INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

The Cultural Construction of Organizations, States, and Identities

RONALD L. JEPPERSON
and JOHN W. MEYER

Institutional Theory

Over the past three decades, Meyer, Jepperson, and colleagues have contributed to the development of one of the leading approaches in social theory, by analyzing the cultural frameworks that have shaped modern organizations, states, and identities. Bringing together key articles and new reflections, this volume collects the essential theoretical ideas of "sociological neoinstitutionalism." It clarifies the core ideas and situates them within social theory writ large. Among other topics, the authors discuss the changing nature of the "actors" that have operated within contemporary social structure. The book concludes with the evolving frameworks that have structured social activity in the post–World War II period of "embedded liberalism," in the more recent neoliberal period, and in an emergent post-liberal period that appears to be a radical departure.

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Preface

Over the past thirty years the authors have produced a set of articles that draw upon and develop one of the main "new institutionalisms" in social science. The central concern of this line of thought is how broad contemporary cultural changes – for example, in religious or political ideas – are "institutionalized" in core social structures (such as legal systems, professions, and organizational structures), and construct both actors and collective action systems. Hence this research program, with the involvement of many scholars, examines the cultural bases of formal organizations, states, and identities. As a cultural institutionalism, the perspective is distinct from the more economics-inspired institutionalisms that have also emerged in recent decades. Put simply, this line of thought takes an "anthropological" view of modern society, in the connotative sense of the term.

The material in this book takes off from earlier institutionalist analyses, as we indicate throughout. Most directly, the work in this volume is based on the sociological neoinstitutionalism that influenced sociology beginning in the 1970s.[1]

This book presents both previously published articles (from 1988 through 2011) and newly written pieces. The previously published elements (some coauthored, some individually written) concern fundamental issues in social theory. They have separately received a good deal of attention. However, they were published in disparate outlets. Any given reader may only have easy access to some of them and may not be aware of companion pieces. Accordingly, this volume provides the articles as a set.

In addition, we add five newly written coauthored pieces. Chapter 1 provides a new basic introduction to the line of social theory and three other chapters provide current reflections on the topics of the previously published articles. A new concluding chapter (Chapter 12) applies the line of social theory by analyzing the cultural frameworks of three historical periods: the post–World War II period of "embedded

liberalism," the more recent neoliberal period, and the emergent post-liberal period.

The book is organized in the following way. After the introduction just mentioned, the chapters cluster around three topics: the foundations of institutional theory, the multiple levels of analysis involved in social theory, and the nature of the "actors" within contemporary social structure. These sections are followed by the concluding chapter described in the preceding paragraph. We introduce the specific chapters of the volume in more detail at the end of the introductory chapter.

A note on the use of the pronoun "we" in the coauthored pieces of this volume: It's just the editorial "we" used for convenience. It would be tedious and distracting to try to specify individual responsibility for statements or to indicate any differences in emphasis. We share equal responsibility for the new chapters in this book (Chapters 1, 5, 8, 11, and 12), those chapters going back and forth between us multiple times. Related, the ordering of author names for the book is merely alphabetical, reflecting the general shared responsibility for the volume.

The work in this book arises not only from our own efforts but also from the ideas and research of a community of institutionalist scholars. It has been a shared enterprise. We report the contributions of our collegial compatriots in the acknowledgments and citations in the separate chapters of this book.

We would also like to acknowledge the support and assistance of Valerie Appleby (commissioning editor at Cambridge University Press), Tobias Ginsberg (senior editorial assistant), and Liisa Salomaa (our research assistant for this book project). We also have benefited from the work of Laura Simmons, Gayathri Tamilselvan, Anitha Nadarajan, and Jim Diggins in the production of the book. Finally, we appreciate the permission to include previously published articles received from the University of Chicago Press, Greenwood Publishing Group, Oxford University Press, Rowman & Littlefield, SAGE Publications, and Stanford University Press.

Notes

1. J. Meyer, "The Effects of Education as an Institution," *American Journal of Sociology* (1977) 83:55–77; J. Meyer & B. Rowan, "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony," *American*

Journal of Sociology (1977) 83:340–63; J. Meyer & B. Rowan, "The Structure of Educational Organizations," pp. 78–109 in *Environments and Organizations* (1978), edited by M. W. Meyer, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; J. Meyer, "The World Polity and the Authority of the Nation-State," pp. 109–137 in *Studies of the Modern World-System* (1980), edited by A. Bergesen, New York, NY: Academic Press; J. Meyer & W. R. Scott, *Organizational Environments: Ritual and Rationality* (1983), Beverly Hills: SAGE.

