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Preferences and Situations: Points of Intersection Between Historical and Rational Choice Institutionalism
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Intersections Between Historical and Rational Choice Institutionalism

Ira Katznelson and Barry R. Weingast

Despite their differences, historical and rational choice institutionalism have a good deal more in common as a result of their convergence on institutions than is ordinarily realized. The dissimilar strengths of these "schools" can advance each other's agendas, some aspects of which have been converging.

The characteristic ways of working by each group of scholars have generated important advances. Our ambition is not to erase these distinctions but to make the most of them. We believe there is much to gain from mutual engagement, not just better self-critical understanding about features of work that could strengthen each tradition in its own terms, but also genuine cross-fertilization and collaboration within the ambit of work on particular puzzles and cases. The chapters in this volume show, in practice, how many of the putative differences separating historical institutionalism (HI) and rational choice institutionalism (RCI) diminish, or even disappear, when they ask how institutional situations shape and help constitute and induce preferences people use to make judgments and choices about the present and the future at particular moments in time.

We first consider how this productive erosion of boundaries has developed, and what the implications are for how the two approaches might "learn" from each other. A shared interest in how context, situations, and institutions induce preferences has largely supplanted approaches that risked depicting agents who either are over- or undersocialized. We first review the turn to institutionalism by rational choice scholars, who often imputed ex ante preferences to individuals without worrying much about their larger sources, and by comparative-historical social scientists, who treated preferences as caused primarily by macro-level dynamics

without much concern about the microdynamics of their interaction. We then show how the convergence by both on institutions, especially when conjoined with temporality, has opened fruitful grounds for collaboration, anchored by a common emphasis on how institutions stimulate and help generate preferences at particular times and places.

Nonetheless, significant barriers impede this goal. Although central to accounts of purposive action, preferences remain a relatively primitive category of analysis. Equally problematic is the inadequate attention paid to "a range of temporal processes that are common in political life" (Pierson 2004, 2). By diagnosing and addressing these obstructions in a fruitful engagement across approaches, *Preferences and Situations* demonstrates that HI's and RCI's approaches to politics, history, and social phenomena have many actual and potential points of contact and overlap. It also highlights how they might come to complement each other rather than contend with one another.

Our two points of departure are preferences and institutions. We focus on these concepts because they lie at the heart of some of the biggest apparent differences between HI and RCI scholars and because of what we see as the growing commonalities. Political science faces a range of such methodological differences and sites of intellectual tension. One is the ongoing debate between instrumentalism and constructivism in international relations. Another is the differences that distinguish the way groups of political theorists read and deploy texts. What follows, therefore, focuses on just one of many important controversies—one, though, that raises important issues at the heart of each of the discipline's subfields.

Preferences are foundational for any theory that relies on agency. We know too little about preferences, where they come from or how they are generated. As we see in the chapters that follow, historical and rational choice institutionalist scholars have been converging on the idea that because institutions often generate sufficiently strong incentives for actors, whether medieval kings or members of the modern U.S. Congress, we can derive a form of preference based on the compelling logic of institutions embedded in particular historical situations; or at least come to understand how a given institutional milieu both constrains and shapes the repertoire of available preferences.

Approaching Preferences

Building on the insights of Peter Hall (2000), we distinguish three ways preferences have been described and understood. First is that they are imputed to actors within the framework of assertive theory; that is, the theory posits a set of preferences for the relevant actors. Second is that

they are caused by historical processes; that is, the theory attempts to suggest how historical developments cause a particular set of preferences held by a given actor. Third is that they are induced by strategic circumstances and human interaction; that is, the theory implies that specific patterns of relationship and interaction within institutions and or social processes encourage or persuade a given actor to possess a particular type of preference.

There are strong and weak versions of each. Theoretical imputation can simply assign bundles of preferences that either are unexamined givens or products of unobserved assumptions about human motivation. Alternatively, and more softly, it can introduce fixed actor preferences into a theory based on observation and induction. Likewise, in some causal accounts individuals are so powerfully inscribed within structures and role categories that they have no option but to prefer what specific historical or institutional roles designate. In less determinate form the sources of potential preferences are discerned probabilistically within the dynamics of social relationships that change over time. Similarly, induced preferences may be invoked forcefully by the logic of strategic interaction among actors within circumscribed institutional contexts. Less determinatively, these settings may actively affect aspects of preferences without uniquely shaping them.

We are partial to the less strong version of each. Good theory requires imputed preferences but better theory assigns preferences for the limited compass of the theory based on empirical learning. Good causal history cannot proceed without embedding individuals but better history works with more than one register of time and structure, understanding that preferences may variously be shaped, and that even the same structural constraints can be understood and interpreted from more than one perspective. Good analysis of strategic situations demands appreciation of how the production of social outcomes induces preferences, rather than just being a reflection of them, but better analysis leaves open the degree to which preferences are thus induced in a relatively durable manner.

