all sorts of rules for how to constrain this kind of choice-making, so it's not ultimately as disruptive as it could be. Bismarck's application of this new mental model, albeit to conservative rather than liberal ends, belongs finally to a larger story of cultural change, one in which governing is not cordoned off from the rest of life, epistemologically or otherwise.

Again, with Trump, we might well wonder, as a result of this adjustment of frame, is the current US president emblematic of a turn in decision-making style and leadership that belongs exclusively to the political realm and is likely to morph yet again with each new occupant in the White House or with his war of choice in which neither his reasoning nor his options have ever been spelled out, is he representative of a larger turn in contemporary thinking about thinking with considerably wider cultural purchase? In making us consider such questions, Professor Clark's own interventions could not be more timely, and I look forward to more discussion this evening and again tomorrow. Thank you. [Applause]

Stephen Kotkin: The Tanner lectures are on human values. But I've spent my lifetime studying in human values. It's not clear to me how I ended up in this seat. Yes, I do have a Berkeley PhD. Yes, I am wearing Australian boots from RW Williams.

Speaker 1: Congratulations.

Stephen Kotkin: Yes, I have a portrait of Bismarck in my home study on the wall. And yes, I've written the only Stalin biography that opens with Bismarck. But still, it's improbable. That decision is one that I'd like to know how it came about. Chris Clark is a treasure. He's the deserved Regis Professor. He's one of our great historians. His books are transcendent. He's a practitioner of exceptional craft, elegance, rigor, judiciousness. History is a craft, and he's a living embodiment.

But history is also a body of knowledge. That's where we run into a little bit of trouble. You see, in 1996, someone named Ian Listik wrote about how social scientists rely on historical cases to make generalizations. The challenge was, which history are you going to rely on? Is it going to be Regis Chris' version of the Great Elector or someone else's version of the Great Elector? Is it going to be Chris' version of Bismarck or the new version of Bismarck, which he seems attracted to, although maybe not fully?

When you're making a social science general patterns argument with historical cases, how do you know which history to choose and which not to choose? That's a very consequential decision, and it's really troubling methodologically. But I'm not going to talk about that. I'm also not going to talk about Chris's veering off into state personalism, pathologies of giant organizations. His focus was on decision-making, and then we ended up with a discussion about how the state works or doesn't work, how particular leaders use the state or fail to use the state, how there's maybe a deep state or suspicions of a deep state. I'm not going to talk about that either.

What I am going to talk about are five small points. The title of these five points is Rubik's Cube with No Solution. So if I get to the end, you'll see. The first point, Regis Chris, is scope. We have

two Chrises, so I'm going to call him Regis Chris, which, by the way, is how he's supposed to be addressed, not as professor.

Regis, the first point is scope. You get into this morass of modern and having to differentiate yourself from the pesky pre-modern and the ancients. And you craft yourself an escape from this problem, but it is a problem we all run into calling something modern. I had this with the Stalin biography, and I came up with the solution that modern are the attributes of the most powerful states in any time period. It wasn't a chronological epoch. It was a series of attributes that certain great powers had that if you didn't have them, you suffered under them.

But whatever solution you come up with, the biggest challenge in scope is not pre-modern or ancient, but the Asians in the story. Europe is a legitimate subject, but how do the Chinese conceptualize decisions, including political decisions? They have maintaining harmony. They have deliberate vagueness; they have saving face. They have a whole lot of stuff. One could venture into India or venture into other domains. Again, Europe is a legitimate subject. Asia is not the subject of Regis Chris, but you need to explain the scope of your generalizations. That's the first point: the scope of your generalizations. The second point is selection. Your leaders and your examples. You know a lot about Prussia. We know that from that magnificent Iron Kingdom, and so it makes sense for you to play to your strengths.

But some might say, well, why those leaders and not others? Why those examples? Why those time periods? How do you justify your selection, your decision to focus on those particular cases? You also select decisions that happen rather than decisions that don't happen. This is like people writing about nationalism who never take a failed case of nationalism to explain how nationalism comes into being. It's not only deliberate indecision, but it's also failure to have a decision, not a deliberate failure if you're not a deliberate evasion of decision. I wonder about the selection of your cases and the selection of decisions. My third point is about the theater of power, the theater of decision-making. This has come up.

