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Methodology's Problem, and Democracy's Too

People fight for democracy. The fall of communisms, the Color Revolutions, and the Arab Spring are recent popular struggles about democratization. If collective human agency causes democracy, two questions arise: what type of democracy do people want? How is their collective agency causal for democracy?

Comparativists studying democratization advocate democratic theories and advance causal methodologies. This book will discern an elective affinity of theory and method. The Moore Curve – the more external the causal methodology, the thinner the democratic theory – governs democratization studies. However, most comparativists never stop to reflect on the relationship between normative and empirical questions of collective human agency. They inevitably slight concerns about how their prescriptive theories and descriptive methods cohere.

The way forward in comparative politics to more fully anthropomorphize people and insert them into the ought/is debate. Desired outcomes Y face the opportunities and constraints of historical conditions X. To deepen normative appreciation and empirical understanding of democracy, to join why-Y normative visions of democracy with if-X-then-Y causal models of democracy, comparativists should thicken their conceptions of collective human agency. Complexifying agency allows comparativists to reconcile different normative theories of democracy with different empirical approaches to causality. A new and different

understanding then emerges: because collective agency is the causal force behind democracy, the freedom and the power of collective agency become the core dilemmas of democratization. With these ideas in hand, comparativists can address the crucial practical problem of democratic performance: in building a democratic state, which democracy under which conditions is best?

Democratic theory without causal method is empty; causal method without democratic theory is blind. Only in unison can knowledge advance about the causal collective human agency behind democratization.

To develop these themes, I first examine Barrington Moore's problem situation (Section 1.1) and his core problem (Section 1.2). I then explore the democratic theories and causal methodologies used by today's comparativists (Section 1.3). Next, I argue that the elective affinities of theory and method result from research schools in comparative politics (Section 1.4). The constructive aims of the book connect causal collective human agency with democratization (Section 1.5). Finally, I summarize the chapters (Section 1.6).

1.1. THE BARRINGTON MOORE PROBLEM SITUATION

The search for the causes of democracy begins with Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. In 1966, Moore offered the UrTheory of modern comparative politics: "No bourgeoisie, no democracy." Outlasting a hundred qualifications and a thousand equivocations, here was a pithy narrative, pregnant with morals and methods, that was powerful enough to animate the field. Moore's proposition held significant implications for what Ira Katznelson (2009) calls the big structures of liberalism: a secular national culture, pluralist civil society, capitalist economic market, procedurally responsive governing institutions, limited state bureaucracy, and an international order facilitating peace and trade among states. Since its inception, "bourgeois" liberalism, Moore reminded us, was a core political

tradition of the West. Under siege in bipolar and multipolar worlds, the tradition was challenged by major powers pursuing counterhegemonic modernities that offered religious and ethnic, authoritarian and statist, alternatives.

One reason for Moore's enduring success arises from his vivid descriptions and concrete explanations of the various paths to modernity. Capturing variation in the historical experiences of the early developers in the West – England and France – he also depicted the diversity of the follow-up experiences of middle-developer Japan and late-developer China. Drawing comparisons to cases not often thought about – America as an early developer and India as a late developer – was a stroke of genius. By not including chapters on Germany and Russia he forced comparativists to rethink the development experiences of these crucial cases.

Moore's narratives were also successful because they told and foretold the dramatic political battles of world politics. Believing that the key protagonists were the crown (bureaucracy and army), aristocracy (landowners), lower classes of ordinary peoples (peasants and workers), and the bourgeoisie, he portrayed the strange political bargains that were struck. To capture the state and direct its development, a rising bourgeoisie could ally with an old rural elite, or a peasantry could join a working-class party. Understanding the protagonists as class-bound actors did produce somewhat of a fairy tale. Nevertheless, Moore correctly argued that during the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries, contending constellations of historical forces – carrier groups and their associated ideas and organizations – advanced their domestic and foreign policy agendas through attempted revolutionary and reformist changes in regimes. Collective human agency was thus causally connected to the interstate conflicts and internal wars of the 1920s and 1930s, producing the clash of democracy, fascism, and communism. In the post WWII period, the old colonial order was opposed by domestic coalitions in new states seeking national liberation from various empires. During the Cold War, states pursuing varieties of authoritarian communism fought states pursuing types of democratic capitalism. After the Cold War,

