

Murray Jardines's Post-Critical Political Theory

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ABSTRACT Key Words: post-critical political philosophy, William Poteat, Michael Polanyi, Alasdair MacIntyre, orality and literacy, narrative practice, speech act, places of faithfulness, public participation.

This review essay discusses Murray Jardine's argument in Speech and Political Practice, Recovering the Place of Human Responsibility, showing how the author skillfully draws on the thought of Michael Polanyi, William Poteat and Alasdair MacIntyre. Jardine offers a sharp critique of contemporary culture and politics as well as political theory. He develops the idea of place, drawing attention to the acritical reliance upon context in human speech acts; this motif he argues can be a component of the new political vocabulary necessary to initiate public conversations about the common good. There are interesting questions about how Jardine's account "fits" with some of the themes in Michael Polanyi's political philosophy.

Murray Jardine, *Speech and Political Practice, Recovering the Place of Human Responsibility*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1998. Pp. 207. ISBN 0-7914-3686-1 paper.

Murray Jardine's volume in the SUNY Series in Philosophy of the Social Sciences is now a dozen years old. It was, unfortunately, overlooked as a prime candidate for a *TAD* review when it originally came out, but Wally Mead's comment on a more recent Jardine book in this issue of *TAD* provides an opportunity for belated remarks about *Speech and Political Practice (SPP)*. Below I outline Jardine's complex argument and then comment on a few elements.

This interesting book treating political theory makes use of Polanyi's thought, and its writer acknowledges William Poteat as one of his important mentors, suggesting that Poteat's graduate seminars "inspired" (ix) the thesis of the book. I am sure as a reader that I fared much better with this eloquent but sometimes dense Poteat-like reflection because I first returned to *Polanyian Meditations* to refresh myself about Poteat's main themes. *SPP* is a bold discussion that takes large steps and is in this regard reminiscent of some Polanyi and Poteat's essays and books in which there is a sharp challenge to the status quo. What *SPP* aspires to do is to redirect much that is standard in political theory discussions. Just as Poteat digested Polanyi and then turned to meditate on other things (e.g., post-critical logic), Jardine has interiorized Poteat (as well as other thinkers Poteat appreciated such as Polanyi, Wittgenstein and Walter Ong) and then turned to the project of criticizing and re-imagining political theory and political life. *SPP* offers both a sharp *fin de siècle* cultural critique (as opposed to Polanyi's mid century critique) and a constructive philosophical alternative view. He begins by quoting Nietzsche to suggest that the emerging postmodern order is an exhausted bourgeois culture that has "degenerated into the technological nihilism of total war and insatiable consumerism" (1). Late modernity is marked by the "breakdown of any sense of human limits" and therefore any new model of political life must provide "some way of reestablishing such a sense of limits, or human finitude" (1). Jardine's constructive project explores the possibilities of reestablishing human finitude by considering "the uniquely human capacity for speech" which leads him ultimately to "rearticulate the human sense of place" (1).

Jardine provides a précis of his critical case in his introduction aptly titled “political theory and human finitude.” He argues that modern discussions of the political order are woven inextricably with broader Enlightenment epistemological and ontological suppositions; political theory and practice are grounded in a misleading Enlightenment conception of knowledge, which, like Polanyi, he dubs an “objectivist” conception.¹

The Enlightenment model of acceptable knowledge “had the effect of progressively shrinking the domain of intelligible human experience” (2). First religious belief and then morality and finally, by the last of the twentieth century, even scientific knowledge failed the test of objectivity and thus culture was thrown into a “thoroughgoing subjectivism” which lead to “the breakdown of any limits of human action in late modernity,” effecting a situation in which it has become problematic “to determine the relative validity of competing truth claims and thus to rule out any belief system and its practical implications as unacceptable”(3). Political theory in the context of this worldview took its task to be “to maximize individual freedom by articulating a set of neutral impersonal rules that does not favor any individual or group of individuals, or any particular way of life over others” (3). So the ideal of a society of autonomous individuals pursuing independently chosen goals without external interference is the dominant imaginative motif underlying modern political theory. Although modernity has succeeded modestly in limiting exercise of arbitrary personal power and has improved for many the material conditions of life, by late modernity, the modern liberal political project has collapsed: it is now apparent that any set of rules privileges some and this leads to the further conclusion that there is only a chaos of subjective interpretations and society is ordered only by power.

