

Randall G. Holcombe. *Advanced Introduction to Public Choice*. 2016. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited. xii + 155 pages. 27.95 (paper).

One is hard pressed to find an accessible yet comprehensive introduction to public choice theory. This is no longer the case with the publication of this excellent book. The volume is broken into four parts.

Part I, consisting of one chapter, introduces the reader to public choice, differentiates between individual and collective choice, and provides a roadmap for the remainder of the book. Each chapter of the book ends with a section of “Notes” which includes references and a very brief discussion (a sentence or two) of primary scholarship related to the material discussed in the text. This feature will be useful for teachers looking to assign primary readings to build on the material in the text and to students looking for further readings on topics that they find interesting.

The second part of the volume includes five chapters addressing topics related to aggregating voter preferences. Holcombe covers the major topics under this general category including: the median-voter theorem, the viability of third-party candidates, the implications of different voting rules, voter turnout, cycling, rational ignorance, and rational irrationality. Concrete examples are provided throughout to illuminate the conceptual points. Figures and tables are also used to illustrate and reinforce the discussion in the text.

After discussing the various aspects of voting, Holcombe turns to the topic of designing public policy. While the previous chapters focus on how democratic mechanisms aggregate individual preferences, the five chapters that constitute Part III focus on political markets and exchange. Among the topics covered are: the role of transaction costs in politics, interest-groups, rent-seeking, regulatory capture, the economics of bureaucracy, and political entrepreneurship. Holcombe discusses these concepts in the context of the production of government policy. One topic not explicitly discussed is rent extraction which would have fit well with either the discussion of rent seeking (Chapter 8) or political entrepreneurship (Chapter 11).

One strength of the book is that clear connections are made to concepts discussed in previous chapters. For example, the discussion of political entrepreneurship in Chapter 11 is connected to the earlier discussion of cycling first discussed in Chapter 5. This provides a cohesiveness to the volume and serves to reinforce concepts for readers new to public choice theory. At the same time, Holcombe does an excellent job of (re)defining concepts, offering the reader the option of reading any chapter in isolation.

The final section of the book includes three chapters covering topics related to constitutional political economy. Holcombe introduces the reader to the important differences between constitutional and post-constitutional choice. He also discusses how constitutions evolve over time due to the incentives facing key parties and the role of checks and balances in ensuring that political activity is directed toward the general interest rather than narrow opportunism.

Overall, an *Advanced Introduction to Public Choice* fills an important gap in in the textbook market and has several key strengths. First, the content and style is accessible to a large audience. The book can be used in a range of college courses, and scholars and laypeople interested in the foundations of public choice will also find the book of value. Second, the book offers flexibility. The book can be read as a comprehensive whole, but each chapter also works as a standalone selection. Further, the book can be read by itself or can be paired with primary readings, with the volume providing the necessary foundation. Third, the book is affordable relative to the cost of most college textbooks, making it attractive for course adoption and general readership. Finally, the tone and content is positive and non-polemical. Holcombe avoids injecting normative judgements and instead explains how the tools of economics can be used to analyze the various aspects of how government operates and the role of constitutional rules in framing these operations. Given these strengths, this book has the potential to expose a large audience to the core ideas and insights of public choice theory.

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