

Review of: "Duality, Liberty, and Realism in Entangled Political Economy"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This paper may be seen from different converging perspectives: (a) as a contribution to the emerging “entangled political economy” research program; (b) as a contribution to the contemporary take on foundational issues related to political order and governance systems from a Classical Liberal perspective and (c) as a contribution to the development of the theme of “duality” --defined as “a useful formal tool of economics that allows the derivation of the structure and solution of one problem (known as the primal) from the structure and solution of another, related problem (known as the dual)”--. Additional elements that make this paper interesting and significant, result from the authors’ skills in mobilizing basic Public Choice theory analytical frameworks and techniques to articulate the structure of the argument.

The paper is clearly written: the objectives of the paper are clearly stated in advance and the arguments used in order to achieve those objectives are well calibrated and precise. In the end, the paper gives you not only a better understanding of a problem of central importance in political economy, but also a sense that you have just been offered a fresh perspective on it.

That being said, I agree with the criticism raised by other reviewers regarding the abstract. The abstract doesn’t do justice to the paper, on first reading. After you become familiar with the paper and then you re-read the abstract, it makes sense. However, it would be useful to have the abstract re-written in such a way as to give a better sense to the first-time reader about the nature and what is at stake in the article.

As regarding what is at stake, the article is dealing with a major issue: The relationship between liberty and coercion seen as (a) social phenomena, (b) institutional features and (c) institutional performance criteria. More precisely, the paper explores how the problem of maximizing liberty differs in practice from the problem of minimizing coercion, while placing this problem in an entangled political economy framework. The paper also connects the core argument to a specific tradition of “realism” in political economy and public choice theory, a fact which makes the paper even more interesting and relevant.

Entangled political economy [EPE] sees the protection of liberalism from two perspectives, and that it a statement of fact, a distinctive feature of that specific approach to political economy and a linguistically, rhetorically and semantically correct way of stating all of the above.

The paper builds on the approach framed by these two perspectives. The authors put things in a crystal-clear way from the very beginning: “The first perspective is sentimental or idealistic, where “human governance could be reduced to

ethics, law, and commerce, leaving no room for the political insertion of force into society". The other perspective is the muscular or pragmatic one of political realism where states and their governments exist, and cannot be abstracted from. In this *realpolitik* perspective, "free societies are not self-sustaining, and can degenerate without the proper use of force". Put differently, the sentimental perspective considers protecting liberalism by maximizing liberty; while the muscular perspective considers protecting liberalism through the minimization of coercion."

The rest of the paper develops in a manner which to me is both clear and technically correct, a set of implications and corollaries of all of the above.

In brief, the paper not only deals with a major issue of both foundational and practical relevance, but it does that in an ingenious, clear, technically competent, and consistent manner.

The paper has the potential to become the core of a larger project, and I would encourage the authors to consider extending this paper and building around it a volume on the very problem of liberty and coercion in the light of the entangled political economy perspective.