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CHAPTER ONE

Making Sense of the World

> Had Pyrrhus not fallen by a beldam's hand in Argos or Caesar not been knifed to death? They are not to be thought away. Time has branded them and fettered they are ledged in the room of the infinite possibilities seeing that they never were? Or was that only possible which came to pass? Weave, weaver of the wind.
>
> —*James Joyce*

Forbidden Fruit is an avowedly provocative but also inviting title. The two, as Eve knew, are often reinforcing. Her offer of the apple to Adam is an invitation to eat from the Tree of Knowledge and possibly transcend their human condition. It is a provocation because it involved violating the one proscription laid down by their creator.[1] Eating from the Tree of Knowledge, the couple soon discover, entails expulsion from the Garden of Eden, hard work to survive, pain in childbirth, and mortality.[2] Counterfactuals can be considered an analog to the apple, and the invitation to engage with them a provocation to those who believe that social science or history can only be corrupted by their use. I sense that the number of scholars who feel this way, while substantial, is on the decline. They believe we live in a metaphorical Garden of Eden, where the social and physical worlds are ordered, predictable, and related in a holistic way. For those of us who recognize that humankind left Eden long ago—if it ever existed—counterfactuals must be considered one more tool to help us make sense of our chaotic and unordered world, where knowledge sometimes has the effect of accelerating disorder.

I use counterfactuals to probe nonlinear causation and the understandings policymakers, historians, and international relations scholars have of historical causation. Toward this end and the broader goal of exploring the relationship between fact and fiction, and factual and counterfactual, I employ historical case studies, surveys, experiments, a short story, and an essay of literary criticism. An avowedly interdisciplinary book aspires to a multidisciplinary readership, and I believe my study has something of interest to say to social scientists, historians, and humanists. Casting my net this wide nevertheless invites problems of presentation and language that could limit my audience. Disciplines and fields or approaches within them often have distinct languages and concepts. To use any one of them

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is to identify with a particular discipline or methodological approach, but to use multiple languages and concepts is to risk incoherence. There is no way to finesse this problem, but I try to minimize its effects by keeping my language as consistent as possible, explaining concepts that may be unfamiliar to readers from other disciplines and, above all, by trying to speak to problems of common interest to these several disciplines and even to diverse approaches within them.

Different methods (e.g., case studies, experiments, literary criticism) employ different languages to conduct research and convey findings to the communities who routinely use these methods. I accordingly adopt, with some minor but important modifications, the language appropriate to each method I use and ask readers from other disciplines for their forbearance. At times, this practice may appear to involve me in contradictions. Social psychologists use the language of positivism, as they conceive of their discipline as a science. Historians and social scientists of the constructivist persuasion conduct case studies in the *verstehen* tradition, eschewing the language and goals of science. Constructivists and others who reject the quest for covering laws envisage social theory as a loose ensemble of concepts whose utility varies as a function of the kinds of questions one asks. Many of these researchers are nevertheless committed to formulating and evaluating propositions in accord with carefully established if ever evolving procedures.[3] I conduct my case studies from this perspective, using the concepts and language of history and constructivism.

My project achieves coherence not from any uniformity in language and concepts across chapters, but from my use of the same protocols to conduct and evaluate all counterfactuals, and more importantly, from the ways in which all the chapters in this book contribute to my overarching goals. Some readers might still find it inappropriate to approach social knowledge from the *erklären* tradition in one set of chapters and its *verstehen* counterpart in others. This too, I believe, is defensible in light of my objective for providing insights useful to these distinctive communities.

Let me expand on the above points and use this elaboration as a vehicle for introducing the book. So-called normal social science is based on Humean causation. It studies observable phenomena to discover regularities in human behavior. Researchers sometimes discover regularities they subsequently seek to explain, as in the case of the Democratic Peace.[4] More often, regularities are hypothesized in the form of propositions, and efforts are then made to validate them—more accurately, to falsify them—using appropriate data sets.[5] To qualify as meaningful, statistical regularities require explanations that identify the causal mechanisms responsible for them.[6] Regularities and associated causal mechanisms attract considerable attention when they appear capable of accounting for

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and, better yet, of predicting, outcomes of importance to us. My general orientation is constructivist, and in the course of this chapter I will critique the way positivist research in international relations is most frequently conducted. My purpose is not to author yet another critique of positivism, let alone drive a stake through the heart of mainstream social science. My criticisms of theory building in social science have a different and more positive goal. In the first instance, they aim to assist those committed to theory building by using counterfactuals to understand the conditions under which generalizations are likely to hold and some of the reasons and dynamics by which those conditions change.

From Max Weber on, good social scientists have recognized that any regularities in behavior must be understood in terms of their cultural setting, and endure only as long as this setting remains stable and the regularities themselves go unrecognized by relevant actors. At best, the social world can be described in terms of punctuated equilibria. Regularities exist within bounded social domains, but those domains are often subject to sharp discontinuities that can change the pattern of practices, how they are understood, or even the ends that they are seen to serve.[7] The search for regularities needs to be complemented by the investigation of ruptures, sometimes caused by changes in both ideational and material conditions, that undermine existing regularities and the understandings of the actors on which they are often based. Counterfactual analysis is particularly suited to this task because it allows us to explore the workings and consequences of nonlinear interactions in open-ended systems in ways many other methods do not.

My research speaks to mainstream social scientists in a second important way. I use counterfactuals to demonstrate the contingency of cases like the origins World War I that are critical for construction of theories (i.e., balance of power, power transition) or offered as evidence in support of them. By demonstrating the contingency of World War I, and of other critical twentieth-century events that followed from it, I not only raise questions about these theories but, more importantly, show the extent to which our most fundamental assumptions about how the political world works are highly contingent. Counterfactual thought experiments provide a vantage point for taking ourselves outside of our world and our assumptions about it where they can be subjected to active and open interrogation. Such an exercise not only makes us aware of assumptions that are so deeply ingrained that we take them for granted, but facilitates imaginative leaps in theory and hypothesis formation.

The preceding comments are directed primarily at political scientists and those among them who study international relations. My book also speaks to psychologists, and in a double sense. Chapters 5 and 6 build on existing work in cognitive psychology by using surveys and experiments

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to investigate questions this literature deems important. I believe these chapters make a modest contribution in this connection. For the most part, psychologists seek to discover the conditions under which people use counterfactual modes of thought and the character of the counterfactuals they invoke. I am more interested in using counterfactuals to probe the understandings people have of causation and what their receptivity to different counterfactuals reveals about their belief systems. These questions should appeal to many psychologists, and so should my efforts to relate my findings to international relations.