So we have leaders performing absolutism. They're performing autocracy. They're performing enlightened despotism. They're performing consensus rule, or they're performing reality TV and WWE. They're all performances in the theater of power, and you are highly focused on those performances without necessarily calling them performances. You talk a little bit about political signaling, we get that. But the monarch wants to appear as powerful and decisive or as benign and just or as whatever the monarch wants to appear as. Bismarck wants to come across as a rational actor or a real politician or a grand strategist. We all know the reality. Those of us who've read your work and others' work, we know the empirical story, and we see ourselves in their play-acting. Play-acting these roles sometimes effectively and sometimes not, which then the historiography can fall for hook, line and sinker. Maybe we don't fall for it because we think we're clever.

But we're not, but we think that. But I wonder how you think about theater of power, theater of decision making, trying to appear in command and control. There's this television show called The American Presidency, and it portrays the American president as in control. If you've ever been in the White House or in the Situation Room or with their advisors, you know that that's not how they feel what's happening. Do they know, or do they assume it's performative, and does that matter for your purposes? Point number 4 is the Wizard of Oz. The Wizard of Oz is in some ways about knowing that there's the wizard behind the curtain and it's fake.

In other words, yes, how do people think about decisions? How do people legitimate or justify decisions? But so many people in positions of power, they know the Wizard of Oz behind the curtain is a staged apparatus. Yet they act, nonetheless, in an as if fashion. That's not just a theater of power. That's consciousness that it's fake, but they do it anyway, and they hope for success. That's a level I would suggest, maybe you won't agree, deeper than just the theater of power or the signaling.

Now, number 5, the Rubik's Cube. The Rubik's Cube has a solution, but decision-making in high office doesn't have a solution. There is no way to align the cube. There is no equilibrium in

power. Moreover, you're looking at one side, and you're trying to align this side, but you are misaligning the other sides while you're trying to align the one side you're looking at, because you're not looking simultaneously at the other sides. I'll go further. Not only are you moving the cube in your decision-making, but somebody else is moving your cube, too. Maybe it's Xi Jinping, maybe it's Vladimir Putin, maybe it's Meritus School riffing in ways that he could potentially want back, but a lot of people are moving the cube. You're not seeing that, and you're not fully in control of that. I've been using this metaphor of the Rubik's Cube for teaching for some time. I've never served in government.

I have no security clearance, and I rarely have access to the corridors of power, but I occasionally do. One of the things you discover about the American superpower is that they don't understand until they're educated the hard way how many strings they're pushing on when they're in positions of power. This gigantic military, this gigantic economy, this gigantic this and that and this and that. They get in there, and it turns out that things don't happen. They make a decision, they announce it, it doesn't happen, or people don't implement it, or somebody abroad decides they don't want to do it. It's not only that the bureaucracy might sabotage it. It's that there are pathologies of giant organizations, and levers of power are really hard because they're not pre-made. You have to cultivate them. One of the most interesting things about seeing a superpower up close is how limited the power can be in so many specific instances.

This is the Rubik's cube that you think you're aligning, but you're actually misaligning or someone else is aligning on your behalf in ways that you don't like. All of this is about your decision making story, not orthogonal to your decision making story, but these comments are directed for you to think through how you want to tell your decision making story. But I'll leave you with this. Chairman Chris, I believe I still have a moment here. Only five points. Come on.

We have these metaphors in biology. One is intelligent design, and the other is emergent properties. Intelligent design as you would expect, is sort of God made the universe. Whereas emergent properties are about how genes might mutate and some might survive and some might not survive, and the actions of so many things, people, organisms, create properties that are not intended, but that emerge in the process of these interactions in a complex way that's nonlinear with nonlinear causality, and you get some type of system that is not attributable to intelligent design.

In other words, seeing the properties you can't say, I intended this or so and so intended that. They happen often despite your perverse and unintended consequences, and so you have this challenge of over indexing, as they now say, on things like policy, intentionality, and under indexing on circumstance, accident, contrivance, emergent property. But this was solved by somebody you know better than I do, who became the methodological North Star of my Stalin biography, and that's Von Moltke, the Elder. Those of you who know whether from Professor Shan, where I learned it or from Professor Clark and others, Von Moltke was the head of the general staff, essentially Prussian creation in Prussia then in Germany. He came up with this theory of strategy. His theory of strategy was not that you planned something out.

It was that all of these things happened that you didn't do, and you then were in this landscape, these set of circumstances, and strategy was about perceiving opportunities in that landscape and trying to turn them to your advantage. Maybe things look bad, but if you could figure out how to flip them a little bit or tweak them, they might look a little bit better. Or as the great transcendent philosopher, Mike Tyson said when he won a boxing match. Mike, congratulations. You won. Did you have a plan? He said, yes, I had a plan, and then I was punched in the mouth. That's how decisions work, including in the White House, including I would imagine in the chancellery, including in just about anywhere, including in the house we were in last night. The chancellor here at Berkeley, a different kind of chancellor, admittedly.

