

Archipelago and Atomic Communitarianism

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I

In the old days, you had your Culture, and that was that. Your Culture told you lots of stuff about what you were and weren't allowed to do, and by golly you listened. Your Culture told you to work the job prescribed to you by your caste and gender, to marry who your parents told you to marry or at *least* someone of the opposite sex, to worship at the proper temples and the proper times, and to talk about *proper* things as opposed to the blasphemous things said by the tribe over there.

Then we got Liberalism, which said all of that was mostly bunk. Like Wicca, its motto is "Do as you will, so long as it harms none". Or in more political terms, "Your right to swing your fist ends where my nose begins" or "If you don't like gay sex, don't have any" or "If you don't like this TV program, don't watch it" or "What happens in the bedroom between consenting adults is none of your business" or "It neither breaks my arm nor picks my pocket". Your job isn't to enforce your conception of virtue upon everyone to build the Virtuous Society, it's to live your own life the way you want to live it and

let other people live *their* own lives the way *they* want to live them. This is the much-maligned “atomic individualism,” or maybe just liberalism boiled down to its pure essence.

But atomic individualism wasn’t as great a solution as it sounded. Maybe one of the first cracks was tobacco ads. Even though putting up a billboard saying “SMOKE MARLBORO” neither breaks anyone’s arm nor picks their pocket, it shifts social expectations in such a way that bad effects occur. It’s hard to dismiss that with “Well, it’s people’s own choice to smoke and they should live their lives the way they want” if studies show that more people will want to live their lives in a way that gives them cancer in the presence of the billboard than otherwise.

From there we go into policies like Michael Bloomberg’s ban on giant sodas. While the soda ban itself was probably as much symbolic as anything, it’s hard to argue with the impetus behind it – a culture where everyone gets exposed to the option to buy very very unhealthy food all the time is going to be less healthy than one where there are some regulations in place to make EAT THIS DONUT NOW a less salient option. I mean, I *know* this is true. A few months ago when I was on a diet I *cringed* every time one my coworkers brought in a box of free donuts and placed wide-open in the doctors’ lounge; there was *no way* I wasn’t going to take one (or two, or three). I could ask people to stop, but they probably wouldn’t, and even if they did I’d just encounter the wide-open box of free donuts *somewhere else*. I’m not proposing that it is *ethically wrong* to bring in free donuts or that banning them is the correct policy, but I do want to make it clear that stating “it’s your free

choice to partake or not” doesn’t eliminate the problem, and that this points to an entire class of serious issues where atomic individualism as construed above is at best an imperfect heuristic.

And I would be remiss talking about the modern turn away from individualism without mentioning social justice. The same people who once deployed individualistic arguments against conservatives: “If you don’t like profanity, don’t use it”, “If you don’t like this offensive TV show, don’t watch it”, “If you don’t like pornography, don’t buy it” – are now concerned about people using ethnic slurs, TV shows without enough minority characters, and pornography that encourages the objectification of women. I’ve objected to some of this on [purely empirical grounds](#), but the [least convenient possible world](#) is the one where the purely empirical objections fall flat. If they ever discover proof positive that yeah, pornographication makes women hella objectified, is it acceptable to censor or ban misogynist media on a society-wide level?

And if the answer is yes – and if such media like really, *really* increases the incidence of rape I’m not sure how it couldn’t be – then what about all those conservative ideas we’ve been neglecting for so long? What if strong, cohesive, religious, demographically uniform communities make people more trusting, generous, and cooperative in a way that *also* decreases violent crime and other forms of misery? We have [lots of evidence](#) that this is true, and although we can doubt each individual study, we owe conservatives the courtesy of imagining the possible world in which they are right, the same as anti-misogyny leftists. Maybe media glorifying criminals or lionizing nonconformists above those who quietly fol-

low cultural norms has the same kind of erosive effects on “values” as misogynist media. Or, at the very least, we ought to have a good philosophy in place so that we have some idea what to do if it does.



A while ago, in Part V of [this essay](#), I praised liberalism as the only peaceful answer to Hobbes’ dilemma of the war of all against all.

Hobbes says that if everyone’s fighting then everyone loses out. Even the winners probably end up worse off than if they had just been able to live in peace. He says that governments are good ways to prevent this kind of conflict. Someone – in his formulation a king – tells everyone else what they’re going to do, and then everyone else does it. No fighting necessary. If someone tries to start a conflict by ignoring the king, the king crushes them like a bug, no prolonged fighting involved.

