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Interpretivism in Motion: Discursive Institutionalism as the Fourth ‘New’ Institutionalism

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Situated knowledge, a term Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph used frequently to elucidate their interpretive approach, can work two ways. It can be seen as a theoretical and methodological commitment to a certain kind of empirical work, but it also could be understood as a meta-theoretical commitment to contextualizing methodological theory—in view of time, place, and interlocutors. The Rudolphs’ interpretive approach, with its emphasis on qualitative methods to gain insights into agents’ ‘situated knowledge,’ was developed at a time when major rival approaches were behaviorist and systemic, with an emphasis on quantitative methods in the search for universal knowledge. Today, the rival approaches to interpretivism are rational choice institutionalism and historical institutionalism, along with quantification and universalism. In this newer context, I have developed an analytic framework that I call ‘discursive institutionalism.’ It plays a similar role in contemporary political science to the Rudolphs’ interpretive approach—as a methodological theory that emphasizes qualitative methods to gain insights into agents’ ideas and discursive interactions in institutional context. My contribution in this chapter will thus elucidate discursive institutionalism even as it shows the deep connections to and influence of the Rudolphs’ seminal interpretive approach.

The chapter begins by situating the Rudolphs’ interpretive approach in the debates at its time of origination, from the 1950s to 1970s. This was a time that was particularly intellectually effervescent with regard to ideas about the nature of explanation in the natural and social sciences as well as about the epistemological underpinnings of knowledge and the problems of relativism. In this first part, I set the disciplinary context in which the Rudolphs developed their understanding of situated knowledge, consider what that understanding entailed and their critique of rival approaches in political science. Next, I explore the debates in the philosophies of science and social science that had a major influence on political scientists at the time, how political scientists responded, and the Rudolphs’ intellectual affinities with the social theorists, philosophers, and social scientists with whom they shared epistemological perspectives. In the last part of the chapter, I follow with a discussion of discursive institutionalism, my own updated version of interpretivism, which began as a response to the neo-institutionalist turn in

comparative politics and political science more generally that took hold beginning in the 1990s. This is when another round of ‘methodological wars’ in political science began, which pitted rational choice institutionalism against historical institutionalism and sociological institutionalism, while largely sidelining most interpretive approaches—including ‘situated knowledge’ and area studies. Discursive institutionalism has been my own way of promoting the pluralism of methods that the Rudolphs had long advocated while ensuring a place for all interpretive (and historical) studies in political science. But beyond adding a ‘fourth neo-institutionalism’ to political science, discursive institutionalism asks a wider set of epistemological questions about knowledge and interpretation while serving as a bridge to theoretical questions about the nature of power and legitimacy—issues of equal concern to the Rudolphs.

Situating the Rudolphs’ ‘Situating Knowledge’ in the 1950s to 1970s

To situate the Rudolph’s knowledge and the sources of the interpretive approach to ‘situated knowledge,’ we need to go back to the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. Political science in the postwar era was awash with new and different theoretical and methodological approaches to the explanation of politics and society—in particular systemic and behavioral approaches. In all cases, they rejected the ‘old institutionalism’ that had flourished in previous decades, which studied the formal institutions of government, used a largely descriptive methodology, drew its conceptions of the state from traditional political philosophy and international law, and remained largely atheoretical. Against this, many sought to develop more ‘scientific’ approaches, often influenced by debates in the philosophies of science and social science.

At the same time, political scientists themselves were engaged in theoretical debates about how best to explain politics and society. The major approaches were systemic—structural-functional or Marxian—and lawlike—behavioral or rational choice. These were countered by historical approaches found in history and more traditional political science as well as by the interpretive approaches of sociology, anthropology, and political science (Ryan 1967; Schmidt 1988a).

The Rudolphs’ interpretive approach to ‘situated knowledge’ was forged largely in opposition to both systemic and behavioral approaches in political science. As political scientists trained and teaching at Harvard in the mid to late 1950s, in the heyday of structural-functionalism, who then moved to the University of Chicago in the 1960s, as behavioralism was taking hold, fellow faculty members at both institutions were their primary interlocutors, whether as co-conspirators or antagonists. Their critiques were theoretical—against the ‘imperialism of categories’ of structural-functional and Marxian

approaches that imposed values and concepts derived from the analysis of more advanced ‘modernized’ polities on less developed ‘traditional’ ones. And they were methodological—against pretensions to ‘objective’ science in favor of ‘subjective’ social science as well as against quantification and reduction in favor of qualitative methods.

Systems Approaches to Explanation in Political Science

By the 1950s and 1960s, systemic approaches to political science had superseded the old institutionalism, whether structural-functionalist or other ‘holistic’ approaches such as Marxian analysis—which had its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. In structural-functionalist, the concept of the state was replaced by the political system and explained in terms of the equilibrium-seeking functioning of its structural parts—through interest articulation and aggregation (Almond and Powell 1966; Easton 1953). This had an essentially conservative bias in favor of the status quo. Embedded in the approach was the uncritical normative assumption that the system would go on so long as its structures functioned in such a way as to achieve its goal—self-maintenance—and that “societies which fulfill the functions more completely are *pro tanto* better” (Taylor 1967, p. 156).

Moreover, the system was static in the sense that revolutions were anomalies, unexplainable within the system, and change was absorbed by the system as an instance of ‘homeostatic equilibrium.’ Where the approach was linked to a political theory of the state, it picked up on traditional interest group theory, and assumed that the state’s role was to arbitrate among competing interests, with the outcome the public interest (Dahl 1961a). The counter-theory was Marxian analysis which, although equally systemic, cast the state as a superstructure in the service of one interest, the bourgeoisie, and saw the system as a whole functioning via class conflict rather than interest competition, with the expected outcome not self-maintenance but self-destruction through revolution (Dahrendorf 1959). This approach was clearly also normative in its assumptions, but critical of the status quo as well as socially determinist.

The Rudolphs focused their critique of systems approaches on modernization theory in particular. This is eloquently laid out in the ‘Imperialism of Categories’ and exhaustively detailed in *The Modernity of Tradition*. In the essay “The Imperialism of Categories,” reprinted in the first volume of their three volume essay collection, the Rudolphs argued that the kinds of concepts used in modernization theory were problematic because universalistic, derived from a ‘Lockean Universalism,’ with its roots in the confluence of structural and functional systems theory, and its “central premise and promise, the reproduction of the West through the replication of its stages of growth.” The Rudolphs condemned it for the view that “history moved towards a progressive future, in a dialectic or linear fashion,” with dyads organizing the social universe related in systemic fashion, with modernity on one side, tradition on the other. For the Rudolphs, this not only denied

the intermediary ground in which the multiple modernities of the East and the West were created. It also misunderstood social change, which is incremental, and occurs through adaptation, with features of tradition persisting, albeit modified, into modernity (Rudolph and Rudolph 2008, p. 107-9). Their ground-breaking *The Modernity of Tradition* was a masterpiece in its ability to show incremental changes over time as tradition adapts to changing needs and circumstances.

But most counter-movements to modernization theory, the Rudolphs insisted, were not much better than modernization theory itself, because they too were universalistic, whether dependency theory, globalization theory, or post-colonial criticism. Area studies was the real counter-movement, focused as it has been on 'situated knowledge.' But, as the Rudolphs admitted, it has increasingly become "a thin, exceptional voice in America" (Rudolph and Rudolph 2008, pp. 111-113).

From very early on, the Rudolphs themselves led the counter-movement to universalist approaches to political science. They proposed 'situated knowledge' as the best alternative to universal knowledge, because it recognizes the importance of time, place, and circumstances for individuals, and "proceeds from specificities and works upward to comparative generalization" (Rudolph and Rudolph 2008, p. 116). Already in their 1958 'Surveys in India,' they demonstrated the importance of situated knowledge, by detailing the problematic Anglo-American assumptions of survey approaches in political science, for example, that people are self-aware enough to hold individual opinions (rather than communal); that all opinions are equal; or that a neutral stance is possible (Rudolph and Rudolph 2008, pp. 3-4).

Moreover, in the essay 'Engaging in Subjective Knowledge,' focused on Amar Singh's diary narratives, a thirty year project finally published in 2003, the Rudolphs demonstrate that 'subjective knowledge' is useful for explaining identity formation and the construction of categories such as race, gender, and class. They convincingly argue that Singh is the ideal participant-observer, part of the culture and society itself but apart from it in terms of his critical stance and awareness of the anomalies. This was particularly true for his British interlocutors who "wonder whether they should read him as a Rajput ruler, an Edwardian officer and gentleman, or an impostor, a black native who does not know his station" ((Rudolph and Rudolph 2008, p. 73). The diary is a first person account of a 'subaltern' in the British raj, whose voice was not heard because silenced or hidden from view by patriarchy, racism, colonialism, class (Rudolph and Rudolph 2008, pp. 70-71).

