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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Institutions and the Common Good. Reconceptualizing Institutional Values as Virtues

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Abstract

This paper addresses the critique regarding the apolitical nature of institutionalist theorizing by developing the concept of virtuous institutions. I start from the observation that current public discourses are often characterized by a destructive pitting of 'my values' against 'your values'. Values, in this usage, represent personal emotion-laden beliefs that are ultimately incompatible. In addition to fueling destructive public discourses, incompatible values (a feature that is central to institutional value theorizing) make system integration (a feature that is also central to institutional theorizing) very difficult. I therefore propose to reconceptualize values as virtues. Drawing on the communitarian ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre and the concept of institutional valuation of Roger Friedland, I suggest a reconceptualization of institutional values that introduces the notion of a common good, understands institutional practices as co-constitutive with such a good, and abolishes the assumption that values are fundamentally irrational and beyond reasoning.

Keywords: *Institutions*; *values; virtue*; *emotions*; *ethics*; *MacIntyre*; *Friedland*

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My aim in this paper is to introduce the concept of virtue to institutionalist value theorizing. Virtues are a subcategory of values, to wit, positive values like, for example, courage, temperance, or modesty (see Risi & Marti, 2022 for a discussion of negative values). While the institutionalist literature has up to now only discussed values in a neutral manner (e.g., Gehman et al., 2013; Kivle, 2020; Wright et al., 2017), I think it would benefit from adopting the more specific interpretation that virtues have to offer.

I am motivated by two – interlinked – concerns. My first concern stems from the perception of public discourse becoming increasingly entrenched, violent, and destructive. From identity politics to cancel culture and from shitstorms to hate crimes, we see people screaming their values at each other with little regard for societal cohesion or institutional integrity. Values, at least when they are made explicit, seem to develop a far greater destructive power than the cohesive and integrative power we attribute to them in normative theories of value (e.g., Parsons & Shils, 1951). This has negative consequences for, among others, public debate and political risk-taking (among others, Bouvier & Machin, 2021; Landsberg, 2021; Wegner et al., 2020; Whipple, 2023).

Public discourse, however, is shaped by many forces, among them what Nicholas Rose (2013), drawing on Foucault (1998), has called 'truth regimes'. These 'truth regimes' are constituted through academic discourse and regulate what can be said 'truthfully', i.e., with support from the natural or social sciences.

This leads me to my second concern. As I will argue in this paper, the manner in which new institutionalism, as a mainstream school in organization studies for over three decades, has conceptualized values has contributed to the shaping of public discourse as described earlier. My reconceptualization of values in institutionalist theory, in contrast, aims at laying the foundation for a more positive and constructive public discourse. As such, it is explicitly politically motivated. I respond in this manner to critique leveled against institutionalist theory both from inside (Munir, 2015, 2019; Suddaby, 2015) and outside of the field (Clegg, 2010; Lok, 2017; Willmott, 2015) berating institutionalism for being acritical, apolitical, and/or conservative-functionalist.

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My argument proceeds in three steps. I will, first, discuss the institutionalist literature on values and show how it is based on an understanding of values as individual, contingent, and incompatible. Their competition, in this view, cannot be resolved without resort to violence. I will, second, argue that this value incompatibility is the offspring of a philosophy of the Enlightenment positing emotions against reasons, and that this underlying philosophy should be replaced by a different philosophy anchored in the Aristotelian concepts of common good, virtues, and practical wisdom, viz. a communitarian ethics (MacIntyre, 1981). I will, third, propose a reconceptualization of values as virtues in institutionalist theory drawing on Friedland's theory of values in institutions. In particular, I will explore how individual values can be replaced by common goods, how linear rational action can be replaced by a co-constitution of good and practice, and how irrational emotions can be replaced by enjoyment.

Values in institutionalist theory

Let me start with the institutionalist literature on values. Two of the most prominent strands of value theorizing in institutionalist theory have been connected with the names of Matthew Kraatz and Roger Friedland. They represent two different ways of conceptualizing values, both of which are instructive for the problem I see underlying institutionalist value theorizing. On the one hand, we have the 'incompatibility view' proposed by Kraatz and colleagues, and on the other hand, the 'practice view' proposed by Friedland.

Kraatz and Block (2008) initially started from a discussion of institutional pluralism, which they defined as an organization being confronted with multiple institutional spheres. Although values are seldom mentioned, there is a sense throughout the chapter that the incompatibility of ultimate values is the cause of problems of legitimacy and governance that organizations then have to solve either by eliminating pluralism, compartmentalizing it, reigning in its tensions, or creating their own values. In a revision of that chapter 9 years later, Kraatz and Block (2017) make the link to values explicit and put them in the center of their analysis. They argue that values not only form the basis for organizational identification and commitment but can also develop centrifugal force as identity groups within the organization fight over power. In this contribution, they also define morality explicitly as an 'emotional, primal and deeply irrational phenomenon' (Kraatz & Block, 2017, p. 546). This emotional commitment is what binds people to institutions (Kraatz et al., 2020). This is, I would hold, a 'classic' definition of values proposing that values are primarily emotional and irrational and therefore incompatible and 'centrifugal' rather than integrative in their societal effects. In their review of the literature, Kraatz et al. (2020) discuss a large number of authors portraying values similarly as laden with emotion, distinctive of individuals, intuitive, pre-conscious, invisible, or out of control.

