

CURTIS YARVIN: DEMOCRACY IS OVER

"Interview with Curtis Yarvin", *The New York Times*, January 2025

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Technology

For a long time, 51-year-old computer engineer Curtis Yarvin has been building a political theory online that has long been unknown. His ideas are extreme: that institutions at the center of American intellectual life, such as the mainstream media and academia, are obsessed with progressive groupthink and should be abolished. He believes that government bureaucracy should be radically dismantled, and perhaps his most provocative proposition is that American democracy should be replaced by what he calls a "monarchy" led by a so-called "CEO." His friendlier term is dictator.

While Yarvin himself may still be unknown, his ideas are not. The Chosen One **Vice President JD Vance** alluded to Yarvin's ideas *to forcibly free* American institutions from so-called "Germanism." The new State Department official **Michael Anton** talked to Yarvin about how he could be appointed to power "**American Caesar**". Yarvin also has fans in the powerful and increasingly politicized circles of Silicon Valley. **Marc Andreessen**, a venture capitalist who became an unofficial advisor to President-elect Donald Trump, approved of Yarvin's anti-democratic thinking. **And Peter Thiel**, a conservative mega-donor who invested in Yarvin's tech startup, called him a "powerful" historian. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given all this, Yarvin has become part of the right-wing media universe: he's been a guest on Tucker Carlson and Charlie Kirk's shows, among others. I've known about Yarvin for years, who makes most of his living from Substack, and I've been most interested in his work as a prime example of the growing anti-democratic sentiment in certain corners of the internet. Until now, these ideas seemed extreme. But given that they're now finding an audience among some of the most powerful people in the country, Yarvin can no longer be dismissed so easily.

One of your main arguments is that America, as you yourself have said before, needs to overcome its dictator phobia – that American democracy is a sham that cannot be fixed and a monarch-type leader is the right way to go. So why is democracy so bad and why should a dictator fix the problem?

Let me answer this in a way that readers of The New York Times can understand quite easily. You've probably heard of a man named Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR).

Yes.

Sometimes I give speeches where I just read the last 10 paragraphs of FDR's first inaugural address, where he basically says, "Hey, Congress, give me absolute power, or I'll take it anyway." So, did FDR actually accept that kind of power? Yes, he did. There's a great article that I sent to some people I know who are involved in the transition...

"What?"

Oh, there are all kinds of people milling around.

Name one.

Well, I sent an article to Marc Andreessen. It's an excerpt from the diary of Harold Ickes, FDR's secretary of the interior, describing a 1933 cabinet meeting. At this cabinet meeting, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins says, "Here's a list of projects we're going to do." FDR personally takes this list, looks at the projects in New York, and says, "This is nonsense." Finally, everyone agrees to get the bill passed and passed by Congress. FDR acts like a CEO. So was FDR a dictator? I don't know. I know that most Americans respect FDR, and FDR ran the New Deal like a startup.

Your point is that we had something like a dictator in the past, so we don't need to fear it now. Is that right?

Yes. To look at the objective reality of government in the United States since the Revolution. You'll talk to people about the Articles of Confederation and say, "Name one thing that happened in America under the Articles of Confederation," and they won't be able to do that unless they're professional historians. Next up is the first

the constitutional period under George Washington. If you look at the Washington administration, what's set up now is very much like a startup. It's so much like a startup that this guy, Alexander Hamilton, who was identified as a startup, runs the entire government -- he's basically the Larry Page of this republic.

Curtis, I feel like I'm asking you, "What did you have for breakfast?" And you're like, "Well, you know, at the dawn of humanity, when grains were first grown - I'm doing Putin. I'll speed it up."

Then answer the question: "What's so bad about democracy?" In short, whether you want to call Washington, Lincoln, and FDR "dictators," it's a shameful word,--they were essentially national CEOs who ran the government like a company from the top down.

So why is democracy so bad?