But this replaces the problem of potential warfare with the problem of potential tyranny. So we’ve mostly shifted from absolute monarchies to other forms of government, which is all nice and well except that governments allow a *different* kind of war of all against all. Instead of trying to kill their enemies and steal their stuff, people are tempted to ban their enemies and confiscate their stuff. Instead of killing the Protestants, the Catholics simply ban Protestantism. Instead of forming vigilante mobs to stone homosexuals, the straights merely declare homosexuality is punishable by death.

It *might* be better than the alternative – at least everyone knows where they stand and things stay peaceful – but the end result is still a lot of pretty miserable people.

Liberalism is a new form of Hobbesian equilibrium where the government enforces not only a ban on killing and stealing from people you don't like, but also a ban on tyrannizing them out of existence. This is the famous "freedom of religion" and "freedom of speech" and so on, as well as the "freedom of what happens in the bedroom between consenting adults". The Catholics don't try to ban Protestantism, the Protestants don't try to ban Catholicism, and everyone is happy.

Liberalism only works when it's clear to everyone on all sides that there's a certain neutral principle everyone has to stick to. The neutral principle can't be the Bible, or Atlas Shrugged, or anything that makes it look like one philosophy is allowed to judge the others. Right now that principle is the Principle of Harm: you can do whatever you like unless it harms other people, in which case stop. We seem to have inelegantly tacked on an "also, we can collect taxes and use them for a social safety net and occasional attempts at social progress", but it seems to be working pretty okay too.

The Strict Principle of Harm says that pretty much the only two things the government can get angry at is literally breaking your leg or picking your pocket – violence or theft. The Loose Principle of Harm says that the government can get angry at complicated indirect harms, things that Weaken The Moral Fabric Of Society. Like

putting up tobacco ads. Or having really really big sodas. Or publishing hate speech against minorities. Or eroding trust in the community. Or media that objectifies women.

No one except the most ideologically pure libertarians seems to want to insist on the Strict Principle of Harm. But allowing the Loose Principle Of Harm restores all of the old wars to control other people that liberalism was supposed to prevent. The one person says “Gay marriage will result in homosexuality becoming more accepted, leading to increased rates of STDs! That’s a harm! We must ban gay marriage!” Another says “Allowing people to send their children to non-public schools could lead to kids at religious schools that preach against gay people, causing those children to commit hate crimes when they grow up! That’s a harm! We must ban non-public schools!” And so on, forever.

And I’m talking about non-governmental censorship just as much as government censorship. Even in the most anti-gay communities in the United States, the laws usually allow homosexuality or oppose it only in very weak, easily circumvented ways. The real problem for gays in these communities is the social pressure – whether that means disapproval or risk of violence – that they would likely face for coming out. This too is a violation of liberalism, and it’s one that’s as important or more important than the legal sort.

And right now our way of dealing with these problems is to argue them. “Well, gay people don’t really increase STDs too much.” Or “Home-schooled kids do better than public-schooled kids, so we need to allow them.” The problem is that arguments never termi-

nate. Maybe if you're *incredibly* lucky, after years of fighting you can get a couple of people on the other side to admit your side is right, but this is a pretty hard process to trust. The great thing about religious freedom is that it short-circuits the debate of "Which religion is correct, Catholicism or Protestantism?" and allows people to tolerate both Catholics and Protestants even if they are divided about the answer to this object-level question. The great thing about freedom of speech is that it short-circuits the debate of "Which party is correct, the Democrats or Republicans?" and allows people to express both liberal and conservative opinions even if they are divided about the object-level question.

If we force all of our discussions about whether to ban gay marriage or allow home schooling to depend on resolving the dispute about whether they indirectly harm the Fabric of Society in some way, we're forcing dependence on object-level arguments in a way that historically has been very very bad.

Presumably here the more powerful groups would win out and be able to oppress the less powerful groups. We end up with exactly what liberalism tried to avoid – a society where everyone is the guardian of the virtue of everyone else, and anyone who wants to live their lives in a way different from the community's consensus is out of luck.

In Part I, I argued that *not allowing* people to worry about culture and community at all was inadequate, because these things really do matter.