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PART I

Introduction

1 Introduction: Cultural Institutionalism

J. MEYER AND R. JEPPERSON

The "sociological neoinstitutionalism" of this volume is a creature of, reaction to, and interpreter of society in the postwar period. The line of thought developed in the 1970s.[1] It emphasizes the way that the "actors" of contemporary society – often taken for granted in both common discourse and (unfortunately) social theory – can usefully be seen as constructions of an evolving rationalistic and individualistic culture.

Informal ideas of this sort are commonplace in ordinary social life. People, even social scientists, wryly understand that those around them – the people they work with, the students they teach, or the troubled patients they counsel – vary greatly from those of the past, carrying thoughts, capacities, and expectations of an entirely distinct spirit. People after hours comment on the different ways in which one must act and talk under changed contemporary cultural conceptions: the new gender dynamics of contemporary life, the new rules of organizational life, the new understanding of problems of the natural environment, or the new demands for transparency in business or personal relationships. These rapidly changing routines in fact reflect dramatic cultural changes that reach all the way up to the global level – for instance, to sweepingly universalistic discussions of human rights in UNESCO and other organs of world society. Such cultural changes have their own history, reflecting the efforts of movements, themselves embedded in previous cultural frames, to change the meaning systems under which social life proceeds.

Noticing such changes, describing them analytically, and attempting to explain them have been the core concerns of the neoinstitutionalism reflected in this book. This introductory chapter provides a brief intellectual history that situates the line of thought.

1.1 Sociology after Mid-century: The Marginalization of Culture

The emergent field of sociology in the early twentieth century routinely invoked broad cultural frameworks in its explanations. Ideas of folkways and mores, embedded in habits, were standard (Camic 1986). Groups were seen as having customs derived from the past, or from broad religious, political, and legal doctrines that themselves had long histories. National societies were seen as having highly distinctive and causally powerful cultures. People were envisioned as natives and role occupants within their communities, deeply embedded within them in both their identities and mentalities.

Early twentieth-century political science also had a cultural-institutional character. The textbooks of the time typically featured compressed national histories that one was to use to make sense of differences in political dynamics and political behavior. A reference to a then-current French protest would naturally invoke a protest repertoire originating in 1789, or explicate tensions among clerical, aristocratic, and statist models of order. A mid-century text continued to emphasize the abiding French tension between plebiscitary democratic and pseudodemocratic Bonapartist models of political order (Wright 1954).

Various cultural institutionalisms remained standard in social science through the mid-twentieth century. A good example of the explanatory imagery is provided by S. M. Lipset's studies of US/Canada differences (Lipset 1990). Lipset emphasized how the different foundational histories of the two polities – one self-consciously breaking with European ties and traditions, the other not – were reified into distinct "organizing principles," deeply built into a variety of social structures from family to religious groups to the political order. Canadian elites saw themselves as sustaining Tory ideas of rule and social order, just as US ones saw themselves as separating from a stigmatized European Old World. The divergent organizing principles generated different practices of leadership, social control, and welfare.

Related, Talcott Parsons offered a sweeping survey of cultural evolution and its institutionalization in social structures, in *The System of Modern Societies* (an analysis independent from but unfortunately overshadowed by his [in]famous systems theory). S. N. Eisenstadt compared world civilizations over a long career, emphasizing the institutionalization of distinct "cultural premises" (Eisenstadt 1966, 1996).

This form of explanation remains standard in social science, if less present in social theory. For instance, textbook discussions of Japanese society naturally discuss the varying influence of Buddhist, Confucian, and Shinto models in establishing the institutional matrix of Japan (e.g., Schneider and Silverman 2012: ch. 1). The Meiji period is then presented as a stark historical break, opening to external models, while at the same time recovering and refashioning old ideas of imperial sovereignty.