In the chapter following his introduction, Jardin provides additional details about his diagnosis of the problems of late modernity (and particularly modern and late modern political philosophy), but he also begins to articulate a prescription, his constructive philosophical alternative, for the disease that grips us. Jardine frames his main ideas in terms familiar to readers of Poteat’s works when he explains modern nihilism and the response to nihilism in terms of necessity and contingency, an important motif that runs through his book:

... the late modern situation is one of unrelenting skepticism about every truth claim because we see all such claims as contingent human interpretations, with no grounding other than changing perceptions . . . Nihilism has resulted from our recent recognition of the extent to which the world we experience is our own creation. If we want to escape from the nihilism of late modernity by regaining a sense of necessary limitations, then it would appear that we must articulate a conception of necessity that is compatible with the interpretative dimension of human existence (17).

Jardine links his constructive project with the work of MacIntyre and others interested in narrative: his work is “an attempt to articulate a vocabulary for judging the validity of the communal narratives discussed by Alasdair MacIntyre and others” (17). He wants to develop “the concept of a speech-based place to modify and extend MacIntyre’s explication of the role of narrative—or as I will conceptualize it, narrative practice—in political communities” (17). This approach, he suggests, is a fruitful way to move beyond “the Enlightenment’s objectivist conception of knowledge which implies a very narrow understanding of necessity” (18) and re-imagine necessity as not at odds with contingency.

Much of this chapter is taken up with a review of the history of Western ideas as they bear on questions of social organization. Aristotle’s “closed cosmos” (20) is one of “unchanging necessity” (19) in which

the “natural essences of beings set necessary limits on occurrences, including ultimately the kind of social structures that will allow humans to function properly” (19). But the biblical understanding of the world as “absolutely contingent upon the paradigmatic personal speaker, God, who speaks it into existence and whose words remain ultimately always faithful” (20) is at odds with classical views, and modern science and modern political ideals grow from these biblical roots.² But the conceptual revolution represented by the biblical understanding also “has destroyed the basis for political theory available to the classical world by breaking down the necessary relations among natural beings and their ends” (20). The nominalist movement in the late Middle Ages brought the recovery of the biblical picture and the final demise of “Aristotle’s entire comprehension of reality” (21) as well as what eventually became the scientific revolution and the emergence of modern political philosophy. Objectivism, of course, grows up in the soil of modernity: “Modern objectivism with its model of exact, impersonal, context-neutral ‘facts’ can be understood as an attempt to establish necessity in the radically contingent world of nominalism, where there are no natural unchanging essences or *teloi*” (22). Although modern thought rejected Aristotelian essences, it retained a residual element of the Aristotle’s cosmos insofar as it “assumes that the world’s order—the ‘facts’ obtained by skeptical reason—must be unchanging and must exist independently of human agency” (22). The path to late modernity’s nihilism is set by the tension between what early modernity rejected and retained.

Having articulated this general framework for analysis, Jardine then goes through early modern political philosophy (Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Rousseau), natural rights theory and its successors, which he shows both reaches for a stable world backed by something like Aristotelian essences and yet “presents us with a much more contingent, changeable world than is the case with Aristotle” (24). There follows interesting discussion of the ideas of successor Kantians like Rawls, as well as Marx, Weber and Nietzsche, but Jardine’s thematic thread is consistent: “The story that I have sketched here attempts to articulate the late modern situation as a loss of any conception of necessity that can allow us to set limits on human actions” (31).

In Jardine’s account, the overt nihilism of early twentieth century totalitarian movements has now yielded to “the subtler nihilism of the emerging global postindustrial capitalist economy” (30).³ What in the present cultural context of crisis is needed, Jardine assesses, is to abandon “the assumption that epistemological and moral limits must take an impersonal, acontextual form” and begin working out a way “to speak of a contextual necessity that actually derives from human creativity and interpretative capacities” (34). Jardine concludes his chapter by turning to a discussion of several contemporary political theorists (Berlin, Walzer, Bell) and ethicists (Hauerwas, MacIntyre) “who attempt to deal with the contingency implied by the collapse of the premodern cosmos” (35). About these figures, Jardine often offers penetrating insights; all (except MacIntyre), however, include latent objectivist elements. MacIntyre, as I have suggested above, Jardine sees himself as building upon.⁴ MacIntyre most clearly sees the “breakdown of the classical cosmos” and, Jardine argues, situates “his discussion of moral virtues and their setting in the context of a narrative which is explicitly conceived not only as an alternative to modern objectivist approaches to ethical reasoning, but also as a substitute for Aristotle’s finite cosmos” (43). Modernity has abstracted moral matters from their historical-social context and has thereby “lost the teleology necessary for coherent moral reasoning” (44) but MacIntyre’s insightful discussion of moral reasoning and ethical practice in terms of the interrelation of virtue, practice, narrative and tradition move us beyond this. MacIntyre shows how “successful moral reasoning and practice takes place within a tradition enclosing a narrative or narratives that inform a number of practices, themselves successful or unsuccessful depending on the possession and exercise of the relevant virtues” (45). However, Jardine criticizes MacIntyre for providing only a “very abstract description of narrative practice”

