Roundtable on *Institutional Economics: Perspectives and Methods in Pursuit of a Better World*, edited by Charles Whalen (Routledge, New York, 2022)

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1 Reynold Nesiba: Comments on Ch. 4, 'Grappling with an ever-changing economy: the evolution of post-Keynesian institutionalism;' and (2) Ch. 10, 'Storytelling and institutional change: the power and pitfalls of economic narratives.'

Charles Whalen's new edited volume makes clear that institutional economics remains a viable and vital way of seeing the world and analysing it. For this reason alone, it makes an important contribution to the institutionalist tradition. From Whalen's perspective, 'Institutional economics is a sociocultural discipline and policy science which draws on the idea that economies are best understood through an appreciation of history, real-world institutions, and socioeconomic interrelations'. Social scientists of all kinds, particularly those interested in public policy, could use this text as an entry point to understand this approach to understanding and improving the world. The text could also be used to introduce undergraduate or graduate students to the subject matter in courses on comparative perspectives, political economy, or institutional economics.

The first six chapters of the book are about *perspectives*, or ways to frame, view, and make sense of the world. The last five chapters explain various *methods* or approaches to studying this world. Whalen himself authors or co-authors four of the 11 chapters. Nine other scholars contributed to the volume. My comments focus on two:

1 Ch. 4, pt. one, 'grappling with an ever-changing economy: the evolution of post-Keynesian institutionalism'.

2 Ch. 10, pt. two, 'storytelling and institutional change: the power and pitfalls of economic narratives'.

Both are authored by Whalen.

In Ch. 4, Whalen discusses the rise and development of post-Keynesian institutionalism. This is a perspective that grew out of the work of the great institutional scholars, Thorstein Veblen, Wesley Clair Mitchell, John R. Commons, and was later combined with the ideas of John Maynard Keynes and others building on his ideas who saw the 'compatibility and complementarity' in these two traditions. Whalen wants to convey to the reader that the post-Keynesian tradition and original institutionalism are not only compatible but stronger together in this integrated post-Keynesian institutional (PKI) tradition. He organises his chapter into seven sections.

In his opening section, Whalen turns to Hyman Minsky who is often regarded as a major contributor to the post-Keynesian tradition. Minsky was awarded Institutionalism's highest honour, the Veblen-Commons Award, by the Association for Evolutionary Economics (AFEE) in 1996 (Whalen speaks from authority; he introduced Minsky at that event). In his comments on receiving the award, Minsky reminded the audience that John Maynard Keynes expressed his affinity for John R. Commons' ideas in personal correspondence to Commons. Like the institutionalists, Minsky agrees that economies are evolving systems and that the evolution of these systems is worthy of study. One sees this more specifically from Minsky's 1975 book, *John Maynard Keynes*, "We live out our lives in transition: there is no final solution to the problems of organising economic life". Given this real-world based starting point, how have post-Keynesian institutionalists attempted to both understand and improve this evolving socioeconomic system? Whalen uses the remaining six sections of the chapter to comprehensively answer this question.

Section two explains that both the Post War boom and the rise of post-Keynesian Institutionalism were foreshadowed by one of the founders of AFEE, Alan Grunchy. It was not a certainty that institutionalists and those writing in the Keynesian tradition were going to get along. There were serious differences in their methodological approaches, theory, and economic policy. Despite this, PKI offered a perspective that is an alternative to both neoclassical economics as well as Marxism. One could say that PKI is institutional economics with a more macroeconomic focus.

In section three, Whalen explains that during the great stagflation of the 1970s a growing group of progressive scholars – including Joan Robinson, Alfred Eichner, Paul Davidson, Hyman Minsky – began to reconsider the work of John Maynard Keynes. They asserted that the most important insights of Keynes' analysis had been ignored. In his 1977 AFEE Presidential address, Wallace Peterson urged the building of a common framework between institutionalists and post-Keynesians. A few years later, Wilber and Jameson's 1983 book, *An Inquiry into the Poverty of Economics*, advocated for a Post-Keynesian Institutionalist Perspective. They saw that megacorporations and their planning processes make monetary and fiscal policy counterproductive. Contractionary policies just increase unemployment but do not necessarily lead to decreased inflation. This was an important contribution because it took into consideration how the existence and behaviour of a key institution, big corporations, influence macroeconomic performance. This helps us understand the links between instability, corporate finance, and macroeconomic performance. It also gives us insight into possible causes of inflationary pressures in 2022 and the limitations of contractionary fiscal and monetary policy in addressing inflation. Unfortunately, stagflation in the bimodal economy, followed by a subsequent decrease in inflation in the early 1980s, reduced the public prominence that Wilber and Jameson's important volume deserved.

In the fourth section of the chapter, Whalen explores the 1984–2007 Great Moderation. It is at the end of this period that Minsky's Financial Instability Hypothesis and financial Keynesianism form a 'Wall Street Paradigm' for thinking about how contemporary capitalism works. The working hypothesis is that capitalism is prone to financial crisis, economic instability, and bouts of high unemployment. Debt deflation can be devastating. Scholars associated with this work include Minsky, Fazzarri, and Dillard. The financial instability hypothesis is at the heart of PKI business-cycle theory. Despite its name, the great moderation was characterised by instability. We had the biggest stock market drop, a savings and loan crisis, the bursting of the dot com bubble, jobless recoveries, and contained turbulence during this period of relative stability.

Important linkages between institutional and post-Keynesian economics were developed in this period as well as applications, and extensions of the PKI framework. These included Wray's work on endogenous money, interest, and employer of last resort. Many others, including Whalen, Carter, Dymski, Kragel, Phillips, Rima, Niggle, and Wolfson were working on various aspects of the financial instability hypothesis and the role of regulation and stabilisation policy. All would agree with the consensus that 'financial crisis and debt deflation will be the continuing legacy of global financial market deregulation'. Although Wolfson never mentions it, his *Financial Crises: Understanding the Postwar US Experience* (2002) is an important integration of this PKI perspective. It is an institutionalist pattern model of business cycle peaks used to explain macroeconomic instability. This should not be a surprise when one realises that Charles Wilber was one of his professors in graduate school at the American University.

Some readers might be surprised that there is little explicit connection made in this section of the chapter to modern monetary theory (MMT), the work of Stephanie Kelton, or others working in this tradition that many regard as inherently PKI (see Nesiba, 2013). Kelton was, after all, a student and colleague of Wray and Kragel. She has published work in post-Keynesian and institutionalist journals and explores how the institution of money is at the centre of understanding macroeconomic phenomena. Is MMT inside or outside of this tradition? The reader is left to make up their own mind. Whalen (p.119, note 9) asserts 'like financialisation, 'MMT' has received considerable attention over the past several years and has aspects that overlap with PKI'. This reviewer would assert that MMT is firmly in the PKI tradition. However, as Grunchy saw long ago, tensions remain between institutionalism and post-Keynesian economics on issues related to money. It is an area where more work remains to be done.[1]

In section five, Whalen takes up a discussion of the 2008 global financial crisis, money manager capitalism, and the ways in which the long view of Minsky's financial instability hypothesis was applied as an approach to understand this crisis and the relationship between changes in the financial sector and main street. References are made to authors (Whalen, Van Lear, Zalewski, Tymoigne, Wray, and others) writing during and immediately after the crisis. This money manager capitalism lens helps one see that the simultaneous focus on short-term stock market gains by big pension funds and other financial actors are also the cause of increasing worker insecurity.

