

Review of: "Neoliberalism, Strong State and Democracy"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

General remarks

I fundamentally agree with the major argument of the paper: neoliberalism was (is) in favor of a strong (constitutional) state. This is nevertheless not a very innovative claim. Already Mirowski and Plehwe (2009) underlined how the relationship of the neoliberal thought collective with the State is very different from laissez-faire, which is precisely one of the reasons why neoliberals felt the need to elaborate a new strategy compared to classical liberals.

I also agree on the second claim, that neoliberalism emerged from Austrian economics, not from neoclassical economics, which is something often neglected or misunderstood in the literature.

I rather have a series of perplexities related to an implicit argument of the paper: that Hayek inspired European confederal and technocratic bias. This is only incidental and depending on the political interest of national elites to avoid surrendering national sovereignty to a supranational government. We discussed this also in a recent workshop held at the European University Institute in Florence, and we all agreed on this.

From this point of view, let me underline once again (I wrote on this already in 2012, 2016, 2018, and 2022) that Robbins lies in a different field from Hayek, as well as on the way they conceptualized federalism. Robbins meant to match the dimension of public institutions with that of market relations, therefore suggesting a multilayered structure of economic policy that might be effective in providing different and territorially concentric public goods and regulatory framework. It was a zero-sum game as concerns the role of public authorities in the economy; while for Hayek, as is correctly underlined in the paper, it was a negative-sum game: he meant to detach markets from any political influence. I would be therefore more cautious in putting in the same pot Robbins and Hayek, or I would at least contextualize their similarities to the mid-Thirties and to some shared expression, which nevertheless implied very different ontological assumptions.

I found the section on authoritarian liberalism convincing, although I am not very much familiar with early Ordoliberal German authors, like Rüstow and Schmitt. I also think that "The coincidence of the two lectures was probably not coincidental", although this is mostly a conjecture that should be assisted by facts, archival material, and/or other sources and historical reconstruction. Even the connections between Schmitt's and Hayek's thought seem to be rather plausible and robust (https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4314135).

The (predominant) influence of neoliberalism on global institutions is an issue on which you might like to quote from other authors, like Martin's *The Meddlers*, Slobodian's *Globalists*, or Schmelzer in Plehwe, Slobodian, Mirowski *Nine Lives of*

Neoliberalism.

Minor observations

The Lipmann Colloquium was held in 1938, not in 1937. The Author was probably mistaken by the date of publication of Lipmann's book *An Enquiry into the Principles of the Good Society* which is indeed 1937.

The sentence "As a member of the German Union of European Federalists, Hayek promoted the unification process in his spirit", although not surprising, is interesting. I was not aware that Hayek ever became a member of Europa Union Deutschland, and am wondering if there is any reference to this.