It's not that democracy is bad, it's just that it's very weak. And the fact that it's very weak is easily seen in the fact that very unpopular policies, like mass immigration, continue despite the fact that a large majority opposes them. So the question "Is democracy good or bad?" is, I think, a secondary question compared to the question "Is this what we really have?"

When you tell a New York Times reader, "Democracy is bad," they're a little shocked. But when you tell them, "Politics is bad," or even "Populism is bad," they say, "Of course, those are terrible things." So when you want to argue that democracy is not a good system of government, just jump right into the argument that populism is not a good system of government, and then you'll say, "Yes, of course, actually, policies and laws should be determined by wise experts, judges, lawyers, and professors." Then you'll realize that you're actually supporting aristocracy, not democracy.

That's probably an exaggeration, considering how close you and JD Vance are.

This is really exaggerated.

But he mentioned you by name publicly and alluded to "de-awakening" ideas that are very similar to yours. You were on Michael Anton's podcast where you talked to him about starting an American Caesars. Peter

Thiel said you're an interesting thinker. Let's say people in positions of power say to you, "We're going to do the Curtis Yarvin thing. What steps would they take to turn American democracy into something like a monarchy?"

My honest answer would be, "It's not the time for that yet." No one should read this and panic, thinking I'm about to be installed as America's secret dictator. I don't think I'll even go to the inauguration.

Were you invited?

No. I'm an outsider. I'm an intellectual. My ideas actually get into circulation mostly through the employees who are floating around in this internet soup. There's definitely an attempt in Washington right now to revive the White House as the executive branch. The problem is, if you were to tell anyone professionally involved in Washington that Washington would function just fine or even better without the White House, they'd basically say, "Yeah, sure. The executive branch works for Congress." So there are these poor voters who think they elected a revolution. They elected Donald Trump, and they have what may be the most capable CEO in the world...

Your point is that because of the structure of the system, he can't do much. He can block things, he can disrupt them, he can cause chaos and unrest, but he can't really change what is.

Do you think you might be overstating the president's ineffectiveness? You could point to the overturning of Roe as a direct consequence of Donald Trump's presidency. You could argue that the response to Covid was tied to Donald Trump's presidency. Of course, a lot of things about Covid were different because Donald Trump was president. I'll tell you a funny story.

Of course.

At the risk of exposing my children to the media: In 2016, my children attended chichi, a progressive, Mandarin immersion school in San Francisco.

Wait. You sent your kids to a chichi, progressive school?

/.../ When the rubber hits the road – you can't isolate children from the world, right? At that time, my late wife and I chose the simple solution – not to talk about politics in front of children. But, of course, everyone talks about it at school, and my son comes back

home and asks a very specific question. He's like, "Dad, when Donald Trump builds a wall around the country, how are we going to be able to go to the beach?" I'm like, "Wow, you really took it literally. Everyone else took it literally, but you really took it literally." I'm like, if you see anything in the real world around you in the next four years that changes because of this election, I'll be surprised.

In one of your recent newsletters, you call JD Vance "normal." What do you mean? [Laughs.]

What I admire about Vance, and what's really great about him as a leader, is that he's got all kinds of Americans in him. His ability to connect with Americans in the world that he comes from is great, but another thing that's great about him is that he went to Yale Law School, so he speaks fluently in The New York Times, which you can't say about Donald Trump. And one of the things that I think I strongly believe in and that I haven't mentioned is that it's absolutely essential that anyone, like the American monarchy, be president of all Americans. The new administration could do a lot better at reaching out to progressive Americans, rather than demonizing them and saying, "Hey, you want to make this country a better place? I feel like you've been misinformed in some ways. You're not a bad person." That's about 10 to 20 percent of Americans. That's a lot of people, NPR class. They're not bad people. They're people. We are all human, and humans can support bad regimes.

