



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Limits of Social Cohesion: Conflict and Mediation in Pluralist Societies: A Report of the Bertelsmann Foundation to the Club of Rome* by Peter L. Berger

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crisis." Elster et al., while noting the frailty of the Hungarian political system, nevertheless note the "political normality" of the country. These interpretations might be compatible, but they require a bit of transposition to be in the same key. Less manageable is the reconciliation of their interpretations of the Czech "success." Elster et al. conclude that the political stability of the Czech Republic (since destabilized) depended on the personal qualities of its political leaders and was accompanied by weak trade unions. Stark and Bruszt argue that the success of the Czech Republic depends on institutions and conjunctures that restrain executive authority and enhance trade union influence in decisions.

It is frankly difficult to decide who is right in these contrasting accounts. The path analysis presented in these volumes is relatively thin in its display of evidence and not so attentive to the complications of historical interpretations. But it is useful to see the same path produce different interpretations among institutional theorists. It suggests the utility of embedding institutions not only in historical paths but also in the contentious historiographies and broader cultural formations that overdetermine them.

Finally, the two volumes imply different audiences. Elster et al. rehearse many stories familiar to those already knowledgeable about the region, but their elegant attempt to parse out the relative importance of institutions and decisions in postcommunist design will appeal to rule-focused designers (as those of constitutions) and to those who view the region mainly as a "natural laboratory" to test abstract theories. Stark and Bruszt are more likely to appeal to those who already know the region, and are looking for ways beyond reigning imaginations. Their arguments are compelling and should be read by those who seek innovative pathways in postcommunist design.

The Limits of Social Cohesion: Conflict and Mediation in Pluralist Societies: A Report of the Bertelsmann Foundation to the Club of Rome, edited by **Peter L Berger**. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998. 396 pp. \$69.00 cloth. ISBN 0-8133-3401-2.

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This excellent book is not like your usual edited collection of disparate articles. The firm supervision of Peter Berger and several conferences in which the authors had a chance to explore the issues together have produced an unusually unified volume. The theme of normative conflict and the possibilities of its mediation is explored in chapters devoted to eleven nations: the United States, France, Germany, Hungary, Chile, South Africa, Turkey, Indonesia, India, Japan, and Taiwan, with a concluding chapter by Berger. The fact that each chapter really does address the common problems of the book so that all add up to a rich comparative picture does not mean that they are homogenized. Within the common problematic, each author pursues the issues with individual flair and, as is inevitably the case, with varying degrees of perceptiveness.

The basic argument of the book derives from a central tradition of sociological thought: Some degree of normative order characterizes any society; normative conflict threatens the cohesion of society; unless such conflict is mediated, the survival of the society will be threatened. As Werner Weidenfeld puts it in the preface, "there are not only limits to growth but also limits to the social cohesion on which our survival as human beings in peaceful societal circumstances depends" (p. x). This old-fashioned argument is well defended by the analysis and evidence of this book. Berger makes it clear that normative conflict can never be empirically disentangled from the conflict of interests. Extreme income polarization, for example, could be seen as normatively incompatible with a decent democratic society; but conflict over such polarization would obviously also involve a conflict of interest between winners and losers as polarization occurs.

But the purpose of the book is to look specifically at issues of normative conflict in pluralist societies where differences of religion, ethnicity, moral belief, and cultural identity are at stake. Berger contends that societies of the sort dis-

cussed in this volume cannot rely on homogeneous normative consensus. There can be no “return” to consensus if such consensus ever existed. On the other hand, Berger argues that pure proceduralism, a sort of “traffic light” theory of normative order, won’t work either, for there are substantive conflicts that are not amenable to procedural resolution. What is required is that the more extreme conflicts be resolved through some process of mediation if social cohesion is to be maintained—what might be called a (not very) modified Durkheimianism.

Perhaps the most interesting finding in the research reported here, one that was surprising to Berger, is that the “intermediate institutions” with which he has long been preoccupied are not necessarily “mediating institutions.” Rather, the intermediate institutions of what is fashionably called “civil society” can be polarizing as well as mediating, and the “macro” institutions, particularly the state and the market, which have often been viewed askance by devotees of intermediate institutions and civil society, can in specific situations provide the mediation that intermediate institutions have disrupted. A small-scale but vivid example from Danièle Hervieu-Léger’s chapter describes how the French state was able to mediate a conflict between natives and colonists in New Caledonia after all organized groups on the ground had broken down into intense and sometimes violent conflict. This kind of example leads Berger to say that “In terms of social order and the peaceful resolution of normative conflicts, there are both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ macro-institutions and both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ civil-society institutions” (p. 363). This is the kind of sociological discovery that, once seen, seems obvious, yet can clear the air with respect to many arguments today.

The analysis of institutions as alternately polarizing and mediating is usefully pursued in the description of the societies discussed in this book, where questions of “Who are we?” and “How are we to live together?” have led to grave conflicts that are not, however, beyond the possibility of mediation.

Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture and Structure, edited by **Mark Irving Lichbach** and **Alan S. Zuckerman**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 321 pp. \$54.95 cloth. ISBN: 0-521-58369-1. \$17.95 paper. ISBN: 0-521-58668-2.

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“Comparative politics,” the editors declare in their preface, “has lost its way.” Lichbach and Zuckerman want their book to define a debate that will advance theory and set the field back on track. They present a metatheoretical framework to help analyze this (allegedly) sorry state of affairs, and bring together an (undoubtedly) impressive group of scholars to discuss it. The result is mixed. Many of the essays are useful; some are excellent. But there is less novelty here than we are promised—and less theory.

The book has four parts. Part 1 is an introductory chapter by the editors that lays out their ambitions and analytical framework. They argue that the field has three competing theoretical traditions: rational choice, culturalist, and structural theories—or, as the editors prefer, “reason, rules and relations” (p. 8). They also list four dominant empirical concerns: the study of electoral behavior, social movements and revolutions, political economy, and state-society relations.

Part 2 has an essay by an advocate for each of the theories—Margaret Levi on rational choice, Marc Howard Ross on culturalist analysis, and Ira Katznelson on the structural perspective. The contributors to Part 3 discuss these theories in terms of the research topics. Samuel Barnes writes on electoral behavior; Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly discuss social movements and revolutions; Peter A. Hall looks at political economy; and Joel S. Migdal reviews the literature on the state. In Part 4, the editors return in synthesizing mood, each with an essay of his own. Lichbach’s is on the relationship between social theory and comparative politics, and Zuckerman’s on explanatory standards within the field.

In the introduction and their individual chapters, the editors push their threefold division of dominant theoretical traditions quite strongly. They argue that each tradition is a package deal that comes with its own ontology, methodology, mode of comparison, lacunae,