Friedland, on the other hand, presents a different value conceptualization that has, over the course of two decades, shifted from a theorizing based on Weberian value spheres (Friedland, 2013a, 2013b) to a practice-based, phenomenological take on values (Friedland, 2017, 2018a, 2018b). This theorizing, however, has its own problems with the incompatibility of values, though for different reasons. Heidegger, who forms the point of reference, starts from a fundamentally shared world, i.e., a world of shared experiences, shared language, and shared practices. The term 'shared practice' may even be regarded tautological as there can be no practice that is not shared.[1] Integration is an essential part of the concept. This concept, however, relates either to interpersonal integration, i.e., a kind of cognitive or sensemaking integration in a situation of two or more actors (e.g., the Schützean idealizations) or a kind of anthropological 'we are all human beings' integration (e.g., the Heideggerian variety). Neither can address conflict among people who do speak the same language, who live, work, and have been socialized in the same nation state, but still live in very different life worlds, nor can they address clashes of culture. I would argue therefore that societal integration[2] cannot be presupposed and will formulate a solution to this problem in the second half of this article. For the time being, I will continue with the more popular (and more problematic) incompatibility view and how to overcome it.

The classic view: Value incompatibility and emotions

To understand the origins of the incompatibility theorizing, we need to go back to its sociological and philosophical presuppositions. As I have indicated earlier, the underlying figure is one of conflict. In the absence of any criterion of comparison that would allow for a reasoned decision, two or more value positions have to engage in violence and manipulation until one emerges as the victor. Which position emerges is contingent on political power and manipulation.

The central sociological author for value incompatibility is Max Weber. Weber (1972) holds that there exist in society a number of value spheres, i.e., value orders centered on one ultimate value, and that these value spheres are incommensurable. The only way to resolve conflicts between them is through societal conflict. The reason Weber (1988) gives is that values have a strong irrational component and, therefore,

1. See, for example, Reckwitz' (2002) definition of practice as routinised behavior and pattern of action or Giddens's (1993) understanding of practices as stretching in time and space. Both describe a repeated performance by a multitude of actors.

2. 'System integration' is the common term used in sociology to refer to the problem of societal integration (Abercrombie et al., 2000).

cannot be fully subjected to reason. Value-rational action is therefore close to affective action, the former differing from the latter only by the fact that the agent is conscious of the value that drives the action.

It is important to note that Weber distinguishes between individual and social aspects of values, as well as between rational and affective components. He regards affects in general and the affective component of values in particular as beyond a discursive-rational sphere in which system integration could be accomplished discursively and in a rational manner. He also holds that values, while social in nature, are 'adopted' (this is not to suggest conscious choice) by individuals and linked to these individuals' affective capacities and dispositions. This view suggests that individuals' emotions and affects, rather than the discursive content of values, are the real obstacles to system integration.

Weber's conceptualization can be traced back to two major philosophical schools (Weik, 2022a). The first is the philosophy of the Enlightenment that I will discuss in more detail later. This philosophy establishes the disjunction, and adversity, of emotions and reason as well as the moral superiority of reason over emotions. The second is the collection of theories commonly referred to as life philosophy (*Lebensphilosophie*) that developed in critique of the earlier paradigm and considered emotions to be a direct emanation of an energizing, original, and authentic (and therefore morally superior) life force *that cannot be argued with* (for a discussion, see Weik, 2022b).

Any attempt to reconceptualize value incompatibility will therefore, I would argue, have to reconsider these philosophical ideas. I will do this now by introducing MacIntyre's critique of the Enlightenment philosophy and his reconceptualization of it in the form of a communitarian virtue ethics.

Emotivism and the loss of the tripartite structure

Value clashes, MacIntyre (1981) notes, derive from incommensurable value positions and are held between people who have already made up their minds. The increasing 'shrillness' of the tone is an indicator of a lack of good argument as contrary assertions are stated and restated on both sides. MacIntyre calls this position, which assumes that 'all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character', emotivism (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 11). He quotes ethical emotivist C.L. Stevenson's definition equating the sentence 'This is good' with 'I approve of this; do so as well' (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 12).

Emotivism arose, according to MacIntyre (1981), as the Enlightenment programme of social progress failed. Nineteenth-century philosophers, most prominently Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, concluded that ethics could not be founded on reason. They turned to Hume, who had argued that morality could be founded on *either* reason *or* desire, and decided to try desire instead.

MacIntyre (1981), however, holds that the Enlightenment did not fail because it founded morality on reason but because the underlying logical structure of the argument was broken. This is where Aristotelianism comes into play. The logical structure of Aristotelian ethics is tripartite asking, first, what characterizes a human being, and third, what it would look like if that human being fulfilled his or her full potential. The intervening second step is then to create some advice (e.g., virtues, moral rules, and divine rules) that gets a human being from its current state to its fulfilled potential or *telos*.

Post-Antiquity, the tripartite structure could be easily adapted to a Christian worldview but suffered beyond repair in the Enlightenment, where human nature became conceptualized in terms of a struggle between passions and reason. To the extent that social life became an arena of the pursuit of self-interest and the individual the sole, autonomous agent in it, the idea of *developing* oneself to fulfill one's potential faded away. In logical terms, this meant that step (3), in the light of which step (2) had been defined, disappeared. Step (2) now became an 'end' in itself; hence, the reference to moral laws as ends in themselves. In the absence of a criterion for comparison (3), however, the choice between different suggestions concerning step (2) became arbitrary, a matter of belief, not to be decided on logical or empirical grounds.