Section six is the chapter's longest section and makes clear that PKI remains a vital research program. Whalen reviews the core elements, research themes, and new directions. In terms of core elements, research in these areas share four common elements:

- PKI uses realistic assumptions to understand a non-static capitalist system.
- It recognises that fundamental uncertainty exists and influences decision making.
- Culture and corporate advertising shapes us and our wants. Our tastes are not 'given' as is commonly assumed in mainstream theory.
- Institutions – not impersonal forces or laws – are the balancing wheel of the economy.

In terms of research themes, methodology has become a research area. Some scholars are assimilating psychological insights into PKI analysis. There is also a recognition that financial instability – such as the global crisis of 2007–2009 – happens among countries characterised by money manager capitalism. Despite his passing in 1996, references to Minsky continue in the *Journal of Economic Issues* by a variety of scholars including Ulger, Scott and Pressman, and Tokucu. There is also inquiry into how money manager capitalism is changing. There's rising worker insecurity, decreased income security, elimination of job ladders, rising retirement and health insecurity, and growing wealth and income inequality.

Scholars are also exploring the role of government and public policy. Is it possible to use the creative state for good? Pavlina Tcherneva thinks so and explains research related to the job guarantee. Jamie Galbraith explores the predator state and ways in which financial elites help money manager capitalism come into being and exacerbate inequality. Others are writing about deepening connections between institutionalists and post-Keynesians on issues related to money, and addressing issues of gender and race. There is also growing awareness related to climate change and planetary sustainability. Again, there are MMT scholars doing work related to the green new deal that could be included in this chapter but does not seem to be regarded as inside the PKI canon.

In the short closing section, Whalen circles back to Alan Grunchy, with whom he began, who foresaw the emergence of PKI methodology and its evolution which is described and documented with such care in this chapter.

In part II of Whalen's volume, the focus changes from perspectives to methods. In Chapter 10, 'Storytelling and institutional change: the power and pitfalls of economic narratives,' Whalen explores the power and pitfalls of economic narratives. Like Chapter 4, the chapter is divided into seven sections.

The chapter opens with reference to the seminal works of Benjamin Ward on storytelling and Deirdre McCloskey on the rhetoric of economics, and contrasting that with the mainstream obsession with formal models and quantitative methods. Whalen makes clear that storytelling has a long tradition in institutional economics and its use of narratives and skepticism toward mathematical models and methods. The chapter's first three sections focus on institutional research on economic methodology, theory, and real-world cases, respectively. Sections four and five give examples and discuss the power and the pitfalls of storytelling as a method and provide effective advice on how we can tell more 'robust' stories. The chapter concludes with a reminder that storytelling needs to be taken seriously.

Section one is used to discuss the role of storytelling in the context of economic science. In the process, Whalen addresses several issues, including, 'What is the definition and purpose of economics?' If like Grunchy, we agree that 'Economics is the science of social provisioning', then one should be able to explore a variety of issues that are not particularly amendable to formal modeling. We are free to ask questions about how corporations create wants for their products through marketing at the same time as they produce goods. We can ask about the roles played by families, the state, and culture in our social provisioning process and explore different methods of valuation.

Again, drawing on Grunchy, Whalen says that economics is about four things: understanding the social provisioning process; communicating process; communicating that to others; and using this knowledge to make the world a better place. This is much different than how some non-institutional economists imagine some sort of value-free science searching for general laws that are empirically testable and falsifiable.

Whalen explores similar questions: How do we move from research to theory? Why do we use sentences instead of equations? What is the difference between storytelling and narratives? And what is narrative economics and its relationship to mainstream economics?

Words are often where economic theory begins and ends. The metaphors are easier to see in verbal form. However, that should not let us overlook that mathematical models also use metaphors, e.g., that we can think of economic output like an aggregate production function. The financial instability hypothesis of Minsky from the PKI perspective is an excellent example of a verbal model that was later mathematically formalised by Keen and others.

Section two is used to explain storytelling and methodology inside of the institutionalist perspective. Here Whalen relies on Wilber and Harrison's influential 1978 JEI article on pattern models. The article is both a methodological critique of mainstream theory as well as providing an alternative to its many shortcomings. The problem is that in mainstream economics, theory is rarely falsified by empirical testing; rather it is insulated from refutation. This of course does not stop them from translating their formal theories into competitive market stories about how the world does and should work. Wilber and Harrison see the world as 'more holistic and evolutionary' and advocate for a pattern model that relies on observation and data to 'highlight common patterns and themes' and to develop hypotheses. They also point out that institutionalists such as Veblen, Commons, Galbraith, and Myrdal have used pattern models to explain economic change over time.

This second section continues with applications of this approach, such as Wilber and Jameson's 1983 *Poverty of Economics*, as a form of theory assessment. If economic theory is often insulated from empirical falsification, then we need to assess economic theory on grounds that go beyond empirical generalisations. Wilber and Jameson say we move from theory assessment and back to storytelling, 'Economists would do better to drop the 'scientific' pretensions and accept the fact that they are 'storytellers'. The economic obsession with mathematical formalisations has meant that important analysis of economic structure, and especially institutions, has been neglected and this realisation could be an opportunity for economists to change their methods and to perhaps 'generate caution and humility'. Part of this also needs to be directed at how we treat empirical facts. Facts require interpretation and this rests on judgement. Storytelling as methodology helps one see the usefulness of pattern models and the necessity of judgement and interpretation of making those facts part of a coherent narrative.

In section three, Whalen uses the work of John Watkins to explain the connection between storytelling in institutionalist research and teaching and economic theory. Watkins takes formal theory, converts it to accurate narrative, then compares that to related institutional analysis. This is an effective way to point out that the stories resulting from the formal mainstream are so unrealistic that they prevent their users from conceiving the possibility of a real-world economic crisis. In short, storytelling can be a highly effective way to assess the plausibility or applicability of competing theories. If there is any hope of making economics more useful and realistic, Watkins says we need to move in the direction of Minsky and the institutionalists – which also sounds like the name of a promising rock band. This section was one of the most persuasively provocative of the entire chapter.

In section four, Deborah Figart (2017) *Stories of Progressive Institutional Change* is used to demonstrate the usefulness of storytelling to explain institutional change and how this contrasts with the mainstream use of predictions and formal hypothesis testing (the book looks to be a pattern model, but that is not explicitly clear. Regardless, Whalen's description was persuasive enough for me to order her book while writing this review). She tells eight stories of progressive change related to raising wages, improving working conditions for low wage workers, debtors refusing to repay loans at for-profit colleges who defrauded them, the public banking movement, and others, including unpaid household work into national income measures, marriage equality, and sustainability with respect to coffee. From these unfinished stories the reader can see the big picture, the role of conflict, and change over time. One can also see how one generates a prediction, a working (provisional) hypothesis, and can think through various scenarios in a way that is far different than what one does in non-institutional economics.

