

Rediscovering Institutions



The Organizational Basis of Politics

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contemporary treatments of the integrative aspects of politics underestimate their significance for political equality.

It is possible that the various risks associated with integrative institutions, the threats of their corruption, the dangers of their perversion by willful, self-interested actors, and the accumulated inertia of institutional structures, make their design and maintenance a study in frustration and disappointment. But achieving political equality is not simply a matter of perfecting institutions for mediating among conflicting interests. It requires significant attention to what those interests are and how they can be compared, shared, and molded in a way that sustains, rather than undermines, democracy. If we wish to pursue political equality, we may have to run the risk of attending to theories of endogenous preferences somewhat more and to theories based on notions of exogenous interests and power somewhat less.



The Role of Political Institutions

Traditionally, students of politics have been interested in how political institutions work, and how the political organization of society contributes to the well-being of citizens and to their enslavement. Political institutions have frequently been seen as preconditions for a civilized society, frequently as symptoms of its decay. Political institutions have been described and analyzed in terms of perspectives as varied as that of a formal, legal style concentrating on constitutions, laws, and rules, of a purely descriptive style focusing on the origins and developments of specific institutions, of a great man tradition portraying political institutions as arenas for charismatic leaders, and of a realpolitik style emphasizing political institutions as arenas for rival, external groups with different resources and interests (Neumann, 1957; Wolin, 1960).

Although it lies within this heterogeneous tradition, this book reflects a specific perspective on institutional analysis. Within that perspective, political actors are driven by institutional duties and roles as well as, or instead of, by calculated self-interest; politics is organized around the construction and interpretation of meaning as well as, or instead of, the making of choices; routines, rules, and forms evolve through history-dependent processes that do not reliably and quickly reach unique equilibria; the institutions of politics are not simple echoes of social forces; and the polity is something different from, or more than, an arena for competition among rival interests.

In short, the organization of political life makes a difference, and institutions affect the flow of history. We have been particularly concerned

with two aspects of such a view: the way in which an appreciation of the role of political institutions contributes to a positive theory of politics; and the way in which understanding political institutions contributes to the normative evaluation and design of them. Understanding involves a theory of how the polity comprehends, changes, and maintains a relationship with its environment through its institutions. Evaluation involves assessing the extent to which political institutions contribute to a meaningful sovereignty of the people.

As a preface to a theory of political institutions, we have identified three broad clusters of ideas. The first emphasizes the way in which political life is ordered by rules and organizational forms that transcend individuals and buffer or transform social forces. The second emphasizes the endogenous nature of reality, interests, and roles, and so a constructive vision of political actors, meaning, and preferences. The third emphasizes the history-dependent intertwining of stability and change. In this chapter we take a brief look at these ideas and their significance for interpreting and assessing political institutions and processes.

THE LOGIC OF APPROPRIATENESS

Politics is organized by a logic of appropriateness. Political institutions are collections of interrelated rules and routines that define appropriate actions in terms of relations between roles and situations. The process involves determining what the situation is, what role is being fulfilled, and what the obligations of that role in that situation are. When individuals enter an institution, they try to discover, and are taught, the rules. When they encounter a new situation, they try to associate it with a situation for which rules already exist. Through rules and a logic of appropriateness, political institutions realize both order, stability, and predictability, on the one hand, and flexibility and adaptiveness, on the other.

A logic of appropriateness can be contrasted with a logic of consequentiality. In a logic of consequentiality, behaviors are driven by preferences and expectations about consequences. Behavior is willful, reflecting an attempt to make outcomes fulfill subjective desires, to the extent possible. Within such a logic, a sane person is one who is "in touch with reality" in the sense of maintaining consistency between behavior and realistic expectations of its consequences. The sacred texts are Bentham and classical decision theory.