(46); put another way (i.e., into Jardine's general framework), "... the problem with MacIntyre's conception of a narrative practice is that it does not appear to contain any elements of necessity" (46). Jardine sees his own project as a remedy for this: "... I will modify MacIntyre's conception of a narrative practice in a manner that will eliminate the need for the kind of historical teleology which it may presently imply, replacing such a teleology with speech-based places of necessity" (47).

Jardine's Chapter 2 turns from modern political philosophy and MacIntyre directly to Polanyi (one of a group of midcentury "revisionist philosophers of science" [52]) who focuses on scientific practice) to make clear what is "missing from the objectivist paradigm" (52).⁵ That is, his discussion of Polanyi unfolds in a fashion that highlights the problems of objectivism and Jardine's alternative constructive Polanyian stance.⁶ He acknowledges that few contemporary political theorists are overt objectivists, although subtle elements of objectivism still color thinking. Jardine also uses Polanyi's account of knowledge to provide a basis for his concept of necessity.

What does Jardine emphasize in his explication of Polanyi? The list is long—too long fully to enumerate here—but it certainly shows its author is a sensitive reader of Polanyi. Jardine carefully discusses how, for Polanyi, order and meaning involve an irreducible personal appraisal and a "temporal process, a groping toward rationality and order which is rooted in our most primordial forms of sentience and motility, and is shared with more primitive organisms" (54). He emphasizes the impassioned and the participative components of Polanyi's account of tacit knowing as a from-to process. Such Polanyian themes make clear that we must rely on the context of the knowing act (as Jardine often puts matters) whereas objectivism emphasizes knowledge as abstracted from the relevant context. "The contextual aspect of tacit knowledge" (68) Jardine later lifts up as especially important and as linked to "teleological features of tacit knowledge" (68); together, the contextual and teleological are both rooted in and the basis for practices in MacIntyre's sense. Polanyi emphasizes the ongoing process of knowing in a dynamic interactive community of inquiring agents making contact with a hidden reality. Objectivism "ignores the inescapable communal and communicative dimension of knowledge" (71) that Polanyi treats so ably. Jardine very much appreciates Polanyi's emphasis upon trust or faith as integral to knowing and suggests this grounds what he later in his book discusses as "the logic of the speech act" (63). Just as Polanyi sees that belief is more fundamental than doubt, Jardine argues that intelligibility is more fundamental than unintelligibility" (63). Polanyi, Jardine emphasizes, does not, as objectivism does, promote universal skepticism but he makes clear that doubt is not heuristic. He notes that Polanyi's solution to the problem of universals (framed in terms of his theory of tacit knowing) very helpfully emphasizes the knowing process as unfolding temporally and this affirms the "dynamic nature of universal formation" (66).

Having presented first his cultural criticism and its bearing on political theory and then a Polanyian counter to objectivism which is the root of many of modernity's problems, Jardine turns in the third chapter to a more general discussion of the written word as an experiential source of objectivism. Specifically, he turns to a review of the rich literature from the last century on orality and literacy, providing a very competent overview that complements his earlier discussion of objectivism. But he judiciously qualifies his claims about literacy: literacy is an important but not the only source of objectivism. As he puts matters, "literacy only makes objectivism probable" (76) and certainly should not be regarded as a single cause of the changes that come to be represented as objectivism.⁷ Jardine also warns it is important to avoid romanticizing primary oral cultures as do many scholars who study differences in orality and literacy; he affirms that literacy is a major human achievement which has brought many good things to human society. His chapter provides a succinct but meaty account of the literature on orality and literature, beginning with work in classics (Parry, Lord,

Havelock) and moving to others who expanded this area (e.g., Goody); he acknowledges that he particularly relies on the work of Walter Ong. He recognizes that he is drawing primarily on the first generation of orality-literacy studies (whose conclusions now have been qualified) but this scholarship serves ably for his general purpose which is “to point out some potential limitations imposed on our thinking by literacy, so that we can be more aware of these limitations and use the knowledge thereof as a starting point for further reflection” (77). Jardine very capably summarizes much of what Ong identifies as the salient characteristics of oral cultures and the ways literate consciousness restructures human thinking. He succinctly reviews Ong’s nine important characteristics of oral mentality and then shows how the emergence of the alphabet and eventually printing decisively reshapes these characteristics. Jardine’s discussion emphasizes that oral communication is intimately linked to the dynamism of the lifeworld and primary oral cultures must structure themselves in terms of this dynamism whereas literate cultures, and particularly print culture, with its heavy emphasis upon the visual, lead people to overlook this dynamism and, as abstract thinkers, to misconstrue much about themselves and their communities.

