

## Garbage Cans, New Institutionalism, and the Study of Politics

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*Bendor, Moe, and Shotts want to rescue some of the ideas of the garbage can model and the new institutionalism. Their rescue program, however, is alien to the spirit of not only our work but also some recent developments that may promise a climate of dialogue between different approaches in political science. Bendor, Moe, and Shotts place themselves closer to a tradition of unproductive tribal warfare than to more recent attempts to explore the limits of and the alternatives to (means-end) rational interpretations of political actors, institutions, and change. By building on a narrow concept of what is valuable political science, they cut themselves off from key issues that have occupied political scientists for centuries.*

It is, of course, flattering that Bendor, Moe, and Shotts (2001) have found it worthwhile to spend time and energy to critique the garbage can and the new institutionalism. The exercise is even more appealing because they argue that some of the ideas are worth developing and, with a little help, might create “scientific progress.” The result, however, is disappointing. As storytellers, they misrepresent what we have aspired to do and what we have done. As innovators, their substantive contribution is modest. Most important, they point the field in the wrong direction. They suggest an approach that assumes away most of the complexity of political actors, the organized settings within which they operate, and institutional change, rather than make a serious effort to understand that complexity. Therefore, the last part of this response suggests an alternative perspective to the one they present.

### BENDOR, MOE, AND SHOTTS AS STORYTELLERS

Bendor, Moe, and Shotts construe the garbage can and the new institutionalism in a way that makes dialogue difficult. Available space limits this response to three short comments.

#### Ambitions and Labels

Bendor, Moe, and Shotts (2001) misread the theoretical ambitions and the spirit of our work. They use the phrase “the garbage can theory of organizations (GCT),” which ignores our title: “A garbage can model”—“a” not “the,” and “model” not “theory.” Even after observing that we call the garbage can a meta-

phor, they conclude: “Yet, the GCT’s basic ideas are obviously intended to be a theory and should be treated as such” (p. 171). Furthermore, they claim that the more recent work of March and Olsen “moves toward a larger theory” (p. 171).

In contrast, our claims are more modest. We have tried to comprehend some empirical observations of actual organizational and institutional behavior. We have tried to specify why the observations are surprises by showing how they are incongruent with dominant theoretical ideas. We have explored the implications of a limited set of ideas intended to provide better interpretations of the phenomena observed.

For instance, the goal of the original article (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1972) was to elaborate and modify existing theoretical ideas about organizational decision making to make sense of some empirical observations. We presented one way of looking at organizations—ideas assumed to be useful for some purposes and to capture some organizations, activities, and situations more than others.

In the 1986 return to these ideas and the reactions they had provoked, the spirit was the same:

Since the complexity of decision making in an organization is unlikely to be captured by a single model, any more than by reports of a single participant or historian, the role of garbage can ideas is limited. They seek to identify and comprehend some features of decision making that are not well treated in other contemporary perspectives and yet are important. Thus, they are efforts to extend, rather than replace, understandings gained from other perspectives (March and Olsen 1986, 12).<sup>1</sup>

The garbage can ideas have been specified at several different levels of precision. In its “purest” form, the model assumes that problems, solutions, decision makers, and choice opportunities are independent, exogenous streams flowing through a system (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1972). Yet, a number of garbage can models exist, and these variations modify most of the key assumptions of the “pure” model, exploring the circumstances under which different results are produced (March and Olsen 1986). For instance, the four streams have been assumed to be more or less inde-

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My co-authors on the original 1972 garbage can paper, Michael D. Cohen and James G. March, share the general sentiments expressed here, but they do not share my inclination to reiterate or elaborate them in the present context. I am grateful to them for our collaboration over the years and for numerous conversations on the present topics, in particular for Cohen’s contribution to the discussion here of the simulation model and for March’s contribution to many years of joint work. I also want to thank Jeffrey Checkel and Ulf Sverdrup for helpful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> The spirit has been the same throughout the last few decades (Cohen and March 1986, xi, xix; March and Olsen 1995, 3, and 1998, 943).

pendent, tightly or loosely coupled. Structures have assumed various forms. The possibilities for intelligent action and management in garbage can situations also have been explored (Cohen and March 1974, 205–15). Surprisingly, Bendor, Moe, and Shotts (note 17, p. 183) see such attempts at exploration, many of them discussed in March and Olsen (1976) and March and Weissinger-Baylon (1986),<sup>2</sup> as indicating that components of the garbage can have been abandoned. On the contrary, the spirit has always been to encourage colleagues to play with the basic ideas, rather than defend them endlessly.