In a logic of appropriateness, on the other hand, behaviors (beliefs as well as actions) are intentional but not willful. They involve fulfilling

the obligations of a role in a situation, and so of trying to determine the imperatives of holding a position. Action stems from a conception of necessity, rather than preference. Within a logic of appropriateness, a sane person is one who is "in touch with identity" in the sense of maintaining consistency between behavior and a conception of self in a social role. Ambiguity or conflict in rules is typically resolved not by shifting to a logic of consequentiality and rational calculation, but by trying to clarify the rules, make distinctions, determine what the situation is and what definition "fits." The sacred texts are Homer and classical jurisprudence.

From this perspective, the polity embodies a political community and the identities and capabilities of individuals cannot be seen as established apart from, or prior to, their membership and position in the community. For instance, the role of civil servant is defined by shared assumptions about what is due to occupants of other roles, like those of an elected leader or a citizen. The political community is based on a shared history, a valued way of life, a shared definition of the common good, and a shared interpretation and common understanding embodied in rules for appropriate behavior. The rules provide criteria for what is worth striving for, and for what is accounted as good reasons for action. Citizens give their allegiance to a set of norms, beliefs, and practices embodied in political institutions. The language is one of the duties and rights associated with specific role relationships.

A major activity of political institutions is educating individuals into knowledgeable citizens. A knowledgeable citizen is one who is familiar with the rules of appropriate behavior and with the moral and intellectual virtues of the polity, and who thus knows the institutional reasons for behaviors, and can justify them by reference to the requirements of a larger order (MacIntyre, 1988). Individuals are seen as having a potential for a great variety of behavior. They may act ethically or nonethically; behave in a goal-oriented way or follow institutionally defined rules and obligations; pursue self-chosen goals or act to achieve institutional ends; and they may identify with a variety of smaller or larger collectivities, organizations, professions, or interest groups. Institutional contexts influence which of these potentials are actually realized.

We have argued that most behavior in politics follows such a logic of appropriateness, that rules are followed and roles are fulfilled. The logic of appropriateness, however, is ideologically beleaguered. The same structure of appropriateness that establishes rules for other behavior also establishes rules for justificatory behavior. And in discourse about action and in the justification of action, Homer has given way to Bentham.

In political institutions, as elsewhere, behavior is justified by a logic of rationality, consequentiality, and individual will. The question "Why did you do that?" elicits an answer of the form "I did it because I expected it to have consequences that I value."

Having determined what action to take by a logic of appropriateness, in our culture we justify the action (appropriately) by a logic of consequentiality. This structure of action and justification results in one of the more frequently observed regularities in decision-making behavior—the elaboration of reasons for action after the decision has been made (Feldman and March, 1981; Brunsson, 1985). Reasons are important. It is clear they must be expressed, but their role in affecting outcomes is more obscure. The explicit processes of choice often seem more designed to justify or legitimize a choice than to make it.

This tension between action based on a logic of appropriateness and justification based on a logic of consequentiality is not a necessary one. It is entirely possible for action to be justified by appeal to identity, to what a role demands, and such justifications are common. For instance, appeals to national identities and the appropriateness of personal sacrifices are common in situations of national disaster and war. Similarly, it is entirely possible for action actually to be based on rational calculation of its consequences as well as justified that way, and such actions are also common. The tension is, however, characteristic of political institutions. It can be seen as resulting in a kind of healthy charade of hypocrisy in which reasons and actions are not tightly linked but place pressure on each other in a way that strengthens each (March, 1978).

THE CONSTRUCTION OF ACTORS, MEANING, AND INTERESTS

Political institutions not only respond to their environments but create those environments at the same time. Such phenomena are not routinely accommodated by modern political theory, which makes political outcomes a function of three primary factors: the distribution of preferences (interests) among political actors, the distribution of resources (powers), and the constraints imposed by the rules of the game (constitutions). Each of these is treated as exogenous to the political system. That is, preferences are developed within a society and transmitted through socialization, resources are distributed among political actors by some broad social processes, and rules of the game are either stable or change by a revolutionary intervention exogenous to ordinary political activities.