I put to you that Von Moltke some ways could be a lifeboat for you as he was for me, in reconciling some of the tensions that you know well about and maybe I've reminded you about, but are within your problematic of how to deal with decision making. Anyway, Godspeed, and it's just wonderful to be up here on the stage with you, Sophia. [Applause]

Christopher Clark: Great. What fantastically deep and thoughtful and insightful comments, and I don't feel able to do them justice straight off the cuff, but I'll do my best very briefly just to come up with a couple of thoughts in response. Just thinking of what Sophia was telling us. I mean, I think it's fascinating this idea because what I was trying to do is pull the political decision out of this larger context of decision and choice making that is, pertains really to all human social life.

What Sophia, in a way is doing is saying, let's reconnect them and see what happens. I think that's an extremely interesting exercise that made me think among other things, about the relationship between decision and choice. I mean, there is decision theory and there's choice theory, and they overlap, but they're not quite exactly the same. Although one might say every choice is a decision, you could say that, and no one would really object, and every decision is a choice. They seem really to be almost synonyms, but they're not quite because the two words place the emphasis in different places. It seems to me that the word decision carries a temporal charge, a preemptive quality. You have to do something in order to prevent something else from happening. Whereas a choice often implies, I mean, in the case that we saw in those two images, choices between personified options, so they're human beings.

They aren't just inert. But their role in the picture is, those two ladies, the virtue and vice are just languidly standing or lying, and the two beaus that we see there are just gaping at the girl. Whereas in the case of a decision, really we'd need something like, I mean, the two of them would have to be the commanders of two armies or perhaps the Mongols are on the horizon and unless a decision is made quickly, they will invade and kill everybody. There would need to be some temporal pressure for this to be a decision of that kind rather than a choice. It seems to me that decision and choice have slightly different quantitative fields. One of the interesting things about decisions is that it brings into focus precisely the quality that Stephen was drawing attention to with his Rubik's cube metaphor, which I thought was fascinating, that you're not the only one who's tampering with the situation.

That's what makes these processes so difficult to see through. They're so opaque and so unpredictable, and nothing ever turns out the way you want it to. I remember the advice that I think LBJ gave to Nixon whe said he said, you're going to be sitting up in that chair, and you're going to think you're the best thing since sliced bread. People are going to turn up, and you're going to tell them to do things. Then you walk out, they're not going to do those things. Nobody's going to do what you want them to do. As LBJ put it in a typical LBJ, similarly he said, it's a bit like the boy who went to the hoochie ******* show at the country fair and came out saying, taint what it was made out to be. Because he was disappointed. It wasn't as hoochie and ******* as he had hoped it would be.

I think the thing about decisions is that they do invoke a world in which everything is in motion, whereas choices, if you think about a choice situation, you're standing in front of a selection of options that you can simply take possession of. I also thought very interesting in your two images, Sophia, was that, la coquette fixee, this one here, it's a binary choice. There are two people. There's two boys. We don't know exactly what they personify. They're just beaus or gallants, and she's going to choose between one and the other.

But she's pausing, and as you pointed out, there's an element of torque. She's off balance, leaning in one direction, but extending the laurel in the other direction, so it's ambivalent. We don't know for sure whom she's going to choose. The same thing is present with the choice of Hercules. He's slightly twisted and so on. But again, it's two ladies, virtue and vice. It's just two things. Whereas, of course, political choices one of the vexing things about them is precisely that they often involve a great range of possibilities like the amendments to bills in Parliament or in Congress. There are all sorts of different versions which have to be borne in mind. They don't come in an absolute unstilled form, and that means you have a great multiplication of different options. That by the way is just first set of thoughts.

Also what you said about the ambient cultures of decision making, of thinking about thinking, as I think you put it, a very interesting formulation, are very important. I think one can do that for someone like Bismarck because of this ambient interest in the decision and because of the way

in which literary narratives in his era configured as decisional sequences where people were key protagonists make decisions which change everything. You think about that 19th century literature on decisive battles, which is a great 19th century genre, the hundred decisive battles that made the modern West, for example, that made modernity. Each one of which changed the course of history. There are larger habits of thought that feed in. That, again, is a way, as you point out, as a way of reconnecting the broader environment of choice making and decision making with the behavior of those very few who are in positions of political power.