as states in the West attempted to reorganize their democracies and markets, variations of liberalism and neoliberalism, and modifications of conservatism and neoconservatism, found domestic and global champions. Since the Iranian revolution, political Islam has been an alternative development strategy pursued in the postcolonial world. After Deng Xiaoping replaced Mao, China showed late-late developers that a communist party could be the vanguard of state-led capitalist economic development. During the 1990s and afterward, certain states in the global south did not pursue any recognizable path of development. Usually predatory and sometimes genocidal, they often collapsed into civil war and bred transnational terrorism. And throughout the post-Moore years, various worldwide political projects emerged from global civil society. Collective actors, advocating socialism with a human face, universal human rights, cosmopolitan peace and justice, and liberation theology proposed regime organizations and global institutions that challenged the hegemony of "bourgeoisie" liberalism.

In sum, Moore effectively captured the problem situation of contemporary comparative politics: in competitive international environments, contending social formations (with preferences, beliefs, endowments, and strategies) construct state institutions that produce policy regimes that, in turn, influence economic development. Today's comparativists typically propose midrange theories about the coevolution of parts of Moore's story. Challenges to the state are global. Ruling coalitions are key factuals. Potential governing coalitions that never form are important historical counterfactuals; causal claims explore, for example, why a German-type authoritarian coalition did not have sufficient collective agency to dominate American politics. World politics is about the conflict over institutional frameworks for constructing and reconstructing states. States pursue policy regimes for economic development, and public policies are judged by their economic consequences.

Moore was also successful because his story built on a core question of social and political thought: how do conflicts create institutions and how do the institutions then manage the conflicts?

The tradition of studying the static covariance and dynamic coevolution of institutions and conflicts extends from Plato (1974) and Aristotle (1981); to Montesquieu (1989) and Machiavelli ([1514] 1961); to Hobbes ([1651] 1988), Locke (1988), and Rousseau ([1762] 1968); to Hamilton, Jay, and Madison ([1787–1788] 1961); to Marx ([1869] 1963) and Weber ([1924] 1968); to Easton (1953) and Almond and Powell (1966); to Linz ([1975] 2000), Eckstein and Gurr (1975), and Huntington (1968); and beyond Moore to Skocpol (1979) and Lijphart (1999). Part of this long tradition, Moore understood domestic battles over state building as entailing more than disputes about today's decision-making processes and tomorrow's allocation strategies – "who gets what, when, and where" questions (Lasswell 1950). Institutions are long-run patterns of authority over peoples and territories that undergird resource extraction (taxes and conscription) and societal regulation (laws and rules). They create power, or "the ability to get someone to do something they wouldn't otherwise do" (Dahl 1957). Structures of domestic governance therefore become the objects of power struggles over alternative paths of development. By following Moore, comparativists could study contentious world politics as the perpetual bargaining in a state over the "*monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force*" (Weber 1946a: 78, emphasis in original) and "the authoritative allocation of scarce values" (Easton 1953). Today's comparativists could thus join generations of social and political theorists in searching for the well-functioning and high-performing structures of politics and government. By following Moore, they could address big questions about deep institutional arrangements. Laying at the interstices of global governance, state structures, and popular participation, these governing regimes create the patterns of conflict and systems of conflict resolution that animate world politics.

Moore thus remains a cornerstone of comparativists studying how collective human agency manifests itself in the political contention surrounding state institutions. In other words, domestic and international actors, and their associated interests, ideas, and organizations, contend for power. Political demands and collective claim making construct characteristic patterns of domestic

politics. Paraphrasing Charles Tilly (1975: 42), one of Moore's most famous students, internal war made the state and the state made internal war. Political contention over development manifests itself as peaceful dissent, social movements, protest demonstrations, and political strikes. Violent ethnic riots, terrorist campaigns, military coups, guerrilla insurgencies, civil wars, and social revolutions are additional possibilities. Because internal wars over grand strategies of state building produced powerful sovereign states in some places and Hobbesian state breakdowns elsewhere, political contention influences the types of political order that prevail in particular historical eras.

