

Liberals: A Tribute

by P.J. O'Rourke

My next book is a collection of articles about—if I may be excused for venturing upon a large theme—the battle against evil. Not that I meant to do anything so grand. I was just writing magazine pieces, trying to make a living, and evil is good copy.

I take on various types of evil. Some are simple. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait is a case of bad men doing wrong things for wicked reasons. This is the full-sized or standard pure-bred evil and is easily recognized even by moral neophytes. Other malignities—drugs in America, famine in Africa, and everything in the Middle East—are more complex. When doing battle against those evils, people sometimes have trouble deciding whom to shoot. And in my new book there is at least one evil, involving the kill-happy Irish, that is being fought whether it exists or not.

Anyway, it's a book about evil: evil ends, evil means, evil effects and causes. In a compilation of modern journalism there's nothing surprising about that. What did surprise me, on rereading those articles, is how much of the evil was authored or abetted by liberals.

Now, liberals are people I had been accustomed to thinking of as daffy, not villainous. Getting their toes caught in

their sandal straps, bumping their heads on wind chimes—how much trouble could they cause, even in a full-blown cultural-diversity frenzy? (I mean, if Europeans didn't discover North America, how'd we all get here?) But every iniquity documented in my book is traceable to bad thinking or bad government. And liberals have been vigorous cheerleaders for both.

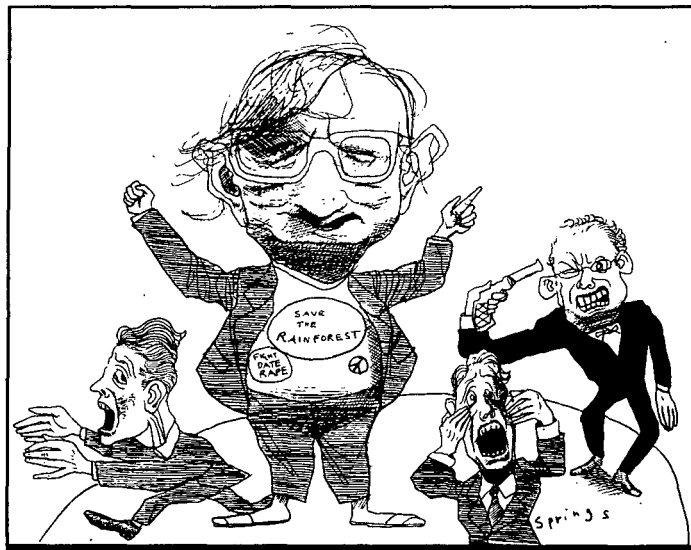
“Liberal” is, of course, one of those fine English words, like lady, gay, and welfare, that has been spoiled by special pleading. When I say *liberals* I certainly don't mean open-handed or tolerant persons or even Big Government Democrats. I mean people who are excited that one percent of the profits from Ben & Jerry's ice cream goes to promote World Peace.

The principal feature of contemporary American liberalism is sanctimoniousness. By loudly denouncing all bad things—war and hunger and date rape—liberals testify to their own terrific goodness. More important, they promote

themselves to membership in a self-selecting elite of those who care deeply about such things. People who care a lot are naturally superior to those of us who don't care any more than we have to. By virtue of this superiority, the caring have a moral right to lead the nation. It's a kind of natural aristocracy, and the wonderful thing about this aristocracy is that you don't have to be brave, smart, strong, or even lucky to join it. You just have to be liberal.¹ Kidnapping the moral high ground also serves to inflate liberal ranks. People who are in fact just kind-hearted are told that because they care they must be liberals, too.

Liberals hate wealth, they say, on grounds of economic injustice—as though prosperity were a pizza, and if I have too many slices, you're left with nothing but a Domino's box to feed your family. Even Castro and Kim Il Sung know this to be nonsense. Any rich man does more for society than all the jerks pasting VISUALIZE WORLD PEACE bumper stickers on their cars. The worst leech of a mergers-and-acquisitions lawyer making \$500,000 a year will, even if he cheats on his taxes, put \$100,000 into the public coffers. That's \$100,000 worth of education, charity, or

¹It was that talented idiot Percy Bysshe Shelley who first posited this soggy oligarchy when he said, “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” Modern liberals are no poets, however, and are hardly satisfied with legislating in the unacknowledged manner. Today's liberals love politics as much as they love disappearing rain forests, homelessness, and hate crimes, because politics is one more way to achieve power without merit or risk.