Historians are another targeted audience. The origin of World War I has long been a central question for historians of modern Europe, and the end of the Cold War has become an important question for them and international history more generally. My chapters on 1914 and 1989 address these events from a relatively novel methodological perspective and offer an original interpretation rooted in nonlinearity and confluence. They also represent, in my judgment, the most sophisticated effort to date to assess the contingency of these outcomes. These chapters speak to historians in their use of primary and secondary evidence but use the language of social science when discussing causation. Chaos and complexity are not novel in their application to European history, so many historians will already be familiar with these concepts.[8] Counterfactuals have always been controversial within this historical community. E. H. Carr dismissed them as flights of fancy, fun over a beer or two in the faculty club, but not the stuff of serious research.[9] In recent years, there has been a veritable explosion of counterfactual research in history, and I trust that many historians will welcome not only the application of counterfactuals to important historical events but the development of more rigorous protocols to guide and improve the quality of historical counterfactual research.[10] In this connection, I hasten to point out that I do not use counterfactuals to make the case for alternative worlds, but use the construction of those worlds to probe the causes and contingency of the world we know.

Students of literature will, I hope, find merit in my chapter on Sinclair Lewis and Philip Roth. In keeping with the practice of literary criticism, I offer close readings of these texts and analyze them with reference to literary genres and other well-established categories. As a political scientist, I bring an additional expertise to what are two very political texts. Drawing on my knowledge of political science and psychology, I analyze the counterfactuals that lie at the core of *The Plot Against America* and use this analysis as my key for opening up the meaning of the text. In turn, I use my readings of these texts to reflect back upon the understanding history and social science have of the past, the motives that move actors, and the respective claims to explain much of what is important about social

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relations. Some social scientists, I hope, will be intrigued by my efforts to use literature and to evaluate social science and its project, just as I hope humanists will find worthwhile my attempt to explore their domain with some of the tools of social science.

I begin my investigation with a brief discussion of World War I. I do so to illustrate the lengths to which policymakers and many of my colleagues will go to deny the contingency of key events that shape our world and how we think about it. The World War I case nicely illustrates the critical importance of non-observables and nonsystematic factors in understanding major international outcomes. I conclude with an overview of the remaining chapters and a discussion of how they contribute to the overall goals of the book.

World War I was the dominant international event of the twentieth century. It hastened the ascendancy of the United States as the world's leading economic power; led to the breakup of the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman empires; and set in motion a chain of events that ultimately led to the demise of the British, French, Spanish, and Portuguese empires as well. The war decimated a generation of young men and killed millions of civilians made vulnerable to influenza and other pathogens by the ravages of war, dislocation, ethnic cleansing, and the Allied blockade. It triggered a revolution in Russia, which had echoes in eastern and central Europe and more lasting resonance in China and Southeast Asia. Collectively, these developments made it almost impossible to restore political and economic stability to Europe, helping to pave the way for Hitler's rise to power, the Holocaust, and a second, far more deadly, bid for hegemony by Germany in alliance with Italy and Japan. World War II in turn gave rise to a Cold War between the Soviet bloc and the West that kept Europe divided for fifty years and the target of thousands of nuclear weapons that at the push of a button could have turned the continent into a desolate, uninhabitable no-man's land.

World War I and the events that followed had equally profound cultural and intellectual consequences. Europe's self-confidence was lost along with its leading role in the world, encouraging forms of artistic expression that communicated defiance, doubt, confusion, and alienation. Many artists and intellectuals sought refuge in a highly idealized image of Soviet-style socialism. Europe's internecine struggles and exhaustion after World War II dramatically accelerated the hegemony of the United States. After 1945, the latter became the leader of the self-proclaimed "Free World," helped finance the reconstruction of Western Europe and Japan, imposed its political and economic institutions and practices wherever it could, and gained wider influence through aid, trade and investment. Extraordinary levels of investment at home in education and research, charitable support for the arts and the immigration of

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thousands of Europe's leading scientists, artists and intellectuals made the United States the world's leader in medicine, science, space exploration, and the creative and performing arts. American popular culture became global in its appeal, leading some intellectuals to worry about Hollywood's hegemony and debasement of real culture, and others to celebrate it as a "soft power" resource.[11]

Many social scientists and international relations scholars consider these outcomes overdetermined. Until quite recently, the conventional wisdom among historians was that Europe in 1914 was like dry kindling just waiting to be set aflame by a match.[12] If the assassinations at Sarajevo had not triggered a continental war, some other provocation would have. International relations scholars have developed theories like power transition and offensive dominance to explain why a European war was all but inevitable. World War II appears at least as inevitable to many scholars given German dissatisfaction with the Treaty of Versailles and the aggressive goals and risk-taking propensity of Hitler, Mussolini, and Japanese leaders. So does the Cold War in the light of the power vacuum in the heart of Europe at the end of World War II and the antagonistic social systems of the two victorious superpowers. The end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of the United States as a "unipole" appear just as inevitable to some observers. Students of the former Soviet Union, liberal theorists, and proponents of globalization provide numerous reinforcing reasons why Soviet-style communism was doomed and American-style capitalist democracy was the wave of the future.[13]

The view that our world is the only possible world, or at least the most likely of all worlds, has multiple and reinforcing causes. There is the hindsight bias, by which we upgrade the probability of events once they have occurred and come to regard the past as overdetermined—but the future as highly contingent.[14] The hindsight bias is reinforced by the very nature of the scholarly enterprise. Historians and social scientists make reputations for themselves by proposing new explanations or theories to account for major events like the fall of the Roman Empire, the industrial and French revolutions, the world wars and the Cold War. Confronted by ever growing explanations for events of this kind, none of which can generally be dismissed out of hand, these events appear massively overdetermined. The need for psychological closure also plays a role. In chapter 5, I report on an experiment Phil Tetlock and I conducted to probe how people understand the consequences of their beliefs. Those who see the world as to a great extent ordered and predictable display a need for psychological closure and are hostile to suggestions of contingency—unless it helps to explain away an outcome inconsistent with their worldviews or preferred theories. Not surprisingly, many in-

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ternational relations scholars cluster toward the order and predictability end of the continuum. Whether they are socialized into understanding the world this way, or choose to become social scientists in part for this reason, the end result is the same: they are generally unwilling to recognize, or uncomfortable with the thought, if they do, that important social outcomes could be the result of agency, chance, or simply bad weather.

Discussions in the coffee lounge with thoughtful colleagues, and feedback from faculty and graduate students at institutions where I gave seminars on my book, indicate considerable interest in counterfactuals as a research tool but widespread confidence in the high probability, if not near inevitability, of major twentieth-century international outcomes, including those described in the paragraphs above. When I suggested that World War I might have been avoided if Franz Ferdinand and his wife had not been murdered by Serbian nationalists, I was frequently told that Europe was on the precipice of war and surely would have been tipped over the edge by some other concatenation of events. Behind this claim lay the belief that World War I was the product of systemic causes. When I raised the possibility of the Cuban missile crisis provoking a superpower war, I met similar objections but a different argument. Policymakers are not entirely irrational, I was frequently told, and, given the conventional advantage of the United States in the Caribbean and the overwhelming U.S. strategic nuclear advantage at the time, the Soviet Union had no choice but to capitulate. This argument was made during the crisis by Maxwell Taylor, who insisted that if Khrushchev had other ideas, more sober Soviet officials would soon assert their authority.[15] Not surprisingly, I found few colleagues convinced by my argument that, had a European or world war in the first two decades of the twentieth century been averted, or if the Germans had won it, we might be living in a world in which authoritarian corporatism might have competed successfully against democratic, laissez-faire capitalism. These counterfactuals elicited a third generic argument: that the social world resembles nature in its competitiveness and natural selection. Practices and institutions that work efficiently will win out over those that do not. Democratic capitalism would ultimately have triumphed.