Finally, Moore was successful because he challenged the never-dying theory of universal modernity. Marx's materialism and Hegel's idealism diagnosed the master levers of systemic change and placed them at the cores of progressively unfolding historical narratives. Their essentialist and historicist perspectives could be tragic and yet ultimately redeeming: holding short-lived bumps on the way to happy endings, they held that social life is governed by blind forces producing resolvable contradictions. A widely accepted moral framework for political thought, modernization's current manifestation is global democracy and cosmopolitan human rights: the everywhere and everytime culmination of the millenniums-long moral development of virtue and enlightenment. Instead of a relentless modernist project – one grand teleological model of organic, stable, and harmonious development – Moore invited us to see bloody battles over science and secularism, nationalism and pluralism, markets and planning, democracy and dictatorship, limited and statist bureaucracies, and international order and global anarchy. He thus taught us that these struggles over "bourgeois" liberalism are endless. While winners claim victory and then in good fractal fashion fragment (Abbott 2001), losers, rather than receding into history, politicize new dimensions of conflict (Riker 1982). As new institutions yield new conflicts, popular agency reinvents itself.

So here are the grand concerns Barrington Moore bequeathed to comparative politics: alternative modernities and the challenges to liberalism; state building and contentious world

politics; and the origins, operations, and outcomes of political institutions. At the center of comparative inquiry, Moore placed the question of causal collective human agency as the motor of historical change.

1.2. THE BARRINGTON MOORE PROBLEM

Given his influence, it is surprising that comparativists have forgotten Moore's (p. 508) concluding reflections: "Whether the ancient Western dream of a free and rational society will always remain a chimera, no one can know for sure. But if the men of the future are ever to break the chains of the present, they will have to understand the forces that forged them." His conclusion was doubly ironic.

Moore's historical narratives had shown that utopian dreams of moral purity transcending politics inevitably confront real-world empirical realities. Moore (p. 427) thus distinguished among the people who begin a revolution, those who carry through the revolution, and the ones who profit from a revolution. In other words, real historical actors never enjoy the benefits of the grand philosophical systems that they try to implement. As would-be makers of revolution adopt incoherent ideologies, offer confused programmatic blueprints, and pursue unstable political strategies, their political actions hold unintended, unwanted, and unexpected consequences. For example, Moore (p. 505) thought that revolutionary violence was needed to produce democratic outcomes, and was often worth the costs. Moreover, local actors never think of themselves as historical agents taking sides in this historical mishmash. While it might seem that "the making of the modern world" entails glorious ideals, giant projects, grand strategies, and great revolutions, Moore's histories were far more complex. Hence, the irony: even if "the men of the future" could "understand the forces that forged" the present, implementing "the ancient Western dream of a free and rational society" could never be straightforward. Moore's most penetrating historical reflections had revealed the disillusioning facts, intractable tradeoffs, and distasteful compromises that plague would-be state builders.

Moore's second irony was contained in his argument that material structures determine political regimes. While he polemicized against cultural theories – "To explain behavior in terms of cultural values is to engage in circular reasoning" (p. 483) – his concluding remarks appear to say something quite different. If people could grasp their architectonic system as a whole, and if they could thereby come to see the laws that drive human affairs, Moore seemed to suggest that their understandings of themselves and of their place in the system could turn a nation-in-itself into a nation-for-itself. Never mind the burdens of history – the grind of path dependence and the trap of causal determinism. While men and women always face rigid economic, social, and political structures, they can turn hidden opportunities into creative possibilities. Alternative modernities, while never infinite, are always greater than at first you believe. Yet once Moore asked people to stop and think about their politics, he had placed normative conceptions of democracy at the core of the causal human agency behind democratization.

