

rassment' with serious forms of sexual assault and abuse," she writes, "is to invite authoritarianism into our lives—the hand of the state everywhere in the private sphere, until there is virtually no private sphere left."

Like many other critics of feminist extremism, Patai notes that it is bad for feminism itself, insofar as feminism is about equality and dignity for women. Refreshingly, however, she adds that one should be able "to attack feminism for the harm it is doing to men and to non-feminist women," not just to its own cause. Patai doesn't just denounce male bashing; she has genuine sympathy for men and a strong sense of the common humanity of men and women. She proposes a fascinating mental exercise: Imagine that men start to clamor for protections against "emotional harassment" by women (all those demands to express their feelings!) similar to current protections for women from sexual harassment by men.

This thoughtful and fair-minded book might have been helped by a look at the question of whether serious sexual misconduct sometimes goes unpunished—when, for example, the wrongdoer is influ-

ential or has the support of campus feminists. One also wishes Patai had included more material from the world outside of university campuses; as it is, she leaves room for the argument that the excesses of the sexual harassment industry which she chronicles are limited to the academy (they are not). Then, too, a few of her case histories might have benefited from more detail. But these are quibbles.

Heterophobia is a powerful brief for personal freedom and against efforts to politicize human relations and strip them of their complexity. Patai leaves no doubt that sexual harassment laws and policies as they exist today do far more harm than good. Perhaps, as President Clinton's tribulations continue to fuel a backlash against "sexual McCarthyism," this timely book can provide an additional push for a rethinking of the ideological and legal orthodoxies that have gotten us where we are now. ♦

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Tasty Economics

By Max Schulz

Eat the Rich: A Treatise on Economics, by P.J. O'Rourke, New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 246 pages, \$24.00

Those whose exposure to economics is limited to collegiate readings of Paul Samuelson's popular textbook would likely second Thomas Carlyle's characterization of the subject as "the Dismal Science." Economics can indeed be dismal when confined to bewildering graphs, stupefying charts, mind-numbing (and often wrong) theories, and classroom discussions led by tenured careerists who may have never worked outside academia.

But economics is really the study of how people live and act day to day. Economics isn't the study of graphs and currency flows and GNP numbers as much as it is the study of human interaction.

Now comes *Eat the Rich*, a refreshing

look at economics by someone who grasps this point and runs with it. The question P.J. O'Rourke, irreverent author of books such as *Parliament of Whores* and a contributor to *Rolling Stone*, seeks to answer is simple: "Why do some places prosper, and others just suck?" Not too different from the question Jude Wanniski, in slightly more elegant form, claimed to answer 20 years ago in his classic *The Way the World Works*. But O'Rourke has one thing over Jude Wanniski: His book is a hell of a lot funnier.

Open *Eat the Rich* and the one-liners jump out. On page 46, the "heart-surgery-colored" Albanian flag bears "the



Not-So-Dismal Scientist: P.J. O'Rourke's *Eat the Rich* seeks to answer the question, "Why do some places prosper, and others just suck?"

image of what's either a two-headed eagle or a very angry freak-show chicken." On page 149: "Measuring the current Russian economic situation against the old Soviet economy is like trying to do arithmetic by tasting the numbers." On page 178, discussing whether the stated reasons for the West's giving Tanzania so much foreign aid—to keep it from going communist—were sensible or not: "The ugly truth is that we care about Tanzanians because they have cool animals."

Credit O'Rourke with seeking empirical evidence to answer his grand question. Or at least credit whoever signs off on his expense account. In preparation for *Eat the Rich*, he traveled the globe, from Wall Street to Tiranë (capital of Albania), from Sweden to its "evil twin," Cuba. He explored locales such as Russia, Hong Kong, and Shanghai.

The charming conceit of this text is that its author has no formal economic training, that he is an idiot on the subject. He just traipses about, poking around and seeing what other peoples around the world do to get by each day. Those familiar with O'Rourke's previous writings will know this to be something of a pose. I recall a hilarious piece he wrote nearly a decade ago lambasting America's skewed agricultural price support system. It was among the most concise and on-the-mark treatments the subject has received.

O'Rourke knows more than he lets on, even if he did blow off Econ 101.

He notes that governments don't cause affluence, that citizens of totalitarian countries have had lots of government for decades and nothing of anything else. At the same time, making his point that complete absence of government doesn't work either, he remarks that "for a million years mankind had no government at all, and everyone's relatives were naked in trees."

