

Review of: "Neoliberalism, Strong State and Democracy"

Rodolfo Leyva¹

¹ University of Birmingham

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this piece. Overall, I think that the article provides a good and clearly written overview of the theoretical and political tenets of neoliberalism, and their historical development. I also generally agree with most of the author's arguments. However, engagement with the scholarship on neoliberal theory was limited to a few and mostly old sources. Recent works such as the ones below -to list but a few-, are not discussed.

Ban, C. (2016). *Ruling Ideas: How Global Neoliberalism Goes Local*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Braedley, S., & Luxton, M. (2010). *Neoliberalism and Everyday Life*. Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press.

Cerny, P. (2014). Globalization and the resilience of neoliberalism. *Critical Policy Studies*, 8(3), 359–362.

Chomsky, N. (2011). *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism & The Global Order*. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Davies, W. (2017). *The Limits of Neoliberalism Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition*. London: Sage.

Hall, S. (2011). The neo-liberal revolution. *Soundings*, 8, 9–27.

Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mirowski, P. (2014). *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste*. New York: Verso.

Mirowski, P., & Plehwe, D. (eds.) (2009). *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the*

Neoliberal Thought Collective. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Plehwe, D., Walpen, B. J., & Neunhoffer, G. (eds.) (2007). *Neoliberal Hegemony: A Global Critique*. New York: Routledge.

This could simply be due to not having access to these texts, and certainly it's not required to include any of them in scholarly works on neoliberalism. Though, Plehwe and Mirowski are leading scholars on the intellectual history and theory of neoliberalism. Moreover, I bring them and the other noted texts up because they also make many of the same main arguments as you.

For example, Ban (2017), Mirowski 2014, and (Plehwe et al., (2007) also argue that neoliberalism never advocated for *laissez-faire*, but rather requires and promotes a strong authoritarian state. Moreover, the Davies (2017) book gives a detailed account of how neoliberals abandoned notions of perfect competition. And so if you have access and time to read at least three texts, then it would be good to see how your conceptualisations differ from and/or can expand on theirs.

Furthermore, the second section cites interesting and important historical debates, but doesn't really expand on the main theoretical points of contention. Moreover, this sections dedicates too many words on arguments over the place of formal mathematical economic modelling. These I think are trivial relative the more substantial points of contention between neoliberals, 19th century neoclassicists, and Keynesians, such as their varied perspectives on marginalism, monetarism, fiscal policy, externalities, and pareto efficiency. Yet none of these critical points of divergence are fleshed out, but really should be.

Pg. 4 states that "Homo economicus plays no or at best a secondary role in the neoliberal schools". Here I have to strongly disagree, though based on the rest of the paragraph we might be discussing different things. That is, by homo economicus I'm not referring to mathematical modelling of economic decision making, but rather to the general ontological conception of human beings as inherently possessive and rational beings who will primarily and mostly behave in accordance with their perceived self-interests. This conception of homo economicus and corresponding peculiar notion of rational/rationality as the ability and propensity to make decisions and choices that garner the most benefit or utility for the individual regardless of how much this impacts others, are both critical to neoliberal theory. Indeed, such ontological conceptions relate to why neoliberals abandoned notions of perfect competition in favour of arguments for the maximisation of utility. Hence, I think these conceptualizations need to also be discussed and unpacked.

Additionally, while Hayek is of course a key and founding theorist of neoliberalism, it seems a bit reductive to just focus on his works when discussing the neoliberal conception of the state. As you note, there are several academics and schools that have contributed to neoliberal theory. This includes, amongst others, Milton Friedman, George Stigler, Maurice Allais, James M. Buchanan, Ronald Coase, Gary Becker and Vernon Smith, all of whom like Hayek, were members of the Monte Pelerin Society and won fake 'Nobel prices'. You do mention some of these figures in passing, but I do think that a more in-depth discussion of what at least a couple of them contributed to the neoliberal conception of the state, is needed.

There are a few other although less important points that I'd like to raise.

The abstract needs a bit more work to give a reader a clearer and more informative understanding about what the article is going to be about. In particular, I suggest replacing the sentence that starts with 'Methodologically', with one or two sentences that describe the range or topics that the article will discuss, and the order in which these will be discussed.

The sixth section on Keynes would better placed in the second section that goes over what neoliberals view as a strong state. This will help to better juxtapose the differences between the Keynesian framework for a regulated liberal-democracy and the framework for a neoliberal democracy.

I recommend replacing the following sentence on pg 2. "The study is structured as follows: In the second section" with the following: "This article is structured as follows. In the first section, I" Also, later in that paragraph you write "The next two sections", This should be "The second section".

Lastly, and this is a minor linguistic issue, but in English-language academic journals and books, the word 'study' usually refers to primary empirical research. What you have is a theoretical paper, so I think it's best to frame it this way.

I hope at least some of my comments are helpful.

Kind regards,

Rodolfo Leyva