The idea that preferences are produced and changed by a process

that is exogenous to the processes of choice is fundamental to modern decision theory. In the "revealed preference" version of the theory, preferences must be stable in order for the theory to be testable. In other versions, preferences can change, but choice itself does not produce a change in preferences. Conventional theories of markets, for example, picture advertising and experience as providing information about alternatives and their properties, not as affecting tastes. Similarly, conventional theories of politics assume that a voter's exposure to and choice of a candidate do not change that voter's preferences for various attributes that a candidate might possess, although they may change a voter's beliefs about which candidates possess which attributes.

Most research on preferences, on the other hand, indicates that preferences and meanings develop in politics, as in the rest of life, through a combination of education, indoctrination, and experience. They are neither stable, nor precise, nor exogenous (March, 1978; Fischhoff, Slovic, and Lichtenstein, 1980). If political preferences are molded through political experiences, or by political institutions, it is awkward to have a theory that presumes preferences are exogenous to the political process. And if preferences are not exogenous to the political process, it is awkward to picture the political system as strictly dependent on the society associated with it (Witt, 1985).

The contrast between the two kinds of notions is found most starkly in theories of political leadership. One classic idea of political leadership emphasizes the creation of winning political coalitions among participants with given demands (March, 1970; Schofield, 1982). The leadership role is that of a broker: providing information, identifying possible coalitions, and facilitating side payments and the development of logrolling. Such a view of leadership is implicit in the theory of the political process that has been developed in political science in recent decades. A second conception of leadership emphasizes the transformation of preferences, both those of the leader and those of followers (Selznick, 1957; Burns, 1978). Leaders interact with other leaders and are co-opted into new beliefs and commitments. The leadership role is that of educator, stimulating and accepting changing worldviews, redefining meanings, and exciting commitments. Such a view is more conspicuous in theories that assume a more autonomous role for political institutions.

The distribution of political resources is also partly determined endogenously. Political institutions affect the distribution of resources, which in turn affects the power of political actors, and thereby affects political institutions. Wealth, social standing, reputation for power, knowledge of alternatives, and attention are not easily described as exogenous to the political process and political institutions. Holding office provides

legitimacy and participation rights, and alters the distribution of power and access (Egeberg, 1981; Læg Reid and Olsen, 1978; Olsen, 1983). The policy alternatives of leaders are not defined completely by exogenous forces, but are shaped by existing administrative agencies (Skocpol, 1980; Skocpol and Finegold, 1982; Skowronek, 1982). The outcomes of the political process modify reputations for power, which in turn modify political outcomes (Enderud, 1976; March, 1966).

Finally, the third exogenous factor in conventional theories of politics, the rules of the game, is not really exogenous either. Constitutions, laws, contracts, and customary rules of politics make many potential actions or considerations illegitimate or unnoticed. Some alternatives are excluded from the agenda before politics begins (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962). The deadlines of political processes, the timing of elections, budgets, and political events, and thus the temporal ordering of choice opportunities, are specified. These constraints are not imposed full-blown by an external social system; they develop within the context of political institutions. Public agencies create rules and have them sanctioned by politicians (Eckhoff and Jacobsen, 1960), and revolutionary changes are initiated and pursued by military bureaucrats (Trimberger, 1978).

Actions taken within and by political institutions change the distribution of political interests, resources, and rules by creating new actors and identities, by providing actors with criteria of success and failure, by constructing rules for appropriate behavior, and by endowing some individuals, rather than others, with authority and other types of resources. Institutions affect the ways in which individuals and groups become activated within and outside established institutions, the level of trust among citizens and leaders, the common aspirations of a political community, the shared language, understanding, and norms of the community, and the meaning of concepts like democracy, justice, liberty, and equality.

As a result, arbitrary institutional change can change the political environment. Two striking examples of how a relatively arbitrary change in an institution can become a relatively permanent change in the political landscape were found by Brady (1988) and Olson (Bergevärn and Olson, 1987; Olson, 1987). Brady studied the transformation of American politics in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Changes in the Congress attributable more to the special features of a single-member, plurality election system than to changes in public attitudes led to subsequent shifts in political interests. Olson studied the impact of changes in public accounting procedures in Norwegian municipalities as a result of the German occupation during the Second World War. Changes introduced by occupation authorities became institutionalized in Norwegian practice

and persisted subsequently, even in the face of the postoccupation rejection of German influence. As a result, Norwegian and Swedish routines, which were similar before the war, diverged substantially.

