The Crisis of Modern Rationalism and How to Fix It: A Reflection on and Critique of Murray Jardine's Writings

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Abstract: The work of professor and theorist Murray Jardine has brought an undeniable impact to the discipline of political science. His work touches on multiple subjects but primarily deals with what he calls the "crisis of modern rationalism." He focuses on the detrimental effects of liberal capitalist democracy and its individualist nature and, more broadly, on what he sees as the incoherence of the Enlightenment understanding of nature and humanity. To resolve this crisis, he proposes the transformation of society into a communitarian system rooted in Catholic social teaching and a decentralized market structure. This essay will explore Jardine's ideas as they have developed in his body of work.

Keywords: Murray Jardine, Colin Gunton, Aristotle, Hobbes, Nietzsche, classical philosophy, political theory, political philosophy, Christianity, theology, oral culture, written culture, rationalism, technology, liberalism

Introduction

The work of professor and theorist Murray Jardine has brought an undeniable impact to the discipline of political science. His work touches on multiple subjects but primarily deals with what he calls the "crisis of modern rationalism." He focuses on the detrimental effects of liberal capitalist democracy and its individualist nature and, more broadly, on what he sees as the incoherence of the Enlightenment understanding of nature and humanity. To resolve this crisis, he proposes the transformation of society into a communitarian system rooted in Catholic social teaching and a decentralized market structure. His work spans approximately thirty years; we will concentrate on his book *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society* as well as a number of essays: "Are Communitarians 'Premodern' or 'Postmodern'?"; "Liberalism and the Semi-Malleability of Nature"; "Political Theory, Theology, and Modernity"; "Pope Benedict's Analysis of the (Partial) Failure of Christian Theology"; and "Issues in Contemporary Political Theory." The central idea of Jardine's writings is that the dilemmas of the modern age can be seen as a consequence of the failure of Christian theology effectively to grasp the capacity for human creativity that is a fundamental implication of the biblical worldview. Medieval and early modern Christian theology tended to have a limited sense of human creativity and a relatively static conception of

nature that became increasingly untenable as modern technological change made it clear that humans have a substantial capacity to control and change their environment—even as, ironically, that technological change was made possible by elements of Christian doctrine. The secular ideologies that emerged from the Enlightenment in response to this failure were no more successful, quickly degenerating into nihilism and total war. The solution to the modern crisis would lie in a renewed Christian theology that addresses more effectively the issue of human agency (Jardine 2004, 13-26).

The Crisis of Modern Rationalism within Liberalism

Jardine begins his book, *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society*, with an examination of the three basic versions of liberalism at the heart of modern political discourse. Throughout this analysis, he seeks to show the incoherence of liberal theories and thus liberal societies. He first examines classical liberalism, a doctrine that was first articulated in a cohesive form during the Enlightenment. Thinkers like Thomas Hobbes and John Locke provided the philosophical foundations for classical liberal thought. Locke believed that all humans were governed by a divinely inspired "natural law" that was ingrained into the conscience of every human being from birth. A very simplified version of earlier "natural law" principles that had been devised by Catholic theologians during the Middle Ages, Locke's conception had at its core two main imperatives: to preserve oneself and to preserve others, with the first of these being prioritized if they came into conflict (Jardine 2004, 40-42).

Notably, while the second of these principles has been carried over into our modern ethical discourse, the first seems to have been deprioritized. Obviously, ensuring one's own survival is still considered paramount for the most part—this is a basic evolutionary instinct that will doubtless remain in the human race forever—but other forms of harm to oneself are often downplayed or dismissed under a "live-and-let-live" rationale. This can be seen in the relaxation of attitudes on a number of activities traditionally considered vices not because they harmed others but because they damaged oneself, sometimes to the point of ruining one's life. Such activities include drug use, gambling, and the consumption of overly sexual or violent media.

Locke constructed a general framework for how government should be constructed and how it should operate based upon these two basic principles. He believed that even in a "state of nature"—a hypothetical situation wherein government has not yet been formed—most people would follow the fundamental tenets of natural law, so this natural state would be peaceful.

However, two problems would emerge in such a situation. First, there would be irrational violators who deliberately seek to inflict harm upon others or themselves in blatant contravention of the law of nature. In addition, well-meaning people who seek to follow the law of nature may dispute how it is applicable to a given set of circumstances with which they are faced. Locke states that in order to resolve these problems, people within the state of nature come together and agree to form a government that is capable of both enforcing natural law against those who violate it and of interpreting it such that its implications on particular situations can be stated explicitly. In practice, executing these duties entails the protection of certain "natural rights": life, liberty, and property. However, as Locke points out, governments themselves have been some of the most egregious violators of these rights throughout history. Thus, government must be subject to restrictions on its behavior embodied in a constitution that is either a formal, written document or a series of traditions that are informal but nevertheless act as an effective constraint on governmental power (as is seen in the United Kingdom). Of course, even constitutional government is not immune to incompetence on the one hand and abuses of power on the other, and Locke argues that if a government fails to protect its citizens' natural rights or, worse yet, actively infringes upon them, it is not only the right but the *duty* of its citizens to overthrow it. He viewed the Glorious Revolution as an example of such a tyrannical government being rightfully overthrown by its own people (Jardine 2004, 42-44).