Behavioralism and Rational Choice in Political Science

By the 1960s and 1970s, behaviorism, also begun in the 1950s, had for the most part submerged the old institutionalism as well as political systems approaches, becoming the predominant approach in political science, with its focus on individuals and their behavior (Somit and Tanenhaus 1982). ‘Methodological individualism’ replaced the ‘methodological holism’ of structural-functionalist and Marxian approaches while the old institutionalism was dismissed as mere description. The behavioral ‘revolution’ sought to explain the “phenomena of government in terms of the observed and observable behavior of men” (Truman 1951—cited in Dahl 1961b) and rejected the normative biases of both structural-functional and Marxian approaches in favor of ‘objective’ empirical observation—since the political scientist was concerned with “what *is*, as he says, not what *ought* to be” (Dahl 1969). In addition, most behaviorists assumed that “human and social behavior can be explained in terms of general laws established by observation” (Przeworski and Teune 1970, p. 4) and sought to develop precise techniques by which to measure data and to demonstrate the validity of law-like theories (Kirkpatrick 1971, pp. 71-3). As a result, that which could be most readily quantified, such as voting and public opinion via electoral studies, survey research, and opinion polling, became the focus. Where this was more difficult, rational choice (or public choice) approaches were pioneered using mathematical models drawn from economics—most notably with the work of Anthony Downs (1957).

In the meantime, systemic political scientists did not abandon their approaches, but rather added behavioralism to it. Most systemic political scientists tended to agree with the reductionists that their theories were to be validated according to lawlike methods, but they nevertheless assumed the systemic approach itself to be justifiable on its own terms (e.g., Easton 1953; Dahrendorf 1959, p. 117; Almond and Powell 1966, pp. 10, 300, 322).

The Rudolfs were equally critical of the behavioral turn in political science along with rational choice models. They originally developed their arguments about ‘subjective’ social science largely in opposition to the assumptions of behavioralists in the 1960s. At the time, the opposition was the right one. But given their understanding of ‘situated knowledge’—and especially in light of on-going epistemological debates, discussed below—we would do better to call this ‘intersubjective’ social science.

As time went on, the Rudolfs also applied their critiques to the ‘new generations of universalism.’ For rational choice in particular, they contended that its “disregard for the collective and the particular does more violence than did modernization theory to scholarship that aims to distinguish and characterize cultures and societies” (Rudolph and Rudolph 2008, p. 110-111). In the essay “Perestroika and its Other,” moreover, Susanne Rudolph offered a systematic contrast between the self-proclaimed ‘scientific mode of inquiry,’ represented by rationalist modeling and empiricist causal and statistically

probable explanation, and the ‘interpretive mode of inquiry.’ While the ‘scientific’ emphasizes certainty, parsimony, cumulative knowledge, causality, singularity of truth, universalism, and objective knowledge, the ‘interpretive’ values contingency, thick description, non-linearity, meaning, multiplicity of truth, contextualism, and subjective knowledge (see discussion in Rudolph and Rudolph 2008, p. 123-128).

But for all their critiques of systemic, behavioral, and rationalist modes of explanation, the Rudolphs do not dismiss these or any other approaches completely out of hand. They mainly ask for a place for interpretive approaches. As Lloyd Rudolph indicates by the title of his Perestroika-related essay: “Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend,” their intention was to make the case for pluralism and against monopoly (Rudolph and Rudolph 2008, p. 130). For the Rudolphs, knowledge is pluralist, and therefore there should even be room “for the imaginative truths found in literature, myth, and memory; for the archival truths of history; for the spiritual truths of religions and religious experience; and for the aesthetic truth of the visual and performing arts.” In support, they cite Max Weber’s advocacy of multiple epistemes and diverse forms of knowledge (Rudolph and Rudolph 2008, p. 76). And notably, the Rudolphs (2008) themselves use a rich variety of methods to situate knowledge, including class interests, state organization and institutional regularities, cultural frames, as much as communities’ ideas and leaders’ media discourse.

On a personal note, I should add that the Rudolphs greatly influenced my own intellectual trajectory, both in terms of theoretical and empirical work. The theoretical influences began with my dissertation (with Susanne as chair of the committee). In it, I sought an epistemological justification for methodological pluralism in political science by looking to the philosophy of science and social science. Elements of this investigation much later served as a springboard for discursive institutionalism. The Rudolphs’ empirical influences are equally important, as I too have used a variety of methods to situate knowledge—albeit first in France and then Europe rather than India—in order to explore questions about the role of the state, the nature of capitalism, the impact of neo-liberal ideas, and the effects of a supranational ‘state’ (the European Union) on national political economies and democracies.

Debates in the Philosophy of Science and Social Science and their Implications for Political Science

One cannot ‘situate’ the knowledge and development of political science between the 1950s and 1970s without also considering the philosophies of science and social science. These disciplines were equally riven by debates focused on the nature and limits of

scientific explanation and its application to the social sciences. Political scientists followed these debates, and used them in their own discussions about the nature of political ‘scientific’ explanation.

In these years, battles raged among over what constituted ‘scientific’ explanation, which criteria established scientific validity, and whether social science could be ‘scientific’ in a manner similar to physics or some other natural science. The philosophy of science itself divided into four rival approaches that mirrored the different approaches to explanation in the social sciences: lawlike, systemic, historical, and interpretive. Mixed in with divisions over which kinds of explanation were most truly ‘scientific’ were epistemological debates about whether the pursuit of knowledge was based on a truth standard, or whether it was success, progress, or creativity that made for scientific validity. The only thing these four approaches held in common was the view that the social sciences could not be sciences on a par with the natural sciences. The philosophy of social science was equally divided between those who believed that social science could indeed emulate lawlike explanation in science and those who instead argued that it was something entirely different, requiring interpretive and/or historical explanation.

These debates had a significant influence on political science, in particular for those political scientists who began pushing for an ‘objective’ political science that was methodologically centered on verification (or falsification) through reduction and quantification; and for those who believed that political science, even if it could not establish truth or even close approximations to it, could be validated via standards of success or progress. But there was also pushback from political scientists who held to more qualitative, interpretive and historical approaches, more ‘situated’ in culture and time and ‘reflexive’ in terms of agents. The Rudolphs were prominent among this latter group.

The main epistemological concern behind all such debates was how to navigate between the Scylla of absolute truths—where universalist generalizations risked imposing an ‘imperialism of categories’ on different cultural and temporal contexts—and the Charybdis of relativism—where no comparisons, let alone generalizations, were possible across cultures or time. Many worried that if there were no rationalist ‘truth,’ no ‘objective’ material reality, then there would be no way to protect contextualized (social) ‘scientific’ explanation from the radical relativism of ‘anything goes,’ in which power and subjectivity could trump truth and objectivity. But need we necessarily end up with radical relativism if we give up on rationalism grounded in the philosophy of science? The Rudolphs themselves took a middle way through this debate, with their advocacy of multiple truths and their commitment to providing a pluralism of perspectives on reality in order to avoid the twin dangers of imperialist absolutism and radical relativism. This

helps explain Lloyd Rudolph's fondness for Graham Allison's "The Essence of Decision," in which he sketched out the multiple governmental understandings of the Cuban missile crisis.

As argued below, we face these twin dangers mainly if we start with a philosophy of science that goes from 'particles to people' rather than with a more society-focused, interpretive philosophy of social science that goes from people to particles. In fact, if we look more closely at how philosophers of science explain science—and mostly physics at that—we can see that they use the four main modes of explanation in the social sciences. Why, then, limit social scientific explanation to the lawlike instead of accepting a pluralism of methods grounded in all four social scientific modes of explanation?¹

Debates in the Philosophy of Science

The philosophy of science between the 1950s and 1970s was split into four rival approaches that mirrored the different approaches to explanation in the social sciences: lawlike, represented by the logical empiricists' theory of verification of universal laws (e.g., Hempel 1965, Nagel 1961) all the way through to Popper's (1970) theory of falsification; systemic, epitomized by Kuhn's (1970) paradigm theory; historical, developed by Stephen Toulmin (1974) in terms of evolutionary 'disciplinary enterprises'; and interpretive, embodied by Michael Polanyi' (1958) 'tacit knowledge.' In addition were mixes of approaches, including Lakatos' (1971) mix of systemic and lawlike in 'research programmes;,' Laudan's (1977) mix of historical and lawlike in 'research traditions;,' and Feyerabend's (1981) mix of systemic and interpretive in 'cosmologies.' But even as each of these approaches in the philosophy of science sought to explain scientific knowledge according to one overall ontology and epistemology, their explanations were based on very different ontological and epistemological premises, and all risked relativism sooner or later.

