

**Violence and Social Orders:
A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History**

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Preface

Lurking somewhere in every explanation of large scale social change is a theory of economics and a theory of politics. Sometimes, as in the materialist theory of Marx, the theories are explicit. But often they are implicit and, even more often, theories of economics and politics are independent. Despite a great deal of attention and effort, social science has not done a good job of coming to grips with how economic and political development are connected in either history or in the modern world. The absence of a workable integrated theory of economics and politics reflects the lack systematic thinking about the central problem of violence in human societies. In most treatments, violence flows from power and, as the saying goes, power comes from the end of a gun.

This book lays out set of concepts that reverse the relationship between violence and power and allow us to see how the allocation of power over political, economic, religious, and educational resources and activities has been used by societies over the last ten thousand years to limit and contain violence. If violence flows from power it seems paradoxical to argue that creating power limits violence, but that is an important implication of our framework. In most societies power is created through institutions that structure human organizations and relationships. These institutions simultaneously create power by giving individuals control over

resources and social functions and limit power by shaping the incentives faced by powerful individuals. Our aim is to understand how a new social order first developed five to ten thousand years ago that utilized this new form of social organization, replacing small foraging societies, and how a third social order arose in the last two centuries that enables the most powerful societies the world has ever seen to constrain power and manage violence through political, economic, social, and cultural competition.

This book lays out a conceptual framework underlying the two social orders and the process by which societies make the transition from one social order to another. After sketching the conceptual framework in the first chapter, we consider the logic of the social order that appeared five to ten millennia ago: *the natural state*. Natural states use the political system to regulate economic competition and creates economic rents; it then uses those rents to order social relations, control violence, and establish social cooperation. The natural state transformed human history, indeed the first natural states developed techniques of building and recording that resulted in the beginnings of *recorded* human history. Most of the world still lives in natural states today.

Next we consider the logic of the second new social order that emerged in a few societies at the beginning of the 19th centuries: *the open access society*. As with the appearance of natural states, open access societies transformed human history in a fundamental way. Perhaps 25 countries and 15 percent of the world's population live in open access societies, the other 175 countries and 85 percent live in natural states. Open access societies regulate economic and political competition in a way that uses the entry and competition to order social relations. The third task of the book is to explain how societies make the transition from natural states to open access societies.

We develop a conceptual framework, not a formal or analytical theory. Our desire is to write a book accessible to social scientists and historians of many types. We identify three underlying patterns in human history. We show how the second and third social orders are structured, why they work the way they do, and the logic underlying the transition from one social order to another. We do not present a formal model that generates explicit empirical tests or deterministic predictions about social change. Instead, we have a conceptual framework that incorporates explicitly endogenous patterns of social, economic, political, military, religious, and educational behavior. The challenge is explaining how durable and predictable social institutions deal with an ever changing, unpredictable, and novel world and to do that the framework provides us with a way to understand dynamic forces of social change. There is, however, no teleology built into the framework: it is a dynamic explanation of social change, not of social progress.

We interlace historical illustrations with the conceptual discussion to provide enough evidence that these patterns actually exist in the world. In the case of the transition from natural states to open access societies, we want to show that the forces we identify can be retrieved from the existing historical record. We are not writing a history of the world. The history provides examples and illumination rather than conclusive tests of our ideas. The examples range from the neo-lithic revolution, Republican and Imperial Rome, Aztec Mesoamerica, the middle ages, to the present. Some specialists in the times and places we study will argue that we have lifted these examples out of context, and we have. But our intention is to put these examples in a new context, to provide a new framework for interpreting the course of human history over the last ten thousand years, and to open new ways of thinking about the pressing problems of political and economic development facing the world today.