

# Review of: "Neoliberalism, Strong State and Democracy"

Matthew Schrepfer<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Brown University

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

This is a richly researched and compellingly presented investigation into the history and nature of 'neoliberalism'. I have two major suggestions to make about the basic argument, and then a few minor suggestions:

First, the focus is much more on neoliberalism as an intellectual project than as a political phenomenon: this means much more attention is paid to what certain figures like Hayek and von Mises thought than on how the policy regime associated with neoliberalism came to be. For example, there is discussion of the disagreement between intellectuals like Hayek and Röpke over the Treaty of Rome, but no discussion of the political forces that led to the treaty being designed the way it was (were the actual framers of the treaty trying to minimize democracy in favor of technocratic rule? Why?). A large part of the importance of neoliberalism, it seems to me, is its political and policy success in the latter twentieth century, something which this paper does little to explain.

Second, (though related to the first), is that the paper focuses on a pretty narrow slice of the intellectual/political tradition that is typically associated with the term 'neoliberalism'. Milton Friedman and his acolytes, for example, were arguably far more influential (at least in the United States) than the Austrian school figures, and yet Friedman is barely more than mentioned in the paper. Moreover, there is a whole tradition of what is called 'left' neoliberalism--associated with the policies of Clinton and Blair--which is entirely ignored here. I think this narrow focus could be justified, but such a justification should be offered in the paper. Alternatively, I think the Friedman and Clinton/Blairite aspects of neoliberalism could be made sense of on your account, though I acknowledge that would be a lot of extra work.

Finally, a few minor things:

--The comparison to Keynes at the end is fine, but seems inessential; it could be cut in favor of spending space addressing the suggestions above.

--The paper opens by claiming that understanding of neoliberalism is hampered by two "ambiguities": beliefs that it supports market fundamentalism and a minimal state. As far as I can tell the argument is not that these terms are ambiguous but that they are just mistaken: neoliberalism is in fact supportive of neither market fundamentalism nor a minimal state. These are mistakes, not ambiguities.

