

Uncertainty and Its Discontents

This volume provides the first major study of worldviews in international relations. Worldviews are the unexamined, pretheoretical foundations of the approaches with which we understand and navigate the world. Advances in twentieth-century physics and cosmology and other intellectual developments questioning anthropocentrism have fostered the articulation of alternative worldviews that rival conventional Newtonian humanism and its assumption that the world is constituted by controllable risks. This matters for coming to terms with the uncertainties that are an indelible part of many spheres of life, including public health, the environment, finance, security, and politics – uncertainties that are concealed by the conventional presumption that the world is governed only by risk. The confluence of risk and uncertainty requires an awareness of alternative worldviews, alerts us to possible intersections between humanist Newtonianism and hyper-humanist Post-Newtonianism, and reminds us of the relevance of science, religion, and moral values in world politics. This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

Peter J. Katzenstein's work addresses issues of political economy, security, and culture in world politics. His recent books include *Protean Power: Exploring the Uncertain and Unexpected in World Politics* (co-edited with the late Lucia Seybert, Cambridge University Press, 2018) and *Downfall: The End of the American Order?* (co-edited with Jonathan Kirshner, Cornell University Press, 2022). He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Science in 1987, the American Philosophical Society in 2009, and the British Academy in 2015. In 2020 he was named the twenty-sixth recipient of the Johan Skytte Prize.

Cambridge Studies in International Relations

Editors

Evelyn Goh
Christian Reus-Smit
Nicholas J. Wheeler

Editorial Board

Jacqueline Best, Karin Fierke, William Grimes, Yuen Foong Khong, Andrew Kydd, Lily Ling, Andrew Linklater, Nicola Phillips, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Jacquie True, Leslie Vinjamuri, Alexander Wendt

Cambridge Studies in International Relations is a joint initiative of Cambridge University Press and the British International Studies Association (BISA). The series aims to publish the best new scholarship in international studies, irrespective of subject matter, methodological approach or theoretical perspective. The series seeks to bring the latest theoretical work in International Relations to bear on the most important problems and issues in global politics.

- 158 Peter J. Katzenstein
Uncertainty and Its Discontents
Worldviews in World Politics
- 157 Jessica Auchter
Global Corpse Politics
The Obscenity Taboo
- 156 Robert Falkner
Environmentalism and Global International Society
- 155 David Traven
Law and Sentiment in International Politics
Ethics, Emotions, and the Evolution of the Laws of War
- 154 Allison Carnegie and Austin Carson
Secrets in Global Governance
Disclosure Dilemmas and the Challenge of International Cooperation

Uncertainty and Its Discontents

Worldviews in World Politics

Edited by
Peter J. Katzenstein
Cornell University, New York



Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-316-51266-1 — Uncertainty and Its Discontents: Worldviews in World Politics
Edited by Peter J. Katzenstein
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE

UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781316512661
DOI: 10.1017/9781009070997

© Cambridge University Press 2022

This work is in copyright. It is subject to statutory exceptions and to the provisions of relevant licensing agreements; with the exception of the Creative Commons version the link for which is provided below, no reproduction of any part of this work may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

An online version of this work is published at doi.org/10.1017/9781009070997 under a Creative Commons Open Access license CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 which permits re-use, distribution and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial purposes providing appropriate credit to the original work is given. You may not distribute derivative works without permission. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

All versions of this work may contain content reproduced under license from third parties. Permission to reproduce this third-party content must be obtained from these third-parties directly.

When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009070997

First published 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-316-51266-1 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-009-06897-0 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>List of Contributors</i>	viii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
1 Worldviews in World Politics PETER J. KATZENSTEIN	1
Part I Substantialism and Relationalism	71
2 Political Worldviews in International Relations: The Importance of Ideologies and Foreign Policy Traditions MARK L. HAAS AND HENRY R. NAU	73
3 Relationality, Post-Newtonian International Relations, and Worldviews MILJA KURKI	97
4 The President as Mascot: Relations All the Way Down JAIRUS VICTOR GROVE	124
5 Jewish Questions and Jewish Worldviews MICHAEL BARNETT	146
Part II Accountable Agents and Epistemic Engines	177
6 Weberian and Relationalist Worldviews: What Is at Stake? HENRY R. NAU	179
7 Oceans, Jungles, and Gardens: World Politics and the Planet PRASENJIT DUARA	203

vi	Contents	
	Part III Science and Religion	227
	8 Scientific Worldviews in World Politics: Rationalization and the Cosmological Inheritance of the Social Sciences BENTLEY B. ALLAN	229
	9 Religious Worldviews in Global Politics TIMOTHY A. BYRNES	255
	Part IV Conclusion	277
	10 Of Gardens, Forests, and Parks PETER J. KATZENSTEIN	279
	<i>Index</i>	353