Roughly the first half of *SPP* focuses on Jardine’s cultural critique and his discussion of objectivism and differences in primary oral and literate societies; his fourth chapter, “Beyond Objectivism: The Logic of the Speech Act,” turns to discussion of the work of writers who he suggests can help provide “an examination of speech and hearing and an application of the results of this examination to our political vocabulary” (103). This is the chapter that draws most extensively on Poteat’s discussion of necessity and contingency in connection with basic sensory orientation; like Poteat, Jardine develops conceptions of order that derive from the dynamic oral world. Jardine aims to show that from speech acts “we can derive a conception of necessity that can coexist even with absolute contingency” (104). In a visual model derived from literacy, we likely lose a sense of the world’s temporality. Change and movement cannot be accommodated in necessary relations that are regarded as forever fixed or determined. A world without necessary relations so defined is one conceived in polar opposite terms as radically contingent, underivable, and chaotic. Jardine uses Polanyi’s account of knowing to counter this dualistic visualist orientation to necessity and contingency. Knowing is a contingent act but is “still subject to necessity” (111)—its results are not derivable from context but are nevertheless reliant on context. Slowly, Jardine recasts the necessity-contingency polarity by mining etymological possibilities, by developing Poteat’s notion of a “motif” (a configuration unfolding in time which is inhabited by a mindbody), and by analyzing the speech act. The speech act is “. . . the experience . . . most closely and directly linked to the dynamism of sound as we experience it” and typically is a communal activity, which “will produce the paradigm most readily translatable into an ethical or political context” (115). Speech acts are not derivable from their context (and are thus contingent) but are depend upon the context, in that “in order to happen they must conform to certain limits” (115). Like Poteat, Jardine links speech acts, inhabited space and place. Thus, he concludes that “. . . a kind of necessity can coexist with even radical contingency, and that this necessity resides in the capacity of speakers to be faithful to their words, which is of course the central theme in the biblical stories” (122).

In “Speech, Place and Narrative Practice,” Chapter 5 in *SPP*, the discussion shifts from the development of themes found in Poteat back to MacIntyre’s discussion of virtues, practices, narrative and tradition. Here Jardine brings his Poteat-influenced account of speech acts to bear upon MacIntyre’s account of narrative practices in order to remedy what he takes to be shortcomings in MacIntyre’s approach.⁸ MacIntyre’s hierarchically-organized scheme is not sufficiently grounded in that it does not show “how we attain critical distance from the narrative practice, of which we find ourselves a part.” MacIntyre does not make clear how “to adjudicate among apparently incommensurable narrative practices” (127). Narratives should clearly set

limits to what is appropriate in practices, and traditions should set limits to what is appropriate in narratives. Jardine argues that to see how a narrative can set limits to practices within it, one must “examine how the narrative and the practices are connected, rather than looking for some principle within the narrative from which we can deduce rules for the various practices” (129). In an ethical or political context, “necessity consists in motifs—events, situation, themes, that set limits to what may be appropriately said in a particular speech act” (129-130). A “motif” is thus a linking or connecting “place,” which provides “an acritical reliance upon context for orientation” (135). Rolling all of this together, this is Jardine’s formulation: “. . . the acritical reliance upon a context of narrative and tradition, here manifested in action and speech, generates a further context of narrative and tradition which is regulative for further action and speech” (135-136). Jardine argues that “place” constitutes “a motif of necessity” (138) when it meets two criteria: “. . . it must be such that it allows one to recognize that one’s acritical reliance upon the relevant context was justified; and . . . it must be such as to allow one to recognize the universal in the particular” (138). This complex philosophical way of putting matters becomes much clearer as Jardine illustrates his case with examples such as how the notion of the *polis* provided a connecting framework in ancient Greek society for individual narratives and how scientific opinion shapes scientific practice. There is an expanded discussion of “place” as rooted in mindbodiness (the “fundamental paradigm” [150]) but as visible also in “derivative cases” (150) and such cases are the specific places “appropriate in political practice” (147). Particularly Jardine’s discussion of apprenticeship (following Polanyi) nicely clarifies his abstract account: “Apprenticeship is a place that connects, and thus limits, practice and narrative” (153). At the end of his chapter, additional examples (the biblical sacrifice of Isaac story, the operation of ritual, and the nature of prophecy) are folded into his discussion; these round out Jardine’s effort to articulate “some basic elements of a speech-based political vocabulary” (161). He summarizes the case in his chapter thus:

. . . necessity for MacIntyre’s concept of narrative practice comes from places of faithfulness which connect practice with narrative or narrative with tradition. These places are themselves events or movements in the sense that any acritical reliance upon context is an event or movement. The structure of the process involved reveals the two features of place that serve as guidelines for evaluating the faithfulness of the speaker. First, a true place must transform those who inhabit it in such a way that they can recognize that their acritical reliance upon their context of practice, narrative, and tradition was justified. Second, a true place will reveal the universal through the particular (161).

The short but very striking conclusion (“Speech, Place and the Postmodern Public Realm”) of *SPP* is Jardine’s effort to draw from his political philosophy focused on narrative practice, speech and place his vision of a new politics. He emphasizes that he has not offered a blueprint for a good society and has not tied his discussion of place to any institutional framework but he, nevertheless, wants to conclude by putting “the concept of place in a larger political context” (163). In the most general terms, he believes that the concept of place opens the possibility for creation of a new “political vocabulary” (163) that can kindle public conversation and action to establish the common good. Clearly, Jardine favors moving beyond the discourse of modern liberalism with its distinctions between public and private, its strong individualism and its notions about competition. He contends that “what is needed to break out of the dilemma of late modern societies, then is a reconstruction of authoritative places of orientation” (166). He hopes that “constructing places of faithful speech acts” (166) will allow criticism and modification of institutional structures and replacing the monolithic sovereignty of the state with a “kind of pluralistic associational life” (167). In Jardine’s vision, the new political society would be one that articulates “those places that can allow individuals to achieve citizenship within

the bounds of overlapping local associations and practices while still binding these associations and practices into a coherent whole” (169).⁹ A broader understanding of the politicized public domain can become the basis for deriving “a new understanding of participation in the public realm” (166). This new understanding would be grounded in a cultural and ethical transformation that moves citizens away from the now much distorted Protestant idea of serving the common good through economically valuable labor. Such an understanding would have new images of human fulfillment that are somewhat akin to “premodern conceptions . . . in that it would encompass community service . . . civic activities directed toward finding and achieving the common good, and ultimately perhaps the spiritual dimension of human existence” (172).

In sum, I find *SPP* to be a coherent and sensitive effort to wrestle with issues in contemporary political philosophy. The book imaginatively relies upon and weaves together elements of Polanyi, Poteat (and others Poteat relied upon), and MacIntyre both to criticize *fin de siècle* culture and political theory and to articulate an alternative vision. Jardine develops the idea of place, drawing attention to the acritical reliance upon context in human speech acts, and this motif, he hopes will be a component of the new political vocabulary necessary to initiate public conversations about the common good. What follow are three very briefly sketched comments about matters germane to *SPP* that puzzle me and offer an opportunity for further thought and dialogue.

(1) Jardine’s treatment of orality and literacy and how they shape thinking and the lifeworld is a careful treatment. He outlines how the written word is an experiential source of objectivism and abstraction while the oral word relies on context and is always dynamic. Jardine notes, using some of the discussions of “secondary orality,” that the media environment of the twentieth century did change, but secondary orality is overlain upon literacy and is not primary orality. Walter Ong and some of the other first generation orality-literacy scholars, despite their attention to secondary orality, in my judgment, did not reckon with the epochal shift to digital technology that began late in the twentieth century; the emerging culture in many places in the world is what I call digital culture and it should not be conflated with print culture. Nevertheless, I believe that an assessment of the way digital media are reshaping thinking and the lifeworld is not yet clear. We live in a time like the Age of the Incunabula (1450-1500 CE) when we are not sure about the possibilities (including the impact upon us) of digital media; those possibilities are only now beginning to take form. Some scholarship—most of it published after the heyday of first-generation orality-literacy studies and even after *SPP*—does try to analyze ways digital media is reshaping the tacit habits of thought of print literacy. Unfortunately, much of the discussion about digital media seems to be polarized with tenacious advocates and critics engaged in their own mini-culture war. Jardine seems disposed toward criticism of the new media: at the end of *SPP*, he comments “if the future holds an increased reliance on the new electronic media, with their tendency to create a post-objectivist or relativist orientation, then it becomes fundamentally important to develop experiential alternatives” (172). I appreciate the commonsense of critics of the new media who ask serious questions and disregard the hype of the technocratic boosters. Nevertheless, it seems to me insufficient simply to link new media with a tendency to create a “relativist orientation” that should be countered. Is it not important to struggle to understand the changing nature and impact of literacy in a global hypermedia environment that increasingly emphasizes interactivity? Perhaps a new political vocabulary grounded in what Jardine calls “authoritative places of orientation” (166) must, in part, be wrought using the new media. After all, our larger sense of what “communication” involves, our ideas about what “reading,” and “writing” and even “speech acts” are, as well as our notions about the nature of “knowledge,” are now being leveraged by our practices using the computer in a networked world.¹⁰