The autonomous role of institutions in the molding of political community and meaning has long been seen as an welcome part of a democratic system. It is the base of theories of democratic leadership (Selznick, 1957; Burns, 1978), as well as many conceptions of jurisprudence (Levi, 1949; Stone, 1950) and political development (Pye and Verba, 1965). Institutional capability for transforming political interests is also, as we have seen in chapters 7 and 8, an important aspect of integrative, as contrasted with aggregative, conceptions of politics. If we see politics as building community and a sense of common identity within which decisions are made, we welcome the role of political institutions as agents in the construction of political interests and beliefs. They are a source of vitality in political life and coherence in political identity.

There is, however, no guarantee that institutional development will necessarily further the integration of a polity. The development of the post-World War II welfare state provides an example of how institutional processes can move the polity in an opposite direction. The expanding agenda and social policies of the welfare state were responses to major shifts in power, resources, and beliefs within the society. Those shifts propelled social democratic parties into political power in many Western democracies. Social democratic policies were dedicated to providing services to all citizens, independent of their social and economic status, and thus to create a political community—*folkhemmet* (the people's home), in Swedish terminology.

The implementation of that vision through specific political institutions, however, tended to move the polity away from an integrated vision of the *folkhemmet* and toward a more fragmented system. New institutions were created to implement new conceptions of justice and equity, to solve immediate social problems, and to resolve social conflict. The internal dynamics of these institutions contributed to the creation of new political actors—new agencies, professions, unions, and client groups. In particular, many of the policies of the welfare state created highly specialized categories of clients, for example, farmers receiving state subsidies, single parents receiving welfare benefits, and homeowners with state loans. For such client groups, the rights and interests linked to the statuses created by public policies tended to become more important for their welfare, and for their political behavior, than their traditional ties to social classes, religions, or geographical regions.

The result was a significant transformation of the social basis of politics,

as illustrated for instance by voting studies (Valen, 1981). The process created new personal and group identities. Specialized agencies, professions, unions, legislators, and organized client groups acted as political interest groups, developing alliances, mobilizing citizens for political action, and even demanding political action. This development contributed to a segmentation of the welfare state (Olsen, 1983). Efforts to achieve universality through detailed justice (millimeter-justice) tended to fragment the political community into small constituencies, and thus weakened integrative aspects of public policy making.

Institutional autonomy is, therefore, an important factor in the development of political integration, but it does not guarantee it. Similarly, the molding of public sentiment through political institutions is in many ways a necessity for political equality, but the capabilities of institutions to affect interests as well as respond to them is an obvious threat both to popular sovereignty and to the power of organized interests. If a wide range of institutional actions can secure post hoc popular approval, the mechanisms of popular control are compromised. The extreme case is a government that seeks mass plebiscitary approval of actions already taken. Experience suggests that such approval is readily, but not always, obtained for quite a wide range of possible policies.

Thus, every democratic system faces a difficult problem of balancing the undoubted advantages, even necessity, of institutional autonomy with the risks that such autonomy will make popular control difficult or impossible. Ultimately, the system works only because of institutionalized limits and mutual trust. Institutional actors refuse to exploit opportunities for autonomous action that might compromise the system. Interest groups grant a reasonable range of independence to political institutions. Sustaining the limits and encouraging the trust, therefore, become an essential part of institution building.

STABILITY AND CHANGE

Although they provide important elements of order in the changing scene of politics, political institutions themselves also change. The processes of change include the mundane, incremental transformations of everyday life as well as the rarer metamorphoses at breaking points of history—when a society's values and institutions are challenged or shattered. These are situations where citizens are more likely to become aware of the values, concepts, beliefs, and institutions by which they live. Typically, in such situations the political institutions and the ways in which

they organize the relations between citizens, elected representatives, bureaucrats and experts, and organized interests are reexamined, and possibly modified, transformed, or replaced.

