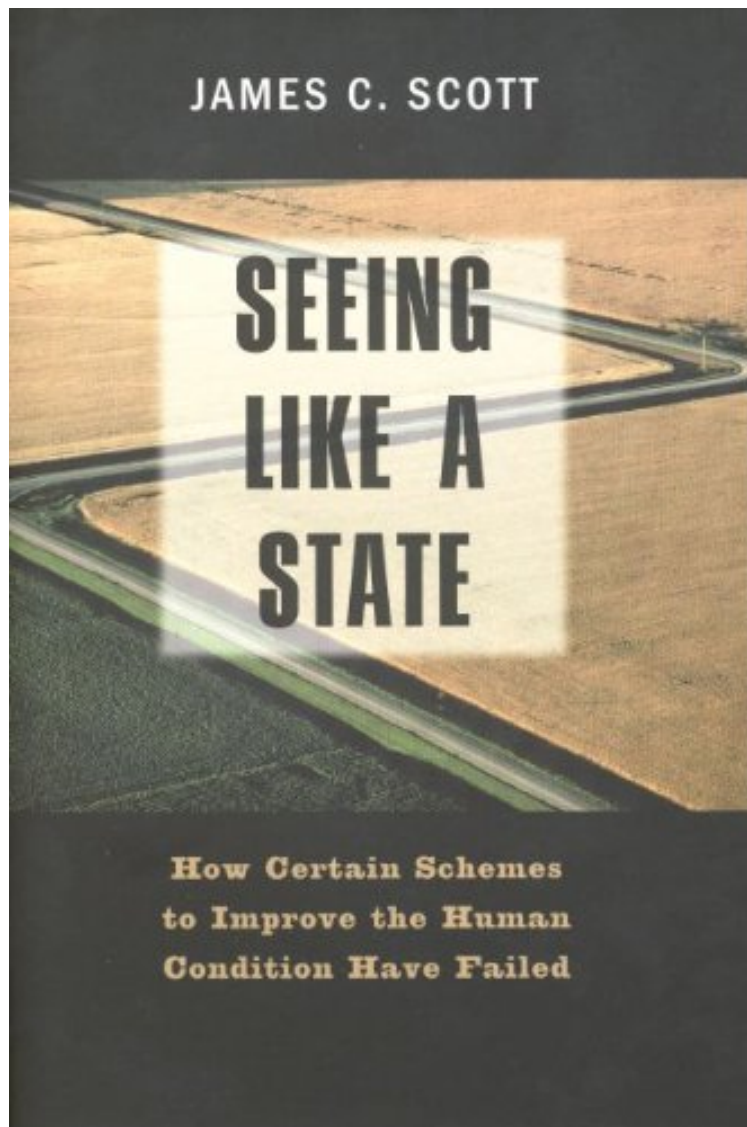


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Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed (The Institution for Social and Policy St)

James C. Scott

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James C. Scott : Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed (The Institution for Social and Policy St) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed (The Institution for Social and Policy St):

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. How Rare a GemBy J.W.In a world where governments continually

seek to invade personal privacy, control the elements, clump humanity into categories and relentlessly attempt to socially engineer their populations, Scott seeks to make sense of the situation by explaining the why and how behind governmental actions, making "the case for the indispensable role of practical knowledge, informal processes, and improvisation in the face of unpredictability." Perhaps Scott sums it up best when he says, "Much of this book can be read as a case against the imperialism of high modernist, planned social order." Every part of this book is clear and concise. This is a rare gem among modern academia.² of 2 people found the following review helpful. Insightful, though it's not for everybody. An extended ...By Thomas JewellInsightful, though it's not for everybody. An extended discussion about how government agencies shape the world to accomplish their ends, Very much about the law of unintended consequences. I am no scholar, so I cannot debate his thesis , but I find this book has changed the way way I look at the world, and particularly, the character of government.⁵ of 5 people found the following review helpful. This book will transform the way you look at governmentBy Richard HughesThis book is essentially a series of discussions of how the perceptual gaps of state apparatus lead to specific sorts of problems, especially when the state attempts to perform large scale, society-changing work. While the book is written by a man who could be reasonably described as a minarchist, it's exceptionally useful to big-state left wing socialists, such as myself, who value understanding why this sort of thing has failed, and failed so badly, in the past.In addition to the educational value, it is an absolute page turner, filled with exciting historical moments that will be brand new to most American readers. I heartily recommend it to anyone.

Compulsory ujamaa villages in Tanzania, collectivization in Russia, Le Corbusier's urban planning theory realized in Brasilia, the Great Leap Forward in China, agricultural "modernization" in the Tropics—the twentieth century has been racked by grand utopian schemes that have inadvertently brought death and disruption to millions. Why do well-intentioned plans for improving the human condition go tragically awry?In this wide-ranging and original book, James C. Scott analyzes failed cases of large-scale authoritarian plans in a variety of fields. Centrally managed social plans misfire, Scott argues, when they impose schematic visions that do violence to complex interdependencies that are not—and cannot—be fully understood. Further, the success of designs for social organization depends upon the recognition that local, practical knowledge is as important as formal, epistemic knowledge. The author builds a persuasive case against "development theory" and imperialistic state planning that disregards the values, desires, and objections of its subjects. He identifies and discusses four conditions common to all planning disasters: administrative ordering of nature and society by the state; a "high-modernist ideology" that places confidence in the ability of science to improve every aspect of human life; a willingness to use authoritarian state power to effect large-scale interventions; and a prostrate civil society that cannot effectively resist such plans.

.com James C. Scott's research for this book began with an examination of the tensions between state authorities and various "unstable" individuals throughout history, from hunter-gatherer tribes to Gypsies to the homeless. He soon became fascinated, however, by the recurring patterns of failure and authoritarianism in certain social engineering programs aimed at bringing such people fully into the state's fold. Soviet collectivization, the Maoist Great Leap Forward, the precisely planned city of Brasilia--these and other projects around the world, while deeply ambitious, extracted immeasurable tolls on the people they were designed to help. One of the most important common factors that Scott found in these schemes is what he refers to as a high modernist ideology. In simplest terms, it is an extremely firm belief that progress can and will make the world a better place. But "scientific" theories about the betterment of life often fail to take into account "the indispensable role of practical knowledge, informal processes, and improvisation in the face of unpredictability" that Scott views as essential to an effective society. What high modernism lacks is *metis*, a Greek word which Scott translates as "the knowledge that can only come from practical experience." Although *metis* is closely related to the concept of "mutuality" found in the anarchist writings of, among others, Kropotkin and Bakunin, Scott is careful to emphasize that he is not advocating the abolition of the state or championing a complete reliance on natural "truth." He merely recognizes that some types of states can initiate programs which jeopardize the well-being of all their subjects. Although the collapse of most socialist governments might lead one to believe that Seeing Like a State is old news, Scott's analysis should prove extremely useful to those considering the effects of global capitalism on local communities. "[An] important book. . . . The author's choice of cases is fascinating and goes well beyond the familiar ones like Soviet collectivization."—Francis Fukuyama, Foreign Affairs