Here I'm saying that if we *do allow* people to worry about culture and community, we risk the bad old medieval days where all non-conformity gets ruthlessly quashed.

Right now we're balanced precariously between the two states. There's a lot of liberalism, and people are generally still allowed to be gay or home-school their children or practice their religion or whatever. But there's also quite a bit of Enforced Virtue, where kids are forbidden to watch porn and certain kinds of media are censored and in some communities mentioning that you're an atheist will get you Dirty Looks.

It tends to work okay for most of the population. Better than the alternatives, maybe? But there's still a lot of the population that's not free to do things that are very important to them. And there's also a lot of the population that would like to live in more "virtuous" communities, whether it's to lose weight faster or avoid STDs or not have to worry about being objectified. Dealing with these two competing issues is a pretty big part of political philosophy and one that most people don't have any principled solution for.



Imagine a new frontier suddenly opening. Maybe a wizard appears and gives us a map to a new archipelago that geographers had missed for the past few centuries. He doesn't want to rule the archipelago himself, though he will reluctantly help kickstart the government. He just wants to give directions and a free galleon to any-

body who wants one and can muster a group of likeminded friends large enough to start a self-sustaining colony.

And so the equivalent of our paleoconservatives go out and found communities based on virtue, where all sexual deviancy is banned and only wholesome films can be shown and people who burn the flag are thrown out to be eaten by wolves.

And the equivalent of our social justiciars go out and found communities where all movies have to have lots of strong minority characters in them, and all slurs are way beyond the pale, and nobody misgenders anybody.

And the equivalent of our Objectivists go out and found communities based totally on the Strict Principle of Harm where everyone is allowed to do whatever they want and there are no regulations on business and everything is super-capitalist all the time.

And some people who just really want to lose weight go out and found communities where you're not allowed to place open boxes of donuts in the doctors' lounge.

Usually the communities are based on a charter, which expresses some founding ideals and asks only the people who agree with those ideals to enter. The charter also specifies a system of government. It could be an absolute monarch, charged with enforcing those ideals upon a population too stupid to know what's good for them. Or it could be a direct democracy of people who all agree on

some basic principles but want to work out for themselves what direction the principles take them.

After a while the wizard decides to formalize and strengthen his system, not to mention work out some of the ethical dilemmas.

First he bans communities from declaring war on each other. That's an *obvious* gain. He could just smite warmongers, but he thinks it's more natural and organic to get all the communities into a united government (UniGov for short). Every community donates a certain amount to a military, and the military's only job is to quash anyone from any community who tries to invade another.

Next he addresses externalities. For example, if some communities emit a lot of carbon, and that causes global warming which threatens to destroy other communities, UniGov puts a stop to that. If the offending communities refuse to stop emitting carbon, then there's that military again.

The third thing he does is prevent memetic contamination. If one community wants to avoid all media that objectifies women, then no other community is allowed to broadcast women-objectifying media at it. If a community wants to live an anarcho-primitivist lifestyle, nobody else is allowed to import TVs. Every community decides *exactly* how much informational contact it wants to have with the rest of the continent, and no one is allowed to force them to have more than that.

But the wizard and UniGov's most important task is to think of the children.

Imagine you're conservative Christians, and you're tired of this secular godless world, so you go off with your conservative Christian friends to found a conservative Christian community. You all pray together and stuff and are really happy. Then you have a daughter. Turns out she's atheist and lesbian. What now?

Well, it might be that your kid would be much happier at the lesbian separatist community the next island over. The *absolute minimum* the united government can do is enforce freedom of movement. That is, the *second* your daughter decides she doesn't want to be in Christiantopia anymore, she goes to a UniGov embassy nearby and asks for a ticket out, which they give her, free of charge. She gets airlifted to Lesbianopia the next day. If *anyone* in Christiantopia tries to prevent her from reaching that embassy, or threatens her family if she leaves, or expresses the *slightest* amount of coercion to keep her around, UniGov burns their city and salts their field.

But this is not nearly enough to fully solve the child problem. A child who is abused may be too young to know that escape is an option, or may be brainwashed into thinking they are evil, or guilted into believing they are betraying their families to opt out. And although there is no perfect, elegant solution here, the practical solution is that UniGov enforces some pretty strict laws on child-rearing, and every child, no matter what other education they receive, also has to receive a class taught by a UniGov representative in

which they learn about the other communities in the Archipelago, receive a basic non-brainwashed view of the world, and are given directions to their nearest UniGov representative who they can give their opt-out request to.