Bendor, Moe, and Shotts suggest that we pose as part of the bounded rationality tradition, although “a clear, cold look at the theory” shows that we are mistaken (p. 174). The framework of bounded rationality, they argue, has been abandoned (pp. 174, 184). The opposite conclusion is reached by the founders of the bounded rationality program (Cyert and March 1992; March 1996; March and Simon 1993) as well as by recent reviewers of the tradition (Goodin 1999; Jones 1999). Moreover, Bendor, Moe, and Shotts fail to suggest any important substantive consequences of labeling us as belonging, or not belonging, to the bounded rationality tradition.

### The Simulation

Bendor, Moe, and Shotts are consistently decisive in their judgments about the role of the computer model that appeared in the original garbage can article, but they have some difficulty being decisive in a consistent way. Initially, they observe that “the verbal theory is fundamental. The computer model is derivative: It is only one of many possible ways to formalize key features of the theory and draw out its implications” (p. 170). Subsequently they proclaim: “The computer simulation formalizes the verbal theory and is widely regarded as the research program’s scientific core” (p. 174). Finally, they decide that the function of the computer model is cosmetic, to bestow scientific legitimacy on the entire GCT enterprise (p. 184). It is hard to have it all three ways, and Bendor, Moe, and Shotts have a problem: If the simulation is derivative, then comments on it are not necessarily germane to the broader issues that they want to discuss. But if the simulation is central, then they have to explain why most of the scholars who find garbage can ideas informative have paid no attention to it. Since this is a dilemma they cannot resolve, they ignore it. By almost any standard of credibility, they exaggerate the significance of the simulation model. In comparison, March (1994, 201) assessed it as “one illustrative set of simulations.”

Although the larger literature critiqued by Bendor, Moe, and Shotts does not rest on the simulation, several points in their discussion of it seem misguided. Although the simulation is certainly not the one we

would build today, with thirty years of hindsight and technical development to draw upon, we remain happy with the choices we made. Most of the changes we might make are not the ones discussed by Bendor, Moe, and Shotts. In particular, they focus on the absence of explicitly modeled solutions. This simplification is something we ourselves pointed out originally (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1972, 3), so we are surprised that they are surprised. It is true that the variegated content of solutions is not modeled in the simulation, but dealing with solutions implicitly rather than explicitly allowed us to have a much simpler structure to analyze and present. This would be an important advantage even now, and it was very important earlier, when few organization theorists had substantial intuition about computational models.

The interpretation of Bendor, Moe, and Shotts completely misses the close connections between “energy” in the simulation and “attention” in the bounded rationality tradition. Overlooking this aspect of a key variable lets them assert that the simulation is disconnected from the verbal positions of the article and from the bounded rationality tradition. But the connection has been clear to other readers. In addition, the main concept linking the simulation to events in universities is “slack,” perhaps the most widely employed conceptual innovation of “A Behavioral Theory of the Firm” (Cyert and March [1963] 1992).

Bendor, Moe, and Shotts portray the clumpy movements of actors and problems from choice to choice as the most disturbing evidence that the garbage can simulation and verbal statement are not aligned. Somehow they have the expectation that these movements should be more of a uniform random buzzing (see their remark on chaos, p. 176). But that expectation is not in the verbal part of our article. Saying that organizational processes are not always ordered as conventionally assumed did not mean to us that the processes should exhibit no order. The sense of “disjunction” detected by Bendor, Moe, and Shotts arises from their misconstruing the introductory discussion. What they see as a major “bug” we saw—and still see—as a “feature.” Namely, the simulation reproduces an experience that many of us recognize from our own lives: moving through a series of meetings on nominally disparate topics, reaching few decisions, while talking repeatedly with many of the same people about the same problems.