In general, changes are produced through some kind of encounter between the rules (or action based on them) and an environment, partly consisting of other rules. The dramatic version is war or civil war which may replace one definition of appropriateness with another. The less dramatic version is an ongoing tension among alternative institutional rules—and an ongoing debate or struggle over the matching of institutional principles and actual situations and spheres of activities. The constitution of a polity defines the major institutional spheres in terms of the appropriate times and places for different types of decisions, and in terms of appropriate participants, problems, solutions, and decision rules, but political orders are never complete. Polities go through periods where a sphere of action is regulated by a single institution, to periods where several institutions make claims upon an individual's allegiance. Some spheres of social life may not be organized by any political institution, or very weakly organized (e.g., the open structures of garbage can situations). Such spheres may become institutionalized, and infused with conflict and debate over the adequacy of different principles.

Contemporary welfare states appear to be in the process of redefining the appropriateness of different institutions, for instance the boundary between a sphere of solidarity based on universal citizens rights implemented through state bureaucracies, a sphere of self-interest and competition implemented through a price system, a sphere of organized interests and bargaining through a "corporatist" system, and a sphere of community values implemented through voluntary associations and citizens initiatives (Olsen, 1988b; Eriksen, 1987). They appear to be developing an interpretation of history by which to explain the expanded agenda of the welfare state. But whether that interpretation will picture the welfare state as resulting from a coalition of self-interested beneficiaries, or as resulting from acceptance of ideals of justice, is not clear. Thus, they may be testing the boundaries of solidarity and community (Martinussen, 1988). The outcome of that process of interpretation may affect the extent to which the next historical period will see cooperation as based on communities or as based on contracts.

Institutions change, but the changes are not predicted simply by institutional environments. Thus, to portray political institutions simply as an equilibrium solution to the conflicting interests of current actors is probably a mistake. Institutions are not simple reflections of current exogenous forces or micro-behavior and motives. They embed historical experience

into rules, routines, and forms that persist beyond the historical moment and condition. If the institutions of the polity were instantaneously and precisely controlled by the balance of exogenous political and social forces in a society, governance would be different from what it is. For example, Lipset has argued that although Canadians and Americans "probably resemble each other more than any other two nations on earth," they differ consistently and substantially as a result of a different historical development beginning at the time of the American Revolution. Despite considerable cultural and economic interpenetration of the two countries, the events culminating in American independence have organized the development of the two countries to produce two distinct political cultures (Lipset, 1986).

Unless we assume that a political environment is stable, it is likely that the rate of change in the environment will exceed the rate of adjustment to it. The institutions at a particular moment are a shifting residue of history, and lags in adjustment are important (Stinchcombe, 1965; Hannan and Freeman, 1984; Astley, 1985). It is a problem familiar to every generation of political actors. Long before a new constellation of forces can transform the polity, that constellation is likely to have been supplanted by another, which will, in its turn, be equally short-lived; and the disparity between the rate of environmental change and the rate of adjustment is itself self-sustaining. By constraining political change, institutional stability contributes to regime instability.

The model is a more generalized version of the competency trap discussed in Chapter 4. As institutions develop competence at acting within a particular political system, those enhanced capabilities are accompanied by an even more significant increase in the disparity between the fit of the institutions to the existing system and their fit to changing demands. Attempts by the regime to impose small changes on the institutional structure either fail, in which case the regime suffers, or they succeed, in which case performance declines in the short run and the regime suffers also. The process is bounded, however. While institutions become increasingly efficient relative to near-neighborhood changes, they tend to become increasingly obsolescent (Hall, 1976). The narrow focusing of competences assures that incremental change will not succeed, but leaves institutions susceptible to radical change.

