VIRTUES FOR A PROTOCOL SOCIETY

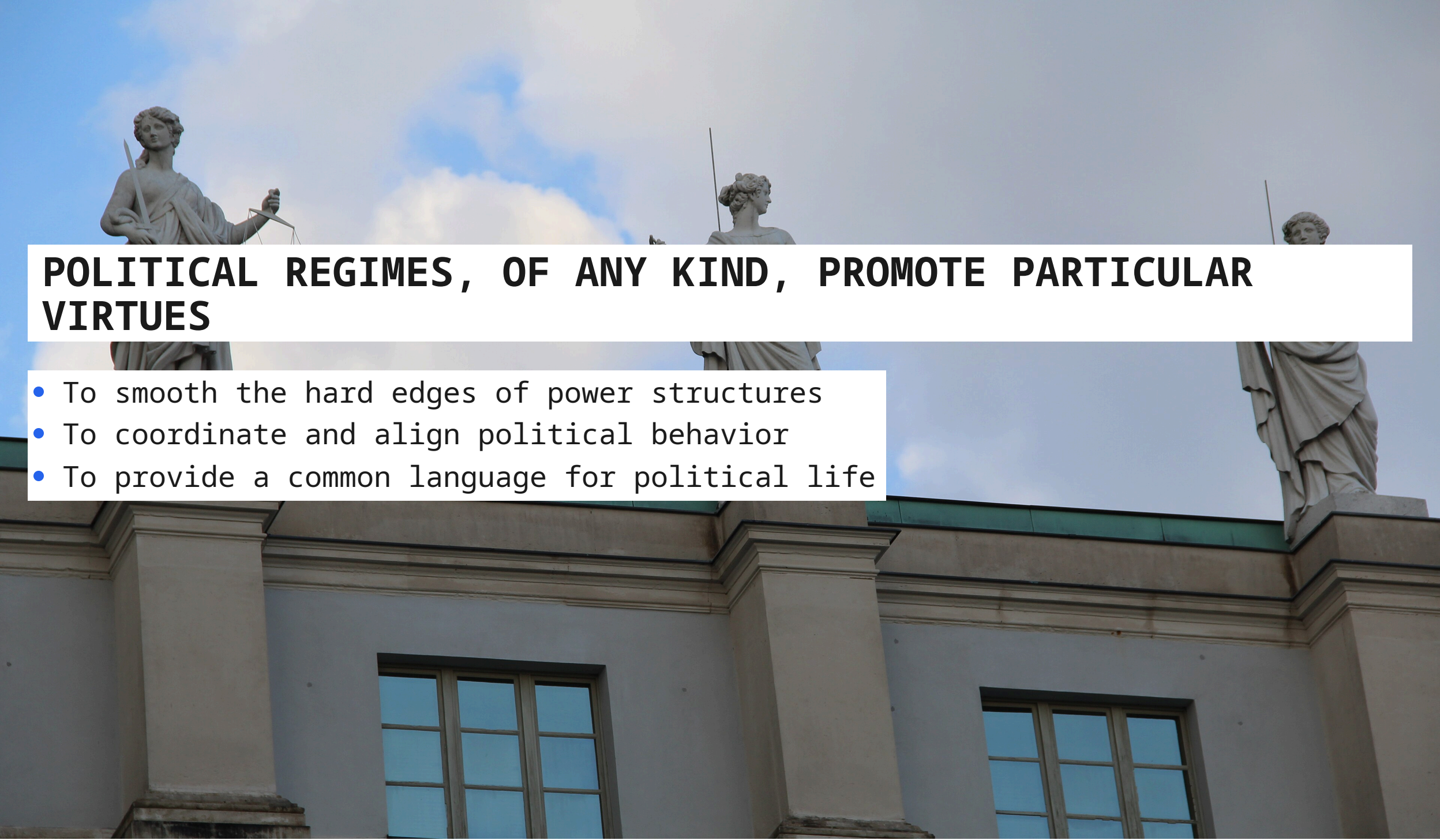
Nathan Schneider
University of Colorado Boulder

Protocol Symposium

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO DO PROTOCOL POLITICS WELL?