Elements of an explicit social theory of varying cultural-institutional "life-worlds" were synthesized in Berger and Luckmann's *Social Construction of Reality* (1966; also Berger 1963). Distinct cultural worlds were seen as carried and reproduced by various institutional machineries (economy, polity, education), but were also seen as institutionalizations of evolving cultural mythologies (e.g., Durkheim's [1969] "cult of the individual," or American Protestant visions of community). In this picture people inhabit entire "symbolic universes" of folk knowledge and rituals. The lifeworlds contain both standardized identities for people (e.g., in the contemporary system, individual, person, and actor) and the main lines of action for these identities (e.g., occupational, educational, marital, and political choices). Much individual activity is enactment of highly scripted identities, within highly ritualized social dramas (e.g., dramas of progress, at the national level; dramas of self-development and success, at the individual level).

In this "phenomenological" imagery, the cultural system – the particular "life-world" – is causally primary and fundamentally ideological in nature. The identities and lines of behavior of individuals and associations are constructed and derivative from a social scientific standpoint. After all, in the great scheme of things, few people vote when there is no election or go to school where there are no schools; when such institutions exist, vast numbers of people are drawn into them, taking up the associated roles, behavioral scripts, and accounts.

Social Construction is a famous book. Nevertheless the ideas that Berger and Luckmann assembled were not much implemented in empirical research programs, at least in the US intellectual context. This is a striking outcome, given the range and seeming power of the ideas. Instead, as American sociology evolved in the 1960s and beyond, it sustained a would-be structural analysis, but marginalized, or individualized and psychologized, the attention to "lifeworlds."[2]

It is important to understand why constructionist ideas were marginalized, and sometimes aggressively excluded, in mainstream American sociological thought. Mainly, they cross a Red Line, by failing to emphasize the "free will" or agency attributed to individual actors, and to the organizations derived from these actors (including the US state), in institutionalized cultural doctrine (Meyer 2010).

1.2 The Red Line

A phenomenological orientation did not fit well with the new folk culture and social structure of the postwar period. That complex dramatically expanded the constitutional individualism of American culture, intensified in reaction to the disastrously failed statisms and corporatisms of European society, and the continuing threats of a cold war. In parallel, a more self-consciously professional and intendedly relevant social science reified much of the new culture, taking for granted many of its cultural assumptions, and accordingly becoming less interested in analyzing them. It was as if society was now, finally, a truly "real" system, made up of very real entities – especially individuals. With social and economic progress, humankind had finally transcended the arbitrary cultural confinements of a primitive past. Society was, now, stripped to its essentials, and the individuals in it were similarly hardwired purposive entities. (See Chapter 2 of this volume, "Society without Culture.") To depart from such conceptions, which were simultaneously academic theories and normative standards, was to cross a line. To disrespect the almost magical rights and powers of the (especially American) individual was a normative and intellectual violation, and often a violation of proper methodological standards. To properly understand social structures, one must understand the points of view of the "actors" within them. This idea was reasonable enough, but in practice it frequently led to the mistaken assumption that these points of view produce the social structure and changes in it. Historical and cultural forces then easily disappear in such analyses.

The glorification of the capacity of individual and organizational participants to modify their own worlds through action marginalized a more traditional analysis of human society as rooted in cultural meanings. A broad understanding of culture was reduced to its contemporary weakened forms. Culture came to mean mostly the set of goals and ideals animating the individual or organizational members of

society. Survey research, along with aggregate ideas and definitions of culture, became more central. Culture became "tools" or "affordances" that people use (as in Swidler's [1986] influential analysis). Or to a lesser extent, culture could be the set of goals and ideals built into the polity – typically, the national state. The idea that people, their actions, and social structures are embedded in a larger set of meanings receded.

The liberalism of the period – in the broad historical sense – clearly seems causally implicated in these intellectual developments. Liberalism of one form or another was a dominant ideology of the postwar period. The liberal project reconstructed the institutional framework of society around a template of rationalized human actorhood, and the more recent neoliberal version intensified it (compare Ruggie 1982 and 1998). The new postwar individualism, the "society of organizations," expanded states, and a worldwide state system were outcomes in both theory and practice.

Social science rapidly shifted to treat these constructions as primordial actors in history, dropping an older standard cultural-institutionalism along the way. Individuals, given their normative centrality, were especially stressed. The fields of economics and psychology grew and gained policy centrality (Frank et al. 1995). Sociology shifted to emphasize social psychological processes. The field of anthropology destabilized. Overall, even history moved to focus on individuals – not just "great men" – rather than authorities and institutions. A taste for reductionism, as well as methodological individualism, became commonplace, and then dominant (see Chapters 6–8 of this volume). Much social theory, in other words, quickly became part of the contemporary cultural world, falling into society, rather than analyzing its foundational culture and structures.

