

ON THE “DARK ENLIGHTENMENT,” AND OF CURTIS YARVIN / MENCIVS MOLDBUG

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My project here is to analyze, in the detail required for all necessary understanding, the thought of Curtis Yarvin, who wrote under the pseudonym Mencius Moldbug. Yarvin is the most prominent figure of what has been called the Dark Enlightenment, one thread of modern reactionary thought. My short summary is that he offers mediocre analysis with quite a few flashes of insight. Even so, his thought is mostly worthless, because his program for political change is silly, since it fails to understand both history and human nature, and is ultimately indistinguishable from the program of the Left. Overall I was very disappointed, and this write-up is shorter than I expected when beginning my project, since there is not all that much interesting to talk about.

As I read and write on Reaction, I continue to divide its modern thought into three basic groups, at least as far as its American incarnation. The first is those who endorse the Enlightenment and merely think that the American experiment has gone wrong from its ideal position, either in 1787 or 1866. Generally, this is associated with scholars who follow the late Leo Strauss. The second group, what I call Augustans, take a dim view of democracy and focus on power and its uses; they are ambivalent about or hostile to the Enlightenment. This group has a major sub-group, what I call “civil institutionalists,” who reject the Enlightenment but focus on the revival of society, not the uses of power. The third, who like to call themselves the “Dark Enlightenment,” a name that encapsulates both their objection to the actual Enlightenment and their atheist perspective, is a loose confederation whose most prominent philosopher is probably Yarvin. It is the Dark Enlightenment (also self-called “Neoreaction” or “NRx”) we are examining today, through the prism of Yarvin.

My own purpose in bothering to do this is to, ultimately, offer my own program for Reaction that is achievable, rational, and comports with reality and human nature. My premise is that our current Western structure is in terminal decline—though the decline I see is very different than the decline seen by Yarvin and his allies. Thus, I don’t care about the Dark Enlightenment as such, and am most definitely not going to

join the team. I am merely using it as a mirror, to construct my own thoughts. If I were a betting man, I would say my own final program will be Augustan in nature, rejecting much of the Enlightenment and pushing a combination of Christianity and human achievement as a unifying force. Its avatars will be men like Ferdinand Magellan, Robert Gould Shaw, Charlemagne, Hernán Cortes, and Ignatius Loyola. Still, seeing what the Dark Enlightenment has to offer is actually clarifying for my program, since it shows the blind alleys one can go down.

This may seem like a lot of effort to put into something, the Dark Enlightenment, that is not an important movement, if measured by actual numbers of people who are paying any attention. Certainly, in the ten years that it's been extant, it has accomplished nothing of its goals and has no political traction. In fact, it seems to mostly be dead or dying, having been overtaken by real events on the right wing of the political spectrum. So, I think of the Dark Enlightenment thinkers as mostly creators of thought experiments. Some of the thinkers are simply useless or bizarre, such as the very significant transhumanist/"accelerationist" contingent. None of them are leaders or have any charisma at all; they aspire to be Rousseau, perhaps, but without the magnetism, social acceptance or lionization. Still, given that our present situation is bad in many ways (though good in others), and it is both unsustainable and increasingly harming, rather than helping, human flourishing, thought experiments may be useful.

This present analysis is the entirety of the time I intend to spend on the Dark Enlightenment, since I have already reached the point of sharply diminishing returns. But to create the present analysis, I have spent quite a bit of effort. It has not been easy or particularly pleasant—not only have I read much of what Yarvin has written on his blog, I have also read various other prominent writers in the Dark Enlightenment, none of whom can actually write (notably Michael Anissimov and Nick Land), as well as writers outside to whom Yarvin points his readers, both modern and older. I have also read criticisms of Yarvin, and of the Dark Enlightenment more generally, ranging from Scott Alexander's (of *Slate Star Codex*) semi-famous (in these circles) Anti-Reactionary FAQ to science fiction author David Brin's rants. As dim a view as I have of the Dark Enlightenment's program, and much of their analysis, those few on the Left who actually engage with it generally suffer from a complete

lack of reasoning or interesting things to say. What they offer is basically a compilation of false and unexamined statements combined with personal insults, usually using what Scott Adams aptly calls “linguistic kill shots.” The sole exception seems to be Scott Alexander’s extended attempted factual takedown of Anissimov, which is not very good, just the best of a bad lot, and of limited value to any overall analysis, since Anissimov is a transhumanist believer in the Singularity, which makes him invincibly stupid and thus an easy target.

