

# Institutions, Anomie, and Violent Crime: Clarifying and Elaborating Institutional-Anomie Theory

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# Institutions, Anomie, and Violent Crime: Clarifying and Elaborating Institutional-Anomie Theory

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A limited but accumulating body of research and theoretical commentary offers support for core claims of the “institutional-anomie theory” of crime (IAT) and points to areas needing further development. In this paper, which focuses on violent crime, we clarify the concept of social institutions, elaborate the cultural component of IAT, derive implications for individual behavior, summarize empirical applications, and propose directions for future research. Drawing on Talcott Parsons, we distinguish the “subjective” and “objective” dimensions of institutional dynamics and discuss their interrelationship. We elaborate on the theory’s cultural component with reference to Durkheim’s distinction between “moral” and “egoistic” individualism and propose that a version of the egoistic type characterizes societies in which the economy dominates the institutional structure, anomie is rampant, and levels of violent crime are high. We also offer a heuristic model of IAT that integrates macro- and individual levels of analysis. Finally, we discuss briefly issues for the further theoretical elaboration of this macro-social perspective on violent crime. Specifically, we call attention to the important tasks of explaining the emergence of economic dominance in the institutional balance of power and of formulating an institutional account for distinctive punishment practices, such as the advent of mass incarceration in the United States.

## 1. Introduction

The influence of the anomie perspective in criminology has risen and fallen over the past seven decades or so. Merton’s well known formulation, which was originally published in 1938, dominated sociological inquiry into crime during the 1950s and 1960s, only to be relegated by some to the dustbin of criminological history (Hirschi 1969; Kornhauser 1978; see also Messner and Rosenfeld 2007, 12–14). However, researchers have subsequently responded to critiques of earlier formulations of anomie theory, crafted expanded versions of the theory, and applied the theory in novel ways. To paraphrase Mark Twain, developments in the discipline in the latter years of the twentieth century and the beginning

of the twenty-first century suggest that the earlier reports of the death of anomie theory had been greatly exaggerated.

One effort to revive and revitalize the anomie perspective in criminology has been the formulation of “institutional-anomie” theory (hereafter IAT). The core arguments of this approach were initially presented as part of an explanation of the comparatively high rates of serious crime in the United States (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007). Over time, these arguments have evolved into a theoretical framework with more general applicability. The distinguishing feature of IAT is its principal focus on culture and social structure as manifested in social institutions. Following in the spirit

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of Durkheimian sociology, IAT is built upon the underlying premise that the “normal” levels and forms of criminal activity in any society reflect the fundamental features of social organization.

In this paper, we seek to further advance the IAT research program by clarifying key concepts, elaborating the arguments about the impact of social organization on levels of violent crime, and extending the scope of the theory. We begin with a formal treatment of the core concept of “institutions,” explaining how it has been derived from and expands upon the classic conceptualization employed by Talcott Parsons (1990 [1934]).<sup>1</sup> This exercise in conceptual clarification is fruitful for two reasons. One, it highlights the central role of cultural values in understanding institutional dynamics. We take this important insight as a point of departure for explicating in greater detail than in previous statements of the theory the kinds of fundamental value orientations that are theorized to be conducive to pervasive criminal violence in the advanced societies. Two, our explication of the concept of “institutions” draws attention to some of the individual-level processes upon which IAT implicitly rests. Concrete human actors ultimately produce and reproduce the institutional dynamics that operate at the macro level. A comprehensive statement of IAT thus requires identification of the linkages between the level of social systems and the level of individual action. By elaborating cultural processes and identifying the multilevel linkages implicit in IAT, we can uncover new “puzzles” that might stimulate research on violent crime in the future.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The Concept of “Social Institutions”

As noted, IAT adopts a conceptualization of “institutions” that is derived from Parsons’ work on general sociological theory (see also Bellah et al. 1991, 287–306) and is compatible with more recent applications in other social science disciplines. Parsons explains that two valid approaches to the study of institutions can be differentiated: the “subjective” and the “objective” (Parsons 1990 [1934], 319). The

former adopts the viewpoint of the actor and is essential for understanding individual-level behavior. The latter refers to the perspective of the sociological observer and is particularly relevant to the characterization of the institutional order in society at large.

From the subjective point of view, institutions play an influential role in guiding “action,” which generally involves some kind of “means-ends” relationship.<sup>3</sup> Actors formulate goals (ends), and they choose “suitable” means (or ways) of obtaining these goals. The “suitability” of the means can be determined with reference to a specified standard of rationality. The precise standard of rationality invoked differs depending on the nature of the ends. For example, the appropriate standards for assessing the rationality of empirical ends (e.g., securing resources) differ from those that pertain to transcendental ends (e.g., attaining salvation).

Individual actors have multiple ends and multiple sets of means that involve “complex ‘chains’ of means-ends relationships, so constituted that the ‘end’ of one sector of the chain is a means to some further end” (Parsons 1990 [1934], 322). Moreover, for social order to exist, different individuals must coordinate their actions. Parsons assumes that this can only occur if there is an appreciable degree of integration of ultimate ends among those in a social system. In other words, he assumes that a concrete, on-going society presupposes a value system that is to some meaningful degree shared or common to the members of that society. Of course, not all people embrace every single value, and even those who accept the values do not always act in ways compatible with them. Nevertheless, Parsons maintains that a situation lacking any agreement on ultimate values would be highly unstable and would likely lead to chaos, i.e., the Hobbesian state of nature, the war of all against all.

The common value system is, therefore, the foundation on which social institutions rest for Parsons. The members of society collectively formulate or accept rules, or regulatory

<sup>1</sup> A preliminary effort along these lines can be found in Messner and Rosenfeld (2004).

<sup>2</sup> See Cole (1975) for a discussion of problem-generation as a key latent function of theories.

<sup>3</sup> Parsons has often been accused of overextending the means-ends conceptualization of action, blurring, for example, the distinctive features of habitual or expressive behaviour and

glossing over the human potential for creativity (see, e.g., Joas 1997). In the context of our present discussion we let this matter rest.

norms, that govern the means that are judged to be acceptable in the pursuit of ends. These norms are accompanied by sanctions, and they have an obligatory quality surrounding them; they are in an important sense “coercive” to use Durkheim’s language (1964b [1895]). There are of course a multitude of norms that pertain to different forms of behavior, and it is accordingly useful to conceptualize systems of regulatory norms that pertain to particular kinds of tasks and performances that are commonly differentiated on the basis of functional considerations. These systems of rules or regulatory norms constitute the major social institutions in a society (e.g., the economy, the family, etc.).

