

Review of: "Neoliberalism, Strong State and Democracy"

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I very much enjoyed reading this article. You know that you've enjoyed reading an article when you've learned a lot from it, and that's certainly the case here. You have traced the lineage of neoliberalism as both political and economic order from its inter-war origins in post-Hapsburg empire Austria to its modern-day hegemony. I found your discussion of the differences but intriguing points of similarity between Hayek and Keynes to be very interesting. You've also opened out the history of neoliberalism beyond the usual starting point of the Mont Pelerin society in a way that gives the discussion a broader historical depth than this topic usually gets within articles. The following comments should, therefore, be seen as constructive pointers in the light of what I believe to be a strong and informative article.

The discussion in section two on the ways in which neoliberalism departs from classical or neoclassical economics is interesting. You're right to point out Hayek's aversion to the notion of Homo Economicus and the quote from his 1974 Nobel Prize speech is illustrative of his stance. However, I wondered if that shouldn't be cast in more explicitly epistemological terms. Hayek was an empiricist for whom the social world was too complex ever to be knowable and planned for: hence his outright rejection of rationalistic concepts such as Homo Economicus, at one end of the political/economic spectrum, or command economy planning at the other. Similarly, the quote from the Nobel Prize speech points to his critique of what he termed 'scientism': the use of the methods of the natural sciences in social sciences such as economics.

I also wondered if the notion of Homo Economicus might have been a little too narrowly conceptualised in the article. On the one hand, you're perfectly right to point out Hayek's rejection and criticism of the concept where it was understood to be some sort of metaphor for the construction of mathematical formulae to predict balances of supply and demand. On the other hand, if we go beyond this understanding of Homo Economicus, I think it would be fair to say that the concept is of significance to an understanding of neoliberalism. The idea of self-maximising, economically rational actors is a key precept behind many contemporary policies such as the marketisation of higher education systems. More broadly, though, Homo Economicus is a way of describing how neoliberalism 'gets into the head' and creates neoliberal subjects. Perhaps a brief acknowledgement of this broader notion of Home Economicus would be useful.

I found the discussion of Carl Schmitt (who I confess I had not heard of previously) to be very informative. You bring out his points of convergence but also divergences from Hayek very well. However, I wondered if you might have brought the contradictions within his ideas out a bit more explicitly. His willingness to curtail parliamentary liberal democracy but also claim to preserve civil society are clearly at odds. You do, of course, make the point that he himself saw no such contradiction and then, when Hitler came to power, he found a natural authoritarian home. But I just felt that a few lines

that brought out the inherent contradictions within Schmitt's ideology would give that discussion greater power.

Two of the illustrative examples you draw on in discussing Authoritarian Liberalism are Weimar Germany and Pinochet's Chile. Again, you make a very interesting case. However, I wondered if, inadvertently, the article might have been giving a bit too much credit to neoliberalism as a motive force behind their turn to authoritarianism. I concede that I'm not an expert in either country's history but it seems to me that the roots of democracy were quite shallow in 1930s Germany and, perhaps, in Chile even allowing for the 'worker democracy' of the Salvador Allende period. Both countries had known autocracy in the past with relatively weak democratic institutions. This is not, of course, to deny the role of neoliberal ideologies in authoritarianism, particularly in the case of Chile. But I think a little broader discussion of national histories would place the impact of neoliberalism in a wider context.

I want to end my review, though, as I started: by emphasizing how much I enjoyed reading your article and how much I have learned from it myself.