Locke also applied the general principles of his natural law theory to the more specific issue of property rights. All land (the most important type of property in the agricultural society of Locke's time) is initially bestowed by God unto humanity in common, but when someone uses this land to generate a thing of value—for instance, converting it into farmland and growing tomatoes in the soil—it becomes the rightful property of that person because he is using it to fulfill the natural law—specifically, to preserve himself. However, once a person owns this land and the products derived from it, he cannot let these products go to waste. Rather, he must use those products themselves or put them to a socially beneficial use. One way of doing so is by exchanging them for money, a good that, unlike many other categories of goods such as food, cannot spoil or expire. Thus, it is permissible, under Locke's view, to accumulate vast quantities of money. However, even this money must be spent productively rather than frittered away on such frivolous pursuits as partying and drinking; it should be invested back into one's economic activities for the purposes of improving productive capacity. Indeed, unlike modern neoliberals, Adam Smith, who incorporated Locke's analysis of property into his economic model, advocated for governmental measures such as luxury taxes for the purposes of discouraging people from

spending their money in frivolous ways (Jardine 2004, 47-50).

Another way the disparity between Locke's ideas and modern liberals' modifications of them can be seen is through his understanding of religious freedom. Locke did *not* believe, as most modern liberals do, that all religions were equally valid and that the government ought not impose a particular religion on the population on these grounds. He did believe that there were true and false religions but stated that the consequences of government establishing the wrong religion were so disastrous—potentially resulting in condemning the citizenry to an eternity in Hell—that fallible governments should not be tasked with choosing which religion they thought was the truth (Jardine 2004, 56-59). This line of reasoning appears to have been quite influential in contemporary political discourse despite the rarity of its application in the modern era to the specific domain of religion. For instance, a common defense of the right to freedom of speech is that, even if one takes for granted that it is okay for the government to prohibit certain ideas one considers objectionable, there is always the possibility—particularly in a democracy—that new leadership may take charge and censor one's own ideas for similar reasons.

The economic theory integral to liberal capitalist democracy was first formulated in a cohesive manner by Adam Smith. Smith did not invent the concept of a capitalist economy; in his groundbreaking work, *The Wealth of Nations*, he described an economic transformation that was already occurring in his own country, Britain, as well as other regions of Europe, while providing a theoretical justification for favoring it over the mercantilist systems that had dominated economic policy up until that time. According to Smith, the capitalist economy makes a massive increase in national prosperity possible through a systematic division of daunting tasks into smaller, more manageable parts, each of which can be easily performed by one or a few people—especially with the aid of industrial machinery. The market is the key mechanism within the capitalist economic system that incentivizes productive use of the division of labor, as inefficient companies will find themselves losing their customer base to their competitors, and it also promotes saving for the purposes of reinvestment to improve one's productive capacity. Jardine notes that a market-oriented mindset now permeates virtually every aspect of liberal society, providing the example of marriage now being treated as a matter of individual choice and a relationship that can be easily dissolved whenever convenient (Jardine 2004, 53-54). We would argue that a related problem is the objectification of women in relationships; especially with the rise of dating apps like Tinder heavily oriented toward the superficial outward aspects of a relationship rather than the more meaningful attributes of moral character, shared interests, and overall personality, men are often more interested in the sexual value a woman can provide them than

anything else, and any seemingly romantic behavior a man engages in within a relationship is often done with the sole intention of ensuring the woman continues to have sex with him—that is, that he ensures a “return” on his sexual “investment.”

Jardine also makes a point that will be critical to his later analysis. Liberal political theories claim to be “neutral” in the sense that they do not, as premodern political theories did, promote or impose a particular way of life but rather allow individuals to freely choose their own way of life, within certain limitations. But any set of limitations will inevitably tend to push individuals toward a certain way of life. Jardine argues that the early versions of liberalism did tend to embody a particular way of life, one enforced—often rather harshly—by the market economy. This way of life could be described as a semi-secularized Protestant ethic, an ethos of hard work and saving, corresponding roughly to what sociologist Robert Bellah has called “utilitarian individualism.” Jardine will ultimately argue that this way of life is incoherent and that this incoherence leads to many of the social pathologies and environmental crises of our own time (Jardine 2004, 61-63).

The philosophies of Locke and Smith were integrated into American political discourse in the nineteenth century, forming the dominant political framework between the Civil War and the Great Depression. Mostly *laissez-faire* economic policies were widely agreed to be the best for ensuring economic stability and supporting the continuous expansion of US territory through its Manifest Destiny policy. These initiatives enjoyed a great deal of popular support, but as American big business developed, lobbyists for the leading industries became another powerful force ensuring the continuation of the *laissez-faire* regime. These policies were in fact successful in enhancing the prosperity of a large proportion of the American population and were responsible for the transformation of the United States into the world’s wealthiest, most developed country. However, by the early twentieth century, a great deal of economic inequality resulted from this approach to governance, with employees being subject to incredibly low wages completely insufficient to raise a family on, poor working conditions that often resulted in serious injury (the treatment of which had to be paid for out of pocket, given that public or private health insurance was largely nonexistent at the time), and crowded, unsanitary living conditions. Unions were not powerful enough to accomplish much on their own, and what attempts they made to remedy the sorry state of conditions for the workers they represented were often met with violence from the companies they were resisting, private security organizations like the Pinkerton Detective Agency, and the police (Jardine 2004, 62-63).