The complete lack of understanding of the spirit in which the garbage can model was offered makes it difficult for Bendor, Moe, and Shotts to avoid muddling the issues. They tell us (p. 172) that the dictionary defines “solution” in terms of problems. So for them the fundamental premise of the original article—that it is instructive to imagine problems and solutions as independent—is literally unintelligible. The account of our work that follows resembles the grumbling of humorless people who accidentally wander into the lively part of town. We are glad that most readers have had more imagination and have found it stimulating to consider a world in which a solution can usefully be

<sup>2</sup> See also Anderson and Fischer 1986; Carley 1986; Crecine 1986; March and Romelaer 1976; Weiner 1976; Weissinger-Baylon 1986; and even March 1994.

conceived as “an answer actively looking for a question.”

### The Garbage Can and the New Institutionalism

Bendor, Moe, and Shotts expand their critique of the GC, and particularly by the simulation, into a general critique of the work of March and Olsen. It is not clear, however, when they are writing about ideas and when they are writing about authors. On the one hand, they argue that it is important not to confuse GCT with its authors (p. 174). On the other hand, they generalize from the GC to the “research program” and the “larger enterprise” of March and Olsen. They argue that “all the more recent work [of March and Olsen] is rooted in the GCT and has inherited, as a result, its fundamental problems” (p. 184). The suggestion is truly extraordinary on the face of it and is neither demonstrated nor even argued with anything more than an assertion.

Insofar as Bendor, Moe, and Shotts attempt to say something about the whole authorship, they fail. Cohen’s later work is ignored, in spite of its obvious relevance to the GC and the use of simulation techniques (Axtell, Epstein, and Cohen 1996; Cohen 1986). March’s work on risk taking, learning, and adaptation is not mentioned (Cohen and Sproull 1996; March 1999; March and Shapira 1987). Olsen’s work on institutional reform is overlooked (Brunsson and Olsen 1993; Olsen 1997; Olsen and Peters 1996).

In fact, garbage can ideas are a minor part of the recent work by March and Olsen (1989, 1995, 1998). Yet, in order to identify the new institutionalism (NI) with the garbage can (GC), Bendor, Moe, and Shotts ignore changes in subject matter. The focus has been extended from decision making in formal organizations, to an interest in political institutions and democratic governance, to how and when international political orders are created, maintained, changed, and abandoned.

Moreover, the core theoretical ideas of the GC and NI are more loosely coupled than suggested by Bendor, Moe, and Shotts. To a considerable degree, those ideas explore organizations and institutions from different perspectives. The GC views organizational life as highly contextual, driven primarily by timing and coincidence. The pure garbage can model is basically institution free, or structure is treated as exogenous. Decisions are produced to a large extent by the temporal linkages of problems, solutions, choice opportunities, and decision makers.

In contrast, NI represents an attempt to supplement ideas of consequential action, exogenous preferences, garbage cans, and efficient histories with ideas of rule- and identity-based action, institutional robustness, and inefficient histories (March and Olsen 1998, 969). A key question is where structures originate and how they are maintained and transformed, including the relative importance of deliberate reform and design. NI assumes that institutional structures impose elements of order on a potentially inchoate world and that institutions have a certain robustness against changes in

external environments as well as deliberate reforms (March and Olsen 1984, 743; 1989). History does not follow a course that leads inexorably and relatively quickly to a unique equilibrium dictated by exogenously determined interests and resources. Instead, history is inefficient and follows a meandering path affected by multiple equilibria and endogenous transformations of interests and resources (March and Olsen 1998, 954).<sup>3</sup>

NI also represents a shift in focus from the logic of consequences and rational calculation of expected utility and prior preferences to alternative forms of intelligence and behavioral logics. In particular, it explores a logic of appropriateness based on a sense of identity (March and Olsen 1989, 23; March 1994). Like the logic of consequences, the logic of appropriateness is explicitly a logic of action or justification for an individual actor (March and Olsen 1998, 952). Actors behave in accordance with their interpretation of rules and practices that are socially constructed, publicly known, anticipated, and accepted. A polity (and society) is a community of rule followers with distinctive sociocultural ties, cultural connections, intersubjective understandings based on shared codes of meaning and ways of reasoning, and senses of belonging. Identities and rules are constitutive as well as regulative and are molded by social interaction and experience.