Policymakers rarely act in response to explicit theories but commonly rely on more informal understandings of how the world works. They display the same belief in the retrospective near inevitability of important historical outcomes as their academic counterparts. In interviews with numerous American, Soviet, and European politicians, diplomats and military officers who played prominent roles in the end of the Cold War, Richard Herrmann and I found that almost all of them believed that the Cold War had to end when and how it did. At the same time, these policymakers insisted on the contingency of developments critical to this

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outcome in which they played a major role. They told us how easily such developments (e.g., arms control, the unification of Germany) could have been forestalled or worked out differently if it had not been for their skill, relationships with their opposite numbers, or ability to collaborate with them behind the backs of their respective governments. They seemed unaware of the contradiction between these two positions and struggled to reconcile them when pushed by us to do so.[16]

There is something wrong with this story. If major historical developments are so inevitable, the pattern of events leading to them should not be so contingent. If events are overdetermined, the underlying conditions responsible for these events should have been apparent at the time to scholars and policymakers alike, making them—although not their timing and specific expression—to some degree predictable. None of the events in question were self-evident at the time. In the decade prior to 1914 there was a general expectation among many military authorities and some, but by no means all, political leaders that a European war was likely. There was nevertheless remarkable optimism, within the diplomatic and business community, that mutual trade and investment had made war increasingly irrational and less likely. On the eve of the war, books advancing both arguments were runaway best sellers.[17] European opinion was also divided on World War II, with many of those in power in France and Britain and the Soviet Union convinced that Hitler had limited aims or could be bought off with territorial and other concessions. For quite different reasons, Churchill and Roosevelt expected to be able to do business with the Soviet Union after World War II. Writing in 1959, John Herz reminds us that the advent of bipolarity was as unexpected as the atomic age, in part responsible for it.[18] Hardly anybody predicted the onset of the Cold War or its demise, let alone the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the early decades of the Cold War, American foreign policy experts worried that the Soviet model would be more appealing to so-called Third World countries than liberal capitalism. In its latter decades, members of the U.S. national security community thought it possible, if not likely, that the Soviet Union would pull ahead militarily and act more aggressively. Both expectations were wide of the mark.

Single events are admittedly the most difficult kind to predict.[19] However, our record is arguably no better when it comes to trends, patterns, and macro-outcomes where prediction rests on the role of reason, social selection, or some other alleged feature of the environment. A socialist world, which Marx thought would require revolution, and later revisionists hoped to bring about through the ballot box, is perhaps the best-known example. Socialists and conservatives alike assumed that education and economic development would make the world increasingly secular and that the power of religion would recede into history. Pre-

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mature triumphalism by neoconservatives about liberal democracy and laissez-faire capitalism, which found voice in such best sellers as Daniel Bell's *End of Ideology* and Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* also proved far off the mark.[20] It is too early to pass judgment on predictions like those of Thomas Friedman that globalization will usher in an age of peaceful, liberal trading states—or, as its opponents insist, an era of vast disparities in wealth and crushing cultural uniformity.[21] I suspect that the future will once again defy prediction based on narrowly formulated logical arguments and linear projections.[22]

I learned this lesson early in my academic career; my first teaching post was at Brooklyn College in 1965, just as the social-political revolution of the 1960s moved into high gear. The civil rights movement had been under way for some time and the antiwar movement was about to begin. Woodstock was three years off, but flower power was in full bloom, bras were beginning to go the way of girdles, and the air was redolent with the pungent aroma of pot and joss sticks. To my senior colleagues, these developments were as unanticipated as they were unpalatable. There are good reasons why they were caught off guard. In retrospect, the transformation of the 1960s was a classic example of a nonlinear confluence. The postwar economic boom made rock and roll possible, and both developments, along with access to automobiles and burgeoning college enrollments, generated a distinctive youth culture. The birth control pill, the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War, all of which arrived hard on the heels of rock and roll, made that culture increasingly defiant. Systematic factors, including key international developments, were an important part of this story, but so were timing, chance, and accident.

All forms of complex causation, and especially nonlinear transformations, admittedly stack the deck against prediction. Linear describes an outcome produced by one or more variables where the effect is additive. Any other interaction is nonlinear. This would include outcomes that involve step functions or phase transitions. The hard sciences routinely describe nonlinear phenomena. Making predictions about them becomes increasingly problematic when multiple variables are involved that have complex interactions. Some simple nonlinear systems can quickly become unpredictable when small variations in their inputs are introduced.[23] As so much of the social world is nonlinear, fifty plus years of behavioral research and theory building have not led to any noticeable improvement in our ability to predict events. This is most evident in the case of transformative events like the social-political revolution of the 1960s, the end of the Cold War, and the rise and growing political influence of fundamentalist religious groups.

Radical skepticism about prediction of any but the most short-term outcomes is fully warranted. This does not mean that we can throw our

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hands up in the face of uncertainty, contingency, and unpredictability. In a complex society, individuals, organizations, and states require a high degree of confidence—even if it is misplaced—in the short-term future and a reasonable degree of confidence about the longer term. In its absence they could not commit themselves to decisions, investments, and policies. Like nudging the frame of a pinball machine to influence the path of the ball, we cope with the dilemma of uncertainty by doing what we can to make our expectations of the future self-fulfilling. We seek to control the social and physical worlds not only to make them more predictable but to reduce the likelihood of disruptive and damaging shocks (e.g., floods, epidemics, stock market crashes, foreign attacks). Our fallback strategy is denial. We convince ourselves that the future will more or less resemble the past, or deviate from it in predictable or manageable ways. We remain unreasonably confident in our beliefs despite the dramatic discontinuities of even the recent past—some of them caused by shocks we could not predict or control. The hindsight bias makes us exaggerate our estimates of the probability of events that actually occur, while belief-system defenses lead us to exaggerate the reasonableness of our prior expectations that other outcomes would occur.[24] Belief system defenses reinforce the hindsight bias and help to explain away predictive failures.

There may be something more fundamental than either the hindsight bias or the need to believe in rationality that makes people—not just international relations scholars—reluctant to accept the important role of contingency in the social world. Prominent thinkers suggest that human beings harbor deep-seated fears about uncertainty and accordingly do their best to convince themselves that they can predict, even control, the future. David Hume believed that "everything that is unexpected affrights us."[25] Martin Heidegger theorized at length about the anxiety generated by uncertainty and mortality.[26] Terror Management Theory builds on this insight as do Anthony Giddens and the ontological security research program.[27] In earlier times the universal human need to reduce anxiety about the future through some form of control found expression in efforts to propitiate the gods. Max Weber believed that modern people could no longer credibly invoke spirits and magic to control their environment, but prayer is alive and well in our society—and becoming more prevalent according to some surveys—despite the absence of any evidence of its efficacy.[28] The enduring belief in the power of prayer is undoubtedly another sign of people's need to believe that they can influence the future, and all the more so when they live in uncertain and dangerous times.