Section five on narrative power and pitfalls requires the reader to return to some of the themes that opened the chapter to assess the usefulness and problems of a narrative approach to economics. Whalen (2022c, p.261) asserts

> "Economics is about understanding social provisioning and then communicating that understanding to others as well as applying it to help make the world a better place. Explanation – what happens and why – is at the heart of economics. Storytelling, via narratives, is a solid way of organizing and communicating our economic understanding."

Whalen and perhaps most readers of this review, reject the notion that narratives are somehow less scientific than mathematical models and quantitative testing. Economics of all kinds is done through creating and communicating stories. Since institutional economics relies on pattern models and other narratives, we often ask questions and do analysis that remain unexplored by non-institutional economists. Narratives are essential to economics and can be powerful ways to do analysis and communicate it to others. This can be a strength of institutional economics that helps others see the big picture.

Storytelling does come with pitfalls. Like all stories, how do we know they are accurate or true? Whalen draws on the work of Myrdal and Ward to address this. From Myrdal we are urged to be open and explicit about our 'assumptions, judgements, and values'. From Ward we are given a checklist to enhance the 'robustness' of the stories we tell.

In conclusion, Whalen makes clear that storytelling is worth taking seriously, 'the fashioning and presentation of narratives – has a central place in economics and we need to appreciate its role and take it seriously'. Finally, 'economic narratives are ubiquitous, indispensable, and powerful. By embracing storytelling, institutionalists are showing the way forward'. I could not agree more.

Whalen's book is worth the purchase even if you read only these two chapters. As the rest of the authors in this roundtable review explain, there is much to learn and enjoy from the other nine chapters and introduction to the volume. Charles Whalen has done a real favour for those of us working in the broadly defined PKI space. He has reminded us how our tradition developed, shows us how it has evolved over time, contrasts this work with that of other economists, and demonstrates that scholarship in this tradition continues to thrive. This is an important text and deserves to be widely read by all interested in economic pluralism as well as institutional economics.

2 William Waller: reflections on institutions, instrumental valuation, and valuation in economics

My chapter on the Veblenian Dichotomy is an overview of the development of thought on this issue by others, but mainly the development of my own thought. I have always argued that the older I get, the smarter Thorstein Veblen gets. And my comments today, hopefully, suggest some things I have thought about in a more mature way since Waller

(1982) which was my term paper for David Hamilton's *Institutional Economics* course at the University of New Mexico that I took as a first semester PhD student. The occasion for writing the paper was the difference I observed between how David Hamilton taught C.E. Ayres' classic *The Theory of Economic Progress* (Ayres, 2021) and the way Louis Junker, my earlier professor at Western Michigan University, had taught it. The resulting article was clearly a reconstruction of the history of the Veblenian Dichotomy starting from the perspective of J. Fagg Foster (and his students) and working back to Veblen. The current chapter (Waller, 2022) starts from Veblen and works forward.

There are three issues I would like to address that extend my argument in my chapter: They concern the definition of institutions, the 'strong instrumentalist' evolutionary argument, and the conceit of economists regarding value theory.

2.1 The definition of institutions

The chapter discusses different definitions put forward by institutionalists starting with Veblen and moving forward to date. Veblen had many definitions of institutions (some clearer than others). Over time, later institutionalists have given their own preferred definition of the term as well. Indeed, one of the most read articles in the *Journal of Economic Issues* is Geoffrey Hodgson's article, where he tries to develop a definition around which institutionalists, both original and new, can agree (Hodgson, 2006). The definition he comes up with is: "*Institutions* are systems of established and embedded social rules that structure social interactions" [Hodgson, (2006), p.18, italics in original].

And he presents correspondence with Douglass North where they agree that this is an acceptable definition to them both [Hodgson, (2006), pp.19–21].

There are definitions I appeal to more than others. But here is the thing. The concept of institutions is a construction of the author, often so defined in terms that are appropriate for their analysis. There is no correct definition. But there are better and worse ones. My criterion is: does the way I define the concept in this analysis communicate the analysis and make it comprehensible to my intended audience? If so, that is the best definition in this case. For others, the criteria seem to include whether or not there is or can be a consensus around a particular definition. I can see the utility in this approach in that it relieves the author of having to discuss and defend their use of the term.

But the thing that is really important – because both definitions of institutions and what we understand institutions to be will evolve – is we can define the word any way that we find useful as long as we are clear about what we mean. Consensus definitions freeze, really reify, the concept of institution as if this had a singular and unique, ever constant set of defining characteristics, functions, and even possible range of effects on the economy. I think this has the potential to significantly retard the development of original institutional economics (this might be desirable for new institutional economists).

2.2 The strong instrumentalist argument

The strong instrumentalist argument is traced by Marc Tool to J. Fagg Foster (Tool, 2000). Foster seems to argue that societies that survive must solve their social problems. Solving social problems requires instrumental reasoning and instrumental valuation of possible solutions. Therefore, societies that survive must have employed instrumental reasoning and instrumental criterion more effectively than societies that did not survive. Thus, from an evolutionary perspective, surviving societies must eventually adopt instrumental reasoning and instrumental valuation processes. Therefore, the adoption of instrumental valuation processes is inevitable. Now, ignoring for a moment that this argument is a tautology, there are two very serious problems with this argument, which on instrumental grounds require its rejection. First, it seems to depend on the notion that these societies employ a single valuation process in social problem solving (more about this below). The second problem is empirical: history and the ethnographic record show a myriad of cultures with many valuation criteria that seem to survive just fine. Indeed, almost any culture that achieves the level of domesticating animals and plants and therefore engages in agriculture can produce a social surplus. The production of a social surplus can make space for innumerable and almost unimaginably stupid practices (technical meaning – non-instrumental, a.k.a. ceremonial practices) for extended periods of time. Thus, the triumph of imbecile institutions remains a possibility and the hypothesis arguing in favour of the inevitable adoption of instrumental reasoning and valuation processes, on its face, seems to be patently unsupportable.

2.3 Economists' conceit regarding value theory

Mainstream orthodox economists subscribe to a utility theory of value. Often, given current training regimes for economists, they are unaware that they do so. Indeed, arguably the purpose of Paul Samuelson's revealed preference framework was to eliminate the need for the concept of utility altogether and insulate economists from the well-deserved ridicule from having this as their sole theory of social valuation.

The labour theory of value was employed by most of the classical economists and is still used by some contemporary Marxists. The critiques of the labour theory of value are too numerous to recount in a short note. However, the theoretical edifice of socially necessary abstract labour time (SNALT) and the reification of this concept by the Marxists employing it are sufficiently comical to place it next to the utility theory of value. Though, admittedly, the labour theory of value has some ethical value in arguments that capitalism is a system of exploitation and theft. But anyone with a passing familiarity with actual industrial production realises that separating the productivity of components of such integrated processes is an act of futility (exactly the same critique applies, of course, to the mainstream's marginal productivity theory).

Of course, institutionalists avoid this reductive approach to value theory by employing two concepts of valuation that are processual in character. Instrumental valuation processes and reasonable value processes. One is based on pragmatic problem-solving processes, the other on pragmatic application of democratic principles to consensus decision-making. However, this does not mean we original institutionalists are on the side of the angels or evolution.