Strangely enough, Bendor, Moe, and Shotts do not explicitly confront such identity-derived, rule-driven behavior with rational (strategic) behavior based on a calculation of expected utility. Rather, their discussion of rule-driven behavior confuses the cognitive processes through which actors go when making decisions with the origins of rules and their effects (p. 186).

### BENDOR, MOE, AND SHOTTS AS INNOVATORS

Although Bendor, Moe, and Shotts consider the GC confused, they think there are “intriguing ideas and assertions” worth saving (p. 185). It is possible to rescue not only the GC but also NI from the morass into which they have been led. All this will take radical surgery and a collective effort of reconstruction (pp. 170, 188, 189). With remarkable assurance, Bendor, Moe, and Shotts offer assistance in the form of an alternative model. It is a generous offer, but it is difficult to discover a basis for their hubris.

The alternative model would focus on the “temporal ordering test,” but it is based on assumptions about stable participation and stable authority (principal-agent) relations (p. 188), so it is hardly in the spirit of the garbage can ideas. Bendor, Moe, and Shotts assume away, rather than incorporate, key observations from behavioral studies of organizational decision making. These show that participation is not always

<sup>3</sup> Brennan and Buchanan (1985, 149) also criticize the Invisible Hand assumption in economic theory: “Great damage has been and is being done by modern economists who argue, indirectly, that basic institutional change will somehow spontaneously evolve in the direction of structural efficacy.”

stable, that there is unresolved conflict, and that authority relations are ambiguous or shifting, not organized into stable hierarchies. Assuming away complexity is especially problematic because many modern polities seem to have a multicentered, multilevel, network character rather than a single center with lawful hierarchical authority (Kohler-Koch and Eising 1999). A possible implication is that the garbage can ideas, originally assumed to capture specific aspects of university governance and thus a small part of the world, now may capture a much larger and more important part of political life.

Quite aside from the alternative model, the basic approach of Bendor, Moe, and Shotts to revitalizing the garbage can research program is misguided. According to them, Cohen, March, and Olsen can best be “salvaged” (p. 169) by conventional economic theories of rational choice. They want the heretics to return to the true faith (March 1992). The suggestion is hardly surprising, given their previous work, and is not totally without precedent, but such a rescue would be a retrogression, more likely to impoverish the line of work than to produce a leap forward.

## POSSIBLE FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Bendor, Moe, and Shotts castigate the discipline before they understand it. They do not understand why so few colleagues share their own low opinion of the GC and NI. They reprimand their colleagues for not having “pounced on the model from the outset, exposed its inadequacies, and prevented it from gaining such prominence and influence” (p. 183). Yet, the most important question is: Exactly how do Bendor, Moe, and Shotts intend to move the field forward, beyond the specific principal-agent model presented?

## Styles of Research

For Bendor, Moe, and Shotts, the core of genuine social science theory and “scientific progress” lies in formal modeling of a particular kind. They tell us that “description is not theory” (p. 185) and “description is not explanation” (p. 187), forgetting the equally trite dictum that “rationalization is not explanation.” This is not the place to recite the long list of useful models of social behavior that look quite different from the one sketched by Bendor, Moe, and Shotts, or to recollect the history of hopes dashed in the pursuit of models of that class. I share much of the enthusiasm of Bendor, Moe, and Shotts for such modeling, but it does not define scholarship. It is simply a part of it. There is no reason to downgrade the value of raising good research questions, of detailed ethnographic accounts of how political organizations and institutions really work, and of theoretical speculation based on surprising empirical observations. Such questions, observations, and speculations often advance political science, even when all the elements are not “organized into a coherent and powerful theory” (p. 183).