The behavioral revolution in social science might be understood as another expression of this primal need. Its bedrock assumption is that the social environment is sufficiently ordered to be described by universal, or at least widely applicable, laws. Regularities in behavior make the past

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comprehensible and the future to some degree predictable. The appeal of deterrence during the Cold War—to theorists and policymakers alike—offers a telling example. It was psychologically and politically reassuring to think that the bogey of nuclear war could be kept at bay by the rational practice of deterrence against the Soviet Union. Empirical support for deterrence was entirely counterfactual: the widespread belief that World War II and its horrors might have been prevented if only major European powers had stood firm against Hitler in 1936 or 1938. During the Cold War, deterrence repeatedly failed (i.e., did not prevent challenges it was intended to) but was repeatedly confirmed tautologically. Political scientists interpreted encounters like the two Berlin and Taiwan Straits crises as deterrence successes, assuming that the Soviet Union or China would have attacked Berlin or Taiwan in the absence of immediate American deterrence.[29] Deterrence failures like the Soviet missile deployment in Cuba were explained away with the counterfactual argument that these challenges could have been prevented if American presidents had practiced deterrence more forcibly. Evidence that came to light at the end of the Cold War would reveal that Soviet and Chinese leaders never doubted American resolve and that the forceful practice of deterrence by both sides—in the form of arms build-up, forward deployments, and bellicose rhetoric—repeatedly provoked behavior it was intended to prevent. The two Berlin crises and Cuba being cases in point.[30]

In the United States—as distinct from Europe—faith in the science of politics remains high despite the inability of several generations of behavioral scientists to discover the kinds of laws that exist in the hard sciences. There is a widespread belief that the social world is governed by the same kinds of regularities as the physical world and that discovery of them will allow us to explain past developments and make reasonable predictions of a probabilistic nature. I do not deny the existence of regularities in social behavior; there is ample evidence for them—and for the power of constraints and opportunities to shape the behavior of actors. As Max Weber observed, these regularities, and the "laws" to which they allegedly give rise, are short-lived because of the reflective nature of human beings and the open-ended nature of the social world.[31] Once regularities are known, actors take them into account, undermining their validity, as in the case of the famous "January effect" in the stock market.[32] Alternatively, they are undercut by changes in the environment that alter the underlying conditions on which the regularity depends, as in the case of party identification to predict voting patterns in American elections.[33]

The regularities that do exist in politics are generally incapable of explaining more than a small percentage of the variance. This point is unwittingly driven home in a widely cited article by James Fearon and David Laitin on ethnicity, insurgency, and war.[34] They claim to demonstrate that

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internal war can be explained by a combination of poverty, political instability, rough terrain, and large population. Only at the end of the article do they address the substantive as opposed to statistical value of the claims. The strongest effects they find increase the probability of civil war from roughly 5 to 15 percent for a country sometime in the next five years. This holds only for countries with extreme scores on their several variables (tenth percentile and below, or ninetieth percentile and above). As the overwhelming majority of countries fall inside these extremes, and include countries that are or have recently experienced internal wars, the regularities they allege to have discovered tell us nothing meaningful about the real world. In international relations, some scholars insist that their theories (e.g., neorealism, balance of power, deterrence, power transition, the democratic peace) account for key developments like peace and war. These claims are rightly rejected by critics who maintain that these theories have little to no predictive value, and that what explanatory power they claim all too frequently rests on ex post facto and historically questionable efforts to square the theories in question with failed predictions. Examples include deterrence theory and the Cuban missile crisis and the 1973 Middle East war, and realism and the end of the Cold War and survival of NATO.

Insight into the future is rooted in our understanding of the past, our socially constructed, psychologically motivated, and ideologically filtered reconstruction of past events and imputation of their "lessons." We use these understandings to affirm the validity of, and occasionally to reformulate, the analytical categories we use to make sense of the world, identify problems that require our attention, and select strategies to cope with them. Our presumed ability to make sense of the past—to discover patterns that allow us to explain social behavior in terms of its enduring regularities—makes us unreasonably confident of our ability to predict, or at least to cope with the future. Theories represent a formal means of turning understandings of the past into guides for the future and are enormously appealing to intellectuals who want or need to believe that we can think about the future in rigorous and more successful ways. Social scientists committed to theory building of this kind are correspondingly reluctant to admit the failings of their theories, let alone the overall difficulties encountered by the predictive enterprise. Like other professionals who make predictions, they invoke a range of defenses to explain away their failures, all of them intended to preserve their theories.[35] International relations scholars commonly deploy an additional defense; they fail to specify their theories in a manner that would make them falsifiable. This facilitates ex post facto efforts to square outcomes with theories.[36]

The general reluctance of political scientists to take nonsystematic factors seriously is adequate provocation to direct our attention to them. Are

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they really inconsequential for theory building or do they confound predictive theories in ways that are little understood or appreciated? Could key events like World War I have been untracked by credible minimal rewrites of history? What if Franz Ferdinand had not been assassinated and there had been no European war in 1914? What if Hitler had died on the western front during World War I instead of surviving, against all odds, almost four years of trench warfare? What if President Hindenburg had exercised his emergency powers more responsibly and Hitler had never come to power? What if Britain and France had prevented Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936 or had stood firm with the Soviet Union at Munich in 1938? What if Kennedy had given in to hawkish demands for an air strike against the Soviet missiles in Cuba? What if Chernenko had not been succeeded by Gorbachev but by another aging party hack intent on postponing any meaningful reform, rightly fearing its domestic and foreign consequences?

Any of these outcomes were possible and some were arguably more likely than not. The list of cases can easily be extended. Counterfactual historians have identified numerous "bifurcation points" where they contend history could easily have taken a radically different course. They run the gamut from military and political events like the ones noted above to more complex developments like the rise of religions and the industrial revolution.[37] In chapter 3 I show how easily the assassinations of Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, could have been avoided and the many reasons to think that, if there had been no continental war in 1914, Europe had at least an even chance to evolve peacefully over the next decade. A peaceful Europe would have been dominated by Germany, the economic and intellectual powerhouse of the continent. German would have rivaled English as the language of business and science, and its corporate model of capitalism would have provided an alternative to the more laissez-faire practices of Britain and the United States. A German-dominated continent would have aborted the birth of the Soviet Union, and while Russia would have survived in some shrunken form, it is less likely that it would have become a superpower. Britain would probably have moved closer to the United States as a means of offsetting German influence. In a multipolar world, international relations theory would have concerned itself with a different set of problems.

Consider a darker scenario arising from an American invasion of Cuba in 1962. The Kennedy administration did not know that Soviet combat forces in Cuba were equipped with nuclear-tipped Luna ground-to-ground missiles and authorized to use them against an invasion force.[38] If they had destroyed the American invasion fleet, the United States might have responded with a nuclear attack against the Soviet Union. Even if escalation had stopped short of an all-out nuclear war, the Cold War would

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have been put on a very different and more confrontational course. Détente would have been much less likely and so too the gradual evolution of the Soviet Union away from its commitment to communism and the Cold War. Damaged and humiliated by American nuclear strikes, the post-Khrushchev leadership might have become more aggressive in its foreign policy. If the destruction of the American invasion fleet had led to a wider nuclear war there might not have been a Soviet Union in its aftermath. The United States and western Europe would almost certainly have been the targets of nuclear weapons in such an exchange, giving rise to a bleak and largely unpredictable future.

