



Prisoners of Reason: Game Theory and Neoliberal Political Economy

By S. M. Amadae

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Is capitalism inherently predatory? Must there be winners and losers? Is public interest outdated and free-riding rational? Is consumer choice the same as self-determination? Must bargainers abandon the no-harm principle? Prisoners of Reason recalls that classical liberal capitalism exalted the no-harm principle. Although imperfect and exclusionary, modern liberalism recognized individual human dignity alongside individuals' responsibility to respect others. Neoliberalism, by contrast, views life as ceaseless struggle. Agents vie for scarce resources in antagonistic competition in which every individual seeks dominance. This political theory is codified in non-cooperative game theory; the neoliberal citizen and consumer is the strategic rational actor. Rational choice justifies ends irrespective of means. Money becomes the medium of all value. Solidarity and good will are invalidated. Relationships are conducted on a quid pro quo basis. However, agents can freely opt out of this cynical race to the bottom by embracing a more expansive range of coherent action.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Based on a far more nuanced understanding of the technicalities of rational choice theory than previous critiques, Prisoners of Reason can be much more incisive in exploring the field's entanglements between the positive and the normative. One can disagree with Amadae about where to lay responsibility for modern ideologies while still finding important food for thought about the sometimes doleful uses of social science in modern society."

Randall Calvert, Washington University, St Louis

"In a deep re-thinking, S. M. Amadae shows that game-theoretic thinking, especially in the form of the Prisoner's Dilemma, underpins not only American nuclear strategy, but neoliberalism in the domestic political economy and also multiple arguments from a different part of the political spectrum for the powerful role of institutions in international politics. Far from being value-neutral, this way of thinking has changed more than reflected much of American policy and life."

Robert Jervis, Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Politics, Columbia University

"S. M. Amadae has a wonderfully arresting thesis concerning why winning the Cold War has proved so disappointing. Game theory's strategic model of rational agency became the animating model of liberal society. We lost the Classical liberal 'no-harm' principle and gained the 'no-holds barred' premise of today's neoliberalism. This is a forensic analysis of how game theory has in this way led us astray."

Shaun Hargreaves Heap, King's College London

"A groundbreaking study of the appalling political consequences of a disastrously impoverished and distressingly dominant understanding of human rationality."

Stephen Holmes, New York University School of Law

"S. M. Amadae has written a fascinating account that links the most important recent advances in social science with major events in political, military, and intellectual history in the twentieth century. This book adds to our understanding of economic and social theories through an in-depth analysis of people involved and institutions of that time."

Jerry Green, Harvard University, Massachusetts

"Prisoners of Reason is an impressive, indeed encyclopedic, overview and critique of the use of game theory to analyze social and political life - from theory to policy. Even those of us friendly to game-theoretic analysis will better appreciate its limits and abuses, and the narrow view of human motivation with which it has been too-often associated."

Gerald Gaus, James E. Rogers Professor of Philosophy, University of Arizona

"Bravo! ... Prisoners of Reason is a genuinely impressive achievement. It provides an arresting and persuasive account of the origins of neo-liberalism and so much more."

Martin Jay, Ehrman Professor of History, University of California, Berkeley

"S. M. Amadae's Prisoners of Reason is a brilliant contribution. It confidently and lucidly navigates the recondite literature of game theory and nuclear strategy, and provides a revealing and persuasive analysis of the dire implications of the neoliberal model of personhood that they inform. The chapters on public choice

and law and economics are masterful. The analysis is especially effective for revealing the falsehood that these ideas are a continuation of classical liberalism in James M. Buchanan's case in particular. The discussion of Buchanan and Rawls is insightful for understanding their strange early 1970s pairing, and illuminates Buchanan's will to power and reliance on force vs. Rawls's emphasis on justice. Especially powerful, though, and urgent for instructors to consider is Amadae's argument about how the pedagogy of Prisoner's Dilemma actually creates the predatory neoliberal subject. So chilling, and yet it makes perfect sense once explained. Bravissima!"

Nancy MacLean, William H. Chafe Professor of History and Public Policy, Duke University

About the Author

S. M. Amadae is a research affiliate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and has held positions as an assistant professor of political science at the Ohio State University and an associate professor of political science at the Central European University. Amadae's first book, *Rationalizing Capitalist Democracy: The Cold War Origins of Rational Choice Liberalism* (2003), was awarded the American Political Science Association's J. David Greenstone book award for History and Politics in 2004. This thought-provoking political theorist who works on the foundations of liberalism and the philosophy of political economy has also contributed articles to the *Journal of Economic Methodology*, *History of European Ideas*, *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science, Economics and Philosophy*, the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, *Ethics*, and *Idealistic Studies*. Amadae graduated with a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley and has held appointments at the University of Cambridge, the London School of Economics, the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, the New School, and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Users Review

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David Pimentel:

The book *Prisoners of Reason: Game Theory and Neoliberal Political Economy* will bring that you the new experience of reading a book. The author style to elucidate the idea is very unique. In the event you try to find new book you just read, this book very ideal to you. The book *Prisoners of Reason: Game Theory and Neoliberal Political Economy* is much recommended to you to learn. You can also get the e-book from official web site, so you can more readily to read the book.

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