Surprisingly, Bendor, Moe, and Shotts attach little value to the process of developing and exploring the-

oretical ideas, compared to the process of testing such ideas.<sup>4</sup> As will be argued below, ignoring the exploration of competing assumptions is likely to impoverish, not enrich, the understanding of politics.

## Competing Assumptions

Students of the dynamics of political action and structure start out with different assumptions when it comes to three basic questions. (1) How do we understand the nature of human beings as political actors? (2) How do we understand the organized political settings within which modern political actors most typically operate: political organizations, institutions, and normative orders? (3) How do we understand political change and development, that is, how are political institutions, identities, and policies established, sustained, and transformed?

Bendor, Moe, and Shotts seem to start with the following assumptions.

- *Rational actors.* Political action is the making of rational choices on the basis of expectations about the consequences for prior objectives.
- *Instrumental organizations and institutions.* Organizational forms are instruments for making and implementing rational decisions in order to achieve pre-specified ends. Organizations have authority structures, and “superiors can tell others what to do” (p. 173).
- *Political development as structural choice and limits on rationality as temporary.* Organizational forms are deliberately designed instruments, stemming directly from the desires of identifiable political actors. The instrumental use of structure by leaders “is pervasive and fundamental to an understanding of organizations.” Leaders do not have to accept the GC’s dynamics (p. 173). Temporal coupling will tend to diminish over time (p. 188).

This constitutes a quite conventional framework in interpretations of politics, and it has become more prominent with the elaboration of economic models of politics. Yet, students of political life, both historically and currently, have observed considerably more complexity in how political decisions are made and meaning is created; in how political institutions are organized—the principles upon which they are structured, how they work and are governed; and in the processes through which political development takes place.

<sup>4</sup> Allow me a personal note. This attitude is particularly surprising because their Stanford colleague, Jim March, has been “a pioneer in raising good new questions for further research” (Thoenig 2000). Always wanting to make “artists out of pedants” (March 1970), March sometimes works in a style close to poetry. At other times he works in a formal and mathematical style. John Padgett (1992) calls him “the Miles Davis of organization theory,” always willing to explore new ideas and never letting himself be caged into a single style of research or school of thought. Thoenig and Padgett emphasize the value of such activities in the development of the social sciences. Bendor, Moe, and Shotts downgrade their importance.

## Actors

Close observers of political life have found great diversity in human motivation and modes of action, not a single dominant behavioral logic. They see the character of political actors as variable and flexible, not universal and constant. Actors may be driven by habit, emotion, coercion, and interpretation of internalized shared rules and principles, as well as calculated expected utility driven by incentive structures (Weber 1978). Most rational choice interpretations conceive an individual's preference function as exogenous, given, and essentially arbitrary, but other approaches emphasize the significance of the basic values of the culture (or subcultures) in which actors are born and live. Actors are socialized into culturally defined and institutionalized ends and purposes to be sought, as well as modes of appropriate or required procedures for pursuing the purposes (Merton 1938, 676). Legitimate institutions, principles, procedures, methods, rights, and obligations give order to social relations and restrict the possibilities of a one-sided pursuit of self-interest or drives (Weber 1978, 40–3).

Legitimacy and efficiency do not necessarily coincide. There are illegitimate but technically efficient means as well as legitimate but inefficient means (Merton 1938). Legitimacy can be established by showing that decisions accomplish appropriate objectives or are made in appropriate ways (March and Olsen 1986, 22; Meyer and Rowan 1977). Rationality can be substantive or procedural (Simon 1976, 1985). Organizational and professional identifications make a difference; they provide not only behavioral logics and standard operating procedures but also mental frames and individual and collective identities. Rational calculations (as well as other forms of intentional intelligence) do not reliably converge on uniquely sensible action (March 1994). Fundamental miscalculations and their (sometimes) unintended and undesired consequences are important aspects of, not footnotes to, social life.

