JD Vance thinks monarchists have some good ideas

JD Vance is, by his own admission, “plugged into a lot of weird right-wing subcultures.” His much-mocked comments about childless cat ladies and unassimilated Italian immigrants were made on a “masculinist” podcast. He doesn’t eat seed oils, a dietary restriction du jour on the extremely online right. When he was nominated to be former President Donald Trump’s running mate, his X following list included Bronze Age Pervert and Raw Egg Nationalist, two pseudonymous right-wing bodybuilders who often promote eugenics and the “great replacement” conspiracy theory. But perhaps no one online has shaped Vance’s thinking more than the neoreactionary blogger Curtis Yarvin, a former programmer with ties to Vance’s friend and benefactor Peter Thiel.

Yarvin — who blogged under the name Mencius Moldbug in the aughts and is now on Substack — has been a far-right public intellectual of sorts for a long time. His oeuvre includes musings about the correlation between race and IQ, calls for a “benevolent dictator” to run the US, and posts like “Why I Am Not A White Nationalist” (because white nationalism is “a very ineffective political device for solving the very real problems about which it complains”). He once wrote that the neo-Nazi terrorist Anders Breivik, who killed dozens of people in a series of attacks in Oslo, Norway, was ineffective because he “didn’t even make triple digits.”

There’s a tendency to not take people like Yarvin seriously. He and other far-right bloggers like Bronze Age Pervert position themselves as provocateurs and couch their work in absurd metaphors — it sounds inherently ridiculous to issue

warnings about a guy who writes long essays about dark elves. And if you do take them seriously, they'll say they were just trolling. But if you look past his edgelord posture and baroque prose, Yarvin has spent the better part of a decade clearly describing what he wants: a dictatorship.

Yarvin is most commonly associated with the neoreactionary movement, whose adherents believe – as Thiel wrote in 2009 – that freedom and democracy are incompatible and that democratic governments and bloated federal bureaucracies should be replaced by enlightened autocratic regimes.

Until relatively recently, Yarvin's name was not brought up in mainstream political discourse. But his ideas about undercutting democratic checks on authoritarian power have struck a chord with the current Republican ticket. While Vance hasn't espoused Yarvin's more extreme ideas – and likely won't – he clearly holds parts of the neoreactionary creed in high regard.

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In a July Substack post, Yarvin denied that he's had a "significant influence" on Vance. Yarvin referred to Vance as a "random *normie* politician whom I've barely even *met*." (He has a penchant for italics.) "While I admire the senator and I think he has *some* potential," Yarvin wrote, "he is hardly a 'friend' of mine and I can't imagine I have influenced him."

Years before he was the Republican vice presidential nominee, however, Vance openly touted that influence. "So there's this guy Curtis Yarvin who has written about these things," Vance said on a right-wing podcast in 2021. Vance didn't stop at a simple name-drop. He went on to explain how former President Donald Trump should remake the federal bureaucracy if reelected. "I think what Trump should do, if I was giving him

one piece of advice: Fire every single midlevel bureaucrat, every civil servant in the administrative state, and replace them with our people. And when the courts stop you, stand before the country and say, 'The chief justice has made his ruling. Now let him enforce it.'"

This "piece of advice" is more or less identical to a proposal Yarvin floated around 2012: "Retire All Government Employees," or RAGE.

As described by Yarvin, RAGE's purpose is to "reboot" the government under an all-powerful executive, a sort of debugging. Yarvin sees elections as ineffective methods for political change because, while the head of state and their political appointees may change, the career bureaucrats (who, in Yarvin's view, are really calling the shots) stay put. "If Americans want to change their government, they're going to have to get over their dictatorphobia," Yarvin said in the 2012 speech in which he described RAGE. Yarvin has since toned down the dictator rhetoric (he more recently called for a "monarchy of everyone"), but the underlying principle remains unchanged. For Yarvin, democracy is an illusion: elections make people think they have a say in what happens, but the Cathedral, his catchall term for journalistic institutions and elite universities, runs everything. Monarchy, in this theory, is the only honest government.