Jardine then describes the growing crisis of classical liberalism in the early twentieth century, and in particular the complete breakdown of capitalism during the Great Depression, as background to the newer version of liberalism, usually referred to as reform liberalism, that developed during this period (Jardine 2004, 67-73). Reform liberals were guided by the same fundamental values as the classical liberals were, but they felt that corporate power could be just as oppressive as government power. While classical liberals had hoped that free markets would produce a more egalitarian society, the more reform-minded currents developing within liberalism saw the dynamic between aristocrats and peasants present in premodern societies being replicated in the inequities and power disparities produced by interactions between the wealthy capitalist class and the proletarian working class. As such, reform liberals argued that while a complete dismantling of capitalism was not needed, reforms in certain areas were needed to protect groups disadvantaged by the economic system. Thus, they advocated for a variety of interventionist measures, such as restrictions on banking practices and financial markets, the introduction of an expansive network of social welfare programs, and the development of consumer safety regulations to address the problems created by monopolies. The "managed capitalism" that emerged from New Deal liberalism and its European cousins, Christian democracy and social democracy, did bring about a quarter-century of unprecedented prosperity and relative equality in the immediate postwar period. In this context, Jardine mentions an often overlooked fact about reform liberalism—namely, that it was in a sense actually intended to assist business rather than combat it. Reform liberal theorists such as Adolph Berle thought that reducing economic inequality would provide companies with a larger customer base able to afford their products, thus allowing stronger corporate growth, and indeed, in the postwar era, many large corporations largely accepted reform liberal policies (Jardine 2004, 73-77).

By the 1960s, reform liberalism was beginning to take a somewhat different direction, following the writings of John Rawls, who attempted to create a version of liberalism free from the cultural biases influenced by the semi-secularized Protestant mentality that he saw in early liberal thought, as manifested in Locke's writings. To do this, he imagined a hypothetical situation known as the "Original Position," wherein individuals, in the formation of a society, are placed under a "Veil of Ignorance," blinding them to any sort of knowledge of their future position in the prospective society. Rawls reasoned that since they would be ignorant of their future status, they would plan for a worst-case scenario in which they would be the worst-off person in the entire society, ensuring the best possible situation for such a person. In order to do so, future members of this society would agree on two principles. The first of these is that

each individual should be given the maximum possible degree of individual freedom up to the point where it infringes upon the liberties of others. The second is that any inequalities that exist within society should serve to benefit the worst off (Jardine 2004, 77-80).

The two basic principles of Rawlsian liberalism had a strong impact on American governmental policy during the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in the field of welfare measures; whereas before government programs, such as Social Security, sought to benefit all, or almost all, people, afterward they increasingly focused on assisting the most marginalized, impoverished, and otherwise disadvantaged groups in society (Jardine 2004, 80).

Jardine also argues that Rawls's first principle contributed to a tendency to prioritize freedom of expression above all else. During the 1960s and 1970s, US courts used Rawls's reasoning to strike down laws mandating public endorsement of specific religious beliefs, censorship of entertainment, and regulation of sexual behavior, and restrictions on activities such as gambling were greatly reduced. Essentially, Rawlsian liberalism began to replace the older semi-secularized Protestant ethos of work and saving with what Bellah, mentioned earlier, has described as "expressive individualism," that is, an ethos of aesthetic self-expression which views all but the most minimal limitations on personal expression very negatively (Jardine 2004, 80-83).

We would argue that the situation has become more complex since Jardine wrote his book, particularly in the realm of self-expression. Jardine gives as an example of his argument a famous court case from 1979 in which Rawlsian liberals favored the right of Nazis to march through a Jewish neighborhood in Skokie, Illinois. Today's liberals, however, would likely react to this situation by, if not outright demanding the government punish the Nazis for their hate speech and intimidation, making every effort to ensure that *private* actors punish the Nazis for their activities—for example, advocating for social media companies to ban them and for their employers to terminate their employment.

By the 1970s, the postwar economic boom had faded into economic crisis marked by the simultaneous occurrence of high unemployment and double-digit inflation (or "stagflation"), a situation that was difficult for reform liberal policy to counteract and which led to the revival of *laissez faire* economics in the form of neoclassical liberalism, also known as "neoliberalism." As Jardine sees it, neoliberalism advocates economic policies similar to those of classical liberalism, but without the Protestant morality that underpinned classical liberal theory. For instance, as discussed above, classical liberals such as Locke and Smith viewed only economic activity that produced "objective value" as worthwhile and

discouraged frivolous spending on such things as gambling or extravagant fashion items, whereas neoliberals viewed these types of expenditures as legitimate economic growth. Mid-twentieth-century economists like Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek were skeptical of efforts to base governmental policy on what they viewed as ostensibly objective but actually biased considerations of morality or even economic value. In contrast to Locke, they viewed value as a highly subjective concept and considered attempts to intervene in a transaction between buyer and seller based on the idea that such an exchange lacked value (such as the luxury taxes proposed by Smith) as attempts to illegitimately impose a particular moral framework on the free market. Only the producer and consumer in this transaction could be the proper judges of whether it held value, according to the neoliberals. Similarly, they saw problems with the reform liberal position that government should regulate markets based on social scientific knowledge, since such "knowledge" tends to replicate the biases of social scientists. They were even skeptical of Rawls's conclusion that government should concentrate on improving the situation of the worst-off in society, pointing out that any assessment of who is worst off in a particular circumstance is itself subjective, and, given the subjectivity of social science research, many social welfare programs were ill-founded and counterproductive (Jardine 2004, 102-109).