## Organized Settings

Students of political life have observed the great diversity of organized settings and types of collectivities and social relationships within which political actors operate (Finer 1997). In modern society special attention has been given to the properties of formally organized settings, that is, to how political orders, organized systems of governance, institutions, and organizations best can be understood as the context of political behavior. Understanding the polity as a configuration of institutions, norms, rules, and practices is a necessary supplement to the idea of political life organized around the interaction of a collection of autonomous individual actors who pursue prior preferences by calculating future outcomes (March and Olsen 1989, 1995).

Whereas Bendor, Moe, and Shotts assume a given authority structure of principals and agents, an old theme in political science has been to understand the

conditions under which there is authority and political order at all. How can order develop out of anarchy, and through what kind of processes is authority achieved, maintained, and lost (March and Olsen 1998)? It has been observed that political orders are more or less institutionalized and that political organizations and institutions are structured to different degrees and in different ways. To understand the organizational mosaic of modern society, it is necessary to go beyond images of hierarchies and markets (Brunsson and Olsen 1998; Dahl and Lindblom 1953).

Likewise, it is necessary to go beyond understanding organizational effects in functional-instrumental terms. That is, institutions cannot be viewed solely as incentives and opportunity structures that regulate behavior by affecting calculations and transaction costs. Institutions constitute political actors. Institutional effects in terms of civic education and socialization are key processes in political life. Historically, forms of government have been assessed according to their ability to foster the virtue of intelligence of the community (Mill [1861] 1962, 30–5).

## Change in Political Orders

As students of politics have observed, political life achieves and loses structure, and the nature of political order changes in a variety of ways. The basic units are constituted and reconstituted, and so are their relationships:

At some periods in some areas, political life has been rather well organized around well-defined boundaries, common rules and practices, shared causal and normative understandings, and resources adequate for collective action. At other times and places, the system has been relatively anarchic. Relations have been less orderly; boundaries less well-defined; and institutions less common, less adequately supported, and less involved (March and Olsen 1998, 943–4).

To understand processes of change, scholars have not always assumed that leaders simply choose structures. Rather, it has been asked, what is the role of human intention, reflection, and choice in the development of political institutions and good government? Under what conditions, and through what mechanisms, can political actors rise above, and get beyond, existing institutional structures (Hamilton, Jay, and Madison [1787] 1964, 1; Mill [1861] 1962, 1; see also Brunsson and Olsen 1993; March and Olsen 1989, 1995, 1998; Olsen 1997)? Rational structural choice and adaptation, like competitive selection and other change processes, are less than perfect. They also interact in complicated ways (March 1981, 1994).

Studies of political and administrative reform have documented the need to go beyond processes of rational adaptation and competitive selection in order to understand change (Brunsson and Olsen 1998). "It is probably important to distinguish situations in which organizations may be susceptible to deliberate willful reorganization from situations in which the process of change more clearly resemble a garbage can process" (March and Olsen 1986, 25). Furthermore, weakly

institutionalized processes, such as comprehensive administrative reform, are more likely to have garbage can properties than are more institutionalized processes (March and Olsen 1983).

### Imperialism versus Multimechanism

For observation-driven behavioral research, the first set of questions is: What are significant and interesting political phenomena? What is worthwhile knowing anything about? The next set of questions, then, is: How can we best understand such phenomena? How will different basic assumptions be of help?

To answer the latter set of questions, it is helpful to know a repertoire of possible ways of understanding political actors, institutions, and change. Then one may better explore the relative importance of—the scope, conditions, and domains of application for—a specific set of assumptions. For example, one can explore the understanding achieved by the conventional assumptions about rational decision making, instrumental institutions, institutional design, and deliberate reform or by the assumptions underlying the garbage can or NI perspectives. One also may identify factors that make different basic assumptions more or less salient to an understanding of different parts of political life. If no single set of assumptions is viewed as more fruitful than all the others under all conditions, and if different assumptions are not seen as necessarily mutually exclusive, then theoretically inclined scholars may also explore ideas that can reconcile and synthesize different sets of assumptions. In particular, one may explore possible interrelationships and transitions among logics of action, roles of institutions, and processes of change.