Social scientists in either of these worlds would have described them as largely determined. In a Europe that avoided a continental war in 1914, or any time afterward, liberalism would have been the dominant paradigm in the United Kingdom and the United States, and socialism would have retained it appeal to intellectuals on the continent. Liberal international relations scholars would have developed theories about the restraining consequences of industrial development, international trade, international law, and trade union movements. Sociologists would have stressed the beneficial consequences of education, widespread affluence, smaller families, and longer life expectancy. If Germany had democratized, it seems likely that some variant of the democratic peace thesis would have emerged. The imaginary critic in my story in chapter 7 makes many of these arguments, and uses them to demonstrate why our world could never have come to pass.

If the Cuban missile crisis had led to war, conventional or nuclear, historians would have constructed a causal chain leading ineluctably to this outcome. It might begin with the Russian Revolution and the ideological cleavage it created between East and West, and go on to include the mistrust and hostility created by the different but equally self-serving ways the Western democracies and the Soviet Union responded to the threat of Nazi Germany, the subsequent division of Europe, efforts by both superpowers to destabilize and penetrate the other's sphere of influence, the spread of their competition to other parts of the world, nuclear arms racing and threats, and finally, a crisis spiral (Berlin, Laos, Cuba) badly managed by insecure and risk-prone leaders (Kennedy and Khrushchev). Instead of explaining the "long peace," historians would have compared the run-up to World War III to the pre-1914 division of Europe into competing alliance systems and the series of crises that led to the July crisis and World War I. Realism would be the dominant paradigm in international relations, although its proponents would see no distinction between bi- and multipolar systems. Counterfactual speculation that a superpower war could have been avoided and the Cold War brought to a peaceful end by the transformation and de facto capitulation by the

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Soviet Union would be greeted with the same degree of incredulity that suggestions of a peaceful twentieth-century Europe meet in ours.

This book does not engage in counterfactual speculation merely to make the case for the plausibility of alternative worlds. The contingency of our world should be self-evident to any serious reader of history. I use counterfactuals to probe the limits of Humean causation and to develop better means of understanding causation in a largely open-ended, nonlinear, highly contingent world.[39] If regularities are short-lived, we have an equal interest in discovering them *and* their limitations and shelf lives. To date, social scientists have directed their efforts to the discovery of regularities, not to the conditions and dynamics that degrade them. Those who believe in systematic or structural approaches to social science—terms I use interchangeably to refer to theorizing based on the discovery of regularities—ought to be equally interested in this latter question. I contend that counterfactual probing of transformations is a first and necessary step toward this goal. My two case study chapters speak directly to these problems, as they probe contingency and the causes of international transformations. In the conclusion I elaborate a method for better determining the contingency of outcomes.

I also use counterfactuals to probe how social scientists and historians understand causation. To the extent that our understandings of the past are in thrall to cognitive and motivated biases, counterfactuals can help us recognize and overcome these impediments to greater openness and objectivity. Chapters 5 and 6 address this problem and demonstrate the power of beliefs to influence receptivity to counterfactuals but also the ability of counterfactuals to increase our estimates of contingency. These chapters also probe the relationship between belief systems and openness to counterfactuals that make and unmake history in ways that reinforce or undercut beliefs.

Finally, I show how counterfactuals can be used to provide otherwise unattainable perspectives on our world. We cannot easily step outside of this world and the beliefs we hold about it. Alternative worlds not only make this possible, they compel us to do so if we take them seriously. By providing distance from our world they are an indispensable means of evaluating it, empirically and normatively. They also provide insight into how we make sense of our world and why we are drawn to certain kinds of assumptions and theories. Such insight is helpful, if not essential, to theory building and evaluation. Toward this end I use a short story and an analysis of two political novels, one of them counterfactual. In contrast to good social science, good literature tells stories that draw readers in, emotionally as well as intellectually. They provide macrolevel insights by placing readers in microlevel encounters, relationships, and situations. Literature and its analysis accordingly have the potential to contribute

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to social science in important ways. This is a theme I began to explore in *The Tragic Vision of Politics* where I argued, pace Nietzsche, that music, art, and literature provide knowledge and experience that cannot be expressed in words and, by doing so, refresh our soul, heighten or provide new visions on that part of the world we seek to understand through language and concepts and the kind of knowledge they enable.[40] The arts, humanities, and the social sciences, while fundamentally different in their methods and often in the responses they invoke in us, should nevertheless be regarded as parallel projects leading to greater understanding of ourselves and our world. In this volume, I try to substantiate this claim by showing how counterfactual literature offers insights into history and international relations that social science cannot and how these insights can further the task of history and social science.

Let me now return to social science and its theory-building enterprise. Counterfactuals and the alternative worlds they create generally privilege the importance of specific events as opposed to underlying trends or features of the environment that might have helped to cause them. These are not only "data points," as some quantitative researchers regard them, but starting (or end) points for theories. We do not pull theories out of the air; they often grow out of our effort to explain important or anomalous events. Theorists work backward from cases to generalizations that might account for these and other events, which theory can now reorder as "cases." Whether we embed these understandings in theories from which we then deduce propositions, or simply develop propositions, individual events are generally the source material for insights into the social and political world. Scientific theories can sometimes be based on phenomena that have a very low probability—supernovas, for example—but they must start from this recognition and attempt to identity conditions under which otherwise rare events may become likely. In international relations theory, researchers just assume that important cases like World War I are representative of a broader and not uncommon class of events. This assumption may reflect a cognitive bias to attribute important causes to important events. Commenting on this bias, Deidre McCloskey notes that "disdain for assigning large events small causes is not rational in a world that is partly non-linear."[41] Counterfactual probing of cases can help us overcome this bias and determine the extent to which the events from which we derive our theories are representative or not of the phenomenon under study. Combined with assessments of their relative contingency, we can evaluate more rigorously their utility as starting points for theories.