P. J. O'Rourke is the author of *Parliament of Whores*. This essay is adapted with permission from his forthcoming book, *Give War a Chance: Eyewitness Accounts of Mankind's Struggle Against Tyranny, Injustice and Alcohol-Free Beer*, to be published in April by Atlantic Monthly Press.

U.S. Marines. And the Marine Corps does more to promote world peace than all the Ben & Jerry's ice cream ever made.

Liberals hate wealth because they hate all success. They hate success when it's achieved by other people, of course, but sometimes they even hate the success they achieve themselves. What's the use of belonging to a self-selecting elite if there's a real elite around? Liberals don't like any form of individual achievement. And if there has to be some, they prefer the kind that cannot be easily quantified—"the achievement of Winnie Mandela," for example. Also, wealth is, for most people, the only honest and likely path to liberty. With money comes power over the world. Men are freed from drudgery, women from exploitation. Businesses can be started, homes built, communities formed, religions practiced, educations pursued. But liberals aren't very interested in such real and material freedoms. They have a more innocent—not to say toddler-like—idea of freedom. Liberals want the freedom to put anything into their mouths, to say bad words, and to expose their private parts in art museums.

That liberals aren't enamored of real freedom may have something to do with responsibility—that cumbersome backpack which all free men have to lug on life's aerobic nature hike. The second item in the liberal creed, after self-righteousness, is unaccountability. Liberals have invented whole college majors—psychology, sociology, women's studies—to prove that nothing is anybody's fault. No one is fond of taking responsibility for his actions, but consider how much you'd have to hate free will to come up with a political platform that advocates killing unborn babies but not convicted murderers. A callous pragmatist might favor abortion and capital punishment. A devout Christian would sanction neither. But it takes years of therapy to arrive at the liberal point of view.

Since we're not in control of ourselves, we are all vulnerable to victimization by whatever is in control. (Liberals are vague about this, but it's probably white male taxpayers or the Iran-contra conspiracy.) Liberals are fond of victims and seek them wherever they go. The more victimized the better—the best victims being too ignorant and addled to

challenge their benefactors. This is why animal rights is such an excellent liberal issue. Not even a Democratic presidential candidate is as ignorant and addled as a dead laboratory rat.

The search for victims of injustice to pester explains why liberals won't leave minorities alone. "The minority is always right," said that pesky liberal Ibsen. And, when it comes to minorities, there is none greater—or, as it were, lesser—than that ultimate of all minorities, the self. Here the liberal truly comes into his own. There is nothing more mealy-mouthed, bullying, irresponsible, and victimized than a well-coddled self, especially if it belongs to a liberal.

Liberal self-obsession is manifested in large doses of quack psychoanalysis, crank spiritualism, insalubrious health fads, and helpless self-help seminars. The liberal makes grim attempts to hold on to his youth—fussing with his hair, his wardrobe, his speech, and even his ideology in an attempt to retain the perfect solipsism of adolescence. He has a ridiculous and egotistical relationship with God, by turns denying He exists and

hiding in His skirts. Either way—as God's special friend or as the highest form of sentient life on the planet—the liberal grows in self-importance. The liberal is continually angry, as only a self-important man can be, with his civilization, his culture, his country, and his folks back home. His is an infantile worldview. At the core of liberalism is the spoiled child—miserable, as all spoiled children are, unsatisfied, demanding, ill-disciplined, despotic, and useless. Liberalism is a philosophy of sniveling brats.

There! It was good to get that off my chest. Now that I've had my say, however, you may be wondering—don't I sometimes get called a Nazi? Yes, name-calling, in which conservatives such as myself are so loath to indulge, is a favorite tactic of the liberals. I have often been called a Nazi, and, although it is unfair, I don't let it bother me. I don't let it bother me for one simple reason. No one has ever had a fantasy about being tied to a bed and sexually ravished by someone dressed as a liberal. □

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Rock Bottom

by Benjamin J. Stein

Monday

My beautiful but difficult neighbor T., the stunning blonde from Mississippi who works in the music business, made me promise I would go with her to a concert by Tin Machine. It's a band led by my idol David Bowie, a true genius. So, even though I had not been to a rock concert in fifteen years and had not missed them one bit, I agreed to go. T. and I rendezvoused at 10:00 p.m. at my condo. She was all in black (rock style), and I wore my pink Brooks Brothers shirt and red sweater (Columbia College Class of 1966 style). I could tell T. was humiliated at my not wearing black, but she bit her lip and we went over to The Palladium.