Thus, political discontent tends to lead simultaneously to increasing stability in institutions and instability in regimes. If a change can be introduced and imposed for the relatively brief time required to achieve modest competence on the new (better) technology, a new fundamental perspective is established, and the old institutional order falls apart rapidly

(Tushman and Romanelli, 1985). The "stickiness" of adaptation means both that improved rules or forms will not be adopted immediately and that there will be a relatively large number of quite different alternative radical steps that can be taken. Thus, history can take a number of different routes, and the particular route that is followed may be heavily influenced by the political institution itself.

Note that there is no assurance that the last part of the story will occur very soon, or even at all. Histories of organizational and institutional change are replete with stories of long stabilities of suboptimal strategies or technologies. A familiar example to anyone in the United States is the persistence of inches, feet, and miles as measures of distance. Similarly, just as pervasive clerical and production competences associated with the QWERTY keyboard have kept that technology as standard against the claims of demonstrably more efficient forms, pervasive experience in political institutions can stabilize institutional rules or forms against alternatives that one would think were demonstrably more effective from a political point of view (Arthur, 1984). A conspicuous political example is the stability of political parties and cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967).

The story calls attention to a general feature of adaptive systems. In most adaptive processes there is a trade-off between exploitation of known alternatives or knowledge and exploration of new alternatives or new areas of knowledge. The issue is discussed as a matter of deliberate choice in treatments of the so-called two-armed bandit problem and optimal research policy. In both cases, the objective is to define an optimal strategy for dividing resources between using technologies currently believed to be best and gathering additional information about alternatives. Where adaptation comes through learning from experience, increases in competence or knowledge tend to lead to the substitution of exploitation for exploration, and thereby tend to limit the discovery of, and experience with, new possibilities that are required for effective learning. That is, learning as a process tends to eliminate the prerequisites of learning as a form of intelligence.

Because of this, the literature on change exhibits considerable concern about the processes by which pressures for experimentation or exploration are sustained. In the political arena, politics has traditionally been viewed as producing pressures toward experimentation, and one of the prime concerns of political philosophy has been how to keep volatile political impulses compatible with a stable social and political order (Wolin, 1960:4). From the point of view of sensible adaptation, the problems, disagreements, cleavages, and conflicts that fill politics can be seen as

providing the basis for exploring new alternatives. Thus, a political penchant for change counterbalances institutional stability and facilitates learning.

Experimentation is important, but the present analysis calls attention to some less obvious features of institutional adaptation and particularly the way in which stability and change are related. Consider, for example, incremental trial and error learning. Incrementalism involves learning from frequent, small, reversible steps. Studies of the requirements for effective learning in complicated learning environments indicate that taking frequent, small, reversible steps is likely to make learning difficult (Lounamaa and March, 1987). Frequent changes provide too little experience with any one strategy to assess its value reliably; small changes tend to be lost in the noise of ordinary historical experience; and reversibility encourages frequent changes. The political institutions we have described are, from such a point of view, surprisingly efficient instruments for learning. They allow incremental drift, but they constrain incrementalism in a way that tends to produce relatively long periods of considerable stability punctuated by rather substantial, rather abrupt changes.

Discussions of the efficiency of learning, however, can be misleading. Political institutions form a complicated ecology of interconnected rules. Within such a system, concepts of efficiency, optimality, or equilibrium are elusive (March and Sproull, 1989). Adjustments made in one part of the ecology may affect appropriate adjustments in another part (Krehbiel, 1987; Shepsle and Weingast, 1987b). Experiments run in one part benefit other parts. Institutions are "nested" in the sense that groups are contained within communities which are contained within larger polities. Actions that contribute to survival of a "higher level" of the system may endanger the survival of a "lower level," yet the existence of the latter may be vital to the former. These complications are not unique to political institutions. They are standard in theories of variation and selection or learning. They lead naturally to variations in the rate of adaptation of different political institutions. The focus of politics on changes in substantive policies buffers political institutions from change, which in turn buffer constitutions. These variations are reinforced by rules of behavior in democratic polities, rules that assume stability in constitutions and institutions while debating changes in substantive policies.