Figures

1.1 Ngrams: worldview, theory, model	<i>page 7</i>
1.2 Worldviews and analytical perspectives	44
5.1 Worldviews of Western Jews	157
7.1 Conceptual map of cosmologies, worldviews, and world politics	210

Contributors

- BENTLEY B. ALLAN Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Johns Hopkins University
- MICHAEL BARNETT University Professor of International Affairs and Political Science, George Washington University
- TIMOTHY A. BYRNES Third Century Chair of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, Colgate University
- PRASENJIT DUARA Oscar Tang Family Distinguished Chair Professor of East Asian Studies, Duke University
- JAIRUS VICTOR GROVE Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Hawai'i at Manoa
- MARK L. HAAS Raymond J. Kelley Endowed Chair in International Relations in the Political Science Department, Duquesne University
- PETER J. KATZENSTEIN Walter S. Carpenter, Jr. Professor of International Studies, Cornell University
- MILJA KURKI EH Carr Professor in International Politics in the Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University
- HENRY R. NAU Professor Emeritus of Political Science and International Affairs in the Political Science Department and Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University

Preface

As I was cleaning out my office one quiet winter afternoon, I heard a colleague down the hall talk like a diligent gardener to a student about the “treatment effects” of various experiments on different political subjects. In sharp contrast, the daily news I have been reading, especially in recent years, reports scenes from the jungle. My political sensibilities tell me that gardening should not be the only occupation for students of world politics.

Why are we drawn so strongly to gardens rather than jungles when studying world politics, and why do we prefer the resolvable, risk-inflected world over the radical, uncertainty-marked one that we so often encounter?¹ The answer lies in a view of the world, for the most part held unconsciously, that prefers to highlight the features of politics which lend themselves more readily to systematic study and political control. Hence, students of world politics are habituated to focus their attention largely on the garden-like elements of world politics ruled by resolvable risks. They leave underattended the jungle-like elements marked by radical uncertainties. World politics encompasses both jungles and gardens, and uncertainty as well as risk. If we focus only on predictable risks, we are closing our eyes to a world filled with unpredictable potentialities waiting, for better or for worse, to be actualized by political action or inaction. They are always out there.

The 2020 pandemic illustrates the bone-shattering uncertainty of the world in which we live. People experience this uncertainty viscerally, as different forms of vulnerability: about their very lives, their economic livelihoods, their loved ones, and the communities in which they live. And the television is filled with incessant chatter by those in power who, often unavoidably, lack adequate knowledge about the virus and how it can be mitigated or contained. In the words of Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Romer, “uncertainty is the overwhelming problem.”² Dramatic environmental change in the wake of global warming,

¹ Kay and King 2020: 14. ² Romer, quoted in Seib 2020.

furthermore, may well make the pandemic a starter dish for a full menu that can pose “an unprecedented existential and temporal *uncertainty* concerning the future of . . . Earth itself.”³ The pandemic illustrates a persistent problem. Many of the most momentous events in world politics are totally surprising to those professing special expertise in the analysis of world affairs.

During the last decade I have been trying to understand why. Together with Stephen Nelson – then a graduate student at Cornell and now a professor at Northwestern University – I wrote some papers to better understand the collective silence with which the discipline of political economy met the Great Recession of 2008, the greatest calamity that had hit the international economy since the Great Depression of the 1930s.⁴ To my astonishment, I learned that economists, political economists, and Wall Street bankers had built their models on the assumption that we live in a world of knowable risk only. Once the crisis hit, those risk models proved to be both totally useless and totally wrong. Little has changed since. Uncertainty is still a marginal concept in finance.

The obliviousness to uncertainty, I sensed, had political roots and consequences worth probing further. Together with the late Lucia Seybert and a group of colleagues, I developed the concept of protean power to capture the unpredictable potentialities that exist all around us.⁵ This was little more than a reminder that Machiavelli’s writing about *fortuna* is as relevant to today’s understanding of world politics as Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. While we were developing this argument, the reaction of my colleagues was overwhelmingly skeptical. Did we need still another conceptualization of power, they asked, since the conventional one focusing on control seemed to have served us so well over the centuries? Brexit and the election of Donald Trump in 2016 changed that reaction, but only a little. Readers were willing to concede that they had been surprised by the outcomes of the referendum and the election, glossing over many other momentous, unexpected events they had conveniently chosen to forget. The seminars I attended and the lectures I delivered on the subject of protean power typically elicited an awkward silence followed by the question “This is very interesting. Let me try to translate what you are saying into my own language.” That language inevitably was Newtonian and steeped in the notion of control power and manageable risk. I sensed that concepts, theories, and models were grounded in something more basic that made it very difficult – and often

³ Hamilton 2019: 610.