The intensive emphasis on individuals and organizations as independent entities finally did provoke a reactive interest in the institutions that regulate systems involving these actors. Institutions began to reappear in social theory in the 1970s and 1980s. However, they were largely seen as "constraints" on the taken-for-granted social actors – a conceptualization far distant from Berger and Luckmann's cultural-institutional "worlds." Culture might appear as a few "rules" – for example, property rights or Westphalian sovereignty – thought to be essential for society as a largely economic or political game. Much purportedly institutionalist literature, in economics but

also political science, was not actually much concerned with institutions, let alone with the broader meaning systems that they embody. Instead, it was about the ways in which coherent (and sometimes rational) actors are thought to build them, use them, resist them, and seek to change them. That was the primary interest.

The reification of actors ended up creating a considerable embarrassment for American sociology. Many of the sweeping social changes of the contemporary period are rooted in a changing cultural meaning system. Inattentive to this system, the field of sociology has produced limited analysis of the most striking social changes of the period. Analyses poorly account for the rise of a global environment movement that completely transcends local environmental problems. The discipline gives weak accounts of the whole raft of social changes around gender and the family system: worldwide increases in the status of women (including divorce and abortion rights), the recognition and legitimation of homosexuality, the legalization of the status of children, the liberations of sexual expression, current experiments with biological sex, and so on. The field deals poorly with the dramatic (and global) declines in the legitimacy of racial and ethnic and now national distinctions, with the dramatic rise of human rights ideologies. Most sociologies do not well explain the explosive rise in institutions of education at every level and in every country. They give feeble interpretations of global expansions in formal organization, elaborations of organizational structures, and demands for organizational transparency, social responsibility, and internal rectitude (Bromley and Meyer 2015). These institutional changes are not a primary interest.

In all these areas, descriptive empirical work routinely shows dramatic and often worldwide changes. Informal conversations constantly call attention to them. Explanatory models, however, are absent or primitive. Contemporary sociologists, for instance, certainly notice informally the extraordinary expansion of female participation in public society – many of them after all are women, who know they would not have been in the room a few decades ago. But if asked to explain the dramatic social change, few sociologists would have any convincing answer: even fewer would be able to coherently explain why the change is worldwide. Sociologists have focused upon changes within taken-for-granted cultural frames, not for the most part changes in the frames themselves.

1.3 The Neoinstitutional Perspective of This Book

The "sociological neoinstitutionalism" of this volume has focused on analyzing such changes. It treats the "actorhood" of modern individuals and organizations as itself constructed out of cultural materials – and treats contemporary institutional systems as working principally by creating and legitimating agentic actors with appropriate perspectives, motives, and agendas. The scholars who have developed this perspective have been less inclined to emphasize actors' use of institutions and more inclined to envision institutional forces as producing and using actors. By focusing on the evolving construction and reconstruction of the actors of modern society, institutionalists can better explain the dramatic social changes of the contemporary period – why these changes cut across social contexts and functional settings, and why they often become worldwide in character.

In this theoretical picture, the behavior of actors – the "action" itself – is as much a product of a script as the choice of an actor. The scripts are rooted, for instance, in ideologies of rights and human capital, and in highly simplified pictures of society (featuring an idealized polity, economy, family system, and religious order). Such ideologies certainly do depict contemporary actors as filled with choices and decisions. But much of this behavior is highly institutionalized, with the ideas about "action" in large part an overlay of "accounts" of activity (a "vocabulary of motives" [Mills 1940]). For example, the choices of contemporary young people to complete secondary school or attend college are generally understood to make good rational sense. Yet, many young people complete these steps without having decided to do so – they simply take it all for granted and follow along the conventionalized pathway. They are actors in a theatrical sense, not the senses employed in contemporary sociological thought. They may be rational (or intendedly rational) in some respects, but they are not, in the main, the actors imagined in much social theory. And because they are embedded in highly institutionalized and changing cultural scripts, an explosion in now-routinized "going to college" can become an astonishing worldwide script directing masses of young people in every country (Schofer and Meyer 2005).

There is no reason to suppose all these young persons are particularly irrational – indeed the script about education for both individual and collective progress is deeply institutionalized, and social and

economic returns to education have been high. Rational or not, however, the question is whether and in what sense these people should be considered real actors as envisioned in much social theory. From an institutionalist point of view, their actorhood is itself a greatly expanded script in the modern order. And since actorhood is prominently a script, rationality becomes difficult (sometimes even impossible) to define.[3] More generally, if the core units making up the modern order are cultural constructions, rationality becomes a tautology.