As you know, this is quite a different position than the one you often take in your writings, where you talk about things like decokeification; that people who work at places like The New York Times should lose their jobs; you have an idea for a program called "RAGE: Retire all government employees"; you have ideas, hopefully satirical, about how to deal with unproductive members of society, which basically means locking them in a room forever. Has your thinking changed?"

No, no, no. My thinking hasn't really changed./.../ From a Freudian perspective, it's a bit too much. Yes. But when you look at how you have to treat those institutions like a company that's going bankrupt, but somehow more so, because these people who had power have to be treated with even more subtlety and even more respect. Winning means that now they're your people. When you understand the new regime's attitude towards the American aristocracy, their attitude can't be so anti-aristocratic: "We're going to stab all the professors and throw them in the ditches or something." Their attitude

it must be that you were a normal person who served a regime that did really strange and crazy things.

How involved do you think JD Vance is in democracy?

It depends on what you mean by "democracy." The problem arises when people equate democracy with good governance. I would say that JD Vance believes that governments should serve the common good. I think people like JD and the broader intellectual community around him would all agree with that principle. Now, I don't know what you mean by "democracy" in this context. All I know is that if democracy is against the common good, it's bad, and if it's for the common good, it's good.

In 2017, BuzzFeed reported on your and the right-wing provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos emails in which you talked about monitoring the 2016 election with Peter Thiel and called him "totally enlightened." What would "totally enlightened" have meant in this context?

To me, fully enlightened means fully disillusioned. When someone living in the bubble of the progressives of the current year looks at the right, or even the new right, the hardest thing to see is that what is really shared is not a positive belief, but an absence of belief. We do not worship the same gods. We do not believe that The New York Times and Harvard are divinely inspired in any sense, and we do not believe that their procedures always lead to truth and wisdom. We do not believe that the U.S. government is doing a good job.

And you call this disbelief enlightenment?

Yes. It's a disillusionment with the faith in these old systems. And what's going to replace that disillusionment is not, "Oh, we need to do things the Curtis way." It's basically just a greater openness of mind and a greater ability to look around and say, We just think that our political science is superior to Aristotle's political science because our physics is superior to Aristotle's physics. And what if it's not?

You haven't quite isolated the question of why a strong person would be better for people's lives. Can you answer that?

Yes. I think that effective government is better for people's lives. When I ask people to answer this question, I ask them to look around the room and point to everything,

what the monarchy created, because these things that we call companies are actually little monarchies. You look around and you see, for example, a laptop, and that laptop was made by Apple, and that's a monarchy.

This is an example you often use when you say, "If Apple ran California, wouldn't it be better?" Meanwhile, if your MacBook Pro was made by the California Department of Computing, you can only imagine.

I'm sorry, I'm here in this building, and I keep forgetting to give my best argument for monarchy, which is that people trust The New York Times more than any other source in the world, and how is The New York Times run? It's a fifth-generation hereditary absolute monarchy. Which was very similar to the vision of the early progressives, by the way.

Early progressives, you go back to a book like Drift and Mastery...

I have to say that the depth of information you provided is more confusing than enlightening to me. How can I change this?

Answering questions more directly and concisely. [Laughs.]

Okay, I'll try.

Your ideas seem to be gaining traction in Silicon Valley. Don't you think there's a certain level where that world is responding because you're just telling them what they want to hear?

If more people like me were in charge, things would be better. I think that's almost the opposite of the truth. There is a world of true leadership where a person like **Elon Musk** "You live every day in SpaceX, and when you think about this world, you think, 'Oh, this is directly contrary to the ideals that I was taught in this society,' that's a really complex cognitive dissonance problem, even if you're Elon Musk." It would be an understatement to say that humanity's history with monarchs is, at best, mixed. The Roman Empire under Marcus Aurelius seems to have done pretty well. Under Nero, not so much. Charles III of Spain is a monarch who is often shown; he's your favorite monarch. But Louis XIV would start wars as if they were going to go bankrupt. This was all before the age of democracy. And monarchs in the age of democracy are just awful. /.../ I can't believe I'm saying this: if we put Hitler aside and