Reestablishing the common good

Overcoming emotivism and value incompatibility therefore requires us to reestablish step (3), which MacIntyre refers to as the common good. How can we start thinking again about it, and how can we integrate it into our theories? Interestingly, sociology, even general or macro sociology, has very little to say about the 'good life' and about what societies should aspire to. By and large, recent sociology has been content with arguing for fair access to economic resources in order for every member of society to fulfill their potential and aspiration (Friedland, 2009b; Rosa, 2019) and/or has even suspected moral issues to hide 'real' issues of interest and power (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013). While there can be little doubt that possession of economic resources as a rule allows people to participate in society and fulfill their aspirations, and the lack of such resources prevents people from doing so, it has also become evident that economic resources may not suffice to generate happy people in a decent society. Rosa (2019), in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, is one of the few sociologists who are actually trying to propose virtues and modes of living that can claim to create a good life and to empirically evidence that claim.

Institutionalist theory, up to now, has had little stake in that endeavor. To say how virtues can be institutionalized or to suggest good candidates for the list, to provide evidence for good

practice or to analyze obstacles and failures would all constitute meaningful contributions to this aim. The majority of publications, however, deal with values in a, to use Hitlin and Vaisey's (2013) distinction, 'formal' way that directs attention to the process of value adoption, maintenance, or destruction and away from the content or substance of the value (for example, Besharov, 2014; Fayard et al., 2017; Gehman et al., 2013). A value in this sense can be any value, and in that understanding, even the mafia holds values (Vaccaro & Palazzo, 2015). I take no academic issue with these analyses and think they can contribute to our understanding of how values work and can be implemented. They do not, however, contribute to our search for the good life.

Meanwhile, there is a comparatively small (but growing) group of authors who propose virtues in the sense sketched above, as they present analyses of social movements, grassroots organizations (e.g., Daskalaki et al., 2019), organizational responses to societal challenges (e.g., Ferraro et al., 2015), or 'green' organization theory (e.g., Hoffman & Jennings, 2015; Jennings & Zandbergen, 1995). I hope these contributions will grow in number. For the time being, I will continue to explore a way to theoretically embed virtue in institutionalist value theory.

MacIntyre's conception of a virtue ethics

To create a focus for my discussion of the institutionalist literature, I will explain the details of MacIntyre's conception for one more section and in a bit more depth. In particular, I will discuss how he characterizes the common good and how it relates to virtues, practical wisdom, and enjoyment (Figure 1).

Eudaimonia and virtues

For Aristotle (1993, 2012), MacIntyre (1981) explains that the ultimate good must be social or public because a human being is a *zoon politikon*, and it must be guided by reason because a human being is an *animal rationale*, i.e., a being whose distinctive feature is reason. This anthropology is not based on an idea of a struggle between passions and reason that has dominated Western conceptions since the Enlightenment. It instead rests on the idea of a cooperation of reason and desire in which desire informs reason, though reason has the last word. I will elaborate on this aspect of practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) later. MacIntyre retains the ideas of politics and reason for his definition of the ultimate good but, parting from Aristotle, abandons the underlying anthropology. Human beings, to him, are not innately, universally or a priori sociable or reasonable, but they can be made to be, and it is demonstrably a good thing for society when they are.

The common good (or *eudaimonia*, in its Aristotelian usage), for MacIntyre (1981), is a vision of a flourishing community (see the 'good life' earlier) negotiated by that same community. This vision includes social values in the sense of specifications of individual behaviors that contribute to the flourishing of that community. Note that instead of understanding the attribute 'social' in 'social values' as 'shared' or 'intersubjective' (indicating origin), virtue ethics conceptualize it as 'directed towards a community' (indicating content). In this understanding, the value of freedom, for example, is a social value because it stipulates that a concrete community or society should guarantee the freedom of its individual members, and that these members should respect each other's freedom. Social values in this sense are always political values. MacIntyre calls them 'virtues'.

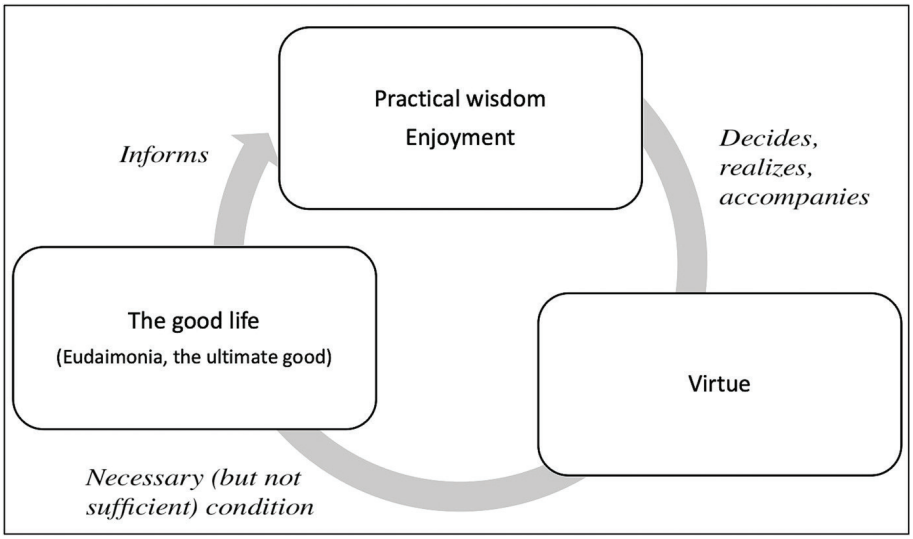

Figure 1. The three central elements of MacIntyre's ethics.