(2) Jardine's discussion presents both a radical criticism of the culture and political philosophy at the end of the century, and the hopeful anticipation of a new order to be grounded in a sounder, non-objectivist philosophy that creates a new political vocabulary. The scope of the indictment of contemporary culture, articulated early in the book, is very broad and seems, at times, to slide toward disgust with the status quo. In sharp contrast, the hoped for new political milieu, briefly sketched at the end of the book, is a palpable, idealized order. I discern in the ambience or tone of *SPP* a certain interesting tension with the ambience I find in Polanyi's suggestions about the social order.¹¹ There is sharp cultural criticism in Polanyi, but it seems to me that Polanyi's rejection of values and practices which take shape in the Enlightenment is only partial.¹² I find hope for the social order in Polanyi, but it is normally quite muted. Polanyi does envision a new day and a society of explorers, but his practical political expectations usually seem very modest; he seems determined to resist any utopian notes in his symphony. He is perhaps infected by the prophetic spirit, but he is on guard against perfectionism and charts the trouble that perfectionism has wrought.¹³ Polanyi ends his chapter titled "Conviviality" in *PK*, on the following note:

The attempt made in this book to stabilize knowledge against skepticism, by including its hazardous character in the conditions of knowledge, may find its equivalent, then, in an allegiance to a manifestly imperfect society, based on the acknowledgment that our duty lies in the service of ideals which we cannot possibly achieve (245).

(3) My third comment is akin to my second insofar as it concerns the relevance of Polanyi's social vision to the sort of work Jardine is doing. Jardine seems to draw, like Poteat, most heavily on the Polanyi of *Personal Knowledge* and *The Tacit Dimension* which I distinguish somewhat from the early Polanyian thinking focused on science and society and the very late Polanyi who focused on the nature and kinds of meaning that a post-critical philosophy opens up. Polanyi's early social vision, although focused on the relation of science and society, outlines a broader conception of the political order as a fabric of dynamic orders.¹⁴ I find echoes of this conception in Jardine's discussions. Dynamic orders—terminology Polanyi borrows and adapts from Köhler—are circles with particular practices. They are communities of inquiry and interpretation situated within broader culture and the political order; such circles are essentially self-motivated and self-governing. Motivation and governance are grounded in individuals who are pursuing common transcendent ideals (i.e., those held up in the particular community of inquiry). Such persons have accepted a calling or vocation. Self-government is achieved through mutual adjustment of persons constituting the community; while serving common ends, persons interact over time and this alters the disposition of the circle. Sometimes Polanyi suggests this is an "internal equilibration" which he contrasts with external forces directly shaping policy. Elements of this model remain part of Polanyi's later philosophy. They can be found in *PK*, but perhaps the model is most concisely described later in the 1960 essay "The Republic of Science: Its Political and Economic Theory." Polanyi's model, particularly as it was described in his early writing, seems to have the dynamism that Jardine is reaching for with his discussion of an operative sense of necessity that is at the same time open-ended and thus contingent. Jardine, of course, does draw out an account of apprenticeship to illustrate his ideas about necessity and contingency and, for Polanyi, apprenticeship was important from very early. Polanyi, sketching his envisioned political order more broadly, suggests that the larger fabric of liberal society must preserve and foster the many dynamic orders that constitute it. Government does this by allowing such dynamic orders to pursue their own transcendent ideals. Social goods thus come from many sources. The orders themselves can prosper only if they maintain what Polanyi calls "public liberty" which is not the liberty one has to do as he or she pleases but the responsible opportunity one has to participate in the public conversation within a particular dynamic order like science or the law. So judges study precedents and then issue a ruling based upon their own discernment; scientists pursue inquiries about the nature of reality and present their findings and their

responsible colleagues respond affirmatively or negatively to these findings put forward by the discoverer with universal intent. Public liberty is concerned with the freedom of the individual to be responsible, within the context of conscience, to respond to the achievements of others in a dynamic order and thus to be faithful to the transcendent ideals of the dynamic order. Public liberty helps resolve disputes and reform tradition. For Polanyi, communists and fascists alike fundamentally misunderstand dynamic orders and their role as the foundation of the social order: “The hope of progress through the pursuit of various forms and aspects of truth—artistic, scientific, religious, legal, etc.—by a number of autonomous circles, each devoted to one of them, is the essential idea of a Liberal Society, as contrasted to a Totalitarian State” (“Growth,” 448).

