Wendy Brown, Peter E. Gordon, and Max Pensky. *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory*. University of Chicago Press 2018. 124 pp. $99.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780226597133); $23.00 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780226597270).

Wendy Brown, Peter E. Gordon, and Max Pensky's *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory* provides an overview and dissection of authoritarianism to reveal key insights into its key components, origins, history, and trajectory. Through analyzing key works of Friedrich Hayek, Friedrich Nietzsche, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, and Alexis de Tocqueville, among others, the three authors draw illuminating connections between the works in dialogues that suggest current overt expressions of authoritarianism are the result of larger policy and societal trends spanning decades, if not centuries. By deconstructing authoritarianism through three distinct but complementary lenses, the authors provide political philosophers with a useful guidebook through which they can better identify authoritarian elements in contemporary theory and practice for the purpose of strengthening equity and democracy in their societies.

The book's primary purpose is to employ 'broad currents of critical theory' so that present authoritarian threats can be examined in ways that emphasize 'the intricate connections between subjective attitudes and large scale historical trajectories, especially those of capitalism and the changing nature of states and social formations' (3). This is done to illustrate the need to apply critical frameworks to authoritarian trends in global politics to prevent contemporary democratic crises from worsening.

The book contains a chapter for each author's unique critical approach to dissecting authoritarianism. The first chapter consists of Wendy Brown's conceptual breakdown of neoliberalism to demonstrate how its initial aims of freedom result in authoritarianism in practice. Seeking key influences that generate 'the antipolitical yet libertarian *and* authoritarian dimensions of popular right-wing reaction today' (11), Brown intersperses multiple contemporary political examples of authoritarianism in liberal democracies with an analysis neoliberalism's theoretical roots from its emergence as a force for individualism to oppose the collectivism of 'European fascism and Soviet totalitarianism' (13). Brown outlines that Keynesianism and the very concept of 'the social' (13) were opposed by neoliberal proponents such as Hayek as attempts to constrain freedom and impose narrow conceptions of good on society that would slowly lead to authoritarian oppression (7-15). For Hayek, the inherent neutrality and justice of market structures are a way to resist authoritarian backsliding and maximize individual freedom, even more so than democracy. This results in a call for all societal structures to be organized like market structures as much as possible, that in practice have taken the form of increased privatization and corporate power (13-19). Brown challenges Hayek by outlining how neoliberalism's implementation has increased injustice towards minority groups, which has increased political tensions and conflicts (19-25). In addition, Brown draws from Hans Sluga's interpretation of Nietzsche's *ressentiment* as not only 'a vital energy of right-wing populism: rancor, grudges, barely concealed victimization, and other affective qualities of *reaction*' (26), but also the erosion, trivialization, and deterioration of truth, reason, and other cultural values into nihilism, as evidenced by phenomena of fake news,

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alternative facts, and the manipulation of religion for political ends (27-29). Marcuse takes this a step further to argue that fundamental aspects of the social, including pleasure and conscience, are likewise manipulated into the capitalist system in ways that justify increasingly authoritarian means providing that they serve the bottom line (29-33). Brown's insights connect neoliberalism to authoritarianism while charting the imposition of profit as the ultimate goal of the social, which lead to neoliberalism taking over more and more aspects of citizens' lives.

In chapter two, Peter Gordon provides a contextual analysis of the creation of the Frankfurt School-supported study *The Authoritarian Personality* and Theodor Adorno's misgivings with the research process. The study, conducted by social scientists and Frankfurt School theorists, sought to identify human characteristics that could be indicators of fascist or proto-fascist tendencies (45-50). The intended result was a 'portrait of latent characterological features that could, under certain circumstances, be awakened for fascist political ends' (50). Gordon uses historical primary sources such as personal letters, unpublished sections, and other documents from the study to outline that while Adorno contributed to the study's overall theoretical framework, he pushed back against the study's sociologically influenced aims of finding an individual authoritarian archetype to instead advocate for authoritarianism to be understood as originating from social relations (50-59). Adorno's differentiation allows for individuals with high scores on the study's authoritarian test to be considered 'less as a case of social pathology than as an emergent social norm' (61). Much of Adorno's writings expressing these sentiments were not included in the final version of *The Authoritarian Personality* (61-64). Adorno's identification of authoritarianism emerging from the social as opposed to the psychological manifests in propaganda and the reification inherent in the massified culture industry (64-70). Gordon connects the social manipulation of citizenry toward authoritarianism that Adorno and other Frankfurt School theorists outline to mass-manipulation in contemporary society, focusing on Trumpism as a symptom of underlying social factors as opposed to merely individual pathologies (70-79). Gordon's behind-the-scenes look at how *The Authoritarian Personality* was conducted builds upon Brown's theoretical foundation to propose a causality of authoritarianism through providing a window into debates within the study's research process.

In chapter three, Max Pensky uses an analytical approach to draw connections between the epistemological warnings of Tocqueville and Adorno which frames the two philosophers as identifying the same systemic issues along different points in the United States' historical timeline. These issues stem from 'a vicious cycle operating between subjectivity and the institutions of public political life—between unit and structure—leading to the dysfunction and fading of the latter and the pathological distortion of the former' (90). For Tocqueville, observations of increasingly prominent desires for material wealth would result in an individualism characterized by 'voluntary self-isolation and withdrawal from associational life' (95) that would erode collective decision-making and surrender more and more power to figures in tutelary roles (80-96). Before moving on to Adorno, Pensky takes time to situate Tocqueville and Adorno through the lens of late epistemology, which involves communicating from a focus on one's positionality at the ebb of a

once commonly held way of thinking, be it the aristocracy for Tocqueville or the bourgeoisie for Adorno (96-107). Tocqueville's depictions of tutelary deferral and apathy are observed in a more extreme form by Adorno a century later through a mass culture that offers pre-manufactured political beliefs that shape citizens' perspectives at the expense of their potential for critical thinking (107-109). Resistance to these isolating and yet massifying impacts are compounded further by a growing hum of frivolous distractions that occupy more and more of citizens' time, even pervading into leisure, dominated by tutelary messaging through mass entertainment (109-113). The amplified tutelary powers grow to the extent that they can effectively police what is accepted as truth (113-115). Pensky concludes that a practical call to action can be deduced from the authors of practicing and propagating critical thinking in a way that can help break through the epistemological confines of tutelary overreach (115-118).

The book's illuminating breakdown of authoritarianism would do well to serve as a foundational resource for academics, activists, and ambitious students looking to oppose authoritarian practices in society through their research and actions. The authors' identification of authoritarianism's theoretical, causal, and epistemological components has the potential to be used as a guide to make anti-authoritarian activism more feasible by dedicating efforts to overcome specific aspects. For future research, it would be interesting to see a more in-depth analysis from Pensky on the connections Immanuel Kant's concept of self-incurred tutelage and Michel Foucault's further exploration of the topic in *The Politics of Truth* (Semiotext(e), 1997, 1-32) could have with Tocqueville and Adorno's late epistemologies, though such a connection to this or a similar concept is hinted at (98, 115-116). As an introduction to understanding the components of authoritarianism and why it is problematic, this book provides a considerable boost to anti-authoritarian efforts that would make it a great required reading for introductory courses in political science and related fields.

Justin Charles Michael Patrick, University of Toronto