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# Theorizing Ideas and Discourse in Political Science: Intersubjectivity, Neo-Institutionalisms, and the Power of Ideas

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THEORIZING IDEAS AND DISCOURSE  
IN POLITICAL SCIENCE: INTERSUBJECTIVITY,  
NEO-INSTITUTIONALISMS, AND THE  
POWER OF IDEAS

**ABSTRACT:** *Oscar Larsson's (2015) essay condemns discursive institutionalism for the "sin" of subjectivism. In reality, however, discursive institutionalism emphasizes the intersubjective nature of ideas through its theorization of agents' "background ideational abilities" and "foreground discursive abilities." It also avoids relativism by means of Wittgenstein's distinction between experiences of everyday life and pictures of the world. Contrary to Larsson, what truly separates post-structuralism from discursive institutionalism is the respective approaches' theorization of the relationship of power to ideas, with discursive institutionalists mainly focused on persuasive power through ideas, while post-structuralists focus on the structural power in ideas or on coercive power over ideas.*

**Keywords:** *discourse; discursive institutionalism; discursive interaction; ideas; ideational power; intersubjectivity; post-structuralism.*

It is always a pleasure to be able to engage in discussion about the benefits and drawbacks of discursive institutionalism as an analytic framework, and

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in particular with proponents of post-structuralist approaches such as Oscar Larsson, who offers what he calls “sympathetic criticism” in his essay published in *Critical Review* (Larsson 2015).

Larsson’s main purpose is to argue that post-structuralism provides special insights into “discourse,” understood as the deep structures of meaning that affect ideas about politics, and which can blind political agents to the power exercised over them regarding who they think they are and what they are doing. He supports this argument in two ways. First, he elaborates on the importance of situating individuals’ ideas within the intersubjective, structural contexts that shape their thoughts and behavior, with extensive discussion of the works of post-structuralist and constructivist scholars to show that ideas are both subjective and intersubjective. Second, he contends that my discursive institutionalism “tends to minimize the social and intersubjective aspect of ideas and thereby neglects their pregiven, constraining elements” (Larsson 2015, 176). He encapsulates this criticism in the abstract to his article by claiming that discursive institutionalism “reduce[s] ideas to properties of individual conscious minds, scanting the respects in which ideas are intersubjectively baked into the practices shared by individuals” (Larsson 2015, 174). His main purpose is to contend that “we should not adopt these frameworks” and instead turn to post-structuralism.

These are fighting words in the arena of ideational and discursive scholarship, since they suggest that my work falls prey to “subjectivism” and other bad things, which justifies abandoning it in favor of post-structuralism. But they are also puzzling words, since Larsson’s charges in no way reflect what I actually say, since I too highlight the interconnections of the subjective and intersubjective nature of ideas in many different works, empirical as well as theoretical.

Larsson’s misreading of discursive institutionalism rests on three claims: first, as already noted, that my work is all about subjectivity rather than intersubjectivity; second, that I am wrong even to suggest the possibility of reconciling discursive institutionalism with the other neo-institutionalisms; and third, that my take on discourse fails to deal with its meaning content, because it is merely about discursive interaction, and Habermasian at that (another bad thing?).

I will briefly proceed with each of Larsson’s claims in turn, and then end with a discussion of what actually does separate discursive institutionalism from post-structuralism. This centers on different ways of understanding the nature of power and its relationship to ideas, with discursive

institutionalists mainly focusing on persuasive power *through* ideas while post-structuralists focus on the structural power *in* ideas and, in some cases, on coercive power *over* ideas. My overall goal here is to show that the post-structuralist approach does indeed diverge on certain points from my own but that, ever the reconciler, I find that it can be seen as complementary to rather than contradictory with discursive institutionalism.