we would just look at Mao, Stalin, Pol Pot, Pinochet, Idi Amin - we are looking at people who are responsible for the deaths of about 75 to 100 million people. Given this historical precedent, do we really want to try dictatorship? Your question is the most important one. Understanding why Hitler was so bad, why Stalin was so bad, is a fundamental piece of the puzzle of the 20th century. But I think it is important to note that in the rest of European and world history, we do not see the Holocaust. You can take the camera back and essentially say, "Wow, there has not been this much chaos and violence since the beginning of European civilization." And you cannot separate Hitler and Stalin from the global democratic revolution of which they are a part.

As I was reviewing your material, I noticed that you make historical claims, like the one you just made about there being no genocide in Europe from 1000 AD until the Holocaust, and then I looked around and thought, "Is that true?"

My skepticism stems from what I feel is a rather strict selection of historical events to support your arguments, and the events you point to are either not factually resolved or are viewed differently.

However, I want to ask a couple of questions about what you wrote about race.

Mm. I'll read you some examples: "Here's the problem with white nationalism. It's strategically sterile. It offers no effective political program." To me, the problem with white nationalism is that it's racist, not that it's strategically unsophisticated.

Well...

There are two more. "It's very difficult to argue that the Civil War made anyone's life any better, including the emancipation of slaves."

Come on. [Yarvin called it the "War of Secession" not the Civil War.]

Third: "If you're asking me to condemn Anders Breivik," the Norwegian mass murderer, but you idolize Nelson Mandela, you might have a mother you'd like to [*swear words*] pour out." Looking at Mandela, the reason I said that – most people don't know this – there was some discontent at the time of Mandela's release because he actually needed to be taken off the terrorist list.

Perhaps the more important point is that Nelson Mandela was in prison for opposing the brutally racist apartheid regime. Brutally racist

the apartheid regime listed him as a terrorist. What does this have to do with equating Anders Breivik, who shot people on a bizarre, deceptive mission to liberate Norway from Islam, with Nelson Mandela? Because they are both terrorists and both violated the rules of war in the same way, and both essentially killed innocent people. We constantly evaluate terrorism. So Gandhi is your model? Martin Luther King? Nonviolent resistance? It's more complicated.

Really?

I could say something about any of them, but let's move on to one of your examples.

I think the best way to deal with African Americans in the 1860s is to just Google slave narratives. Read random slave narratives and you'll learn about their experiences at that time. A historian recently published an article - and I would argue that this number is too high - but he estimated that about a quarter of all freed people essentially died between 1865 and 1870.

I can't speak to the truth of that statement. But you say that there are historical examples in slave narratives where freed slaves expressed regret for their liberation.

To me, this is another great example of how you are selectively reading history, as other slave narratives speak of horrific cruelty.

Of course.

"It's hard to argue that the Civil War made anyone's life more pleasant, including freed slaves"? Okay, first of all, when I said "anyone," I was talking about a population group, not individuals.

Are you seriously suggesting that the slavery era was somehow better than... If you look at the living conditions of an African American in the South, they were at an absolute rock bottom from 1865 to 1875. They are very bad because basically this economic system was disrupted.

I can't believe I'm arguing. Brazil abolished slavery in the 1880s without a civil war, so when you look at the cost or the meaning of the war, you see that it did enormous damage to all kinds of people, black and white. All these evils and all these good qualities existed in the people of that time, and that,

What I'm fighting against in both of these quotes, and also the reaction of people to Breivik - you're basically reacting in a caricature. What's the difference between a terrorist and a freedom fighter? This is a really important question in the history of the 20th century. To say that I have a strong opinion on this issue without having the answer to this question, I think, is very difficult and wrong.

