Sociological Institutionalism and World Society

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Introduction

Sociological institutionalism (or “neo-institutionalism”) has had influence across sociology and beyond, but particularly on studies of the trans-national sphere and global social change (for general reviews, see Jepperson 2002; Meyer 2009; Meyer et al. 1997; Schneiberg and Clemens 2006). Variously labeled world polity theory, world society theory, and the neo-institutional perspective on the global system, scholars have drawn on sociological institutionalism to generate an expansive theoretical and empirical agenda stressing the importance of global institutions and culture in shaping the structure and behavior of nation-states, organizations, and individuals worldwide.

The world society perspective is historically linked to John W. Meyer and collaborators, working at Stanford University in the 1970s and 1980s. Reacting on one hand to the enduring influence of functionalism in American sociology (e.g., modernization theory) and perspectives stressing economic and military power on the other (e.g., world-system theory, neo-realism), the world society tradition has sought to explain global change – most notably the diffusion of Western-style state policies – as the consequence of emerging global institutions, international organizations, and an increasingly common world culture in the period following World War II.

Institutionalisms

Institutional perspectives, generally, shift attention away from individual social actors and toward the social context or environment in which actors are embedded (see Amenta 2005). Institutionalisms vary substantially, however, in both the conceptualization of institutional environments, and in the extent to which actor interests and identities are seen as existing \textit{a priori} versus being fundamentally shaped or even constituted by the external environment. We may think of a continuum with interests-seeking rational actors on one end and “stage actors” on

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1 We thank Colin Beck, Elizabeth Boyle, and members of the Irvine Comparative Sociology Workshop for their insightful comments. We regret that we could not, in this brief review, do more than scratch the surface in terms of providing references to the outstanding theoretical and empirical work on this topic.
the other (Meyer 2009). World society theory is on the latter end of the spectrum, characterizing actors as creatures of their context – as enactors of social or cultural rules and scripts provided by their wider environment.

Economic institutionalisms (e.g., North 1990) and much work in political science (e.g., Keohane and Nye 1977) begins with the assumption of strong interested actors, and seeks to understand when and why those actors choose to enter into institutional arrangements that may ultimately constrain their behavior to some degree. Historical institutionalisms focus on the ways that historically emergent features of the institutional environment channel subsequent behavior (and even interests) in contingent, path-dependent ways (Skocpol 1979). Actors may struggle to pursue their interests, but within a range of possibilities shaped by the past.

Sociological neo-institutionalism goes further in asserting the influence of social context, which shapes or even “constitutes” social actors – defining their identities and goals (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). To varying degrees, neo-institutional scholars draw inspiration from the cultural and phenomenological traditions of Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Goffman (1974), which stress the socially constructed nature of reality, and the extent to which social behavior reflects the enactment of socially appropriate frames in a given context (in contrast to, say, images of rational calculation).

The world society tradition, drawing on cultural/phenomenological institutionalism, seeks to de-emphasize the role of interested social actors (e.g., modern states) in social scientific explanation – characterizing actors as products of a wider culture rather than prime-movers of the system. The primary competing perspectives are those that stress functionality/efficiency or powerful actors: e.g., one may see isomorphism and policy diffusion as a consequence of organizational learning and optimization – organizational actors seeking advantage – or as the product of economic or political power, for instance a hegemonic or imperialist culture imposed on the world by dominant actors (e.g., various literatures on colonialism).

**World Society and World Culture**

The initial impulse for the world society tradition came out of comparative research on education and governance in the 1970s. Education systems in Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, seemed surprisingly like those of Western societies despite stark differences in the labor markets they served. Schools and curricula looked like resource-poor imitations of those in the West, rather than functional systems adapted to the educational needs of non-industrial economies. It appeared that governments and educators were more attuned to global models of schooling than local needs and realities “on the ground.”

This similarity across societies, or *isomorphism*, was explained as conformity to dominant, legitimated, or “taken-for-granted” views. Conventional ideas about governance and education could be seen as *cultural models* – that is, blueprints or recipes that define what a “normal” or appropriate nation-state looks like (Meyer et al. 1997). Moreover, these cultural models suffused the international sphere, becoming a key component of the institutional environment surrounding, and constituting, nation-states. The world society tradition thus stresses the historical build-up of international organization and structures – such as the United Nations and
international associations – that serve to institutionalize cultural models, effectively embodying and sustaining a global culture.

