

The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition (Published in association with Theory, Culture & Society)

By William Davies

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"Brilliant... explains how the rhetoric of competition has invaded almost every domain of our existence."
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"A sparkling, original, and provocative analysis of neoliberalism... a distinctive account of the diverse, sometimes contradictory, conventions and justifications that lend authority to the extension of the spirit of competitiveness to all spheres of social life."
- Professor Bob Jessop, University of Lancaster

"In a world that seems to lurch from one financial crisis to the next, this book questions both the sovereignty of markets and the principles of competition and competitiveness that lie at the heart of the neoliberal project."
- Professor Nicholas Gane, University of Warwick

Since its intellectual inception in the 1930s and its political emergence in the 1970s, neo-liberalism has sought to disenchant politics by replacing it with economics.

This agenda-setting text examines the efforts and failures of economic experts to make government and public life amenable to measurement, and to re-model society and state in terms of competition. In particular, it explores the practical use of economic techniques and conventions by policy-makers, politicians, regulators and judges and how these practices are being adapted to the perceived failings of the neoliberal model.

By picking apart the defining contradiction that arises from the conflation of economics and politics, this book asks: to what extent can economics provide government legitimacy?

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Editorial Review

Review
Some books describe the neoliberal project using the neoliberals' own terms; others promote more profound understanding by bringing in other intellectual resources. Will Davies is one of the best of the latter. In this fascinating book he inverts the conventional neoliberal practice of treating politics as if it were mere epiphenomenon of market theory, demonstrating that their version of economics is far better understood as the pursuit of politics by other means. (Professor Philip Mirowski)

Writing with clarity and precision and drawing on a rich array of sources, Will Davies takes the sociological discussion of neo-liberalism, its past and possible futures, to newer and richer intellectual realms. A substantial, original, and welcome contribution to the burgeoning literature on neo-liberal thought and rule. (Professor Paul du Gay)

This is a sparkling, original, and provocative analysis of neoliberalism. It offers a distinctive account of the diverse, sometimes contradictory, conventions and justifications that lend authority to the cumulative extension of competitive market principles and the spirit of competitiveness to all spheres of social life and that provide it with room for manoeuvre and reinvention in the face of resistance and crisis. It also demonstrates the importance of the sovereign authority of the national state to the spread of neoliberalism and, equally, to exceptional rescue measures in those states of economic emergency that only sovereign states can declare. Combining philosophical reflection, principles of grounded critique, political theory, intellectual history, the theory of conventions, reflections on law and economics, and a sociological analysis of competitiveness, this book breaks new ground, offers new modes of critique, and points to post-neoliberal futures. (Professor Bob Jessop)

In a world that seems to lurch from one financial crisis to the next, this book questions both the sovereignty of markets and the principles of competition and competitiveness that lie at the heart of the neoliberal project. This is a brilliant piece of work and is essential reading for anyone interested in the politics and economics of contemporary capitalism. (Professor Nicholas Gane)

Highlights the role of financial experts, management gurus and other economic and political elites within neo-liberalism's post-crisis re-legitimation project. By interviewing US, UK and EC government officials and advisors, and by studying a series of relevant policy reports, Davies provides an evidence-based, conceptually rich and experientially grounded account of how, as he puts it, 'the economic critique of the state can be employed precisely so as to legitimate, empower and expand the state'. (Stephen Dunne)

About the Author

William Davies is a Senior Lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London, where he is Co-Director of the Political Economy Research Centre.

He is author of *The Happiness Industry: How the Government and Big Business Sold Us Wellbeing* (Verso, 2015) and *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition* (SAGE, 2014). His writing is available at www.potlatch.org.uk.

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