Here is how I view the tendency of economists to argue that there is a single valuation process in society. First the classical, mainstream, and Marxist economists are not trying to explain value; they are trying to connect it to prices in exchange since their theories require such a connection to justify the theoretical edifice and policy conclusion they wish to support. Second, once price is dropped from the consideration of value, all societies and cultures simultaneously employ many valuation processes, successfully, always.

Consider the utility theory of value. It is all about appetite and desire irrespective of its origin or implications. This is actually a rather typical valuation process employed by young children, sociopaths, and presumably mainstream economists. Take a 3-to 5-year-old child into the candy aisle of any grocery store and you will see it in action, often in an unpleasant way. But this really is not an unusual valuation process. And sometimes acting on such an impulse is perfectly reasonable behaviour.

Similarly, the labour theory of value, while ignoring the actual complexity of production processes, is frequently employed as well. Amateur artists frequently value their artistic product in terms of how hard they worked on it. College and university students frequently value the essays they produce in terms of their effort. When getting an undesirable grade, they often tell their instructor how hard they worked on the assignment or how hard they studied for an exam. This is the labour theory of value at work. It is not unreasonable, but it is generally not the valuation process the instructor is using. But consider, are the instructors' criteria any better? Usually, the comments on a paper are instructive, often clarity, correctness, critical analysis, among other elements, are important criteria; but then the result of this evaluation process is reduced to a letter grade. The letter grades are, of course, relatively arbitrary (despite the claims of many natural science and social science faculty that their grading is objective). Does anyone seriously think a B+ in econometrics represents the same accomplishment as a B+ in a first-year seminar? Then we take these arbitrary letter grades and assign equally arbitrary numerical valuation to each arbitrarily letter grade, as if they represented the same learning experience. And then we take these arbitrary numerical values assigned to qualitative grades and average them, as if such a statistical artefact was meaningful and indicative of accomplishment and learning. These idiotic grade point averages are then used to determine employment and entrance to graduate/professional school programs. Frankly, a student's claim to have worked hard and expended considerable effort on an assignment is probably more reflective of their abilities and accomplishments – it is, at least, not any worse than a grade point average. And when we return home from a tough day of work what do we tell our family and friends: the amount we produced or how hard we worked that day?

Of course, everyone, as a matter of course, in their daily problem-solving behaviour uses instrumental valuation. It is literally defined as tool-using (both physical and mental) behaviour directed in such a way as to attain the desired result. We use it individually, we struggle to use it in groups, we try to use it to construct policy. Since the warranted knowledge it depends upon is itself an evolving, moving target, there will always be disagreements and varied assessments. After which, when the time comes and a decision must be made, we try to choose the best option for action available to us. But the constantly changing character of demonstrable warranted knowledge does not eliminate pervasive uncertainty, no matter how thorough the process and sincere the participants. Our judgements and choices may be the best we could garner from our inquiry, and these judgments and choices may be completely, and always partially, incorrect.

Reasonable value, which is brilliantly discussed in Charles Whalen's chapter on the topic (Whalen, 2022b), is used all the time. Of course, it was a foundational component of John R. Commons' conception of democratic decision-making in a society with multiple, possibly competing, perspectives and interests. The groups most affected by the policy decision would be assembled. In Commons' case, he envisioned independent commissions with representatives of all stakeholders, assisted by a well-staffed research group attached, to make important decisions addressing policy.

In the USA, many federal commissions were formed with this framework as its model. Of course, in the neoliberal era, the membership of these commissions is now selected on the basis of political affiliation and ideology, and as such have functioned less well than was envisioned or hoped. But reasonable value is the process frequently employed in committees', boards', and counsels' decision-making processes with varying effectiveness. No claims of having made a correct decision is made in this process, rather it is what is acceptable to a group representing diverse interests in society. It may, in fact, be the best we can get, but not necessarily. In an interesting twist of sorts, if this process succeeds, none of the participants will be happy, because necessarily every participant must have had to compromise. If someone leaves such a decision-making process and is very happy with the outcome, unless they are completely altruistic or completely indifferent, the process has not worked.

So, we must be careful about discussing valuation processes. We use many social valuation processes all the time. Different processes of making value judgements are used and are often appropriate. There is no way of connecting any of them to prices in an objective way because prices are set and administrated in a myriad of ways depending on who has the power to set them and what the objectives the powerful have for setting prices turns out to be. The key is focusing on the valuation criteria employed in particular social and economic processes and the consequences of those criteria on the decisions that result and how those results affect the life process of the community.

2.4 Conclusions

If there is a conclusion to be drawn, it is that economists need a bit of humility regarding the question of the legitimacy of particular concepts, definitions, descriptions, and valuations. All are socially constructed, all are evolving and thus transitory, and all may be appropriate in social inquiry, social decision-making, and cultural understanding. Similarly, economists should always be reflective regarding their investigatory and analytic apparatuses. Methodology is not a distracting bit of philosophical thinking to be dismissed (as it often is); it is, instead, central to all meaningful inquiry.

3 Barbara Hopkins: comments on institutional economics

I assigned chapters from *Institutional Economics: Perspectives and Methods in Pursuit of a Better World* in a Master of Science course on Economic, Social and Ecological Systems. In a pluralist program such as ours it can be challenging to convey the ontological foundations of heterodox economics to students who have already been taught 'how to think like an economist'. Whalen's text provides models of ontological principles with practical methodological examples that resonated with my students and supplied an opportunity to encourage new paths to knowledge.

In his introduction and, indeed the title, Charles Whalen emphasised the idea that there is a common good 'The only reason to study economics is 'to make this world a better place in which to live'' [Whalen, (2022a), p.1]. My students largely agreed but pointed out that other students in their undergraduate classes were studying economics to have their ideological positions confirmed. This highlights the challenges of teaching institutional economics in the current polarised political environment and the importance of challenging students to consider the meaning of 'a better place'. The positive/normative dualism that is part of "thinking like an economist" in principles of economics textbooks does not seem to have registered with my students, but the tendency to frame economic theory in dualistic terms as though heterodoxy and orthodoxy are two non-intersecting sets of theories is part of the landscape. By framing economics as the pursuit of a better place, a foundation for dialogue can be laid. Even if the potential for agreeing on the nature of that better place seems elusive, the idea that finding the common good is a legitimate topic for scientific inquiry is important.

The text offers several chapters on how to evaluate policies to move us closer to the common good. William Waller pointed out that although "all economic schools of thought oddly assume there is only one way to individually value or socially value … there is nothing in the fabric of social reality that requires that we use only one valuation process" [Whalen, (2022a), p.41]. This opens the door for a public discussion about social valuation processes for various purposes by rejecting the application of a single valuation process that offers an objective truth. Commons' concept of reasonable value, as described in chapter 2, is a social valuation process that utilises public discussion to achieve a common good. Indeed, Whalen moved beyond the conflict among institutionalists in the 1980s over two alternative ways of evaluating policy and defining the common good, by offering a way to reconcile the ideas of instrumental value and reasonable value. In the section on methodology, Thomas Kemp's chapter provides a blueprint for finding a common good through applying the concept of reasonable value through participatory policy making processes. Similarly, in his chapter, 'Storytelling and Institutional Change', Whalen shows how storytelling can be used to understand historical examples of social movements that have effected change towards a common good.