To get to the punch line right away, at the concert there was a mob of miserable-looking people all dressed in black, many young people with pins and rings through their faces, about half of them with leather jackets. There was deafening, indecipherable waves of noise from the stage, and, right behind where T. and I were standing, a man selling *ear plugs*.

You got it, Jack. Ear plugs.

Now, when I was in high school, I used to go to rock 'n' roll concerts at the old Uline Arena in D.C. Little Richard. Screamin' Jay Hawkins. The Platters. The Moonglows. The Shirelles. Big names. The music was beautiful, bewitching, even if sometimes anarchic. The audience was rapt.

In college, I went to concerts at the Lincoln Center featuring Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. In 1962, when Dylan turned music upside-down, I can recall sitting so close to him that I could see the spittle coming out of his harmonica as he played "It Ain't Me Babe."

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After law school, I had a girlfriend who worshipped Mick Jagger. We went to Rolling Stones concerts at RFK Stadium in Washington, at Madison Square Garden in New York, maybe somewhere in San Francisco, too, as I think about it. The music was loud, and our ears hurt when we left, but everyone was smiling and happy, and we certainly wanted to hear the music, to hear Mickey talk about Zuma Beach (where I now live) and Wild Horses.

When I worked at the *Wall Street Journal*, covering pop culture, among other things, I went to dozens of rock concerts. Al Greene, Bad Company, even John Lennon and the Faces. I love music. It's a drug, but in moderation it's no worse than the occasional Chardonnay.

There's a point to music, even rock music. It takes you away, amuses you, uplifts, makes melancholy, accesses that upstairs room of the soul that other forms of communication often cannot reach. In concerts, you also get a form of communion with your fellow humans that ends loneliness for a time (and then makes you grateful for it when it comes).

But ear plugs? T. and I left after about fifteen minutes, and after dropping her off, I called D., another friend in the music business. "People wear ear plugs all the time at concerts," she said. "It really makes you wonder why they bother to go."

Sometimes I see hoodlums riding around here in Camaros with guitar cases in back and bumper stickers that read "If the music's too loud, you're too old." Maybe so. Or maybe if the music's too loud, it's not music.

Tuesday

Doo-doo happens. Morning at my house in Malibu. Fatigue. Failure. Loss. Loneliness. All sparked by a story in the *Wall Street*

Journal about some stock called TCI that's gone up by an incredible factor of 800 since 1975. I owned a few hundred shares of that stock in the early 1980s and it never went anywhere. Now it's up by 800 times? This is what leads people to suicide.

I lay in bed hugging Trixie, wondering if I should take pills, shoot myself, or what. Then I remembered that I couldn't kill myself this morning because I have to be on a cable comedy channel, Comedy Central, to comment on President Bush's State of the Union Address. That'll be at 6:30 our time, and then I'll kill myself.

I got dressed and read some correspondence, including a cryptic note from Michael Eisner *sending back* the Christmas card I sent him a few weeks ago. Then I went to a meeting that I now call "Voyage into Self-Obsession." People talked about how happy they were that they were alive and not sticking a needle into their arms. I felt glad about it, too, and my mood started to improve. So now I won't kill myself at least until dinner time.

I ducked out of the meeting to listen to my saintly father talking about the State of the Union message on my car radio. Then I called my assistant Susan, who told me that a reporter from Channel 13 was on his way to ask me for my comic views of the State of the Union message. I love being interviewed, so now I can't kill myself until after that interview, the State of the Union address, my comments on it, and then dinner, and it's very possible that, after all that, I'll be too tired to even load my gun.

On my way home, I heard that Bush was going to repeal the luxury tax on yachts. I like it a lot, but there is much more that needs to be done:

- A federal grant to develop a truly good domestic bottled water.