Even after this effort, it has not proved easy to engage with the Dark Enlightenment. Yarvin’s writing, which is the best among its thinkers, has numerous debilitating deficiencies. First, the organization is atrocious; while any given paragraph is usually written reasonably well, and the flow of discussion is more or less in one direction, there is no clear organization or argument. It is mostly musings, bordering on conversation, something the blog format tends to encourage. Musings have their place, but they have no point in political manifestos, and the reader suspects obfuscation. I haven’t read any Lenin, yet, but I’m very sure Lenin didn’t muse in his writings. Second, the snarky tone of ironic superiority grates on the reader, both just because it’s a bad tone, and because there is no reason for the reader to believe that Yarvin has earned it. Third, he beats metaphors to death; if I have to hear about the Matrix’s “red pill” one more time I’m going to scream. Fourth, and the single worst structural element of Yarvin’s writing, is that he will frequently create a link to refer to a third-party source, but the link will not specify what he is trying to show, and so any point simply hangs there unless the reader goes hunting. Or he will quote something with a link to it, not specifying the author and expecting the reader to go figure it out and then return. This would be bad enough, except that maybe 70% of Yarvin’s links are to Wikipedia, and of the remaining 30%, maybe 80% are dead. So, the reader reading a printout or a Kindle version offline is left mystified at critical points, trying to parse out what Yarvin is trying to say. If he is reading online, any flow of thought is continuously disrupted by the need to click, only to find that, in the case of Wikipedia, Yarvin could have summarized his point and omitted the link, and in the case of dead links, that he is baffled. This is, again, no way to write a political manifesto. Fifth, Yarvin pretty frequently shows that he is not as educated as he likes to think. For example, he

repeatedly ascribes to Machiavelli the phrase “if you strike at a king, you must kill him,” though it really comes from Emerson (admittedly, a vastly inferior mind to Machiavelli). And it was not Edmund Burke, but Adam Smith, who said “there is a lot of ruin in a nation.” Such errors, rarely fatal but always irritating and undermining Yarvin’s claim to have a macroscopic view, crop up with metronomic regularity.

All Yarvin’s writings were written as posts on his blog, *Unqualified Reservations*, which is now dormant. It was active from 2007 until 2016, though the majority of writings took place between 2007 and 2009. The blog itself is wide-ranging, but Yarvin offered four multi-part writings, written as serials, totaling approximately a thousand pages in standard text, that seem to encapsulate most or all of his philosophy. The most talked-about is titled *An Open Letter to Open-Minded Progressives*. The second, which has significant overlaps with the first, is *A Gentle Introduction to Unqualified Reservations*. Both of these I have read, twice, along with at least some reading of most of the (obscure) books he links to within those writings, and those two will be the focus of my analysis. Two other writings are more focused: *How Dawkins Got Pwned*, a shorter screed attacking Richard Dawkins for being insufficiently dedicated to actual atheism and true unbiased inquiry, and *Moldbug on Carlyle*, a set of admiring essays about the Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle. The first is unreadable; the second not terribly interesting. For all the attention Yarvin has gotten of late, it is not at all clear to me that any significant number of people have actually read anything Yarvin has written. All his four serial writings are available for the Kindle and have been for years; they have an average of two brief reviews on Amazon, from fans of his. The number of comments on his posts isn’t high—maybe an average of a hundred, with most of those coming from repeated comments from a handful of people. And his personal Blogger profile, prominent on his site, apparently over all time, has 60,509 views—of which ten are from me, since every time you go or hit “Refresh,” another is added. My conclusion is that if the more mainstream press had not occasionally mentioned Yarvin, nobody would ever have heard of him. Which does not show he is wrong, but does suggest delusions of grandeur, which is buttressed by his habit of stating that what he says is, once revealed, self-evident and irrefutable. Yarvin, like all Dark Enlightenment types, regards himself as a genius. It gets tiresome.

But Yarvin does offer a competent and half-original political typology. First, he defines progressives and reactionaries. To him, a reactionary is nothing more than “a believer in order.” Progressives have a more complex definition, because they are self-delusional liars. They “see themselves as the modern heirs of a tradition of change, stretching back to the Enlightenment. They see change as inherently good because they see this history as a history of progress, i.e., improvement. In other words, they believe in Whig history.” Progressivism’s real *raison d’être* is being “a way for people who want power, to organize,” while at the same time being able to “rationalize this ruthless, carnivorous activity as a philanthropic cause. The real attraction is the thrill of power and victory—sometimes with a little money thrown in.” And so the core distinction between right and left is that “Right represents peace, order, and security; left represents war, anarchy, and crime. . . . The left is chaos and anarchy, and the more anarchy you have, the more power there is to go around.”

Yarvin calls the “Synopsis” the received wisdom of Progressivism at any point on any particular matter, which wisdom always changes in the direction of being more left-wing. More left-wing means movement towards entropy, toward the opposite of order. Presumably the pursuit of egalitarianism and emancipation, the core values of the Enlightenment Left, aligns with entropy, although Yarvin does not make this argument explicitly (suggesting a failure to understand actual Enlightenment thought). According to Yarvin, this slide toward entropy began with the radical Protestants, Dissenters, which led to the Enlightenment, which has led to nothing good. Finally, Yarvin’s most famous definition, and neologism, which has achieved semi-mainstream use among conservatives, is the “Cathedral”, which is “the set of institutions that produce and propagate the Synopsis—mainstream academia, journalism, and education.” This is a form of spontaneous coordination, “*Gleichschaltung* without Goebbels.” Effectively, “the press and universities control the State,” through the vehicle of the Cathedral. It is not a coincidence that the term has religious overtones, as we will see below, though Yarvin is a hardcore atheist.