The list of communities they are informed about always starts with the capital, ruled by UniGov itself and considered an inoffensive, neutral option for people who don't want anywhere in particular. And it always ends with a reminder that if they can gather enough support, UniGov will provide them with a galleon to go out and found their own community in hitherto uninhabited lands.

There's one more problem UniGov has to deal with: malicious inter-community transfer. Suppose that there is some community which puts extreme effort into educating its children, an education which it supports through heavy taxation. New parents move to this community, reap the benefits, and then when their children grow up they move back to their previous community so they don't have to pay the taxes to educate anyone else. The communities themselves prevent some of this by immigration restrictions – anyone who's clearly taking advantage of them isn't allowed in (except in the capital, which has an official commitment to let in anyone who wants). But that still leaves the example of people maliciously leaving a high-tax community once they've got theirs. I imagine this is a big deal in Archipelago politics, but that in practice UniGov asks these people, even in their new homes, to pay higher tax rates to subsidize their old community. Or since that could be morally objectionable (imagine the lesbian separatist having to pay taxes to Christiantopia which oppressed her), maybe they pay the excess

taxes to UniGov itself, just as a way of disincentivizing malicious movement.

Because there *are* UniGov taxes, and most people are happy to pay them. In my fantasy, UniGov isn't an enemy, where the Christians view it as this evil atheist conglomerate trying to steal their kids away from them and the capitalists view it as this evil socialist conglomerate trying to enforce high taxes. The Christians, the capitalists, and everyone else are extraordinarily *patriotic* about being part of the Archipelago, for its full name is the Archipelago of Civilized Communities, it is the standard-bearer of civilization against the barbaric outside world, and it is precisely the institution that allows them to maintain their distinctiveness in the face of what would otherwise be irresistible pressure to conform. Atheistopia is the enemy of Christiantopia, but only in the same way the Democratic Party is the enemy of the Republican Party – two groups within the same community who may have different ideas but who consider themselves part of the same broader whole, fundamentally allies under a banner of which both are proud.

IV

Robert Nozick once proposed a similar idea as a libertarian utopia, and it's easy to see why. UniGov does very very little. Other than the part with children and the part with evening out taxation regimes, it just sits around preventing communities from using force against each other. That makes it very very easy for anyone who wants freedom to start a community that grants them the kind

of freedom they want – or, more likely, to just start a community organized on purely libertarian principles. The United Government of Archipelago is the perfect minarchist night watchman state, and any additions you make over that are chosen by your own free will.

But other people could view the same plan as a conservative utopia. Conservatism, when it's not just Libertarianism Lite, is about building strong cohesive communities of relatively similar people united around common values. Archipelago is obviously built to make this as easy as possible, and it's hard to imagine that there wouldn't pop up a bunch of communities built around the idea of Decent Small-Town God-Fearing People where everyone has white picket fences and goes to the same church and nobody has to lock their doors at night (so basically Utah; I feel like this is one of the rare cases where the US' mostly-in-name-only Archipelagerness really asserts itself). People who didn't fit in could go to a Community Of People Who Don't Fit In and would have no need to nor right to complain, and no one would have to deal with Those Durned Bureaucrats In Washington telling them what to do.

But to me, this seems like a liberal utopia, even a leftist utopia, for three reasons.

The first reason is that it extends the basic principle of liberalism – solve differences of opinion by letting everyone do their own thing according to their own values, then celebrate the diversity this produces. I like homosexuality, you don't, fine, I can be homosexual and you don't have to, and having both gay and straight people living side by side enriches society. This just takes the whole thing

one meta-level up – I want to live in a very sexually liberated community, you want to live in a community where sex is treated purely as a sacred act for the purpose of procreation, fine, I can live in the community I want and you can live in the community you want, and having both sexually-liberated and sexually-pure communities living side by side enriches society. It is pretty much saying that the solution to any perceived problems of liberalism is *much more liberalism*.