So O'Rourke sees what works (or, more

with that, at least for a while, you don't need Kant to tell you that such a system can't work everywhere.

This may sound a bit serious or stuffy. But O'Rourke's charm is that he's not one of the self-serious types found haunting the low-rent neighborhood of cable television networks sponsored by NBC, pompously holding forth on the affairs of the day. None of which means this isn't a serious book. It is. Very much so. It just happens to be slap-ass funny, too. That

"This is central planning. And anybody who advocates central planning—from Gennady Zyuganov to Sidney Blumenthal—should be made to get down on his hands and knees and lick the Irkutsk-to-Vladivostock train," writes O'Rourke about an awful Trans-Siberian Railroad trip.

often, what doesn't work) in various countries, and his observations can be fascinating. His study of the "Good Socialism" of Sweden would seem to present one rather large ideological problem: The country works. Detailing the evils of, say, Cuba is not hard. Far from living in a socialist paradise, Castro's serfs are impoverished and the country is broken down. But in Sweden, people are affluent and relatively contented; the country is peaceful. Is this the real socialist paradise?

O'Rourke describes a society whose redistributive mania has been fully endorsed by the mass of citizens. People happily tax themselves to the gills and voluntarily restrict their personal freedoms as a means to achieve equalized prosperity. Which leads O'Rourke to remark, once it dawns on him that the Swedish Stepford streets contain no loons or nuts, "The last time I walked through Gamla Stan, I didn't wonder where the crazy people were. In Sweden the craziness is redistributed fairly. They're all a little crazy."

Those who advocate Swedish-style socialism are in fact a little bit crazy, at least in thinking it could have any sort of universal application. It can't. Swedes may be willing to shell out most of their income in taxes, but most people aren't. And even those high taxes don't cover the lavish benefits of Sweden's fabled "middle way." And while one country can get away

kind of combination hasn't really occurred since, well, since O'Rourke's last book, *Age and Guile Beat Youth, Innocence and a Bad Haircut*.

Consider his foul three-day trip on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, one of many unholy relics of the old Soviet system. The hardships he records I can only hint at, but they involve disgusting and sweaty Russians cramped together, nasty overflowing restrooms, stiflingly hot cars, and (worst of all) a shortage of vodka. The lesson learned can be reprinted in full: The train is "reeking, grubby, airless, and clamorously loud," he writes. "This is central planning. And anybody who advocates central planning—from Gennady Zyuganov to Sidney Blumenthal—should be made to get down on his hands and knees and lick the Irkutsk-to-Vladivostock train." Somehow, I can't quite picture Hayek saying it the same way.

O'Rourke goes from countries that don't work to one that does—er, *did*—Hong Kong. Why did the former colony work? Because it was essentially unplanned. Its British overlords made Hong Kong successful, if those are the right words, by doing little or nothing.

Such laissez faire "isn't Tanzanian administrative sloth or Albanian popular anarchy. Quite a bit of government is required to create a system in which the government leaves people alone." "Doing

nothing" is a relative term, O'Rourke explains. It really means keeping taxes and regulation to a minimum, maintaining the rule of law, and ensuring the currency is sound.

O'Rourke does us all a great service by providing a little history lesson on Hong Kong and giving appropriate credit to Britain's postwar administrator, John Cowperthwaite, who served there from 1945 until the early '70s. Histories tend to exalt government leaders who *do* and *act* and *build* and generally expand the state, whether it is Teddy Roosevelt or FDR, Mao or Stalin. Cowperthwaite, however, accomplished more good than those grandiose and arrogant dreamers ever could. Naturally, he is virtually unknown.

When he first arrived in Hong Kong to implement the recovery, Cowperthwaite wisely recognized that the island was recovering nicely without him. He thus inflicted as little government as possible on the island, leaving it to prosper of its own accord. That sensible ethic reigned until the communist takeover in 1997.

By the end of his journeys O'Rourke has a pretty good idea why some countries prosper and why others just suck. And it boils down to some simple things: the rule of law, private property, limited government, sound money, personal freedom.

He waxes philosophical on these points, and even a little theological, as in his hilarious reflection on the 10th Commandment and what God thinks about the politics of envy: "If you want a donkey, if you want a pot roast, if you want a cleaning lady, don't bitch about what the people across the street have. *Go get your own.*" The message to all wealth redistributors "is clear and concise: Go to hell."