Whereas much work in political sociology stresses both heterogeneity and contestation, the world society tradition focuses on strong commonalities in international discourses on a wide range of topics, from human rights to environmentalism. As with clothing fashions, variability may co-exist with clear patterns and trends, such as common assumptions, rules, and fads. Ideas and discourses regarding educational policy institutionalized in the international sphere, for example, may vary on specifics yet embody broadly common assumptions that pervade a given historical period – providing common blueprints that generate conformity among countries.

A great deal of empirical research has studied the top-down process through which global models and discourses diffuse to nation-states, typically through policy adoption. As constructed entities of a highly rationalized world society, seemingly disparate nation-states exhibit a great deal of structural similarity in their constitutions (Boli 1987), ministerial structures (Kim, Jang, and Hwang 2002), and policies, including those on national security (Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein 1996) and women’s suffrage (Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan 1997). Common goals of the modern nation-state are furthermore reflected in such areas as expanded educational systems (Baker and LeTendre 2005; Meyer, Ramirez, and Soysal 1992; Schofer and Meyer 2005), environmental protection (Frank, Hironaka, and Schofer 2000; Frank, Longhofer, and Schofer 2007; Hironaka 2000), and the promotion of science (Drori et al. 2003; Schofer 2003).

The Content of World Culture

World society theory is a theory of modernity. Specifically, it seeks to unpack the institutionalized culture of modern society, and to characterize social actors as products of that culture. Drawing on Weber and other accounts of modernity, world society scholars emphasize rationalization, universalism, belief in progress, and individualism as foundational cultural assumptions that undergird global discourse and organization (Boli and Thomas 1999). This culture supports a very wide array of movements, initiatives, and innovations but proscribes many others. It is unthinkable for the United Nations, for instance, to argue for the return of traditional feudal arrangements, which violate world norms regarding individual freedom and progress.

World society scholars view global culture as a product of history, not some inevitable or teleological evolution of values. Historically, Christendom and major cultural movements, such as the Enlightenment, formed the basis for an emergent European culture (Meyer 1989). Subsequent European dominance and colonial expansion propagated Western ideas on a global scale. The Allied victory in World War II and the emergence of the U.S. (rather than Germany) as a dominant power shifted global culture in a more liberal, individualistic, and arguably “American” direction. Yet, world society scholars have resisted the idea that global culture is simply hegemonic ideology. Rather, the cultural system evolves substantially autonomously. For instance, the liberal “American” ideals expressed in the UN declaration of Human Rights have formed the basis for a much larger international human rights movement than the U.S. state envisioned or (presumably) desired.
More recently, scholars have begun to dig more deeply into the origins and content of world society. Lechner and Boli (2005) suggest that world culture, though riddled with tensions and contradictions, saturates social life through law, organizations, religion, national identity, and even anti-globalization movements, and Boli (2005) documents recent changes and trends in global culture. Frank and Gabler (2006), meanwhile, examine world culture as reflected in university curricula worldwide, highlighting striking similarities in substantive emphases in seemingly national institutions. We discuss directions for future research below.

Disorganization and Loose Coupling

Cultural/phenomenological institutionalisms, in rejecting actor-centrism and functionalism, characterize social life and social actors themselves as rather disorganized and messy. Whereas neo-realist perspectives in political science, for instance, assume that states are coherent and unitary actors, world society theory sees states, organizations, and even individuals as loose structures with internal inconsistencies and instabilities over time. Lacking coherent interests or identities, states (and their subunits) draw haphazardly upon cultural models from the institutional environment, moving in multiple (and sometimes inconsistent) directions. Furthermore, ritualized enactment of global models may be only loosely related to policy implementation – especially in impoverished countries (for a discussion of outcomes “on the ground,” see Schofer and Hironaka 2005). Disjunctures are the norm. This may seem unsatisfying to those who want a simple answer as to whether world culture “really matters.” Yet, it is a strength of the perspective to recognize and even help make sense of the complex forms of loose coupling often observed in modern organizations (Orton and Weick 1990).