### *What Is Discursive Institutionalism?*

But before we begin, a brief sketch of discursive institutionalism is in order. Discursive institutionalism has its origins in my desire to give a name to a very rich and diverse set of ways of explaining political and social reality that has long been pushed to the margins in political science by the growing domination of three older “new institutionalisms”—rational choice, historical, and sociological. With this naming exercise I seek to call attention to the significance of approaches that theorize not only about the substantive content of ideas but also about discourse. By discourse, I mean not just the representation or embodiment of ideas, but the interactive discursive processes by and through which agents generate and communicate ideas. The “institutionalism” in the name, meanwhile, underlines the importance of considering both ideas and discourse in institutional context, by which I mean the meaning context as much as the context of formal institutions, informal rules, and everyday practices.

My purpose in developing what is essentially an umbrella concept for all such approaches to ideas and discourse is not simply definitional. It is also constitutive, in that it seeks to identify a discursive sphere within which practitioners of these varied approaches can discuss, deliberate, and contest one another’s ideas from epistemological, ontological, methodological, and empirical vantage-points. As such, there are many different possible ontologies and epistemologies as well as methodologies that may fit under this larger conceptualization of discursive institutionalism, including my own particular approach and, dare I say it, that of Larsson.

### *The Subjective and Intersubjective Ontology of “Discourse”*

The first part of Larsson’s essay reviews the philosophical literature on ideas regarding the nature of subjectivity and the importance of intersubjectivity. He begins with a snapshot of post-structuralism’s approach to the

causal (or structuring) power of ideas, illustrating this approach by discussing Judith Butler's Foucauldianism, which claims that ideas and discourses of gender and sex produce the identities they aim to describe, with dominant discourses rather than nature naturalizing the differences between genders (Larsson 2015, 177). He goes on to consider the constitutive nature of ideas, meaning that ideas in many different forms help constitute social and political reality, citing a wide range of scholars, including Alexander Wendt, Ian Hacking, and John Searle. This is followed by a discussion emphasizing the importance of recognizing that the constitutive nature of ideas goes beyond subjectivity (agents' individual and subjective conceptualizations) to intersubjectivity, building on Alan Finlayson, Emanuel Adler, Pierre Bourdieu, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Anthony Giddens, Hacking, and more. Larsson here argues that intersubjectivity involves the structural and social dimension of ideas, meaning ideas that have become accepted by a wider set of actors and that take the form of collective knowledge, culture, and tradition. Intersubjectivity, Larsson continues, does not deny agency, because agents have the potential to both reproduce and alter structures as constraints, acting as a force for change by bringing concerns to their "discursive consciousness" (citing Giddens) and making tacit or explicit choices that break away from the (structuring) ways in which they are classified (citing Hacking) (Larsson 2015, 182–83). He ends by suggesting very briefly that institutions—both formal, as codified ideas, and informal, as ideational but non-codified—have a "very real and material structure" that affects material realities.

So far, so good. My own ontological approach to the nature of ideas in discursive institutionalism is very close to that discussed by Larsson, as elaborated both in articles to which he refers (i.e., Schmidt 2008, 2010, and 2011a) and in many others to which he does not (e.g., Schmidt 2000; 2002, ch. 5; 2006, ch. 5; 2011b; and 2012). It therefore came as a surprise when I began to read the second part of Larsson's essay, where he claims that my views about the constitutive nature of ideas agree with his, but that the rest of Discursive Institutionalism does not, because I stop at subjectivity, and close off any possibility of intersubjectivity.

To disprove that claim, rather than paraphrase my own words, I quote a passage from the article on discursive institutionalism to which Larsson refers most, which appeared in the *Annual Review of Political Science* (Schmidt 2008, 314):

[Discursive institutionalism] treats institutions at one and the same time as given, as structures which are the context within which agents think, speak, and act, and as contingent, as the results of agents' thoughts, words, and actions. As objects of explanation, such institutions are internal rather than external to the actors, serving both as structures (of thinking, saying, and acting) that constrain actors and as constructs (of thinking, saying, and acting) created and changed by those actors. As a result, action in institutions, instead of being the product of agents' rationally calculated, path-dependent, or norm-appropriate rule-following, is better seen as the process by which agents create and maintain institutions through the use of what we will call their "*background ideational abilities*," which underpin agents' ability to act within a given meaning context. But it does not stop here, because such institutional action can also be predicated upon what we will call the "*foreground discursive abilities*" through which agents may change (or maintain) their institutions. This represents the logic of communication which is at the basis of agents' capacity to think, speak, and act outside their institutions even as they are inside them, enabling them to deliberate about the institutional rules even as they use them, and to persuade one another to change those institutions or to maintain them.