Parsons has been legitimately criticized for exaggerating the degree of value consensus in concrete societies and for largely neglecting the role of factors other than institutional norms that can coordinate action and create social order, such as the exercise of raw or “charismatic” power, and considerations of self-interest. Similarly, although he acknowledges a role for “implicit” rules in constraining behavior (1990 [1934], 329), he does not display much appreciation for the extent to which social interactions are infused with taken-for-granted presumptions that have little direct relationship to any ultimate value system. Nevertheless, his analytic framework introduces some highly useful conceptual distinctions for institutional analysis. For example, a common approach to institutions is to equate them with observed patterns of behavior. From this perspective, behaviors that occur with a high degree of regularity are “institutionalized” behaviors. Parsons, in contrast, restricts his conceptualization of institutions to the rules that contribute to the emergence of these regular patterns of behavior. A very similar approach appears in the “new institutionalism” that has emerged in economics, political science, and economic sociology in recent decades. As Douglass North puts it: “Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction” (1990, 3).

The analytic distinction between the “rules of the game” or institutional norms and concrete forms of behavior is critically important because it allows for an empirical assessment of the role of institutional controls in contrast with the role of other factors. Parsons recognizes that concrete

behaviors are determined by many factors, including the physical environment, biological heredity, and psychological traits (1990 [1934], 320). If institutions are equated with behavioral regularities themselves, it is impossible to isolate the distinctive contribution of institutional factors in the explanation of these behaviors.

Parsons also distinguishes between moral and utilitarian sources of compliance with institutional norms. He theorizes that the primary motive for obeying an institutional norm “lies in the moral authority it exercises over the individual” (1990 [1934], 326). When a norm is imbued with such authority, the actor complies with the norm because the prescribed behavior is “good for its own sake” and is not merely a means to some other end. The moral authority of institutional norms, however, is never perfect. A secondary, utilitarian type of control invariably accompanies the moral type in ongoing societies. This involves a “calculation of advantage” rooted in an appeal to interest, which may take the form of positive advantages on the one hand or disadvantageous consequences on the other.

Shifting from the “subjective” to the “objective” view of institutions, Parsons goes on to argue that institutions themselves can be thought of as constituting a collective system. Each institution has implications for others. In his words, the institutions are inter-related with respect to their mutual “requiredness” (1990 [1934], 332). The norms of a given institution are not compatible with just any kinds of norms in other institutions. Only some kinds of norms would “fit” with others. The degree of fit between institutions can be understood as constituting the degree of “structural integration” of the institutional order. Parsons cites the medieval relations between church and state as an instance of weak structural integration. Each of these institutions “claimed an allegiance which inevitably encroached on the requirements of the other” (1990 [1934], 332).

Parsons identifies an additional feature of the institutional order—its “regulatory integration” (1990 [1934], 332). This refers to the degree to which and the means by which institutional norms govern behavior in practice. In a hypothetical society with perfect regulatory integration, conformity with the norms would be universal and would be brought

about entirely by the moral authority of the norms. Such a hypothetical concept is not intended as a “descriptive category” but as an “ideal type,” a “polar concept” (1990 [1934], 332). Such a society will not exist in the empirical world. At the opposite end of the continuum is a hypothetical society wherein the moral authority of the norms has dissolved. Initially, considerations of self-interest might produce conformity with social norms in such a society, although Parsons anticipates that such a situation would eventually result in a “loss of control even by that means” (1990 [1934], 333). Following Durkheim (1966 [1897]), Parsons uses the term “anomie” to refer to the situation in which the moral authority of the institutional norms has broken down (see also Merton 1964). In essence, a high degree of anomie implies that concrete behavior is no longer “institutionalized” in the sense of being governed by the moral authority of social norms.

In sum, Parsons has put forth a useful, albeit highly abstract, analytic framework for institutional analysis that potentially has wide applicability for understanding social phenomena. Institutions refer to systems of rules intended to control behavior that have the distinctive quality of being “moral,” i.e., rooted in some overarching value system.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, processes of institutional control can be understood as operating at dual levels. At the individual level, institutional rules constitute part of the environment confronting actors as they select the means to realize their ends. At the macro-level, institutions form different configurations exerting constraining but also orienting and enabling influences upon the members of society. Though these configurations ultimately arise from and are maintained by individual and collective actions their emergent properties (that need to be theoretically reconstructed) cannot be (fully) “designed” by specific actors.

### 3. Institutional-Anomie Theory

IAT builds on and adapts this general framework for institutional analysis to explain the specific phenomenon

of crime. In so doing it also draws liberally on Merton’s variant of the anomie perspective (1968:189), incorporating in particular his keen insights about the tendency of considerations of technical expediency to override moral concerns under conditions of extreme anomie. However, whereas Merton places primary emphasis on the stratification system when considering the social structural determinants of anomie, IAT broadens the focus to include other primary institutions of society.<sup>5</sup>

#### 3.1. Bringing Institutions into Criminological Theory

Social institutions are to some extent distinct with respect to the primary activities around which they are organized, which is the basis of conventional classifications of institutions. To illustrate, the system of institutional norms that relates to activities pertaining to the subsistence requirements of human organisms—food, clothing, shelter—is typically labeled the “economy,” though today the economy goes far beyond these minimal requirements. The system of institutional norms that governs behaviors related to the biological reproduction of the species is referred to as the family, and so on (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007; see also Turner 2003).

The functions associated with the institutional norms are necessarily overlapping and interdependent in the sense that the functioning of a given institution has consequences for the functioning of the others. For example, the performance of the economy is dependent on the quality of the “human capital” cultivated in the schools. The capacity of the schools to develop human capital is circumscribed by the individual backgrounds that students bring with them from their families. The effective functioning of all three of these institutions—the economy, education, and the family—presupposes an environment with at least a modicum of social order, for which the polity has formal responsibility. Finally, the effectiveness of the polity in promoting the collective good (at least as perceived by those who wield political power) depends on the nature and quality of

<sup>4</sup> It is important to distinguish this usage of the term “moral” from a conceptualization that invokes a transcendental standard of morality. A concrete society might secure compliance with institutional

norms by virtue of the moral authority that they exercise over societal members, but the prescribed behaviors might be judged to be immoral according to some “ultimate” standard of morality.

<sup>5</sup> See Messner (2003a) for an extended discussion of points of overlap and divergence between Merton’s theory of social structure and anomie and IAT.

economic resources and human capabilities supplied by the other institutions.

The interdependence of major social institutions implies that, for the society to “work” at all, there must be some coordination among institutions, just as there must be some coordination among the ultimate ends of individual actors. The requirements for the effective functioning of any given institution, however, may conflict with the requirements of another. This potential for conflict is manifested in two important ways. One source of conflict involves competing demands associated with role performance. Given the fact that time is a finite resource, performing a given institutional role (e.g., working overtime) may preclude performing another role (e.g., taking one’s daughter to soccer practice). In addition, the kinds of orientations towards action that are appropriate differ in certain important respects depending on the institutional domain.

An especially stark contrast can be seen between the orientations for interactions embodied in the institutions of a market economy and the family. Family relationships are expected to be regulated by the norms of particularism, affective engagement, and diffuseness, whereas transactions in the marketplace are governed by universalism, affective neutrality, and specificity (Parsons 1951). Concrete actors are thus required to shift their basic orientations towards interactions as they negotiate the different institutional demands that they face.

