

Review of: "Carl Friedrich's Path to "Totalitarianism""

C Scott Jordan

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Both authors give a thorough and balanced analysis of the opus of Carl Joachim Friedrich, an important voice in the rapidly shifting political thought of the mid-twentieth century, especially around the Germany state which witnessed one of the greatest transformations of that period – a transformation that would go on to shape greater European politics throughout the existence of the European Union up through today. Friedrich provides a necessary counter narrative to the binary one (an all too common tendency for those in classification and history) concerning totalitarianism and individualism or say communism and capitalism or whichever word combinations you prefer. Perhaps it was the authors' intent to leave one wanting more. For me, I think the discussions being had at the beginning of the Cold War, especially the 1953 conference mentioned would be fascinating to have more of an account on. The reason being is that how does Friedrich's thought give us pages and lessons to take into our modern context, particularly around rising fascist tendencies and either neo-individualist or a return to form for xenophobic chauvinism we are witnessing not just on the European continent but around the world. I would argue, but stand to be corrected with additions or subtracts, that Friedrich gives at least two key insights. One, that yes, it is okay for your thought and opinions to evolve. Too many academics get caught in the trap of some egoist need to hold onto a past thesis, instead of adapting and evolving as Friedrich, it appears, at least tried to do. John Rawls and Francis Fukuyama were both confounded by an inability to get beyond their monolithic, and unfortunately early in their career theses. Second, Friedrich, though with his biases – which we all have and should point out or those who study us ought to point out for inquiring minds – teases at the language games that prevent us from seeing certain realities. Our definitions continually need updating and we must be ever weary of falling into binary or categorical pitfalls that limit our ability to follow developments of systems and thought. Lastly, as one who likes to see political science do more than just a retelling of history, I would like to either in this piece or, if it is to go on to become a chapter or a book in and of itself, see how Friedrich's insights and perhaps the discourses of his time have set us up or set us on the wrong foot to deal with rising tensions that are springing up all across Europe and indeed across the globe.