Overall, the theoretical ideas presented in this book are distinct from more conventional lines of social theory along several axes. First, the conception of culture is much broader than an imagery of individual attitudes, whether about politics or gods. We include great areas of institutionalized doctrine as central cultural material: microeconomic theory, for instance, or scientific medicine as a set of principles, or psychological doctrines of individual empowerment – professional and pseudo-professional knowledges (in the sense of Foucault) of every sort. All sorts of schemes have cultural standing far over and above both social structures and individuals. They operate as frameworks for the creation and behavior of actors.

Second, the ideas here emphasize the cultural elaborateness and dependence of the actor identities. Far removed from any natural or functional aspects, the contemporary actor is a model – a highly theorized one, and hence ordinarily a very unrealistic one. This is why, in practically all contemporary societies, the ordinary individual person is seen as clearly "not good enough." Almost everywhere, a decade or more of carefully organized reconstruction through the medium of compulsory formal education is demanded. Even after all this forced socialization, people interact with a wide range of others – therapists, trainers, consultants – who bring a continuous supply of the ingredients for actorhood down to the inadequate individual. Similar huge consulting industries operate exoskeletally to sustain modern organizations and national states as actors. The expanded standards of actorhood produced and intensified in the whole postwar (liberal and neoliberal) period mean that every natural person can be seen as failed or inadequate, requiring much schooling and therapy. Every organization requires regulation and reform. Every national state is a partially or entirely failed state.

Thus, in institutional theories, disjunction between cultural models of actorhood and the practical capacities of modern social entities is a normal condition – a kind of moving equilibrium (Brunsson 1985, 1989). The rapidly expanding postwar world has not been held together by a dominant stabilizing organizational structure – its theories and ideologies imagine a world held together by capable and responsible actors. These theories usually have, as ideologies, a functional cast – this is a preferred intellectual form in a modern society that takes its pretenses seriously. But they achieve their functionalism by grossly expanded and unrealistic conceptions of who actors actually are and what they can do, creating the "decoupling" or loose coupling, of vision and empirical reality, emphasized in the institutionalist literature (Weick 1976; Meyer and Rowan 1977). Given the great gaps between models and practical possibilities, institutional theories tend to distance themselves from any assumed functionalism.

Third, as the previous point implies, the line of thought emphasizes continuous interpenetration between actors and changing cultural environments. New cultural schemes are directly incorporated: for officers of organizations, departments of states, and individual persons. For instance, as a business executive goes along, he or she is influenced not only by the MBA degree conferred years ago but also by the continuous evolution of business school ideologies in the current period. The actor, thus, is in continuous interdependence with the expanding cultural environment that built his or her original identity.

We do not present such theoretical ideas as a self-sufficient social theory. They differ in this metatheoretical respect from the many lines of social theory presented as putative closed or core systems (whether of power or interests or functions or communication). At the least, the ideas reflected in this book should be a corrective to much common theorizing, and we hope an addition to the corpus of well-established social theory. The line of thought offers hypotheses and empirical generalizations that go beyond those that are ordinarily considered. It presents a distinctive causal imagery, pursued in order to explain features of the social world not easily captured – or not even noticed – when thinking about social entities as if they are relatively natural ones, that is, having natures and lines of behavior mostly determined outside of, or prior to the effects of, the wider social world.[4]

1.4 Empirical Research

Because this is a book of social theory, it may inadvertently give a false impression of the overall line of thought. The line developed in close conjunction with empirical research focusing upon macrosocial forces and variations. Many scholars have been involved, and research bibliographies are lengthy.[5] The relevant research, emphasizing the contemporary cultural construction of actorhood, naturally focuses on those areas of social life where actorhood has been most highly culturally constructed – individualism, organizations, and national states. The postwar liberal order elaborated models of these entities, as social constructions: these models provided theories and ideologies of how social order could be structured in an explosively expanding global society. An early elaboration laid out multiple dimensions of research (Thomas et al. 1987). Chapter 4 of this volume presents a characterization and review of research through 2000. Here we will note some research topics, designs, and findings in main research areas, to illustrate the dialectic of research and theory.

