# What to make of Curtis Yarvin

The readers of Modern Age might broadly be classified as “respecters of traditional moral principles.” Few of us would regard every jot and tittle of morality passed down to us by our ancestors as sacrosanct, but principles that have survived for millennia should never be tossed out lightly. I dislike using the term “traditionalist,” because that suggests respect for tradition turned into an ideology. It is when traditions start to collapse that we see the rise of traditionalists: for instance, in the early centuries of the Roman republic, citizens respected tradition simply as part of their way of living, and not as dogma. But as the Roman Revolution proceeded over the course of a century, we saw the rise of dogmatic traditionalism. So let us instead coin a rather awkward neologism, traditionaphiles, as use that from here forward. [DAN: HAPPY TO IMPROVE UPON THIS AWKWARD WORD!]

How should a traditionaphile rank political regimes? Judging along what is merely one access, it is clear that a traditionaphile should order, from best to worst, regimes that:

1. Actively support a life lived in accord with traditional moral principles.
2. At least do not get in the way of such a life.
3. Actively work to undermine such a life.

It is clear to me that today we live under the third type of regime. Thus, a move to a regime of type two would be a marked improvement. And that brings us to Curtis Yarvin’s recent political writing, which has stirred some controversy among traditionaphiles.

In particular, “You can only lose the culture war” divided American citizens into “hobbits and elves.” (https://graymirror.substack.com/p/you-can-only-lose-the-culture-war) Yarvin says that the average American citizen today is a hobbit who “just wants to grill and raise kids.” (The number of traditionaphiles who got upset at him for his “hobbit” characterization apparently had forgotten that it was a devout Catholic who came up with that metaphor for the common people in the first place.) Well, it would be nice if we lived in a polity full of Aristotelian *spoudaios* (mature people), eager to engage in intelligent discussions about how we should arrange our political life. But we do not, and the average American couch potato, while a sort of spud, is no sort of *spoudaios*, and transforming him into one will be no mean task. Morality requires, among other things, that we base our actions upon a realistic evaluation of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, rather than upon fantasy or wishful thinking. If Yarvin is correct in his assessment of the degree of political engagement of the average American, and I think that he is, then we must take that reality into account in evaluating different proposals for improving the current political situation.

So what does Yarvin propose to do about our current malaise? Among his requirements for “The contract of any next regime” is the following:

“Every culture has the right to educate its children in the doctrines of its own tradition. Every culture has the right to judge the behavior of its members, or conflicts between its members, by the law of its own tradition. Every culture has the right to tax its own members and collectively spend their resources, without subsidizing other cultures, funding the central government by a fair and uniform percentage of internal revenue. Every culture has the right to preserve its own tradition with a content barrier. And while every person can leave any culture, any culture can reject or eject any person.” (https://graymirror.substack.com/p/the-contract-of-any-next-regime)

In other words, Yarvin quite explicitly defends the right of traditionaphiles to live in a traditional culture (if they wish to!), to set their own laws for the members of their culture, to prevent anti-traditional ideas from undermining their culture, and to decide who is actually a member and who isn’t, so long as they allow free exit. So, quite certainly, this is not a recommendation to establish a pro-tradition national government. And by his principle, Satanist would also have the right to establish a pro-Satanist culture. But it *is* a proposal for a form of government that is not actively hostile to traditional communities. In other words, he recommends establishing a neutral regime, rather than enduring a regime that is actively anti-tradition, which I take the current regime to be.

Some people might argue that such a “neutral regime” is not actually possible. I myself have made arguments like that at times. And under our current form of goernment, that is probably correct… but Yarvin explicitly recommends a constitutional (peaceful) revolution, where the president of the United States asserts the monarchical powers that, under a plausible reading, the US Constitution seems to grant him. And we do have historical examples of imperial governments that were able to remain largely neutral between the many sub-cultures within the empire, for instance, the Persian Empire before Alexander’s conquest, or the Holy Roman Empire’s post-Reformation settlement, where each prince decided the confession of his

Another reason some people might reject opting for a neutral regime is they think the number one option, a regime that promotes traditional morality, is possible. In our current situation, I do not think it is. Perhaps Adrian Vermeule would say that I have an impoverished political imagination… (https://postliberalorder.substack.com/p/it-cant-happen-or-the-poverty-of) and perhaps he would be correct. But I am stuck with making judgments employing the imagination that I actually have, not some bolder imagination I might hope to have.

One fellow traditionaphile, upon seeing me defend Yarvin, said, “But he is a nihilist!” Well, if true, that is bad, but:  1. It is not really relevant as to whether his current political proposals are worth considering (unless one thinks he is trying to trick us into accepting proposals that will result in destruction); and 2. Whatever he once said about his philosophical stance, I don’t think “nihilist” accurately describes his current beliefs.

I am only familiar with Yarvin’s recent writing. I am aware that at some point in the past he appeared online as some character named “Mendacious Moldy Bugs,” or something like that. I don’t think I ever read a single word written by that persona. And perhaps it was accurate to describe that persona as a nihilist; indeed, I have been told that he himself described himself as such.

But when I look at what he has been writing over the past few years, I find him saying things like “the prerevolutionary consensus on the purpose of government is quite consistent. It fits in a Latin motto, salus populi suprema lex: the health of the people is the supreme law.” (https://graymirror.substack.com/p/policies-of-the-deep-right) And: “The largest existential risk facing humanity is the present global political order.” (https://graymirror.substack.com/p/do-not-punch-rationalists)

These are clearly statements of moral concern about our current situation. A nihilist would not care what the supreme law is, nor would he be worried about existential threats to human life on our planet. In fact, a true nihilist would *welcome* existential risk to humanity, right? So even if this label applied to Yarvin at some point in the past, I’d have to say it no longer does.

Another complaint against Yarvin is that he considers the Dobbs decision as a loss for the people celebrating it. Why does he say this? He writes:

"An action is strategically useful if, after that action, it is easier to replace the regime. Let’s call a useful action a strike—making a useless or ’ounterproductive one a ball. (Note that the French coup translates as strike.)

“See how easy this is? Dobbs is not a strike, because post Dobbs, the elves get motivated and the hobbits demotivated. If the regime can only be changed by coordinated hobbit action against Elf-Ruled America, and this action becomes harder, Dobbs is a net lose – a ball.” (https://graymirror.substack.com/p/two-strokes-of-state)

Yarvin is **not** claiming that a “right” to abortion should be protected; instead, his claim is that Dobbs is actually a loss for pro-life people, because it has energized pro-abortion forces while causing anti-abortion people to relax. Now, his pragmatic analysis may be wrong, but it is certainly not a defense of any right to an abortion. And while there are many factors at play in the upcoming mid-term elections, Democrats are clearly hoping to motivate their base by citing the Dobbs decision. If it does, and the result is an increased Democratic majority in both houses, pro-abortion forces might very well get congress to pass a law mandating an unlimited right to abortion, a law that states could not override. So, while Yarvin’s strategic analysis of the impact of Dobbs might be *wrong*, it is not “pro-abortion”: it is prudential warning to consider the long-term impact of some governmental action, rather than merely looking at whether it *appears* to be a victory for one’s side.

A traditionaphile operating in the political sphere ought not to base their decisions upon wishful thinking. Prudence is a virtue, and while not succumbing to utilitarianism, we are obliged to take the likely outcome of our decisions into account when evaluating them. If we conclude our best bet right now is to replace a hostile regime with a neutral regime, then we ought to cooperate with others seeking to bring about that same end, even if we disagree with them on other, very fundamental matters.