Both case study and quantitative research support notions of loose coupling as described by world society theory. For example, Boyle (2002) finds that anti-female genital cutting reforms—derived from global principles of human rights and overriding many notions of national sovereignty—did not necessarily diminish the practice, even when individual attitudes aligned with global norms (see also Boyle, McMorris and Gomez 2002). Similarly, Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui (2005) show that signing human rights accords did not actually improve human rights records in the most abusive countries. Decoupling appears to be especially pervasive in developing countries, where, for example, the pressures of economic globalization produce a variety of science policies in the name of development but rarely a boost in the scientific labor force (Drori et al. 2003). Yet, loose coupling does not simply mean the “absence of real change.” Schofer and Hironaka (2005) argue that institutional forces may push consistently across levels of an organization, generating systematic change even if the organization lacks tight internal coupling.

Related Traditions

Complementary perspectives include constructivism in political science, as well as sociological work on transnational civil society and social movements. Constructivism in International Relations is a close cognate of the world society tradition (see Finnemore 1996). Constructivism fundamentally accepts the idea that culture matters – most often conceptualized as “norms”. State behavior is, in part, influenced by norms, which are propagated by non-state actors (“norm entrepreneurs”) (Sikkink 1998). Within sociology, recent work on transnational social
movements also bears much in common with the world society tradition – including an emphasis on international association, and (to varying degrees) an appreciation for “cultural frames” as a source of mobilization (Smith 2002). Yet, (despite exceptions) these traditions have retained more of the actor-centrism and emphasis on power that cultural/phenomenological institutionalists seek to reject. Actors are still frequently characterized as prime movers, even if their behavior is sometimes constrained by “norms.” Non-state actors or “norm entrepreneurs” are, themselves, cast as strategic actors rather than agents of a broader culture. And, imageries of interests and incentives, rather than culture, are often more central to arguments. Nonetheless, the broader image – of a thick international environment consisting of non-state actors (organizations) and norms (culture) that influence states – bears much in common with world society theory.

Myths and Misperceptions

Over time, several interrelated criticisms of world-society theory have arisen – and in part grown themselves myth-like and institutionalized. We address them here in hopes of advancing discussion. At the same time, we consider some misperceptions in the literature – to some extent shared by practitioners – that may limit the perspective’s contributions to the wider field.

1. World-society theory ignores actors, interests, and power.

It is true that work from the world-society perspective – and sociological neo-institutionalism generally – de-emphasizes actors and interests relative to the sociological mainstream. It is indeed a core contention of the perspective that “actors” and “interests” are best, or at least usefully, conceived as derivative features of the wider institutional environment, and that one gains fundamental insight into their nature and quality by examining the models or blueprints from which they derive.

Relatedly, world society theory de-emphasizes the role of coercive power in creating and maintaining institutions, contra the standard American view of a social world comprised of primordial actors – in this case marked not only by interests but by disparities in power. Such views dominate political sociology. The problem they face is that considerable social change occurs without clear assertions of power – i.e., coercion by means of violence. Rather, authority – i.e., persuasion by status or expertise – is pervasive in social life.

By de-emphasizing actors, interests, and power, world society scholars are able to pose questions about phenomena that are unobserved or unremarked upon by more conventional actor-centric and power-based theories. For instance, theorists of actor-centric and power-based theories might note the role of anti-colonial movements in subsequent decolonizations of the 1950s and 1960s. What is striking from a world-society perspective is the opposite side of the coin. In the majority of colonies, anti-colonial movements were ostentatiously weak and disorganized – with little control over means of coercion. Nevertheless, decolonizations occurred, even in those colonies which did not mobilize anti-colonial movements. World society scholars have argued that in many cases, the authority and legitimacy conferred by a wider global-institutional environment was more effective in gaining political independence than armed coercion (Strang 1990).
2. *World-society theory cannot explain the origins of cultural forms or cultural change.*

This criticism also typically, though not always, arises from conventional actors/interests assumptions. Here, one concedes the importance of cultural “blueprints” but then asks where they come from or how they change – often assuming that “real” actors with “real” interests stand behind the curtain. It is true that much empirical work from the world-society perspective focuses on the global diffusion of existing models, and the sheer abundance of this work – and the attention it merits – perhaps tempts the conclusion that world-society theorists ignore the origins question. But that conclusion is more caricature than accurate representation. In fact, a growing number of studies attend directly to the origins question – articulating the ways evolving and intensifying global institutions give rise (and fall) to various blueprints and models. Accounts stress that contemporary world society is replete with individual actorhood and also professionalized expertise, aimed at developing general models of legitimate goals and putative “best practices.” Models with stronger theories of collective good, with better articulations with the taken-for-granted elements of developing world culture, and with more elaborate international organizational carriers are more likely to become institutionalized. The origins question in these accounts never reverts to actors and interests, as some might hope, but remains in the realm of enactors and culture.