Moreover, these approaches work best when their boundaries are crossed. Just as any good theory must do some imputing and any institutional analysis must grapple with how specific sets of rules and behavior within their ken shape and reshape the predilections of actors, assigning preferences and identifying institutional pressures and possibilities gain power by being nested inside compelling analytical histories that offer warrants for designating what actors want and the conditions within which they choose. In turn, accounts of historical causation insisting that the building blocks of preferences—including interests, desires, values, opinions, tastes, and morals—be located inside thickly inscribed tempo-

ral and spatial contexts gain power both from relatively focused designations of preference within processual accounts of institutional dynamics.

Further, it is our belief that the study and understanding of preferences has been advanced by the turn to the analysis of institutions by both HI and RCI, and thus to richer understandings of how preferences are induced within their ken. Before this shift, HI scholars had tended to stop once they had underscored how preferences are caused by macro-historical change without showing clearly enough how, in a more fine-grained way, they also are induced within particular and often restricted institutional settings. RCI scholars were inclined to designate actor preferences by imputation rather than demonstrate how they had been institutionally induced. With the focus on institutions, both sets of scholars turned their attention to situationally induced preferences in a more focused manner, complementing but not replacing their prior emphasis, respectively, on caused and imputed preferences.

Fastening large-scale and often long-term processes to human relationships and patterns of power via the establishment of rules, signals, norms, and incentives, both schools have come to share the view that institutions solve key problems of human coordination and cooperation, offer frameworks for problem-solving, and confirm as well as establish political, economic, and social hierarchies. Institutions are not free-floating processes or cultures that provide milieus within which individuals and groups are most directly embedded for some or many aspects of their lives. Over time, they also help establish the identities and categories of actors and their range of possibilities, hence the scope and content of preferences.

Irrespective of their intellectual provenance, each of the chapters in this book seeks to make interconnected sense of preferences, time, and institutions. Because RCI and HI have moved to this focus from rather different starting points, because each is nourished primarily by different disciplines and research traditions, and because each situates its institutional analysis in distinctive ways, it often is difficult for practitioners to see just how much common ground for productive mutual learning they in fact have forged.

A key problem for rational choice scholars (most of whose work in noncooperative game theory is based on John Nash's pioneering idea that players adjust their strategies until none any longer can gain from shifting) "is not that Nash equilibria fail to exist" for particular profiles of preferences "but rather there are too many of them" (Austen-Smith and Banks 1998, 274). Historical institutionalists tend not to be surprised, not because a given game can generate multiple solutions, but because history throws up many games both in sequence and all at once. Because historical circumstances vary so widely, and because they develop over

uneven spans of time as the result of an extensive array of causal chains, historical institutionalists have insisted as a signature claim that choices about feasible alternatives are structured by determinate situations regarding who the actors are and which choices are in fact on offer. This, as it turns out, is what rational choice institutionalists have been stressing and doing as well, especially when they attend to particular historical cases.

Much remains to be done to make exchanges across the RCI-HI divide fruitful. Perhaps the biggest difference between the two approaches concerns the types of questions they ask. Rational choice scholars especially prize the analysis of specific, time-bound, events—an election or a piece of legislation, for example. The penchant of historical institutionalists for longer temporal horizons spanning decades or more makes them a good deal more likely to encounter and analyze situations in which preferences on several dimensions evolve over time and in which the set of actors is less likely to remain stable. History, moreover, rarely stands still for any specific game, as actors and their preferences are entailed within many strategic and normative settings simultaneously, in layers. What historical institutionalists mean by the environment is rather more complex than the environments considered by most RCI collective choice and game theory models as they try to yield meaningful predictions. By contrast, historical social science is more concerned with guarded generalizations and post-diction, often under conditions of complexity and uncertainty.

Notwithstanding the distinguishing features of each approach and enduring differences of emphasis, we wish to stress the fair number of overlapping possibilities. The richer the historical story within which it is set and the more persuasive the attribution of preferences to actors, the more convincing is the selection of a given institutional game. Likewise, particular games played by particular agents with ascribed preferences can help drive and guide historical accounts of particular circumstances or longer-term dynamics, even if the primary causal movers may be assigned elsewhere.

But if we are to do more than take note of such points of connection, we need to overcome a number of stereotyped images of the other that continue to impede mutual consideration and potential collaboration. When HI scholars look at how rational choice scholars treat preferences, they still tend to see the traits Kenneth Shepsle described a decade and a half ago. Rational choice, he observed, is motored by "rational man" considered as "an atom unconnected to the social structure in which he or she is embedded," and is marked by theories that "worry hardly at all about the sources of preferences and beliefs." Further, he noted, formal theorists often deliberately repress institutional details, rejecting the

"time- and location-bound" qualities of bureaus, courts, legislatures, and electoral arrangements as impediments to general theory (Shepsle 1989, 134, 135). This description identifies RCI squarely within the strong version of imputed preferences.

These, of course, are characteristics likely to produce a recoil by historical institutionalists who share commitments to chronology and temporality, to the specificity and particularity of situations, and to the importance of historical causation over more than very short periods when considering purposive action. From this vantage, they understandably are made nervous by any casualness about the specification of the origins and content of preferences or insouciance about assumptions concerning the stability and precision of assigned preferences. These features are especially apparent when relatively thin and often short-term historical accounts, deployed illustratively, are instantiated and mediated by very strong theory, or are considered one situation or one game at a time rather than within more complex temporal or institutional configurations.