Virtues, however, are not simply instruments to bring the common good about. They do not guarantee success. Yet, the common good cannot be reached without them. To oversimplify: Everybody being honest, loyal, courageous, etc. does not guarantee a flourishing community, but such a community is impossible to achieve when these traits are missing. Instead of a linear-causal relationship between practice and good, MacIntyre proposes a co-constitutive relationship. He devotes a full chapter defining virtue as doing something because it is virtuous, as choosing the right course of action because it is right. There exists no tick-list of virtues that are instrumental in bringing about the good life (*eudaimonia*) as necessary or sufficient causes, nor do virtues constitute an aim in themselves, in the sense of 'I want to be courageous because it is good to be courageous'. Instead, the two central elements of MacIntyre's conception of virtues are, first, practical wisdom: 'I do this because it is the right thing to do'. The second element is enjoyment: 'I enjoy doing this because it is the right thing to do'. I will say more about both later. To return to our example, happily married spouses do not care for each other in order to have a happy marriage (as a higher end) but because it is what you do when you love each other. They also enjoy caring for each other.

Practical wisdom, enjoyment, and practice

The Aristotelian notion of *praxis*, which translates as 'doing', 'action', or 'practice', is different from *poiesis* (transl. making and producing) because it is an end in itself rather than an action producing an external end, often an object. Both, however, aim at a good. Someone playing the flute, an example of *praxis*, wants to play it well; someone carving a plate, an example of *poiesis*, wants to make a nice plate.

The aforementioned discussion should show that virtues cannot be defined a priori but only become meaningful in a particular social context. Physical strength, for example, is a virtue for a man in a warrior society but not in a clerical context. Within the right context, however, they provide a path to the ideal community, and the person within that community, at the same time as embodying that ideal.

Virtues, however, also have a personal, individual aspect. This aspect emphasizes the use of practical wisdom and the enjoyment that accompanies virtuous behavior. Practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) enables a person to deliberate when to break the rules and which course of action to choose to actually bring a purpose about (see Shotter & Tsoukas, 2014; Tsoukas, 2018 for applications of the concept in organization studies). In contrast to intellectual knowledge (*episteme*), practical wisdom deals with the contingent aspects of human life, with everything that does not follow eternal laws or logic. It embodies a logic of appropriateness. Virtue, as MacIntyre (1981) puts it, is the choice for the appropriate course of action. Since that choice is dependent on contingent factors, there can be no a priori list of virtues. Since there is no fixed list, people need to employ reason to judge (1) to which end a particular course of action will lead, and (2) whether this end is good. Practical wisdom is needed because life is anything but straightforward, and sometimes it may actually be good not to obey a moral law. (Despite the maxim that one should not lie, one can be honest *to a fault*, for example.) Life is also subject to luck and chance, and therefore, the best outcome may be contemplated but not always within our reach. Finally, the best intentions may remain just that and never translate into action, or worse, result in some disastrous happenings. From a virtue ethics perspective, therefore, the well-meaning fumbler is as unvirtuous as the bigot or the cynical calculator of the greatest good for all. Good intentions are important but so is the wisdom to realize them. This, in turn, implies that virtues are intrinsically linked to purposive action. A person is virtuous neither by chance nor by nature but through reflexive behavior developed and enhanced over time. Virtue is, in consequence, not about following a tick-box list of do's and dont's but involves an act of deliberation and evaluation of different courses of action. This deliberation becomes easier, the more habitual the virtuous practice becomes.

Virtue is, however, not just a cognitively determined behavior. On the affective side, enjoyment is an essential part of virtue. It is not enough to be good and do good, but the really virtuous character enjoys doing good and does good because she or he enjoys it. A man doing his duty with a sour face would be virtuous for Kant's *Gesinnungsethik* (Kant, 2016), but not for MacIntyre. A woman being generous in order to be seen to be generous would be virtuous for Mill's consequentialist ethics (Mill, 2008), but not for MacIntyre. The combination of practical wisdom and enjoyment can perhaps be seen most easily in examples like being a good painter, a good parent, or a good footballer – all require practical skills and wisdom, but also enjoyment, to be considered 'good'.

Integrating virtues into institutionalist theory

Theoretical requirements

In order to integrate a virtue ethics, any reconceptualization of institutionalist value theorizing thus needs to address the following issues: First, values need to be reconceptualized from being personal, intersubjectively incompatible, and emotionally driven beliefs to being social, public virtues. As I have explained earlier, the term 'social' here refers to the content being directed toward a flourishing community, not to the origin of those values. Second, the relationship between institutional practices and institutional values, or goods, needs to be reconceptualized as co-constitutive rather than as means-ends relationships. Third, values need to be reconceptualized as realizing

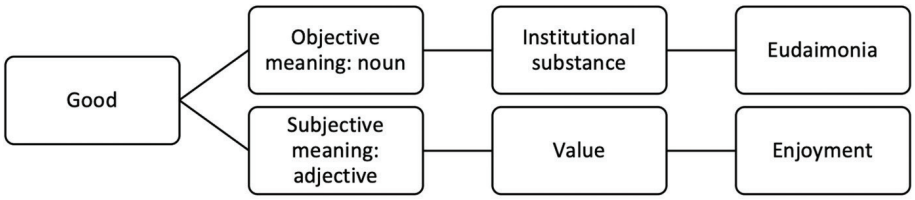

Figure 2. The polysemic quality of 'good'.

enjoyment when practiced instead of as resulting from, and driven by, a primordial and irrational emotional 'life force'. I will discuss these three issues in the following three sections.

