other and common fate. Inmates could now use the newspaper, along with traditional instruments of riots and strikes, to express their grievances. Also, the economics of state use faltered; the demand for prison-made goods never rose to expected levels. A second wave of reformers (ca. 1913–17) revised the concept that inmate labor was the primary font of inmate morality, leading to successful release and citizenship. Alongside work opportunities, inmates were to be provided education, recreation, music, athletics, and privileges. Stability behind bars trumped the mission of preparing inmates for their return home as reformed citizen-workers. By 1940, the new paradigm had won out.

This brilliantly written history of U.S. prisons convincingly demonstrates that prisons are like other political orders that must establish their legitimacy. This task is especially difficult in a society that is committed to principles of freedom, yet denies them to a few—and, in recent years, far more than a few.


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Given the typical trajectories of the careers of sociologists and sociological theories, this is a very unlikely book. It is surprising enough that the authors make a radical challenge to the logical skeleton of sociological theory, proposing that formal expressions of dynamic logic might usefully supplant the natural-language expressions of classical logic that are the default in sociology. It is shocking that they would apply this approach in a far-reaching overhaul of the organizational ecology research program in which they have been leaders. That program has thrived for three decades, despite some foundational weaknesses. Most problematic was that organizational populations were imprecisely defined, such that analysts would identify interdependent organizations in ad hoc and inconsistent ways. This and other problems did not deter organizational ecology’s enthusiasts, who have produced hundreds of empirical studies, and, recently, the program’s critics have faded.

This is the point where most of us would declare victory and reap the rewards of status and influence that accrue to the authors of important theories. Instead, Hannan, Pólos, and Carroll have returned to the foundations of ecology, addressing exactly the issues that once animated their opposition. I think this is a delightfully courageous effort, and this book deserves to be recognized as an affirming statement about scholarly values.

Moreover, the reworking yields some fascinating results. A key advance
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is the authors’ use of fuzzy sets in the development of a micro theory for the emergence of organizational forms and populations. These macro constructs begin with an individual audience member who clusters and labels organizations, while allowing that a given organization may have only partial fit with a cluster. Audience members then develop cognitive schema, sets of characteristics that are expected of a given organizational type. When a segment of audience members has consensus over the schema of an organizational type, that schema qualifies as a category. Organizational forms are categories that have been legitimated. One of the most useful aspects of the book is the precise account of cognitive legitimation, a process that is important to organizational ecology and institutional theory, but one that has previously been treated as a black box. Legitimation is the collective manifestation of individuals coming to take for granted their schema for an organizational type. Taken-for-grantedness is also explained with refreshing clarity. Taken-for-grantedness is a function of the extent that the audience member will assume that organizations of a type have all of the features of a schema based on direct evidence of only some of those features (the less direct evidence required, the greater the tendency for taken-for-grantedness).

The shift to fuzzy sets solves some of the nagging problems of organizational ecology. For example, it is now possible for organizations to be simultaneously members of multiple populations. It becomes easier to define which organizations will compete with which others, and which will have the advantage in appealing to a given audience segment. But the great leap forward is in the determinants of population legitimacy. The theory of density-driven legitimation, which holds that the legitimacy of a population is driven by the number of organizations in the population, has been one of the least convincing claims of the ecological program. If legitimacy derives from taken-for-grantedness, it does not seem right that it should depend only on the number of organizations, and not on their homogeneity. The schema-based reformulation addresses this. With this approach, the taken-for-grantedness of a population depends on its contrast, which is the extent to which its members have a higher grade of membership (i.e., they are more full members and more like the other members of the population). For me, this is a much more resonant account of legitimation. This more precise definition also opens up some exciting avenues for research. I am particularly intrigued that with this model of legitimation, organizations have an interest in policing the boundaries of their own population. If an organization that was not sufficiently similar to others in a population claimed membership in the population, it could lower the population’s legitimacy. So, organizations may compete in cognitive space, attempting to exclude peripheral others from claims to population membership, in order to preserve the clarity in the mind of the audience member about just what the population represents. This categorical battle for the mind seems promising as a way of understanding
institutional entrepreneurship, and therefore represents an opportunity to apply the ideas in this book beyond organizational ecology.

It is the great irony of this book that its most compelling idea about how to appeal to an audience is not reflected in the structure of the book itself. Just as populations are more legitimate if they show a greater contrast to their environment, these authors (and others) argue that organizations are more appealing if they fall clearly into a focused category rather than spanning boundaries. Yet this book spans boundaries by trying at the same time to make a statement about the method of theory development and to offer a revised theory of organizational ecology. From the title onward, the book reflects an identity crisis. This makes it harder to read than necessary; for example, it begins with a stirring opening chapter on the methodological agenda, then spends four chapters on the substance of forms and populations and only in chapter 6 details the nonmonotonic logic the authors have developed. And many of the methodological details are presented in appendices. Readers who were not able to develop formal theory using dynamic logic before reading this book will not be able to do so after.

The substantive side of the book also could have benefited from more focused attention. In particular, I would have liked to see more on organizational identity, a topic these authors have said very interesting things about elsewhere, but give slight treatment to here.

I cannot help but conclude that this would have been better as two books, but I nevertheless like it very much. The scope that results from the dual focus means that it poses many more interesting questions than it answers, but this should stimulate more work on these ideas. It is also fun to read, as the authors mercifully offset the minutiae of formalization with wit. Logics of Organizational Theory deserves to be read and discussed by everyone interested in organizations and in the method of developing sociological theory.


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In 2002, Harry Collins and Robert Evans published a much-discussed paper that proposed an agenda for the sociology of experts and expertise (“The Third Wave of Science Studies: Studies of Expertise and Experience,” Social Studies of Science 32 [2]: 235–96). Rethinking Expertise is an elaboration of this agenda, which the authors continue to pursue. Instead of debunking science, they propose a refined analysis of the bases for knowledge claims made by scientific and lay experts: we should compare the bases of expertise claims to improve evaluation—especially if