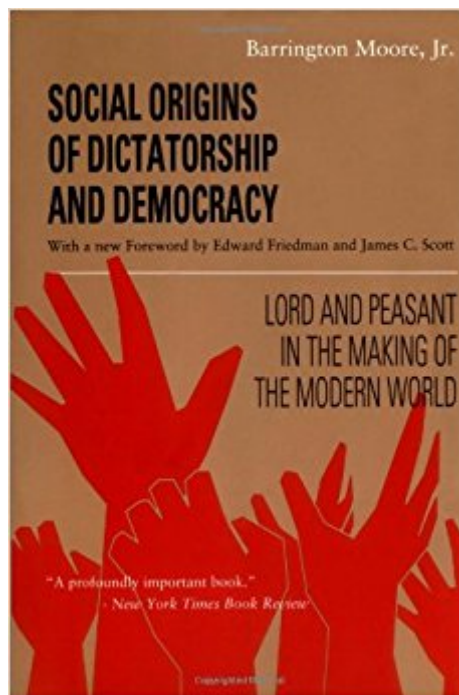




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Social Origins Of Dictatorship And Democracy: Lord And Peasant In The Making Of The Modern World



Synopsis

A landmark in comparative history and a challenge to scholars of all lands who are trying to learn how we arrived at where we are now. -New York Times Book Review

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Customer Reviews

A landmark in comparative history and a challenge to scholars of all lands who are trying to learn how we arrived at where we are now. -New York Times Book Review

BARRINGTON MOORE, JR is a Lecturer in Sociology at Harvard University and Senior Research Fellow for the University's Russian Centre. He was educated at Williams College, where he took a degree in Greek and Latin, and at Yale University where he gained a PhD in sociology. His book *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* received the Woodrow Wilson Foundation Award in political science and the MacIver Award in sociology. He is also the author of *Soviet Politics: The Dilemma of Power, Terror and Progress: USSR, Political Power and Social Theory* and, with Robert P. Wolff and Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*. His most recent book, *Reflections on the Causes of Human Misery and upon Certain Proposals to Eliminate Them*, was given the Ralph Waldo Emerson Award of Phi Beta Kappa.

Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World is a masterful example of comparative historical analysis. More than any of the pieces I have been

reading these past few weeks, Barrington Moore, Jr. is able to build as solid of an argument for the three major "routes to the modern world" from agrarian society as he does for the importance of qualitative methodologies in general. In other words, what he analyzes is as important, I believe, as how he goes about analyzing it. This is a sprawling, rolling text. And I think it is helpful to mention a few design elements of the book before tackling it. First off, you have to read the Preface. Do not just brush past that for Chapter I. Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy--much more like a tome from one of the political theorists of centuries past (Montesquieu's Preface to *The Spirit of the Laws* comes to mind)--has a lot of important ideas crammed into the Preface. In fact, if you do not spend some time on just those first eight pages of the Preface, Chapters I-III, will wash over you like some ugly biblical wave of powerful historicity. Moore's preface is the lifeboat that will keep you afloat. With that simple, but honest admission out of the way, we can move forward. But instead of moving on to Chapter I, I suggest we do something criminal--something I am positive Moore would not want us to do--by skipping past the first six chapters and peaking ahead to the last three. Why do this? Well, it is because Moore does something a bit odd with the design of the book. In building his causal arguments of the main factors that propel a national state from an agrarian society to an industrial society, Moore, in a way, places the evidence before the argument. This is why I said the Preface was so important earlier, because without it, trying to understand what Moore is after can seem somewhat frustrating for the reader. This unique and imaginative design creates the surreal experience for the reader of being a watcher of history unfolding before you. You actually get the sense that you do not know how things are going to turn out. Even though we all know that Chapters I-III on England, France, and America will end with these national states enjoying democratic regimes, and that Chapter IV and V on China and Japan will lead to more autocratic regimes, and that Chapter VI on India will lead to a muddled mess (you knew that one about India, right? ha! Do not forget that this was book was published in 1966)--even though we as good political science students know all this already, Moore, by electing to wait until the end of his book to outline clearly his main argument, allows the reader to truly appreciate the complicated narrative of case-specific facts that must not be allowed to rust alone and forgotten and that must be properly polished and used to prop up the enfolding process of time and rich textuality if we ever hope to understand what went into, what caused the modern world to be modern. Cool, right? Anyway... So here is the soulless version of Moore's argument, stripped of all the goodies of time; three avenues exist, he argues, to get from peasant-infested agriculture to modern industry:- Route of Bourgeois Revolution, a combination of capitalism and parliamentary democracy (of which he cites England, France, and America in Chapters I, II, and III).- Route of "Revolution from Above," the fascist variety, still with

capitalism, though with ugly top-down reactionary politics (say hello to Japan in Chapter V).- Route of Peasant Revolution, this sucker leads to communism (China, he emphasizes here in Chapter IV). There is also something of a fourth route, if one can call it that:- Route of Stillborn Revolution, it seems that India had yet to work out its "backwardness" by the time Moore was authoring this in the 1960s (Chapter VI). This is the main gist of his book. And what, then, are the empirical data leading to this conclusion? That, of course, cannot be given away in this small review. I say that it is much better to digest the book for yourself. Enjoy! [...]

for someone who loves political theory, this is an excellent book to read that delves deeply into what causes revolutions and what creates a dictatorship and what creates a democracy. the only problem with this book is that it can't seem to take an account of why India is still a democracy. the peasants won in india, but they are still a democracy.