My use of the term *background ideational abilities* builds on the work of many of the philosophers cited approvingly by Larsson, and clearly demonstrates my concern with the intersubjective basis of ideas. In my own elaboration of background ideational abilities, I specifically refer to Searle's (1995, 140–145) conception of "background abilities," but also cite Giddens and Wendt, while noting that I could equally have defined the concept using Bourdieu's "*habitus*" (with Searle himself noting the similarities) or the later Wittgenstein (Schmidt 2008, 315–316; see also 2012, 92–94).

But even though I explicitly base my ontology on intersubjectivity, could Larsson not still find me guilty of subjectivism, given my reference to the foreground discursive abilities that enable individuals to change or maintain their institutions? The answer is that here, too, I am clear about the intersubjectivity involved. Rather than, in Larsson's (2015, 189) words, "overemphasizing the autonomy of agents by relying on individuals' ideas and actions to explain change ... (which) threatens to deprive us of the ability to recognize and explain the existence and continuity of institutions," I make clear that individuals act within the context of ongoing, existing institutions even as they may seek to change or to maintain them. Background ideational abilities and foreground discursive abilities operate in tandem, with discourse working at both the everyday level

of people living in continuing institutions (as both structures and constructs) and at a meta-level that involves people's second-order critical communication about what goes on in their institutions. This meta-level refers to individuals' ability to think outside the institutions in which they continue to act, to talk about such institutions in a critical way, to communicate and deliberate about them, to persuade one another to change their minds about their institutions, and then to take collective action to change them (Schmidt 2008, 316; 2010, 15–16; 2011b).

But one might further ask, couldn't my emphasis on foreground discursive abilities, along with the interactive processes of discourse, nonetheless support Larsson's charge that "Schmidt uses 'discourse' as essentially equivalent to strategic communicative action," which "has little to do with discourse viewed as a framework of meaning" (2015, 190)? Again, Larsson misrepresents my arguments, both because I use discourse as a framework of meaning and because discourse understood as an interactive process is not simply equivalent to strategic communicative action—although it does build on Habermas, among others.

As I have stated explicitly time and again, I use the term "discourse" because it spans the divide between the substantive content of ideas and the interactive processes of discourse through its embodiment of both.<sup>1</sup> Notably, not only do I elaborate on the many different ways in which ideas are discursively developed, such as through cognitive and normative arguments, at different levels of generality, including policies, programs, and philosophies, and in many different forms, from frames, stories, and narratives through discursive practices and struggles. I also explicitly refer to the benefits of post-structuralism in exploring the meaning content of discourse in innovative ways, including in the seminal work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and its application by David Howarth and co-authors (2000)—although admittedly I don't mention them in the three articles cited by Larsson (but see Schmidt 2011a and 2011b).

My guess is that part of what Larsson doesn't like in my *Annual Review* article (Schmidt 2008) is that I move directly from a theoretical discussion of the different forms taken by ideas and discourse to an empirical discussion of examples from a wide range of approaches, without explicitly referencing post-structuralism. And he is correct to note that "any notion of 'subjectification,' reference to identity or identity formation is left out of the picture" (Larsson 2015, 190). But isn't it possible to discuss the meaning context of discourse without limiting it to a post-structuralist definition?

Moreover, why is it a problem if, in addition to defining discourse in terms of its meaning context, one also discusses it in terms of the interactive processes involved? Why is Larsson so intent on insisting that my use of discourse is only about strategic communication and “debate,” which he then claims ensures that the ideas in such debates “are primarily regarded as properties of individuals who are disconnected from ideational structures and existing discourses” (2015, 190)? Could it be because he can make the case for my approach falling into the “sin” of subjectivism only if he ignores my entire discussion of the ontological foundations of discursive institutionalism while denying any validity to my (non-post-structuralist) definition of the meaning context of discourse?