I think this is mostly exactly right about Progressives, and certainly the Cathedral is a compelling and accurate image, although as I have delineated elsewhere, there are multiple types of power that attract,

and they should be distinguished. Yarvin notes “The progressive never sees it this way. . . . Usually there is some end which is unequivocally desirable—often even from the reactionary perspective. But if you could somehow design a progressive movement that could achieve its goal without seizing power or smashing its enemies, it would have little energy and find few supporters. What makes these movements so popular is the opportunity for action and the prospect of victory.” “The continued existence of reactionary [i.e., Right] phenomena provides evidence that progressives are struggling against dark forces of titanic and unbounded strength. . . . So it is reality itself that progressivism attacks. Reality is the perfect enemy; it always fights back, it can never be defeated, and infinite energy can be expended in unsuccessfully resisting it.” This explains the unhinged nature of late-stage Progressivism—having successfully overcome the Right on any issue that could plausibly be tied to reality, they have moved on to wholly fantasy political programs waged with increasing shrillness, such as the demand that mentally ill people believing they are really the opposite sex be praised and accommodated, including by surgery for children against the parents’ wishes, or that we pretend a child can have two fathers, one of which bore him. I can hardly wait for their next few crusades, because my guess (not Yarvin’s) is that their reach has exceeded their grasp.

Whether that is true is really the key question for our future. Yarvin correctly identifies that history has moved in a Progressive way for two hundred years (he would say longer, but his grasp of history is poor). To Progressives, of course, this is because they are correct and on the right side of history. More likely, it is because they have a unifying, simple theme attractive to a wide range of people: you can be granted power over others, and, with respect to the natural world, ye shall be as gods. Whatever the reason, this process has accelerated in recent decades, creating a centrifugal force that will, I think, force a fragmentation that will be an opportunity. Needless to say, for Yarvin, democracy is not desirable in the abstract; it was a failure when tried, and now we do not even have democracy; rather, now, “the government implements [the Cathedral’s] scientific public policy in the public interest.”

Back to the analysis. Most progressives are part of the ruling class, what Yarvin calls Brahmins. Opposed to them are Townies. Brahmins are, on average, richer, more fashionable, tied to elite jobs, and viewed

as superior. This is basically the red state/blue state distinction; or Joan Williams's "professional-managerial elite," or any of the many other variations on classification of Americans that have lately become fashionable. Over time, Progressivism always wins in America, and the Right always retreats. Progressivism, since it is merely the desire for power manifested as the demand for change, is a predatory phenomenon, both inside the country, where Brahmins prey on the Townies, and outside, such as in World War II, where the worldwide Progressive alliance started the war and crushed non-Progressive movements, a process that has continued globally since. Yarvin is continually spitting epithets at Nazis and fascists, the latter poorly defined as "neomilitarism" in the Wilhelmine mold, while admitting that they are reactionary movements opposed to Progressives, which creates what may charitably be called a feeling of dissonance.

So that's the modern world of Curtis Yarvin. On to normative claims. The core premise of Dark Enlightenment types is that Western society has gotten worse on every relevant objective measure, most especially in personal security against violence, but also on other measures. But this is false. What Steven Pinker gets wrong is not that the world has gotten better on certain measures; it is why it has gotten better. As I have demonstrated at length, the Enlightenment has nothing to do with it, and in fact the Enlightenment project has reached its inevitable end. But that says little or nothing about the future potential for human progress and human flourishing, although to be sure the West will need to be released from the idiot dead end into which the Enlightenment has led it, which is now actively generating the opposite of human progress and human flourishing.

Anyway, Yarvin's core claim is that the only reason for a government to exist is to ensure peace, order, and security. According to him, all modern governments fail, and fail increasingly, at this. Around the world, from the United States to Naples to Guatemala, peace, order and security a hundred years ago was much greater. It really cannot be overemphasized that all Yarvin cares about is personal security. He does not mean national security (he wants to return to what he incorrectly labels "classic international law," basically might makes right, in international relations), he means lack of violent crime. He claims that crime in America and England (he never says anything relevant about

the history of any other country, other than occasional cherry-picked narrow pieces of data) has exploded over the past century. I am not sure of the truth of this, other than that crime in America has decreased significantly in the past twenty years, and crime in England increased.

