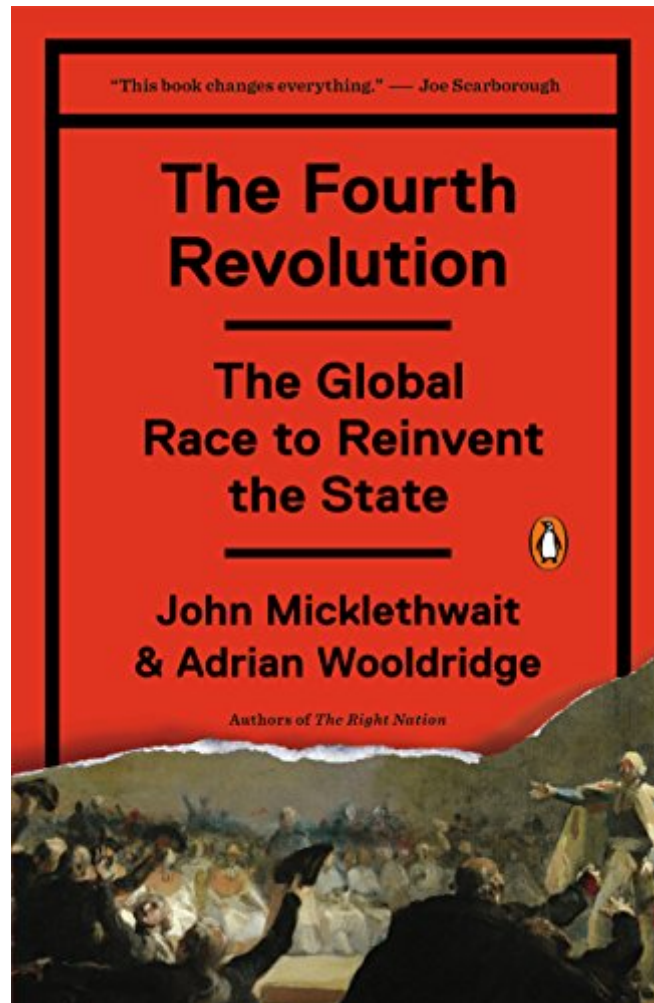




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The Fourth Revolution: The Global Race To Reinvent The State



Synopsis

From the bestselling authors of *The Right Nation*, a visionary argument that our current crisis in government is nothing less than the fourth radical transition in the history of the nation-state. Dysfunctional government: It's become a cliché, and most of us are resigned to the fact that nothing is ever going to change. As John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge show us, that is a seriously limited view of things. In fact, there have been three great revolutions in government in the history of the modern world. The West has led these revolutions, but now we are in the midst of a fourth revolution, and it is Western government that is in danger of being left behind. Now, things really are different. The West's debt load is unsustainable. The developing world has harvested the low-hanging fruits. Industrialization has transformed all the peasant economies it had left to transform, and the toxic side effects of rapid developing world growth are adding to the bill. From Washington to Detroit, from Brasilia to New Delhi, there is a dual crisis of political legitimacy and political effectiveness. *The Fourth Revolution* crystallizes the scope of the crisis and points forward to our future. The authors enjoy extraordinary access to influential figures and forces the world over, and the book is a global tour of the innovators in how power is to be wielded. The age of big government is over; the age of smart government has begun. Many of the ideas the authors discuss seem outlandish now, but the center of gravity is moving quickly. This tour drives home a powerful argument: that a country's success depends overwhelmingly on its ability to reinvent the state. And that much of the West—and particularly the United States—is failing badly in its task. China is making rapid progress with government reform at the same time as America is falling badly behind. Washington is gridlocked, and America is in danger of squandering its huge advantages from its powerful economy because of failing government. And flailing democracies like India look enviously at China's state-of-the-art airports and expanding universities. The race to get government right is not just a race of efficiency. It is a race to see which political values will triumph in the twenty-first century—the liberal values of democracy and liberty or the authoritarian values of command and control. The stakes could not be higher.

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Customer Reviews

John and Adrian write a compelling book on how to reform the state, which is in much need of a redo. However, I feel that there is more to the story than the two authors lay out. When talking about teachers, for example, they sing the gospel of charter schools and private enterprise running schools, but fail to mention that a school is as good as the teachers who are in it. The Nordic countries have a higher standard of entry into the teaching profession than America does, which raises the quality of education. They talk down to Obamacare in the book but also sing the gospel of it in The Economist, which Micklethwait was the editor. Also, the two need to brush up on their American History, which is not only a problem in the book but in the magazine as well. Otherwise, it is a good book for serious reformers. A bitter pill for left-of-center voters like myself, but as they said in the book: The first step to solve a problem is to admit you have a problem.