The human individual: Postwar cultural developments, given the failure of corporatist and statist conceptions of society, have dramatically emphasized the capacity, rights, and authority of the individual. Early formulations of institutional theory drew upon some available studies in this area and proposed others (e.g., Meyer 1977). Some early empirical research examined the dramatic and worldwide expansion in rights attributed to children (Boli-Bennett and Meyer 1978) and women (Ramirez 1987). An interest in the elaboration and shaping of individuality naturally motivated research attention to the worldwide expansion of education at all levels. Early on it became clear that the education focused on the development of people as expanded human actors, rather than on efforts to train people to fit into structures of social roles (e.g., vocational ones) (Ramirez and Meyer 1980). Research showed that mass primary education had become almost universal in the world independent of local social resources or needs (Meyer et al. 1977, 1992; Ramirez and Boli 1987). Studies of over-time development of tertiary education tracked the enormous global expansion of university enrollments to their current level, perhaps two-fifths of current cohorts – again with only loose connection to social roles such as jobs (Schofer and Meyer 2005; Kamens 2012; Baker 2014). Further, it became clear that the

dramatic expansion of education at every level was devoted to rather universalistic cultural ideas organized at the global level (Meyer et al. 1992; Frank and Gabler 2006). For example, the global Education-for-All movement depicted education as a human right that all proper actors should support anywhere (Chabbott 2009). The central points of these studies are precisely that education came to be focused on general models of actorhood, and that these models took on force worldwide. The proper human individual actor is defined worldwide in a surprisingly homogeneous way.

These points were deepened with empirical studies of the explosive expansion in world-defined human rights – transcending older models of the rights of the national citizen (Elliott 2007, 2011, 2014). Such studies tracked how human rights treaties emerged and were ratified almost everywhere – even by the worst actual violators in the world. The sorts of individual assigned these rights expanded greatly – women, children, immigrants, minorities, indigenous people, handicapped people, old people, and so on. And the nature of human rights, as defined in these sweeping cultural assertions, changed over time too: modern human rights empower the human as actor – they do not simply state entitlements. Contemporary humans have the old civil, political, and social rights; they now also have sweeping rights to assert their own cultures, religions, languages, and norms, and indeed to choose their own versions of gender.

The organization: The idea that organizations should themselves be seen as constructions of a rationalized culture developed in the 1970s, and was central to the rise of a range of institutional theories. In reaction to common pictures of organizations as natural, instrumental, and functional (see Scott 2003 for overview), Meyer and Rowan (1977, 1978) emphasized their dependence on wider cultural material, and thus their common arationality. The term "decoupling," used initially in Karl Weick's (1976) work, was emphasized to stress the integration of the organization with its environment, and the resultant loose internal integration (Bromley and Powell 2012). The line of thought had considerable influence in the rapidly expanding world of organizational research (Zucker 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Scott 1983; Powell and DiMaggio 1991).

Institutional analyses, centrally, called attention to the dependence of organizations on common models – and, in particular, the idea of formal organization as a model. The concept of institutional

isomorphism came to be central to the field: a picture of organizations, not as entirely adapted to local settings and functions, but as enactments of models of high formal rationalization, cutting across social sectors and countries, and expanding rapidly around the world. Studies showed that firms and government agencies and schools and hospitals are all built to conform to general models of their specific character (e.g., schools), but also models of the organization-as-actor in general. Naturally, decoupling is endemic in all these sorts of cases: practical adaptation may occur in practice, but it also becomes crucial to display proper actorhood – as a charity, or firm, or agency – in general. Thus many national states with very negative human rights records nevertheless signed on voluntarily to sweeping global human rights norms (Hafner-Burton et al. 2008). More and more of society came to be composed of similarly structured formal organizations – a "society of organizations," indeed (Coleman 1982; Bromley and Meyer 2015).

By the turn of the millennium, institutional theories had become central to the whole field of organizational research (Greenwood et al. 2008, 2017). Scholars now emphasize that contemporary organizations contrast sharply with older forms of formalization, such as classic bureaucracies – those that depended on the external sovereigns which they were to serve. In fact the older term "bureaucracy," with many negative connotations, was increasingly replaced by the more neutral term "organizations." These creatures are what Kruecken and Meier (2006) and Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson (2000) call "organized actors," with choices and decisions of their own, over and above the controls of their nominal owners or sovereigns. They are understood to be engaged in rational purposive action – hence presupposing a great deal of imagined order in their environments. Strikingly, the model of social life as properly formalized around organizations, posturing and depicted as actors, has gone worldwide. Now it is found not only within practically all national states but also in the supra-national world beyond them (Bromley and Meyer 2015).

