

Review: Modernization and Other Modes of Producing Muddled Thinking
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Modernization and Other Modes of Producing Muddled Thinking

From Modernization to Modes of Production: A Critique of the Sociologies of Development and Underdevelopment, by JOHN G. TAYLOR. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979. 335 pp. $27.00 cloth. $10.95 paper.

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Impenetrable prose is sometimes taken as a sign of great mental depth. Attacks on the ideas of others frequently give the erroneous impression that an author has ideas of his own. An excellent title will often attract attention to an insignificant work. John Taylor's recent book has three things going for it.

The title attracted me right way. In fact, I actually paid good money for a copy before being sent the review copy. This probably contributes to my annoyance with the book: I had neither the benefit of a free copy nor the luxury of leaving the majority of the book unread. I anticipated a much-needed review of the development/underdevelopment literature. The field has burgeoned over the last couple of decades, and has been especially cursed with writers who invent new labels for new subdisciplines each time they have a new (or almost new) idea. A guide book was in order—and, in fact, Ian Roxborough has provided quite a passable one (1979). John Taylor has not, first because of the lack of clarity in his thought, second because he has failed to critique the "modes of production" half of the title, and third because of the completely unsystematic nature of his review of the literature. Modernization theory is reviewed, for example, without any mention of Rostow, Inkeles, or Moore (among others). On the left, we find no mention of Cardoso, Wolf, Anderson, or Worsley, and only the most casual of waves in the direction of Wallerstein and the numerous "world-systems" theorists and researchers.

A colleague of mine frequently argues that there is no important difference between "bourgeois" and "Marxist" modernization theories. I am wont to argue several divergences—beginning with the rejection of the word "modernization." My argument is always limited, however, by the failure of the Marxist-inspired theories to reframe the discussion, getting beyond critique and both stating their own positive cases and recognizing the limitations of some of the earlier Marxist discourse. Taylor's book looked ideal for clarifying this collegial discussion. But, instead, it is a complete muddle. Taylor seems to reject all that he cites, consigning the "left"- and "right"-wing theories to the same scrap heap (though, in fact, both functionalism and post-Althusserian Marxism creep back into Taylor's own argument without acknowledgment).

Had the book any clear, empirical object of analysis, it might have gained in rigor and focus. Taylor, however, is of the "anti-empiricist" strain of Marxists, and so allocates research a priority decidedly below those of conceptualization and hair-splitting (though perhaps slightly better off than in pure Althusserian formulae in which the lowest depths of theoretical hell are reserved for empiricism). The first section of the book belies the author's contempt for data, though, actually introducing several tables. These are designed to show—surprise!—that there is unequal and restricted development in the Third World. The latter sections do contain a number of vague allusions to empirical examples, mostly designed to show that countries are different from each other—surprise again! There is no sustained empirical analysis, though, and not even much of a proposal for what one should look like (though Taylor promises one to come).

So, what do we have? First, as an opening course, Taylor returns us to that Ur-source of modern Marxist nourishment, the critique of Talcott Parsons. The critique is neither original nor thorough; its most remarkable feature is the almost complete neglect of modernization theories proper in favor of an abstract critique of functionalism in general. After beating that dead horse, Taylor turns to rejecting underdevelopment and dependency theories. These are represented only by a narrow line of economic argument drawn from Baran and Sweezy and, to a lesser extent, Gunder Frank. The fault Taylor identifies is too much concentration on the existence of a surplus product extracted from the Third World, rather than the dynamics of its production. Fair enough, though Taylor is annoying in his tendency to focus on early, rela-

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tively minor works rather than later, major ones (especially in his consideration of Baran). Taylor really has no analysis to improve on the early ones he mentions, and he does not treat any of the literature following up the Baran/Sweezy/Frank analysis (or any of Frank's responses to critics and recent arguments, e.g., 1974).

The second part of Taylor's book is labeled "towards a historical materialist theory of Third World formations." After the critique, one hopes, the constructive theory building is about to come. But, alas, such is not the case. Instead, Taylor's critical juggernaut rolls on, finding fault with Marxist after Marxist in the best traditions of left-wing abstraction from the real world and theoretical factionalism. The question apparently being addressed here is how capitalist penetration into social formations dominated by noncapitalist modes of production creates new social formations. A good many of the Althusserian conceptual clarifications of the 1960s and 1970s are rehearsed at length, with a few others thrown in. Slow going indeed. Here and there throughout the section are sound points, if not original ones. The special significance of merchants' capital is rightly stressed. The importance of the separation of direct producers from their means of production is heavily stressed—though with little close analysis.

The absence of the promised new theory is genuinely disappointing. The limits of existing development and underdevelopment discourses do need to be transcended, but Taylor's title misleads. He does not intend to criticize heavy reliance on the concept "mode of production" as well as that on "modernization." Taylor follows his pedantic account of "mode of production" and "social formation" with an argument that turns crucially on the mysterious (for quite unexplained and unsubstantiated) ability of modes of production to reproduce and even renew themselves. No consideration is given to the nature of the relationship between modes of production and politics, culture, or other aspects of social relations. Indeed, the Hindess/Hirst/Cutler et al. school of thought to which Taylor more or less belongs has given some serious attention to these issues, as have a number of French Marxists. Taylor ignores all.

Production is, however, at the heart of the issues facing development theory, for both modernization and dependency variants lack thorough treatments of productivity and relations of production. Taylor's major critique of both is the familiar (but I think unhelpful) notion that both are teleological. Much more significant (but unanalyzed) is the tendency of modernization theory to place too much stress on individual attitudes (in economistic as well as psychologistic formulations). Since entrepreneurs are at the heart of modernization theory's false vision of capitalism, both the nonentrepreneurial structure of real multinational, corporate capitalism and the historical and structural differences among countries and peoples are given short shrift. Similarly more significant is dependency theory's (and also world-system theory's) concentration on trade relations to the virtual exclusion of exploitative class relations, the labor process, and independent domestic politics (see Brenner's critique, 1977, but note that Wallerstein's second volume shows more attention to some of these issues than did the first).

Alas, modernization theory will linger on, I fear, its intellectual status deeply suspect but its theories (like functionalism in general) more critiqued than replaced. The various sociologies of underdevelopment and dependency show a little more vitality, but they are incomplete, in no small part because they still derive their sense of direction from the criticism of their enemies rather than from positive foundations of their own. The "macrohistorical" Marxist approaches of thinkers like Anderson and Wallerstein are making much more of the intellectual running today. They have not, however, as yet produced serious practical approaches to problems of development. And, despite the important contributions of Amin, Arrighi, Warren, Paige, and others, researchers have not yet established a new empirical sociology (or political economy) of development. Taylor is right that a serious understanding of the common and divergent problems of the "older" theories (for even dependency theory was born before most of today's university students) would help us to transcend their limits. He simply has not produced such a study.

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