Jardine argues that politicians such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, who were heavily influenced by neoliberal theorists, did not fully grasp the implications of those theories. Reagan and his conservative allies wanted to recover the older America of free markets and Protestant virtue, but the 1980s saw the almost complete disappearance of the remnants of the old moral culture. The development of a culture of aesthetic self-expression which began in the later stages of the reform liberal regime accelerated dramatically in the neoliberal era. Jardine sees this as the ironic logical conclusion of the work culture of capitalism, or more precisely of the semi-secularized Protestant ethic that informed early capitalism: several generations of hard-working, thrifty people eventually results in a hugely productive economy, which means that somebody has to buy all those goods. Businesses must invent ways to convince people that they should be consuming things they don't really need. The expansion of credit played a role in the new rhetoric that corporations would adopt to begin distancing themselves from a culture that only bought goods that provided for basic needs. It became easier to convince consumers to buy things that they really did not need if they could buy them now and pay for them later. And now, a century after the consumer economy started to develop, Americans are spending more than they are making. Furthermore, corporations will not stop there. Once it became clear that Americans were willing to "buy now, pay

later," the message had to be sent to show them why they needed the things that they should be buying, and this would be done through a new focus on advertising. Goods were promoted on the basis of their ability to improve one's capacity for aesthetic expression. Jardine is able to sum up this expressive culture by explaining that it is inevitable for such a competitive, capitalist society to eventually bring about an aesthetically oriented culture. The approval of our peers in the name of beauty can only come from wealth accumulation in a society that is driven by consumerism. We will always chase the biggest yacht, the faster car, or the fancier restaurants when a consumerist society actively tells us we need these things to be more beautiful. The trend wherein people view their identities as synonymous with what they consume, which began to develop in the reform liberal era, became even more pronounced under neoliberalism (Jardine 2004, 85-97).

Looking back at Jardine's observations in 2024, it seems apparent that there has been a shift away from neoliberalism in mainstream politics. Politicians still seek to adopt the *aesthetic* of economic libertarianism, but in reality, they have become increasingly willing to endorse government intervention in the economy when it suits their goals. For instance, many Republicans have floated the idea of cracking down on monopolies in Big Tech, due to the censorship of conservative views commonly practiced by tech companies, especially social media platforms. Meanwhile, Republicans and Democrats alike approved stimulus checks to assist Americans struggling during the COVID pandemic. We have also seen the rise of the progressive "Berniecrat" left as well as the adoption of many of its ideas by even mainstream liberal politicians; this can be seen in President Biden's cancellation of large amounts of student debt and his support for a public option with regard to health insurance.

On the cultural side of American life, however, the situation described by Jardine has largely continued unabated. People still define themselves by the media they consume and by the brands they buy, constructing their identity around what they passively receive rather than the things they actively do. Interpersonal interactions have become far less important in our society, and people have replaced them to some degree with parasocial relationships with producers of media. This includes obsessive fanbases of celebrities within the entertainment industry, which have been taken to a new extreme with the emergence of Twitter (ed: recently renamed X) "stan culture"—a subculture of obsessive fandoms revolving around entertainers that cultivates unhealthy parasocial relationships and frequently leads to invasion of the artists' privacy—as well as of "influencers" who communicate their fashion choices, daily activities, and political views through their posts on social media. This has even occurred in the romantic sphere, where people are shunning actual romantic

and sexual relationships in favor of pornography and other sexually explicit content that they can interact with in an impersonal fashion. People have sacrificed their personal identities for group identities through shared association with a particular aesthetic to the extent that many teenagers and young adults have begun attaching themselves to particular art styles and color palettes that they explicitly label “aesthetics,” often referring to themselves as “aesthetic kids.” These “aesthetics” tend to revolve around the design of corporate products; one of them draws upon the appearance of software created by Microsoft during the late 2000s and early 2010s.

After this brief history of liberal theory and practice, Jardine examines the twentieth-century crisis of liberalism. He first discusses Alexis de Tocqueville’s argument about how liberalism’s focus on individualism to the detriment of familial and other social bonds leads, ironically, to a subtle form of tyranny, “administrative despotism,” as governments attempt to fill the void created by broken social bonds with a byzantine network of rules and regulations that constrain human activity. Jardine extends Tocqueville’s analysis in two ways. He argues that, first, the breakdown of social bonds can actually lead to a violent form of tyranny as seen in the totalitarian ideological regimes of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. These regimes sought to exploit isolated populations by creating a warped sense of community (racial in Germany and class-based in the Soviet Union) through propaganda and fear, promising a utopia through the violent overthrow of the existing system. He secondly argues that, in addition to government, capitalist markets can exert a thoroughgoing control over people, both in their roles as workers and, ironically, as consumers, as discussed above (Jardine 2004, 113-123).

We think this argument could be extended even to the social sphere. What once were organic social interactions have succumbed to the same legalistic, rigid framework seen elsewhere in society; the tyranny of bureaucratic regulation can be seen even in what are supposed to be purely recreational activities. Friend groups and other social circles nowadays fall victim to cliquish instincts whereby anyone who does not conform with specific, prescribed manners of behavior, opinion, and above all aesthetic are shunned and cast out of the group. Fandoms and political groups are especially prone to hampering their own effective functioning or even destroying themselves through constant purity testing and gatekeeping; anyone who does not conform to high and perpetually rising standards is considered to be unworthy of membership in the group.