John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge's book 'The Fourth Revolution: The Global Race to Reinvent the State' has some expansive ambitions. Claiming that government has become too bloated and inefficient, the authors seek nothing less than to reform it, advocating for leaner more effective governments. Comparing Western governments to East Asian governments such as Singapore, and China, they feel that the west is losing ground to the east in the race to make government leaner and more effective. The book is titled the 'fourth revolution' because the authors believe that we have had 3 and a half revolutions before our current stage. As another reviewer on

pointed out, the first revolution was brought about by Thomas Hobbes, through his idea of a contract between government and the people. The two revolutions that most impact our current age, are the rise of the welfare state linked to the ideas of Beatrice Webb, and the influence of Milton Friedman on the policies of Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Mr. Micklethwait and Wooldridge consider Friedman's influence to be a half revolution because the reforms did not succeed after the Clinton presidency, illustrating that government grew in size again through the presidencies of George Bush II, and Barack Obama. Reflecting on the message of 'The Fourth Revolution,' I felt that the history lesson was the highlight of the book. I also feel the authors provided a good prognosis of the current condition that we find ourselves in. However, I was disappointed with the solutions they offered. The first point that troubles me is their need to compare. Sure, there is nothing wrong with adopting ideas from other countries if they prove effective. However, I do not like the insinuation that we should compete and that there are countries winning 'a race,' whatever this race is. Governments, like culture, and education are adapted to the specific conditions of each country. There are specific reasons why a government managed economy is more effective in countries like Japan, China, and South Korea than in the U.S. To learn about these reasons, again one would have to delve into history. The Marshall plan that was put in place to rebuild Europe offers some good points to start reflecting on. Much of the current economic structure of the world was put in place through mechanisms such as the Marshall plan. Government managed economies allowed war-torn countries that were behind industrially to catch up. However, the question is whether managed economies will allow these same countries to have an innovative edge. Similar arguments can be made for education. Again, countries such as South Korea may have very good test results but there are other factors that should be accounted for, these include the homogeneity of the population, and the education style. A thought for reflection, should we emphasize rote learning, or education that teaches critical thinking, and what is the best method to assess learning? These are some of the questions we should be entertaining and not whether a certain country is ahead in the learning curve just because their students are more adept at filling in bubbles on a multiple choice exam. A reader may challenge my current line of thinking and state that I am just offering excuses to maintain the status quo. Again, I do not have qualms with the message, just in how it is delivered. The authors are thought provoking and wake their readers up to how much waste is going on in government. However, after all the 'comparisons' this was their solution: 1) cut agriculture subsidies, 2) end entitlements, 3) make tax adjustments, 4) get rid of gerrymandering, and 5) privatize certain government functions. For such an ambitious project, diagnosing our current malaise, I didn't feel like this was much for solutions. I felt solutions offered merely advocated a continuation of Milton

Friedman's revolution to cut the size of government. Certainly a lot less pages could have been devoted to getting me to this point in their argument. Yes, and maybe all the time and effort spent on 'comparing' was meant to convince me that government could be made more effective. Yet, I felt this merely weakened instead of strengthening their argument. Still, despite all the twists and turns, and tangents that the reader is taken on, I feel there is some merit to this book. This includes the history lesson, and the diagnosis. Yes, we could be at another turning point in history, and yes, maybe changes need to be made. However, are they the changes that the authors call for?

This is a useful overview of how a few states (countries) are trying new approaches to providing public services and organizing their public sectors. Yet the breathless title gives it away. Is there a "global race" to "reinvent" the state? No, and neither are the authors convincing when they argue that a "fourth revolution" of government is on the way, although their discussion of what it might look like is intriguing. Note that the right-wing Swedish government that is a featured case study in the book was just ousted from power. Despite its flaws, the book provides a worthwhile summary of how a few governments are experimenting with a variety of market-based and technological solutions to perennial problems of governance.

The main point of this book is that the West has been dominant politically since the Middle Ages by constantly reinventing itself through three major political revolutions which were largely developed in Britain. The first was the change to centralized states from medieval states, which were basically a loose confederation of dukedoms supporting a central kingdom. This occurred in the 1600s and was promoted by Thomas Hobbes in his book *Leviathan*. This change brought order within the state and protection from other states. The second was the change to liberal democracies with free enterprise and small government. This occurred in the 1700s to the 1800s and was promoted by John Stuart Mill as well as the American Revolution. The emphasis here was on individual liberty and equality of opportunity. The third was the change to the massive welfare states we have today. This occurred mostly after World War II and was promoted by Beatrice Webb, a Fabian Socialist from Britain, and the Democratic Party in America. Here the emphasis is on massive government spending to promote equality of results. Today's massive welfare states are heading towards bankruptcy and the authors stress that there must be a fourth revolution to keep them from collapsing. They really don't come up with anything new but support smaller welfare states through spending cuts, privatization, and efficiency through technology. This is partially a return to liberal democracies and a continuation of the half revolutions in efficient government started by Thatcher and Reagan, and promoted by

Milton Friedman. But there is a major alternative to this western model and that is the Asian alternative. The best example is Singapore which has a government and economy that is more efficient than anything in the West. Hong Kong is another example. But the main alternative is China which is following these two models. The main difference is these three are authoritarian states, mostly without elected leaders, which have shown that free enterprise can flourish without democracy. So the main contest here is between democracy and technocracy. But this viewpoint depends on the myth that China is run by a meritocratic elite while America is governed by the people. Actually America is governed by an elite consisting of a few thousand people in government, media, academia, and business. The worst example is the federal judiciary which has less than a thousand judges but which can overturn any law passed by any elected legislature or propositions passed by citizens, by calling their acts "unconstitutional." The constitution is worded so broadly that any act can be classified as being unconstitutional, so these elites can always impose their political solutions. The real competition is then between the Asian elites (led by China) and the Western elites (led by America). The main difference is that China is a nationalistic monocultural country while America is doing its best to destroy its culture through multiculturalism. China has survived for thousands of years because it has been able to maintain its culture. It should be no surprise that China will probably win this contest.

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