⁴ Katzenstein and Nelson 2013a, 2013b; Nelson and Katzenstein 2014.

⁵ Katzenstein and Seybert 2018; Katzenstein 2020.

impossible – for members of these audiences to acknowledge the importance of uncertainty and the relevance of protean power effects for the analysis of politics.

That more basic thing, the opening and closing chapters of this book argue, lies in the conventional understanding of science, which most students of world politics boil down to commonsense reasoning. A Newtonian view of the world is baked deeply into our language and sensory experience, and often holds sway over subconscious ways of thinking. No stranger to fragility and uncertainty, journalist Thomas Friedman advised the Biden presidential campaign in 2020 to adopt an ad stating “I believe in the Enlightenment, Newtonian physics and the Age of Reason. The other guy doesn’t.”⁶ Really? Why would Newtonian physics be the answer to a Post-Newtonian president trafficking in disruption and uncertainty?

The conventional theories, models, and hypotheses that inform our study of world politics are grounded in a Newtonian worldview that has no place for uncertainty. My chapters in this book attempt to uncover this hidden foundation and to contrast it with a Post-Newtonian worldview more attuned to the existence and importance of uncertainty. For more than a century, theories and approaches grounded in this Post-Newtonian worldview have generated remarkable progress in our understanding of the natural world. Is there something that students of world politics, and the social sciences more generally, could learn from the natural sciences that think of the world as filled with potentialities and uncertainties? As Albert Hirschman observed about the social sciences, including the study of world politics, a long time ago, they often “consider it beneath their scientific dignity to deal with possibility until *after* it has become actual and can then at least be redefined as a probability.”⁷ Today it is a marker of the professional respectability of the best scholars of world politics to be carefully trained in a broad array of statistical methods and thus to acquire an intellectual disposition that overlooks *ex ante* possibilities by treating them as *ex post* probabilities.

The authors of the book’s eight other chapters have a variety of interests in their exploration of worldviews. Mark Haas and Henry Nau focus on foreign policy ideologies and traditions interpreted from the perspective of worldviews (Chapter 2); Milja Kurki on relational cosmology as a central scientific contribution to the relational revolution in the natural sciences and its implication for the analysis of world politics (Chapter 3); Jairus Grove on relationalism as shown in American nuclear war preparations (Chapter 4); and Michael Barnett on Jewish nationalism and

⁶ Friedman 2020a, 2020b. ⁷ Hirschman 1980: xii.

xii Preface

cosmopolitanism in disparate Jewish communities (Chapter 5). Henry Nau (Chapter 6) and Prasenjit Duara (Chapter 7) reflect on these contributions through the lenses provided by their distinctive worldviews. Finally, Bentley Allan (Chapter 8) and Timothy Byrnes (Chapter 9) present challenging arguments about science and religion as today's two foundational worldviews. In short, this is a hybrid of an edited and single-authored book that analyzes both implicit and explicit worldviews.

I want to acknowledge here that my understanding of Newtonianism and Post-Newtonianism is that of a barely informed layperson. I bring no special expertise to any number of extremely complex subject matters and theoretical debates in physics and cosmology. Asked to read a few pages, a physicist friend of mine acknowledged that “physics is part of human culture, sure . . . to try to lift someone’s language about very arcane physics and paste it into some other situation should not be attempted.”⁸ None of what he had read, he argued, was of any relevance to the social sciences or humanities. I promised myself and him that, in the interest of full transparency, his unsparing judgment would be included in the book’s Preface, possibly providing my colleagues in the social sciences some welcome cover for stopping their reading here.

Needless to say, I disagree. Physics is undeniably part of human culture, and the unwillingness of the social sciences to acknowledge uncertainty as a constitutive aspect of world politics and its tendency to equate uncontrollable uncertainty with manageable risk surely can be informed by a branch of science that takes uncertainty seriously.