The book also models social connection and cultural context in history of thought, which resonated with my students. Many chapters helped students understand how understanding of the economy can be shaped by life experiences specific to a particular time and place. Waller's analysis of the concept of instrumental valuation illustrated a complex intellectual development that evolved over time and generations of scholars. The idea of the Veblenian (Ayresian) dichotomy was traced across scholars who were linked to one another through teacher/student relationships. Janice Peterson describes how scholars were influenced by the challenges of their own time and how feminist radical institutionalism developed through collaborations on edited books illustrating that knowledge creation is a social process. Michele Cangiani's chapter on the theory of Karl Polanyi laid out the historical and cultural context of Polanyi's life experiences. Sarah Klammer, Eric Scorsone, and Whalen similarly describe the social context in which Allan Schmid developed the method of situation, structure, and performance. And, finally, Whalen illustrates how the history of the macroeconomy and its failures shaped the evolution of post-Keynesian institutionalism.

The book also models the value of pluralism – the idea that different bodies of thought or points of view contribute to a more complete understanding. Whalen's introductory chapter and Waller's chapter on instrumental value include many different definitions of institutions, including variation within Veblen's writings. Disagreement about the definition of institutions has become a cliché, but the point made here is that such difference does not damage the integrity of original institutional economics. Instead, the flexibility of the definition and the ability to apply a definition appropriate to the specific analysis being undertaken illustrates a key methodological principle – the tools and concepts used should be chosen for the specific analysis being undertaken rather than allowing the tools and concepts to determine what to analyse.

Furthermore, any broad topic should incorporate a range of analyses. This principle is also represented by Peterson's chapter on feminist institutionalism because Peterson highlighted the work of historians and sociologists as well as economists. Since students who are studying economics to make the world a better place are in a stage of discovery, the variety of interpretations required by pluralist values is particularly important. The more complete picture of reality presented is also more likely to reflect the experiences of students coming from a diverse set of backgrounds.

One of the most basic insights of institutional economics is that the social and cultural context is important not just for understanding how people think about the economy, but for understanding the economy itself. Peterson's chapter explains how cultural institutions like patriarchal marriage define gender relations and, thus, gendered inequality. Similarly, Richard Adkisson's chapter on environmental sustainability describes the preconceptions and cultural values that shape and constrain the evolution of environmental regulations.

I have generally been more successful at getting students to understand that institutional economics offers a good story about the economy than I am at getting them to perceive it as a useful tool for analysis. The chapters in this text are full of concrete examples of the tools institutional economists use to investigate and change the economy. Adkisson's chapter on the environment illustrates the value of case studies of institutional change. Peterson's chapter on gender illustrates the value of identifying and unpacking dualisms. Mary Wrenn's chapter on myth busting presented a path for dismantling neoliberal ideology. Kemp's discussion of data and the civil service provides a good opportunity to get students to think about where data comes from and what it actually means.

The concrete example of situation-structure-performance (SSP) analysis presented by Klammer and Scorsone (2022) provided a blueprint for students to do a simplified real project.[2] SSP breaks analysis into different pieces with specific questions students can answer. Although narrowly focused on institutional structures that shape provisioning of a specific good, the opportunity to actually explore interdependence in a specific market goes a long way towards busting some of the myths of neoliberalism. There will always be some students who are seduced by the seeming objectivity of econometric analysis, but many students have become energised by the idea of myth busting and institutional impact analysis. Overall, the book succeeds as an overview of original institutional economics for a new generation.

4 Tonia Warnecke: the evolution of feminist institutionalism

Given the complex challenges facing the world today, the importance of practical research cannot be overstated. Too often, research analyses are based on assumptions that do not reflect the world we live in. Too often, the complexities of social norms and their relationship to economic outcomes are pushed to the side. In her chapter, *Culture, Gender, and Feminist Institutionalism*, Janice Petersen does a magnificent job tracing through the evolution of a feminist institutionalist approach to economic analysis.

To begin, Petersen reviews the work of four scholars in the 1970s and 1980s: two institutionalist economists (Edythe Miller and Daphne Greenwood), a historian (John Diggins), and a sociologist (Barbara Ryan). In so doing, Petersen focuses on the linkages between Thorstein Veblen's gender analysis, feminism, and economics. Starting with Miller's (1972) work, Petersen (2022, p.128) explains how Veblen's critique of orthodox economics can be linked to his refusal to accept the traditional role of women. Indeed, Veblen traces the issue of ownership to the capture of women and the reshaping of 'women's place' to support men's conspicuous consumption [Miller, (1972), pp.81–82]. Cultural conditioning leads to the devaluation of women's work.

Shifting to Diggins' work, Petersen shares Veblen's perception that the lack of political rights for women does not fully explain growing gender inequality. Like Miller, Diggins emphasises the critical role played by sociocultural norms. For example, status grew for so-called 'predation and exploit' tasks (guarding the tribe) in contrast to 'industry and drudgery' tasks such as everyday household and community labour [Diggins, (1978), p.144]. The former became associated with men and the latter with women. The growing gap in status is interesting given the importance of provisioning as a critical source of value (Diggins, 1978). Like Miller, Diggins (1978, p.146) shows that Veblen rejects orthodox conceptualisations of 'economic man' because of its masculine bias, not only its individualist bias [Petersen, (2022), p.129].

Petersen then transitions to the work of Barbara Ryan, showcasing Ryan's argument that sociology and a significant portion of Veblenian research ignored the feminist underpinnings of Veblen's work [Petersen, (2022), p.129]. For example, much sociological work was oriented around class divisions but for Veblen, the division between the sexes shaped the development of lower status work [Ryan, (1982), p.33]. Similar to Diggins, Ryan explains that for Veblen, achieving equal rights was not the end goal, but a step towards changing the entire socio-economic structure [Ryan, (1982), p.44].

The emphasis on exclusion of gender as a focal point for analysis carries through to Daphne Greenwood's research. Greenwood (1984, p.663) shares that institutional economics is deficient in this regard. While institutional economics defines the economic problem and labour more broadly than orthodox economics, neither school of thought adequately explains where value comes from. Greenwood attributes this to sexism. Sexism shapes beliefs about value, which shape expectations of women's activity inside and outside the home, the division of labour, occupational segregation, and power relationships [Petersen, (2022), pp.130–131]. This mirrors Veblen's perception of gender as a lens to understand values in society and their influence on economic behaviour [Greenwood, (1984), p.667].

Feminist economics also highlights the importance of gender as an analytical category. This school of thought conceptualises economics as the study of social provisioning, which encompasses concerns about 'the devaluation of unpaid work, the adequacy of traditional measures of well-being, the explicit recognition of values, and the importance of methodological pluralism' [Petersen, (2022), p.132]. The emphasis on intersectionality (the interrelationships between gender, race, age, class, and nationality, among other demographic characteristics) may also be explored through radical institutionalism, which aims to shift the economic system toward more democratic and participatory social structures and practices (Waller, 1989). Like the scholars discussed above, William Dugger criticised contemporary research for not adequately addressing the gender-biased roots of inequality (Dugger, 1989).

