

## Larry Wilson: Cash and crass at PayPal

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LAST week I heard a radio news story about the largest steps yet toward a cash-less society.

Not just cash-less - credit card-less.

It isn't that in the future you won't have to pay for the various privileges, and the stuff. It's that you won't have to be carrying your wallet to do so.

The NPR reporter talked about going into a Home Depot and buying some carpet cleaner even though he'd forgotten his wallet. All he needed was his smartphone and a password for money to change hands through PayPal.

He said that in some chain stores, customers are already photographed as they come through the doors, and regulars are recognized utilizing computer scanning. All they really need to do to pay up is to be there and take their purchases to the register - it's a retina scan, I suppose. Come in and don't buy anything? The computer makes a note of that as well. Soon, probably, you'll get a text when you walk away empty-handed: "How can we better supply your needs?"

Creepy, that.

I'll tell you what else is creepy. Whenever I use PayPal for an online purchase, I think of stories I've read recently about the increasing oddness of the brilliant founder of the company, Peter Thiel, famously gay and libertarian and Christian as well as smart and rich.

It turns out he's so down on the way we live now that he wants to secede not just from the use of currencies as set up over millenia - he wants to secede from nationhood itself. He's big

"seasteading" - establishing "autonomous ocean communities" offshore in international waters.

It's kind of weird, in an L. Ron Hubbard way. But more power to his Pirate Radio platforms if that's his chosen social experiment.

What bothers me is to read two quotes from a piece Thiel wrote for the libertarian Cato Institute in 2009: "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible," he says.

Well, OK, then. I've got problems with our system of government, too. But while I would (and do) joke about the inherent problems of electoral politics, I'll still take it over a benevolent dictatorship by Silicon Valley self-styled geniuses.

It's the next thought, from the same piece, that is truly repellent, though - it turns out Thiel is against women having the vote: "Since 1920, the vast increase in welfare beneficiaries and the extension of the franchise to women - two constituencies that are notoriously tough for libertarians - have rendered the notion of 'capitalist democracy' into an oxymoron."

Geez - imagine if you combined the two categories, and you were a welfare mother approaching the polling place, with Herr Sea Captain Master Mariner Peter Thiel handing out the ballots. You'd be out of luck, sister.

As columnist Leah Nelson in Intelligence Report has it, Thiel "outlined a vision of the future free from the quixotic desires of the poor, stupid, and X-chromosomed among us."

Funny - the smartest libertarian I ever met was the superb writer and long-time editor of Reason magazine, Virginia Postrel, a fellow attendee at a journalism conference up at the (Julia Morgan-designed) Asilomar in Pacific Grove. And I see from flipping through the latest Reason here on my desk that its current managing editor is Katherine Mangu-Ward. Can reasonable libertarians rise up and question the sexism of Thiel before they join him at sea?