Jardine concludes his critique of liberalism by arguing that, whether or not consumerism is a subtle form of tyranny, or even just an inferior way of life, it is

not sustainable. Although he mentions briefly that consumerism is probably not environmentally sustainable, his main focus is on how a consumer culture is socially destructive. He identifies three ways a consumerist society is unsustainable. Firstly, the culture of expressive individualism fostered by a consumerist society simultaneously breaks down social bonds and destroys individual competence to the point where people can neither develop the skills necessary to produce the goods that form the lifeblood of the consumerist economy nor form the connections required to coordinate business activity. Second, an expressive individualist culture tends to attract workers toward glamorous occupational fields in which only a few individuals can truly achieve success, entertainment and sports being the most extreme cases. This results in both a waste of talent in highly competitive fields such as such as law, finance, and the media and a shortage of talent in less glamorous fields such as engineering and public administration. Finally, and most importantly, a decline in fertility rates can be observed in expressive individualist cultures. People either become focused on their personal self-actualization and are uninterested in starting a family, or alternatively they view their children as essentially extensions of their own personality and live vicariously through them, pushing them toward their own idea of perfection—something that is much more difficult to do with many children simultaneously, meaning that people with this attitude tend to have fewer children. This is economically unsustainable, since the generational imbalances create a deficit of new labor as well as an increased burden on public and private resources due to a population skewed toward the elderly (Jardine 2004, 123-129).

A critique of the first of these points is warranted; the producer class does not seem to be in danger of disappearing entirely or being rendered nonfunctional; rather, it appears that it is becoming more insular and more inaccessible to newcomers, being increasingly dominated by a mere handful of companies in each industry. Success in today's complex economic world has become increasingly defined by the connections one has and the opportunities one receives in childhood and early adulthood, which are influenced in large part by the environment one is born into. We see the plutocracy of the large corporations dominating our economy and our politics slowly transitioning into something resembling a traditional aristocracy, wherein those who are successful are those who have been groomed almost from birth for positions of economic power, while the common people are consigned to low-level jobs that pay but a pittance, are primarily concerned with "grunt work" that these new aristocrats consider themselves above, and offer no real prospects of even approaching the levers of power.

The Crisis of Modern Rationalism in a Broader Theological Context

In the second half of *Technological Society*, Jardine places his analysis of liberalism in a larger context, examining the entire history of Western political thought and institutions beginning with the ancient pagan warrior cultures, as portrayed in the *Enuma Elish* and the *Gilgamesh Epic*, and then focusing on the Greek philosophers, primarily Aristotle, before examining what he sees as the revolution in thought and practice produced by the biblical understanding of reality. He then traces how the only partial victory of the biblical worldview led to the incoherence and breakdown of modern rationalism.

Before he begins his analysis, Jardine points out that one cannot properly understand ancient societies without some knowledge of the differences between premodern oral cultures, in which few people can read and write, and modern literate cultures, in which, thanks to the printing press, most people can read or write. He mentions how people in a literate culture tend to think in primarily material terms, whereby there is a strict delineation between things one can see and things one cannot see, with the latter being understood as less real. He links this to the decline of spirituality in the modern era, in contrast to the premodern period, in which spiritual matters were seen as equally valid to, if not more so than, more material affairs, and the former were considered to rightfully have a significant impact on the latter, in contrast to today's society, which tends to believe that spirituality should interfere with other aspects of life, particularly politics, as little as possible. Pagan oral cultures saw spirituality as baked into the very fabric of the world, since they understood nature phenomena as the manifestations of the gods. The Abrahamic religions see God as a being who is separate from the world he created but also as one who plays a decisive role in what happens within it. Additionally, due to the central role of face-to-face communication within oral cultures, Jardine characterizes the way people within premodern societies thought as being much more personal, emotional, and metaphorical, whereas the thoughts of modern literate people can be described as more impersonal, analytical, and factual (Jardine 2004, 138-141).

The fundamentally different thought processes of oral cultures can be seen in their mythologies, which were not held to convey stories that were completely factual (as modern theological literalists believe is the case with the Bible) but rather to convey important truths about the world in a poetic manner. For instance, the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* depicted the world as being created through the procreation of personified representations of saltwater and freshwater. This was intended to portray the universe as marked by a cycle of life-giving and life-taking, as represented by water's benefit for irrigation and danger in flooding. More generally, the battle among the gods that creates the

earth and sky from the carcass of the mother goddess symbolized the chaotic, unordered forces of the universe. The *Enuma Elish* also reflects the Babylonian conception of humanity's purpose; in the story, humans were created from the blood of a dead god named Kingu with an explicit role of passively serving the gods. This left little room for human agency or individuality, which were not viewed as part of the task the gods had enlisted humanity to perform. Similarly, in the Mesopotamian *Gilgamesh Epic*, the story of the demigod Gilgamesh and his close companion Enkidu as they perform great deeds and how, after Enkidu's tragic death, Gilgamesh searches the earth looking for the secret to immortality, is used as a parable to illustrate how humans are at the mercy of the gods. This is demonstrated both in the life-altering negative consequences that result from Gilgamesh's attempts to defy the gods and in the mortality of all humans, exemplified by the fruitless endeavors of Gilgamesh to achieve physical immortality. Even though Gilgamesh is a demigod, he is still portrayed as entirely at the mercy of divine will, being subject to punishments as a result of his sacrilegious behavior and having a plant that would have given him physical immortality snatched away from him (signifying the unalterable deadly fate of all humans). However, the story also aims to show that, like Gilgamesh, humans can live on forever in a sense, through memories of the great deeds they accomplish throughout their earthly lives.