RAGE bears obvious parallels to Trump's war against the "deep state" of federal bureaucrats. In October 2020, Trump signed an executive order that stripped employment protections from certain federal positions "of a confidential, policy-determining, policy-making, or policy-advocating chapter." Federal agencies would also be encouraged to hire staffers who pledged loyalty to the president. The new policy was called Schedule F, after the new employment category it would have created had Biden not canceled the order shortly after taking office.

Schedule F was a radical idea cloaked in the sanitized language of the federal bureaucracy. Its goal was to concentrate power in the presidency and undercut what Trump (and others on the far right) refer to as the deep state and what Vance has repeatedly referred to as "the regime." The regime goes beyond liberals or Democrats — it includes mainstream politicians from both parties whose primary goal is to uphold our current political order.

Yarvin's Cathedral takes this argument a step further, extending the cabal beyond Congress, the White House, and the courts; the media and elite universities are part of it, too. Where other right-wingers back efforts to take over universities and elite institutions and dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, Yarvin has written that these tactics will likely only "reinforce progressive cultural power." He's kind of an all-or-nothing doomer; his ultimate vision is an American monarchy run by a "national CEO," or in Yarvin's own words, "a dictator." (Trump, famously, has said he would not be a dictator in office "except for day one.")

And if Trump wins, Yarvin's RAGE proposal could be back on the table. Schedule F is among the dozens of policy proposals buried in the 2025 version of the Heritage Foundation's nearly 1,000-page *Mandate for Leadership*. If carried out, it could affect tens of thousands of federal employees. Schedule F is legally dubious, but as *Politico* has explained, the current makeup of the Supreme Court could allow for it to go forward anyway.

If the courts don't side with Trump, Vance has suggested as recently as this year, he should proceed anyway. "If the elected president says, 'I get to control the staff of my own government' and the Supreme Court steps in and says 'You're not allowed to do that' — like, that is the constitutional crisis. It's not whatever Trump or whoever else decides to do in response," Vance told *Politico* months before becoming

Trump’s vice presidential nominee.

Heritage Foundation president Kevin Roberts sees the think tank’s role as “institutionalizing Trumpism” and is a friend of Vance, whom he’s referred to as “one of the leaders – if not the leader – of our movement.” Under Roberts, Heritage has shed its former identity as a home for free trade fanatics and Reagan Republicans and has fully leaned into an ultranationalist MAGA ethos. Vance wrote the foreword to Roberts’ book *Dawn’s Early Light*, whose publication date was pushed back from September until November – after the election.

Heritage isn’t alone in this transformation. The right-wing think tank ecosystem has been completely remade in Trump’s image since 2016. The far-right fringes have now taken over the mainstream, putting forth an exclusionary vision of America and who belongs in it – one in which nuclear families are led by an all-powerful executive who is accountable to nothing and no one. The Claremont Institute, once fairly traditional, is now the self-styled intellectual MAGA brain trust. Michael Anton, a former Trump administration official and Claremont fellow, wrote about Bronze Age Pervert’s book for the *Claremont Review of Books*; his review noted he had been gifted a copy by Yarvin.

Yarvin is by no means Vance’s only influence. As *Politico*’s Ian Ward has written, Vance’s worldview has been shaped by a variety of right-wing thinkers, including Catholic intellectual Patrick Deneen and French philosopher René Girard, but it’s also been affected by people like Thiel and Yarvin. If you strip away the veneer of respectability provided by Heritage and Claremont, the layers of irony behind which Yarvin hides his views, and the academic credentials of Vance’s other influences, the extreme nature of their proposals becomes impossible to ignore.

Vance is smart enough not to cite Yarvin in public now that

he’s the vice presidential nominee, and he hasn’t publicly supported some of the blogger’s more repugnant views. But that doesn’t mean he’s not plugged in.

https://www.theverge.com/2024/10/16/24266512/jd-vance-curtis-yarvin-influence-rage-project-2025