As indicated earlier, I will use and modify Friedland's institutionalist value theorizing to conceptually anchor virtues in institutionalist theory. I do this not only because Friedland has arguably presented the most sophisticated theory on values in institutions but also because his theory is already built on Aristotelian foundations,[3] which makes it easier to introduce MacIntyre's (Aristotelian) concepts.

In Friedland's terminology, an *institutional logic* is the grammar that orders bundles of subjects, objects, and practices (Friedland, 2013b). This ordering is based on valuation (Friedland, 2018a). An *institutional substance* is the metaphysical foundation of the institutional logic (Friedland, 2013b). It is the good that grounds the valuation of an institutional logic (Friedland, 2018a). In this manner, institutional logics, institutional substances, valuations, and goods come together to define to core structure of an institution.

Common goods, not individual values

It is noticeable that in recent years, Friedland has shifted from calling the institutional substance an ultimate value (Friedland, 2009a, 2012) to defining it in terms of a good (Friedland, 2018a). One reason he gives is that the term 'good' has a polysemic quality that 'value' is lacking (see Figure 2). This polysemic quality refers to the fact that 'good' as an adjective expresses subjective positive attribution ('This is a good person'.) while as a noun it expresses an objective thing that can be possessed ('The good was shipped'.) (Friedland, 2018b). The term therefore allows him to fuse the subjective and objective aspect of valuation. Values, he maintains now, are based on a subjective ascription of value to a thing, whereas substance cannot be reduced to a subjective ascription (Friedland, 2018a). The latter is important because an institutional substance, i.e., the 'core' of an institution, cannot be considered to be purely subjective. On the other hand, Friedland needs the subjective aspect – positive valuation, desire, and belief – to energize and motivate actors' participation in institutions. As a consequence, Friedland now understands the institutional substance as an ultimate (public) good, which caters to the idea of *eudaimonia*. Its subjective, individual, and emotionally charged counterpart are values that are energizing actors. This speaks to the idea of enjoyment that I will discuss a bit later.

Friedland's conception of the good therefore already conveniently comprises the traditional institutional theorizing on values (in the subjective part of his conceptualization) as well as the virtue ethics theorizing (in the objective part of his conceptualization). What holds both parts together in his theory is a semantic (polysemic) connection. What we need, however, is a practical connection. This is supplied by MacIntyre's conceptualization of virtues as social values, i.e., values directed toward a common, or in Friedland's words, 'objective', good. This allows us to move from the branching structure that Friedland suggests, in which enjoyment is far away from eudaimonia, to the co-constitutive cycle proposed by MacIntyre in Figure 1. As we have seen there, virtues derive from, and embody, a particular social context that is shaped by and ideal of a flourishing community or common good (see also Figure 3).

Co-constitution, not rational action

The major challenge for a reconceptualization of values into virtues lies in a certain penchant of institutionalist theory to understand values as individually owned 'causes' for action. Traditionally, values form a component of the 'normative pillar' (Scott, 1998, 2003) and as such can cause practices to become institutionalized because they embody a value that a sufficient number of actors hold and that is important to them (Strang & Sine, 2002). This line of argument is closely tied to the 'old' institutionalism that understood this normative institutionalization to be the prime form of institutionalization (Stinchcombe, 1997). More recent theorizing, in contrast, has adopted a practice-theory approach in which values appear, though rarely in a prominent place in the argument. The institutional logics approach can be considered paradigmatic in that it dissolves the old 'pillars' into a rather fuzzy set of elements:

> [Institutional logics are the] socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, assumptions, values and

[3] Friedland (2018b) uses the Aristotelian term *ousia* as a synonym for substance. Most other descriptors he uses to describe an institutional substance are taken from Aristotle's conceptualisation of *ousia*, for example, that it is a final cause, unobservable, or a unity of form and matter.