These societies adopted a fatalistic outlook in which humans were considered to have little to no free will and were essentially the playthings of the gods. The most valued way of life was that of the warrior, who accomplished great deeds through his fighting and therefore made a name for himself that would be passed down through multiple generations, achieving a sort of immortality even after his physical body departed the mortal plane. However, not everyone could take such an esteemed position in society—pagan warrior societies were governed according to a strict hierarchy, with the relatively autonomous warrior class at the top and everyone else, consigned to serve the upper class with no opportunities to move up the social ladder, at the bottom (Jardine 2004, 141-147).

Applying Jardine's comparisons of oral and literate cultures to the present, we draw a connection between our literate culture and the rise in conspiracy theories and reactionary dismissal of expert consensus that has accompanied more widespread literacy. One would expect that such a trend would result in a more informed, better-educated population, and that was indeed its effect in the early stages. However, later on, one of the more negative effects of a population with the ability to choose from a variety of different sources began to assert itself. People began to isolate themselves within a bubble of information catered to their specific viewpoints and fiercely distrust all sources that sought to rebut

these views, which they were better able to do than in the Middle Ages, during antiquity, and even during the early modern era, when their sources of information were more limited on account of their illiteracy. This led to a surge in support for extremist ideologies that previously could more easily be suppressed, as well as conspiracy theories convincing groups on the margins of society that shadowy, powerful organizations and institutions were "out to get them," and attitudes of deep resentment towards experts and hostility towards established scientific fact. Healthy skepticism of certain prevailing beliefs among experts can be appropriate, but outright denialism of the most basic scientific principles has become all too common. These sorts of tendencies are often generated, nurtured, or exploited by political actors to achieve a particular agenda, as seen in certain right-wing groups' embrace of creationism, anti-vaccine rhetoric, or "race science" as well as some left-wingers' anti-GMO alarmism, mental illness denial, or downplaying of biological distinctions between men and women.

With his discussion of the early pagan cultures as background, Jardine moves into a discussion of the Greek philosophers, focusing on Aristotle's ethical theories. He notes briefly that the invention of the alphabet, much easier to learn than earlier complicated symbol-systems, did increase levels of literacy among the Greek citizen class, leading to the more analytical type of thinking that Western culture associates with true rationality. Aristotle believed that the key to achieving happiness was living a virtuous life. He distinguished happiness from simple pleasure, and the Greek word he used to label it can be best translated as "fulfillment." He believed that humans gained happiness by fulfilling the primary purpose of being human, which he described as "rational activity," an umbrella term that covered any human activity necessitating a well-developed comprehension of the natural order. He conceived that rational activity was performed through the proficient use of a wide variety of skills.

However, many of these skills could not be effectively exercised alone—they had to be put into practice in the context of a meaningful community. Aristotle thought that the most important skills to happiness were those practiced through interaction with one's fellow human beings. In order for the purpose of a rational activity to be fulfilled, Aristotle stated, it must be performed in a virtuous, or correct manner. He described most virtues as consisting of the "golden mean" between two corresponding vices: one of deficiency and the other of excess. For instance, the virtue of bravery can be contrasted with, on the one hand, its vice of deficiency—cowardice—and, on the other hand, its vice of excess—recklessness. Aristotle held that the purpose of government was to promote virtue, both directly and indirectly through support of other institutions that were effective conduits for instruction in virtue, such as religion, families, and educational

systems.

Aristotle grounded his virtue ethics system in a fundamentally static conception of nature. In his eyes, everything in the world attempted to move toward a defined end, or goal, or *telos*: its purpose for existence or what one might call its proper function in the cosmic order. These attributes were fairly rigid, leaving little room for artificially induced changes to a thing's substance or purpose. While this framework harmonized well with ancient Greek society, which was technologically primitive compared to our own, it became increasingly apparent over time that Aristotle's ethical theories underestimated the potential for human creativity to radically transform the world. If the natural world can be transformed in such a dramatic way, this means that human goals can also be transformed, which invalidates Aristotle's concept of overarching, static goals for humanity applicable in all societies at any point in time (Jardine 2004, 148-170).

Jardine sees Christianity as the source of the distinctive features of the modern age and thus of the crises it has encountered over the past century. The critical idea in Christianity is its understanding of the power of speech. In Genesis 1, God creates the world through speech, and humans are created in the image of God. Therefore, if God created humans through speech, and God created humans in His image, then humans must also have the capacity to create through speech. Obviously humans can't create matter through speech, but they have the ability to create relationships, promises, and laws through speech, and they can create concepts that can allow them to understand the natural world. Furthermore, since the spoken word is dynamic and creative, so is the universe that God created by speaking. In Christianity, no longer is the natural world considered to be a purely static environment as Aristotle conceived it; rather, it is constantly changing, evolving over time in a continuous process guided by God. This process is not characterized by the sort of chaos that pagans thought determined the world; rather, it has a distinct order to it, shaped by God's constant faithfulness to His word. (Jardine argues that modern science is made possible by the biblical picture of reality; because God is an ever-faithful speaker, it follows that the world He created can be fundamentally trusted and that therefore our observations of it can be relied upon. The inductive model of reasoning that characterizes modern science starts from these observations, assumes that they can be trusted, and uses them to derive general principles about the world in which we live.) And since humans have the creative capacity of speech, they have a role to play in this process. Further, since humans primarily speak to each other, not to themselves, human existence under the biblical model is communal, and humans can only play their role in God's creative process as part of a community. Finally, since everybody speaks,

