Although coercion is a fundamental and unavoidable part of our social lives, economists have not offered an integrated analysis of its role in the public economy. The essays in this book focus on coercion arising from the operation of the fiscal system, a major part of the public sector. Collective choices on fiscal matters emerge from and have all the essential characteristics of social interaction, including the necessity to force unwanted actions on some citizens. This was recognized in an older tradition in public finance, which can still serve as a starting point for modern work. The contributors to the volume recognize this tradition but add to it by using contemporary frameworks to study a set of related issues concerning fiscal coercion and economic welfare. These issues range from the compatibility of an open access society with the original Wicksellian vision to the productivity of coercion in experimental games.

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Jorge Martinez-Vazquez:

To Isaac, Jonah, Lily, Amelia, Oliver, Eleanor, and Emma

Stanley L. Winer:

To Navah and Zev
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Editors’ Preface and Acknowledgments

The papers and formal discussions presented in this volume emerged from the workshop on “Coercion and Social Welfare in Contemporary Public Finance,” held at Stone Mountain, Atlanta, in October 2010. This conference was designed and organized by us with the intention of creating the book on the meaning and role of coercion in public finance that is before you. The idea for working on public finance in the Wicksellian tradition emerged in the course of our own individual research activities, and we are fortunate to have been able to collaborate in bringing together a distinguished group of scholars to explore this line of thought more fully than we could do on our own.

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