The second reason is quite similar to the conservative reason. A lot of liberals have some pretty strong demands about the sorts of things they want society to do. I was recently talking to Ozy about a group who believe that society billing thin people is fatphobic, and that everyone needs to admit obese people can be just as attractive and date more of them, and that anyone who preferentially dates thinner people is Problematic. They also want people to stop talking about nutrition and exercise publicly. I sympathize with these people, especially having recently read a study showing that [obese people are much happier when surrounded by other obese, rather than skinny people](#). But realistically, their movement will fail, and even philosophically, I'm not sure how to determine if they have the right to demand what they are demanding or what that question means. Their best bet is to found a community on these kinds of principles and only invite people who already share their preferences and aesthetics going in.

The third reason is the reason I specifically draw leftism in here. Liberalism, and to a much greater degree leftism, are marked by the emphasis they place on oppression. They're particularly

marked by an emphasis on oppression being a really hard problem, and one that is structurally inherent to a certain society. They are marked by a moderate amount of despair that this oppression can ever be rooted out.

And I think a pretty strong response to this is making sure everyone is able to say “Hey, you better not oppress us, because if you do, we can pack up and go somewhere else.”

Like if you want to protest that this is unfair, that people shouldn't be forced to leave their homes because of oppression, fine, fair enough. But given that oppression *is* going on, and you haven't been able to fix it, giving people the *choice* to get away from it seems like a pretty big win. I am reminded of the many Jews who moved from Eastern Europe to America, the many blacks who moved from the southern US to the northern US or Canada, and the many gays who make it out of extremely homophobic areas to friendlier large cities. One could even make a metaphor, I think rightly, to telling battered women that they are allowed to leave their husbands, telling them they're not forced to stay in a relationship that they consider abusive, and making sure that there are shelters available to receive them.

If any person who feels oppressed can leave whenever they like, to the point of being provided a free plane ticket by the government, how long can oppression go on before the oppressors give up and say “Yeah, guess we need someone to work at these factories now that all our workers have gone to the communally-owned factory

down the road, we should probably at least let people unionize or something so they will tolerate us”?

A commenter in the latest Asch thread mentioned an interesting quote by Frederick Douglass:

The American people have always been anxious to know what they shall do with us [black people]. I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. Do nothing with us!

It sounds like, if Frederick Douglass had the opportunity to go to some other community, or even found a black ex-slave community, no racists allowed, he probably would have taken it [edit: [or not, or had strict conditions](#)]. If the people in slavery during his own time period had had the chance to leave their plantations for that community, I bet they would have taken it too. And if you believe there are still people today whose relationship with society are similar in kind, if not in degree, to that of a plantation slave, you should be pretty enthusiastic about the ability of exit rights and free association to disrupt those oppressive relationships.

V

We lack Archipelago’s big advantage – a vast frontier of unsettled land.

Which is not to say that people don't form communes. They do. Some people even have really clever ideas along these lines, like the seasteaders. But the United States isn't going to become Archipelago any time soon.

There's another problem too, which I describe in my [Anti-Reactionary FAQ](#). Discussing 'exit rights', I say:

Exit rights are a great idea and of course having them is better than not having them. But I have yet to hear Reactionaries who cite them as a panacea explain in detail what exit rights we need beyond those we have already.

The United States allows its citizens to leave the country by buying a relatively cheap passport and go anywhere that will take them in, with the exception of a few arch-enemies like Cuba – and those exceptions are laughably easy to evade. It allows them to hold dual citizenship with various foreign powers. It even allows them to renounce their American citizenship entirely and become sole citizens of any foreign power that will accept them.

Few Americans take advantage of this opportunity in any but the most limited ways. When they do move abroad, it's usually for business or family reasons, rather than a rational decision to move to a different country with policies more to their liking. There are constant threats by dissatisfied Americans to move to Canada, and one in a thousand even carry through with them, but the general situation seems to be

that America has a very large neighbor that speaks the same language, and has an equally developed economy, and has policies that many Americans prefer to their own country's, and isn't too hard to move to, and almost no one takes advantage of this opportunity. Nor do I see many people, even among the rich, moving to Singapore or Dubai.

Heck, the US has fifty states. Moving from one to another is as easy as getting in a car, driving there, and renting a room, and although the federal government limits exactly how different their policies can be you better believe that there are very important differences in areas like taxes, business climate, education, crime, gun control, and many more. Yet aside from the fascinating but small-scale Free State Project there's little politically-motivated interstate movement, nor do states seem to have been motivated to converge on their policies or be less ideologically driven.