everyone is fundamentally equal under God; indeed, since every human can contribute to the cosmic process in some way, every individual human life is infinitely valuable. However, while humans have the capacity to create through speech, they are still subject to certain limitations in this regard; they are not as powerful as God. In Genesis 3, attempting to "play God" and act in a manner that is not cognizant of one's creative limitations is the source of sin, which leads to human misery and, more fundamentally, failure to play our role in God's plan. But the revelation of Christ indicates that despite human failure, God can still accomplish his purpose (Jardine 2004, 171-197).

Jardine argues that in the modern age, the biblical understanding of humans as capable of (limited) creativity emerged in a confused manner and that this is the source of the modern crisis. His initial formulation of this argument, in *Technological Society*, was that Christian theology sought to combine the ideas presented in the Bible, which assumed a creative and dynamic world that humans have some capacity to change, with the Greek construal of nature, which lacks that sense of dynamism, failing to recognize the extent that human creativity can alter the universe. (Actually, he notes that when basic Christian doctrines were formulated in late antiquity, the Church fathers always recognized the differences between the Greek and Hebraic worldviews and always came down on the Hebraic side, but he argues that the use of Greek philosophical categories could have caused confusion later, particularly during the late Middle Ages.) The incoherent conceptualizations that resulted from this synthesis led eventually to ideologies of unlimited human creativity in the modern era (Jardine 2004, 195-203).

As we will see below, Jardine later modified significantly this part of his analysis; in any case, in *Technological Society* he makes a complicated argument (which we will not describe here) that the incoherent synthesis of Greek and biblical elements in early and medieval Christian theology eventually led to the picture of the world as completely predetermined by God's will found in John Calvin (or at least in most interpretations of Calvin). The materialistic, or more precisely mechanistic, understanding of the world and human existence found first in Thomas Hobbes and broadly informing the Enlightenment can be seen as essentially a secularized version of Calvin. Hobbes envisions a universe that consists of material objects acted on by mechanical forces. The world is nothing but a machine. Hobbes draws from emerging scientific insights that discovered mathematical and mechanical principles underlying previously mysterious physical phenomena, drawing the conclusion that these theories could be used to model metaphysical issues as well. In a sense, the only difference between Hobbes and Calvinism is that Hobbes believed that God ordered the universe as a machine so that he could allow the machine to run its course, so that, in Hobbes's

philosophy, there is no governance of God at all beyond initial creation. Humans then are determined by mechanical forces, which they experience as desires. Ethically, humans are able to pursue any desires they may have, as long as this does not interfere with other humans pursuing their desires. Practically, Hobbes believed that human desires were primarily material and thus that in a liberal system where people are given freedom to pursue their desires, the system will be primarily oriented toward material ends. Hobbes thus establishes, in a crude way, the basic framework of liberal political theory and liberal capitalist society (Jardine 2004, 203-206).

Jardine then argues that Hobbes's analysis contains a critical contradiction: although he believes humans are nothing but the product of mathematically determined mechanical forces, he tacitly thinks that they have a substantial creative capacity in that they have the ability to create government and produce wealth. This incoherence in Hobbes's theory (also found in slightly different form in Locke) is what Jardine means, at one level, when he says that modernity can be understood as the biblical implication of (limited) human creativity emerging in a confused way, and this confusion eventually leads to the nihilism of late modernity (Jardine 2004, 209-212).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau attempts to solve this contradiction in Hobbes's theory. He accepts the Enlightenment's mechanical picture of the universe but diverts from Hobbes on the topic of the desires of humans. Rousseau instead believes that desires simply come from the social environments of humans; what early liberals like Hobbes took to be a natural desire for material well-being is actually socially constructed, peculiar to the early modern bourgeoisie. Humans outside of any social environment—that is in the state of nature, before humans come together to form society—would be nothing but animals that are biologically like humans but have none of the desires and aspirations regarded as essentially human; such desires and aspirations develop only after humans form society. This means that since humans are created through their socialization, and society is conversely created by humans, then humans are therefore self-creating beings with unlimited creative capacity. Humans can make of themselves anything they want. For Rousseau, this means overthrowing existing corrupt and oppressive social systems and constructing a completely democratic community (Jardine 2004, 213-214). Karl Marx, writing as industrialization was drastically expanding human control over nature, would take Rousseau's idea much further, concluding that humans could create a society without scarcity, crime, or war and which indeed would transform human nature; the acquisitiveness and selfish desires resulting from material scarcity could be completely eliminated (Jardine 2004, 214-218).

