corrective to contemporary accounts that focus on disorder and anarchy as the dominant forces in natural states. Before seeking to transplant institutions devised in open-access orders to natural states, as the international community has been prone to do, we would do well to understand the mechanisms that natural states have developed for providing order and stability. Natural states function as they do for sound reasons. This book goes a long way toward helping us understand what those reasons are and the consequences that follow from them.

Notes

1 Centeno 2002.
2 See Lake n.d. for a discussion of the process by which individuals and groups "vest" themselves in a particular social order.

References

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When I first cracked the pages of this ambitious book it was with a sense of trepidation. In George Eliot's masterwork, *Middlemarch*, the desiccated scholar Causuban spends his entire life composing a towering—and never complete—theory of everything existing. Was this to be a social science version of the hapless Causuban's project? I was soon relieved on that score. The book is nothing if not ambitious, but the authors' goal is merely to account for all social and political phenomena since recorded history. A breathtaking aim, that, but at least it is not everything. How well do they do in establishing this new conceptual framework?

There are many virtues to this work. It is clearly and crisply written. The authors are forthright about their guiding assumptions. They take up some unusual topics for a work of social science, offering, for example, a smart, serious consideration of the medieval church with its extraordinarily complex structure of law and authority. There is a gap here that means they cannot claim comprehensiveness for this account, however, as they do not discuss in any detail the regnant medieval theory—the "two swords" doctrine—that held there were two legitimate swords, one "secular" (as we might say), the other sacred. The challenge, then, was to figure out who had effective authority over whom and what. There was ambiguity in all of this that is ignored in the book's discussion (more in the following). Still: they pay attention where very few do and that is all to the good. There are other such moments as well.

Violence and Social Orders must be assessed, finally, not on whether it incorporates phenomena social scientists often ignore but on its conceptual framework and whether one finds it compelling or not. The power of the book's argument hinges on whether one is persuaded that all of human history can be encapsulated in three states or conditions of rule: the natural state, the limited-access order, and the open-access order. Douglass North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry Weingast do not argue that all states everywhere transition through these phases at the same time—clearly an impossibility—but, rather, that these are identifiable stages in all societies known to us historically. The conceptual framework is laid out in the first chapter. The historic transitions are covered in subsequent chapters, as the authors unpack the logic of social orders, from millennia in the natural state to orders that emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century, from limited- to open-access orders. It is the internal logic of orders that interests

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them—that and the transition from one social order to another.

In a fascinating manner, the authors contend that most of the world remains in the natural state. This lends urgency to their task of explaining how societies make the transition from natural states to open-access orders. They offer no formal model of necessary change; no teleology of progress, but plenty of change. If there is a "law" in human history it is the story of change, but that change is not predetermined to move ever onward and upward. Such change is a dicey business, not entirely predictable. And undertaking such an ambitious theorization of such change is fraught with pitfalls as well. Historians, anthropologists, and cultural analysts, as well as other political scientists and theorists, will surely take exception to the conceptual framework and to the ways in which the authors—unavoidably in such a work—downplay or ignore some phenomena even as they emphasize others. This is not necessarily a fatal flaw. Every sophisticated reader appreciates that no one book can do everything—although this one tries. At the same time, authors are responsible for the consequences of their own presuppositions.

What prompted this ambitious undertaking in the first place? According to the authors, it was a "lack of systematic thinking about the problem of violence." Here I must offer my first demurral. It is simply not the case that there has been a lack of such thinking. Apart from what anthropologists and historians have done with the question, just war thinkers have for centuries tackled the problem of violence with admirable rigor.

The authors might respond that just war thinkers are concerned only with violence in time of war. But this is not quite the case. The just war tradition is also a more general account of politics. On this account, while the peace of the kingdom is unattainable by mere mortals on this earth, human beings can nevertheless strive to make the social order, whether internally or externally, less violent and brutal through quite specific measures. The authors would have done well to be a bit less uninhibited in their claim to originality in this regard. To this one must attach a second question, namely, why do the authors not distinguish between violence *tout court*—which suggests something chaotic, something unleashed—and the rule-governed and limited use of force that is a constituent of all ongoing political orders?

On the plus side, in their (Weberian) account of sovereignty, the authors do well to note the "importance of groups and organizations to the operation of modern liberal democracies" (p. 17). But, they add, "most organizations in all societies function with the explicit support of the state" (p. 30). Here is a claim worth examining in some detail. One could argue, in fact, that many groups and organizations functioned in the teeth of opposition from the organized powers-that-be. The abolition movement, for example, scarcely had state support. The twentieth-century U.S. Civil Rights movement faced implacable hostility from state governments, although, to be fair, it was supported with varying degrees of enthusiasm by the national government. The decades-long slogging of indefatigable Suffragists for the vote—one of the major civil society efforts of the nineteenth century—had no state support, unless I am misunderstanding in some major way what the authors mean by "state support."