Regardless of the statistical truth about crime, this is a pauperized vision of government, ignoring thousands of years of political philosophy on the question of the purpose of government as it relates to human flourishing. It is, however, a vision of government that fits well (though by no means perfectly) with the only pre-nineteenth-century political philosopher Yarvin cares about: Machiavelli. The Dark Enlightenment is all in with Machiavelli—not with the details of his thought, with which they cannot be bothered to engage, but with Machiavelli's rejection of virtue as having any relevance to governance. Yarvin has no different view of human nature or human teleology than Progressives. For the Dark Enlightenment, it is instrumentalism all the way down, and the sole desired fruit for the populace of that instrumentalism is personal security against non-state violence. As far as I can tell, few of the major Dark Enlightenment figures have any moral vision at all. They don't even have utilitarian morality, although they generally view the world through a utilitarian lens. This leads some of them into openly endorsing eugenics (which was, of course, a Progressive invention widely implemented once already in the United States), and I suspect all of them would endorse it in practice. I further suspect they'd endorse all sorts of things in practice that would be very unpleasant. There is some truth in the claim that Yarvin makes, which I discuss below, that Progressivism is desiccated Christianity, though what remains of that underpinning is disappearing quickly. The Dark Enlightenment's ideal world would not even have that as a moral underpinning; it would be the pagan world of Augustus, which, as I have noted elsewhere in detail, was in many ways a moral horror, if efficiently governed. In the immortal words of Ross Douthat, if you don't like the Christian Right, you really won't like the post-Christian Right. Or Left.

Having these definitions in mind, Yarvin's main mode of discourse is to pick some books relating to a seminal event somewhere between 1770 and 1935, most of which are available for free online, and tell us that this book (a) contradicts everything we have been taught about history and (b) is undoubtedly correct in its views, and everything we have been

told to the contrary is wrong. Why it is correct, though, we are never told, other than that contemporaneous primary sources that agree with Yarvin's conclusions are unimpeachable for some unspecified reason. Yarvin's approach is typical of the ideologically driven autodidact. His focus is extremely narrow and his analysis and conclusions are Gnostic. The Kingdom of Darkness wars with the Kingdom of Light, but with the keys provided by Curtis Yarvin, we can see the truth. Anything that does not fit the story does not appear. This means that at no point does Yarvin engage with any actual arguments of those he has designated as his opponents, i.e., Progressives, since he regards them all as cover for lies. I suppose that's satisfying for his acolytes, and internally coherent, but not overly attractive to the world at large—thus justifying Yarvin in his conclusion that discussion is worthless.

In its shortest form, what Yarvin advocates to solve the problem of Left dominance is the destruction of our current political system and the creation of a system based on what he variously calls by names such as “neocameralism” and “joint-stock republic.” This is a monarchy where the monarchy is viewed as a chief executive; but, like a chief executive, his power can be removed at will by a group of stockholders. At the same time, Yarvin claims he is a Jacobite, a supporter of the restoration of the Stuart monarchs as absolute monarchs (apparently there is a current pretender to the throne, namely the crown prince of Lichtenstein), and that the English monarchy giving up any power was a mistake. I think he says that to grab attention, since the Stuart monarchy bore very little actual resemblance to “neocameralism.” Yarvin gives as the only major example of an actual implementation of a program like his the Prussia of Frederick the Great. “Although the full neocameralist approach has never been tried, [the] closest historical equivalents to this approach are the 18th-century tradition of enlightened absolutism as represented by Frederick the Great, and the 21st-century nondemocratic tradition as seen in lost fragments of the British Empire such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai. These states appear to provide a very high quality of service to their citizens, with no meaningful democracy at all. They have minimal crime and high levels of personal and economic freedom. They tend to be quite prosperous. They are weak only in political freedom, and political freedom is unimportant by definition when government is stable and effective.”

What of conservatives, as opposed to progressives or reactionaries? On a practical level, Yarvin is correct that for a very long time, conservatives have been losers. Yarvin has contempt for today's American conservatives, of whatever stripe (though he wrote prior to current events). He regards them as ineffectual and irrelevant to all political matters, which I tend to agree with, especially after reading, for example, Jonah Goldberg's latest, in which he admits openly that he has no intention or desire to win on any issue of concern to him, merely to delay somewhat the pace of never-ending and always-expanding Progressive demands. Which is Yarvin's point. In Yarvin's words, "A conservative is someone who helps to disguise the true nature of a democratic state. The conservative is ineffective by definition, because his goal is to make democracy work properly. The fact that it does not work properly, has never worked properly, and will never work properly, sails straight over his head. He therefore labors cheerfully as a tool for his enemies." Or, quoting Robert Lewis Dabney, chief of staff to Stonewall Jackson: "American conservatism is merely the shadow that follows Radicalism as it moves forward towards perdition. It remains behind it, but never retards it, and always advances near its leader."

Quoting a man from the era of the Confederacy also implicitly illustrates a second point, which is that the modal opinion shifts Left over time. I think Yarvin exaggerates this somewhat, since he defines any change as Left. But there's always change of some sort, and in the manner of most ideologues, Yarvin tries to fit a line to the data that is not as straight as he thinks. Still, as he says correctly, "The [pre-1922 corpus] is far, far to the right of the consensus reality that we now know and love. Just the fact that people in 1922 believed X, while we today believe Y, has to shake your faith in democracy. Was the world of 1922 massively deluded? Or is ours? It could be both, but it can't be neither. Indeed, even the progressives of the Belle Époque often turn out to be far to the right of our conservatives."