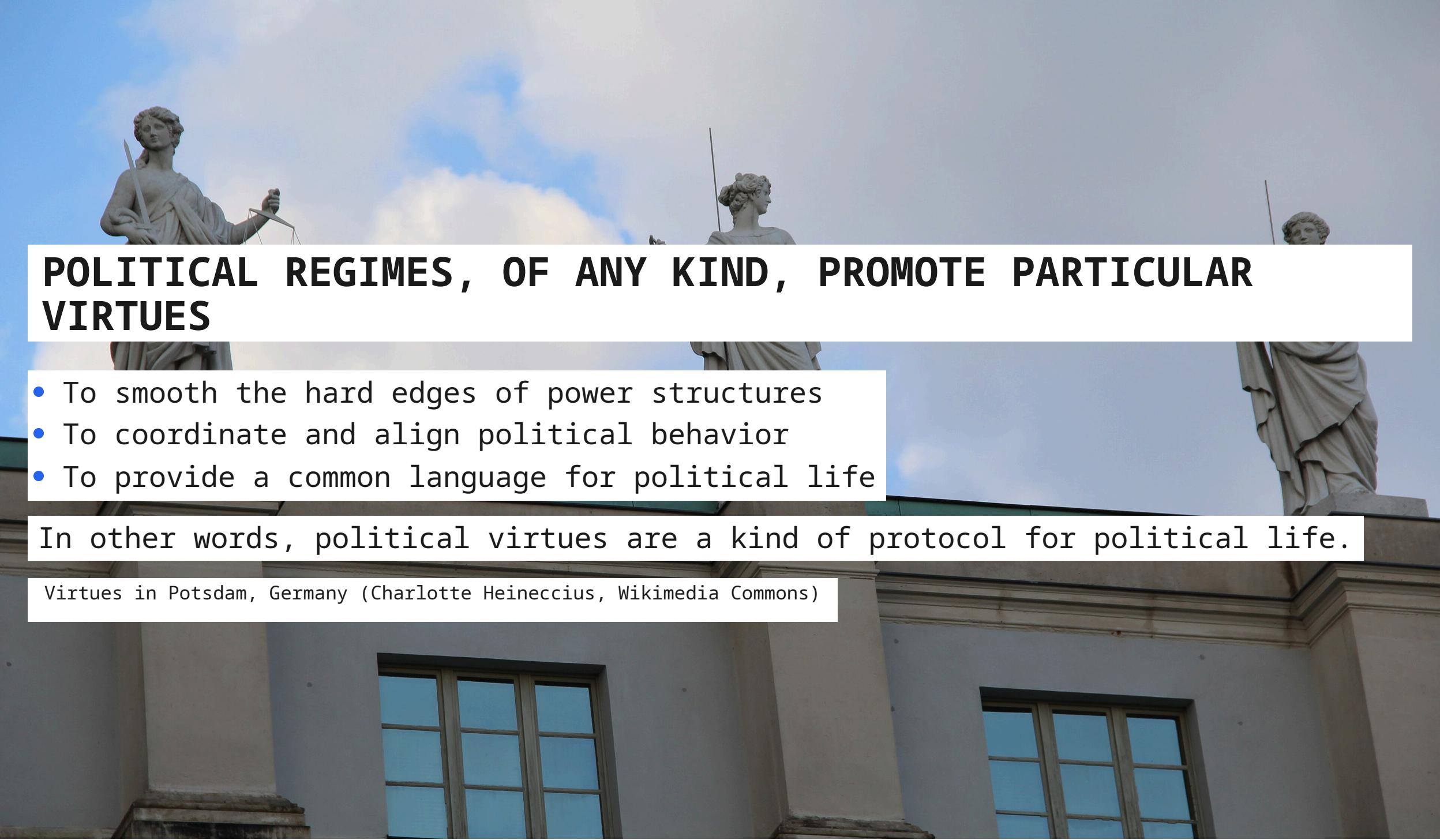
Imagine, as many here believe, that protocols are becoming first-class techniques for things like:

- Digital governance
- Climate stewardship
- Political order



POLITICAL REGIMES, OF ANY KIND, PROMOTE PARTICULAR VIRTUES

- To smooth the hard edges of power structures
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In other words, political virtues are a kind of protocol for political life.

Virtues in Potsdam, Germany (Charlotte Heineccius, Wikimedia Commons)

ANY GIVEN REGIME HAS ITS PREFERRED VIRTUES

Bureaucratic	expertise, neutrality, meritocracy
Capitalist	competitiveness, individualism, thrift
Democratic	accountability, argumentation, participation
Indigenous	ancestry, locality, mutuality
Monarchist	charisma, restraint, propriety
Nomadic	adaptability, austerity, mobility
Oligarchic	elitism, loyalty, nobility
Socialist	materialism, solidarity, unity
Theocratic	obedience, piety, tradition

BUT WHAT VIRTUES MAKE SENSE FOR A PROTOCOL SOCIETY?