In turn, RCI analysts still tend to see that preferences, so central to their own studies, are downplayed as an analytical category in historical social science analysis. They see scholarship that gives greater priority to the macroscopic tracing of historical cases and processes whose more general import or potential for cumulative knowledge often is unclear, and they fail to see the connection between long-term structural processes and the imputation of preferences to groups of actors based on their role in primarily structural historical arguments governed by their own versions of strong theory. Reading classics in comparative-historical analysis, RCI scholars observe that preferences often seem ascribed or imputed or caused too slackly, and, further, worry about the absence of strategic analysis of how preferences are aggregated into social outcomes. In other words, RCI sees the HI arguments about how historical processes "cause" preferences as undertheorized and often inadequate.

Both of these assessments are out of date. Their mirror-image caricatures are hardly baseless, yet each fails to appreciate the difference the turn to institutional analysis and induced preferences has made to both schools of analysis. The rational choice tradition has begun to attend more systematically to historical and institutional processes to better understand how actor preferences have been fashioned and how institutions have introduced biases or other distortions. Historical institutionalists have begun to study how preferences are deployed and reshaped in practice. Both, albeit with distinct links to other features of their work, have done so by placing institutions and preferences front and center in a new way.

Preferences and Circumstances

Preferences signify propensities to behave in determinate circumstances by people who discriminate among alternatives they judge either absolutely or relatively. But preferences may in considerable measure be the product of circumstances and institutions that, in mediating between the agency of persons and large-scale historical developments, can guide reasons for how people actually choose. Situated this way, preferences cannot be reduced to the conduct of persons or groups of individuals, nor can they be assigned to people by theory alone. Nor can they be read or inferred directly from the larger historical structures that help give rise to them. Despite the range characterizing the ways HI and RCI scholars examine politics, their approach to preferences gains power when their inquiries about such institutions as those of transitional justice, monetary union, court systems, voting, and candidate nominations are understood not just to be shaped by, but to convoke, human preferences.

As the new institutionalism within rational choice moved from an austere universe that had elided institutional details to a rich concern for the origins and particulars of specific institutional arrangements within which strategic action occurs, the status of preferences has undergone a significant change, particularly the standing of imputed preferences and the relationship between induced and imputed preferences.

Any rational choice model of human action is constituted by individuals, information, feasible options, and preferences. Whether the theory takes the form of social choice or noncooperative games, choices are understood to echo or reveal preferences held by persons, either alone or in collectivities. Before rational choice scholars turned to institutions, they tended to impute attributions about fundamental preferences—such as a wish to keep power, get rich, provide for one's family, or promote an ideology—prior to strategic situations or interactions. Such preferences thought to be deeply embodied by the person, as in claims that these are fundamental human desires, were offered axiomatically as durable, bedrock motivations. In this sense, they were transhistorical human traits that transcend particular cultures, settings, or institutions. These imputed preferences (imputed in part because they are impossible to determine with empirical certainty) neither were considered as caused or induced in the typical analysis, but rather considered as given, stable, precise, consistent, and exogenous. This treatment ranged from simple single-dimension linear vector models to more complex and inherently quadratic ones.

Within the new institutionalism, rational choice scholars have become

far more empirical, conditional, and situational in deploying preferences. At some distance from the notion that the preferences of actors are constant and enduring, preferences now are treated as those of persons in interaction with other actors, in particular institutions, understood as game forms. No longer simply imputed by the theorist-observer, here the interactive play of the game itself in part induces actor preferences. Context and situations matter deeply, especially when players mutually anticipate the actions of others and select strategies that respond to those decided by others. These induced preferences concerned with instruments, such as strategy choices, at times can be observed with sufficient regularity that they can be legitimately imputed as ends toward an individual's fundamental goals or underlying preferences.

It is easy to miss this change. The typical RCI paper still begins by assuming a simple form of preferences and traces the consequences in particular institutional settings. The vast majority of RCI studies of Congress, for example, simply assert that members seek reelection. Looking at a single paper, it can appear that preferences are imputed by the theory alone as an unquestioned prior. But this characterization is inadequate. On closer examination it becomes clear these preferences were induced and, further, that a series of earlier works have shown how they are induced, how they vary across time, and in particular which institutional details explain their emergence. Not all RCI literatures have this cumulative quality, of course. In particular, papers that branch out into new topics such as the study of dictatorship have a different character. In those literatures, imputed preferences are more questionable as the papers are best understood as preliminary and exploratory. Moreover, RCI scholars typically give less status to conclusions based on imputed preferences over which there is no consensus than they do results based on preferences over which there is empirical work.

In more developed settings, such as work in American politics on Congress or elections, RCI scholarship moves differently. Scholars tend to build on the work of their predecessors, who in turn had built on theirs. Contributions do not reinvent the wheel. This holds for characterizations of behavior, such as the role of committees, but also for the form of preferences, such as the claim that politicians maximize the probability of being elected or reelected.