To set the record straight, my discussion of the interactive side of discourse assumes the meaning context as a given even as it discusses a wide range of interactive discursive processes involving policy actors engaged in a “coordinative” discourse of policy construction, and political actors engaged with the public in a “communicative” discourse of deliberation, contestation, and legitimization (Schmidt 2000, 2002, 2006, and 2008). In the coordinative discourse, the agents of change may be individuals acting as policy “entrepreneurs” (Kingdon 1984) or “norm entrepreneurs” (Keck and Sikkink 1998) and/or groups of individuals in discursive communities, whether in loosely connected “epistemic communities” that share cognitive and normative ideas about a common policy enterprise (Haas 1992); closely connected “advocacy coalitions” that share ideas and access to policymaking (Sabatier 1993); “discourse coalitions” that share ideas over extended periods of time (Hajer 2003); or expert networks of actors who share ideas and technical expertise (Seabrooke and Tsingou 2014). In the communicative discourse, political agents generally translate the ideas developed in the coordinative discourse into language accessible to the general public. Such agents may be political leaders, elected officials, party members, policy makers, spin doctors, or others who act as “political entrepreneurs” as they attempt to form mass public opinion (Zaller 1992) or engage the public in debates about the policies they favor (Mutz et al. 1996). Such agents also include the media, interest groups acting in the specialized “policy forums” of organized interests (e.g., Rein and Schön 1994), public intellectuals, opinion makers, social movements, and even ordinary people through their “everyday talk” (Mansbridge 1999). The directional arrows of these discursive interactions may be top to top among political and/or technical

elites, top down through the influence of elites, or bottom up via civil society, social-movement activists, or ordinary people.

The interactive side of discourse, thus, is a lot more than simply about “strategic communication.” It encompasses a wide range of discursive interactions in both policy and political spheres that ensure a mix of subjectivity, as individuals are engaged in communicative interaction; and intersubjectivity, as their communications and actions are naturally based in a given institutional context. And most importantly, by paying as much attention to the interactive side of discourse as the meaning side, I am able to focus attention not just on the continuities in such agents’ discursive structures but also on the dynamics of change (and continuity) in agents’ (re)structuring ideas in institutional context.

### *Institutions, Neo-Institutionalisms, and the Epistemology of Discursive Institutionalism*

What remains to be explained, therefore, is the nature of the institutional context, and whether this must be defined solely in terms of the meaning context of ideational structures and discourses (as Larsson insists) or can also be open to the institutional forms considered in the other neo-institutionalisms.

On the question of the constitution of the institutional context, Larsson charges discursive institutionalism with being incoherent. For, in its “attempt to reconcile the various forms of institutionalism,” it “works from the assumption that objective and material interests can both, with the *addition* of ideas, be included within a single analytical framework” (2015, 190). To respond: I define institutional context as the meaning context, as discussed above, and do not include objective and material interests in discursive institutionalism. But I do maintain openness to the various forms of neo-institutionalism.

By openness, I mean that discursive institutionalists, as scholars of ideas and discourse who themselves often come out of and/or engage with one or more of the other neo-institutionalist traditions, *may* use the *results* of such studies as background information or as issues to be debated and investigated (Schmidt 2010). However, I make it clear that this does not mean that neo-institutionalists’ assumptions about objectivity or material interests can be included in the framework of discursive institutionalism. Much the contrary, I discuss at great length the divides in

ontology and epistemology between more rationalist or materialist-oriented neo-institutionalisms and discursive institutionalism. In fact, I insist precisely that “one cannot talk about ‘objective’ interests as opposed to ideas because all interests *are* ideas and because ideas *constitute* interests, such that all interests are ‘subjective.’ Institutions, as the product and subject of ideas, cannot constitute (rationalists’) neutral incentive structures” (Schmidt 2008, 317).