Petersen illustrates the deepening of feminist institutionalism in the 1990s. For example, both feminist and institutional economics reject the double dualism framework (Jennings, 1992). This dualism considers state and family as 'not the economy', similar to the way women are considered 'non-economic persons' 'because of their association with family' [Petersen, (2022), p.134]. As Waller and Jennings (1991, p.487) explain, 'the separations involved deny patterns of coherent and substantive social linkages that must exist for viable cultural patterns of activity, and the separations do not have a logically consistent basis'. Nonetheless, once women are relegated to a sphere outside the economy, this further supports the devaluation of their labour. Since one's sphere influences socially acceptable contributions, Veblen understood that entering the formal labour force would not be sufficient to eradicate gender inequality [Petersen, (2022), p.135]. Economy, family, state, community, and environment are inherently connected in the design of social and economic outcomes.

With the above contributions in mind, Petersen explains that feminist institutional economics grew to embrace and embody seven core concepts: culture, gender, dualism, social provisioning, institutions, inequality, and care. This is an important contribution of the chapter. These concepts illustrate the central role of social norms, relationships, and power hierarchies in shaping economic outcomes, a clear contrast to the individualistic focus of 'rational economic man' in orthodox economics. As Petersen demonstrates, history matters for feminist institutionalism. Since change generally does not follow a linear process, effective problem-solving becomes more complex. Gender is socially constructed and sculpted by institutions in each sector of the economy and society, sometimes intentionally and sometimes not, and this process evolves over time. Gender is fundamentally integrated into all social and economic issues; it is not a special topic to be analysed 'on the side'. Similarly, local context is not peripheral; understanding how real-world situations and challenges evolve is necessary to ground research aiming to address those challenges.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a good example of this. All 17 SDGs have faced setbacks globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic (United Nations, 2021); however, there are significant geographic disparities in outcomes. For example, in the poorest countries, SDG #10 progress in reducing inequality 'is being pushed back a full ten years because of the pandemic' [IISD, (2022), n.p.]. SDG #5 (achieve gender equality) is impacted by the lack of support structures for care work. While women perform more unpaid labour than men globally, in Mexico women spend nearly twice the number of hours (5.5 per day) on unpaid care and domestic work compared to women in Thailand (2.8 hours per day) [Hernando, (2022), p.2]. Progress toward SDG #8 (promote decent work for all) is hindered by the proliferation of precarious employment. In Costa Rica, informal employment comprises 38.8% of all employment; the figure is 85.3% in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (United Nations Statistics Division, 2022). Even within a given country, outcome gaps between urban and rural areas are present. These problems are not new and were not created by the pandemic, but the pandemic exacerbated them. Understanding the process by which this occurred requires significant understanding of institutional context and sociocultural norms. Much work remains to be done, but Petersen makes a compelling case for the role that feminist institutionalism can and should play in framing conversations about these issues and analysing policy and program responses moving forward.

5 Yan Liang: review of chapter 6, 'Environmental sustainability in social context: an original institutionalist perspective' (Richard V. Adkisson), and chapter 9, 'Myth busting: institutional economics and mythopoetics' (Mary V. Wrenn)

These two chapters share a common theme, that is, the role of cultural values and social beliefs in shaping socio-economic institutions and public policies.

Wrenn starts by pointing out that the study of mythopoetics has long been part of the subject and method of institutional economics. She examines the work of Thorstein Veblen, John Kenneth Galbraith, and William Dugger, on the functions and forms of 'enabling myths'.

Wrenn notes that according to Veblen, mythologies existed in non-Western societies alongside systems of knowledge and served an 'entertainment purpose' for the society. And yet with technological advancement, mythical forces that were once credited for creating material progress are becoming less so. Veblen also notes that if mythologies are attached to the technical aspects of production, then they could hinder technological progress. However, it is not a usual practice for workers to do so, as mythos is much more associated with the animate side (plants and animals) than the inanimate side (tools and technical applications). Finally, Veblen argues that scientific inquiry could benefit from the mythologies surrounding the natural world, as they help inspire creative thoughts and interest.

In all, myths contribute to material progress, but they also help maintain the status quo and prevailing power relations. In regard to economics, Veblen maintains that Classical economics consists of a 'ceremonially consistent formula' via which mythological concepts and laws are built and with which the discipline's hierarchy is sustained.

John Kenneth Galbraith continued with Veblen's critique of economics as a "system of beliefs". The conventional economic wisdom perpetuates the myths of scarcity, power-free markets, consumer sovereignty, and "convenient social virtue", such as hard work in pursuit of income. These myths help sustain the "passive, producer-centric understanding of capitalism" [Wrenn, (2022), p.232]. Galbraith notes that the economics curriculum at the university level, education in general, corporate advertising and public policy are the four major mechanisms that promulgate the economic myths. He further notes that they must be dismantled to create an equal and flourishing society, and that the incongruity of the myths with the lived experience of individuals will facilitate the dismantling.

William Dugger observes and challenges two sets of myths that underpin capitalism. First, the 'omnipotent' myth of free and 'natural' markets, which masks the power relations within the market where decisions are in fact made by those with power against those without. And second, the myth of individualism, which is comprised of six enabling myths: class, race, sexism, jingoism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism. These myths work through four mechanisms: double standards, blind spots, stereotypes, and otherness. The myth of 'individual responsibility' ascribes discrimination and inequality to individual choices and actions, thereby reinforcing the narrative that nothing can or need be done at a systemic level. Wrenn further notes that Dugger's analytical framework unveils the neoliberalism mythology. She writes, "[T]he myth of the individual and individualism reinforces the omnipotence of neoliberalism, while the autonomous and apolitical neoliberal market ideology reinforces the complete agency of the individual" (2022, p. 241).

Wrenn ends the chapter by reiterating that the enabling myths of neoliberalism have led to an absurd scale of inequality and persistent economic crises, which in turn would serve to undermine these myths. She passionately calls for institutionalists to continue their work of myth busting.

Rick Adkisson's chapter focuses on the role of social beliefs in pushing forth governmental policy actions for environmental protections. Adkisson starts by elucidating the worldviews of the Original Institutional Economics (OIE) regarding the environment, institutions, cultural values, and pluralistic methodology. In OIE, the patterns of human activities are governed by implicit and explicit rules and reflect the existing states of technology, nature, and folkways. And to make changes to human activity may require collective action through public policy. This is certainly the case when it comes to improving environmental sustainability.

Adkisson uses several case studies of institutional adjustments in support of sustainability to illustrate the importance of cultural values in shaping policy changes. In the case of the use/ regulation of pesticides, Adkisson shows that in the late 19th century, the 'quiescent Earth' worldview dominated which downplayed the impacts of pesticides on the Earth and on human health and thus justified the liberal use of arsenic and DDT. But by the 1960s, the dominant worldview had evolved to acknowledge human impacts on the natural environment. This change in the cultural values enabled the government to pass regulations to outlaw the use of DDT.