On the question of civil society—which plays a major role in the book's analysis of open-access orders—there is one essential institution, arguably the most fundamental, that the book leaves missing in action, namely, the family. Is it possible that the authors' assumptions about "rent seeking" behavior, driven by cost–benefit analysis as the bottom line, do not comport with our most important social relations? Can everything social and political be shoved into that particular category?

According to the authors, the negotiation and renegotiation of "privileges and rents" is the primary motor that affects the "distribution of violence" and thus drives historical change. This is particularly true of the transition from natural states (whether fragile, basic, or mature) to open-access orders. North, Wallis, and Weingast argue that "open access orders control violence through a different logic than the natural state" by creating consolidated military and police organizations. "Peace," they argue, is a "balance of interests created by the rent-creation process" (p. 20). Reading this, I was overtaken with the image of all those peace advocates and protestors over the centuries—with their vision of a world in which "interests" is not the only vital "word" or process—reading these words, which I imagine would have the affect of fingernails scraping over a blackboard. Whether such peace advocates were "realistic" or not is another question, but certainly their idealistic beliefs prompted political behavior that did have palpable effects—again for better or worse—on political processes and events. And I wonder whether the rational choice perspective of this book suffices to account for such beliefs and commitments.

This adds up to one rather large demurral regarding the loss of richness of meaning and interpretive ambiguity—an ambiguity that is constitutive of social experience *and* a source of social change—when one embraces a particular vocabulary, in this case a vocabulary derived from market economics. I am not implacably opposed to the use of such language. But I am concerned when it is proffered as exhaustive—as if there is nothing vital left out, nothing remaining. For all the compelling clarity of the authors' framework, there is much that is squeezed out—especially self-sacrificial behavior, whether for family, friends, or faith (and religious faith, too, is inadequately addressed even as the power of the institutional church in medieval Europe is taken into account).

The length of this review precludes unpacking all the criteria for the determination of natural states and

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open-access orders. Suffice it to say that to call states with clearly identifiable forms of social organization "natural" does fly in the face of ordinary linguistic understandings of the term, especially within the world of political theory where a "natural state" is typically seen as a prepolitical (Locke), if not a presocial (Hobbes), condition. Be that as it may, the authors admirably appreciate that the "most fundamental problem societies face is managing violence" (p. 14). I would put it somewhat differently. But we do know this much: There is not one shred of evidence that any society has existed anywhere at any time that was violence free. The paleontological evidence from prehistory demonstrates clearly that prehistoric man was anything but a pacifist. This endemic problem cannot be "outsourced," so to speak. All societies struggle with it and develop moral strictures and norms to limit it to varying degrees. And any account that aims to be comprehensive must take account, in the final analysis, of moral inhibitions—norms and rules not reducible to "rent-seeking" behavior.

In sum, I recommend *Violence and Social Orders* for its audacious ambitions and the clarity of its presentation. It is a work that others can "bounce off against" quite profitably. In being so clear about their framework, the authors enable others to clarify their own.

Larry Diamond
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Any work that promises in its subtitle a conceptual framework for interpreting five to 10 thousand years of recorded human history is bound to be sweeping in scope, powerful in abstraction, and not lacking in ambition. This exciting new work by Douglass North, John Wallis, and Barry Weingast is all of these and more. While I find the book deficient in some respects, I think it succeeds in offering a valuable conceptual framework for understanding how states differ in their essential developmental properties and prospects, and in furnishing key elements of a unified theory of how states transition from violence, instability, poverty, corruption, and inequality to prosperity, stability, and freedom. A reason the authors succeed is that they show how economics, politics, laws, and beliefs are intertwined, and thus must change together in some kind of balance over time. This is a real theoretical (not just conceptual) achievement. So let me elaborate on the positive before I become critical.

When I first read the working paper that introduced the basic framework of this book, I became intellectually aroused because it spoke so profoundly to what I have observed of the process—and the failures—of political development. Many readers are bound to object that the key terms in this book—the natural or limited-access order, and the open-access order—are just new labels for old concepts, and that terms like "liberal democracy" would do just as well. But embedded in the conceptual framework they have built around these terms is a very powerful and parsimonious idea, and I would like to carry it just a step further. Not simply the natural state of social and political organization but the natural impulse of most economic, social, and political actors is to construct monopolies. That is the natural end point of competition: to drive out and destroy the competition. Preventing the construction of monopolies of power, wealth, information, market presence, and so on is the most important requirement for a successful, stable, decent, and fair society. This is what *open-access orders* achieve, though they are never wholly successful, and I wish the authors had paid more attention to the ways in which even highly institutionalized open-access orders constantly struggle—and not always very effectively—against the impulse to limit access and aggrandize rents as a result. I know this book went to press after the financial markets collapsed a year ago, but the current crisis is certainly a striking example of the fact that open-access orders are never perfect and secure; that—as

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