In these cumulative literatures, the issue of the form of preferences is often the subject of intense debate. This is readily seen in the early spatial model literature of the 1960s and 1970s, which used a range of different maximands. The same point holds for studies of Congress. Most RCI studies of Congress do assume maximizing reelection, a form of imputed preferences. These are not fundamental preferences, however. People are

not born with the idea that they will run for Congress and seek to increase their probability of reelection. Rather, people who run for Congress with whatever set of motivations, and who thus wish to make a career of public life, must by virtue of the institution get elected and reelected.

This is not as truistic as it sounds, as demonstrated by *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, David Mayhew's classic work (1974) that helped forge the consensus among Congress scholars about the reelection hypothesis. Part 1 of the book traces the implications of the reelection assumption in the electoral arena and part 2 outlines them for behavior and institutions within Congress. Mayhew opens, however, with a contextual introduction that focuses on the reelection assumption itself, and discusses why this form of induced preference is reasonable to impute in the context of the United States, but not in Great Britain or continental Europe.

To this end, he examines various institutional details of Congress, contrasting them with the British Parliament. The institutions differ, he argues, in three critical environmental dimensions. The first is nominations. In the United States, any individuals meeting minimal qualifications can run for a House or Senate seat. Moreover, they typically can run as a candidate under the major party's label by a simple administrative procedure. Second, members of Congress attain many positions of power within the legislature, including committee and subcommittee chairmanships, in large part by virtue of service such as seniority. Third, financing elections is highly individualistic; members of Congress do not rely solely on their party for funds but typically raise their own (although this began to change at the end of the twentieth century). In contrast, political parties control all three features of political life in Britain. An individual needs permission of the party to run under its label for a particular seat. The party awards positions of power, such as ministerial positions. And the party controls electoral funds.

For Mayhew, the point of this contrast is twofold. First, it helps motivate the reelection assumption for the United States. To function as what at first appears simply as an imputed preference within the book's larger analysis, the electoral imperative is presented as having been generated endogenously within a particular type of legislature. Moreover, it is a time-sensitive preference. Congress in the antebellum era was different. Then, most members did not seek a career in Congress. A great many preferred local office, serving a only short time in Washington as part of their duty to the local party to get rewards from it. Second, the incentives induced by a deep, contextual understanding of the institutional differences between countries and their legislatures yields a comparative con-

clusion: The goals of MPs should differ systematically from those of MCs. MPs, for example, are necessarily more focused on their party and its fortunes than their counterparts in the United States.

This example indicates a heightened RCI sensitivity to the way institutional arrangements and rules not only interact with preferences to produce outcomes but also help generate the preferences themselves. It also identifies potential points of contact between HI and RCI. The reelection assumption did not emerge as an aspect of strong deductive theory. Rather, it came into view as a scholarly consensus following extended contextual-historical analysis, particularly the degree to which in the 1970s RCI types and traditional Congressional scholars came to believe they were engaged in the same enterprise and thus could draw on one another's findings.

In taking on a more nuanced and historically informed focus on institutions, RCI scholars have revised understandings first drawn from less institutional approaches. Their assumptions about preferences evolve as they trace consequences and test predictions against behavior. As an example, RCI scholarship on Congress has rejected an alternative assumption quite common among economists in the public choice tradition to the effect that politicians are rent-seekers (see, for example, Tollison 1982). Instead, they have drawn closer to the way HI writings insist that individuals often have preferences by virtue of being in an institutional and political environment with determinate characteristics. Thus, the assumption of reelection maximizing is causal and structural in the same sense that preferences sometimes are imputed for members of particular groups within HI analysis. Indeed, members without these preferences soon would cease to be members.

We can see this shift in emphasis regarding preferences in the new institutionalist RCI literature on bureaucratic behavior in the United States, which has gone through three phases with respect to preferences. In the initial stage, RCI scholars assumed that bureaucrats focused on themselves, seeking to maximize the emoluments of office or the size of their budget (see, for example, Downs 1967, Tullock 1965, and Niskanen 1971). Students of the next RCI generation, finding the predictions and explanations of the first literature inadequate, sought a new mode of analysis. This group emphasized the importance of other institutional actors in the bureaucracy's environment, such as interest groups, Congress, or the president. Initially, these models were dyadic in the sense that they studied the bureaucracy in the context of only one institutional actor: interest groups for George S. Stigler (1971) and James Q. Wilson (1980), the president for Terry M. Moe (1982), Congress for Morris Fiorina (1981) and Barry R. Weingast and Mark J. Moran (1983). In these studies, the bureaucracy was typically assumed to be an agent of a particular political principal that, by virtue of the pattern of rewards and punishments offered by the principal (Congress, the president, an interest group, depending on the given analysis), pursued policies favored by the principal.

By the middle to late 1980s, it was clear that these dyadic models were inadequate. A given bureaucracy could not at once pursue policies favoring both the president and Congress because, typically, they disagreed. The third phase of this literature, building on the second, regards bureaucrats as possessing preferences over policy and who act to further those preferences subject to a complex interaction with other institutions, such as interest groups, Congress, the president, and the courts (see, for example, Eskridge and Ferejohn 1992, Epstein and O'Halloran 1999). Individual studies on bureaucracy thus assume particular forms of preferences. This assumption, however, is not arbitrary, but subject instead to considerable debate, nuance, and evolution.