If the world were to move more toward a politics of diverse and overlapping protocols, people would need to cultivate the appropriate virtues.

What should they be?

IDENTIFYING CANDIDATE VIRTUES

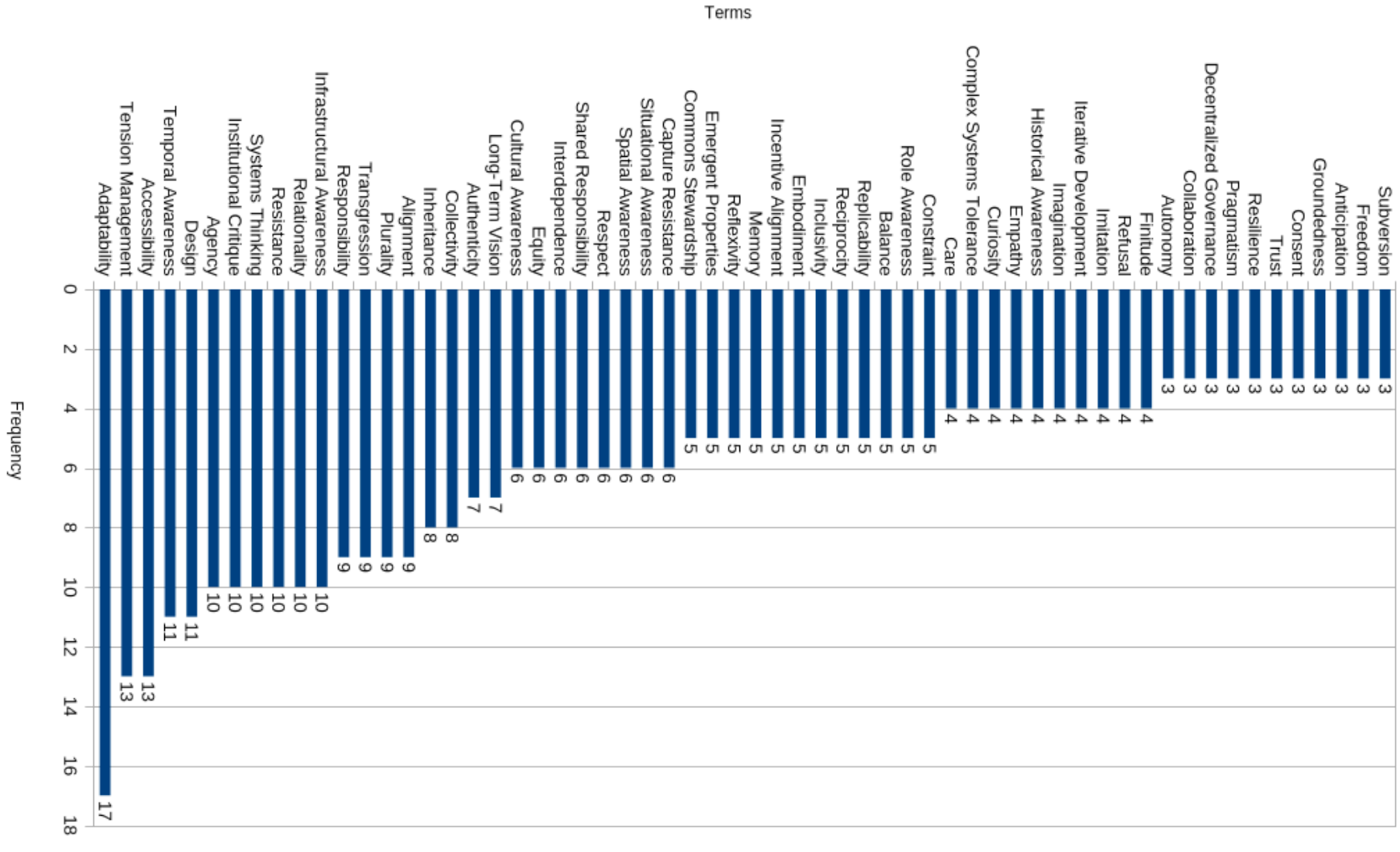
Sources for a thematic analysis:

Source	Virtue-relevant passages
As for Protocols (Christian et al., 2025)	62
The Protocol Reader (Rao et al., 2025)	72

Procedure:

- LLM supported generation of terms (n=71)
- Manual review and removal of terms (n=56)
- Apply terms to manual review of passages (n=37 used from LLM list; n=36 manually added)

FREQUENCY ANALYSIS



Plot of all terms with a frequency greater than 3.