Philosophers of science who used a lawlike framework of analysis—which shares its explanatory ideals about the importance of causal or statistically probable explanation with behavioral and rationalist social scientists—run from logical empiricists like Carl Hempel (1965) and Ernst Nagel (1961), who insisted that progress toward universalistic knowledge in science proceeds by using methods of verification to establish the absolute truth of lawlike (hypothetico-deductive or deductive-nomological) propositions, through to Karl Popper. Popper's method of falsification, however, by the time he wrote *Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1961, pp. 273-76) could only reach proximity to truth. His method itself became increasingly informal, with science in *Conjectures and Refutations*

¹ This was the main conclusion of my dissertation (PhD in Political Science, University of Chicago 1981), "Meaning and Method in the Natural and Social Sciences and its Implications for Political Science," with Susanne Rudolph as Chair, Stephen Toulmin from the Committee on Social Thought as the main reader, and David Greenstone as third reader.

involving "progressing from problems to problems" because every new theory builds on the old, raising new problems while solving old ones, and correcting or contradicting the previous theory where necessary (Popper 1965, p. 222). Finally, by *Objective Knowledge*, Popper's (1972, pp. 163-89) explanations could take any form, so long as they solved problems, even if they did not formally reduce to lawlike terms (see discussion in Schmidt 1988a, pp. 176-8). Substituting problem-solving for truth and using the language of falsification even without lawlike explanatory practice emptied the logical empiricist enterprise of much of its substance, promoted a tolerance for many methods so long as they solved problems, and denied behavioral and rationalist political scientists the 'scientific' trump card they had come to take for granted.

For behaviorist political scientists, the logical empiricist emphasis on the search for truth through verifiable lawlike generalizations, as per Carl Hempel (1965), fed directly into their own lines of argument. But they also had little difficulty moving from an emphasis on logical empiricist verification to Popper's (1965, 1972) falsification, and then on to Popperian problem-solving. The latter Popper equally left the way open to non-behavioral political scientists to use the language of falsification and problem-solving as legitimation or better, cover, for their non-reductionist explanations (including systemic, despite the fact that Popper had explicitly rejected it as metaphysics). But Popper's work also opened the way for methodological pluralism. Interestingly, Gabriel Almond, having followed the behavioral pied piper in earlier years by adding it to the systemic, insisted by the late 1970s on the need to abandon the exclusive use of lawlike methods in a plea for pluralism because "in 'good' science, methods are fit to the subject matter rather than subject matter being truncated or distorted in order to fit it to a preordained notion of 'scientific method'" (Almond and Genco 1977).

Around this same time, the truth-basis for lawlike philosophy of science was also being undermined from another side (the following discussion builds on Schmidt 1988a). Thomas Kuhn's (1962/1970) 'paradigm' theory used a systemic framework of analysis typical of the sociology of Parsonsian equilibrium systems or, better, Marxian revolutionary theory, to reject the truth claims of the logical empiricists. With progress in science based on the revolutionary succession of fully incommensurable paradigms that die under the weight of accumulating anomalies, Kuhn got rid of the Popperian fig leaf altogether with regard to truth and certainty. He substituted a success standard for the truth standard, leaving a radical relativism in which there could be no understanding from one paradigm to the next. Imre Lakatos (1971) sought (unsuccessfully) to reapply Popper's fig leaf by positing overlapping (and therefore partially commensurable) research programs in which a method of 'sophisticated falsification' provided a (heuristic) success standard. Larry Laudan (1977) instead turned to a historical framework of analysis while building on Kuhn and Lakatos to similar effect, by

identifying overlapping research traditions for which the standard was historical progress (rather than systemic success) through continues and discontinuities in ideas. But Laudan's weakness, much as that of Lakatos, came from his attempt to identify 'objective' standards that stood outside the ideas of the scientists themselves in order to avoid relativism. Paul Feyerabend (1978), by contrast, plunged wholeheartedly into relativism with his argument that physicists, like witchdoctors, construct 'cosmologies,' and that Popper himself ends up with 'anything goes' (Feyerabend 1981, p. 161).

Many behavioralists jumped onto the Kuhnian or Lakatosian bandwagons (but not Feyerabend's), seeing revolutionary change in incommensurable paradigms or incremental change in overlapping research traditions as the way to build a scientific social science. But rather than taking this to mean that they should welcome a pluralism of methods, they began to argue that even if they may no longer have had truth on their side, they at least were still the predominant paradigm—as (an earlier) Gabriel Almond (1966) himself proclaimed in his inaugural address to the American Political Science Association, a decade before his conversion to Popperian methodological tolerance. Power and success had replaced truth.

Political scientists generally (although not the Rudolphs) missed out on two other approaches in the philosophy of science: historical and interpretive. The historical approach was developed most extensively by Stephen Toulmin (1972), a close friend of the Rudolphs at the University of Chicago (and the main reader of my dissertation). Toulmin consciously modeled his approach on Darwinian biology rather than on physics—despite identifying physics as the ideal 'compact' science. Here, 'disciplinary enterprises' escape relativism with a standard not of truth or success but rather of historical progress, with the genealogy of disciplinary concepts, problems, procedures, and ideals affected by the extent to which scientists' intellectual concerns complement or compete with their social concerns over time, leading to disciplinary evolution, extinction, or unchanging continuity (Schmidt 1988b).

Even earlier than this, we find the interpretive framework of analysis of Michael Polanyi (1958)—also a Rudolph reference. For Polanyi, scientists' 'personal knowledge' informs the often unconscious rules of science which are at the basis of scientific explanation—rather than lawlike propositions, systemic paradigms, or historical enterprises—while the creativity of the scientific imagination is the standard of evaluation rather than truth, success or progress (see Schmidt 1988a, pp. 191-97). This is all about 'tacit knowledge,' which is developed and carried by 'succeeding generations of great men,' and networks of scientists in epistemological communities. This approach finds echo by the 1980s in the work of anthropologists of science like Bruno Latour and

Steve Woolgar (Latour and Woolgar 1986), who track the ‘everyday life’ of the laboratory.

In all these approaches, then, the search for standards by which to establish objective truth gave way to relative truth or to other standards of evaluation, none of which solved the problem of relativism. This helps explain why more recent philosophers of science have been attracted to ‘critical realism,’ which traces its roots back to the ambivalence of Bashkar (1979) and others to choose between beliefs in, on the one hand, proximate truths established through standards of empirical verification or falsification of (objective) explanations and, on the other hand, beliefs in relative truths established through standards of evaluation based in the success, progress, and/or creativity of (subjective) ideas. Critical realists, in other words, remained on the fence, trying to reconcile what are essentially irreconcilable approaches grounded in different ontological and epistemological presuppositions.

What is the moral of this fourfold story, then? Philosophers of science from the very beginning have had very different approaches to scientific rationality that mirror the four main methods of explanation of the social sciences. This suggests that if we were to look at what philosophers of science do when they explain science rather than what they say, we would see that they use the methodological approaches of the social sciences to explain ‘science.’ But if the philosophy of science is social science applied to science, and pretty rudimentary social science at that, why should so many political scientists seek to emulate science (poorly), especially since the science in question is itself mostly a stylized and idealized version of physics? They would do better to stop trying to emulate the logical empiricist idealization of physics and get on with the task of explaining political reality with as many methods as are appropriate.

This is all the more sensible since all four kinds of philosophers of science themselves did not believe that the social sciences could be ‘scientific’ in the manner of the natural sciences. Nonetheless, the logical empiricists and Popper still urged social scientists to adopt lawlike approaches so as to reduce all social science propositions to verifiable or falsifiable hypotheses, even if these could never be as good as those of the natural sciences. As for Kuhn, although he left open the possibility that the successful transition to a paradigm-guided social science “may well be occurring today” (1970, pp. 19-21), he insisted that it was a much more difficult transition for social scientists than natural scientists because social scientists are not as insulated from the concerns of society and even often tend “to defend their choice of research problem chiefly in terms of the social importance of achieving a solution,” something natural scientists never do (1970, pp. 163-4). Toulmin similarly found that the natural sciences had for the most part developed as historically rational, ‘compact’ disciplines, with common sets of intellectual

concerns and reinforcing social concerns, while the social sciences had not, and therefore were hardly rational, "would-be" disciplines that could not achieve historical progress because social scientists' competing social concerns undermined their already vague and often contradictory intellectual concerns (1974, pp. 360, 380). And much like the others, Polanyi found that whereas the interpretive frameworks of all the natural sciences tended to be highly creative, because natural scientists had generally achieved a consensus on how to choose among frameworks, and were reinforced in their work by society (1958, pp. 216-17), the social sciences tended to be much less creative because social scientists could not achieve a consensus on how to choose among interpretive frameworks, nor were they reinforced by society (1958, pp. 203-4).