So that's his analysis. As I say, Yarvin's didactic method is to instruct us that what we know about history is wrong, by picking some primary sources from different eras, and putting them on a pedestal. Yarvin's main historical example of "altered history" is the American Revolution. He has two basic claims: it was illegitimate, built on lies; and that the Americans won only because traitorous Progressives in England, Whigs,

allied themselves with the American rebels. His evidence consists of a few books: Thomas Hutchinson's 1776 pamphlet, *Strictures upon the Declaration of the Congress at Philadelphia*; Peter Oliver's 1781 *Origin & Progress of the American Rebellion*; and George Fisher's *True History of the American Revolution*, from 1902. I bought all of these, and read them in part. They're interesting Loyalist history, and certainly there is a coherent argument against the American Revolution, perhaps one sometimes overlooked in summary history. But Yarvin treats these well-known facts and views as dynamite he's placing against the foundations of the American system, and that's just a delusion of grandeur. Naturally, he does not mention disagreeing contemporaneous sources, even from conservatives, such as Friedrich von Gentz's comparison and contrast of the French and American Revolutions. Yarvin just can't admit to himself that the American Revolution, like all historical events, was a complex event with many causes and competing interests, not some conspiracy by Progressives.

On more modern history, Yarvin is no better. He loves Albert Jay Nock, a lazy and cynical fake anarchist, because he agrees with Nock's jaundiced view of both Nazis and Roosevelt. I can get behind such a double-jaundiced view, but it doesn't mean the Nazis and Roosevelt were the same, which is basically Yarvin's claim. He treats as a fresh discovery, which it is not, that every member of Roosevelt's so-called Brain Trust was sympathetic to Communism, and that Roosevelt's NRA (not the good one we have today) was a cult. Much of this has the feel of fitting a theory to a view of history, making it by definition unfalsifiable. You can always find a primary source that fits with your theory, if you look hard enough, and given the actual connections between twentieth-century Progressivism and very bad behavior, it's easier the closer you get to the present. That doesn't make it news. He also points to modern conspiracy-oriented books as the Gospel truth, such as "George Victor's [2008] extremely convincing *Pearl Harbor Myth*," due to which "it has become clear that the long-bruited rumors of FDR's prior awareness of Pearl Harbor are quite simply true." I have no idea whether FDR knew about Pearl Harbor in advance, though I am aware some make the claim. But the claim that sixty years of dispute about a factual matter is settled by one new book is typical of this mindset.

Thus, Yarvin is crippled by his lack of history, even though he thinks he is knowledgeable. He's the type of man who thinks Erich von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods* is history, but that only he and a select few can see its undeniable truth. In occasional flashes of honesty, he admits his lack of knowledge: "I know more or less nothing at all about the history and historiography of the twelfth century." Any other century could be substituted for "twelfth," except for a narrow grasp of certain aspects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He doesn't even know anything about seventeenth-century England, his Jacobean paradise. Yarvin says little about history other than as quotes from old books, but when he does, it's often laughable (and cribbed from Steven Pinker, whom he claims to dislike), such as his allegation that in the nineteenth century, children in England were hanged for blasphemy. Actually, the last execution for blasphemy was in 1697, of Thomas Aikenhead, an adult, and there is precious little evidence any child was ever executed in the entire history of England for any crime, much less for blasphemy. Such examples could easily be multiplied.

It's not just history, either, about which Yarvin makes errors. He also usually gets the law wrong. It is not true that parents are liable for torts their children commit, nor (necessarily) that with respect to "a company's stock price, leaking information—whether authorized or not—is actually a crime." More importantly, he does not understand how corporations really work, seeming to conceive of them as some kind of monarchy. Since his entire program is a "joint-stock republic," this makes his solutions facile. And he appears to know nothing at all about the Greek and Roman world, in history or political philosophy. Grappling with Thucydides' reasons for the Peloponnesian War might have given him some appreciation for his simplistic view of the causes of war. Examining Polybius on mixed government might have shown him that the questions he tries to address are very old. But these thinkers never show up in his ramblings. And every so often bizarre asides show up. He is constantly at pains to say he's all for gay rights—but why should he be? He's against change. Gay rights are a huge change in human society. Why does he like this change and not others? And every single time he brings it up, he simultaneously emphasizes that he is very, very heterosexual himself. Hmmm. . . .