Any given society will therefore be characterized by a distinctive arrangement of social institutions that reflects a balancing of the sometimes competing claims and requisites of the different institutions, yielding a distinctive “institutional balance of power.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, a very useful way of classifying whole societies is according to the prevailing form of institutional balance. In some societies, such as the former Soviet Union, the political system dominates the institutional order. In others, the so-called primordial insti-

tutions (family, clan, ethnic group) are dominant. The core claim of IAT is that the type of institutional configuration that is conducive to high levels of crime in the advanced societies is one in which the rules of the economy are awarded highest priority in the system of institutions. In such a society, the economy tends to dominate the institutional balance of power, thereby creating institutional imbalance.

Economic dominance is manifested in three principal ways. One is devaluation. Non-economic institutional roles tend to be devalued relative to economic roles. Non-economic roles carry less prestige than economic roles and their occupants receive fewer rewards for effective role performance. A second manifestation of economic dominance is accommodation. Individuals feel pressures to sacrifice other roles to economic roles when conflicts emerge, as when a family abandons collective meals because they conflict with members’ work schedules. The third manifestation of economic dominance is penetration. The logic of the marketplace intrudes into other realms of social life. Paying students for their educational accomplishments is a particularly stark example (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007, 82–83). On a larger scale, the increasing commercialization of sports and the arts and the “privatization” of public institutions and functions provide countless examples of such intrusions.

Economic dominance in the institutional balance of power can be linked specifically with criminal behavior via both internalized normative controls and informal social controls. With respect to the former, economic norms in market capitalist economies are predicated on a calculative orientation towards action. Economic thinking, economizing, intrinsically involves cost/benefit assessments to determine how to allocate scarce resources among alternative uses. In their performance of economic roles, actors are thus encouraged to apply “efficiency” norms in the selection of the means to achieve their ends, and to accumulate as much as possible the prime medium of exchange used in economic transactions: money.

<sup>6</sup> We use the term “power” in the phrase “institutional balance of power” in the sense of functional primacy and not in the sense of political struggles. When an institution domi-

nates the institutional balance of power, the claims and requisites of that institution take precedence over those of other institutions.

IAT predicts that under conditions of economic dominance in the institutional balance of power, the orientation toward action associated with the performance of economic roles “spills over” into social action more generally. Concrete actors are prone to use whatever means are technically expedient to realize their ends, regardless of the normative status of these means. To return to the language introduced above, institutional norms have little moral authority when the economy dominates the institutional balance of power. The means of social action have been literally de-moralized, resulting in anomie.<sup>7</sup> Under conditions of extreme anomie, the internalized restraints against crime are expected to be quite weak. Compliance with institutional norms, including legal norms, is thus dependent on the “secondary type of control,” i.e., the “calculation of advantage.”

Yet economic dominance tends to undermine this alternative type of control as well. Economic dominance implies that non-economic institutions are enfeebled. The roles of these institutions become less attractive; people fail to develop strong attachments to them; and the enactment of these roles is subservient to the enactment of economic roles. The incentives and disincentives associated with non-economic role performance are thus rendered less salient to actors as they orient their behaviors away from such roles. Accordingly, the two principal motives for compliance with institutional norms explicated above—their moral authority and the potency of the incentive/disincentive structures associated with them—are likely to be weak under conditions of economic dominance. It follows that behaviors contrary to the norms, including behaviors that violate norms that

have been codified in criminal law, will be relatively frequent and commonplace.

### 3.2. The Value Foundations of Economic Dominance in the Institutional Balance of Power and the Explanation of Criminal Violence

IAT thus describes how a specific configuration of social institutions and the accompanying normative order it represents create a social environment that is more or less conducive to criminal behavior by virtue of the operation of internalized moral controls and external social controls. The original formulation of the theory does not fully explain, however, the interconnections between institutional structure and fundamental cultural values. If institutions reflect values that are in some meaningful sense shared and “basic” to a society, as argued persuasively by Parsons, then any institutional structure that endures for an appreciable amount of time, even one that exhibits “imbalance” among the constituent institutions, must be grounded in a distinctive set of values.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the applicability of IAT specifically to violent criminal offending—the focus of the present inquiry—requires explicit consideration. The erosion of the moral authority of institutional norms and the weakening of external social controls are in principle relevant to the explanation of all forms of criminal conduct and of deviant behavior more generally. Research by Karstedt and Farrell (2006) indicates that insights from IAT can in fact be applied to explain the so-called “crimes of everyday life,” i.e., morally dubious acts, not all of which are technically illegal. In addition, a paradox emerges when the applicability of

<sup>7</sup> The “demoralization” of the means of action as a result of the penetration of the logic of a market economy is not the only possible source of anomie. Anomie may reflect features of the normative order itself, such as internal inconsistencies among norms or lack of clarity in the norms. See Thome (2003; 2007) for an extended discussion of the different subtypes of anomie in Durkheim’s work and, in particular, the distinction between “developmental” or “process induced” anomie and “chronic” or “structural” anomie. The former is a temporary condition that emerges during periods of rapid change; the latter refers to a stable feature of the institutional order. IAT focuses primarily on “chronic” or “structural” anomie, although it has potential applicability for other forms of anomie as well.

<sup>8</sup> Although we adopt Parsons’ general approach to the conceptualization of social institutions, we depart here from the spirit of much Parsonian sociology in one important respect. Parsons emphasizes the smooth functioning of social systems, and he thus might have conceived of “economic dominance” as a temporary form of structural malintegration, one that would be rectified through equilibrating mechanisms. We leave open the possibility that a social system characterized by economic dominance in the institutional balance of power is viable and durable, although we expect that such a social system will exhibit high rates of criminal violence as part of its “normal” functioning (see Rosenfeld and Messner forthcoming).

IAT to violence is considered in historical context. Historical studies reveal that levels of interpersonal violence, and in particular homicide, have declined substantially over the course of the past several centuries, at least in Europe, where rich historical data are available (Eisner 2003a, 2003b). How can the institutional dynamics depicted in IAT, which pertain to highly developed market societies, be reconciled with these documented trends in violence? A comprehensive account of the impact of social organization on levels of criminal violence requires that the cultural underpinnings of economic dominance in the institutional balance of power be explicated clearly and fully, and that the hypothesized institutional and cultural processes be situated within the larger historical context.