In this vein, for example, one might query the origins of environmental protection. The powerful and interested actors in the story – especially nation-states and corporations – may oppose most forms of protection, insofar as they compromise goals of development and profit. Nevertheless, experts and professionals, authorized by membership in the scientific community, pose models of the human-nature relationship that assert the primacy of collective goods. The victory of the ecosystems model, wherein humans are elaborately and causally connected to wider nature, represents at least as much the triumph of a scientific model, advocated by formally disinterested others, as it does the imposition of a model by interested actors (Frank 1997).

3. *World-society theory is equivalent to the INGO effect.*

A key conduit of world society models and discourses are international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). World society resembles a transnational version of a decentralized Tocquevillian associational landscape, abundant with INGOs in fields ranging from development to technical standardization (Boli and Thomas 1999; Drori, Meyer, and Hwang 2006). INGOs represent the organizational dimension of world society, conveying global models to domestic receptor sites charged with, “unscrambling global signals for local constituencies” (Frank, Hardinge, and Wossick-Corea 2009: 277; Frank and McEneaney 1999). Thus, many empirical studies find an important “INGO effect,” or a positive relationship between INGO memberships and policy diffusion. However, the persistent INGO effect is often misinterpreted.

The problem lies in equating the signature INGO effect to the world-society effect. The role of INGOs in diffusion is undoubtedly central, and clearly it has been celebrated in the literature. The mistake is to stop there, to collapse the cultural dimensions of world-society theory into its organizational dimensions. There is no question that INGOs serve as primary organizational
expressions of global institutions. But a cultural aspect accompanies the organizational aspect – spurring not only diffusion but diffusion along particular lines, in particular directions.

Thus, for example, world-society theory predicts not only the reforms of sex laws – enabled by INGO ties – but also reforms that are consistent with the ascending status of the individual in world models of society. The substantive dimensions of change – the cultural and directional dimensions – too often fade from discussion. Sex-law – and many other – reforms track substantive transformations in world society.

4. World-society theory is equivalent to ceremony without substance.

As articulated above, conventional sociological accounts privilege actors and interests over enactors and institutions, and thus they prioritize substance over ceremony or the delivery over the claim. This is part and parcel of traditional American sociology. World-society accounts, by contrast, stress the extent to which social life bears a ceremonial or “ritualized” character. Therein, one finds formal adherence to institutionalized blueprints, often only loosely coupled with implementation on the ground (i.e., enactors and scripts). It is mistaken, however, to deduce from the differing emphases that world-society theorists envision an enduring state of hypocrisy, with no change at the level of practice. On the contrary, the perspective suggests (a) that the oft-noticed phenomenon of ceremony without substance is accompanied by the less-noticed phenomenon of substance without ceremony, and (b) that a host of processes promote the convergence of the two over time.

It is easiest for world society scholars to counter competing explanations – to show that “culture matters” – when one observes patterns of global conformity that are (a) obviously dysfunctional, such as copying policies that are ill-suited for local conditions; and (b) do not support, or appear to contradict, the interests of powerful domestic actors. As a result, world society scholars have sometimes presented the “diffusion of the trivial.” This was, perhaps, a reasonable strategy when world-society theory was in its infancy, given the priority of explanations involving power and interests. But it is important to note that even core “functional” aspects of the modern state – such as economic or military policy – may be analyzed as products of a global cultural system, a point increasingly addressed in recent scholarship (Hironaka 2010; see below).

Indeed, substance (or, outcomes) without ceremony (adoption) is common in the global system. For example, Frank, Hardinge, and Wosick-Correa (2009) find that the global diffusion of rape-law reforms is associated with increased police reporting even in countries without any rape-law reforms. Similarly, human rights practices improve even in countries that fail to ratify human rights accords, given the ascendant legitimacy of the global human-rights movement (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2005). Formal commitments render countries as even more vulnerable than others to pressures for everyday compliance. Global institutionalization involves substance without ceremony – i.e., changes in practice without changes in formal commitment – and also vice versa. The two sides of decoupling go together.