But this raises a further set of epistemological questions for constructivists with regard to what we can know about the world with any certainty. For if everything is related to ideas and discourse, with no “neutral incentive structures” or “objective” and “material” interests, how can one avoid falling into some sort of extreme idealism or relativism, in which one can’t know anything for certain, because the world is radically uncertain or even immaterial? The answer is that discursive institutionalism assumes the existence of material reality, but it opposes the (rationalist) conflation of material reality and interests into “material interests.” Material reality is, rather, the setting within which or in response to which agents may conceive of their interests (Schmidt 2008, 2012).

But what, then, is material reality or, better, what is “real” even if it is not “material”? Searle (1995) is once again useful, in this case for his differentiation between “brute facts”—which, like mountains, are material because they exist regardless of whether sentient agents acknowledge their existence—and “social facts,” of which “institutional facts” are a subset. Institutions are not material because they don’t exist without sentient agents, but they are real to the extent that the collective agreements by which they were established continue to hold and, like the institution of property or of money, are real and have causal effects (Schmidt 2008, 318; 2012, 96–97).

To get a clearer sense of how this matters with regard to knowledge and certainty, I find illuminating the later Wittgenstein’s little-noticed distinction in *On Certainty* between language-games based on our experience and those based on our pictures of the world (Schmidt 2008, 2012). Language-games based in our everyday experiences in the world are generally very certain, since they ordinarily admit of no doubts and mistakes—such as knowledge of one’s own name and address, of the number of one’s hands and toes, and of the meanings of the words one uses. By contrast, language-games based in our pictures of the world often follow from our (social) scientific interpretations of the world—such as belief in the existence of the earth one hundred years ago, in

the events of history, in the temperature at which water boils, or, say, in the materialist incentives structures that determine economic behavior. These always allow for doubts, mistakes, and even gestalt switches or radical conversions, even though some such picture-games may also allow for much less doubt because they sit at the “foundation” of our picture of the world, as part of the very “scaffolding” of our thoughts (Wittgenstein 1972, #s 211, 234; Schmidt 2008, 318–19, and 2012, 97–100).

This distinction between matters that have to do with our experiences of everyday life and those involving our pictures of the world suggests that social scientists’ explanations have different kinds as well as degrees of certainty, depending on their objects of inquiry. In the case of matters close to everyday life, the “facts” about agents’ experiences are usually not in dispute (at least until the advent of “post-truth” politics) even if the interpretations are, and agreement on the facts is not likely to change radically even if there may be some question about which facts to take into account in the interpretation of events. By contrast, the “facts” involving agents’ pictures of the world, say, deduced through the mathematical models of economists—with their pictures of rational actors in the business of rationally calculating their interests in order to maximize their utility—can be upended, in particular when the models fail to predict, as in the massive financial market crash of 2007–2008 (Schmidt 2012, 98–99). That said, deep structures of meaning matter, such that the ideas at the foundations of our understanding of the economic world continue, which is why neoliberalism has remained resilient up until recently (Schmidt and Thatcher 2013; Schmidt 2016). Since Donald Trump’s election, however, these ideas have been subject to increasing contestation, as new rhetorical strategies using uncivil language and the new social media in a “post-truth” environment have served to reshape the political landscape by framing debates in ways that challenge conventional political discourse and action (Schmidt 2017).

### *The Power of Ideas: Real Differences between Post-Structuralism and Discursive Institutionalism*

If I have successfully demonstrated that discursive institutionalism is constructivist with a subjective and intersubjective approach to contextualized meaning, then how, one might ask, does it differ from post-structuralism?

And, leaving aside Larsson's misreadings of discursive institutionalism, why might we agree with his counsel to other post-structuralists to be careful when attempting to merge approaches? The reasons are found in the different ways in which the two approaches conceive of the nature of power and its relationship to ideas.

Many of the approaches that generally fit under the discursive institutionalist umbrella do not theorize power, but instead simply state that ideas have power (e.g., Blyth 2002; Campbell 1998; Cox 2001; Kingdon 1984). The problem here, as a result, is that with few exceptions (notably Béland 2010), the matter of *how* ideas have power remains under-theorized and underinvestigated.