This research, like HI, makes the historical and situational analysis of institutions a central feature. RCI contextual analysis often proceeds through the analysis of comparative statics, studying how equilibrium preferences and behavior change as institutional details change. Because papers often take analysis one argument at a time, focusing on particular episodes (as in the many studies of how individual pieces of legislation were passed into law), the cumulative effect may be difficult to discern to those not steeped in the particular literature. Reading a paper in isolation gives no sense of the longer conversation through which consensus and understanding have emerged.

Too often, to our taste, these analyses suffer from the absence of longer time horizons, both medium and more extended. But some RCI scholars have begun to work with longer periods of time. Thus, in chapter 3, David W. Brady, John Ferejohn, and Jeremy C. Pope study the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, but not from the more typical RCI vantage of the strategic interaction of members of Congress in that single Congress. Rather, they step back and observe that civil rights had been on the agenda for a decade and that two previous bills, in 1957 and 1960, were gutted so that they passed primarily as symbolic acts. What, they ask, made 1964 different? To address this question, they look at two hypotheses. First, preferences of members of Congress changed through elections that brought new members to Congress with different preferences. Second, public opinion changed so that members' induced preferences over policy changed. Their evidence favors the latter.

Still, the dominant trend with RCI is for the focus of particular models to be short term, relatively presentist, and closely linked to particular strategic situations with particular structures of payoffs. Although comparative statics allow the assessment of behavior over time and across

changing contexts, the analysis works best when the particularities of situations—that is, the institutions within which interaction and choice take place—are very well specified. This is an advantage, because in such research exacting claims about historical distinctiveness, and the individuality and nonreplicability of specific historical moments and conjunctures, staples of historians and historical institutionalists alike, can contribute productively to the delineation of strategic players, games, and moves within substantial accounts of structures, institutions, and persons in determinate situations. In making these moves, RCI has come to help us understand when, why, and which institutions come into play. Thus, within RCI, attributions of the preferences of the relevant actors have become a good deal more than imputed "just so" ascriptions.

Shifting Analysis

Rational choice scholarship has moved from imputed preferences to accounts of institutionally induced preferences (some of which are sufficiently regular and durable to become imputed assumptions). Historically oriented social scientists have also moved—from a relative neglect of preferences to more structural emphases, or from a concern for how historical developments cause preferences to a tighter focus on induced preferences (which then can be deployed within macro-causal accounts more centered on agents and agency than were typical just a short time ago).

The classic precursors of HI today are the books of macroanalysis on a large scale written in the 1960s and 1970s by, among others, Reinhard Bendix (1964), Barrington Moore (1966), Perry Anderson (1974), Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), Charles Tilly (1975), and Theda Skocpol (1979). Despite differences in emphasis, questions, and spatial as well as temporal scale, these works shared a number of key traits. They all sought to tame the varieties, contingencies, and remarkable range of history by deploying strong theory, primarily Marxist, often modified by Weberian impulses, to focus on moments and processes characterized by change on the largest scale. (Tilly 1984) They studied how feudalism ended and capitalism began, how a Europe-centered and integrated global market developed, how pathways to different types of political regimes were forged, and how revolutions developed and concluded. The main goal was to identify and explain in relatively parsimonious ways the appearance and enlargement of the main features of the modern, especially Western, world after the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These features included state-making, large-scale organized warfare, capitalism, urbanization, increasing differentiation of the zones of life (state, market, and society; work and home), and the mobility of people, ideas, money, and

power. Efforts at periodization sought to distinguish and understand moments marked by change on a massive scale and more ordinary times whose dynamics and pathways were shaped, perhaps even determined, by the processes and outcomes at moments of very high indeterminacy.

Such efforts found their handmaiden in rather holistic analyses that treated structures both as outcomes of large-scale historical processes and as causes that, alone and in combination, established fields of action within which human beings lived, cooperated, and conflicted. In the analytical hierarchy typical of these works, rather less attention was paid in the first instance to agents and their preferences. People and their preferences tended to be collapsed into categories established by the interplay of theory and history. Once defined, say, as peasants, kings, Protestants, bureaucrats or other such positions in the social order, agents were of course recognized as the bearers of preferences, but their content almost could be taken for granted. In a form of imputation, actors were constrained to possess a limited array of preferences inside strong theoretical and historical accounts.

These works, given the structural holism so prominent within them, seemed totally at odds with the microdynamics of rational choice as it then was emerging as a site of influence in the social sciences. If, from the vantage of this body of historical social science, rational choice seemed more concerned with deductive model-building than understanding vexing historical instances, then from the perspective of rational choice, the social science of "big structures, large processes, and huge comparisons" (Tilly 1984) lacked causal discipline, the capacity to cumulate findings, and, perhaps above all, the ability to identify and analyze microfoundations for historical developments.