Eat the Rich is a book written for people who might want to know more about economics "but have never gotten further into the subject than figuring out a trifecta at Belmont." Now, if O'Rourke would only write a book about handicapping. I have no illusions that he could help me decipher the Rosetta Stone of the *Racing Form* or figure a way to hit a daily double, but at least I'd be laughing while losing my shirt. ♦

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HMO Phobia

Quack remedies for the health care "crisis"

By Thomas W. Hazlett

Dr. Ken Smith has a mission: to destroy the HMO system which today enrolls 85 percent of insured Americans. The Boston-based physician's reasons are simple and humane: "We are for patients, not profits." And his disgust is real: "How dare somebody in some board room in Connecticut decide what I'm worth, and on a whim decide that my worth should be reduced?"

The elements of the current crusade against managed care combine the front-page horror story of the access-denied victim with the political clout of a network of influential millionaires. In swank country clubs all across the land, high-powered attorneys are burying the hatchet with prosperous physicians, getting beyond that little multibillion-dollar spat over medical malpractice. Now they're toasting martinis and swearing litigation against the common enemy: HMOs that clamp down on medical costs.

It may shock the good Dr. Smith, but many of the common folk are quite used

party payments. When Dr. Smith was perfectly free to prescribe for "his" patient and push the costs onto others—well, that was the Golden Age for doctors. And, coincidentally, 9.9 percent annual medical cost inflation (just to pick the peak year, 1991) for the rest of us.

Managed care stepped in—indeed, it arrived in an ambulance answering a 911 call from ratepayers. HMOs had a tough job to do, teaching lots of doctors with egos the size of Smith's that there ain't no such thing as a free surgical procedure. They have yet to succeed; a group Smith has helped to organize, The Ad Hoc Committee to Defend Health Care, protests the "HMO bean counters" and advocates a single-payer system.

The reality is that the rationing that accompanies state-run systems makes the HMOs look like big spenders. That's not because the government hires better "bean counters." Quite the reverse—the beans sort of just disappear. And then it's, "Sorry, you'll just have to wait on that heart bypass

The rationing that accompanies state-run systems makes HMOs look like big spenders. That's not because government hires better "bean counters." That's because the beans sort of just disappear.

to having distant big shots in faraway boardrooms establish the price for their labor. And as for the purity of spirit to which Smith appeals, we do appreciate the thought. But it's best to avoid any kind of competition regarding who's been more successful in bringing health care to the masses, the typical HMO shareholder vs. the typical M.D. After all, who is more likely to be recreating out on the golf course Wednesday afternoon?

The health care market is tricky, and the shadow under which all discussion takes place is the cost explosion tied to third-

until some more beans turn up."

Marc Roberts, a Harvard economist specializing in health care markets, claims that the doctors' real aim is "to regain status, power and income that they lost in this for-profit industry," and that holding the patient's welfare out as a bargaining chip is a smart stratagem. "They wouldn't gain any support if they stood up and said, 'Instead of making \$300,000, I now make \$200,000, and you should all feel sorry for me.'" The blunt fact is that letting doctors run up medical tabs resulted in runaway expenditures, stealing money from the

pockets of wage earners, who ultimately pay in the form of reduced take-home.

Unaffordability is itself a cause of illness, as it puts more Americans outside the health insurance system altogether, lessening their access to regular checkups and preventive medicine. Instead, they increasingly resort to visits to crowded hospital emergency rooms. Treatment there is inefficiently administered—and quietly tacked onto the bills of paying customers, further driving up costs and pushing more working people out.

As consumers, many of us prefer plans which offer a wide range of choice among doctor and treatments. But to receive the benefits from that high-cost deal, we do—and should—pay more via higher premiums and lower reimbursements. Government surely has a role to play enforcing contracts with insurers who attempt to renege and as a smart shopper purchasing large volumes of health care directly. (My understanding is that neither courts nor Medicare and Medicaid are as yet perfectly administered.)

The pressure to realistically assess the cost-benefit tradeoffs in medical care should be welcomed by those outside the fashionable salons where "for-profit" medicine is profitably denounced. In fact, the overwhelming majority of Americans find their HMOs good to excellent, and most rate them as superior to traditional health insurance on the value/dollar scale.

That's a state of affairs that the HMO reformers aim to change. Stuart Altman, professor of health policy at Brandeis University, notes: "The more we reduce the power of managed care to control spending by restricting services, the more we are going to take [away] the pressure of providers to constrain spending."

That's what doctors want, that's why lawyers will sue, and that's the reason Congress will legislate. But don't feel left out—you'll get the bill. ♦

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