So the question for social scientists and philosophers of social science is whether, given the difficulties of applying the 'scientific' reconstructions of philosophers of science to social science, they should even attempt it. And why, in any case, should we apply such approaches developed for 'particles' to people? As Fritz Machlup (1969) once noted, 'if molecules could talk,' we would be in a very different universe indeed. In short, why would social scientists have wanted to subsume their own explanations of social science and society under a much narrower explanatory approach focused on science, especially one that philosophers of science themselves insisted applied poorly to social science and society? This question was very much at the core of the Rudolphs' commitment to a truly 'social' science, which starts with society rather than science, and focuses first and foremost on human agency and understanding. Such a commitment may help explain why Susanne Rudolph's main theoretical reference point was Max Weber's social theory rather than the philosophy of science—and why both Rudolphs mainly valued philosophers of social science who challenged 'scientistic' approaches to society.

Debates in the Philosophy of Social Science

Many philosophers of social science found the conclusions of philosophers of science—that their approaches did little to explain social science—unsurprising. For such philosophers, in particular those focused on historical or interpretive approaches to social scientific explanation, the phenomena explained by the social sciences were categorically different from those of the natural sciences. Their focus was on the phenomena of social science *per se*, and what that meant for a truly 'social' science.

The basic argument of such philosophers of social science was that the reflexivity of social phenomena—the fact that social scientists are themselves social agents and that social agents can change their behavior in response to accounts of their actions—made lawlike explanation modeled on physics inappropriate for the social sciences. As Peter Winch (1958, pp. 127-8) explained it: "the concept of war belongs *essentially* to my behaviour. But the concept of gravity does not belong essentially to the behaviour of a

falling apple in the same way: it belongs rather to the physicist's *explanation* of the apple's behaviour." He also argued in a similar vein that any attempt to predict behavior was bound to fail because with the subject matter of interpretive explanation, just as with the historical, we might *expect* a social agent to act a given way but we cannot *predict* it in a lawlike sense (1958, p. 94). This is grounded in Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1968, I #581) insistence that: "An expectation is embedded in the situation from which it arises" and therefore comes from a calculation involving common sense, not a deduction from some law. It is also at the very basis of the Rudolphs' interpretivism and their rejection of behaviorism.

Moreover, against logical empiricist and behaviorist assumptions that reduction does not deny the individuality of actions, only the need to examine them individually (e.g., Hempel 1965, pp. 253-4), interpretivists insisted that social agents' words and actions are both individual and non-reproducible. And the only way to understand them, therefore, was in terms of the rules of the culture itself. Such understanding, as the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1979, pp. 217-18)—another Rudolph colleague and friend at University of Chicago—suggested in his interpretation of the Balinese cockfight, required "a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves." For Geertz, comparisons across cultures were certainly possible, but only to "define their character in reciprocal relief" (1979, p. 223).

Additionally, interpretivists found that the determinism in lawlike explanation, much as they might have tried to deny it, even carried over to the work of those such as Mancur Olson (1965) or Anthony Downs (1957) who subsumed the interpretive under the lawlike in economic or public choice models and in game theory. By attempting to set the statistical probabilities that political agents will act in one or another of a given set of rational ways, thereby following the pre-established rules of a given economic or political context, rational choice theorists assumed that individual agents were actually bound by those rules and could not, therefore, contrary to Wittgenstein's (1968, I#83) suggestions, "alter those rules as they go along" or even "create new ones." In short, when the lawlike model was used to explain social agents' actions and intentions, the primary subject matter of interpretive explanation, it tended to entail a kind of determinism which contrasted quite sharply with the greater freedom assumed by the interpretive model. In the "thick description" of Clifford Geertz (1973), for example, although social agents may be in a sense determined by their cultural context, they are in another sense its determinants, since they are free if not always willing to try to change it.

The interpretive approach of the Rudolphs is very much in tune with interpretive social science, given that in 'situated knowledge,' at the same time that social agents inherit traditions that structure their lives, they also reconstruct those traditions, adapting them to

the needs and desires of their time. This is at the very basis of the Rudolphs' understanding of the 'modernity of tradition. Similarly, (2008, p. 72), what makes the diary of Amar Singh particularly important is that, though the account of an individual, it also reveals the 'rule-following', in Wittgenstein's terms, where "a few well-placed informants make it possible to discern that a rule is being followed." The Rudolphs' analysis of rule-following shows how this approach can reveal insights on important issues concerning both structure and agency, so as "to suggest actors' subjective knowledge can give us a handle on the politics of identity and category formation" (Rudolph and Rudolph 2008, p. 73).

Interpretivists generally considered the difficulties involved in cross-national research to be much greater than what logical empiricists and behavioral social scientists admitted when they insisted that such problems were merely technical, involving the need for better translation, data collection, and interpretation (e.g., Nagel 1961, p. 500). Because interpretive explanations accounted for social agents' words and actions, which could have very different meanings from one culture to the next, Winch (1958, pp. 35, 51, 119) argued that they could not be subsumed under cross-cultural, statistically probable laws. And to seek to establish such laws, as Alasdair MacIntyre (1967, p. 175-7, 184) insisted, was therefore to risk imposing social scientists' own set of cultural rules on all other cultures studied by asking questions that make good sense only for their own culture. As Charles Taylor (1979, pp. 34-5) similarly noted, what makes sense in one culture may not make any sense at all in another.

We should add here that historical explanation is similarly irreducible to lawlike generalizations. But it is itself different from interpretive explanation, despite the fact that the two often appear together—as they do in the Rudolphs' own work. Interpretive approaches combine with the historical in studies which, according to the philosopher of history R. G. Collingwood (1969, pp. 214-15), did best because they looked at both the "inside" of events involving individuals' reasons for action and the "outside" involving the institutions and events which are the context in which individuals' words and actions must be understood. Other philosophers of history for the most part concurred. For example, W. H. Walsh (1974, pp. 133, 136-7) argued that historical explanations contain "colligatory concepts" which, unlike causal or statistically probable laws, serve to organize by tying together the disparate, sometimes previously unconnected events of history. William Dray (1964, pp. 97-104) added that because such concepts account for non-reproducible, often unique events that cannot be subsumed under statistically probable laws, historical explanations cannot be reduced to lawlike terms. Thus, most philosophers of history opposed reductionists such as Patrick Gardiner (1961, pp. 570-1) who saw uniqueness as at best only one aspect of historical events, and an unimportant one at that. They argued, moreover, that because the historical considers patterns of

development over time, it can *expect* certain things to happen but will not *predict* them. And its ‘causes,’ when discussed in narrative history, for example, are connected to one another in a chain of events that is not causal in any lawlike sense (Dray 1964, pp. 97-104). Finally, as philosopher Michael Scriven (1959, pp. 464-6) suggested, even lawlike testing of historical generalizations, would yield very little, since historical generalizations are for the most part truisms, and will either be false if they fit the lawlike model, or true but trivial, and therefore inadequately general.

But if all explanation is so culturally and temporally contextualized, critics might ask: how can interpretive or historical explanation avoid relativism? The response from interpretive and historical philosophers of social science is that relativism is not such a problem because translation is always possible across cultures, reinterpretation across time. Thus, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre (1977, p. 464) sees change in ‘dramatic narratives,’ or our normal way of interpreting the world, as rationally based because the new always incorporates an understanding of the old. If epistemological crisis results from radical doubts about our dramatic narrative, crisis resolution comes, as in Shakespeare's Hamlet, with the "construction of a new narrative which enables the agent to understand *both* how he or she could intelligibly have held his or her original beliefs *and* how he or she could have been so drastically misled by them" (MacIntyre 1977, 455). In science as much as social science, MacIntyre, (1977, pp. 465-6) argues that the creation of a new narrative does not obliterate the old—as in Kuhn’s paradigms—but rather rewrites it, explaining the failure of the old narrative as part of its new interpretation of the world. *Contra* Polanyi, moreover, MacIntyre (1977, pp. 461-5) argues against seeing "every man his own Galileo" because a scientific genius such as Galileo comes at a moment of crisis in the tradition, and achieves "not only a new way of understanding nature, but also and inseparably a new way of understanding the old science's way of understanding nature."

Finally, in order to get a clearer sense of the differences between knowledge and certainty in science versus social science, I have found illuminating the later Wittgenstein’s (1972) little-noticed distinction in *On Certainty* between language-games based on our experience and those based on our pictures of the world (Schmidt 2008, 2012). Language-games based in our everyday experiences in the world are generally very certain, since they ordinarily admit of no doubts and mistakes—such as knowledge of one’s own name and address, of the number of one’s hands and toes, and of the meanings of the words one uses. By contrast, language-games based in our pictures of the world often follow from our (social) scientific interpretations of the world—such as belief in the existence of the earth one hundred years ago, in the events of history, in the temperature at which water boils, or, say, in the materialist incentives structures that determine economic behavior. These always allow for doubts, mistakes, and even gestalt switches

or radical conversions, even though some such picture-games may also allow for much less doubt because they sit at the “foundation” of our picture of the world, as part of the very “scaffolding” of our thoughts (Wittgenstein 1972, #s 211, 234; Schmidt 2008, 318-19, and 2012, 97-100).