Social scientists of the neopositivist persuasion believe in the possibility of universal social laws and theories. An increasing number of social scientists are willing to admit that causal relationships only function within

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a specific cultural sphere. Max Weber is generally understood to have argued that culturally and temporally specific generalizations are the most social science can hope to produce. Even this goal must be questioned if the world in which we live is to a significant degree shaped by agency, accident, and confluence. If so, theories—including those that make no claims beyond a specific cultural and temporal setting—can do no more than offer a first cut into a problem. They may be helpful in organizing our thinking, but are incapable of explaining outcomes in and of themselves and even less capable of making meaningful predictions.[42]

Weber had more fundamental objections to the kind of theory many American social scientists still seek. He recognized that the relationship between the knower and the known was historically situated and must be considered in tandem. Methods in the social sciences are not universal but culturally determined: epistemology is best understood as a historically situated philosophy that presupposes certain social phenomena and is therefore a social phenomenon in its own right. It must also be treated as an object of sociological study. Weber, like Nietzsche, understood that the project of value-free knowledge—about whose efficacy he had serious doubts—could only arise in a world in which the mythic had been rejected in favor of rationalization.[43] Demystification (*Entzauberung*) led ineluctably to the recognition by intellectuals that values were the product of will and choice, not of science. In a telling reference to the Garden of Eden, Weber warned that the "fate of an epoch which has eaten from the tree of knowledge" was to live in a world in which the limits of knowledge must be acknowledged. "We must know that we cannot learn the meaning of the world from the results of our analysis, be it ever so perfect; it must rather be in a position to create this meaning itself." Intellectual liberation encourages the belief that reason can unlock the secrets of the world but actually compels us to renounce the temptation to make holistic sense of the world.[44] Intellectuals, he recognized, are loath to accept this limitation; they constantly try to make the world appear more ordered and predictable than it is because they lack the moral grounding to face the truth on which honest and persuasive inquiry depends.[45]

As Weber expected, most social scientists remain committed to the world of theory building and downplay or ignore the cultural and historical localism of their approach and its limitations. Most theories in political science pretend that systematic factors are determining and that nonsystematic factors (agents, accidents, confluences) are transitory and without lasting significance. King, Keohane, and Verba, whose *Designing Social Inquiry* is widely used in graduate scope and methods courses, are typical in this regard. They assert that nonsystematic factors are worth examining only insofar as they enable us to determine what is systematic—to separate, so to speak, the wheat from the chaff.[46] This

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approach to theory would make sense only in a world in which systematic factors explain most of the variance. This is no reason to believe that we live in such a world, and certainly King, Keohane, and Verba offer no evidence in support of this their most fundamental and critical assumption.

In international relations there appear to be few, if any, discernible patterns beyond a few obvious ones (e.g., neighbors are likely to be historical adversaries, my enemy's enemy is my friend, hegemonic powers tend to overreach themselves). They were all common knowledge before the era of theory building. These patterns are to some degree robust but unreliable predictors of behavior and far from universal. Neighboring political units have frequently gone to war, or waged cold wars, but many have normalized their relationships over time.[47] States often, but not always, have close relations with adversaries of their adversaries, and their efforts to draw close can restrain or provoke their neighbors, making their consequences for war and peace uncertain. Hegemonic powers routinely overreach themselves in efforts to lock in their advantages (e.g., Athens, Spain under Philip II, France of Louis XIV and Napoleon), but do not always do so; contrast Bismarck's Germany to Wilhelm's, or Clinton's America to George W. Bush's. Nor do dominant powers necessarily provoke catastrophic wars when they act this way. Rising powers are assumed to challenge hegemons but the Soviet Union was careful to avoid war with the United States, and opinion is divided in the West as to whether China, undeniably a rising power, is preparing to challenge the United States or accept the status quo.[48] Each of these so-called patterns is indeterminate, as their consequences depend on nonsystematic and often idiosyncratic factors.

The relative importance of systemic and nonsystemic factors in bringing about an outcome is an empirical question, and one I address in the next two chapters. If the outcomes of individual cases are invariably indeterminate, aggregating cases will not change this reality. As I noted earlier, data sets and statistical manipulations often reveal significant correlations but the substantive power of the propositions or theories being tested is extremely limited. They may identify factors statistically associated with war and peace but do not explain or predict these outcomes. Their statistical findings are not infrequently artifacts of the data set or its coding. The democratic peace thesis and studies that allegedly demonstrate the efficacy of general and immediate deterrence have been severely criticized on these grounds.[49]

Statistical studies of international conflict, war, peace, and conflict resolution confront a number of difficult, if not insurmountable obstacles. The universe of cases, no matter how we define it, is limited. Most cases cannot be considered independent because relevant policymakers most

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often act on the basis of the lessons they drew from what they consider relevant previous cases. The conditions under which they act (e.g., nature of the regime, domestic constraints, alliance patterns, military balance, and technology) differ from case to case, and often do so dramatically over time. To construct a sample large enough to warrant statistical analysis, it is generally necessary to include cases that violate the conditions of independence and comparability. Even if we allow for the discovery of certain regularities, they would at best explain only a small part of the variance. To improve our understanding of outcomes—in individual cases and more generally—we need to take nonsystematic factors into account. Rather than dismissing them as "idiographic," and of only incidental interest to "nomothetic" (read serious) researchers, we must begin to think about nonsystematic factors in a systematic way. Knowledge of nonsystematic causes, when combined with the product of research into systematic causes can give us better explanations of events and better understandings of the limits of theory.

As noted earlier, the relationship between so-called underlying (systemic) and immediate causes and their implications for theory building is one of the core questions of this book and is addressed by all of its chapters in one form or another. This chapter has laid out the problem and the case for the utility of counterfactuals in exploring it. Chapter 2 focuses more specifically on counterfactuals, providing a definition of them, describing three kinds of counterfactuals, and exploring their respective utility for formulating policy, evaluating outcomes, and understanding their causes and contingency.[50]

Chapter 2 also advances a novel and provocative epistemological claim: that the difference between so-called factual and counterfactual arguments is more one of degree than of kind. Both rest on assumptions about the world and how it works and connect hypothesized causes to outcomes by means of a chain of logic consistent with available evidence. In factual arguments there is rarely, if ever, a "smoking gun" that allows researchers to maintain with any degree of certainty that a particular cause was responsible for an outcome. The plausibility of factual and counterfactual arguments alike rests on the appeal of their assumptions, the tightness of the logic connecting cause to effect and the richness of the evidence that supports them. The fundamental similarity between the structure of counterfactual and factual arguments means that many of the criteria for assessing the plausibility of one kind of argument are appropriate to the other. There are nevertheless additional criteria for good counterfactual arguments, and here we must be careful to distinguish good from valid counterfactuals. The criteria for good counterfactuals says a lot about their utility for purposes of analysis but nothing about their external validity. External validity can sometimes be

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tested on the basis of evidence. Like all propositions, counterfactuals can be falsified but never validated.

The protocols for conducting counterfactual thought experiments depend on the social domain in which they are used. The most important feature of this domain is the extent to which it is amenable to statistical laws and generalizations. For the reasons I provided, history and international relations generally lie outside this domain and accordingly require a set of protocols that are different from those used for counterfactual experimentation in the sciences. Chapter 2 develops a set of protocols more appropriate to history and international relations and in doing so also highlights some of the limitations and problems in using counterfactuals in these domains. The concluding section of the chapter uses earlier sections of the chapter as a foundation to construct a method for assessing the relative importance of systematic and nonsystematic factors—determination versus contingency—in specific historical outcomes. For my example, I use the phenomenal success of the West in the modern world.

Chapters 3 and 4 follow the protocols developed in chapter 2 to conduct counterfactual analysis of two important historical events: the origins of the First World War and the end of the Cold War, responsible for what international relations scholars generally consider two of the three transformations of the international system in the twentieth century—the other being the product of World War II. They are important cases substantively but also intellectually because they demonstrate the key role of nonsystematic factors and nonlinear causation. As noted earlier, these cases provide the basis for a procedure, elaborated in the conclusion, for unpacking cases to determine their contingency and the relative importance of structure, agency, and accident. This in turn can provide important insights into how nonlinear causation works in international relations.