We can advance such an account by drawing upon Durkheim's insights about the morality of traditional versus advanced, highly differentiated societies.<sup>9</sup> In his classic formulation of the processes of societal evolution, Durkheim (1964a [1893]) explains the transition from primitive or segmentally divided to modern societies with reference to a fundamental shift in forms of social solidarity—from the “mechanical” type to the “organic” type. Durkheim also identifies a concomitant erosion of “collectivism” and rise in “individualism.” This latter distinction is directly relevant to understanding patterns in violence. Specifically, Durkheim suggests that “with the progress of civilization homicide decreases” (1958 [1950], 113). The reason for this trend lies in the demystification of the collectivity and its devaluation relative to the “worshipping” of the individual. Durkheim construes “collectivism” as an integrative pattern in which the group—the family, the clan, a professionally defined group, a religious or ethnic community—is valued much more than the individual and his or her well-being.

Premised on this foundational value pattern, Durkheim identifies two major, closely intertwined organizing prin-

ciples which, in his view, shaped the institutional order of pre-modern European societies and made such an order prone to interpersonal violence: honor and a rigidly defined social hierarchy, within a society divided into estates. The importance of honor and its counterpart, “defamation,” in stimulating violent conflict has been widely recognized in a variety of contexts and need not be elaborated here (see, for example, Nisbett and Cohen 1996; Spierenburg 1998). With respect to hierarchy (Roth 2001, 47), we note in particular the following aspect. If the group counts more than the individual, particular persons are typically regarded as closer to the gods than the masses; there are leaders and followers, masters and servants, insiders and outsiders. In other words, members of the various strata differ in the amount of honor, respect, and general human worth granted them. These differences are likely to be criminogenic on their own, as indicated in various historical studies (e.g., Ruggiero 1980; Lehti 2004, with reference to Ylikangas 2001) and also in experimental research (Zimbardo et al. 1974).<sup>10</sup> The potential for hierarchy and processes of social marginalization to contribute to violence is likely to be relevant to the (post-) modern societies as well as to the traditional, collectivistic societies.

Durkheim argues that traditional collectivism had to break down in the course of an increasingly advanced division of labor and the transformation from a segmentally divided, rigidly stratified society to a functionally differentiated society. In the latter type of society, the individual is no longer tied into a closely knit mesh of norms, symbols, and rituals that define his or her own identity primarily in terms of belonging to a collectivity. The fusion of personal and collective identities dissolves. The individual's social standing and reputation are no longer defined by a group-specific code of honor that, for example, makes blood revenge obligatory.<sup>11</sup> Violence that injures, mutilates, or kills another person becomes increasingly repugnant, abominable.

<sup>9</sup> The following discussion is based on Thome (2007). Advances in historical knowledge and sociological theory have corrected and modified many of Durkheim's ideas (Fenton 1984, Turner 1993). Nevertheless, some of his insights are still valid and quite helpful in explaining the long-term developments in violent crime.

<sup>10</sup> Baumeister et al. (1996) review some of the psychological literature confirming the violent implications arising from claims of superiority. For the connection between sharpened economic competition and the “renaturalization” of inequality resulting in differential claims of moral worth, i.e. superiority, see Bauman (1990) and Young (1958).

<sup>11</sup> The code of honor is still relevant in certain situations involving group relationships, such as adolescent street life in inner city ghettos (Anderson 1999).



Although traditional collectivism erodes as societies evolve, Durkheim by no means posits a total disappearance of collective sentiments (Bellah 1973, xli). There is a “collective conscience” even in individualized societies, but the highest-ranking value is the individual “in general”; not just the individual “self” but also the individual “other.” This “moral” or “cooperative” individualism respects the individual as the carrier of universal rights and obligations. As a social praxis, moral individualism is based on mutual sympathy and respect for others—any other person. It seeks to increase social inclusion, and it postulates the right of self-actualization for all. It runs counter to “free-riding” practices, promotes adherence to the principles of reciprocity (solidarity based on fairness), and occasionally calls for (bearable) sacrifices to help those in need. Cooperative individualism thus implies a principled readiness to invest in collective goods (like having a democratic government or preserving the natural environment) even without calculable individual payoffs or losses.

Moving from culture and social praxis (forms of interaction) to the social structural and the political plane, we note that cooperative individualism seeks to secure justice and to balance personal freedom and equality, mainly by combining social welfare provisions and parliamentary democracy. Durkheim insists on the functional primacy of the state over the economy, because the latter is immanently amoral. The state serves as “the organ of moral discipline” (1958 [1950], 72), and at the same time it is the champion of individualism (1958 [1950], 69). Without the state, the individual could not have been set free from primordial bonds; without the state, there would be no power to protect the individual against the tyrannical claims of the group. Durkheim, on the basis of his reading of history, is led to the conclusion that “except for the abnormal cases . . . the

stronger the state, the more the individual is respected” (1958 [1950], 57).<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, Durkheim also stresses the necessity of counterbalancing the power of the state with strong secondary social groups—what political scientists and sociologists have later conceptualized as various forms of “corporatism” (e.g., Siaroff 1999; Hall and Gingerich 2004).

In Durkheim’s view, then, it was mainly the erosion of collectivism that brought about the long-term decline in levels of interpersonal violence.<sup>13</sup> In his earlier, more optimistic, writings he also assumed that the emerging individualism would predominantly take on the cooperative form just described: the presumably “normal” type of modern society that would stabilize the low level of interpersonal violence. The new value system implies, among other things, a lower level of passion and stronger control of emotions. The reason why passions, in particular the impulse to retaliate and punish violently, are lower or more constrained in individualist cultures seems to be that the person who violates the norms (and is to be punished for that) is, so to speak, an incarnation of the very object which is now being worshipped, i.e., the individual in general (Durkheim 1978 [1895]).

Durkheim’s account of the large-scale pacification associated with the growth of individualism is similar in some respects to Elias’s views on the “civilizing” process (1982 [1939]), but with an important distinction. For Elias, the disciplinary forces of the advanced societies hold down individual impulses; for Durkheim, individuals are freed from the closely knit bonds that tied them to the collectivity. Durkheim also theorizes, however, that the restructured agents of social control and moral guidance, particularly the nuclear family, the school, professional organizations,

<sup>12</sup> Durkheim’s faith in the capacity of the state to serve as “the guardian, promoter and enforcer of civic morality” can certainly be challenged given subsequent historical developments, as noted by Varga (2006, 463). See also Wolfe (1989) for an extended discussion of how expansion in the authority of the state can threaten the vitality of civil society.

<sup>13</sup> This thesis has been supported by a statistical analysis of crime data available for Germany at the end of the nineteenth century (Thome 2002). Karstedt (2006) also reports evidence consistent with Durkheim’s claim about the effect of the movement from collectivistic to individualistic values on levels of violence. In her analysis of cross-national variation in homicide rates in the latter decades of

the twentieth century, she finds that an indicator of individualism is negatively associated with levels of homicide. See also Karstedt (2001, 2004).

and most importantly, the authority of a democratically legitimized state, play a critical role in providing the moral underpinnings of the new social order.