This distinction between matters that have to do with our experiences of everyday life and those involving our pictures of the world suggests that social scientists’ explanations have different kinds as well as degrees of certainty, depending on their objects of inquiry. In the social sciences, approaches based in historical and interpretive explanation such as the Rudolphs’ tend to be closer to everyday experience in terms of the phenomena they seek to explain than the more systemic and lawlike explanations that are often closer to picture games. In interpretive and historical explanation, the “facts” about agents’ experiences are usually not in dispute (at least until the advent of “post-truth” politics) even if the interpretations may be, and agreement on the facts is not likely to change radically even if there may be some question about which facts to take into account in the interpretation of events.

By contrast, the “facts” involving agents’ pictures of the world, say, deduced through the mathematical models of economists—with their pictures of rational actors in the business of rationally calculating their interests in order to maximize their utility—can be upended, in particular when the models fail to predict, as in the massive financial market crash of 2007-2008 (Schmidt 2012, 98-99). That said, deep structures of meaning matter such as the ideas at the foundations of our understanding of the economic world continue, which helps explain why neoliberalism has remained resilient up until recently (Schmidt and Thatcher 2013; Schmidt 2016).

Even in the natural sciences, moreover, we can differentiate between knowledge based on pictures of the world and those closer to everyday experience. For example, changes in the theories of physics—say, from Newtonian mechanics to Einsteinian relativity—are very different from those in natural history—say between Linnaeus and Darwin. Whereas in physics the very nature of the phenomena described may change—from the ‘elements’ of the Greeks to subatomic particles—much as in Kuhn’s (1970) duck-rabbit picture (first you see a duck, then a rabbit), they do not in natural history. An eagle remains an eagle for Darwin and Linnaeus. Only if we went from seeing an eagle perched on a cliff to a ‘cleagle,’ with the eagle inseparable from the cliff, could the change in the perception of the phenomena be similar (Schmidt 1988a, pp. 184-85, 2012).

Knowledge and certainty in the sciences as much as the social sciences, then, depend upon the extent to which the phenomena under consideration are available to social agents, whether as matters of their experience or as part of their pictures of the world.

And the more everyday the action, the more certain the understanding, but arguably the more difficult the job of persuasion if the goal is radical change—given the hold of tradition and ‘situated knowledge,’ which are likely to make adaptation and incrementalism the main dynamic for change.

Updating Interpretivism via Discursive Institutionalism

By the 1980s, political science had moved on. The philosophy of science and social science were no longer of interest to political scientists who had absorbed as much of the lessons as they saw fit. Some continued to believe in ‘science’ and the ‘truth-based’ nature of lawlike explanation, or at least in the need to develop universal generalizations based in rigorous causal models and statistically probable correlations via quantitative analysis. Many forgot the lessons of Kuhn, or never even learned them, whereas others assumed, following Kuhn, that whichever approach became predominant was correct by definition, because there was no other truth than that of success or usefulness, as decided by the scientific community itself.

In political science today, interpretivism still lives on, with many vigorous defenders. But it has become a minority sport, as has area studies. Since the 1990s, the methodological wars pitted other groups of scholars against one another. These consist of the ‘new institutionalists’: mainly the rational choice institutionalists—focused on rationalist logics, formal models and causal or statistically probable explanations—versus the historical institutionalists—concerned with logics of path dependencies, rules, and regularities—and even the sociological institutionalists—centered on logics of appropriateness, cultural frames, and norms. There are of course still self-defined ‘interpretivists’ out there, especially in area studies, public policy, and political theory, writing articles, books, and handbooks. But the field of comparative politics, and indeed, political science more generally, has changed the terms of debate, with the focus now on the different kinds of ‘neo-institutionalisms’ of various kinds. In joining in this debate through the invention of a ‘fourth’ new institutionalism that I have called ‘discursive institutionalism,’ I have been ‘adapting’ the tradition of interpretivism to current preoccupations. By focusing in on the substantive content of ideas and the dynamics of discursive interaction in institutional context, discursive institutionalism builds on interpretivism at the same time that it is in dialogue with the other neo-institutionalisms.

But beyond this, discursive institutionalism connects to other disciplines and theories as well, drawing on linguistics and philosophy, behavioral economics and psychology, anthropology and sociology, postmodernism and post-structuralism, policy analysis and communications studies, and more. As such, it seeks to constitute a broader field of

inquiry that brings together all scholars concerned with ideas and discourse. With regard to political analysis in particular, moreover, discursive institutionalism is concerned not only with defining the different sorts of ideas and spheres of discursive interaction but also with exploring the ideational sources of power and legitimacy as well as the discursive dynamics of change, whether following from elite leadership or citizen mobilization.

From the Three Older New Institutionalisms to Discursive Institutionalism

‘New institutionalism’ has its roots in the 1980s and 1990s, with the desire by a wide range of scholars to bring institutions back into the explanation of political action. It was less focused on rejecting the ‘old institutionalism’ than on providing a counter to behaviorism. ‘New institutionalism’ was a response to the absence of institutional analysis, or of considering collective action as collective through composite or institutional actors. It rejected the reduction of political action to its methodological individualist parts, opposing the proposition that observable behavior was the basic datum of political analysis; that observation of political behavior reveals actors’ preferences; that aggregating preferences explains collective decisions; and that collective decisions equal the public interest (Immergut 1998, pp. 6-8). In addition, these new institutionalists rejected all systemic approaches, including Marxian, with their *a priori* standard of justice based on pre-determined ‘objective’ interests such as class, gender, or social position (Immergut 1998, p. 11).

But while these new institutionalists have been united on the importance of institutions and in the rejection of behaviorism and systemic approaches, they have been divided along a number of other dimensions. These include their definition of institutions, their objects and logics of explanation, and the ways in which they deal with change. The battle lines were mainly drawn between ‘rational choice institutionalism’ and ‘historical institutionalism,’ with ‘sociological institutionalism’ a distant third (for more detail see: Schmidt 2008, 2010)—and interpretivism not even a contender. Moreover, methodological pluralism was ruled out from the start, as the battle lines were drawn between approaches, even if later there was the occasional ceasefire or attempts at reconciliation or combination of approaches (e.g., Grief and Laitin 2004; Katznelson and Weingast 2005).

Briefly defined, rational choice institutionalism focuses on rational actors who pursue their preferences following a ‘logic of calculation’ within political institutions, defined as structures of incentives. Historical institutionalism instead details the development of political institutions, described as regularized patterns and routinized practices, which are the (often unintended) outcomes of purposeful choices and historically unique initial conditions in a ‘logic of path-dependence.’ Sociological institutionalism sees political

institutions as socially constituted and culturally framed, with political agents acting according to a 'logic of appropriateness' that follows from culturally specific rules and norms. In contrast to these three institutionalisms, discursive institutionalism considers the ideas and discourse that actors use to devise, deliberate, contest, and/or legitimize political action in their 'meaning' context according to a 'logic of communication.'

Of the three older new institutionalisms, rational choice institutionalism seeks to establish the most universal of generalizations, by positing rational actors with fixed preferences who calculate strategically to maximize those preferences and who, in the absence of institutions that promote complementary behavior through coordination, confront collective action problems (Ostrom 1990). This deductive approach to explanation makes it good at capturing the range of reasons actors might normally have for an action, but its universal claims about rationality along with its deductive approach to explanation means that it risks overgeneralizing and has difficulty explaining any anomalies that depart radically from interest-motivated action, an individual's reasons for action, or real political events (Green and Shapiro 1994). Moreover, it can appear deterministic, as individuals are predicted to respond in a limited number of expected ways to external incentive structures (Immergut 1998, p. 14). Finally, because rational choice institutionalism assumes fixed preferences and is focused on equilibrium conditions, it has difficulty explaining why institutions change over time, especially given the lack of concern with the origins and formation of preferences (see Green and Shapiro 1994; Blyth 1997)..

Historical institutionalism avoids some of the problems of rational choice institutionalism by focusing on the actual institutions, or 'macro-structures,' in which political action occurs (Steinmo et al. 1992). It emphasizes not just the operation and development of institutions but also the path-dependencies and unintended consequences that result from such historical development (Hall and Taylor 1996, p. 938; Steinmo et al. 1992; Thelen 1999; Pierson 2000). However, by emphasizing the structures and processes much more than the events out of which they are constructed, let alone the individuals whose actions and interests spurred those events, historical institutionalism lacks the 'micro-foundational logic' present in rational choice institutionalism. Change is largely described (rather than explained) from the outside (exogenously), whether by way of 'big bang' theories about critical junctures (e.g., Gourevitch 1986) or by path dependencies with lock-in mechanisms and positive feedback effects (Pierson 2000). As a result, historical institutionalism can appear historically deterministic or even mechanistic where it focuses exclusively on continuities and path-dependencies. Even recent attempts to put more history back into historical institutionalism, by focusing on incremental change through processes of drift, layering, and conversion (Streeck and Thelen 2005), do more to describe change from the outside than to explain it from the inside, through agency.

