

Review of: "Neoliberalism, Strong State and Democracy"

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This is a timely, scholarly and interesting paper. I have two points to make in regard to it (a third may follow if the second concern is well placed).

The first concerns framing in its lengthy introduction. When I wrote in 2017 that “if the reality of the US economy is complex mix of private enterprise, public institutions, and a tangled skein of corporatist and clientelist forms of politics, the rhetoric of ‘rolling back the state’ is misleading” (Republic of Equals, OUP, p.66) I did not take that point to be original to me (I cited work by Jamie Galbraith, Stiglitz and Matthew Drennan). Adam Tooze has also written recently about how the alleged neo-liberalism of the Samuelson Keynesians is a radically pragmatic doctrine of power. That the state is sometimes co-opted and sometimes subverted in neo-liberalism is, I think, now a widely shared view in both political philosophy and history. It does not detract from this paper if its claim to novelty is slightly softened in the ‘Introduction’. Its scholarly value does not lie in being the first ever to make these points.

The second point is that the paper establishes a range of dramatis personae and then moves Schmitt to centre stage. The relationship between his work and the general movement of which he is being taken to be a representative could be further explained. Does he distil some essential “neo-liberal” traits? How representative is he? Helpful here might be Raymond Plant's scholarly discussion in his book on the neo-liberal state of how the idea of the rule of law helps to define this normative approach (OUP 2012).

Finally – and this may be a corollary of the second point – if Tooze is right that we are dealing here with an amorphous, opportunistic, pragmatics of power then how many different strands of ideas might need to be described to capture its intellectual motivations? Perhaps, like Wittgenstein's family resemblances, various traditions have been seized on and put to use as this essentially political doctrine has gone to work. It would be no detriment to this valuable paper if it framed its contribution in terms of the description of just one thread of ideas that has proven to be influential.