These gaps have, to put it mildly, crippling effects. Among other things, and relevant for what a government is and how it works, what Yarvin totally fails to understand in his historical analogies is the role of custom. Last week, I happened to pick up in an architect's office a book by Ralph Adams Cram, a man never mentioned by Yarvin, who was once perhaps the most famous architect in America. The book was his 1917 work, *The Substance of Gothic*. I return to Cram below for a different point, but Cram states something Yarvin would have done well to read. "A word of warning should be given to those who, very properly, turn to available contemporary documents, particularly those of a legal nature, to obtain a first-hand idea of feudalism as an actuality. The legal theories of feudalism were very lightly regarded in actual practice, for there it was never a question of what the law was, or might be made, but what had been established by ancient custom and universal experience. The insanity of law-making and law-tinkering which has been and is the curse of modern society is hardly three centuries old and was then unknown. Government is not now a system of laws but of decrees, differing little in motive from the irresponsible edicts of absolutism, and the result is general contempt and a flagrant willingness to evade the provisions of these decrees by every possible means. Then the full force of universal custom was supreme; laws were this custom proved and codified; and as a result Law had a force that made it almost imprescriptible, while it represented not fluctuant opinion but the matured results of the interplay of influences both high and low." This one paragraph utterly destroys Yarvin, for it shows that he does not understand how the past was structured, and that the new Stuart monarchy, or its supposed analogue of a "joint-stock republic," could never work, since the custom that created and underlay that system is organic and cannot be imposed as a new system. Yarvin, with his instrumentalist and abstract views, has no conception of an organic human society. In this, he is very like the ultimate Progressive, Tom Paine, company in which Yarvin would not like to be found.

One key trope, endlessly repeated by Yarvin, is that the Cathedral is a manifestation of Christianity. Yarvin, a proud atheist, knows essentially nothing at all about Christianity. Still, he whips this horse, over and over, apparently thinking riding it will lead him, and us, to insight. But as with so much of Yarvin's thought, he takes something with a

superficial plausibility and turns it into what amounts to “Yarvin’s Iron Law of Whatever the Topic Is.” Here, he claims that Progressivism is the religion of the Cathedral, and Progressivism is merely the embodiment of a specific strain of Christianity. Yarvin traces this strain back to the Quakers, about whom he knows about as much as can be gleaned from his beloved Wikipedia, but is completely unaware of anything at all about Christianity prior to roughly 1650. Yarvin’s analysis of Christian history is totally incoherent; it appears to be a claim that there is a direct line from today’s Progressives back to the Puritans of the seventeenth century, all bound together as “ecumenical mainline Protestantism.” Why this should be, and what the relevant principles are, is obscure, although it seems to relate to the Quakers’ “Inner Light,” and be shown by “abolitionism, the Social Gospel, the Prohibitionists, and straight on down to global warming.” He calls this “Universalism,” apparently unaware that has a specific meaning in Christian eschatology having nothing to do with a progressive program. This is mere babbling, for many reasons, but most of all because if Progressivism is about demanding change as a screen for gaining power, that cannot plausibly be said of any brand of actual Christianity, which suggests any correlation in programs is happenstance.

Still, Yarvin tries. Lacking real history, he returns again and again to his major piece of evidence, which he claims to have unearthed like some magical archaeological artifact, the “American Malvern” conference of 1942. This was an inter-denominational Protestant conference, under the aegis of the Federal Council of Churches (merged in 1950 into today’s National Council of Churches). The only reference available to this forgotten episode of American history is a brief *Time* magazine article that Yarvin found, which calls it “American Malvern,” though that was not apparently what its participants called it. According to this summary, the conference endorsed collectivism, what amounted to a one-world government, and various types of central economic planning, and *Time*’s reporter calls the conference “super-Protestant.” To Yarvin, this is proof positive that American Protestantism and Progressivism are one and the same, always have been, and always will be.

But this confuses the order of things. Progressives are the heirs of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, which were both strongly anti-Christian. Correlation is not causation. Yes, the religion of today’s

atheist elite is a form of pauperized and desiccated Christianity. Google's (now dropped) slogan "Don't be evil" is proof of that—what they mean by opposing "evil" is to endorse remnants of Christian belief, mainly being a "nice person" as long as that does not contradict whatever Left values are being touted today. This is all that remains of the Sermon on the Mount. In other words, what few morals Progressives have are indeed Christian in nature and origin. But they are disappearing, because without a religious framework all morals evanesce, just like the mainline Protestant churches, and that means Progressives are diverging from Christianity, not continuing its line. It is not to the contrary that some demands for change, such as the abolition of slavery, were driven by certain Christian denominations, especially the Quakers, and that the Quakers are now aligned with the Progressives and don't believe in Christ. The Progressives corrupted the Quakers, and all of mainline Protestantism, not the other way around.

Nowhere does Yarvin stop to wonder why the conference on which he bases all his conclusions about Christianity was called the American "Malvern." That was because it followed an Anglican conference in 1941, chaired by the Archbishop of York, later Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, which was the original "Malvern," because it met in that spa town located in the English midlands. The Anglican conference apparently adopted various left-wing policies as well, and the reason the conference Yarvin discovered was called "American Malvern" by *Time* was because it was a copycat. As I say, Yarvin treats this conference as proof that Protestantism is Progressivism, and vice versa. But it is easy enough to, for example, find a 1942 *Atlantic* article that says "[Temple's] efforts came to a dramatic climax in the Malvern Conference of 1941. It is true that the convocations of the Church of England and the general convention of its sister Episcopal Church in America, instead of following that lead, damned it with faint praise and thereby intimated to the world at large how out of harmony is Malvern with well-established denominational attitudes toward society." In other words, a contemporaneous observer noted that the larger Protestant church, even of the same denominations as the conference participants, ignored these conferences. Maybe that's true; maybe it's not. Certainly, the Protestants have merged with the Progressive movement since 1941, as they have

been corrupted further by the Progressives, so Yarvin's argument seems convincing. But, as I say, he confuses cause and effect.