Preface to this review: This is a great book is a great work and this review is a review of the work and offers an extension to today by utilizing Samuel P. Huntington, Theda Skocpol, and Schneirov & Fernandez. Skocpol was a student of Barrington Moore and offers one of the greatest critiques of his work. She offers one of the best intellectual views of his work. I also utilize Edward Friedman when criticizing India and China. These insights help point out some of the flaws, but remember this book is a cornerstone of understanding development of capitalism and understanding modernity. The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy by Barrington Moore is very well researched book providing a Marxist approach to answering the question of what conditions cause certain societies to be democratic and non-democratic. Moore argues that economic factors rather than cultural ideology. Moore suggests there are three different routes to modernization. The first route is the bourgeois revolution that is a bottom up revolution that is democratic capitalist; he uses England, France, and the United States as his examples. Moore then states that the second route is top down reactionary capitalist route that leads to fascism and he sites Germany and Japan in the book. The third route that Moore highlights is the peasant led Communist route where he analyzes Russia and China. Moore's argument is that all of these countries developed differently through class structures and through the change of agrarian societies to industrial societies. Moore states that these transitions are violent upheavals. The main point that Moore states is that there cannot be a democratic revolution with out a strong bourgeoisie. This paper will begin by laying out the basic argument that Moore makes and then critiquing it by utilizing Theda Skocpol, Edward Freidmen, and Samuel P. Huntington. Moore sites England, France, and The United States as

having a strong bourgeois impulse. This bourgeois impulse is the key factor in determining a democratic society. If the bourgeois impulse is strong in the beginning stages of modernization then the country will be democratic. Moore argues that there are three variables that determine a democratic revolution. The first variable is the commercial impulse or the growth of the urban base commodity markets. Moore points out the degree of commercialization or the spread of urban-based commodity markets occurring throughout all three routes to modernization. This variable is important in describing how an agrarian society can transition to a more industrialized society. In the case studies that Moore outlines he states that the countries that democratized had a strong bourgeois impulse. The countries that have a fascist route have a moderate strength bourgeois impulse. The countries that have had the least or no bourgeois impulse were the communist countries. The determining factors of a democratic revolution still hinge on political propensities and the opportunity for class alliances between the agrarian classes. If the bourgeois impulse is strong then the bourgeois classes will set the tone of the political discourse, as seen in England. If the bourgeois impulse is moderate then the upper classes will set the political discourse. Theda Skocpol states it comes down to three variables, which are the formation of commercial agriculture, whether it will be labor-repressive or prefer market agriculture. A strong bourgeois class will favor a form of market commercialization over a labor repressive one as seen in England and the U.S. The second variable is the potential for a peasant revolt. For a potential peasant revolt the bourgeois element needs to align with the peasantry or lower orders to help create a more democratic revolution. If these variables are in place then there will be a bottom up revolution. The third variable is the propensity for a peasant revolt. This all relies on the concept of the peasantry having a cross-class alliance with the bourgeois element. The peasantry provides the insurgency needed to encourage the revolution. The key aspects of the peasantry fall on whether the agrarian state can be fully transformed into a commercial state. In order to have a commercial society the peasantry needs to be eliminated. In the case of the American Civil War the North was industrializing very quickly and becoming a commercial society whereas the South was still heavily rooted in an agrarian, feudal system. The act of slavery was a hindrance to commercial interest of industrialization. A fascist system with a moderate to low bourgeois impulse will have a more favorable outlook for labor-repressive agriculture and will likely fuse with the monarchy. In a fascist route the Upper landed class will align with the emerging bourgeois class instead of the peasantry. If this class alignment happens then there will be little effect to industrial progress or modernization. However, it will lack the democratic element and will be unstable. This is an example of a top down approach. If there is no bourgeois element then the government will have to step into the role of the