What if we held an exit rights party, and nobody came?

Even aside from the international problems of gaining citizenship, dealing with a language barrier, and adapting to a new culture, people are just rooted – property, friends, family, jobs. The end result is that the only people who can leave their countries behind are very poor refugees with nothing to lose, and very rich jet-setters. The former aren't very attractive customers, and the latter have all their money in tax shelters anyway.

So although the idea of being able to choose your country like a savvy consumer appeals to me, just saying “exit rights!” isn’t going to make it happen, and I haven’t heard any more elaborate plans.

I guess I still feel that way. So although Archipelago is an interesting exercise in political science, a sort of pure case we can compare ourselves to, it doesn’t look like a practical solution for real problems.

On the other hand, I do think it’s worth becoming more Archipelagian on the margin rather than less so, and that there are good ways to do it.

One of the things that started this whole line of thought was an argument on Facebook about a very conservative Christian law school trying to open up in Canada. They had lots of rules like how their students couldn’t have sex before marriage and stuff like that. The Canadian province they were in was trying to deny them accreditation, because conservative Christians are icky. I think the exact arguments being used were that it was homophobic, because the conservative Christians there would probably frown on married gays and therefore gays couldn’t have sex at all. Therefore, the law school shouldn’t be allowed to exist. There were other arguments of about this caliber, but they all seemed to boil down to “conservative Christians are icky”.

This very much annoyed me. Yes, conservative Christians are icky. And they should be allowed to form completely voluntary communi-

ties of icky people that enforce icky cultural norms and an insular society promoting ickiness, just like everyone else. If non-conservative-Christians don't like what they're doing, they should *not go to that law school*. Instead they can go to one of the dozens of other law schools that conform to their own philosophies. And if gays want a law school even friendlier to them than the average Canadian law school, they should be allowed to create some law school that only accepts gays and bans homophobes and teaches lots of courses on gay marriage law all the time.

Another person on the Facebook thread complained that this line of arguments leads to being okay with white separatists. And so it does. Fine. I think white separatists have *exactly* the right position about where the sort of white people who want to be white separatists should be relative to everyone else – separate. I am not sure what you think you are gaining by demanding that white separatists live in communities with a lot of black people in them, but I bet the black people in those communities aren't thanking you. Why would they want a white separatist as a neighbor? Why should they have to have one?

If people want to go do their own thing in a way that harms no one else, you *let* them. That's the Archipelagian way.

(someone will protest that Archipelagian voluntary freedom of association or disassociation could, in cases of enough racial prejudice, lead to segregation, and that segregation didn't work. Indeed it didn't. But I feel like a version of segregation in which black people actually had the legally mandated right to get away from white

people and remain completely unmolested by them – and where a white-controlled government wasn't in charge of divvying up resources between white and black communities – would have worked a lot better than the segregation we actually had. The segregation we actually *had* was one in which white and black communities were separate until white people wanted something from black people, at which case they waltzed in and took it. If communities were actually totally separate, government and everything, by definition it would be impossible for one to oppress the other. The black community might start with less, but that could be solved by some kind of reparations. The Archipelagian way of dealing with this issue would be for white separatists to have separate white communities, black separatists to have separate black communities, integrationists to have integrated communities, redistributive taxation from wealthier communities going into less wealthy ones, and a strong central government ruthlessly enforcing laws against any community trying to hurt another. I don't think there's a single black person in the segregation-era South who wouldn't have taken that deal, and any black person who thinks the effect of whites on their community today is net negative should be pretty interested as well.)

This is one reason I find people who hate seasteading so distasteful. I mean, here's [what Reuters has to say about seasteading](#) :

Fringe movements, of course, rarely cast themselves as obviously fringe. Racist, anti-civil rights forces cloaked themselves in the benign language of “state's rights”. Anti-gay religious entities adopted the glossy, positive imagery of “fami-

ly values”. Similarly, though many Libertarians embrace a pseudo-patriotic apple pie nostalgia, behind this façade is a very un-American, sinister vision.