In sum, in the thirties and early forties, Polanyi seems to have been actively interested in articulating a vision of what he regarded as a liberal society, one that had certain features that are not standard in what Jardine dubs “liberalism,” although these features seem akin to some of the things Jardine envisions as important in a political order rooted in a re-visioning of place.

Although it is now an older book, *SPP* should not be overlooked; it is a rich reflection on political theory which develops many of the themes important to figures like Polanyi, Poteat and MacIntyre.

Endnotes

¹David Rutledge’s early *TAD* essay on *Polanyian Meditations* (*TAD* 14:2 1986-87: 6-17) quotes an early effort by Poteat succinctly to sketch the “objectivist” notions about knowledge and reality in the critical ideal:

... it is the perennial temptation of critical thought to demand total explicitness in all things, to bring all background into foreground, to dissolve the tension between the focal and the subsidiary by making everything focal, to dilute the temporal and intentional thickness of perception, to de-historicize thought... To lighten every shadow place, to dig up and aerate the roots of our being, to make all interiors exteriors, to unsituate all reflection from time and space, to disincarnate mind, to define knowledge as that which can be grasped by thought in an absolutely lucid “moment” without temporal extension, to flatten out all epistemic hierarchy, to homogenize all logical heterogeneity; in short, the temptation of enlightenment is to doubt all of our previous certainties and to ground our knowledge strictly upon clarity and distinctness in the present... (6)

Poteat’s summary can perhaps here stand for the many dimensions of the “objectivist” problem, several of which Jardine treats in different parts of his book.

²The biblical understanding is the seedbed for “the promise of modernity—freedom, democratic equality, and scientific knowledge” but also—with the coming of a loss of religious faith—of modern nihilism construed as “an absolutely contingent, placeless chaos” (21).

³With a certain rhetorical exuberance, Jardine condemns the present order. “The recently triumphant neoclassical liberalism” (Hayek, Friedman and Nozick), he says,

asserts that the utterly arbitrary distribution of rewards deriving from unregulated capitalism is the very guarantor of individual freedom, since any “patterned” distribution of rewards imposes someone’s values on others. Legitimation comes... from the freedom capitalism

allows to will one's own values and act on them, i.e., from the system's capacity to provide an ever greater variety of demonic value choices. The moral orientation of contemporary capitalism is no longer rational self-improvement but rather aesthetic self-expression (30-31).

The last half of the twentieth century moves into a world of more inequality than ever. Reagan's "degenerate version of the Protestant ethic," that says "one can succeed against any conceivable obstacle through nothing but hard work" is no more than a "crude version of the will to power"(33). Thus, Jardine concludes, "the ultimate fulfillment of Nietzsche's prophecy seems not to be violent totalitarianism but rather libertarian consumer capitalism" (33).

⁴" . . . MacIntyre's idea of a narrative practice is essential to constructing a political theory to inform ethical communities which can construct a new public realm for postindustrial and ultimately post-bourgeois societies" (45).

⁵The "fit" between MacIntyre and Polanyi is an interesting topic in itself but one not explicitly treated by Jardine, although he certainly sees some similarities. Mark Mitchell (*Michael Polanyi: The Art of Knowing* [Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2006] and John Flett ("Alasdair MacIntyre's Tradition-Constituted Enquiry in Polanyian Perspective," *TAD* 26:2 [1999-2000]: 6-20) have, after the publication of *SPP*, laid out some of the overlap in MacIntyre and Polanyi's philosophical critiques and their constructive philosophy. Jardine might appreciate the perspectives of Mitchell and Flett and find it helpful to correlate their interpretations with his account of MacIntyre in terms of narrative, tradition, practice and virtue. Interestingly, despite being a part of the late sixties Unity of Knowledge discussions which Polanyi, Marjorie Grene and Edward Pols organized, MacIntyre seems to have misconstrued early in his career what Polanyi was up to as a philosopher of science (see "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narratives and the Philosophy of Science," *Monist* 60 (1977): 432-457, an essay that Jardine cites). MacIntyre seems not to give serious attention to Polanyi's later exploration of the importance of the realm of the unspoken (whose value Jardine does carefully exploit as a political philosopher). Also MacIntyre does not seem to know anything about Polanyi's more overtly social-political writings before *PK* (perhaps dismissed as no more than Hayek-like market philosophy) where he might have readily found some good resources to help develop ideas about the practices of skillful communities, the valence of their frameworks, and the nature of ongoing tradition-grounded inquiry which aims to reform tradition. To this Polanyi reader, it seems that MacIntyre also is more steadfastly a rationalist (actually a Thomistic rationalist) than Polanyi. Polanyi does however affirm that humans can—and it is their gift to do so—use rational faculties (empowered by tacit powers) to understand reality, which nevertheless remains partially hidden.