Listening to David Mermin, a Cornell physicist, fed my curiosity at a ten-hour intellectual marathon I convened in the fall of 2016 in my living room for a discussion of Alex Wendt’s *Quantum Mind*. Building on the argument that physics is part of human culture, Mermin, disagreeing with what he had read in Wendt’s book, wrote in an email exchange with Wendt: “we’re at opposite poles. I take human experience as given, and try to use it to make sense of quantum mechanics; you take quantum mechanics as given, and try to use it to make sense of human experience.”⁹ This opened the door for me to begin thinking and reading seriously about the effects of different scientific worldviews on the scholarly and the human enterprise.

Concerned with a few basic differences between two scientific worldviews, I am neither interested in nor qualified to adjudicate the intense and persisting arguments among physicists and cosmologists. My

⁸ Eric Siggia, personal communication, August 30, 2020.

⁹ Wendt 2015; David Mermin email correspondence with Alexander Wendt (September 2, 2016).

overriding concern is instead to show that students of world politics will be unable to integrate uncertainty into their theories and models as long as they remain committed, often unthinkingly, to a Newtonian worldview. As the natural sciences have moved in the last century to Post-Newtonian understandings of the world that integrate Newtonianism as a special case, why is that intellectual move so difficult for so many scholars of world politics, who insist that they are committed to the *scientific* study of world politics?

In this they are joined by public intellectuals and policymakers who often have no interest in science. Richard Haass's recent compendium on world politics offers a practical guide for readers seeking a better understanding of the global forces that shape their lives. As President of the Council on Foreign Relations and former director of Policy Planning in the US Department of State, Haass is well suited to this task. He dismisses academic debates and theories as "too abstract and too far removed from what is happening to be of value to most of us."¹⁰ The literature on which Haass draws and to which his compendium contributes depends on a handful of foundational concepts, such as the balance of power, that have barely changed since the time of Hobbes and Newton. His book illustrates that the creation of knowledge in the field of global politics all too often is repetitive. In light of new circumstances, authors confront foundational issues with a handful of well-known concepts without adding new depth to our understanding of world politics – including our understanding of the unexpected.¹¹ This book is a prime target for Haass's criticism: it is about abstractions that are removed from daily events.

This, however, does not make it a purely academic exercise. Far from it. Newtonianism has a view of nature as inert and self-equilibrating that is at odds with the view of many natural scientists. The 2020 pandemic, firestorms, and floods are warning signs that should open our eyes to the prospect of much broader environmental challenges reflected in nature as active and utterly oblivious to any notion of an equilibrium. This will certainly change, and possibly transform, world politics in the coming decades. Being more self-aware of the various worldviews that shape our theories and models of world politics may turn out to be highly germane to those interested in policy.

I recall vividly a conversation with economic historian Charles Kindleberger in front of the Harvard Bookstore, a few years before his death. Charlie was an icon. When queried regarding what he was doing toward the end of his distinguished career, Charlie was, as always,

¹⁰ Lawrence 2020; Haass 2020. ¹¹ Gabriel 1994.

unpretentiously laconic and wry. He replied cheerfully that he was tidying up his study: putting together in various books some of his myriad of articles and book chapters so that they would be more readily accessible for others after he was gone. This book has done the exact opposite for me. My study is not tidy. Far removed from my expertise, I have delved into fields of scholarship looking for insights that had escaped my attention, as they continue to escape the attention of most scholars of world politics. Working in fields I barely understand has made me appreciate once more the old adage “the more we know, the less we know.”

This book was made possible and indelibly energized by two friends and intellectual companions. Alexander Wendt’s monumental and audacious book *Quantum Mind* made him an astute and supportive critic at different stages of the project’s evolution, and especially of my two chapters. Himself the editor of a book on worldviews, Henry Nau might well be tempted to update for this occasion Winston Churchill’s World War II characterization of Charles De Gaulle: “the heaviest cross I have to bear is the Cross of Lorraine.” This project was a serious test of his *Leidensfähigkeit* (ability to suffer), as it was at least for one of my German colleagues who introduced me to this delicious noun after reading excerpts from Chapters 1 and 10. I am immensely grateful to both Alex and Henry for their inspiration, perseverance, and, most importantly, their friendship.