Thus far we have recounted Durkheim's thesis of the "normal" evolution of cultural values. He also identifies an important "pathological" departure from cooperative individualism, which he refers to as "egoistic" or "excessive" individualism.<sup>14</sup> The defining characteristics of this form of individualism are hedonistic self-fulfillment instead of social solidarity; ruthless pursuit of one's own interests while using others as a mere "means" in strategic interactions. In the tradition of the Frankfurt School of social thought, it is the triumph of "instrumentalism" or, in Habermas' terms (1984), the dominance of strategic interaction over communicative action seeking mutual understanding and recognition. Durkheim is skeptical about the long term viability of this type of cultural value system, explaining that such orientations are ultimately self-delusive: a meaningful life can be found only within solidary social relationships. Tocqueville had already warned that materialism and egoism triggered by too much competition would threaten the moral base for political democracy.<sup>15</sup>

We suggest that what Durkheim depicted as a pathological but possibly temporary cultural condition is in fact compatible with an ongoing institutional order. As noted above, the emergence of the new forms of social solidarity

predicated upon a moral individualism presupposes the effective operation of the restructured agents of social control and moral guidance—the family, the schools, the democratic state, and other entities associated with civil society. However, as described by IAT, economic dominance in the institutional balance of power implies that these sources of effective social control and moral guidance are rendered relatively impotent. The type of individualism that emerges along with the erosion of collectivism as societies become more highly differentiated is thus likely to give increasing weight to the "egoistic" form rather than the "moral" or "cooperative" form. Moreover, under these conditions, egoistic individualism at the level of cultural values is likely to go hand in hand with anomie at the level of normative regulation. The values of this type of individualism do not promote social integration; quite the contrary, they interfere with effective integration and are distinctly disintegrative (Thome 2007). In short, we propose that egoistic or disintegrative individualism provides the cultural foundation for economic dominance in the institutional balance of power and widespread anomie.<sup>16</sup>

A heuristic model of our elaborated formulation of IAT is presented in Table 1. This model highlights the core features of an institutional order that is theorized to be conducive to high levels of violent crime in advanced industrial/post-industrial societies.

<sup>14</sup> At this point we somewhat expand Durkheim's concept of egoistic individualism so as to bridge the conceptual gap implied in his original distinction between egoistic and anomic suicide. One might refer to this modified concept under the title of "disintegrative individualism" (Thome 2007). Durkheim himself, in several passages of *Suicide*, constructed tenuous bridges of this kind. See also footnote 16 below.

<sup>15</sup> On the causal connections between a culture of competition, social and economic inequality, and violence see also Hagan et al. (1998), Jacobs and Carmichael (2002), Messner (2003b), and Pescosolido and Rubin (2000). An interesting approach to studying the anomic consequences of highly

marketized societies is also offered by Burkatzki (2007); see also the Burkatzki paper in this issue. Studying data from European surveys conducted in 1969 and repeated in 1990, David Halpern (2001) finds evidence for increasing importance attached to "self-interest." He also finds a rather strong positive relationship between aggregated self-interest and national victimization rates, particularly when combined with relatively high level of social inequality. It fits into this picture that of all the various types of criminal violence robbery rates exhibit the largest increase since the 1960s.

<sup>16</sup> Durkheim himself, in his book on suicide, does not interpret egoistic individualism as a force that would promote violence; he views it only as an aggravating condition with respect to suicide. Thome (2004) has argued that Durkheim's reasoning is not convincing on this point. Dicristina (2004) notes that Durkheim concentrates on unpremeditated murder which he could more easily line up with his notion of "passions" presumably preeminent in collectivistic societies. Premeditated murder, instrumental killings, and other forms of intentional assault, however, should be clearly within the reach of egoistic individualism, particularly so if it is joined with anomie in the form of disintegrative individualism.

**Table 1: Predicted rates of homicide under varying economic conditions.**

Characterization of the institutional order		Predicted aggregate behavioral outcome	
Value foundations:	Type of structural integration:	Degree of regulatory integration:	High levels of criminal violence
Disintegrative (egoistic) individualism	Economic dominance in the institutional balance of power	Tenuous moral authority (anomie) and weak institutional control	

#### 4. Integrating Levels of Analysis

IAT was originally advanced as a distinctively macro-level perspective on the social determinants of crime. The key concepts and processes that constitute the theory pertain to objective properties of large-scale social systems. It is important to recognize, however, that institutions can also be approached from the subjective view of concrete actors, as stressed by Parsons. The institutional dynamics depicted in the heuristic model in Table 1 are ultimately grounded in individual-level processes. Institutions emerge from human agency, and the level of violent crime in a society is ultimately comprised of the aggregated volume of discrete acts of criminal violence. From the vantage point of individual actors, violence might be appealing for a variety of reasons. It might serve the expressive purpose of inflicting harm on others in response to grievances or humiliations, or it might be used for the instrumental purpose of securing compliance from others against their will (Tedeschi and Felson 1994) or eliminating them to obtain some type of external “good.” Accordingly, in the absence of salient normative considerations and moral obligations, the likelihood that violence enters into social interaction increases.

IAT implies that the probability of selecting violent means that are proscribed by the criminal law will be related to actors’ orientations towards the institutional norms, their valuation of economic roles and goals relative to non-economic roles and goals, and their “performance repertoires” of economic and non-economic roles and the resources available to them. With respect to orientations towards norms, the distinctive prediction to be derived from IAT is

that the likelihood of criminal violence will be high when actors are not particularly sensitive to the moral status of the means of action in general. Such actors will lack strong internal controls against the use of whatever means are expedient in pursuit of their goals, including violent means.

We emphasize the reference to the means of action in general in the formulation of our hypothesis. The prediction that the strength of allegiance to a specific legal norm is related to the probability of violating that norm is certainly plausible but is not particularly original. This prediction could be readily translated into the “belief” element of conventional social bonding theory (Hirschi 1969). Moreover, the connection between beliefs and violent crime becomes tautological if the committing of the crime is regarded as definitive evidence of the lack of allegiance to the corresponding criminal law. Persons commit acts of criminal violence when they have little respect for the laws prohibiting such violence; the lack of such respect is manifested in the violation of the criminal laws. The novel and testable prediction to be derived from IAT, in contrast, pertains to the “spillover” effect hypothesized as characteristic of a situation of high anomie. The theory implies that the tendency for actors to adopt a calculative orientation to the selection of means in non-economic but legal realms of life will predict the degree of involvement in criminal violence.

With respect to the relative valuation of institutional roles, the prediction from IAT is that actors who perceive economic roles to be more attractive and more highly valued than non-economic roles are expected to be at comparatively high risk of criminal behavior, including violent crime. Such individuals will not be strongly bonded to conventional society through the diverse array of institutional attachments and will thus be exposed to weak external controls (Hirschi 1969). These perceptions of the relative attractiveness and valuation of institutional roles are likely to be empirically related to, but analytically distinct from, behavioral repertoires. The performances of various types of institutional roles depend not only on subjective evaluations but also the opportunity structures and role demands confronting actors. Accordingly, an additional prediction follows from the vantage point of IAT: actors who tend to privilege economic roles over non-economic roles in their

actual role performance, especially under conditions of role conflict, will be more likely to engage in violent crime.