5. World-society theory predicts that everything will diffuse.
The heavy emphasis on diffusion studies in the empirical literature can lead to the misconception that world-society theory predicts that everything will diffuse, and some critics take evidence of non-diffusion or resistance (e.g., Vietnam) as disproving the theory. On the contrary, world-society is as much a theory of non-diffusion as diffusion (see Strang and Meyer 1993). In particular, it predicts that (a) models that fail to assert collective goods over private interests, (b) models that fail to articulate with prevailing global institutions, and (c) models that lack international organizational carriers will be unlikely to diffuse, regardless of support from powerful and interested actors.

Thus, for example, neo-liberal economic policies did not diffuse globally until they were cast as general models promising general benefits, until they embraced the individuated human actorhood that is central to contemporary global institutions (democracy, mass education, etc.), and until they received the authoritative backing of professional economists and intergovernmental organizations (Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2006).

The emphasis on global or worldwide effects by no means excludes effects at lower levels of analysis. To find, for example, women’s suffrage rights around the world (Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan 1997) is not the same as finding that such rights are respected to the same extent, in the same way, with the same implications in every country, village, and household globally. Of course there are differences and variations, and of course they are important, just as are the global effects to which world-society theory calls attention.

6. World-society theory is a normative and/or teleological perspective similar to modernization theory.

World society scholars study “modernity” not as an ideal or inevitable trajectory, but as a set of cultural views or ideologies that are prominent components of global culture. World culture is deeply modernist in character, involving ideologies of national progress/development, the expansion of education, science/rationality, and so on. World society scholars seek to understand the consequences of this culture. At times, world society theory generates empirical predictions similar to those of modernization theory (e.g., global expansion of education), but these predictions are neither teleological nor are they necessarily normatively desirable.

7. World society theory fails to attend to mechanisms.

This criticism has, in part, been addressed in recent empirical work (see Schofer and Hironaka for a discussion). Scholars have documented a variety of “carriers” of institutionalized cultural models, including international associations, scientists and professionals, media and telecommunication, modern school systems which convey standardized curricula, and even the legacy of colonial ties. That said, Schofer and Hironaka (2005) point out the limits of searching for concrete mechanisms to explain complex cultural processes. Can one easily enumerate the specific mechanisms through which cultural capital is transferred from parents to children? Countries embedded in global culture are influenced via multiple, often very diffuse, mechanisms operating simultaneously. The more deeply institutionalized a cultural form, the more it becomes “built in” to many mechanisms, such as law, custom, school curricula, and so on. And, dramatic change is often observed even when some specific mechanisms (e.g., a given
law or treaty) appear to be ineffective. Those in search of any single “smoking gun” responsible for diffusion or change are likely to be disappointed.

**New Directions in World Society Theory**

Research continues apace within the world society paradigm, much of it extending the lines of research outlined above. But distinct new lines of research have also emerged within the last decade. While partaking of the original spirit, these new directions develop theoretical arguments to explain the role of actors in the world polity, theories of institutional change, and theory about the outcomes of world polity processes.

*Role of Individual Actors*

As discussed above, one common gloss on world-society theory is that it ignores the role of individuals in developing institutions. Recently, however, some scholars have argued that the creation of meaning and interpretation by individuals is an essential aspect of diffusion, particularly in a global context that champions individual human rights and actorhood (Frank and Meyer 2002; Suárez 2008). Such arguments recognize that global institutions continue to influence the perceptions and actions of individuals. Concurrently however, individuals act as agents, or at times resisters, of global institutions. Such individual actions enable the implementation of the often nebulous influences of global institutions (cf. the old institutionalism represented by Stinchcombe 1997).

Along these lines, Hallett and Ventresca (2006) develop the concepts of an “inhabited institution.” Instead of conceptualizing bureaucratization as expanding automatically, Hallett and Ventresca find its contours depend upon the particular personalities of the managers, the contingent interpretations of the workers, and the formulation of specific policies. Similarly, Dobbin (2009) argues that the development of equal opportunity practices in the U.S. workplace was not the result of automatons mindlessly carrying out the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Instead, the practice of equal opportunity depended upon the personnel staff that developed policies and standards to construct a definition for equal opportunity.