Much as RCI has turned to institutions, so has HI, if from a rather different starting point. During the past quarter century, HI has developed as a somewhat narrower, more focused, offspring of the earlier body of historical social science. Its temporal sweep is shorter. The range of regimes it considers is more limited. It is interested as much in durable patterns as in immense change. It has developed more of a policy focus, concerned to understand, among other key issues, the political economy of capitalism in its many variants (Hall 1986; Streek 1992; Thelen 1991; Steinmo 1996; Hall and Soskice 2001; Swenson 2002), types of welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990; Immergut 1992; Skocpol 1992; Pierson 1994; Huber and Stephens 2001; Hacker 2002), social movements and their popular bases (Katznelson and Zolberg 1986; Goldstone 1991; Banaszak 1996; Ritter 1997; Tarrow 1998; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001), and the rise, persistence, or decline of authoritarianism and democracy (Downing 1992; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992; Ekiert 1996; Ertman 1997; Mahoney 2001).

Institutions have come to play three critical roles in this body of work. First, understood as historical products, they provide links between unsettled moments of great transformation and more ordinary times. Second, they constrain and shape human beliefs, values, interests and the way these are deployed to shape outcomes. Third, and this is the leading point of contact with RCI, they are understood to generate preferences. In these ways, institutions have come to provide the great connecting tissue between types of time and between levels of analysis within HI (Immergut 1996; Katznelson 1997, 2003; Pierson and Skocpol 2002; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003). In so doing, they have changed the genre of historical social science.

Along the path of this intellectual shift in character and emphasis—indeed, in part prodded by it—has been the crisis of Marxism, both in the world at large and in the academy. In the precursor scholarship to HI, much of the work was accomplished or suggested by historical-materialist understandings of temporality, change, and the key units of structure and action. Purposive behavior largely was understood to be the product of structural imperatives. Even when Weberian themes were introduced into this scholarship—mainly by way of adding state-centered subjects to those of capitalist political economy—human action, preferences, and choice remained downplayed.

In part, the turn within HI to a serious engagement with institutions was a response to a loss of confidence in Marxism's master narrative. No longer was it possible to treat history as a singular process of successive types of social organization composing coherent social types. In a transition from Marxism (but not a rejection of Marxist subjects and themes), HI disaggregated such outsized concepts as the state and capitalism into more specific sets of interacting institutions. Images of distinct systems and transitions have become more plural, often moving to different rhythms of institutional change (Skowronek 1993; Orren and Skowronek 2004). Of course, there have been stronger reactions to the predicament of Marxism, including varieties of postmodernism that reject notions of reality in favor of signification and that decline or even reject the search for systematic regularities, patterns, mechanisms, and causes. HI did not take this turn. It never left causal social science, though at times it has engaged with more hermeneutical scholarship interested in constructing interpretations of human identity and diversity.

The new focus on institutions and the resources they offer, the connections they make across time, and the links they present that connect constraints and opportunities to choices and decisions has made it possible for HI scholars to bring agency and preferences to the fore rather more than in earlier historical social science (Wickham-Crowley 1992; Greenstone 1993; Clemens 1997; Sanders 1999; Goodwin 2001; Katznelson 2003). Their analyses that are concerned to make sense of the various kinds of action institutions facilitate or inhibit are based on a number of strong intellectual commitments. There is a devotion to understanding particular cases in depth. Individuals are always historical and embedded, never free-standing or the irreducible units of analysis. Institutions are understood to be both stable arrangements that endure over the long term and locations that can produce profound disturbances to the status quo. Institutions change probabilities of preference formation and action. People pursue projects based on their preferences within institutions, just as institutions delineate the scope of possible projects and help bring preferences forth (Collier and Collier 1991; Yashar 1997; Waldner 1999). For such work, institutions constitute social reality in ways that are complex and multiform.

Detailed attention to institutional histories and design, and to the way actors understand their situations, provide bases for inference within HI. Its various qualities by no means restrict HI scholars to qualitative methods of one kind or another. Rather, HI is methodologically permissive, even opportunistic. But only within bounds. HI views variable-centered views of the world skeptically when they imply relatively closed systems in which the causal torque of relationships between or among variables is assumed to stay relatively constant across a wide range of times and places. Though quite open to large-scale data sets and big-N scholarship, HI treats findings based on this kind of inference as guides to hypotheses and to questions that can only be parsed by the analysis of specific situations in which variables appear in distinct, sometimes unique, configurations. As a causal enterprise, HI seeks to understand how particular institutional arrangements in particular locations at particular times were fashioned as results of long-term historical developments. In this aspect of HI work, preferences are caused by these historical processes. In turn, HI scholars also consider how institutions that result from historical causes themselves induce the formation of preferences, and how it is that these preferences then recursively enter into the larger dynamics of historical development and change. Sometimes preferences are exogenous to institutions; at other times, they are the products of the process by which institutions endogenize preferences.

Within RCI, institutions have been seen primarily as sites of cooperation, in which problems of coordination and collective action can be overcome. To be sure, there have been RCI scholars (Moe 1987; Knight 1992) who have sought to make power and the uneven distribution of capacities and resources as constitutive of institutional analysis as cooperation, but this has been a minority trend. Within HI, by contrast, power is central. Institutions are always seen as distributive switchboards and as peopled by individuals and groups with a range of assets and possi-

bilities. While some relationships within institutions cluster people who share attributes and are located in structurally equivalent places, others convene ties between people of different circumstances and abilities. In part, institutions normalize or naturalize these states of affairs but also provide arenas for contests and offer the potential for change (Douglas 1986; Haydu 1998).