The Clean Air Act of 1970 and the passing of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) is another case study illustrating the importance of public support and bipartisan political backing in passing environmental regulations. In other words, the success of these regulations is at least partly due to the fact that the regulatory structure satisfies well the dominant social beliefs. By contrast, the current disagreements on how and whether to respond to global warming occur because of diverse public opinion, which fails to inspire a political consensus. Adkisson argues that addressing the problem of climate change requires not only effective and durable public policies, but a change in social beliefs that influence people's behaviours to align with sustainability.

Adkisson's chapter not only demonstrates the importance of cultural values in shaping policy changes, but it does so through story-telling, a distinctive methodology of the OIE. The narrative of three representative case studies sheds light on the evolution of the dominant social beliefs and how such changes affect public policy making. The story-telling approach avoids generalisations while providing specific historical and socio-economic context; it shuns from unrealistic assumptions and abstraction but elucidates real world experiences. It is an effective approach to piece apart a complex and evolving reality without construing an unrealistic, parsimonious economic model.

Both Wrenn's and Adkisson's chapters explore the root causes of behavioural and policy changes, that is, social beliefs and cultural values. It is the social (mis)beliefs in individual freedom and responsibility that promote neoliberalism; and it is the cultural values of ecocentrism and partisan politics that prevent effective anti-climate change legislation. As Hayden [1988, p.417, quoted in Adkisson, (2022), p.155] points out, cultural values are the 'basic and primary prescriptive forces that circumscribe societal norms, which in turn serve as criteria for institutional patterns'. Cultural values influence behaviours 'in the deepest and most subtle ways' [Hall, (1986), pp.17–18, quoted in

Adkisson, (2022), p.155] and yet, they are the most ignored subject in mainstream economics. Wrenn's and Adkisson's work is valuable in highlighting the importance of studying cultural values and demystifying false social beliefs, so as to initiate positive public policies and behavioral changes toward a 'better world'.

6 Tom Kemp: notes on Commons' 'reasonable value as an idea and a process'

This volume, *Institutional Economics: Perspectives and Methods in Pursuit of a Better World* contains a summary and applications of John Commons' 'reasonable value' that are accessible to the interested reader and concise (see chapter 2 by Charles Whalen and Chapter 7 by Tom Kemp). I believe that this concept is central to the construction and maintenance of a civil, democratic society and to a thriving and stable, yet participatory, economy.

I believe that the idea of reasonable value should also be central to a solid education in economics and especially central to the training of young economists. With education in mind, I have attempted to create an even more concise explanation of this concept below from the material in these chapters (2 and 7).

'Reasonable value' (a la Commons) is a recognition that valuation in an economy is a social process, which is often the source of conflict. Second, reasonable value involves the recognition that there is a community and individual interest in the resolution of conflict – for both economic and psychological reasons. This is the idea of reasonable value. The arrival at a 'reasonable value' is not guaranteed, but it is desirable. These so-called 'reasonable values' are desirable because they facilitate human interaction in the form of transactions and because they are relatively-socially stable. This is the process of arriving at reasonable values.

Consider each of these in turn.

Values, of course, do not have to be social. I can 'value' a favourite shirt, a memory, or even an idea. I do not need anybody to agree with, or even consider my values for them to exist. To these, the concept of reasonable value is not relevant (but the formations of these do remain relevant for economics in general). Reasonable value is potentially arrived at when individuals can reconcile differing personal valuations. This reconciliation will be founded upon a variety of social understandings that we may call institutions – most directly the law, but also social and community understandings and expectations of human relationships. 'Reasonable value' is one method through which individuals or groups of individuals may resolve divergent valuations.

People have multiple reasons why they might wish to resolve divergent valuations. Economically speaking, a division of labour and subsequent exchange (transaction) is central to every relevant form of economy. Thus, to maintain a certain material standard of living, individuals have an interest in being able to work together repeatedly. Additionally, at least to the degree that social understandings and institutions are the product of shared values, individuals and groups have a psychological interest in ensuring that emergent social values are not radically divergent from individual and group values and beliefs. There are, at least, two ways to resolve these divergencies. Individual or party 'A' may force or coerce to a given outcome of their preference. This can be a 'coarse' process that takes the form of a 'gun to the head' or it can be more subtle. For example: Individual or party 'A' may convince individual or party 'B' that they can force individual or party 'C' to comply with their preferences (preferences of 'B'). The subsequent conflict of 'B' and 'C' form the basis for eventual compliance with the preferences of 'A'. In this second case party 'B' has been deceived into working for the interests of 'A', directly against the interests of 'C' and indirectly against their own interests. Both deceit and coercion have been employed. Neither of these resolutions are 'reasonable'.

Another method of resolving divergent ongoing values is to resort to common, pre-established values. That is, to build upon 'what we have already agreed upon'. Consider a simple example: Person 'A' desires some corn to prepare a meal; person 'B' states that they can provide said corn. How much should be supplied? Let us say 'a bushel'. The concept of 'a bushel' is presumably something that both parties can agree on – certainly, one can conceive many different things and amounts that might be called a bushel. The concept may be established in law or in custom but in either case the concept must be jointly known if the quantity of corn is not visually present. This is but one of many jointly known and agreed upon concepts that must be established to arrive at a mutually agreeable conclusion in even this most basic of transactions. Cases in which the resolution of divergent values relies (at each step) on processes that work logically through 'that which we all agree on' are what may be considered 'Reasonable'.

Outcomes that are arrived at through a 'Reasonable' process are argued to be stable – when compared to other processes – because they are not built upon either coercion or deceit but upon agreement of more fundamental principles (for example: how much is a kilogram? Lying is wrong. People have a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness). Thus, outcomes remain stable (or are subject to only marginal alteration associated with changes in technology, human understanding, or improvements in inclusion) when subjected to scrutiny. Put more bluntly, while neither party may be 'happy' with the 'reasonable' outcome, they can agree that the process by which that outcome was arrived at is something that is consistent their shared beliefs.

Below, I list the steps to the construction of a 'reasonable value':

6.1 Part 1 foundations

1 Current Law (or social right/obligation)

- What is the current state of the law? What rights, duties, and allowances are stipulated? To whom are each of these given?
- What are the understandings and expectations within the community of the social rights and obligations of the participants?

2 Legal History (process of development of the current social right/obligation)

- What are the pertinent legal decisions that led to the current state of the law? What are the foundational principles on which these decisions are based?
- What are the historical social conflicts that led to the current social right and obligation? What are the community values that provide a foundation for these outcomes?

3 The Economic Data (quantitative and qualitative as appropriate)

- What are the answers to the questions, that we as a society, consider important? The datapoint – 2020 U.S. GDP = $21 Trillion USD – is the answer to several historical questions considered to be of importance by many.

6.2 Part 2 process

1 Who is involved or impacted?

- Who are the individuals that are involved or impacted by the process?
- What are the rights and obligations of these individuals or groups?
- To what extent do these individuals or groups need to be involved to develop a stable outcome?

2 What is the desired solution?

- What are the goals and objectives of the participants? What would a 'win' look like?

3 What is possible?

- What is already being done?
- Can we observe desirable outcomes elsewhere?
- What gaps exist between the current situation and those outcomes?

4 Who will inform?

- Who will decide what information is admissible?
- Who will give that information?