The hypotheses about individual action considered thus far pertain to the balancing and prioritizing of the respective roles considered across distinct institutional domains. We also suggest that the macro-level condition of economic dominance in the institutional balance of power is reflected in the nature of the performance of roles within the institutional complex of the economy itself. Here it is important to recall Parsons' distinction between concrete forms of behavior and the institutional element contained in such behaviors. The performance of economic roles by definition contains a paramount economic element. However, concrete interactions, such as transactions in the marketplace, can and usually do incorporate to varying degrees social elements in addition to the purely economic element.

Fred Block (1990) has proposed the very useful concept of "marketness" to capture variation in the social content of economic activity. Marketness refers to a continuum that essentially reflects the extent to which market transactions are "embedded" in more general social relationships.<sup>17</sup> At one end of the continuum, that of high "marketness," actors are primarily responsive to price signals, and their motivations for the transactions are purely instrumental (1990, 51–54). Actors engage in exchanges that are most rational in terms of an economizing cost/benefit assessment, and the character of these exchanges reflects the orientations of homo economicus. The participants are regarded universally; there is little affect involved; and the activity is highly specific to the task at hand. At the other end of the continuum, market transactions are not exclusively economic in character. Considerations other than price come into play, and instrumental motives are blended with expressive motives.

To illustrate, consider the customer of a convenience store who develops an acquaintanceship with the owner and

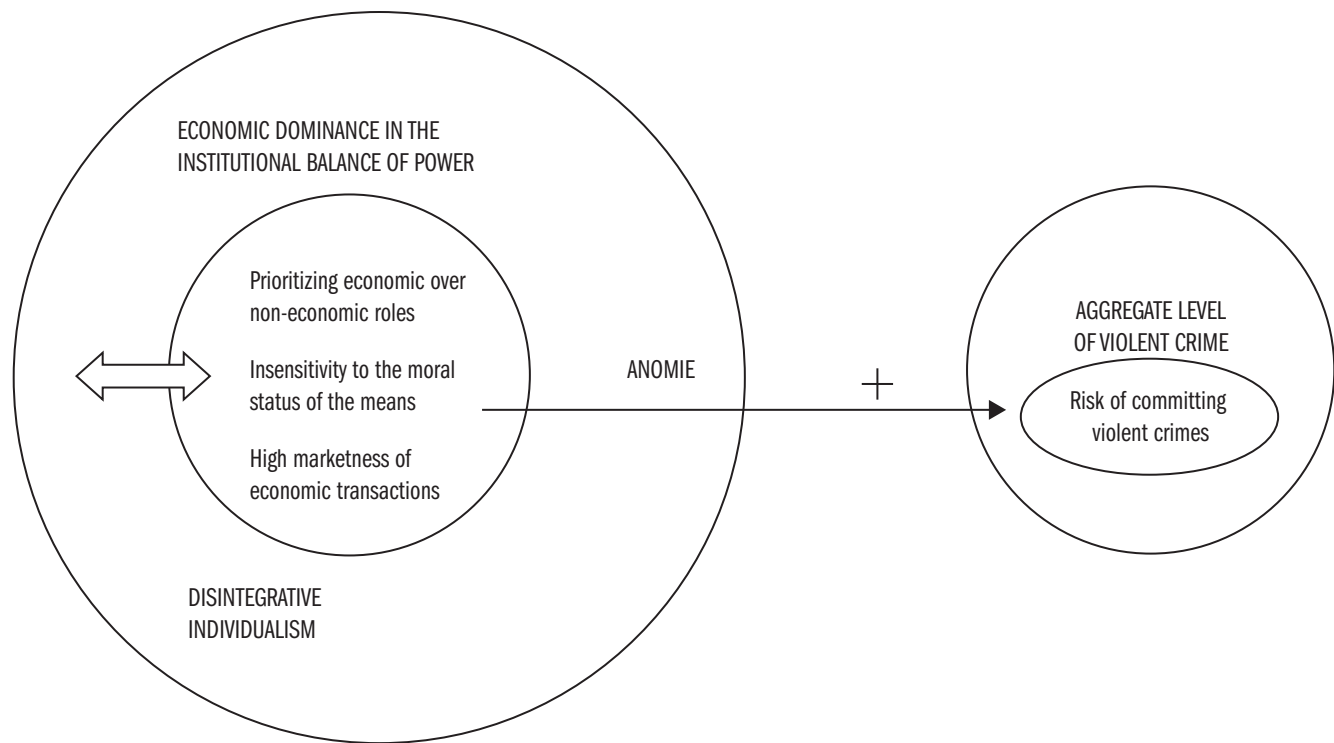
patronizes that particular establishment despite higher costs of products because the interactions are enjoyable. The "marketness" of the ensuing transactions—the purchase of commodities on the market—has been lessened, although economic institutional roles are nevertheless being enacted. In principle, the nature of involvement of a given member of a society in economic transactions could be characterized with respect to the overall degree of their "marketness" (Block 1990, 56). The associated prediction to be derived from IAT is that persons who exhibit a high degree of "marketness" in their economic transactions will tend to exhibit anomic orientations towards social norms and be at relatively high risk of involvement in criminal violence.

These arguments about the underpinnings of institutional processes in the behaviors of concrete actors suggest an individual-level counterpart to the system-level arguments of IAT elaborated above. The two sets of arguments can be merged into an integrated multi-level model, which is presented schematically in Figure 1. The inner circles represent the realm of individual action, while the outer circles depict the associated properties of the social system. At the level of individual action, our arguments imply that the risks of committing violent crimes will be high for actors: (1) who prioritize economic roles over non-economic roles (perceptually and behaviorally); (2) who are insensitive to the moral status of the means of action; and (3) whose enactment of economic roles is high on the "marketness" continuum. The specific intervening mechanisms are individual-level analogues to the postulated macro-level processes and are the well established proximate causes of crime as enumerated in much conventional criminological theory. Specifically, individuals with the designated orientations to institutional roles and goals, and the designated behavioral repertoires, are expected to have weak internal (moral) controls and weak external institutional controls.

<sup>17</sup> Block's arguments are informed by the classic work of Karl Polanyi (1957 [1944], 1968 [1947]) on the "disembedding" of economic activity from social relationships as part of the emergence of market capitalist societies. For a discus-

sion of the affinities between Polanyi's ideas and IAT, see Messner and Rosenfeld (2000).