Thus, Yarvin sees (Protestant) Christianity (he has almost nothing to say about Catholicism) and Progressivism as poisonous snakes intertwined around a demonic staff of Asclepius. There is a strong argument that the Reformation ruined the West, made most recently by Brad Gregory in *The Unintended Reformation*. Yarvin doesn't make it, though. He seems to think Anglicans are fine and that Christianity only became a problem, spawning Progressivism, when Dissenters gained traction in England. Why Anglicans are fine, where Lutherans fit in, and many similar problems with his theory are simply ignored, because his knowledge is superficial in the extreme.

So much for definitions and analysis. As far as what to do, Yarvin correctly points out that any modern challenges to the Cathedral have failed disastrously, either in the destruction of the challenger (Joseph McCarthy; Enoch Powell) or the failure of the challenger's program (Ronald Reagan; Margaret Thatcher). Similarly, Yarvin is entirely right that only left-wing violence is permissible under our current system, as we have seen all through Trump's presidency, accelerating in the past week, and that anyone who points to past right-wing violence as a model ignores that only works if the judicial system is on the right-wing side, as it is on the left-wing side now. Yes, elections seem unlikely to bring reactionaries to power by winning elections (real power does not rest in the hand of politicians), and attempting to gradually take over institutions in a Gramscian or Fabian way does not seem feasible, since reactionaries will be co-opted or destroyed. On the other hand, much of his modern evidence for the certain failure of such attempts is the supposed total futility of attempts by UK conservatives to leave the European Union. And we saw how that turned out, or how the vote turned out, which undercuts his arguments—though the Cathedral's desperate attempts to reverse the vote support Yarvin's argument.

Yarvin therefore calls for the abandoning of political actions and instead for working toward what he variously names a "hard reset," a "sovereign bankruptcy," or a "reboot." By this he means the United States government should be entirely dissolved and all power given to a figure called the "Receiver" (after the term in bankruptcy law, which, like all law, Yarvin does not fully understand). The Receiver will take

the government's debts (and other obligations) and exchange them for stock in the sovereign corporation that is the United States government. He will fire all government employees and implement a Georgist-style taxation system (more shades of Nock). He will eliminate crime by destroying urban gangs, who apparently are the only source of crime, as a military problem and by moving all who are dependents of the state to "secure relocation centers," where they will be re-educated in solitary confinement with virtual reality, which is "perfectly fulfilling." The result will be a paradisaical life for everyone.

Following this, the Receiver will promptly hand over all power to an actual corporation, owned by the new stockholders, who (not directly, but somehow through a "Trust," which is not well explained but presumably bears some relation to a board of directors, a concept not mentioned anywhere, showing a failure to understand how a corporation works) will control the executives of the corporation through cryptographic keys that will somehow control the weapons and allow the executive to be dismissed at will and without danger or hassle. Among other random suggestions, Yarvin suggests that the Trust be composed of "all active, certified, nonstudent pilots," who are "responsible, but also independent-minded, often even adventurous . . . an aristocratic combination. Pilots are a fraternity of intelligent, practical, and careful people who are already trusted on a regular basis with the lives of others. What's not to like?" As with many of Yarvin's ideas, this has some surface plausibility and merit—but I note that this group is about five percent women, something Yarvin misses or chooses not to point out (he has nothing to say about male/female differences), so he would be in effect creating a patriarchy. However precisely constituted, this is the "joint-stock republic," and it will be secure and effective, and that is all that matters.

How is this to happen? Perhaps through a military coup, but Yarvin says he cannot predict or control that, so he sets it aside. Instead, he suggests the "Program," whose goal is most definitely not to get a majority of the populace on its side. Instead, the goal is to, using the Internet, "a combination of philosopher and crowd," create a "counter-Cathedral," which will use "crowdsourced wiki-power" to "establish the truth on every dubious subject," by asking each side of a dispute (creationism, global warming) to "list their claims, and edit them collectively, producing the

best possible statement of [their] case.” Then “it would be very easy for any smart young person with a few hours to spare to see what the pattern of truth and error, and its inevitable political associations, started to look like.” This will replace the university system with what Yarvin calls the “Antiveristy.” “The results will be devastating,” undermining (somehow) the entire Progressive edifice.