Then coming to Stephen's comments, I think your point about the theatricality of all of these decision making processes is absolutely right, and it's something I under exposed in my own words yesterday and today. That's to say, I exposed it very patchey. I occasionally refer to it in the case, for example, of the coronation ritual that follows the great elector's death. I mean, some years after his death, but the fact that that ritual enacts the coronation as a decision simply to create a kingship rather than representing it as the inheritance of a tradition. That's one example that's theatrical context in which these cultures play out.

But one could do it consistently for all the cases and show how the performative dimension of decision making shifts. I think decision making does have in all these cases. I'm not sure about the Nazis because of their radical demotion of the decision, but I think it does certainly it's theatrically very present in all the other cases. I'd have to think more about that, but I think Merkel, in a way was very resistant to the idea of theatricalization of decision.

In fact, she was very reluctant to use press conferences as a way of advertising the outcome of a decisional process, and that made her unusual. Sometimes her advisers were frustrated and said, we've done something really good. We need to take this to a press conference, and she would say, no, it's not ready. There are further bits that need to be added on before it's complete. Then to her great irritation she'd be told that Belusconi had just held a huge press conference and so on. There are different relationships with the performative, I suppose. There are different relationships between performance and decision making from case to case. Then your question about decisions that don't happen, that's very interesting because I was thinking, what would that mean, a decision that doesn't happen? Because until the decision is made, it's not a decision.

So there is that. But you made me also think when you made that remark of the phrase avoid decision, which was very central to the very critical analysis of the German Constitution of 1871 that Wolfgang Mommsen wrote. When he said that at the heart of that constitution were a lot of decisions people should have made, but didn't. One of them was a decision about the relationship between military chains of command and civilian chains of command.

How do you make that relationship work in a military monarchy? He said that decision was simply dodged. It may be. I mean, I'm not an American constitutional historian. I know very little about the American Constitution, but it may be that one could apply a similar analysis to the American Constitution. Perhaps there are decisions that could qualify to use Mommsen's term, as avoided decisions. All constitutions have them. No constitution can cover all the eventualities. Decisions aren't just things that are made in real time and television time, whatever. They are also things that are embedded in the constitutional framework in which people have to operate. Then I thought also your Wizard of Oz comment was very interesting. Could it be that people know that they don't have very much power? I think the answer is yes, they mostly do.

To think of Bismarck, we were talking about this yesterday, and Stephen made the point that it would seem very misjudged to praise Bismarck as the ultimate rational actor, given the fact that he spent a great deal of his life suffering from various psychosomatic illnesses brought on by his absolute rage at those who were preventing him from doing the things he wanted to do. They included psoriasis, cramps, terrible intestinal disorders, which I won't go into, and skin diseases of one kind or another, sleeplessness, endless lists. Jonathan Steinberg's book is very good on this, and he cites Bismarck at one point as saying, he turned up at a meeting with very red eyes, and somebody said, he didn't look well. They said, you're not looking well, Your excellency. He said, [Foreign], I per hated the entire night. I was awake with hatred the entire night.

These are not people who feel power surging through them like electricity, this will be done, that will be done. You're probably right. I mean, not probably. I think you are right that one has to see the flamboyant waving of the executive orders and so on, as in a sense a concession, an expression of frustration as a dimension in which theatricality is replacing something more efficacious. As I said, a lot of this decisional activity is not actually very decisive, either in its content or in its impact. There is a very strong element of theatricality there, which I haven't said enough about.

Finally, I'll stop here because there are lots of things one can say about both of the comments, which are both brilliant, and by the way completely vindicate as did the comments yesterday from Christian List, the choice of these three commentators. I think it's been a really exceptionally interesting juxtaposition of perspectives. But the last thought was the one about the state. You said I veered into a discussion of the state. I think you may be right about that. Actually that's the bit about the argument that I was uncomfortable with. I thought I'm aware that there is this, and it's not just in the United States, it exists in the UK as well and in Australia, my native Australia, a kind of skepticism and hostility about the state. Stephen accused me yesterday of being a German, which is a terrible thing to be accused of.

But it is true. An Australian. An Australian German, he claimed. But in fact I have no German relatives, unlike President Trump. But I do think that there is this tradition of hostility to the state and skepticism and distrust, and it can be very vehement, but it probably is very different. The state doesn't mean the same thing in these different contexts. I think I have to be more careful about that. I might simply just excise that and focus instead on these other dimensions where I think it works better and where it's more closely connected to the spinal theme of decision making.

But thank you both for your absolutely amazing comments, and thank you, Christian, for your comments yesterday. Once again, thanks to the Tanner Lectures Committee and Board for choosing these amazing colleagues to talk about this. I mean, I've never had an experience like this, and it's pretty amazing. Thank you. Thank you.