These features of the processes of change have implications both for understanding political institutions and for changing them. The transformation of institutions is neither dictated completely by exogenous conditions nor controllable precisely by intentional actions. For the most part,

institutions evolve through a relatively mundane set of procedures sensitive to relatively diffuse mechanisms of control. Ideas about appropriate behavior ordinarily change gradually through the development of experience and the elaboration of worldviews. Such processes tend to result in significant lags in the adjustment of institutions to their environments. The lags, in turn, make institutional history somewhat jerky and sensitive to major shocks that lead not only to occasional periods of rapid change, but also to considerable indeterminacy in the direction of change.

ENDING

We began this book by observing that contemporary styles of theories of politics tended to describe political behavior as institution-free. We have tried to explain why we think that posture is a mistake, why an adequate theory of politics must include not only a conception of elementary processes such as those organized by political competition or temporal sorting, but also systematic attention to political institutions. We have tried to show how such attention deepens our understanding of political phenomena and enriches our efforts to bring political life closer to democratic ideals. In a broad sense, we have been urging that a perspective of politics as organized around the interactions of a collection of individual actors or events be supplemented with (or replaced by) a perspective that sees the polity as a community of rules, norms, and institutions.

Such a vision is an old one. It is also a part of several recent criticisms of individualism in contemporary life (Mansbridge, 1980; MacIntyre, 1988). It has become rather fashionable to speak of the need to reconstruct our lives and our political systems in a new image based on a sense of community and a commitment to tradition-dependent institutions. We are sympathetic to such a reconstruction, but our viewpoint is basically somewhat different. We object to contemporary descriptions of politics, not so much because they describe an unattractive political world but because they describe the real world badly. We believe that theories and philosophies of politics have obscured important realities of political life.

Our objective has been to suggest changes in the way we think about that life, to lay a basis for bringing theories of politics closer to our experience of it. We are convinced that norms of appropriateness, rules, routines, and the elaboration of meaning are central features of politics, that an understanding of stability and change in politics requires a theory of political institutions. Political institutions simplify the potential confu-

sions of action by providing action alternatives; they simplify the potential confusions of meaning by creating a structure for interpreting history and anticipating the future; and they simplify the complications of heterogeneity by shaping the preferences of participants. All of those features are not utopian dreams but descriptions of politics as it occurs. As a result, it is hard to be sanguine about contemporary theories of politics, or contemporary efforts to reform politics, that ignore institutions, or relegate them to a secondary role.

Notes

CHAPTER 5: INSTITUTIONAL REFORM AS AN AD HOC ACTIVITY

1. We include such efforts as: (1) the Commission on Department Methods (the Keep Commission), 1905–1909, chaired by Charles H. Keep; (2) the Commission on Economy and Efficiency, 1910–1913, chaired by F. A. Cleveland; (3) the Joint Committee on the Reorganization of the Administrative Branch of the Government, 1920–1923, chaired by W. F. Brown; (4) the President's Committee on Administrative Management (Brownlow Committee), 1936–1937, chaired by Louis Brownlow; (5) the Senate Select Committee to Investigate the Executive Agencies of the Government, 1936, chaired by Senator H. F. Byrd; (6) the U.S. Commission on the Organization of the Executive Branch of Government (First Hoover Commission), 1947–1949, chaired by Herbert Hoover; (7) the Second Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch (Second Hoover Commission), 1953–1955, chaired by Herbert Hoover; (8) the President's Advisory Committee on Government Organization, 1953–1961, chaired by Nelson Rockefeller (1953–1958) and by Don Price (1958–1961); (9) the Price Task Force, 1964, chaired by Don Price; (10) the Heineman Task Force, 1966–1967, chaired by Ben Heineman, Sr.; (11) the President's Advisory Council on Executive Organization (Ash Council), 1969–1971, chaired by Roy Ash; (12) the President's Reorganization Project, 1977–1980, several task forces appointed by President Carter and led by Bert Lance; and (13) the Cabinet Council on Management and Administration, the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency, the President's Council on Management Improvement, and a variety of projects under the "Reform '88" umbrella, and the President's Private Sector Survey on Cost Control (the Grace Commission), appointed by President Reagan, 1981–1988.