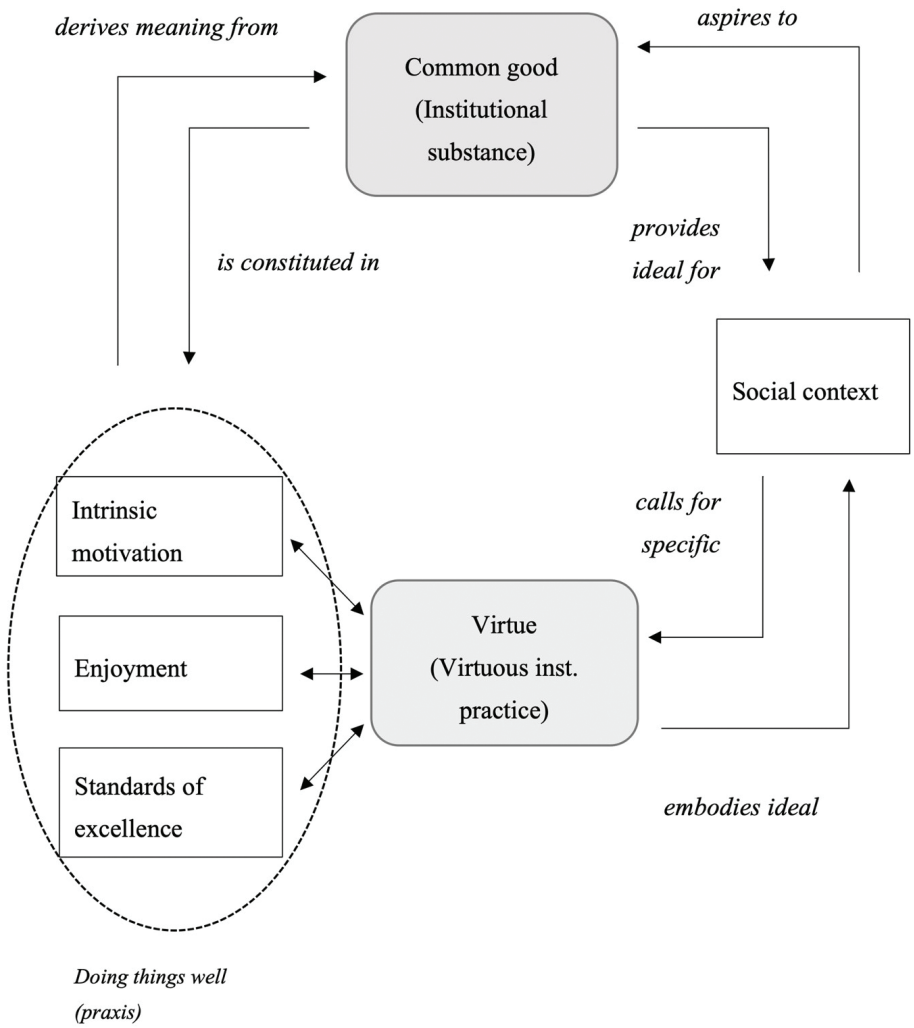

Figure 3. The relationship between common good, virtue, practice, and social context.

> beliefs by which individuals produce and reproduce the material subsystems…. (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 51)

These elements are considered to be co-constitutive, but the focus is much more on the 'nexus of sayings and doings' (Schatzki, 2001) than on the co-constitution of values and practices. Enjoyment plays no role in the discussion. And even within this practice-theory approach, many authors still refer to values as 'underlying' and 'foundations' from which action manifests itself. Values are often merged with interests as triggers and motivators for action, once more cementing the individual and personal nature of values. Kraatz et al. (2020, p. 35) even talk about values being 'useful in allowing us to see the person's fundamental autonomy and separateness from the institutional matrix'.

For Friedland, in contrast, the co-constitutive relationship between common good and institutional practice is central as he assumes that an institutional practice is a practice that derives its meaning from the goods that are immanent to it (Friedland, 2018b). The good is hence neither some underlying, hidden structure from which action manifests itself nor a primordial, or at least earlier, cause from which action flows. The common good and the institutional practice evolve together and at the same time.

Although the good is immanent in practice, it is therefore neither the cause nor the aim of the action. The former would stand at the beginning of the action, while the latter would be the projected end of it. The constitution of the good, however, happens at the same time and 'all along' the action, so to speak. It is co-constitutive with the practice, as Friedland puts it. In his words:

> In an institutional logic a value is not a quality of an institutional object or thing; it is consubstantial with the object and the material practices it affords and by which it is afforded. Institutional objects *are* values and depend for their objectivity on their incorporation of

> the value, as does the productivity of the practices effected through or with them. Institutional practice is valuation, a regime of particular value production; its evaluation derives from, is integral to and is consonant with that valuation. (Friedland, 2017, p. 21)

This means, first, that there is no value before the evaluation. It is not the classical situation of an evaluation taking place with regard to already established values. Instead, the values emerge during the evaluation. It means, second, that institutional practices, objects, or subjects come into existence during, and through, the evaluation. They do not exist independently of the evaluation. In short, we do things not because we have certain values that we seek to express in certain practices. We do things because we value them, and we value the things we do.

A few sentences later, Friedland speaks about institutional logics as 'tautological regimes'. This rather strong expression reiterates the insight that institutional practices uphold and manifest values we would not even know without them. The good of marriage, for example, i.e., what makes a happy marriage, only exists (as a recognizable 'package' of the spouses' values, feelings, and behaviors toward each other) because the institution of marriage exists. We cannot evaluate the happiness of a marriage by any other criterion than by the one it constitutes itself.

We can therefore import Friedland's conception directly into an institutional virtue ethics. Common good and virtuous practice are co-constitutive: The common good is constituted through virtuous practice, while virtuous practice derives its meaning from the common good (see also Figure 3).

Enjoyment, not irrational emotions

I have discussed in the previous section how the assumption of values as something 'underlying' action is problematic for a virtue ethics. I will now discuss the relationship between values and emotions in the institutionalist literature. As indicated earlier, there is a long tradition, in institutionalist theory as in other schools of organization theory, to emphasize the motivational and energizing function of values for action.

In this line of reasoning, values are often discussed as a motivational force for people to engage in institutional work (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; Weber et al., 2008) or, as the flip side of the coin, an instrument for institutions to socialize and discipline people into maintaining institutional arrangements (Creed et al., 2014; Lok et al., 2017). There is, moreover, a discussion of how institutional values allow people to connect to institutions in a nonrational, 'visceral' fashion (Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018, p. 434), a point that clearly borrows from the primordial conception of emotions as life forces. Although the authors in question often stress the dual (individual-social) nature of values, I would argue that the majority of these discussions still takes its cue from the idea of personal values that are shaped, promoted, or oppressed by the various societal forces of that individual's environment.

As indicated earlier, however, this idea of a primordial life force linked to individual, personal values was developed in life philosophy in reaction to the privileged position given to reason in the Enlightenment. Like this Enlightenment rationalism, however, life philosophy is based on a juxtaposition of reason and emotion that a virtue ethics rejects. The challenge is therefore to find a formulation in which the energizing force is linked not to a display of raw emotion but to the exertion of practical wisdom.