⁶The way of organizing his discussion of Polanyi (plus his concise but superb analysis of major themes) suggests to this reader that this chapter might be used, independent of Jardine's book, as an effective way to introduce Polanyi's main ideas against the backdrop of objectivism.

⁷Later Jardine remarks, "What is needed is not exactly a causal explanation, since we are attempting to escape such objectivist modes of thought, but rather an explanation that demonstrates that literacy can create a context or configuration where objectivist thinking becomes more probable" (93). The crucial transformation brought by literacy is "the tendency to perceive the world and ourselves abstractly, i.e., cut off from the existential context necessary for meaning" (93).

⁸Essentially, Jardine wants to supplement MacIntyre's account (attending briefly also to shortcomings in Habermas' discussion) by developing an account of "place" as a faithful speech act: ". . . what would hold together a particular practice . . . with the particular narrative from which I render intelligible my various activities and aspirations, is the concrete place provided by my faithful speech acts which relate my various activities to each other and to their settings" (143).

⁹About his conception of place, Jardine says, it “holds out the possibility of developing local traditions of self-government and citizenship without attempting to return to the tribalistic politics of the polis” (167).

¹⁰In “Sight, Sound and Epistemology: The Experiential Sources of Ethical Concepts” (*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. LXIV, No. 1 [Spring, 1996]: 1-25), an article published before *SPP* but an expansion of his third chapter, Jardine says somewhat more about the new electronic media. Nevertheless, his perspective seems to be much the same as in *SPP*:

Just as relativism is derivative of objectivism, the new electronic media are derivative of literacy, so the developing postliterate relativist orientation can be seen as the logical culmination of the earlier literate objectivist orientation. The ultimate problem remains understanding objectivism and elaborating non-objectivist modes of thought that can allow us to escape the relativism into which we are rapidly sliding” (14).

I share Jardine’s interest in elaborating non-objectivist modes of thought but I also suspect that our communication practices in digital culture, although originally built on print culture, may ultimately reshape our mental habits in ways that make us more temporally and contextually attuned. See my discussion in “Media Ecology and the New Literacy: Notes on an Electronic Hermeneutic” (in *From One Medium to Another: Basic Issues for Communicating the Scriptures in New Media*. Paul A. Soukup and Robert Hodgson [eds.]. Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1997: 310-333) and “Bible Study, Critical Thinking and Post-Critical Thought: Cultural Considerations,” (in *Critical Thinking and the Bible in the Age of the New Media*, Charles M. Ess [ed.]. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004: 269-290).

¹¹Jardine is, of course, not obligated to find Polanyi’s ambience or tone appropriate for his own political philosophy. In Polanyi, I find a certain patience and political sobriety toward the prevailing social order—a qualified acceptance of, for example, a market production and distribution system since alternatives he saw he recognized as inoperable. Such elements are less apparent in Jardine’s account.

¹²There is an excellent discussion of this point in Sanders’ “Tacit Knowing—Between Modernism and Postmodernism” (*TAD* 18:3 [1992-92]):15-210.

¹³“ . . . [U]nless we agree that within our lifetime we must no more than loosen the ties of a free society, however iniquitous they may be, we shall inevitably precipitate men into abject servitude” (*PK* 245). A little later, Polanyi affirms that “unjust privileges prevailing in a free society can be reduced only by carefully graded stages” (*PK* 245).

¹⁴Polanyi’s early social vision is perhaps clearest in his 1941 essay “The Growth of Thought in Society,” *Economica* 8, 428-456 (hereafter cited as “Growth”) and in some of the chapters in *LL* which develop early themes. To be sure, some of the elements of what seem to be Polanyi’s notion of a properly ordered society are only sketchily drawn. See my recent discussion in “Michael Polanyi’s Use of Gestalt Psychology,” *Knowing and Being: Perspective on the Philosophy of Michael Polanyi*, Tihamér Margitay (ed.) (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010): 10-29.