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

Frequency	Centrality	Synthesis
Adaptability	Adaptability	Adaptability
Tension Management	Design	Design
Accessibility	Agency	Temporal Awareness
Temporal Awareness	Temporal Awareness	Agency
Design	Systems Thinking	Institutional Critique
Agency	Collectivity	Tension Management
Institutional Critique	Transgression	Accessibility
Systems Thinking	Institutional Critique	Systems Thinking
Resistance	Plurality	Transgression
Relationality	Relationality	Collectivity
		Relationality
		Resistance
		Plurality

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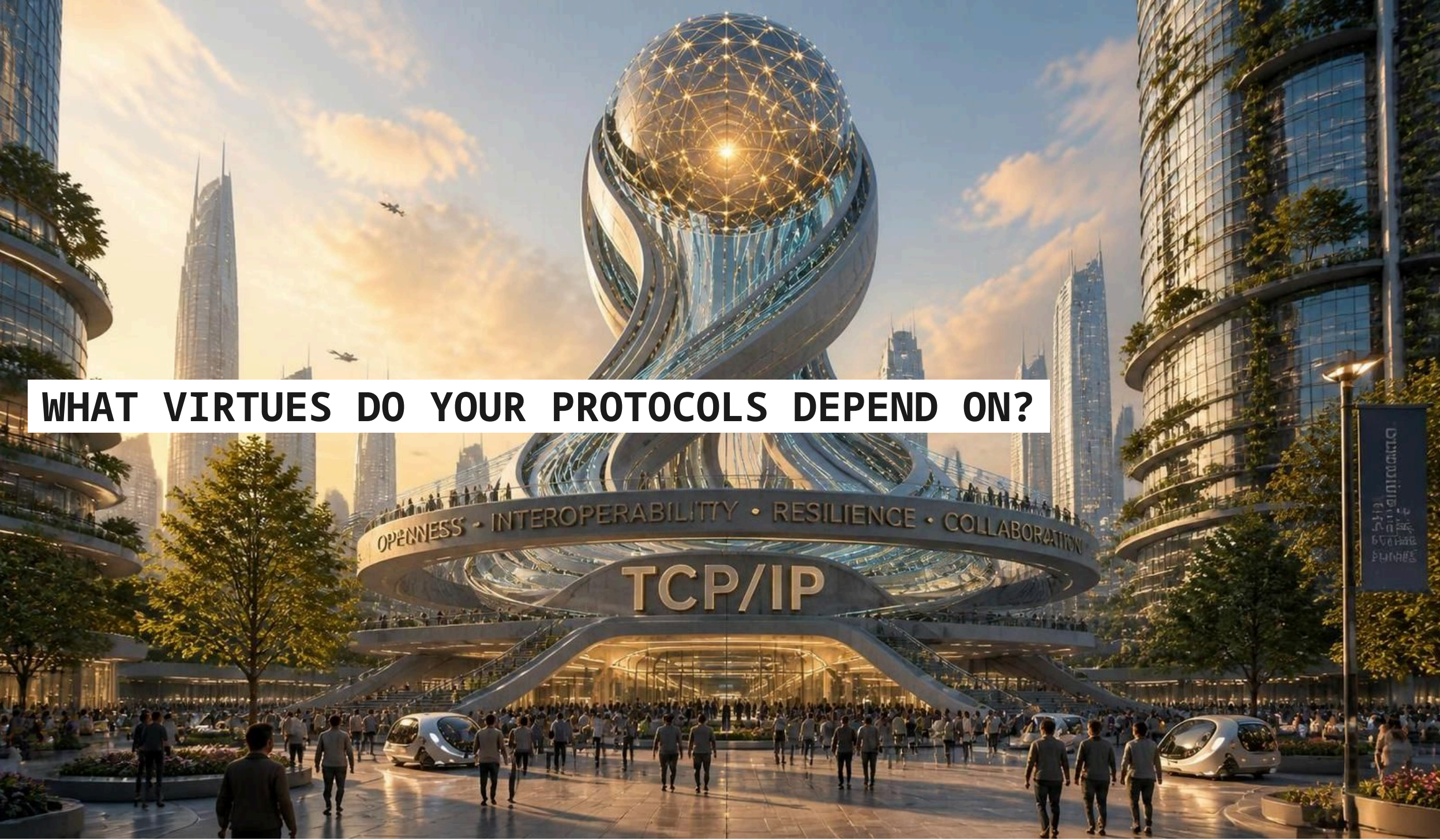