I have received an enormous amount of help from many friends and colleagues, which I note at various places in Chapters 1 and 10. I am immeasurably grateful to Uriel Abulof, Begüm Adalet, David Bateman, Alexandra Blackman, Alexandra Cirone, Caryl Clarke, Matthew Evangelista, Roderick Floud, Jill Frank, Jeffrey Friedman, Peter Gourevitch, Ilene Gabel, Patrick Jackson, Sabrina Karim, Robert Keohane, Jonathan Kirshner, Stephen Krasner, Sarah Kreps, Douglas Kriner, Adam Levine, Patchen Markell, David Mermin, Henry Nau, Daniel Nexon, Leonardo Orlando, Richard Price, Yaqing Qin, Chris Reus-Smit, Bryn Rosenfeld, Rudra Sil, Divya Subramanian, Geoffrey Wallace, Christopher Way, and Alexander Wendt. Close to the end of this project, my colleagues at the Social Science Center Berlin (WZB) discussed excerpts of Chapters 1 and 10 in two seminars. I am very grateful for their generosity even though I was not able to follow all of their suggestions or answer all of their objections.

David Stuligross improved the writing in Chapters 1 and 10 immensely by editing the text from “within,” as it were, nudging it toward communicating to readers just what I am trying to convey rather than from “without,” improving only grammar and punctuation. I am immensely thankful for his work.

I also would like to thank Keenan Ashbrook, Colin Chia, Naomi Egel, Nina Obermeier, and Aditi Sahasrabuddhe for their expert research assistance; Cornell's Carpenter Chair for providing the funds necessary to carry out this project; and Cornell's Government Department for giving me, once again, the intellectual freedom and support to pursue an unconventional project.

This has been a deeply collaborative project. Without the help of a group of exceptional scholars and friends whom I invited to join me on this journey, I simply could not have ventured this far off the garden path. I would like to thank my coauthors, who agreed to draft discussion papers for a roundtable on the subject of worldviews at the 2019 meeting of the International Studies Association in Toronto. Their papers – and a memorable lunch after the public event – convinced me that this project might indeed be feasible. The coronavirus upended plans for a meeting at Cornell in April 2020. Full drafts were instead discussed in three Zoom meetings in June 2020. The revisions of our papers were aided enormously by the insightful and constructive critiques of four discussants. I thank John Owen, Richard Price, Robbie Shilliam, and Alexander Wendt for their written comments and active intellectual presence throughout our meetings.¹²

Every text has a subtext. Mine is a song without words. I dedicate this book and its song to Mary, the love of my life.

Bibliography

- Friedman, Thomas L. 2020a. "This Should be Biden's Bumper Sticker," *The New York Times* (July 1): A 24.
- Friedman, Thomas L. 2020b. "How We Broke the World," *The New York Times* (May 31): SR5.
- Gabriel, Jürg Martin. 1994. *Worldviews and Theories of International Relations*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Haass, Richard. 2020. *The World: An Introduction*. New York: Penguin.
- Hamilton, Scott. 2019. "I Am Uncertain, but We Are Not: A New Subjectivity of the Anthropocene," *Review of International Studies* 45, 4: 607–26.
- Hirschman, Albert O. 1980 [1945]. "Preface to the Expanded Paperback Edition," in *National Power and the Structure of Foreign Trade*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. v–xii.
- Katzenstein, Peter J. 2020. "Protean Power: A Second Look," *International Theory* 12, 3: 481–99.

¹² I would also like to thank Stephen Kalberg for joining the meeting for the discussion of Bentley Allan's chapter.

xvi Preface

- Katzenstein, Peter J. and Stephen C. Nelson. 2013a. “Reading the Right Signals and Reading the Signals Right: IPE and the Financial Crisis of 2008,” *Review of International Political Economy* 20, 5: 1101–31.
- Katzenstein, Peter J. and Stephen Nelson. 2013b. “Worlds in Collision: Uncertainty and Risk in Hard Times,” in Miles Kahler and David Lake, eds., *Politics in the New Hard Times: The Great Recession in Comparative Perspective*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, pp. 233–52.
- Katzenstein, Peter J. and Lucia A. Seybert, eds. 2018. *Protean Power: Exploring the Uncertain and Unexpected in World Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kay, John and Mervyn King. 2020. *Radical Uncertainty: Decision-Making Beyond Numbers*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Lawrence, Mark Atwood. 2020. “Intelligence Matters: Why Americans Should Educate Themselves about International Affairs,” *The New York Times Book Review* (June 14): 14.
- Nelson, Stephen C. and Peter J. Katzenstein. 2014. “Uncertainty, Risk, and the Financial Crisis of 2008,” *International Organization* 68, 2: 361–92.
- Seib, Gerald F. 2020. “In Coronavirus Fight, Uncertainty Emerges as the New Enemy,” *The Wall Street Journal* (May 26): A4.
- Wendt, Alexander. 2015. *Quantum Mind and Social Science: Unifying Physical and Social Ontology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.