Finally, Friedrich Nietzsche would take this line of reasoning to its logical—and for the Enlightenment, unexpected—conclusion, saying that if humans are radically creative beings, then all of reality is (at least far as we can ever know) a human interpretation. Since humans will, however, have differing interpretations of reality, the world is a continual clash of competing interpretations, with the strongest—those with the most persuasive interpretations—ruling. Nietzsche thinks the most persuasive people are creative artists and looks forward to a new, neopagan aristocracy, based not on physical domination as in the ancient pagan world but on artistic creativity, to replace the bourgeois civilization derived from Christianity. Jardine mentions that fascism was obviously a crude application of Nietzsche's theory, but more importantly he argues that neoliberal global capitalism bears an uncomfortable resemblance to Nietzsche's vision, as it is characterized by, as discussed earlier, an aesthetic or expressive orientation that has generated massive inequality and huge concentration of power in what could be described as an artistic elite, the global capitalists (Jardine 2004, 218-222).

Ultimately, then, the distortion of the biblical idea of human creativity that characterizes modernity produced monstrously destructive wars in the first part of the twentieth century and, more recently, environmental degradation, an epidemic of psychological disorientation, and impending demographic oblivion. For Jardine, the solution to this crisis is a renewed Christianity.

A Renewed Christian Theology as the Solution

In his 2010 essay, "Political Theory, Theology, and Modernity," Jardine somewhat modifies this analysis, indicating that his original argument about the dilemmas of the modern age arising from an incoherent synthesis of Greek and biblical elements was a bit simplistic. Specifically, his later work focuses on the doctrine of the Trinity, arguing that the dilemmas of the modern age can be seen as resulting from the inability of Christianity to develop this doctrine more effectively. He examines Protestant theologian Colin Gunton in regard to this issue. Gunton argues that historically Christian theology focused primarily on the Father (that is, the creator), less so on the Son, and very little on the Spirit, leading to a picture of God as purely creator and as creating through pure will. This development has two consequences. First, it leads to the Calvinist understanding of the world as predetermined by God's will, which (as mentioned above) in secularized form becomes the Enlightenment's mechanistic picture of the world. Second, since humans are made in the image of God, it leads to a model of humans as acting primarily through will and thus ultimately seeing

themselves as pure creators. Escaping the nihilism of late modernity would require a more thorough articulation of the Trinity doctrine (Jardine 2010, 11-19).

Later, in his 2019 essay, “Pope Benedict’s Analysis of the (Partial) Failure of Christian Theology,” and his 2023 essay, “Issues in Contemporary Political Theory,” he refines this analysis a bit more. He concludes that Gunton’s analysis, discussed above, is more descriptive of the trajectory of nominalist-Protestant thought and that Pope Benedict sketches out a more complete picture. Benedict argues that early and medieval theology did develop an elaborate doctrine of all three persons of the Trinity but was not able to extend this model to the human person or to God’s creation generally, that is to say, to nature. This failure sets the stage for the distortions of modernity (Jardine 2019, 6-11). A more complete model of the Trinity’s relation to creation would mean that a “clearer understanding of the human person, as affected by the action of the entire Trinity, could escape the will-based individualistic subjectivism of late modernity and point toward a more adequate model of human community, and a more dynamic conception of nature, derived from a fully Trinitarian conception of creation, could allow us to make moral sense of our technological capacities to change nature” (Jardine 2023, 11).

In more practical political terms, to remedy the problems Jardine has identified stemming from our culture’s individualist nature and formulate an approach to a truly communitarian society, he proposes moving away from liberal individualism by localizing markets and government, which he argues would produce creative, virtuous, and thriving communities. More specifically, in several of his essays, Jardine calls on the economic theory of Karl Polanyi, which would replace the disembedded markets of corporate capitalism, which are invariably severely socially disruptive in favor of markets that are embedded in communities. Embedded markets are limited in various ways, such as worker ownership, so that people are not subordinated to the abstract, impersonal workings of market forces. An economy based on such markets would tend to be more local but could still incorporate significant long-distance trade (Jardine 2019, 11-16).

Jardine’s work encapsulates many key points of communitarianism, but the question to ask is what will it take to construct such a society. How would we begin to deconstruct our current predicament of corporate consumerism and the excessive individualism that we have been granted? And what attributes of individualism would we leave behind in favor of communitarianism? If we are to further our knowledge of the Trinity to explore how it could affect the community, what exactly will we do with this knowledge? Will it be necessary to

replace individualism in favor of a more theocratic form of community? Certainly, Jardine is correct in his analysis of consumerism's rise in Western society. But would it have been possible to achieve our advancements in fields such as medicine in a different market? And if markets are to be more localized, could it not also be possible that the more densely populated communities could in turn monopolize technological advancements, since they will almost certainly have the strongest economies? If this were to be the case, we could be forced into a more localized system. Jardine's analysis of the development of consumer culture is absolutely correct, and it would be difficult to argue that consumer culture has not affected society for the worse, but it is uncertain whether a greater focus on localized markets and revoking some of the individualistic nature of the population could remove us from the toxicity of consumer culture.

Despite the critiques we have raised in response to Jardine's writings, his work undeniably is a monumental achievement in communitarian thought. The ideas presented therein have the potential to dramatically transform the way our society operates. Jardine presents both a unique analysis of the problems plaguing modern liberal society and a fresh, innovative perspective on how to solve these issues that, up to this point, has not been discussed much in mainstream political or academic discourse. His analysis of the progression of liberalism, as well as the deleterious effects of modern consumer culture on our societies, is hard to disagree with.

The principles he envisions a transformed communitarian society as operating around are well-formulated, although he is often vague as to what must be done in order to attain such a society in the first place.

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