From there we will complete the “Procedure,” also known as “Passivism.” This is the idea that reactionaries should simply completely and totally accept the current political system, making no attempts to oppose or change it. Supposedly this will starve the Left of the hate that drives it. At the same time, make yourself “worthy,” by educating oneself by reading blogs like *Unqualified Reservations*. At some point the current structure will fail spontaneously. Meanwhile, with the help of the Antiveristy, a new structure will have been created by blog readers. This structure will be “more worthy to rule,” and power will flow to it, on the same principle as the Chinese Mandate of Heaven (which Yarvin apparently thinks is not just a cover for retroactive justification of whoever wins a power struggle, but some mystical principle). The Antiveristy will “guide the New Structure toward stability, acting as the brain of the [New Structure], just as the [existing universities] acted as the brain of the [Old Structure].” “In short, all the Reaction must do is convince reasonable, educated men and women of good will to support stable, effective and reliable government.” Most bizarrely of all, Yarvin claims to see signs, in 2009 or so, of this happening. In 2018, they seem to be sorely lacking, though there certainly are many other changes afoot.

All this is clownish on many levels, starting with the ignorant hope that technology will reveal the truth in a manner that cannot be disputed. Praying to aliens would be a more likely method to succeed. Without getting into it now and lengthening this further, I am convinced that what we really need is some form of societal/governmental fracture, followed by a Man of Destiny and a struggle to remake society based on reality. If there is ever a new, reactionary form of government (something I certainly support), it will have to develop organically from circumstance, not from the imposition of an abstract program that misunderstands history and human nature, but is doubtless very appealing to a computer programmer like Yarvin.

Finally, I think it important to discuss accusations of racism often made against both Yarvin and the Dark Enlightenment more generally. Those accusations strike me as mostly accurate. In their minds, they are not racist because they say they are merely following the data, and the data on “human neurological uniformity” say that humans differ along the axis of race. I save the mention of what many see as Yarvin’s racism for last, because the Left wants it to be discussed first, in its usual mode of requiring preemptive apologies in order to force their enemies to commit suicide after receiving what Scott Adams, again, pithily calls “linguistic kill shots.” Yarvin is an Ashkenazi Jew by descent, a group with high average IQs in many testing regimes, as are Asians, so at least he is not a “white supremacist,” a current kill-shot word, or what might be called a “traditional racist.” At the same time, he links to a wide variety of completely insane blogs, that are overtly white supremacist, and also to “game” or “pickup artist” sites, which are appalling instances of degraded behavior masquerading as tradition, that make bizarre claims such as that women want expensive weddings to keep their men poor so they can be controlled. Yarvin links to such sites because he thinks he’s all about radical candor and they have something to say; maybe they do, but a person can be judged to an extent by the company he keeps.

In any case, I just don’t find anything of value in debating the relative IQs of groups of people. I discuss it to make two points, one about the Dark Enlightenment, and one about reactionary politics more generally. As with so much of the Dark Enlightenment focus, this IQ obsession betrays an instrumentalist view of human beings, combined with a keen desire to show personal superiority, another common trait among this set (and the basis for, I think, most racism). Anyone who views human beings as inherently worthy of dignity cannot make this the centerpiece of his thought; at most, it becomes a question of, if it is true, what, if anything, is to be done in a meritocratic system to alleviate resulting inequalities. Instead, it is used as a pillar of analysis by most of the Dark Enlightenment, suggesting pernicious motives of creating tiers of worth in human beings.

My more general point, or thought, is wondering what this shows about the traditional approach that the Right has taken for at least seventy years, of restricting acceptable belief to a narrow spectrum of thought. No Objectivists; no racists (today, at least); no John Birchers.

The Left, though, has always had the opposite principle, for far more than a hundred years: “No enemies to the Left.” Its own policy has not benefited the Right, which has been pushed back for decades, and the Left has never had to pay a penalty for openly associating and cooperating with evil. Why the double standard? Should the Right change to a new policy, “no enemies to the Right”? That is a question I will take up in a near-future book review. You will have to wait.

At the end, the Dark Enlightenment is really no different than its enemies, Progressives. Their plans would ultimately create a society not essentially different for human beings from the present one they despise. We can see this by recurring to Ralph Adams Cram, a proto-Yarvin. Aside from architecture, Cram’s main political point, for which he was famed, was that most humans were “anthropoid” and not worthy of being called humans at all. Nock, whom Yarvin worships, makes this the key element of his own thought. Such an instrumentalist and utilitarian view of humans, profoundly anti-Christian and Machiavellian, with no moral core or attempt to encourage virtue, is also at the center of Yarvin’s thought. But it is indistinguishable from the center of Progressive thought, which also views humans as mere instruments for achieving change and ultimate utopia. The utopia may differ, but all ideologies will ultimately build their utopias on top of human skulls. Yarvin is like Shervane, the protagonist in Arthur C. Clarke’s classic science fiction short story “The Wall of Darkness.” Shervane dedicates his life to building a giant staircase to surmount the enormous wall at the edge of his world. Finally topping it and looking across to the other side, he sees only the world on his side of the wall—for his universe is built like a Möbius strip. He destroys the stair, and the story concludes “For none knew better than he that the Wall possessed no other side.” So with Yarvin, and with the Dark Enlightenment.