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UNCERTAINTY AND THE SOCIAL ORDER OF THE ECONOMY:  
INTRODUCTION TO THE ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY OF JENS BECKERT

Jens Beckert is a central figure among the second generation of economic sociologists who emerged following the discipline’s revival in the 80’s and the pioneering work of Mark Granovetter, Harrison White, Paul DiMaggio, Viviana Zelizer, Frank Dobbin, Richard Swedberg, and Neil Fligstein. Over the last 20 years his work has greatly contributed to the institutionalization of economic sociology in Europe. Since 2005 Beckert has been the director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), one of the leading research institutes for economic sociology and political economy.

Beckert is currently one of the central theorists working in economic sociology. Social theory is concerned with three main questions: What is action? What is social order? What determines social change (Joas and Knöbl 2009: 18)?

Beckert has been investigating these questions with reference to the economy. He has written extensively on the concept of economic action (Beckert 2003; Beckert 2013b; Beckert 2016; Joas and Beckert 2001), the problem of economic order (Beckert 1996b; Beckert 2009; Beckert 2016), and economic change (Beckert 2010a; Beckert 2010b; Beckert 2016). What characterizes his theoretical work is that it starts out from the fundamental theoretical problem in economic sociology: Why should sociologists study the economy when a discipline called economics already exists (Beckert 1996a; Beckert 1996b)?

An introduction to his work can be done by looking at four articles that should be considered his programmatic statements (Beckert 1996b; Beckert

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1 These three questions as the foundation of social theory were introduced by Hans Joas, who was Beckert’s dissertation supervisor and later collaborator Joas, Hans, and Jens Beckert. 2001. “Action Theory: Handbook of Sociological Theory.” Pp. 269-85, edited by Jonathan H. Turner: Springer US.