Post-structuralists such as Foucault (2000), Gramsci (1971), and Laclau and Mouffe (1985), instead, put power at the center of their understanding of ideas, be it as discursive formations, hegemony, ideology, or the production of subjectivity. The problem here is that power and discourse are so often intermingled that any empirical discourse analysis is imbued with the theoretical focus on domination by elites, such that investigation centers on how elite ideas control the ways in which people come to think about politics and society. For political scientists who do not start with these premises (although they might end with them as conclusions), embedding substantive theory about power relations in the methodology risks over-determining the results.

Lately, in conjunction with Martin Carstensen, I have developed a systematic theorization of constructivist ideas about ideational power that seeks to set these approaches, among others, in perspective (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016). Drawing on both existing ideational scholarship and the larger power debate in political science (focused mainly on coercive, structural, and institutional power), we define ideational power as the capacity of actors (whether individual or collective) to influence other actors' normative and cognitive beliefs through the use of ideational elements. We note that acts of ideational power—whether successful or not—occur in only a subset of the relations relevant for understanding how ideas matter, namely when actors seek to influence the beliefs of others by promoting their own ideas at the expense of others'.

In this view, ideational power has certain distinguishing features. First, it is exerted through the constitution of intersubjective meaning structures that agents both draw on, to give meaning to their material and social circumstances, and battle over, to affect which ideas and discourses are deemed viable. Second, ideational power is conceived as both a top-down and a

bottom-up process. That is, ideational power takes seriously not only the discursive struggles occurring among policy actors at the top of the power hierarchy, but also those related to the effort of political actors at the bottom to get their ideas across to the general public. This contrasts with the singular focus on top-down interaction generally characterizing the coercive, structural, and institutional understandings of power in ideationally insensitive political science (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 321–22).

With this in mind, we have identified three ways of theorizing about the power of ideas and discourse. These include looking for persuasive power *through* ideas via discourse, looking for coercive power *over* ideas and discourse, and looking for structural or institutional power *in* ideas and discourse.

Power *through* ideas is the most common approach to ideational power among discursive institutionalists. It consists of the capacity of actors to persuade other actors of the cognitive validity and/or normative value of their views of what they should think and do through the use of ideational elements. They tend to do this via discourses that serve to explain and/or legitimate their proposals and actions, whether in coordination with other policy actors (coordinative discourse) or in communication with the public (communicative discourse). This is not necessarily a completely “rational” process in the sense that the most powerful necessarily are the ones with the “best” argument. Instead, the persuasiveness of an idea depends on both the cognitive and normative arguments that can be mustered in its support. In this view, ideational power is not primarily about manipulating people into not recognizing their “real interests” (Lukes 1974), but rather about persuading other agents about one’s understanding of an issue based on available intersubjectively held ideas (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 323–26).

Power *over* ideas is the capacity of actors to control and dominate the meaning of ideas either directly, by imposing their ideas on others, or indirectly, whether through shaming opponents into conformity or by resisting alternative interpretations. This version of ideational power connects with more coercive forms of power, since here the beliefs of others are directly disregarded. It is the most common approach to ideational power taken by ideationally insensitive scholars, who see this power as the capacity of actors who control most of the levers of traditional power—coercive, structural, and/or institutional—to therefore also promote their own ideas to the exclusion of all others. However, power *over* ideas can alternatively be seen as the coercive power of actors who are usually

powerless in the sense that they enjoy little access to coercive, institutional, and structural forms of power, but who, by the use of discursive means, are able to shame otherwise powerful actors to act in ways they would not otherwise have done—as in the case of progressive social movements. Finally, power over ideas can manifest itself in the ability of actors who are normally quite powerful in terms of institutional position and authority to, themselves, not listen to alternative ideas—as with many economists in the neoliberal era (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 326–28).

