Reviewed by Andrew Day (Northwestern University)

M. Patrick Cottrellâs study of institutional replacement draws from International Relations (IR) theory and the history of global governance to argue that political contests over the legitimacy of an institution can supplant one institution with another during certain critical junctures. As a distinct developmental outcome of institutions, replacement occupies an âanalytically distinct middle ground between resilience and dissolutionâ (p. 15). Cottrell aims to show when replacement is likely and what it entails politically. By making replacement his âempirical baseline,â he hopes to also improve our understanding of institutional continuity and gradual change (p. 2). The work is self-consciously problem-driven, rather than theory- or method-driven, and the opening pages of each empirical chapter pose questions that Cottrell sets out to answer.

Much of the book consists in Cottrell convincing his readers that institutional replacement, though rare, is indeed a phenomenon worth investigating. His argument on this point is compelling. Many important global governance institutions replaced prior ones after a period of crisis, and we cannot understand these institutions without taking their predecessors into account. Institutions do not materialize *ex nihilo* but possess an evolutionary lineage that renders historical contextualization a top priority for careful IR scholars. For example, many people dismiss the League of Nations as an abject failure and portray the United Nations (UN) as an important, if sometimes fragile, success story. But these two institutions have in fact promoted the same fundamental principles, and the story of the UNâs creation indicates it would likely not exist without its cognitive ancestor. As Cottrell puts it, the UN âcontained the genealogical imprint of its predecessor, but also attempted to correct the flaws of the League laid bare by the legitimacy contests it experienced over the two decades priorâ (p. 66). In other words, to understand the UN we must see it as a replacement institution. Cottrellâs primary theoretical contributions comprise drawing attention to this understudied phenomenon and providing a theoretical framework on which future investigations can rely.

That framework is primarily concerned with the different political pathways to replacement. âReplacement by reaffirmationâ occurs when change agents challenge the ability of an institution to pursue agreed-upon principles and goals, leaving the shared commitment to extant ideas and values uncontested. By contrast, âreplacement by reconstructionâ involves a more fundamental rethinking of the conceptual resources from which an institution draws, rendering an institution unviable amid a sea change in shared beliefs concerning both the nature of global problems and the optimal responses to them. Cottrell seeks to deepen our understanding of these processes by providing historical narratives of global institutions from a social constructivist perspective.

Cottrell confines his empirical investigations to international security institutionsâthe UN, the Mine Ban Treaty, and the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). The first two are replacement institutions; the latter one may one day be replaced, though for now it appears resilient due to a deep structure of legitimacy underlying it. Cottrell devotes one chapter to each institution, and the narratives he provides are historically informative and

interesting. IR scholars conducting research on any of these institutions would benefit from reading both the bookâs opening theoretical chapters and the empirical chapter on their institution of interest.

While cornerstone security institutions exhaust the empirical investigation, the exact scope of Cottrellâs theory is not specified. International security institutions are presented as a âhard caseâ because of the collective action problems they pose (p. 32). This implies that Cottrellâs theoretical framework should be even more illuminating of non-security institutions, but âinstitutionâ is notoriously difficult to define. Cottrellâs working definition of institutions is sufficiently expansive to comprise formal organizations and multilateral agreements. This is the standard usage in IR, but it is unclear whether Cottrell believes the causal logic and normative concerns he elucidates would apply, for example, to informal institutions at the national level. There is no obvious reason why the theory would apply only to international security institutions, and yet attempting to theorize institutional development *in general* through an application of the concept of legitimacy is a daunting task. The theory therefore risks trying to explain too much of sociopolitical life.

In any case, it is also unclear what precisely the bookâs causal theory is, or to what extent the word âcausalâ is an appropriate qualifier. Asking why some institutions are replaced and others are not ostensibly requires a causal explanation, but the bookâs strengths are also its weaknesses when it comes to providing one. One advantage of Cottrellâs argument is that it leaves ample space for human agency and historical contingency. His emphasis on critical junctures draws the readerâs attention to periods wherein structural constraints are lessened because the perceived legitimacy of an institution is in crisis. While this theoretical move allows Cottrell to avoid the pitfalls of deterministic and highly stylized rationalist models of human behavior, it shifts attention to causal connections that are difficult to identify and impossible to predict. For example, whether or not an institution gives rise to a replacement depends in part on whether the institution is resilient and change agentsâ arguments concerning its legitimacy are convincing. But identifying the qualities âresilientâ and âconvincingâ *ex ante* requires more operational specificity than Cottrell supplies, lest we risk defining these causal factors by reference to the outcome of interest such that replacement reveals institutions to lack resilience and arguments to be convincing.

Cottrellâs normative argument concerning the âparadox of legitimacyâ is also sometimes less than convincing (p. 9). Cottrell follows Ian Hurd's *After Anarchy: Legitimacy and Power in the United Nations Security Council* (2007) in conflating legitimacy with the perception of legitimacy, meaning the ââbelief that an institution ought to be obeyedâ and hence existâ (p. 34). Legitimacy in Cottrellâs theoretical argument is thus what Friedrich Kratochwil and and John Gerard Ruggie call an âintersubjective appraisalâ rather than an objective moral quality.[1] Cottrell draws from this conceptualization to warn that we should not confuse normative change with progress, since institutions can have âtoo much legitimacyâ (p. 196). The trouble comes when Cottrell makes the secondary theoretical move of marrying legitimacy with authority such that the two concepts are mutually implicated. Cottrellâs conceptualization suggests that you cannot have effective international authority without a positive valuation of institutions by the governed, but empirically this is a dubious proposition.

In the examples he cites, most notably, the NPT and World Trade Organization, Cottrell correctly observes that many less powerful states have very different ideas than we do concerning their institutional legitimacy. But if these institutionalized power relationships are locked in despite widespread, non-Western perceptions of their *illegitimacy*, and if *legitimacy* is indistinguishable from *perceptions of legitimacy*, it is difficult to see why the central normative problem at issue is that these institutions are âtoo legitimateâ to effectively challenge. Rather, it seems more accurate to say that a few privileged global actors are empowered to determine which institutions are legitimate while less powerful actors, including some of the most populous states in the world, must put up with the consequences. Whether or not less powerful countries believe that free trade treaties âought to be obeyed,â the option of exit from global capitalism is not readily available. This insight equally applies to security institutions, which many outside the West see as instruments of US hegemony. Augmenting this weakness of the normative argument, there are instances of conceptual slippage in the text between legitimacy and the âright to govern,â a phrase that seems out of place in a book about political contestation of entrenched global authorities (pp. 63, 179).

Nevertheless, Cottrell argues persuasively that institutional replacement is a political phenomenon worth studying. Equally important, Cottrell shows that scholars interested in this phenomenon should direct their attention to the debates over and challenges to the legit-

imacy of institutions, a terrain of international political contest more significant in the twenty-first century than arms races or battles over territory. The empirical chapters are well done and historically informed, a methodological necessity for any constructivist work interested in institutions, which, as Cottrell reminds us, are often rooted in temporally specific normative logics and cognitive frames. And though it sometimes suffers from the conceptual baggage that sociological legitimacy so often carries, Cottrellâs argument on what he calls the âdark sideâ of legitimacy poses provocative questions concern-ing the best way to strike a balance between effective authority and Gramscian hegemony (p. 195). Given the proliferation and increased powers of global institutions, such questions are indeed worth pondering.

Note

[1]. Friedrich Kratochwil and John Gerard Ruggie, âInternational Organization: A State of the Art on an Art of the State,â *International Organization* 40, no. 4 (Autumn 1986): 774.

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