

Moral Aspects of Economic Growth, and Other Essays, by Barrington Moore Jr.

reviewed by [Philip J. Chmielewski](#) in the [March 24, 1999](#) issue

*By Barrington Moore Jr., Moral Aspects of Economic Growth, and Other Essays. (Cornell University Press, 240 pp.)*

Barrington Moore is ever alert to and articulate about the social and intellectual forces that have led to both private and public horror and hardship. His previous works have explored inequality, injustice, revolution and dictatorship. In this collection he brings his comparative, historical analysis to bear on such topics as how failure in business came to be regarded as morally suspect; how attempts at maintaining an austere equality take surprising turns in particular institutions; and how differently democracy and liberalism regard the poor.

Moore's essays also probe an array of contemporary problems: the antisocial behaviors that shape our culture; fear and fragmentation as causes of inequality; the uncertainty of attaining the social conditions necessary for sustaining rational discussion; and the troubling ambiguities that mark our pursuit of trivial knowledge. Moore differentiates the religious passion that continues to value the individual conscience from the enthusiasms of blunt fundamentalisms.

Encountering Barrington Moore's lively mind is a delight. Both his range-from Carthusians to kibbutzim, from Athenian to Chinese empires-and his fresh turns of thought-for example, concerning the increasingly democratic character of contemporary oppression-prod one to think about the present causes of suffering. His stringent refusal to let "the status quo have the benefit of the doubt" should inspire readers to pursue a similar stringency.