The national state in world society: Much of the early empirical research in the institutionalist vein concentrated on the striking fact that national states in the current world – supposedly and in part actually creatures of historical, ethnic, religious, and natural differences – were far more similar in structure and aspiration than common theories would predict. The idea that they are partly constructions of an

increasingly integrated and rationalized world society strongly suggested itself as an explanation.

Ensuing studies in fact showed that formal state structures – constitutions for instance, but also agencies and policies – parallel each other (Boli 1987; Lee and Strang 2006, and many others). Ideologies of progress copy prestigious forms and change in homogenous ways (in the educational arena see Fiala 2006 and Fiala & Gordon Lanford 1987). Environmental policies copy forms worked out in professional networks or by prestigious polities (Frank et al. 2000; Hironaka 2014). Sweeping rules of accounting transparency rise to the fore and generate local adaptation (Drori et al. 2006; Jakobi 2013). Even ideologies of family life and gender relations flow along parallel (and Anglo-European) lines worldwide (Frank et al. 2010 studying the state regulation of sex).

World society: In contrast to legitimated individuals, organizations, and national states, the world as a whole is obviously not constructed as a social actor – it has been conspicuously stateless. Indeed, this feature is a main factor explaining the cultural elaborations of individuals and organizations and states as actors, making their own efforts at social order, social control, and progress. These constructed actors are accompanied by equally constructed cultural agents who operate as consulting "Others": putative agents of the collective good rather than narrower interests. Strong nation-states act in this way, with schemes of aid and support, but also with high-minded advice from experts and consultants of every sort. A huge industry of professional advisors has emerged, putting forth programs for the proper development of individuals, organizations, and states anywhere in the world (see Chapter 10, this volume).

To a striking extent the claimed authority of these "Others" is rooted in science or in an expanded range of professions (with their putative "best practices"). These authorities have displaced or supplanted religious ones. So, one line of research on world society has focused on the explosive expansion of science, a complex that has grown in numbers of people and activities, topical domains, global scope, and influence (Drori et al. 2003). A conspicuous domain has been the environment, now subject of elaborate scientific analysis spread around the world and providing urgent rationales for global collective action (Meyer et al. 1997; Frank et al. 2000; Ignatow 2007; Hironaka 2014). Environmental regimes and movements have been the focus of a good

deal of institutional research, studying for instance the spread of arrangements for environmental impact assessment or the global spread of national parks.

Beyond science, a world proto-legal system has developed, emphasizing expanded doctrines of human rights, as noted earlier (Elliott 2007). A dense network of treaties and international organizations celebrates the expanded rights and capacities of all sorts of people – and the agency of the people to defend their rights. So there are rights asserted on a universal scale to education, health, welfare, and economic activity – and to culture, religion, and language. The conceptualization of rights also implies the capacity to act – the modern individual is seen as carrying authority to make the widest variety of choices in political, economic, social, cultural, religious, and familial life. The rights are asserted as applying to all humans – they go beyond traditional citizenship rights. Obviously, practice is very far from the asserted rights: the point is that the whole postwar period constructed an enormously expanded vision of a world society, not that this vision was put into practice. The expanded vision has had great impact on the formation of states, individuals, organizations, and people's "movements" of all sorts – this is the point of neo-institutional theory.

Contemporary world society has also been infused with models of the good society itself, around democratic ideals and norms of political, social, and economic transparency. This is a development that has been studied by many lines of scholarship, including the line represented in this book (e.g., by Drori et al. 2006, 2009, and Jakobi 2013). Models of democracy and open and free markets abound and take on much authority – they have, obviously, diffused around the world (Simmons et al. 2008, as well as Huntington 1991 among many others). The contribution of institutional theory has been to emphasize how a shared world cultural frame facilitates what may appear to be voluntaristic diffusion (Strang and Meyer 1993; Lee and Strang 2006; Simmons et al. 2008).

The strength of liberal models of individual and society clearly reflects the conditions of the postwar period, and the dominance of liberal societies in the world order. As this authority and dominance declines, so may the extraordinarily expansive visions the models contain: anti-liberal reactions seem to be increasing in the most recent period. We discuss future prospects in Chapter 12, considering

implications for world society but also for the forms of social theory appropriate for it.