Figure 1: Multi-level model of institutional-anomie theory



Individual action, of course, is nested within a larger institutional environment. The type of institutional order that is hypothesized to generate the criminogenic individual-level properties in the model is one in which the economy dominates the institutional balance of power, anomie is pervasive, and fundamental cultural values emphasize a disintegrative form of individualism. The institutional environment and action in the form of the enactment of institutional roles and expressions of institutional orientations are themselves mutually constitutive, as reflected in the wide two-headed arrow. Institutions are created collectively by concrete actors, but these creations are in important respects external to any single actor. Finally, the level of violent crime in any society is in the final analysis the simple aggregation of discrete acts of criminal violence.

##### 5. Empirical Applications of IAT at the Macro- and Individual Levels of Analysis

An accumulating body of research offers some support for key claims of IAT. The most common empirical

applications of the theory involve efforts to assess the impact of indicators of institutional dynamics on crime at the macro-level. For example, several studies have operationalized “economic dominance” with reference to indicators of social welfare policies and considered how these indicators act in concert with measures of the vitality of non-economic institutions such as family, polity, and school to affect levels of crime. The general conclusion to be drawn from these studies is that the expansiveness and generosity of the welfare state seem to be associated with reduced levels of crime, especially lethal criminal violence, either directly or by mitigating the effects of other criminogenic conditions, such as economic inequality or economic insecurity (Antonaccio and Tittle 2007; Messner and Rosenfeld 1997, 2006; Pratt and Cullen 2005; Savolainen 2000). However, the evidence is mixed, and given the inconsistencies across studies, further efforts along these lines are clearly warranted to generate greater confidence in the utility of IAT as a macro-level sociological explanation of crime.

Less attention has been devoted to the cultural dynamics implied by IAT than to the institutional dynamics in the macro-level research. This is not entirely surprising given that cultural phenomena tend not to be recorded and published in standard administrative data sources. Efforts to circumvent these limitations by using the World Values Survey (WVS) to assess claims in IAT have not yielded much support for the theory, although the interpretation of the findings is open to question (Cao 2004; Jensen 2002; Messner and Rosenfeld 2006).

More encouraging results concerning the impact of cultural factors have been reported by Baumer and Gustafson (2007). In a highly innovative analysis, these authors assess key propositions from both IAT and Merton's classic anomie theory (1938) using data on individual value commitments taken from the General Social Survey (GSS) in the United States aggregated to counties and county clusters. By aggregating individual survey responses to the area level, they are able to characterize populations according to theoretically strategic cultural constructs such as the strength of commitment to monetary success goals and the degree of respect for the legitimate means of attaining monetary success. They also include several measures of non-economic institutional strength (e.g., time spent with family, marriage rates, attitudes toward divorce, school expenditures, voter participation, welfare assistance) and examine both main effects and theoretically derived interaction effects. As with most of the research in this field, their analyses yield a complex picture, with some hypotheses receiving support (e.g., a criminogenic effect of a strong commitment to monetary success and a weak commitment to the legitimate means for pursuing success) and others not receiving support (e.g., higher level interactions between cultural orientations and indicators of the vitality of non-economic institutions). Nevertheless, Baumer and Gustafson's research illustrates quite nicely the potential for combining survey-based data with records from administrative sources to assess propo-

sitions about both cultural and institutional dynamics derived from IAT.

Efforts to apply IAT at the individual level are quite rare. One notable exception is a study of a minor form of deviance—student cheating—by Muftic (2006). Muftic explicitly sets out to assess the “robustness” of IAT by operationalizing key cultural and institutional variables at the individual level. Her research is based on survey data for a sample of 114 U.S. and 48 foreign-born undergraduates. Muftic creates scales to measure cultural values associated with the American Dream such as individualism, universalism, achievement orientation, and “monetary fetishism.” She also constructs indicators of commitment to the family, the educational system, the economy, and the polity.

The results of her analyses provide partial support for hypotheses derived from IAT. “[S]tudents with higher adherence to the cultural values of universalism and the fetishism of money had a higher likelihood of cheating” (2006, 648).<sup>18</sup> In addition, the indicators of commitment to the family and the polity were negatively associated with the probability of cheating, as expected. Hypotheses about interactions between cultural and institutional variables, however, were not supported. The most powerful predictor of self-reported cheating by far was place of birth. The U.S. students were much more likely to report cheating than the foreign-born students.

The most ambitious and sophisticated attempt to apply insights derived from IAT at the individual level is the research by Karstedt and Farrell (2006). They focus on relatively common “morally dubious” acts, which they characterize as the “crimes of everyday life” (2006, 1011). These include behaviors such as avoiding taxes, not paying fees, and claiming benefits, subsidies, and refunds one is not entitled to. Karstedt and Farrell develop an elaborate, integrated analytic framework that combines E. P. Thompson's

<sup>18</sup> As explicated above, “universalism” also characterizes moral individualism. In our view, it should therefore not be treated as an isolated variable but rather as an element in a broader interactive constellation of values and cognitive orientations.

concept of the “moral economy” with claims from IAT. On the basis of this framework, they theorize that a key determinant of the level of involvement in the crimes of everyday life is the “syndrome of market anomie.” This syndrome is conceptualized as a constellation of normative orientations comprised of three dimensions: a lack of trust of others in the marketplace, fears of becoming a victim of disreputable practices of others, and legal cynicism.

Karstedt and Farrell test their hypotheses with survey data collected from random samples of households in England and Wales and the former East and West Germany. They estimate structural equation models to assess the impact of the syndrome of anomie, treated as a multidimensional latent construct, on measures of intentions to engage in the crimes of everyday life. Their results in all three regions are consistent with theoretical expectations. The syndrome of anomie is positively associated with intentions to offend, and this syndrome mediates the effects of other relevant predictors of offending.

#### 6. Directions for Future Research

The research applying IAT has thus been encouraging, but the evidence is obviously quite limited. In particular, applications of the theory to understand individual-level behavior, such as those by Muftic and by Karstedt and Farrell, are rare. We accordingly encourage further efforts along these lines.

We can also propose some new lines of inquiry at the individual level that are suggested by our explication of multilevel linkages above. The prior applications of IAT at the individual level have focused on minor forms of offending—student cheating and morally dubious but common misbehaviors in the marketplace. Our theoretical arguments, however, imply that insensitivity to the moral status of the means is likely to be a generalized phenomenon. It is likely to extend beyond the realm of norms governing instrumental behaviors and culturally prescribed success goals. We therefore predict that indicators of anomie at the individual level, such as Karstedt and Farrell’s measures of the syndrome of market anomie, should be capable of explaining involvement in serious forms of non-normative behavior, including (but not limited to) criminal violence.

We also note that prior individual-level research on the institutional determinants of criminal involvement has focused primarily on perceptual and attitudinal measures (see, for example, Muftic 2006, 642). These are intended to capture survey respondents’ subjective evaluations of the worth and importance of non-economic institutional roles. While such measures are useful and quite relevant to IAT, it would also be instructive to develop further and incorporate into statistical models indicators of “performance repertoires.” Such indicators could be based on accounts of the actual allocation of time devoted to the enactment of roles in the respective institutional domains. In addition, reports of how role conflicts have been resolved in practice would shed light on the extent to which, at the level of individual actors, the economy tends to dominate the institutional balance of power.