Bendor, Moe, and Shotts are representative of an imperialist intellectual tradition. That is, they embrace the notion that a single, simple theory of human action will suffice to interpret complex historical events and political phenomena. The strategy is as risky as it is pretentious. I prefer a more catholic approach. For example, what is the relationship between strategic and rule-driven action?<sup>5</sup> Political actors are constituted both by their interests, by which they evaluate their expected consequences, and by the rules embedded in their identities and political institutions. They try to calculate consequences and follow rules, and the relationship between the two is often subtle (March and Olsen 1998, 952). The richness of the alternatives mirrors the richness of the phenomena, and wishing that the phenomena were less complex will not make them so.

Similarly, understanding the role of political institutions in coercion, in managing exchange through incentives, in redistribution, in building a political culture, and in developing structures for the sustenance of civic virtue and democratic politics (March and Olsen 1995,

245) is not likely to be furthered by seeking a single, simple interpretation. Political change is similarly a study in historical and contemporary complexity. Understanding institutional abilities to adapt spontaneously to environmental changes, environmental effectiveness in eliminating suboptimal institutions, and the latitude of purposeful institutional reform requires attending to several processes of change.

### The European Union as an Example

Are there significant political processes in which interactions and shifts among logics of action, institutional forms and functions, and processes of change can be observed? An obvious candidate is the European Union. As a political order, the EU is involved in a large-scale institutional experiment and a search for constitutive principles and institutional arrangements.

Principled action based on various identities mixes with detailed calculation of material self-interest. As a multicentered and multilevel polity, the EU combines a variety of institutional forms and degrees of institutionalization. As part of the transformation process, struggles over the European mind combine with struggles over institutional structures. No identifiable group of actors can unilaterally choose the future institutional arrangements of the EU. Yet, there are elements of choice in the coevolution of institutional structures across levels of governance and functional structures, and some actors are more powerful than others. A variety of “local” (territorial as well as functional) processes interact in complex ways, combining willful choice, chance, and compelling structures in a fashion that generates both complex processes and outcomes that are difficult to predict.

The current transformations remind students of politics of Tocqueville’s ([1835] 1945, 7) comment upon observing the new American democracy: “A new science of politics is needed for a new world.” Yet, the difficulty of understanding political phenomena such as the European transformation may have important implications for prospective theory builders. It may be necessary to recognize that the relationship among political action, institutions, and the flow of history involves a complicated interplay among several logics of action, institutional roles, and processes of change. It also may be necessary to accept that significant political phenomena sometimes are complex enough to make any simple theory of them unsatisfactory (March and Olsen 1986, 29).

### CONCLUSION

The comments by Bendor, Moe, and Shotts are unlikely to improve our understanding of political organizations and institutions. They misrepresent the garbage can and the new institutionalism, and their unsuccessful example of how these ideas can be “rescued” is hardly promising. By building on a narrow concept of what is valuable political science, and by assuming away interesting challenges, they cut themselves off from some of the key issues that have

<sup>5</sup> To some degree, different logics are located in different institutional spheres. Where they compete, a clear logic may dominate an unclear logic. One logic may be used for major decisions, the other for minor refinements of those decisions. Logics can be sequentially ordered, or either logic can be viewed as a special case of the other (March and Olsen 1998, 952–3).

occupied political scientists. Their own program is without substantive political content. They do not tell us which political phenomena they want to understand, and their separation of politics from its institutional and historical context makes it difficult to discuss which basic assumptions are most likely to be helpful—those they suggest or those of the garbage can or institutional perspectives. In sum, they indicate an unpromising route and point research in the wrong direction.

The Bendor, Moe, and Shotts rescue program is alien to the spirit of not only the garbage can model and the new institutionalism, but also some recent developments that may promise a climate of dialogue between different approaches, in contrast to unproductive tribal warfare (Bates et al. 2000; Cook and Levi 1990; Elster 2000; Green and Shapiro 1994; Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1999; Levi, Ostrom, and Alt 1999). It is a pity that the willingness to explore the limits of and the alternatives to (means-end) rational interpretations of political actors, institutions, and change; to accept that different approaches may contribute something of value to the study of politics; and to look for possible ways of integrating competing perspectives has not yet influenced Bendor, Moe, and Shotts.

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