Can collective human agency trump structuralist teleology and fashion democracy? Can citizens overcome billiard-ball causal constraints, manipulate environmental counterfactuals, and invent "a free and rational society"? By pitting collective human agency against structural finalism, modernist dreams against genealogical realities, Moore had problematized the relationship between normative theories advocating a democratic state and causal methodologies seeking the origins of democracy.

The Barrington Moore Problem: reconciling the causal claim "no bourgeoisie, no democracy" with the normative "dream of a free and rational society."

Modernity, Moore tells us, is an unfinished project fraught with challenges and crises. In analyzing struggle, comparativists should bring their moral commitments to their academic work. Using the analytical powers of social science, they should preserve and protect, defend and extend, the Enlightenment's liberal values of a free and rational political order. Nevertheless, Moore also led comparativists to wonder: given the causal dynamics behind

multiple paths to the modern world, can the dream of a free and rational society be salvaged? Is it possible to employ realistic empirical methodologies and simultaneously defend normative commitments to democracy? Put otherwise, under the causal conditions of modernity, can a self-organizing community of free and equal citizens create a rational society as proclaimed by the Enlightenment? Or do the conditions of economic industrialization and technological development unleash the destructive capacity of collective human power that outweighs its creative potential?

It is important to recognize the Barrington Moore Problem as part of a 1960s problematique (Katznelson 2003). Just as in the 1930s, and even earlier at the turn of the twentieth century, in the 1960s democratic practices challenged democratic theories. As the new realistic empiricism coming out of political science undermined the long-standing desiderata cherished by political theorists, the West seemed unable to defend its commitments. Caught between the specter of academic relativism and the fear of real-world absolutism, defenders of a free and rational society rallied against irrationality and autocracy.

Offering a dynamic twist on a debate concerned with equilibrium outcomes, Moore studied class alignments and revolutionary violence as historical agents of the West's democratization. Unfortunately, Moore never elaborated a theory that connected cause and cause, that is, moral cause with empirical cause. If bourgeois capitalist industrialization began the process of democratization, his bourgeoisie remained a messy and contested ethical force behind change. Without an explicit etiology of collective human agency, his analysis raised as many questions as it answered. The task of reconciling the ought/is dilemma of democratization was bequeathed to future comparativists.

1.3. COMPARATIVISTS TODAY

Moore's concluding remarks have been forgotten, allowing today's comparativists to benefit from a division of labor. While they elaborate alternative visions of causality – comparative

statics, constructivism, historical-structural typologies, and mechanisms and processes – they leave the task of specifying alternative visions of democracy to political theorists. Passions and commitments – the hopes and dreams for a democratic politics based on electoral procedures, a national community, economic development, and peaceful contention – are for others.

In the nearly five decades since Moore wrote, comparativists devised new methodologies for causal analysis. Their methods permit them to explore new situations confronting new actors possessing new forms of agency. However, the deepening of empirical methods have come at the cost of ignoring Moore's core problem of moral agency in a causal world. Today's comparativists never stop to think about how their answers to the question "What causes a democratic state?" depend on what they mean by *cause*, depend on what they mean by *democratic state*, and depend on the elective affinities of their answers. In short, comparativists never address democracy as *both* normatively *and* empirically relevant to today's novel problem situations.

To study how the Barrington Moore Problem arises in today's comparative politics, four questions should be addressed:

1. What is the problem situation in which the Moore Problem arises?
2. Which type of democracy is advocated?
3. How is the research methodology causally relevant?
4. Who provides the collective human agency that solves the Moore Problem?

In other words, comparativists must begin with their understanding of the world-historical problem situation, propose normative theories of democracy, and advance research methodologies. The problem of collective human agency – the cause behind a cause – then arises. As normative theory and research methodology interweave, potentially fruitful elective affinities are brought to the various problem situations under investigation.

This book shows how these four questions are addressed by four research paradigms, or overall visions of politics, that have gained prominence since Moore wrote (Table 1). Rational choice