Chapter 3, "Franz Ferdinand Found Alive: World War I Unnecessary," is a much reworked and expanded version of an article that first appeared in the *Political Science Quarterly*.[51] In the last decade new evidence and interpretations based on them have shifted our understandings of the origins of the war and I have updated my own arguments to incorporate and reflect the latest scholarship. This in turn led me to rewrite the conclusions, which address the broader implications of the case for international relations theory. The new evidence buttresses my contention that World War I was contingent in both its underlying and immediate causes. Historians have proposed a variety of underlying causes for World War I, from social Darwinism to nationalism, the alliance structure, offensive dominance, and shifts in the balance of power. What made Europe ripe for war, I maintain, was not this multitude of alleged causes, but the nature of the interactions among them. The First World War is best understood as a nonlinear confluence of three largely independent chains of

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causation that produced independent but more or less simultaneous gestalt shifts in Vienna and Berlin, and a slightly earlier one in Russia. Had the timing of the Austrian and German shifts been off by as little as two years, Austrian leaders would not have been so intent on destroying Serbia or German leaders might not have encouraged them to do so and the Russians would not have been willing to risk war in Serbia's defense.

Chapter 4, "Leadership and the End of the Cold War: Did It Have to End This Way?" is coauthored with George W. Breslauer and originally appeared in a volume I co-edited on the end of the Cold War.[52] The conventional wisdom about the resolution of this conflict emphasizes—correctly in my view—the important role of actors, notably Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan. Gorbachev was different from previous Soviet leaders in his commitment to end the Cold War and his willingness to take political risks at home and abroad to do so. Reagan differed from other presidents and presidential candidates in the initial intensity of his hostility to the Soviet Union but also in his subsequent willingness to take the rhetoric of a Soviet leader seriously and work with him to reduce superpower nuclear arsenals and end the Cold War. Breslauer and I imagine East-West relations without Gorbachev, Reagan, or Bush and by doing so make the case for the determining role of leaders. We identify other leaders that might have come to power and consider the most plausible policies they would have pursued toward one another's country. This generates a wide range of possible scenarios in the late 1980s that range from intensification of the Cold War to its resolution on terms that might have allowed for the continued existence of the Soviet Union. We argue that the end of the Cold War, the terms on which it ended, and their consequences for the post–Cold War world, were contingent and highly dependent on leaders.

Part I of my book offers ontological arguments for why systemic theories of international relations are inadequate and attempts to devise methods for thinking more systematically about nonsystematic factors. Part II is concerned with psychological limitations on theory building and uses counterfactual surveys and experiments to probe how foreign policy experts, historians, and international relations scholars understand causation. It uses history as a resource rather than a focus of analysis. Its findings lend additional support to psychological critiques of systemic theories that contend that advances in theory building are seriously hindered by substantive and methodological commitments of researchers that are often impervious to evidence. In keeping with my objective to facilitate, not just critique theory building, I suggest several strategies to help overcome, or at least cope with these cognitive limitations.

Chapter 5, "Scholars and Causation 1," is coauthored with Philip E. Tetlock and originally appeared in the *American Political Science Review*.[53]

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It conducts correlational studies to determine the degree to which professional observers of world politics rely on abstract principles and laws (e.g., the national interest, the balance of power, deterrence theory) to assess the plausibility of real and imagined past outcomes. It uses experiments to test the effects of "close-call" counterfactuals on their judgments. Close-call counterfactuals are minimal rewrites of history close to the event whose outcome we wish to mutate.

We theorize a sharp divide between "generalizers" who believe that behavior and outcomes display sufficient regularity to be described, even predicted, by principles or laws, and "particularizers" who foreground the role of agency and chance, doubt the efficacy of prediction, and emphasize the idiosyncrasy of individual cases. The conflict between these worldviews is made readily apparent by how participants respond to close-call counterfactual scenarios that use plausible rewrites of the past to move history on to an increasingly divergent path. Close-call counterfactuals make the case for the determining features of context, which make them anathema to generalizers but music to the ears of particularizers. The findings of both the correlational studies and experiments suggest strong links between belief systems and psychological orientations and the resistance of both to alternative worldviews or historical interpretations.

Chapter 6, "Scholars and Causation 2," builds on the findings of the previous chapter. Tetlock and I found that participants in our experiments considered the contingency of events to diminish the closer we approach them in time. Counterfactual priming made participants more open to contingency, and more so when the counterfactuals were packaged in narrative accounts that embedded them in local context. In this chapter, I attempt to see if the same pattern holds when historians and international relations scholars are asked to devise their own close-call counterfactuals. Participants with a high need for closure should respond positively to this task when the case is at odds with their view of the world or preferred theory, and be resistant, or at least cross-pressured, when it is a case they consider supportive. The cross-pressure, I surmise, arises from their need to demonstrate their imagination, historical knowledge, and competence in constructing arguments versus their need to defend their views of the world.

I also probe understandings of causation through the novel use of what I call long-shot counterfactuals. These are minimal rewrites of history at considerable temporal remove from the outcome I want to mutate. They entail a long chain of events between antecedent and consequent, and many enabling counterfactuals. Long-shot counterfactuals should be inherently less credible than their close-call counterparts because of these differences. The experiments in chapter 5 indicate that historians and international relations scholars estimate events to be more contingent the

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farther back in time from them they are asked to make an assessment. Experiments using long-shot counterfactuals nevertheless suggest that such counterfactuals are difficult to make plausible. When they are judged implausible, historians and international relations scholars lower their estimate of the overall contingency of the event in question. Counterfactual priming with close-call and long-shot counterfactuals appears to have divergent consequences. Following Tversky and Kahneman, I argue that both outcomes are due to the effect of vividness, which draws participants into a scenario, narrowing their conceptual horizon. If they judge the scenario plausible—a judgment much easier to bring about in a close-call counterfactual—they raise their estimates of the overall contingency of the event, and vice versa, if not.

Close-call and long-shot counterfactuals pose different kinds of challenges to participants. The latter encourage them to think about how remote and improbable our world would have appeared from the vantage point of the antecedent. They also highlight causal connections across social domains that are normally separate fields of study and by doing so emphasize the open-ended nature of the social world. I explore these features of long-shot counterfactuals and the cognitive tensions, even contradictions, that my experiments highlight in follow-up interviews with participants. Overall, these experiments and surveys indicate that neither historians nor international relations scholars display what might be considered rational thinking when they consider the contingency of alternative or actual outcomes that are perceived as having important implications for their beliefs about the world and how it works.