1.5 Outline of the Book

The chapters of this volume were written within this research context. Following this Introduction (which constitutes Part 1 of the book), the chapters of Part 2 address basic theoretical issues in this one neoinstitutional line of work. Chapter 2, "Society without Culture," sets up the volume. Published in 1988, the paper focused upon the marginalization of the concept of culture in social theory. Chapter 3, "Institutions, Institutional Effects, Institutionalism," from 1991, sought to provide clarification of the basic ideas and definitions involved in the concept of institution, a term that has been employed in a wide variety of ways. Chapter 4, from 2002, provided a survey of the arguments across the main empirical areas of the research program, up to that time. Chapter 5 provides current reflections on these articles. We emphasize how much contemporary social science still imagines a "society without culture," and still works with conceptions of institutions that have an intellectually conservative quality.

The chapters of Part 3 discuss levels of analysis: the differences between and relations among individual, structural, and institutional or collective lines of argument. A central feature of institutional arguments is precisely their focus on causal processes at macrosocial levels. Chapter 6, from 2011, develops our conception of this fundamental issue, drawing not only upon sociological research – including the field's long discussion of Weber's "Protestant Ethic thesis" – but also including clarifications suggested by philosophers. Chapter 7 is a companion piece, providing a wide range of empirical examples of how insistence on individualistic thinking – including "methodological individualism," or the contemporary ideological emphasis on the human individual as a natural actor – has hindered the explanation of macrosocial outcomes. The chapter presents examples from European economic history, modern and postmodern economic development, and globalization. Chapter 8 provides current reflections on these articles, including ones stimulated by criticisms from would-be reductionists. We emphasize how and why many social scientists – those for whom modern ideology is grounding theory – still show discomfort

with a pragmatic approach to multilevel theorizing, one that would include more collective and historical ways of thinking.

Part 4 presents chapters on the nature and construction of the "actors" of contemporary society – individuals, organizations, and states. Chapter 9 (from 2000) offers arguments about how the modern (European, now global) cultural system constructs the modern actor as an authorized agent for various interests. Seeing modern actorhood in this way helps greatly in explaining a number of otherwise anomalous or little-analyzed features of these entities. Chapter 10 (from 2009) discusses how the institutionalism of this volume has been used to understand the rise, nature, and impact of the world order – that is, international and transnational order – as itself a society. Chapter 11 provides current reflections on these articles, noting (among other observations) the remarkably unrealistic qualities attributed to individuals, organizations, and states in much contemporary social science.

Part 5 (Chapter 12) provides a capstone piece for this volume. It applies the line of social theory by analyzing the cultural frameworks that shaped social activity in three historical phases of the postwar period. We refer to the phase of embedded liberalism (Ruggie 1982), intensifying into neoliberalism, and then a recent emergent period, seemingly a post-liberal one. In so doing we seek to further illustrate how one might give broad cultural frameworks – institutionalized "meaning systems" – their due.

Notes

1. John Meyer played a leading role, with many collaborators (especially W. Richard Scott, but also Brian Rowan, Michael Hannan, Francisco Ramirez, John Boli, George Thomas, and others who are acknowledged in the various chapters here). Later many others contributed variously. See Chapter 4 for a depiction of the first twenty-five years.
2. This sundering was both reflected in and reinforced by the ongoing institutional and professional separation of sociology and cultural anthropology. Within sociology it was reflected in the treatment of "comparative sociology" as a separate subfield. These developments allowed and even encouraged inattention to history and comparison – and hence culture.
3. As now acknowledged by some "rational choice" theorists (e.g., Elster 2015: conclusion).

4. In saying this we by no means deny biology, psychology, and social psychology, in their attempt to isolate shapings that originate outside of the institutional and cultural order. (Consider the extraordinary corpus of behavioral biology assembled now by Sapolsky 2017.) Instead, we are criticizing the positing of natural tendencies, or the mere assumption of them, without empirical warrant. And we are criticizing the failure to consider the possible social construction of social entities, or the cultural shaping of their identities, or the scripting of lines of behavior for the entities. Any future real social science will have to be a multilevel one. (See Chapters 6–8 infra; also Sapolsky 2017 and Hacking 1999: ch. 1.)
5. Some bibliographies of studies at national and global levels: Boli et al. 2009, Meyer 2010; at organizational levels, Greenwood et al. 2008 and 2017.

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