Power *in* ideas focuses on the authority certain ideas enjoy in structuring thought at the expense of other ideas. This power can be seen as structural or institutional. Structural power in ideas results from agents having established hegemony over the production of subject positions, and is generally the focus of post-structuralists. Institutional power in ideas is a consequence of institutions imposing constraints on which ideas agents may take into consideration, and is mostly the domain of historical institutionalists. While the other forms of ideational power generally concentrate on the interactions between ideational agents, power *in* ideas mostly concerns the deeper-level ideational and institutional structures that actors draw upon and relate their ideas to in order for them to gain recognition from elites and the mass public (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 329–331).

What is particularly interesting about power *in* ideas is that it can be seen as even more “powerful” in some sense than coercive or structural power. While coercive power forces agents to do what they might not want to do, agents may at least be aware of this domination, like it or not. In the case of Foucault’s structuring ideas, by contrast, the ideational structure dominates not just what agents do but also what they think and say, while for Bourdieu (1994), the *doxa* or vision of the world of elites who dominate the state creates the *habitus* that conditions people to see the world in the way they (the dominant) choose (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 331).

Ironically, however, one could also argue that Foucault and Bourdieu themselves use power *through* ideas to make others aware of the underlying structuring power of the discourse or *habitus* of people’s everyday lives. As such, their work uses the “foreground discursive abilities” noted above to step outside the *doxa* or discourse by means of their own writings, and through interactive discourse and debate to encourage others to reason, argue, and change the structures they use. Gramsci (1971) makes this explicit when he emphasizes the role of intellectuals in breaking the hegemonic discourse. But beyond even Gramsci, it is necessary to point to the importance of public debates in democratic societies in serving to expose the power *in*

ideas that serve as vehicles for elite domination and power. Significantly, Foucault's own work has often been used in the social movement literature to demonstrate how NGOs' power *through* ideas, to persuade first other activists and then the general public of the cognitive validity and normative value of their views, has become not only power *over* ideas, by forcing political leaders to accept such views, like it or not, but also power *in* ideas, as these ideas then come to structure subsequent thought. A perfect example of this triple power of ideas is Charlotte Epstein's (2008) case study of the shift social movements effected in the discourse on whaling. Activism that convinced the larger public to change its ideas (power *through* ideas) about whales and whaling moved the discourse on killer whales from creatures that could and should themselves be killed, as in "Moby Dick" (power *in* ideas), to "Moby Doll" and a total interdiction on killing whales (power *in* other ideas), which in turn served to shame governments in the international arena (power *over* ideas) to change their discourse and rules.

\*                     \*                     \*

In conclusion, let me reiterate that discursive institutionalism is an umbrella concept that constitutes a wide field, with many different approaches to ideas and discourse. It can accommodate all three forms of ideational power, including my own particular focus on persuasive power *through* ideas and Larsson's on post-structuralist power *in* ideas. These are admittedly different, and are accompanied by other subtle differences in ontology and epistemology that push post-structuralists to investigate questions related to the deepest structures of meaning, while discursive institutionalists explore a wider range of questions that go from ideas through discursive interactions in institutional context. But rather than seeing these differences as so irreconcilable as to warrant the exclusion of one or the other approach, I prefer continued engagement, mutual learning, and friendly contestation as the pathway forward.

#### NOTE

1. As a side note, using the term *discourse* in articles and books directed at convincing mainstream political science of the value of explanations in terms of ideas and discourse has been tricky business, and was even more so when I first began making these arguments in the late 1990s and early to mid 2000s (e.g., Schmidt 2000, 2002, and 2006), at a time when *discourse* was seen by the mainstream as a dangerous word. This should help explain my comment about using discourse as a generic

term “stripped of post-modernist baggage” (Schmidt 2008, 305). This was not meant as a slight to post-modernism or post-structuralism but rather as an indication to political scientists of what I intended to do, which was to develop an application of the term in a manner different from the way in which it had been used heretofore. My own experience, in presentations since the mid-1990s, had also taught me that such a “trigger warning” helped to ensure that political scientists might just stop long enough to listen.

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