Both RCI and HI, in short, have converged to institutions; one from the direction of microanalysis, the other from macroanalysis. For both, power and problem solving meet in institutional settings. Both prize particularity and credit the distinctiveness of situations whose rules they seek to understand as precisely as possible.

Inducing Preferences

These intellectual developments have set the stage for this book. Part of the broader trends we have underscored, here we are fascinated with the processes by which institutions in their wider historical settings induce preferences, and, in so doing, alter the character, qualities, and effects of human agency.

The contributions fall into three main groups: first, those that consider particular episodes, seeking to identify the paths and mechanisms by which preferences both emerge within these contexts and, in turn, motor historical developments; second, those that emphasize specific mechanisms and processes; and, third, those that reflect on types of occurrences. The book concludes with a reflection on how an accomplished research project would have profited from a closer integration of HI and RCI.

Situations

Richard Bensel studies the interaction of structural features and strategy in the 1896 Democratic Party Convention that ultimately nominated William Jennings Bryan. When it opened, no front-runner had emerged. The preferences of a great many delegates over the identity of the nominee had yet to clearly form, and no candidate had a majority. Bryan's speech was electrifying. By the time it and the subsequent demonstrations were over, he was the obvious nominee. Over the course of the speech and demonstration, most delegates came to support him. A strength of this paper is that, while written from the HI perspective, its principal insights can also be told from an RCI perspective of ex ante uncertainty, not about fundamental preferences (which involved winning the presidency), but over the instrument or strategy—in this case, the nominee—best placed to achieve that end.

David Brady, John Ferejohn, and Jeremy Pope are interested less in how preferences crystallize than in how they change. As noted, they study the evolving preferences of members of Congress for civil rights. Such legislation garnered insufficient support to pass in the 1940s, 1950s, and the early 1960s, but received enormous support in 1964 and thereafter. What accounted for this quite radical shift in member preferences? In assessing alternative explanations, they show how, in this instance, the major factor was constituency change. As the plight of southern blacks became widely publicized, many northerners came to believe in the injustice of the southern Jim Crow system. As constituents' attention and views changed, so too did those of their representatives. It was the institutional dynamics of political representation that generated the dramatic shift in preferences that made it possible to turn the demands of the civil rights movement into law. Among the contributions of the paper is a demonstration that standard statistical techniques in the study of congressional voting can be used to trace and estimate the degree and shape of changes in preferences.

Studying the decision of Edward I in 1290 to expel England's Jews, Ira Katznelson asks how we should understand not only the shift by the king from a program of integrating this minority more fully in English life but the radical disjunction from the preferences of prior English kings during the period of Jewish settlement that began at the end of the eleventh century. He gives pride of place to the manner in which thirteenth century kings, culminating in Edward, had to manage new normative and institutional relationships linking the crown to society, most notably the emergence of a body of rights after Magna Carta, and especially the robust development of Parliament following the Montfortian rebellion of the 1260s. Set within a larger framework of events—both international, especially shifts in geopolitics with the loss of territory in Normandy, and domestic, with the growth of a national identity in the context of efforts to extend the scope of English rule in Britain—the mechanism of political representation, the paper shows, fundamentally altered the manner in which Edward and his successors defined the situation and framed decisions about the Jewish minority.

Processes

All actors, whether individuals, groups, or collectivities like national governments, Peter Hall stresses, never have a singular interest or a sole identity. Any given issue may tap more than one interest and one identity. Thus, the formation of preferences concerning specific actions must include a process by which actors weigh the relative importance of different interests and identities. They make such judgments, Hall argues,

by deploying causal ideas and persuading others to agree. Stressing how such preference development occurs in a series of events, and in circumstances of uncertainty, about which there is an unfolding narrative, he shows how these processes shaped the decisions taken by the British, German, and French governments regarding membership in the European Monetary Union (EMU) in the 1980s.

Barry Weingast studies a radical shift in preferences in colonial America. Weingast's purpose is twofold: methodologically, he uses rational choice tools to model the historical institutionalist's concept of critical junctures; substantively, he applies the model to the emerging rebellion against British rule. How and why, he asks, did an elite that largely took its Britishness for granted become potential revolutionaries? Specifically, why did American moderates switch sides from opposing to supporting the radicals to create the Revolution? Weingast addresses these questions by focusing on the interaction of the radicals' theories of the British and their actions. He shows how the Americans' world views combined with the evidence from British actions to alter the beliefs held by moderates about British malevolence so they came to support a revolution, thus creating a critical juncture.

Charles Cameron seeks to understand the quite remarkable growth of the federal judiciary in ways that were unanticipated at the founding of the United States. Rather than opt for one of the two dominant positions in the literature—that judicial state building was produced by Congress or that it was the product of actions and decisions by the Supreme Court, he develops a more inclusive model, offering a constitutive role to federalism, suggesting when majorities in Congress become the prime movers and when Congress recuses itself and the Court becomes the lead player in advancing judicial development. The essay develops its arguments by presenting analyses of key nineteenth-century cases, including the Fugitive Slave Act, the Removal Act of 1875, and those concerning state sovereign immunity.