You often refer to the history of the pre-democratic era, and the situation of women in that period that you are evaluating is not what I have seen in your writings. Do you think your arguments take enough account of the fact that monarchies and dictatorships have historically not been great for certain demographic groups?

When I look at the status of women in, say, a Jane Austen novel, written long before suffrage, it seems pretty normal. Women who are desperately looking for a man because they have no way of earning an income without him? Have you ever seen anything like that in the 21st century? I mean, the whole class of Jane Austen's world is the class of aristocrats who earn US dollars, right?

You don't mean to say that there were aspects of political life in the era of kings that were inferior or gave people less freedom than political life today?

You have done what people often do - you confuse freedom with power. The word freedom is freedom. The right to vote is a form of power. So you are assuming that when women got the right to vote in England and America in the early 20th century, their lives improved.

Do you think it's better that women have the right to vote?

I don't believe in voting at all.

Are you voting?

No. Voting essentially gives you a sense of status.

"What does this power mean to you?" is really the most important question.

I think for most people today it means they feel important. It makes them feel important. That sense of importance is something very illusory, which is at odds with the important point: we need a government that is actually good and that actually works, and we don't have one.

Your proposed solution, as we have said many times, involves appointing a monarch, a CEO. Why do you have such faith in the abilities of CEOs? Most startups fail. We can all point to CEOs who have been ineffective. Furthermore, a CEO or “dictator” tends to think of citizens as purely economic entities rather than living, breathing people who want to thrive in their lives. So why are you so confident that a CEO would be the kind of leader who could ensure a better life for people? That seems like such a simplistic way of thinking.

This is not a simplistic way of thinking, and having worked in salt mines where CEOs are CEOs, and having been a CEO myself, I think I understand this better than most people. If you took any of the CEOs of the Fortune 500, just randomly picked one and put him or her in charge of Washington. I think you would get something much, much better than what is out there. It doesn't have to be Elon Musk.

You've said before that despite his goals, Trump is unlikely to achieve anything transformative. But what are your thoughts on Trump in general?

I've talked about FDR before, and many people with different perspectives might not understand this comparison, but I think Trump is very reminiscent of FDR, who had an extraordinary charisma and self-confidence, coupled with an extraordinary ability to be the center of the room, to be a leader, to overcome nonsense, and to make things happen. One of the main differences between Trump and FDR that has held Trump back is that FDR comes from one of America's first families. He's a hereditary aristocrat. The fact that Trump doesn't come from the upper class of American society has really hurt his self-confidence. It's limited his potential as a leader in many ways. One of the encouraging things I see is that he's operating with a little more self-confidence this time around. He almost seems to actually feel like he knows what he's doing. That's very helpful, because insecurity and fragility are his Achilles' heel.

What is your Achilles heel?

I also have problems with self-confidence. I will not regret it just because of my beliefs.

Does your insecurity manifest itself in your political thinking?

That's a good question. If you look at my older work in particular, I had this general sense that, well, I feel like I'm onto something, but also... the idea that people in 2025 are going to take these things as seriously as they do now, when I was writing in 2007, 2008? I mean, I was completely serious. I'm talking completely serious. But when you attacked me with the most outrageous quotes you could find from my 2008 writings, there were serious feelings behind them, and they are serious now. Would I have expressed it that way? Would I have been trolling? I always try to be less trollish. On the other hand, I can't resist the temptation to troll Elon Musk, which may be one of the reasons I've never met Elon Musk.

Do you think your trolling instinct is out of control?

No, it's not strong enough yet. [Laughs.] Looking back, I realize that the instinct to look at things from the bottom up is definitely not a trollish instinct. It's a serious and important thing that I think the world needs.

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This interview is edited (slightly shortened) and consists of two conversations. The Google translation has been slightly edited, as the language of the conversation participants is very peculiar, but I think it is understandable.

<https://yonkersobserver.com/the-interview-curtis-yarvin-says-democracy-is-done/>