bourgeoisie. The state will act as the industrializing actor and will lead to the communist route and will leave little room for democracy. Moore's analysis is well researched and contributes greatly to the understanding of the origins of how states become democratic, fascist, and communist. It is a great explanation and creates a great basis for the understanding of modernization and democratization, but there are flaws within his argument. The first critique is in regard to the bourgeois impulse. Moore, when looking at the bourgeoisie and judging its degree of strength by a system-wide analysis, determines these factors based on the number, dispersion, and the density of urban upper class people participating in commerce. Was the emergence of the bourgeois impulse the reason for creating transition or was it the desperation of power among all people in society? If one applies the same method of assessment to the different classes would there be a different result? Many people did not benefit from the change of the system structure, yet when looking at the people separately they did not all have bourgeois ideas. This could be explained by the fact that the hegemonic bloc was in a transition and that even people who benefited from an agrarian society would choose to follow the new ideology of a market system. The second critique of Moore is within his market system versus the labor-repressive commercial agriculture system. His idea is somewhat flawed in that he determines a market system is not controlled by some governmental agency. Moore states that the English are market-commercial in that they were primarily relying on themselves to extract surplus. Skocpol states that: "England employed Parliamentary decrees to enclose lands, used control of parish political offices to regulate the movement of labourers via administration of justice and the Poor Laws." This is being done with the help of a governmental power. The same can be said with Japan. Moore states that Japan's relationship was the reverse to that of England. Moore continues by saying Japan used the government to push off tenants from their land. England also used poor laws, and other political mechanisms to force tenants off of their land. The third critique is concerning the terminology that Moore uses when dealing with the Marxist political sociological outlook and how it is seen as inadequate when compared to Marxist interpretations. Skocpol remarks that the state will work against short term and long-term interests to preserve the mode of production. Moore's folly is that he focuses on the landed upper classes and asserts that bourgeois economic activities are influences. So if every bottom up revolution does not replace the previous landed upper class then the revolution was a result of the political action by the upper class and not the bourgeoisie. Other criticisms made by Edward Friedman about Moore's analysis of India and China. The criticisms about India and China come from the apparent inconsistencies that Moore demonstrated when talking about Leninist economic systems. Friedman criticizes Moore

about how he championed the superiority of Socialist China but he failed to see that India had a Leninist government. Friedman asserts that China and India were not economically different and that Moore knew India's economy mimicked the economy at the end of Lenin's last years in power. Maoist China and Nehru-Gandhi's India both were Leninist economies. Moore wrote previously that Leninism had stagnation built into the structure and would be seen as a dead end. In *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Moore equates violence under Leninism with liberal modernization but he did not account for the importance of freedom. Moore justifies that violence is necessary for democracy to happen and cites France as an example of violence being the necessity for democracy. India had a democracy but was economically Leninist. The problem then becomes that if violence is necessary for democracy and then praise is put upon a country like India that is economically Leninist, and then violence under the Leninist state is justified because at the time it was seen as modernizing. It was only after the revelation of the failure of Leninist economies that the model was dismissed as backward. Friedman ultimately states that Moore was writing from a place of bias and states: "Moore wrote from the inevitably prejudiced palace of the present." Moore's theory that for a successful transition to democracy requires violence is suited for older revolutions but how does one describe the revolution in the later part of the twentieth century? Samuel P. Huntington speaks to this question by stating that the democratic revolutions from 1974 onward transitioned with very limited violence. This is not to say that there was no violence, in fact almost all democratic transitions had some violence. In the later twentieth century revolutionary democratic countries were less violent for a few reasons. The governments were less likely to impose violence against opposition parties. A second reason is that different measures of violence are associated with different transitions of democratizations. The reason for this is that reformers in the regime were powerful enough to help initiate a transition to democracy and therefore could do it with little violence. The third reason was that government sometimes resisted the use of violence if there was a more wide spread middle class element. Countries would be more likely to use force if the country had a relatively low level of socioeconomic development. Finally there was less violence from in the later twentieth century because the opposition parties and their leaders insisted on the use of nonviolence. Huntington states that the use of nonviolence is key in helping countries shift toward democratization. Huntington states in opposition to Moore's claim that there needs to be violence for a successful revolution by stating between the 1860's and 1960's violent revolutions happened but they resulted in few democratized states. Between 1974 and the 1990's the revolts that were very violent produced almost no democratic revolutions. Moore states for the democratic path to happen

there needs to be a major violent upheaval. Huntington shows that in the twentieth century there were many countries that took the democratic path and transitioned successfully with little violence. Barrington Moore's book is a great work that tediously goes into the histories of different states and helps explain the different routes to modernity. This book is a great positive contribution to the scientific enterprise of understanding modernizations. It is easy to criticize the book today with the power of hindsight and to see many of his flaws. The flaws are fairly small compared to what Moore

It remains a classic text. Yes scholarship has moved on but this work remains foundational for anyone interested in the questions Barrington Moore was raising.

an old but sophisticated analysis of the origins of modern states, whether of the democratic or the authoritarian variety. A sociological masterpiece.

Good book!

Excellent work. Fundamental work for exploring social change.

I did not read this book because I thought it would be fun, but rather was forced to read this book because it was supposed to be an exemplar of comparative politics. The idea is that comparative political science is not as rigorous as other portions of the discipline, and that this book disproves that fact. Well, I do not agree because Moore's evidence is skewed, even though the comparative method that is used is useful in illustrating differences between units of analysis. The method is nice in that Moore finds differences between different countries and then illustrated how these differences matter or where brought about. Like I said before, I disagree with some of the evidence used, but not the method. It is a dense book, but not all that bad for what it is.

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