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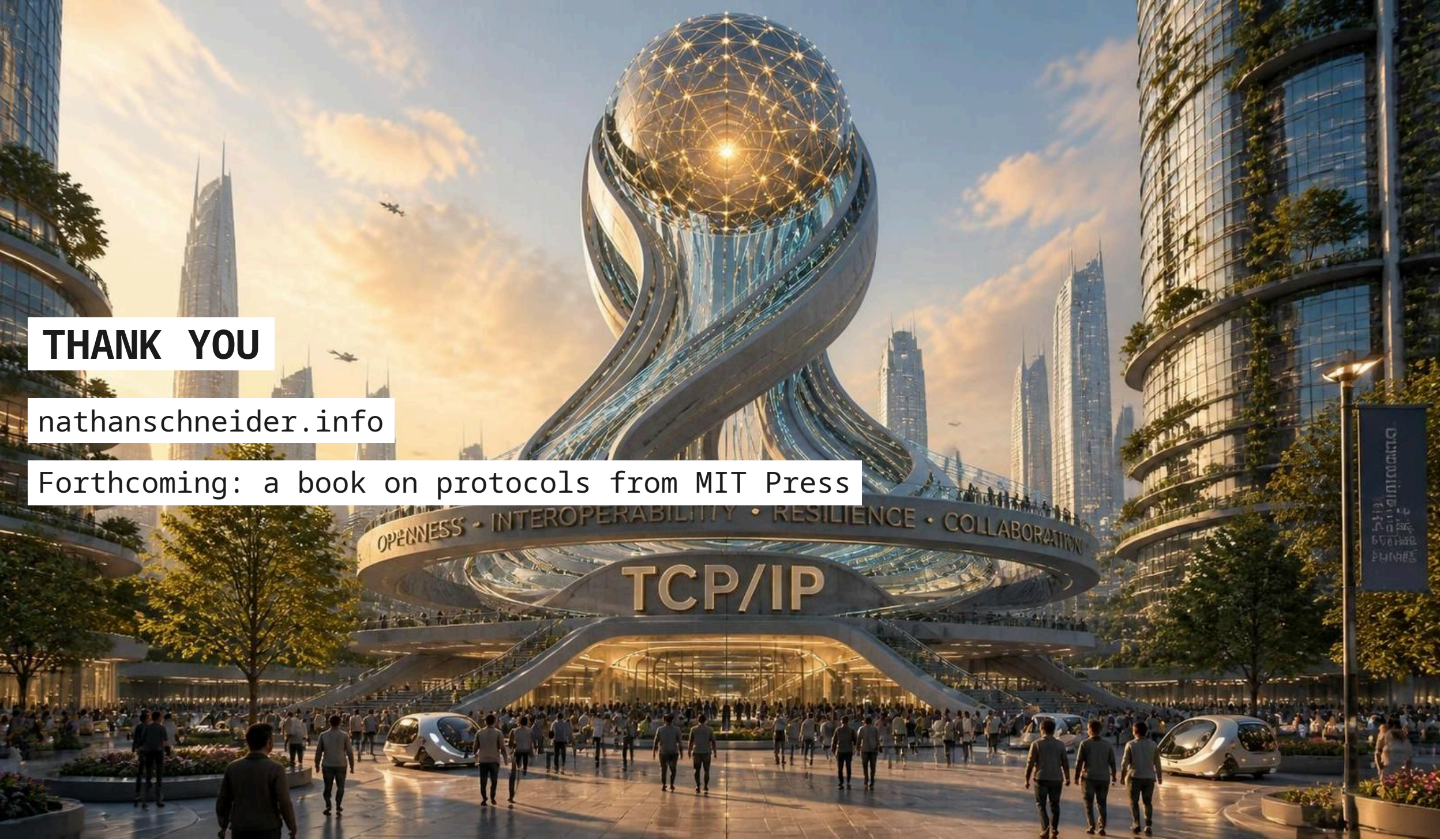
Design is not commonly a political virtue in monopolistic regimes, but it is necessary in plural and overlapping ones.

VIRTUE PEDAGOGY

How does the protocol regime promulgate its virtues? Through myths, pulpits, or compulsory schooling?

- Gatherings like this
- Protocol art (de Filippi, 2024)
- Protocol fiction (Sachin, 2025)
- Protocol watching (Stinson-Schroff, 2025)


WHAT VIRTUES DO YOUR PROTOCOLS DEPEND ON?
OPENNESS • INTEROPERABILITY • RESILIENCE • COLLABORATION
TCP/IP



THANK YOU

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Forthcoming: a book on protocols from MIT Press