Part III turns to fiction on the grounds that it provides the most compelling and persuasive exploration of alternative worlds. The move from social science to literature and the humanities, I argued earlier, is fully justified given the goals of my inquiry. Nor is it as great a leap as it may appear to some readers. Fact and fiction have always been intertwined in the human mind and share a common etymology in most Western languages. History at the outset was inseparable from myth. It was only in mid-fifth-century Greece that the concept of myth was formulated, and with it, the possibility of distinguishing history from fiction. A century later, Aristotle argued that fiction—by which he meant all forms of poetry, including tragedy—was superior to history, which merely described events, because it had the power to order them in abstract ways and thereby convey deeper truths.[54]

The idea of the "fact" as a description of the world independent of theory is an invention of the seventeenth century.[55] This innovation is generally attributed to Francis Bacon or his followers.[56] In the eighteenth century, the understanding of "facts" as a form of "uninterested knowledge" had profound consequences for philosophy, history, and literature.

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Traditional European history was shaped by the Christian belief that it encodes a pattern and purpose that can be discovered. The search for history's immanent plot, which used poetry for a model, tied it closely to literature. Literature in turn became implicated with history. Many novels of the middle to late eighteenth century, including those of Richardson, Fielding, and the plays of Steele, sought to mediate between figurative and empirical discourses, between discourses rooted in biblical narrative and those founded on observation. Novels of the period had yet to establish stable boundaries, and their authors often described them as a form of history. Only later would novelists come to understand their work as a form of poetry, but many still reserved the right to engage history.[57]

British empiricists of the latter half of the eighteenth century were drawn to history because they understood the present to be constructed on the understanding of the past. They sought rules for gathering and evaluating facts, became champions of quantitative data, and tried to develop more transparent modes of presentation. David Hume rejected interpretations that were not based on particulars that could be observed, and brought his understanding of induction to the study of history. He effectively debunked the idea that history told a story about a decline from a past golden age. His involvement with history nevertheless led him to conclude that it is functionally indistinguishable from novels and epic poetry because, like these forms, it is only made meaningful by fictional emplotment, a mere recital of past events being nothing more than a chronicle. For Hume, history, freed of its Christian and mythical roots, is the proper paradigm of human understanding because it connects our consciousness with what lies outside of it. It is a "moral science" because the conventions that govern human behavior are the unintended result of individuals' engagement with one another and the world. History helps to clarify these conventions and make them more meaningful by describing their emergence and evolution.[58] Many eighteenth-century historical works contain features that we associate with the novel because they seek to generate knowledge through the vehicle of conversation with the reader and elicit identification with the author who appears as the principal "character" of his or her work.[59]

Thanks to Hume and his continental counterparts, by the mid-nineteenth century history had replaced poetry as the principal source of knowledge and wisdom about humanity. Poetry was subsumed under the rubric of fiction, which by now had emerged as a generic category. This reversal of the relative standing of history and poetry, or more broadly speaking, of fact and fiction, was never fully accepted by creative artists and some philosophers. Modernist writers, among them Joyce, Pound, and Eliot, insisted that no era had a monopoly on experience, understanding, and wisdom and that recovery of the past was essential to human fulfill-

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ment. They embraced poetry as the appropriate vehicle toward this end.[60] Nietzsche went a step further and insisted that art and music spoke a truth that went beyond words and had the potential to free people from the tyranny of logic.[61] Twentieth-century writers, whether or not they engage history, are heirs to this tradition. Many of their readers have come to accept fiction as a vehicle for stretching and challenging their consciousness and understanding of the world in ways history does not.[62]

Historical counterfactuals have the potential to build bridges between history and fiction. They may be used to interrogate and offer critical perspectives on history and social science or their intellectual foundations. This is the avowed goal of my short story in chapter 7. It plays psycho-logic off against the laws of statistical inference to demonstrate the inherently conservative bias of the latter with respect to alternative worlds. My story takes place in an imaginary world in which Mozart has lived to the age of sixty-five, and as a result, neither world war nor the Holocaust occurred. My heroine and her partner try to imagine what the world would have been be like if Mozart had died at age thirty-five, her partner's age. The alternative world my characters invoke is a pale version of our twentieth-century world with all its unspeakable horrors, and is summarily dismissed by an imaginary critic who demonstrates its political and statistical improbability. My heroine concludes with a biting if humorous rejoinder. My story does double duty as a "long-shot" counterfactual and experimental instrument, which I use in chapter 6 as part of my effort to understand how historians and international relations scholars understand causation.

Chapter 8 examines more serious fiction in the form of two best-selling novels. It compares Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, published in 1935, with Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*, published in 2004.[63] The former looks ahead to the 1936 presidential election and the victory of the fictional fascist Senator Buzz Windrip over Franklin Roosevelt. The latter looks back to the 1940 presidential election to imagine Roosevelt's defeat by aviator Charles A. Lindbergh, in thrall to the Nazis, and whose administration is isolationist abroad and anti-Semitic at home. Strictly speaking, these novels only peripherally engage international relations. Novels about alternative worlds—especially those set in the past—are nevertheless the ultimate form of counterfactual unpacking. They speak to a fundamental goal of my book: exploring the ways in which fact and fiction work together to create a powerful impression on readers. They suggest that the binary between fact and fiction is to a great extent artificial and can creatively and usefully be bridged for analytical as well as artistic purposes. This understanding, I argue in the conclusion, has important implications for the study and practice of international relations.

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Of the two novels, only *The Plot Against America* qualifies as counterfactual in that it remakes the past. Counterfactual fiction almost invariably uses an antecedent—some rewrite of history—to produce a consequent in the form of an altered present. The antecedent is intended to be amplifying in its effects, taking history farther away from the world we know. Roth changes history by changing the outcome of the 1940 election and making its winner subject to blackmail by Hitler, creating a sharp divergence from the history we know. Toward the end of the novel he introduces a deus ex machina to return history to its actual course once the alternative world he creates has served its purposes. Critics find his second order counterfactual unconvincing, but its credibility, I contend, is beside the point. Roth is a cut above other practitioners of the counterfactual novel genre, and not only by virtue of the quality of his writing. He is self-conscious and reflective about his use of history and counterhistory. There is much to learn from Roth about the ways in which counterfactual history can be used to offset inherent weaknesses of the genre of history and become an effective rhetorical vehicle for advancing cultural or political projects. More importantly for our purposes, his novel drives home just how much our emotional and intellectual anchors are the product of our circumstances, circumstances that we generally take for granted. Even if they are not as contingent as *The Plot Against America* appears to suggest, they are still parochial, not universal, and certainly not preordained. This realization has important consequences for our understanding of theory in the social sciences.

The last chapter, Conclusion, builds on the findings of the earlier chapters to make more general arguments about the nature of causation and the relationship between fact and fiction, and factual and counterfactual. Drawing on World War I and the Cold War cases, it expands upon the procedure outlined out in chapter 2 for determining the relative weight of systematic and nonsystematic causes in individual cases. It develops a strategy for using counterfactuals to explore nonlinear causation. It reviews the findings of my two experimental studies and their implications for international relations theory and the ability of scholars to meet the cognitive and ethical requirements Weber associates with good theory. A final section attempts to build bridges between literature and social science. It does so by revisiting the binary of fact and fiction. I argue that we should recognize the tensions and fuzziness that surround this binary and exploit them for creative ends, as do social scientists who conduct counterfactual research and novelists who write counterfactual fiction. Until now, these projects, often on parallel tracks, have had no switches connecting them. My book aspires to remedy this situation to the benefit, I believe, of both communities.