Categories

Margaret Levi is interested in the problem of how diverse preferences come to be placed in a hierarchy within a given organization. Focusing on the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), she asks how the preferences of their leaders were ordered. Why, in some instances did leaders put a higher priority on serving the union, thus producing open and honest institutions, rather than their personal interests, which can lead to closed and corrupt organizations? Why, in other instances, the reverse? These inherent tensions in preference formation, she stresses, occur not only at the level of the organization or competing groups within it, but at the individual level itself. Once a preference hierarchy crystallizes, with communication and signaling it can harden into a collective culture shaping outcomes.

Jon Elster explores how preferences are formed about transitional justice after the shift from a given regime to another, especially the creation or return to democracy after a period of authoritarian rule. Historically, responses vary widely, from ignoring previous crimes and actions, to granting immunity, to truth commissions, to paying reparations, to investigations followed by trials. Renewing a distinction of seventeenth-century French moralists, Elster distinguishes preferences motivated by emotions, impartial reasons, and interests in esteem, power, or money. He then parses each type, showing how it might come into play in different circumstances of transition, and illustrates the utility of his typology in treatments of a wide array of cases, ranging from French Revolution and post-Napoleonic era to the aftermath of Latin American dictatorships, from the German Democratic Republic to apartheid South Africa.

James Johnson examines the process by which the rules for excluding some citizens from the franchise were dramatically narrowed as a site from which to consider issues in how RCI studies the development of institutions. He especially fosters more self-consciousness on the part of RCI analysts concerning how to analyze, explain, and justify equilibria, understood as outcomes, by examining the emergence of universal suffrage as an equilibrium institution, and by considering normative and strategic motivations as distinct causal sources. These, he insists, must be kept separate. Because the expansion of the right to vote has a moral torque, it is all too tempting to account for this result in moral terms. Thus, in focusing on the problem of existing elites and voters' preferences over expanding the franchise, Johnson rebuts previous studies that emphasize the moral aspect of these preferences. Instead, he argues that franchise extension was mainly the result of strategic interactions amongst myopic actors with short timeframes who could not possibly have foreseen the outcome their dealings produced.

Synthesis

James Mahoney's reflections on the place of liberalism in political development in Central America make up the most self-conscious of the book's essays in seeking to show how, within a specific zone of inquiry about institutions and preferences, combinations of HI and RCI can offer better accounts than either on its own. Having written a major book on choices elites made selecting between radical policies and moderate reforms that was written mainly from an HI vantage (Mahoney 2001),

Mahoney now asks how RCI models can advance a more focused account of the nature and outcomes of these choices by key actors. He does so, moreover, without sacrificing historical depth or an appreciation for the importance of context; in this instance, the degree of political threat elites faced when making decisions at critical junctures.

Read individually and collectively, these papers advance our understanding of how productive points of contact between HI and RCI can illuminate important historical episodes, processes, and puzzles. But they also leave open, and thus invite further consideration of important questions about preferences as a concept and as a tool of research.

Preferences is a broad and capacious category. It encompasses a wide range of beliefs, values, interests, even emotions, and more than one type of choice situation. Is it too heterogeneous to consider from a single approach? Are the same conceptual distinctions and methods equally valid across the scale of decisions, ranging from the relatively trivial (which brand of black beans should I buy) to the large and critical decisions that individuals make about themselves and their societies (should one accommodate to a dictatorship or seek to overthrow it even at great personal risk), and the majority that fall in between (like the voting choices members of Congress make hundreds of times in a given session)? (Ullman-Margalit and Morgenbesser 1977; Ullman-Margalit 1984). Moreover, even within a particular zone of decision, individuals typically possess not a single, all-purpose ordering of preferences, or a simple distinction between ethical and subjective preferences (Harsanyi 1955) but hierarchies of preferences whose rankings can alter under specific institutional and historical conditions (Sen 1977). Such considerations, in turn, raise vexing issues about the conduct of research and the empirical determination of preferences—do we simply ask individuals, read their prose, conduct ethnographies, observe behavior, infer preferences from variations in outcome, or combine such approaches? Over what span of time and with which range of settings and institutions? What rules should guide such choices and potential combinations?

Postscript

We wish to close on a cautious and realistic note. This book focuses on preference formation and change, and reveals considerable points of intersection and overlap between historical and rational choice institutionalism. We have seen that much of this overlap is due to the ways in which approaches have focused on institutions, particularly the way institutions shape the incentives and preferences of actors.

Despite these points of contact and mutual learning, the two approaches have not come together as one. They possess different histories,

instincts, questions, methods, and, dare we say, preferences. RCI tends to move from preferences induced within institutional settings to deductive theory in which, on the basis of its institutional findings, it feels confident in imputing preferences to actors within the theory's domain. By contrast, HI tends to move from preferences induced within institutional settings back to large-scale history, thus making the preferences produced inside institutions causal forces within generously proportioned analyses across relatively large swaths of time. There is little danger that communication and collaboration will produce methodological uniformity. But there are, we hope this volume indicates, many opportunities for fruitful sharing.

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PART I

Situations