Sure, most libertarians may not want to do away entirely with the idea of government or, for that matter, government-protected rights and civil liberties. But many do — and ironically vie for political power in a nation they ultimately want to destroy. Even the right-wing pundit Ann Coulter mocked the paradox of Libertarian candidates: “Get rid of government — but first, make me president!” Libertarians sowed the seeds of anti-government discontent, which is on the rise, and now want to harvest that discontent for a very radical, anti-America agenda. The image of libertarians living off-shore in their lawless private nation-states is just a postcard of the future they hope to build on land.

Strangely, the libertarian agenda has largely escaped scrutiny, at least compared to that of social conservatives. The fact that the political class is locked in debate about whether Michele Bachmann or Rick Perry is more socially conservative only creates a veneer of mainstream legitimacy for the likes of Ron Paul, whose libertarianism may be even more extreme and dangerously un-patriotic. With any luck America will recognize anti-government extremism for what it is — before libertarians throw America overboard and render us all castaways.

Keep in mind this is because *some people want to go off and do their own thing in the middle of the ocean far away from everyone else without bothering anyone*. And the newspapers are trying to whip up a panic about “throwing America overboard”.

So one way we could become more Archipelagian is just *trying not to yell at people who are trying to go off and doing their own thing quietly with a group of voluntarily consenting friends*.

But I think a better candidate for how to build a more Archipelagian world is to encourage the fracture of society into subcultures.

Like, transsexuals may not be able to go to a transsexual island somewhere and build Transtopia where anyone who misgenders anyone else gets thrown into a volcano. But of the transsexuals I know, a lot of them have lots of transsexual friends, their cissexual friends are all up-to-date on trans issues and don't do a lot of misgendering, and they have great social networks where they share information about what businesses and doctors are or aren't trans-friendly. They can take advantage of trigger warnings to make sure they expose themselves to only the sources that fit the values of their community, the information that would get broadcast if it was a normal community that could impose media norms. As Internet interaction starts to replace real-life interaction (and I think for a lot of people the majority of their social life is already on the Internet, and for some the majority of their economic life is as well) it becomes increasingly easy to limit yourself to transsexual-friendly spaces that keep bad people away.

The rationalist community is another good example. If I wanted, I could move to the Bay Area tomorrow and never have more than a tiny amount of contact with non-rationalists again. I could have rationalist roommates, live in a rationalist group house, try to date only other rationalists, try to get a job with a rationalist nonprofit like CFAR or a rationalist company like Quixey, and never have to deal with the benighted and depressing non-rationalist world again. Even without moving to the Bay Area, it's been pretty easy for me to keep a lot of my social life, both on- and off- line, rationalist-focused, and I don't regret this at all.

I don't know if the future will be virtual reality. I expect the post-singularity future will include something like VR, although that might be like describing teleportation as "basically a sort of pack animal". But how much the immediate pre-singularity world will make use of virtual reality, I don't know.

But I bet if it doesn't, it will be because virtual reality has been circumvented by things like social networks, bitcoin, and Mechanical Turk, which make it possible to do most of your interaction through the Internet even though you're not literally plugged into it.

And that seems to me like a pretty good start in creating an Archipelago. I already hang out with various Finns and Brits and Aussies a lot more closely than I do my next-door neighbors, and if we start using litecoin and someone else starts using dogecoin then I'll be more economically connected to them too. The degree to which I encounter certain objectifying or unvirtuous or triggering media already depends more on the moderation policies of Less

Wrong and Slate Star Codex and who I block from my Facebook feed, than it does any laws about censorship of US media.

At what point are national governments rendered mostly irrelevant compared to the norms and rules of the groups of which we are voluntary members?

I don't know, but I kind of look forward to finding out. It seems like a great way to start searching for utopia, or at least getting some people away from their metaphorical abusive-husbands.

And the other thing is that I have pretty strong opinions on which communities are better than others. Some communities were founded by toxic people for ganging up with other toxic people to celebrate and magnify their toxicity, and these (surprise, surprise) tend to be toxic. Others were formed by very careful, easily-harmed people trying to exclude everyone who could harm them, and these tend to be pretty safe albeit sometimes overbearing. Other people hit some kind of sweet spot that makes friendly people want to come in and angry people want to stay out, or just do a really good job choosing friends.

But I think the end result is that the closer you come to true freedom of association, the closer you get to a world where everyone is a member of more or less the community they deserve. That would be a pretty unprecedented bit of progress.