Sociological institutionalism focuses on agents who act within cultural institutions that consist of the norms, cognitive frames, and meaning systems that guide human action. Such cultural institutions constitute the setting within which purposive, goal-oriented action is deemed 'appropriate,' such that rationality is socially constructed and culturally and historically contingent (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; March and Olsen 1989). Because sociological institutionalist explanations are arrived at inductively rather than deductively, they can lend insight into individuals' reasons for action in ways that rational choice institutionalism cannot. Moreover, because such explanations account contextually for individuals' reasons for action, sociological institutionalism is better able to explain the events out of which historical institutional explanations are constructed. Finally, rather than appearing either economically or historically deterministic, sociological institutionalism can appear culturally deterministic where it emphasizes the cultural routines and rituals to the exclusion of individual action which breaks out of the cultural norm. Like the rational choice approach, it too can be too static or equilibrium-focused, and unable to account for change over time. This said, where sociological institutionalists emphasize rule-creation and change, they could be categorized just as readily as discursive institutionalists, much like scholars in the historical institutionalist and rational choice institutionalist traditions who have come to focus on the role of ideas and discursive interaction, say, in the recalculation of interests, reshaping of historical paths, or the reframing of culture.

In fact, it is important to note that some scholars in the three older institutionalisms, concerned with the deterministic and static aspects of their approaches have straddled the divide with discursive institutionalism. There are relatively few in rational choice institutionalism, where the foray into ideas was short-lived because it may have appeared 'a bridge too far (Blyth 2002, 2003), although there are notable exceptions (e.g., Rothstein 2005). But there are many in historical institutionalism, since from the very beginning it encompassed scholars whom we now would see as discursive institutionalists (e.g., Desmond King, Margaret Weir, Sheri Berman). Historical institutionalism largely cast them out as it moved closer to rational choice institutionalism over time, as material perspectives came to predominate over the more ideational. As for sociological institutionalism, much depends upon whether scholars see ideas mainly as static ideational structures, as norms and identities constituted by culture (e.g., Katzenstein et al. 1996) or present ideas as more dynamic, that is, as norms, frames, and narratives that not only establish how actors conceptualize the world but also enable them to reconceptualize the world, serving as a resource to promote change (e.g., Finnemore 1996).

What defines discursive institutionalists is the focus on ideas as explanatory of change, often with a demonstration that such ideas do not fit predictable ‘rationalist’ interests, are underdetermined by structural factors, and/or represent a break with historical paths and/or cultural frames (see discussion in Blyth 2003; see also Schmidt 2008, 2010). But importantly, discursive institutionalism remains open to a pluralism of methods, as noted earlier. For example, in my book, *The Futures of European Capitalism* (2002), I begin with a soft rational choice approach together with historical institutionalism to show that rather than converging on a single neo-liberal model of capitalism or splitting into a liberal market economy modeled on the UK and a coordinated market economy modeled on Germany, Europe continues to have at least three varieties of capitalism, with a state-influenced market economy modeled on France as another variety in its own right. But I then explain both the continued variation as well as the liberalizing changes of these three countries using discursive institutionalism in order to highlight the importance of ideational leadership and discursive persuasion in the politics of adjustment. In another book, *Democracy in Europe* (2006), I begin with a historical institutionalist analysis showing that the ‘highly compound’ European Union has a more disruptive impact on ‘simple’ polities like Britain and France than more compound polities such as Germany and Italy. But I then turn to discursive institutionalism to demonstrate that institutions are not destiny. The presence or absence of legitimating ideas and discourse about the EU-related changes to the traditional workings of national democracy better explain countries’ differential responses to Europe’s perceived ‘democratic deficit,’ in particular in the UK and France. The recent experiences of the Brexit vote in the UK versus the election of the pro-European President Macron in France are further cases in point.

Defining Discursive Institutionalism

Discursive institutionalism is an analytic framework which gives a name to the very rich and diverse set of ways of explaining political and social reality that are focused on the substantive content of ideas and the interactive processes of discourse in institutional context (see Schmidt 2002, Chapter 5; 2006, Chapter 5; 2008; 2010; see also Campbell and Pederson 2001). As such, it calls attention to the significance of approaches that theorize about ideas and discourse in their many different forms, types, and levels as well as in the interactive processes of policy coordination and political communication by which ideas and discourse are generated, articulated, and contested by ‘sentient’ (thinking, speaking, and acting) agents.

My initial purpose in developing what is essentially an umbrella concept for a highly disparate set of ideational and discursive approaches coming from very different traditions has been two-fold: First, I have sought to constitute a ‘field’ or discursive

sphere within which practitioners coming from very different epistemological, ontological, and methodological vantage-points can discuss, deliberate, argue, and contest one another's ideas about ideas and discursive interaction. Importantly, this very open definition of discursive institutionalism as a major field also has allowed me to set out my own distinct set of epistemological and ontological predispositions. Second, I have sought to demonstrate to political scientists in particular that discursive institutionalism represents a fourth neo-institutionalism which does a much better job than rational choice institutionalist interest-based logics, historical institutionalist rules-based path dependencies, or even sociological institutionalist culture-based frames in helping to explain the dynamics of institutional change (see Schmidt 2008; 2010; 2012b). But what started as a response to neo-institutionalism, in an attempt to create space for interpretivism, has moved far beyond this to address major questions about politics and society, including the epistemological foundations of human knowledge and action and the theoretical bases of power and legitimacy.

Discursive institutionalism is open to a wide range of approaches focused on ideas – such as the ‘ideational turn’ (Blyth 1997) or ‘ideational constructivism’ (Hay 2006) – as well as on discourse—including post-modernist and post-structuralist approaches (those building on Foucault, Bourdieu, or Laclau and Mouffe). The ideas themselves come in many different forms. They may be cast as strategic weapons in the battle for control (Blyth 2002); “frames” that provide guideposts for knowledge, analysis, persuasion, and action through “frame-reflective discourse” (Rein and Schön 1994); narratives or discourses that shape understandings of events (e.g., Roe 1994); “storytelling” to clarify practical rationality (Forester 1993); “collective memories” that frame action (Rothstein 2005); discursive “practices” or fields of ideas that define the range of imaginable action (Bourdieu 1994; Howarth, Norval, and Stavrakakis 2000); or “argumentative practices” at the center of the policy process (Fischer and Forester 1993). Here, we could add what Kristen Monroe (this volume) calls narratives or stories that appeal to the moral imagination.

Such ideas may come at different levels of generality, as policies, programs, and philosophies. The first level of ideas encompasses the specific policies or ‘policy solutions’ proposed by policymakers for debate and adoption. The second level includes the more general programs that underpin the policy ideas, which define the problems to be solved by the policies, the issues to be considered, the goals to be achieved, the norms, methods and instruments to be applied, and the objectives and ideals. These may be cast as ‘paradigms’ that reflect the underlying assumptions or organizing principles orienting policy (Hall 1993, Schmidt 2002, Ch. 5); ‘programmatic beliefs’ (Berman 1998) that operate in the space between worldviews and specific policy ideas; ‘policy cores’ which provide sets of diagnostics and prescriptions for action (Sabatier and Jenkins 1993); or

‘problem definitions’ that set the scope of possible solutions to the problems that policy ideas address (Mehta 2011). At an even more basic or deeper level of ideas are the ‘public philosophies’ (Campbell 1998), ‘public sentiments’ (Campbell 2004), ‘deep core’ (Sabatier and Jenkins 1993); worldviews and ‘*Weltanschauung*’ which frame the policies and programs with a deeper core of organizing ideas, values, and principles of knowledge and society. These therefore often constitute the ‘background ideas’ to programs and policies (Schmidt 2016?).