It would be quite interesting as well to pursue the line of inquiry suggested by Block (1990) and to attempt to operationalize the “marketness” of economic transactions. Our elaboration of multilevel linkages in IAT stipulates that economic dominance pertains not only to the balancing of roles across institutional domains but also to the manner in which economic roles themselves are enacted. Individual actors can embed their transactions in the marketplace with greater or lesser social content. In principle, it should be possible to measure the extent to which the economic activity of individuals is in practice more or less socially embedded. Our explication of IAT implies that the marketness of transactions should be positively related to anomie, and through anomie, positively related to criminal involvement, including involvement in violent crime.

In carrying out individual- and multi-level research on IAT it will be necessary to include indicators from other theoretical perspectives, some of which are theoretical “close cousins,” such as Agnew’s general strain theory (1992, 2006), and others seemingly at odds with IAT, such as Gottfredson and Hirschi’s general theory of crime (1990). We do not view insensitivity to the moral status of the means of social action, the marketness of social interactions, and the other individual-level attributes and processes we have described as the sole source of individual criminality or

necessarily as competing alternatives to indicators derived from other perspectives. They may also interact with indicators from other perspectives such that their effect on criminal behavior depends on the distribution of other factors, for example, suitable criminal opportunities and targets (Cohen and Felson 1979).

The individual-level dimension of IAT, however, does differ from other individual- or micro-level theories in two important and related respects: First, from the perspective of IAT, the individual attributes and repertoires that lead toward or away from criminal behavior arise in and, in turn, reinforce the defining cultural and structural features of whole societies. As such, they should be understood and investigated in multilevel context. Second, the characteristics that distinguish criminals from others in IAT should not be interpreted as signs or symptoms of abnormality, pathology, or other individual deficiencies or defects. On the contrary, they are the normal, expected outcomes of socialization in contexts in which anomie is rampant, non-economic institutions are weak, and disintegrative individualism prevails.

We acknowledge that further theoretical questions remain unanswered in current formulations of IAT. Perhaps one of the most basic questions pertains to the origins of economic dominance or other forms of imbalance in the institutional balance of power. One approach to this issue is to direct attention to the decreasing power of the nation-state and other political institutions to regulate economic processes or to compensate for certain dysfunctional consequences they produce in other spheres of social life.<sup>19</sup> These pro-

cesses have often been summarized under the heading of “globalization”, i.e., the worldwide expansion of markets which has been proceeding during the last three decades at a much greater pace than the internationalization of political decision making (with the development of globally effective democratic control structures lagging even further behind) (Messner and Rosenfeld 2000). Major dimensions and consequences of these processes are: the increase of inequality in income and economic wealth in most societies worldwide (since the late 1970s); increasing poverty rates and social marginalization of growing segments of the population in many of the economically advanced nations; the rearrangement of social welfare regulations moving the social-democratic and the conservative type towards the “liberal” type, with less generous support and an emphasis on rigorous means testing (Esping-Anderson 1990); the increase of antagonistic forms of competition between states (indicated by falling tax rates on capital and business profits) and within states (indicated by increasing rates of insolvencies among businesses and private households as well as an expansion of advertising and marketing strategies); a concomitant decrease in the level of corporatist structures and employment protection; and a decreasing level of trust in government, political parties and parliament. All these developments are likely to be potentially criminogenic (Thome and Birkel 2007).<sup>20</sup>

A final issue that should be addressed by any criminological theory with claims to comprehensiveness is the problem of punishment. Recent scholarship on imprisonment and the “mass incarceration” program in the United States and, to a

<sup>19</sup> Of course, there is a wide spectrum of ideological positions regarding the desirable degree of the regulatory power of the state. But independent of one’s personal ideological position there are clear indications that during the last three decades the state has generally suffered from a loss of (democratic) political control over the economy. This is partly due to technological advancements (particularly in the means of communication) but also by political decision making like the dismantling of the Bretton Woods agreement and the liberalization of the financial markets (pioneered and pushed through mainly by the United States and Great Britain). For an analysis of these developments from a neo-Marxist perspective, see Harvey (2005).

<sup>20</sup> Modern versions of systems theory take a completely different approach to the questions that we are addressing. The answers offered (for example, in the work of Niklas Luhmann [1990, 1998]) rest on the assumption that there is an evolutionary process by which social systems become increasingly functionally (rather than segmentally) differentiated thereby forming sub-systems which tend to reach beyond national borders. Though “structurally coupled” they operate autonomously on the basis of “symbolically generalized media of communication” (or “exchange”), each subsystem defined by the use of a dominant medium which it specifically, and in contrast to other subsystems, applies. These are, for example, money in the economic subsystem, power

in the political realm, or proven truth in the realm of science. In each subsystem actors seek to maximize their own share of the dominant currency in order to secure or widen their range of future options. Morality “falls behind” in societal evolution because it is not supported by or rooted in a specific social subsystem (Luhmann 1990; 1998, 1036–45); it even tends to disturb smooth operations within these subsystems. Such a system-theoretic framework shares thematic concerns with core claims of IAT about institutional imbalances, and it would be instructive to derive and test formally complementary and competing hypotheses from the respective approaches.



lesser degree, England directs attention to the institutional underpinnings of the punishment process in advanced societies, but does not integrate theories of punishment with theories of crime (Garland 1990; Garland 2001; Sutton 2004). The heavy reliance on formal social control, and specifically imprisonment, as a response to crime is explicable from the perspective of IAT, particularly in its elaborated form presented in this paper. Societies in which “soft” behavioural controls have been vitiated by the institutional dominance of the economy can be expected to rely on imprisonment as a means of final resort to control high levels of violent crime. We can also expect such societies to exhibit an anomic insensitivity to the means by which the collective goal of crime control is attained and, therefore, to pursue punishment policies such as mass incarceration without scruples about the economic, social, and moral costs of escalating rates of imprisonment. At the same time, crime control through mass incarceration is incompatible with a strong cultural emphasis on the moral worth of the individual. In short, the resort to formal social control generally and the adoption of a policy of mass incarceration in particular are consistent with some of the core claims of IAT. One of the most promising aspects of the theory is the possibility of integrating explanations of crime and punishment within a single conceptual framework.

To sum up, IAT remains a work in progress. It emphasizes the importance of the larger institutional and cultural context for understanding crime and violence, and in that sense it seeks to stimulate a thoroughly “sociological” criminology. We argue that it is applicable at multiple levels of analysis, ranging from that of individual action to the dynamics of social systems. However, many core empirical claims have yet to be verified, and key mechanisms associated with the development of forms of social organization that are likely to be more or less criminogenic have yet to be adequately theorized. Nevertheless, we are hopeful that even in its evolving form, IAT will continue to generate fruitful puzzles for criminological theorizing and research.

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