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Whither Global Governance? A Tale of Decline and Deepening of Authority beyond the State

Zürn, Michael. **A Theory of Global Governance: Authority, Legitimacy & Contestation**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 336pp. £70.00 hardback, £19.99 paperback or e-book (ISBN 9780198819974).

A Theory of Global Governance (TGG) places itself in the tradition of the grand theories of International Relations, but offers a context-sensitive, updated perspective. Its holistic account of contemporary global politics is both theory-driven in its reconstruction of global developments over the course of seven decades and theory-enhancing in its stipulation of the relations between different components, such as the diversity of actors, changes in global and public authority, questions of legitimacy that stem from these changes, and resulting practices of politicization. TGG's central argument holds that global politics has decisively moved beyond the worlds captured by Realist and Liberal Institutional theories, which describe different versions of sovereignty-based intergovernmentalism but struggle to adequately explain how the global normative structure *endogenously* produces contestation, resistance, and distributional struggles (p. 3). At the heart of the book's grand narrative of global politics is a concern with global public authority—that is, the capacity of both international (e.g., the United Nations) and transnational institutions (e.g., rating agencies) to influence the fate of states as well as individuals. TGG sets out to explain how global public authority works and what trajectory it is likely to take, given that global governance institutions have become subject to scrutiny and open resistance that might interfere with humankind's ability to solve the pressing issues of our times.

According to the book's theoretical model, global governance institutions are based on normative principles that justify the shift in authority away from the state, such as notions of global common goods. These justificatory foundations are under strain. States and non-state actors increasingly challenge them because institutions lack the accountability that would reflexively link the institutions to those over which they exert authority, and because they are ill-equipped to deal with cross-sectoral coordination issues, such as managing the intersection of trade and health (p. 251). As a result, two simultaneous yet contrary developments emerge: the *decline* of governance institutions (i.e., increased blockage and a potential counter-institutionalization) and their *deepening* (i.e., adjustment of institutional functions). Zürn then devotes much space to discussing the link between the newly developing political or epistemic authorities and their limited room to manoeuvre, given the justificatory practices vis-à-vis states and societal actors. Concerning such practices, Zürn makes a compelling argument why technocratic or legalistic narratives appear to be the only viable strategies: these narratives claim to be based on non-prejudiced expertise and knowledge, or the enhancement of the role of law. Nevertheless, because actors do not regard institutions as working impartially, they further critique institutions through protest movements, populist parties, or so-called rising powers (Chapter 3). These actions challenge institutions' competence, not least because the participatory rules and the general *modus operandi* favour the status quo. The empirical chapters of the book (Chapter 6-8) subsequently offer a more detailed discussion of the mechanisms behind either the decline or deepening of institutions. To those who, like Zürn, hold the view that global governance is generally desirable to solve transnational problems, this analysis provides a glimmer of hope.

Empirically, TGG builds on an impressive list of studies that the author has conducted over the last decade. As befits a contribution that discusses the macro level of global politics, empirical examples draw on mostly aggregated data, stemming from a broad range of sources (e.g., the Berlin Social Science Research Centre's International Authority Database, semi-automated analyses of newspaper articles, and European Union-wide or global opinion polls). The author then ventures into possible scenarios for the decades ahead. Based on a variety of data, he identifies cosmopolitan pluralism as the most likely trajectory—out of a range of cosmopolitan offerings drawn from a number of prominent, Western, male theorists (Chapter 9). This pluralism centers on the notion that statehood is in decline and politics has become increasingly post-national, and advances the normative position that those affected by decisions should have a say in them. TGG closes with recommendations that would support institutional developments towards this end.

TGG's main contribution lies in its conscious positioning as a theory that replaces neorealist and neoliberal accounts of world politics. It offers a grand narrative that is historically contextualized and empirically anchored to the extent that any discussion of current politics premised on 'cooperation under anarchy' becomes obsolete. Just as some commentators envisage a return of realist power politics and proclaim that the 1990s and early 2000s were merely an interlude to the eternal struggle of all against all, the book comprehensively explains how the new system is of a different quality. It thereby invites a plurality of comments from the rich, interdisciplinary landscape that has flourished over the last three decades. Political and legal theorists, for example, might engage with Zürn's assessment of cosmopolitan institutions and global constitutionalism. Similarly, constructivist and poststructural scholars are offered a field of discussion—in TGG's closing "new global politics paradigm"—that cuts across issues of integration, fragmentation, hierarchies, modes of knowledge creation and institutionalization, inequalities, resistance, and contestation (Chapter 10).

This late acknowledgement of constructivist and poststructuralist empirical work is the book's weak spot; it is only in the closing pages that the author actively reaches out to the postpositivist and critical scholarly community. A considerable body of work theorizes global politics from a plurality of perspectives that reach beyond cosmopolitan pluralism. It has been debating for a while what Zürn seeks to achieve in this book—namely, to "develop hypotheses about the causes of conflicts and struggles, and the ongoing institutionalizations in world politics that are other and better than the theories linked with the anarchy premise" (p. 263). It is therefore not difficult to imagine how Zürn's approach will inspire further studies that support or challenge TGG's model of global governance by offering more fine-grained empirical assessments of global institutions.