Policies, programs, and philosophies tend to contain two types of ideas: cognitive and normative. Cognitive ideas elucidate ‘what is and what to do,’ normative ideas, ‘what is good or bad about what is’ in light of ‘what one ought to do.’ Cognitive ideas speak to how (first level) policies offer solutions to the problems at hand, how (second level) programs define the problems to be solved and identify the methods by which to solve them, and how both policies and programs mesh with the deeper core of (third level) principles and norms of relevant scientific disciplines or technical practices (see Hall 1993; Schmidt 2002a, 2008). Normative ideas instead attach values to political action, and serve to legitimize the policies in a program through reference to their appropriateness (see March and Olsen 1989). They speak to how (first level) policies meet the aspirations and ideals of the general public and how (second level) programs as well as (first level) policies resonate with a deeper core of (third level) principles and norms of public life, whether the newly-emerging values of a society or the long-standing ones in the societal repertoire (Schmidt 2000, 2002, Ch. 5)

Discourse encompasses not just the representation or embodiment of ideas but also the interactive processes of coordination by and through which ideas are generated in the policy sphere by discursive policy communities and entrepreneurs and communicated, deliberated, and/or contested in the political sphere by political leaders, social movements, and the public. In the policy sphere, the ‘coordinative discourse’ consists of the individuals and groups at the center of policy construction who are involved in the creation, elaboration, and justification of policy and programmatic ideas. These are the policy actors—the civil servants, elected officials, experts, organized interests, and activists, among others—who seek to *coordinate* agreement among themselves on policy ideas. They may do in a variety of ways in a wide range of venues, whether in loosely connected “epistemic communities” that share cognitive and normative ideas about a common policy enterprise (Haas 1992); closely connected “advocacy coalitions” that share ideas and access to policymaking (Sabatier 1993); “discourse coalitions” that share ideas over extended periods of time (Hajer 2003); or expert networks of actors who share ideas and technical expertise (Seabrooke and Tsingou 2014). But the coordinative discourse may also contain individuals who, as ‘entrepreneurs’ (Finnemore and Sikkink

1998) serve as catalysts for change as they draw on and articulate the ideas of discursive communities and coalitions.

In the political sphere, the ‘communicative discourse’ consists of the individuals and groups at the center of political communication involved in the presentation, deliberation, and legitimization of political ideas to the general public. These consist of political actors who, as political leaders, government spokespeople, party activists, ‘spin doctors,’ and more, *communicate* the policy ideas and programs developed in the context of the coordinative discourse to the public for discussion and deliberation in a mass process of public persuasion (see, e.g., Mutz, Sniderman, and Brody 1996). But it encompasses other political actors as well, including members of opposition parties, the media, pundits, community leaders, social activists, public intellectuals, experts, think-tanks, organized interests, and social movements, among others who, often organized in the ‘policy forums’ of ‘informed publics’ (Rein and Schön 1994) and the ‘public of organized private persons’ (Habermas 1989), *communicate* their responses to government policies, engendering debate, deliberation, and ideally, modification of the policies under discussion. Finally, the general public of citizens and voters to whom this communicative discourse is directed also contribute to it. They may do so as members of civil society, through grass-roots organizing, social mobilization, and demonstrations, as members of ‘mini-publics’ in citizen juries, issues forums, deliberative polls, and the like (see Goodin and Dryzek 2006), or as members of the electorate, whose voices are heard as the subjects of opinion polls, surveys, focus groups, as well as, of course, as voters—where actions speak even louder than words.

The directional arrows of these discursive interactions may be top to top among political and/or technical elites, top down through the influence of elites, or bottom up via civil society, social-movement activists, or ordinary people. Most frequently, the arrows of discursive interaction appear to be going from top down, as policy elites generate ideas in different policy sectors which political elites then communicate to the public—often weaving them together into a ‘master’ discourse which presents an (at least seemingly) coherent political program that provides a ‘vision’ of where the polity is, where it is going, and where it ought to go—after which they ‘mediate’ the ensuing public debates. There is an extensive literature, in fact on how elites shape mass public opinion by establishing the terms of the discourse and by framing the issues for the mass media and, thereby, for the mass public more generally (e.g., Zaller 1992). The arrows can also go from bottom up, however, in the discursive interactions of social activists, feminists, and environmentalists in national and international arenas (e.g., Keck and Sikkink 1998; Epstein 2008). The arrows can even remain solely at the level of civil society, in ‘public conversations’ (Benhabib 1996), communicative action in the ‘public sphere’ (Habermas 1989), or ‘deliberative democracy’ in the supranational sphere (Dryzek 2000). The

Rudolphs' work on Gandhi's charismatic leadership is a very good example of how bottom up mass social mobilization can be spurred through innovative ideas conveyed through the inspiring discourse of an exceptional leader.

Institutional Context in Discursive Institutionalism

The institutional context is equally important for discursive interactions. But it can be understood in two ways: first, in terms of the meaning context in which agents' discursive interactions proceed following nationally situated logics of communication; second, in terms of the formalized as well as informal institutions that inform their ideas, arguments, and discursive interactions (Schmidt 2008, 2010). The institutions in the first sense of institutional context are akin to what the Rudolphs saw as 'situated knowledge.' They are above all dynamic, as structures and constructs of meaning internal to 'sentient' (thinking and speaking) agents whose "*background ideational abilities*" enable them to create (and maintain) institutions (building on Searle but also Bourdieu, Foucault, and more) at the same time that their "*foreground discursive abilities*" enable them to communicate critically about those institutions (building on Habermas, Gramsci, and more) so as to engage in collective discourse and action to change (or maintain) them (Schmidt 2008; 2012). This, then, is a fully interpretive approach to institutions, which emphasizes not only agents' 'situated knowledge' as part of the 'structuring' capacities of culture but also their active engagement with the world, as agents' ability to '(re)construct' their world as they think, speak, and act collectively to adapt it to their needs and desires. This discussion also creates a bridge with more psychological understandings of individual moral action and cognition, as elaborated by Kristen Monroe (this volume), where the moral imagination can be seen as developed through agents' "foreground discursive abilities" while moral salience and the nature of moral imagination are shaped by their "background ideational abilities."

Institutions in the second sense are the formal (or informal) ones that are generally the objects of explanation of the three older neo-institutionalisms, including the rationalist incentive structures, historical rules, or cultural frames that serve as external constraints to agents' action. In discursive institutionalism, these kinds of institutions may be treated either as unproblematic background information—e.g. as the formal institutional context that shapes discursive interactions or the social norms that remain unquestioned as ideas—or they may themselves be the objects of inquiry e.g. to investigate how agents' changing ideas may (re)construct interests or how their discourse is key to understanding change during critical junctures. Agents' ideas, discourse, and actions in any institutional context, however, must also be seen as responses to the material (and not so material) realities which affect them--including material events and pressures, the unintended consequences of their own actions, the actions of others, the ideas and discourse that seek

to make sense of any such actions, as well as the structural frameworks of power and position.

But this raises a further set of epistemological questions with regard to what we can know about the world with any certainty. For if everything is related to ideas and discourse, with no “neutral incentive structures” or “objective” and “material” interests, how can one avoid falling into some sort of extreme idealism or relativism, in which one can’t know anything for certain, because the world is radically uncertain or even immaterial? The answer is that discursive institutionalism assumes the existence of material reality, but it opposes the (rationalist) conflation of material reality and interests into “material interests.” Material reality is, rather, the setting within which or in response to which agents may conceive of their interests (Schmidt 2008, 2012). And to understand that setting, we need to also consider the material conditions in which people live, the structural forces that may be at work, the formal and informal institutional rules that people may follow, and naturally the unpredictable events that affect peoples’ lives because, after all, ‘stuff happens.’ Material reality encompasses, in other words, very much the same elements that affect agents in the Rudolphs’ interpretive approach to ‘situated knowledge.’

But what, then, is material reality or, better, what is “real” even if it is not “material”? Searle (1995) is once again useful, in this case for his differentiation between “brute facts”—which, like mountains, are material because they exist regardless of whether sentient agents acknowledge their existence—and “social facts,” of which “institutional facts” are a subset. Institutions are not material because they don’t exist without sentient agents, but they are real to the extent that the collective agreements by which they were established continue to hold and, like the institution of property or of money, are real and have causal effects (Schmidt 2008, 318; 2012, 96-97). Such social facts and institutions have been the focus of the Rudolphs’ work in so many different ways, including in terms of the effects of colonialism, the nature of domination and subjection, along with the possible split in perceptions of identity, or who is seen as a ‘subaltern,’ as in the case of Amar Singh.

The Power of Ideas/Discourse

Our final question is how to relate power to ideas and discursive interactions in discursive institutionalism. This is not such an easy task, mainly because many of the approaches that generally fit under the discursive institutionalist umbrella do not theorize power, but instead simply state that ideas have power (e.g., Blyth 2002; Campbell 1998; Cox 2001; Kingdon 1984). The problem here, as a result, is that with few exceptions (notably Béland 2010), the matter of *how* ideas have power remains under-theorized and under-investigated.

In contrast, post-structuralists such as Foucault (2000), Gramsci (1971), and Laclau and Mouffe (1985) put power at the center of their understanding of ideas, be it as discursive formations, hegemony, ideology, or the production of subjectivity. The problem here is that power and discourse are often so intermingled that any empirical discourse analysis is imbued with the theoretical focus on domination by elites, such that investigation centers on how elite ideas control the ways in which people come to think about politics and society. For political scientists who do not start with these premises (although they might end with them as conclusions), embedding substantive theory about power relations in the methodology risks over-determining the results.