Throughout his writings, Friedland is explicit about the fact that an institutional substance is something that is enjoyed (Friedland, 2009b, p. 61) or even desired (Friedland, 2013a, 2018a). He conceptualizes emotions as providing the motivational energy to act and participate in institutions (Friedland, 2017). The pith and power of this belief rests on the affectual, nonrational elements of ultimate ends. Affect, as Friedland (2018a) summarizes, does not work through meaning and, by implication, rational discourse.

As I have argued in the first part of the article, however, the nonrational conceptualization of emotions conflicts with any attempt to create system integration. In Friedland's case, it requires him to differentiate between values and goods. Values are, to him (Friedland, 2017, p. 29), subjective attributions to an object, whereas goods are objective institutional substances that subjects may, or may not, desire.

Within the recursive framework of practice and good that I have described in the preceding section, however, good and practice co-constitute each other, as do value and good. The reason this works is that we have abandoned the Enlightenment understanding of the relationship between reason and emotion as antagonistic and have adopted an Aristotelian conceptualization of them as complementing each other in virtue.

What this means for enjoyment and pleasure is that they are not derived from giving free rein to one's emotions or of being 'authentic' by acting in a completely self-centered manner. Enjoyment comes from exercising virtue and practical wisdom, both of which are directed toward communal values and goals. This also implies that reason is not a 'cold' and impersonal rational logic, as pictured so brilliantly in Weber's iron cage. Practical wisdom is a humane form of reasoning that allows for feelings. As such, it has commonalities with Voronov and Weber's (2020) attempt to put people, rather than actors, at the heart of institutionalist theory, or with Creed et al.'s (2022) emphasis on the role of concern in institutionalized practices.

The enjoyment accompanying virtue is not innate or primordial but entrained and continuously practiced until it becomes a habit. This aligns with Friedland's idea of certain emotions that form parts of institutional formations and are, as a consequence, 'institutionally constituted and constitutive'

(Friedland, 2018a, p. 520). Reason and emotion are thus not opposite character forces battling each other but human capabilities that can be brought to support and enhance each other – this, indeed, is one of the goals of individual moral development according to Aristotle.

Enjoyment is therefore still a major driving force of virtuous practice, but this enjoyment comes from doing things well (the Aristotelian *praxis*) rather than from a self-centered or even egotistic self-actualization.

Synopsis

Drawing together the threads of my discussion, we can transform MacIntyre's original conception of a virtue ethics (Figure 1) into a more detailed description of the elements of a virtue ethics in institutionalist theory and their relationships (Figure 3). Summing up, both the common good (institutional substance) and the virtuous institutional practices are derived from particular social contexts, partly through rational discourse and negotiation in the community. There is a large body of institutionalist literature describing these institutionalization processes that I will not discuss in detail here. The institutional substance describes any number of features that the community should have and aspire to, while the virtuous institutional practices embody this ideal. Virtuous institutional practices are furthermore characterized by fulfilling a certain quality or standard of excellence ('doing something well') as well as by intrinsic motivation and enjoyment accompanying the actual activity. The latter does not necessarily spring from innate positive emotions regarding the activity but from entrained and habitual practice. Through being practiced, virtuous institutional practices establish and give meaning to the common good, while at the same time, the institutional substance is constituted through these practices.

A caveat: The historical nature of rational discourse

I have, with MacIntyre, repeatedly referred to the rational nature of the discourse that the search for the common good should entail. This rational discourse is central to my argument as it links the common good to practical wisdom and thus virtue. To avoid misinterpretation, it is important to elaborate on the nature of this rationality. 'Rationality', 'rational action', or 'rational discourse' are often[4] used to refer to a calculative means-end-rationality, as discussed by Weber (1979). It should be noted that this is not the kind of rationality I am referring to in my argument.

The previous sections presented a conceptualization of virtues and practice that despite its affective-habitual components and despite the contingency involved in practical wisdom is capable of rational argument concerning the common good and the settling of disputes. It precludes emotivism. The ability to settle disputes rests largely on three related factors. The first is the fact that the ultimate goods chosen are discursive rather than nonverbal. The second is the fact that they are chosen for a reason rather than out of personal attachment. This reason needs to be related to bringing about the common good. The third is that they refer to a collective good, or good for the society, which, in Western circumstances, we may conceive of as democratically constituted.

The rational argument I am proposing is therefore not based on a means-end-rationality, as virtues and the common good do not stand in a means-end-relationship. As I have stated earlier, it invokes not a logic of calculative optimization but of appropriateness. Some authors (e.g., Bourdieu, 1990) refer to it as 'reason' as distinct from 'rationality', but I will not pursue this distinction here.

This rationality does, furthermore, not spring from a Habermasian notion of universal rationality (Alexander, 2000). As I have argued earlier, there is no appeal to a universal anthropological quality called reason. Instead, MacIntyre (1981) proposes a rather pragmatic argument that invites us to choose between rational argument and emotional manipulation: If ultimate values are incompatible, then there is no ultimate reason or criterion for moral choice, which means that manipulating others becomes the only way to win a moral argument. This leads to rather quixotical situation in which we have a supposedly free, morally autonomous individual who is, by necessity, manipulating everybody else. People are considered autonomous and permanently manipulated by others at the same time. If we want to reject this quixotic situation, as MacIntyre (1981) argues, we should accept the kind of rational argument that the notions of common good and practical wisdom suggest.