5 Who will decide?

- Who will decide?
- Who must abide by the decision?
- What are to be the penalties for failure to abide by the decision?

Based on the above steps, the economist's role should be:

- *Gathering information:* what, in terms of the scope, scale, and type of economic activity, do we all agree on?
- *Research:* what is possible (economically speaking)? What is already being done? Uncover and clarify the goals of the community.
- *Provide solutions:* what actions or policies might help to close gaps in divergent preferences as expressed by process participants?

7 Janice Peterson: some thoughts on institutional economics and the symposium

In mid-January 2020, I received an email from Charles Whalen inviting my participation in a book he was editing to offer 'a fresh look at institutionalist perspectives and methods'. He indicated that he sought to provide a volume that would be of interest and accessible to students and practitioners as well as academic scholars, and asked if I would write a chapter on 'Culture, Gender, and Feminist Institutionalism', addressing the origins, evolution, key elements, application, and frontiers of this tradition in institutional economics. I feel honoured to have been included in this project, and by the generous and thoughtful comments on my chapter by Barbara Hopkins and Tonia Warneke in this *Symposium*.

As Whalen notes in the 'Introduction', shortly after the project began, the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe [Whalen, (2022a), p.8]. This had a profound impact on my chapter 'Culture, Gender, and Feminist Institutionalism', largely written during the summer and early fall of 2020. In addition to fostering a reflective mind-set, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis focused my attention on the importance of inequality and care as key elements of feminist institutionalism, and the significance of culture, gender, dualism, social provisioning, and institutions in shaping feminist institutionalist understandings of and applications to inequality and care (Peterson, 2022).

Writing this chapter provided me with the opportunity to revisit the scholarship that played a critical role in the development of my understanding of the significance of gender and feminism in institutional economics beginning in the mid-1980s, as well as the influences of emergent feminist economics and radical institutionalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[3] Feminist institutionalism continued to develop through the 1990s and early 21st century through the contributions of many scholars embracing new theoretical and methodological questions, exploring new fields of study within economics, and addressing emerging economic problems and challenges.[4]

This process of intellectual development and evolution continues as feminist institutionalists grapple with the continuing and emerging problems of our world. For example, Hopkins in her contribution to this symposium argues that the pluralistic nature of feminist institutionalism offers a more complete picture of reality, which is more likely to reflect the experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. Warneke argues that understanding institutional context and sociocultural norms is necessary for undertaking research to address the complexity of current challenges and provides the United Nations SDGs as an example. In her contribution to this review essay, Warnecke notes that these goals – including reducing inequality, promoting decent work – have been set back globally due to the pandemic, but achieving gender equality, and using feminist institutionalism can and should play a role 'in framing conversations about these issues and analysing policy and program responses moving forward'.

At the beginning of his Introduction, Whalen references 'a bedrock principle of the institutionalist tradition' [Whalen, (2022a), p.1; drawn from Wesley C. Mitchell): "The only reason to study economics is 'to make this world a better place to live'." He argues further, 'the need for an economics dedicated to striving for a better world might be greater now than ever' [Whalen, (2022a), p.1]. The Introduction concludes optimistically with regard to these assertions:

> "The complexity of the real world and its problems may be daunting, but ignoring the complexity does not make it vanish. There's also a solid reason for hope: to a very great extent, the future is ours to make. That's because socioeconomic system are products of human action, which means they can be reshaped and reorganized. By shedding light on the world as it really is, the holistic economics at the heart of the institutionalist tradition has a key role to play in helping us move toward a better world." [Whalen, (2022a), p.11]

I believe that the institutional economics presented in this book, and the discussions of this symposium, support this optimism.

8 Charles J. Whalen: book editor's comments on the institutional economics roundtable

In the introduction to *Institutional Economics: Perspectives and Methods in Pursuit of a Better World*, I write that the collection aims not to serve as a cookbook on institutionalism, but instead to 'provoke a dialogue and spark innovative and practical research' that better advances socio-economic flourishing and environmental sustainability [Whalen, (2022a), p.1]. This roundtable demonstrates that a thoughtful dialogue has indeed begun. Moreover, the dialogue has already clarified the direction forward for innovative and practical research.

Perhaps the highlight of the [2022 AFIT] roundtable in Denver was when Barbara Hopkins reported on her successful use of Institutional Economics in the classroom, where she encourages students to think critically about the foundations of economics and to consider alternative analytical possibilities. As her essay in this review shows, Hopkins uses the book to emphasise the value of pluralism in economics, public policy, and human interaction. While the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many of us to rethink who we value, what we value, and how we value, Hopkins demonstrates that a serious look at our values has always been at the heart of institutionalism – and deserves to be at the centre of the work of any humane and democratic society.[5]

Meanwhile, each of the other essays adds clarity on the direction forward for institutionalist thought. Reynold Nesiba does this by focusing on the strengths of the post-Keynesian institutionalist tradition and on institutionalism's longstanding attention to the importance of economic storytelling. Tonia Warnecke provides clarity by underscoring how feminist institutionalism integrates gender into all our socio-economic analyses. William Waller moves us forward by extending three aspects of the argument found in his book chapter on the Veblenian dichotomy. Yan Liang shows us how environmental policy is determined in a social context, while also analysing mythopoetics, i.e., mythmaking. And Thomas Kemp builds on two of the book's chapters to further outline the process of constructing 'reasonable value'.

Reflecting on the Denver event and the essays it produced, my most enduring impression is that institutionalism is a vital tradition not because of the *Institutional Economics* volume or any other published work of institutionalist scholarship. Rather, institutionalism's vitality comes from the brave, collegial, and open-minded scholars that we find today in groups such as the Association for Institutional Thought and other organisations open to institutionalist thinking. These economists are relegated to the margins of the profession, but still they persist, making a difference in times of crisis when the mainstream falls silent, and struggling year-after-year to keep economics a pluralistic discipline regardless of the intellectual fashions of the day. Given the multiple socio-economic crises now confronting humanity (owing, for example, to the ongoing pandemic, decades of economic polarisation, the rise of authoritarianism, and global warming), the need for institutionalism is as great as ever. If, as I hope, institutional economics manages to flourish in the years ahead and helps move us toward a better world, the credit will belong to all my intrepid institutionalist colleagues, not just those who contributed to this book and subsequent roundtable.

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Notes

1 Editor's note: for a helpful exposition see (in this volume, Greitens, 2022).

2 Editor's note: see the fascinating book; *The Legal Foundations of Micro-Institutional Performance* (2022) which extends and builds on the SSP foundation presented here, along with a forthcoming review to be published in the *IJPEE*, Vol. 13, No. 3.

3 In her contribution to this symposium, Barbara Hopkins notes that feminist radical institutionalism developed through collaborative scholarly efforts 'illustrating that knowledge creation is a social process'. This is indeed an important aspect of the early development of feminist institutionalism (see for example, Peterson and Brown, 1994).

4 My major regret with respect to this chapter is that I could not discuss every scholar who has made important contributions to this literature and come even close to my already generous page limit.

5 While Hopkins used the book in a graduate-level course at Wright State University, William Waller also reported successful use of the book in his undergraduate institutionalism course at Hobart and William Smith Colleges.