Lately, in conjunction with Martin Carstensen, I have developed a systematic theorization of discursive institutionalist scholars' approaches to ideational power that seeks to set these approaches, among others, in perspective (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016). Drawing on both existing ideational scholarship and the larger power debate in political science (focused mainly on coercive, structural, and institutional power—the focus of the other three neo-institutionalist approaches), we define ideational power as the capacity of actors (whether individual or collective) to influence other actors' normative and cognitive beliefs through the use of ideational elements. We note that acts of ideational power—whether successful or not—occur in only a subset of the relations relevant for understanding how ideas matter, namely when actors seek to influence the beliefs of others by promoting their own ideas at the expense of others'.

In this view, ideational power has certain distinguishing features. First, it is exerted through the constitution of intersubjective meaning structures that agents both draw on, to give meaning to their material and social circumstances, and battle over, to affect which ideas and discourses are deemed viable. Second, ideational power is conceived as both a top-down and a bottom-up process. That is, ideational power takes seriously not only the discursive struggles occurring among policy actors at the top of the power hierarchy but also those related to the effort of political actors at the bottom to get their ideas across to the general public. This contrasts with the singular focus on top-down interaction generally characterizing the coercive, structural, and institutional understandings of power in rational choice, historical, and sociological institutionalism (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 321-22).

With this in mind, we have identified three ways of theorizing about the power of ideas and discourse. These include looking for persuasive power *through* ideas via discourse, looking for coercive power *over* ideas and discourse, and looking for structural or institutional power *in* ideas and discourse.

Power *through* ideas is the most common approach to ideational power among discursive institutionalists. It consists of the capacity of actors to persuade other actors of the cognitive validity and/or normative value of their views of what they should think and do through the use of ideational elements. They tend to do this via discourses that serve to explain and/or legitimate their proposals and actions, whether in coordination with other policy actors (coordinative discourse) or in communication with the public (communicative discourse). This is not necessarily a completely “rational” process in the sense that the most powerful necessarily are the ones with the “best” argument. Instead, the persuasiveness of an idea depends on both the cognitive and normative arguments that can be mustered in its support. In this view, ideational power is not primarily about manipulating people into not recognizing their “real interests” (Lukes 1974), but rather about persuading other agents to accept one’s understanding of an issue based on available intersubjectively held ideas (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 323-26).

Power *over* ideas is the capacity of actors to control and dominate the meaning of ideas either directly, by imposing their ideas on others, or indirectly, whether through shaming opponents into conformity or by resisting alternative interpretations. This version of ideational power connects with more coercive forms of power, since here the beliefs of others are directly disregarded. It is the most common approach to ideational power taken by scholars who see this power as the capacity of actors who control most of the levers of traditional power—coercive, structural, and/or institutional—to therefore also promote their own ideas to the exclusion of all others. However, power *over* ideas can alternatively be seen as the coercive power of actors who are usually powerless in the sense that they enjoy little access to coercive, institutional, and structural forms of power, but who, by the use of discursive means, are able to shame otherwise powerful actors to act in ways they would not otherwise have done—as in the case of progressive social movements (e.g., Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Epstein 2008). Finally, power over ideas can manifest itself in the ability of actors who are normally quite powerful in terms of institutional position and authority to, themselves, not listen to alternative ideas—as with many economists in the neoliberal era (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 326-28).

Power *in* ideas focuses on the authority certain ideas enjoy in structuring thought at the expense of other ideas. This power can be seen as structural or institutional. Structural power in ideas results from agents having established hegemony over the production of subject positions, and is generally the focus of post-structuralists such as Foucault or Bourdieu. Institutional power in ideas is a consequence of institutions imposing constraints on which ideas agents may take into consideration, and is mostly the domain of historical institutionalists. While the other forms of ideational power generally concentrate on the interactions between ideational agents, power *in* ideas mostly concerns the deeper-level ideational and institutional structures that actors draw upon and relate

their ideas to in order for them to gain recognition from elites and the mass public (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 329-331).

What is particularly interesting about power *in* ideas is that it can be seen as even more “powerful” in some sense than coercive or structural power. While coercive power forces agents to do what they might not want to do, agents may at least be aware of this domination, like it or not. In the case of Foucault’s (2000) structuring ideas, by contrast, the ideational structure dominates not just what agents do but also what they think and say, while for Bourdieu (1994), the *doxa* or vision of the world of elites who dominate the state creates the *habitus* that conditions people to see the world in the way they (the dominant) choose (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 331).

Susanne Rudolph (2009) provided an illustration of how this kind of structuring power *in* ideas is also influenced by coercive power *over* ideas and persuasive power *through* ideas. The illustration in question involves the explanation of the British East India Company’s shift in the nineteenth century away from a conceptualization of Indians as ‘civilized,’ and therefore worthy of a certain measure of autonomy and self-governing capacity, to one in which Indians were portrayed as hardly civilized at all, as primitive. One could offer a rational choice institutionalist account of this in terms of coercive power and material interest, by noting the instrumental manner in which these new ideas became the interest-based rationale for dispossessing the Indians of their power by a new group in the East India Company. But this is to suggest that all were aware of what they were doing. Rather, for the vast majority of British actors, the shift in conceptualization was an exercise of power *over* ideas, imposed by a new group, that turned into power *in* ideas for subsequent colonists, as they developed a whole new way of seeing Indians, structuring their thoughts about India, which changed politics in the UK and power relations in India. It would take another hundred years before Gandhi would force those in power to listen (power *over* ideas), through his persuasive power *through* ideas to mobilize fellow Indians to engage in the everyday practices of non-violent resistance (Schmidt 2011).

In sum, with these three ways of dealing with the power of ideas, it is important reiterate that discursive institutionalism is an umbrella concept that constitutes a wide field, with many different approaches to ideas and discourse, which is methodologically pluralist within its analytic framework, as well as in relation to other neo-institutionalist frameworks. As such, it can accommodate all three forms of ideational power: my own particular focus on persuasive power *through* ideas along with post-structuralist, sociological institutionalist or historical institutionalist power *in* ideas and rational choice institutionalist power *over* ideas.

Conclusion

Political science has moved on from those early debates about political scientific explanation, focused on systemic and behavioral approaches, as well as from the debates in the philosophies of science and social science. But a residual set of assumptions remains: that political science can be a ‘science’ by following rules of verification and falsification through reduction and quantification. If nothing else, this essay should have made it clear that we should stop trying to emulate the ideas of philosophers of science, with their idealization of physics, and stop looking for answers in fields so much narrower in their objects—rather than subjects—of study, but instead get on with the task of explaining political reality with as many methods as are appropriate. We may lose the claim to science but we gain our freedom to be *social* scientists. And as social scientists, we are freer to explore all the ways of interpreting social and political reality in all its many variations by situating knowledge in its social and political contexts.

Discursive institutionalism serves to update the Rudolphs’ interpretivism as it reiterates the importance of studies using a multiplicity of perspectives on empirical reality. In this chapter, for practical purposes, I have referred mainly to the Rudolphs’ essays in the first volume of their three volume opus of collected essays: *The Realm of Ideas: Inquiry and Theory*, of *Explaining Indian Democracy: A Fifty Year Perspective, 1956-2006*. But their books and other works make the same points, often with more detailed analysis and at greater length with substantive theories serving to interpret political and social realities. In rereading these essays, I remembered how central the Rudolphs were to my own initial intellectual development, having learned interpretivism at the ‘knees of the masters,’ in classes such as ‘The Modernity of Tradition’ and ‘Domination and Subjection.’ But it is equally important for me to highlight the double function of ‘situated knowledge:’ not just as an empirical method but as meta-theoretical justification for updating interpretivism through discursive institutionalism. Today, political scientists have come to speak another language with different ways of explaining the similar kinds of phenomena considered in earlier eras. Contemporary political science’s new institutionalism requires an interpretive response that can speak to practitioners in ways that they can understand, with arguments, critiques, and admonitions that can persuade them of the ‘power’ of interpretive ideas. This is why discursive institutionalism is needed today, but in no way supersedes interpretive approaches. Much the contrary, it *is* interpretivism. But it is interpretivism with a difference, since it involves more extensive analysis of the epistemological grounding of ideas and discursive interaction in the philosophies of science and social science, more systematic discussion of the vast field of ideational and discursive analysis, more critical engagement with other contemporary approaches to explanation (including but not limited to neo-institutionalist approaches), and a greater attention to how ideas and discourse are central to the exercise of power.

There's more to be done however. My own empirical work has focused on the importance of ideational innovation and discursive leadership in the dynamics of change. But more could be done with regard to how ideas and discourse may resonate beyond the limits of their cognitive and normative qualities and their contextualization in coordinative or communicative discourse. Linguistic and psychological issues related to the uses of language, or the appeal of particular kinds of narratives to individuals' emotions and their moral imagination, could benefit from further development. But this is where we can look for greater insights on the psychological aspects and moral dimensions of interpretivism, as developed by Kristen Monroe in the next chapter.

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