As it is not universal, it must be an empirical, historically developed form of rationality. It is, for this reason, also inextricably linked to power structures, as not only Foucault has argued but also Friedland (Friedland, 2009b; Friedland & Arjaliès, 2019) stresses repeatedly. He (2009a) argues that power is not culturally neutral but constituted and constitutive. Again, he draws a line to the Aristotelian concept of *praxis* when he explains that institutional languages constitute before they justify and are therefore self-referential. If, as is the case in Aristotelian *praxis*, the good of an action lies in the action itself, then constitution and justification are collapsed. This, in turn, allows us to see truth, the ultimate point of reference of any rational discourse, not as universal and ahistorical but as grounded in practice (Friedland & Arjaliès, 2020).

4. I am thinking, for example, of Rational Choice Theory (Coleman, 1990), Agency Theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1994), or Transaction Cost Theory (Williamson, 2008).

The importance of this insight lies in the imperfection it brings with it. A historically developed form of reason carries within it historical power structures and thus biases and discrimination. There is no ultimate logical or ontological force that would necessitate its adoption. If unchecked, it can have a conservative function in prolonging the status quo of power. I would argue, with MacIntyre, that this is not optimal, but the best we have, and that we need to trust in public scrutiny to reveal these old structures of power.

Conclusion

My aim was to introduce virtues into institutionalist value theorizing to address the increasing shrillness and destructiveness of public discourse by reconceptualizing the way a particular (mainstream) field of academia thinks about values. At the same time, I wanted to address the critique of the apolitical nature of institutionalist theory by making a constructive suggestion of how to turn a hitherto neutral and formal discussion of values into a more politically sensitive conceptualization. I shall conclude with both in inverse order.

My theoretical concern, a politicized reconceptualization of institutional values into institutional virtues, is based on Friedland's value theorizing which I have infused with MacIntyre's communitarian ethics. I have proposed a conceptualization of institutions that embody and manifest virtues while, at the same time, socializing, regulating, and enthusing people to participate in them. Such institutions rest on public, democratic discourse without succumbing to the illusion of universal rationality as its core.

The core features of this conceptualization follow MacIntyre's interpretation of an Aristotelian ethics. They comprise, first, an abandonment of the antagonism between emotions and rationality in favor of practical wisdom and enjoyment; second, conceptualization of social values as values directed toward a common, social, public good ('virtues'); third, the understanding of a co-constitutive relationship between common good, virtuous practice, and emotions that grows over time and is subject to education and socialization; and fourth, the insight that the rationality guiding reason and public discourse is not an a priori logic but a situated, historical, and political affair.

Combining this conceptualization with Friedland's theory of institutional values, I have constructed a theoretical framework in which the common good is identified with the institutional substance as the entity that is co-constitutive with virtuous institutional practices. Such practices form a praxis of doing things well and comprise enjoyment, intrinsic motivation, as well as standards of excellence.

Speaking to my first, nonacademic, concern, I have presented a theory that can overcome the destructive effects of public discourse by understanding values not as incompatible but as social and directed toward a common good. I am not oblivious to the fact that academic discussion and a reconfiguration of a theoretical tool have very little immediate effect on what is happening 'out there'. This is as true for institutionalist theory as it is for other organization theories. I am, moreover, not a believer of creating any 'impactful' knowledge through the dissemination of blogs or yet another podcast. What I do believe, however, is that the concepts and implicit assumptions we teach and purport over decades and, in this case, centuries, have an effect on how lay people understand the world, and therefore of the means and ends they adopt in their private and public lives. As we have seen with economics and neoliberalism (Bourdieu, 2010; MacKenzie et al., 2007), the relationship between academic and public discourse is more that of a self-fulfilling prophecy than one of direct impact.

Clearly, the conceptualization presented in this article can only be a start, and further research is needed on the theoretical as well as on the empirical plane. One possible direction would take neo-institutionalism to a closer cooperation with our colleagues from macro or general sociology who provide many astute diagnoses of today's society and its problems. Many of these problems have an institutional, or institutional-organizational, aspect to them that institutionalist scholars, with their immense, big-tent toolkit, are well equipped to address. Moreover, this paper has only scratched the surface of philosophical ethics, and there is much more brilliant work there as well as in the fields of the Sociology of Morality (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013) or the Sociology of Values (Inglehart, 2018).

There is, furthermore, the nontrivial question of how institutional arrangements relate to human beings, as different from social actors (Voronov & Weber, 2020). Existing work on the institutional regulation of emotions (Creed et al., 2014; Moisander et al., 2016; Voronov & Vince, 2012; Voronov & Weber, 2016) or identities (Creed et al., 2010; Glynn, 2008), or on value-related agency in institutions (Friedland, 2013a; Vaccaro & Palazzo, 2015) should be revisited to develop a substantive, rather than formal, morality.

Both strategies, I hold, are necessary not only to address current societal challenges and problems but also to allow organizational institutionalism to participate in a discussion of what institutions are, what they are good for, and how they can contribute to a good life, and do so even beyond the confines of academia. Nicholas Rose (2013) has urged the social sciences and humanities to reclaim their power to define what it means to be human from the biological sciences. Academic disciplines, he reminds us, constitute regimes of truth regarding their objects of study. The same, I would argue, goes for institutions and institutionalist theory. We are not just distant observers but important contributors regarding the question what

institutions are and which role they play in society. It is of political consequence how we conceptualize institutions.

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