Thus, a growing line of research links insights from world polity theory to the growing field on transnational movements (e.g., Keck and Sikkink 1998; Smith and Johnston 2002). World polity researchers have expanded on these arguments, finding that global processes also influence the mobilization of social movements. Global political opportunity structures, such as the creation of international organizations, complement and may even supersede the effects of national political opportunity structures (Barrett and Kurzman 2004; Tsutsui 2006; Cole 2006; Longhofer and Schofer, forthcoming). Global cultural frames provide broader legitimacy and meaning to local struggles (Tsutsui 2004; Lounsbury et al 2003; Ghaziani and Ventresca 2005). And global resources may be available from international organizations or interested players for domestic social movements (Tsutsui and Shin 2008; Berkovitch and Gordon 2008).

*Theories of Change*
One distinctive new line of work explains institutional change as a “learning” process, in which organizations or states copy newly successful actors. However, “learning” is in quotes as it does not necessarily connote improvement – but rather the adoption of socially constructed “lessons” copied from other actors and translated via professionals, experts, and other authoritative interpreters. Scholars have studied the rise of business fads such as “quality circles” (originally a Japanese innovation) in the U.S. or more enduring shifts in political and military policy (Strang and Macy 2001; Dobbin 1993; Hironaka 2010). These changes occur with the rise of a successful new star, such as the economic success of Japan in the 1980s. Alternately, change may occur during a crisis, when perceived failure creates an opening for policy shifts.

In contrast to realist approaches, world polity theorists maintain skepticism that these processes lead to effective change. Since indicators of success are constructed, the “successes” that are copied may be misleading. Stories are created to explain the success of particular firms or countries, yet these accounts are often fictive or mythical (Strang and Soule 1998; Strang and Macy 2001). In a sense, states throw out a grab-bag of policies and then ordain those that are followed by economic growth as effective, despite the likelihood of spurious causality (Dobbin 1993). The complexity of economic and military phenomena belies the accuracy of simple cause-and-effect stories (Hironaka 2010). Yet, such stories abound and form the basis for subsequent isomorphic change.

**Explaining Consequences and Outcomes**

Scholars in the world polity tradition have increasingly sought to theorize the substantive outcomes that result from global institutional processes – rather than focus solely on formal policies or laws. Early lines of research on loose coupling questioned the link between institutional processes and substantive specified outcomes (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Cole 2005). Yet world polity research has subsequently uncovered a broad set of phenomena in which world polity pressures have led to tidal waves of change “on the ground” over time. The massive expansion of education, the bureaucratization and rationalization of society, and the broad empowerment of individuals represent fundamental changes to society in the past century (Ramirez and Wotipka 2001; Drori et al 2006; Dobbin 2009; Frank and Meyer 2002).

In other arenas, most notably in respect for human rights, world polity pressures have failed to produce comprehensive changes (Bradley 2000; Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2005; Cole 2005). Such research has shown that discourse alone is insufficient to lead to substantive improvements in outcomes. Yet it is possible that improvements in human rights may have also been confounded by the global legitimacy of authoritarian regimes during the Cold War. With the delegitimation of the authoritarian state and the outbreak of democracy worldwide, human rights abuses may decline as predicted by the rhetoric in future decades.

In other fields, world polity processes have been shown to be consequential for outcomes on the ground. Improvements in outcomes occur as the net result of broad institutional shifts in which no one particular policy or action is essential (Schofer and Hironaka 2005). International treaties and discourses have indirect effects, such as “naming and shaming” rather than more direct sanctions and enforcement (Drori et al 2006). National policies which are criticized as ineffective may still result in improved outcomes within a decade or two (Liu and Boyle 2001).
Over time, world polity pressures lead to the development of a “virtuous regime” in which the goodness of a particular outcome becomes taken for granted. Once virtue has been declared, actors may find it increasingly difficult to justify departure (Schofer and Hironaka 2005).

**Concluding Thoughts**

With maturity, the world society literature is shifting focus – from original battles with functionalism and Marxism (which nevertheless crop up again and again under new labels) – to a more nuanced set of debates in a world where “institutionalisms” of various sorts are increasingly common. A key fault line for future theory and research will likely be between more cultural/phenomenological institutionalisms and those that take a more purely actor-centric stance (as in the institutional traditions in International Relations theory). We believe that the world society tradition has been generative by countering the endemic actor centrism in American sociology. The future of the world society tradition will hinge on making the case that global culture matters.
References


