

FERRARI REFUTES THE DECLINE OF THE WEST AND SO DO CLASSICAL COMPACT DISCS:

SOME REFLECTIONS ON FREEDOM, MATERIALISM AND THE WINNING OF THE COLD WAR

BRIAN MICKLETHWAIT



A favorite book for me in recent months has been *Republican Party Reptile* (Pan Books, Picador paperback, London, 1987, first published in the USA, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987) by the American writer P. J. O'Rourke. O'Rourke introduces himself as a "conservative". However, he says:

... I'm not completely happy about this. Let's face it, conservatives can be butt heads too. There are the reborn Jesus creeps, for instance. We should do to these what the conservative Romans did, with lions. But even regular country club-type Republicans can be stuffy about some things — dope smuggling, for example, and mixing Quaaludes in your scotch, and putting your stereo speakers on the roof of your house and turning the volume all the way up and playing Parliament of Funk at 3:00 a.m.

So what I'd really like is a new label. And I'm sure there are a lot of people who feel the same way. We are the Republican Party Reptiles. We look like Republicans, and think like conservatives, but we drive a lot faster and keep vibrators and baby oil and a video camera behind the stack of sweaters on the bedroom closet shelf. (p. xv)

Yes, well, as for me, I uphold the right of reborn Jesus creeps to be reborn Jesus creeps, but I agree that this is what they are. Dope smuggling is fine, but don't try selling it to me. So is mixing Quaaludes in your scotch, whatever a Quaalude is. What consenting individuals do with baby oil and video cameras is their business and nobody else's, and in particular, please, not mine. I love it when O'Rourke writes about Parliament of Funk at 3:00 a.m., but I absolutely do not want ever to be on the direct receiving end of such a thing. Is such pandemonium part of the deal you have with your neighbours? As Leon Louw explains in *Libertarian Alliance Legal Notes No. 10, Libertarianism and the Lessons of Common Law*, a contract need not be explicit or in writing to be a contract nevertheless. There are such things as implied contracts. And if your contract with your neighbours, explicit or merely implied, excludes 3:00 a.m. high decibel stereophony, then you should duly desist. The chances are that it does, and if you live within earshot of me it definitely does.

FROM THE TOWERS OF MANHATTAN TO THE BLUFFS OF TOPANGA CANYON

Republican Party Reptile is a collection of magazine articles, and one of them that I particularly like is called "Ferrari Refutes The Decline of the West". In this, O'Rourke describes an epic journey made by him and his boss (a certain Julian Weber) across the United States in a Ferrari 308GTS, which Ferrari North America (based in New Jersey, on the East Coast) wanted delivered to Los Angeles (on the West Coast) for use in a film that was to be made in Hawaii. O'Rourke gets the job because one of the magazines he regularly writes for is *Car and Driver*. He enjoys the trip, because the car is so wonderful, and in particular so effortlessly fast.

We came by a 930 Turbo Porsche near the Talladega exit. He was going about ninety when we passed him, and he gave us a little bit of a run, passed us at about 110, and then we passed him again. He was as game as anybody we came across and was hanging right on our tail at 120. Ah, but then — then we just *walked* away from him. Five seconds and he was nothing but a bathtub-shaped dot in the mirrors. I suppose he could have kept up, but driving one of those ass-engined Nazi slot cars must be a task at around 225 percent of the speed limit. But not for us. I've got more vibration here on my electric typewriter than we had blasting into Birmingham that beautiful morning in that beautiful tour across this wonderful country from the towers of Manhattan to the bluffs of Topanga Canyon so fast we filled the appointment logs of optometrists' offices in thirty cities just from people getting their eyes checked for seeing streaks because they watched us go by. (p. 102)

I love the lunatic excessiveness of that last sentence. And I love the way that Americans wallow in their place names. (Think of Chuck Berry's song lyrics, to take another marvellous example.) In Europe, a place is just a place. You have to live somewhere, so, okay, you live in London, or Marseilles or Milton Keynes or Aberdeen. We have far more places than we can conveniently fit in, so there's little poetry in our place names as such, only in their occasional antique associations. But in America every place is a victory, by Americans over the vast empty meaningless expanse of what America used to be before the Americans got hold of it and planted it with roads, wires, skyscrapers and shopping malls. Talladega! Birmingham! Manhattan! Topanga Canyon! America still consists almost entirely of nothingness, so every American place is a defiant assertion of humanity in the face of that nothingness. A trip across America, for an American, complete with all those wonderful place names, is like gazing at the ceiling of Kings Chapel or listening to a Beethoven symphony for a European. Doing it in the ultimate car is like listening to Beethoven on the ultimate stereo system.

Here are some of O'Rourke's climactic paragraphs:

When we got to Atlanta, the band in the hotel bar was the worst thing we'd ever heard. But it didn't matter. Nothing

Cultural Notes No. 20

ISSN 0267-677X ISBN 1 870614 96 8

An occasional publication of the Libertarian Alliance,
25 Chapter Chambers, Esterbrooke Street, London SW1P 4NN
www.libertarian.co.uk

© 1990: Libertarian Alliance; Brian Micklethwait.

The views expressed in this publication are those of its author, and not necessarily those of the Libertarian Alliance, its Committee, Advisory Council or subscribers.

Director: Dr Chris R. Tame
Editorial Director: Brian Micklethwait Webmaster: Dr Sean Gabb

FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY



could cloud our outlook. Ralph Nader himself would have been welcome at our table, so infected were we with the spirit of superiority to the humdrum concerns of daily life. I mean this car does one thing. It makes you happy.

And the car did one more thing for me. It reaffirmed my belief in America. It may sound strange to say that a \$45,000 Italian sports car reaffirmed my belief in America, but, as I said, it's all part of western civilization and here we were in America, the apogee of that fine trend in human affairs. And, after all, what have we been getting civilized *for*, all these centuries? Why did we fight all those wars, conquer all those nations, kidnap all those Africans, and kill all the Indians in the Western hemisphere? Why, for *this!* For this perfection of knowledge and craft. For this conquest of the physical elements. For this sense of mastery of man over nature. To be in control of our destinies — and there is no more profound feeling of control of one's destiny that I have ever experienced than to drive a Ferrari down a public road at 130 miles an hour. Only God can make a tree, but only man can drive by one that fast. And if the lowly Italians, the lamest, silliest, least stable of our NATO allies, can build a machine like this, just think what it is that *we* can do. We can smash the atom. We can cure polio. We can fly to the moon if we like. There is nothing we can't do. Maybe we don't happen to build Ferraris, but that's not because there's anything wrong with America. We just haven't turned the full light of our intelligence and ability in that direction. We were, you know, busy elsewhere. We may not have Ferraris but just think what our Polaris-submarines are like. And if it feels like this in a Ferrari at 130, my God, what can it possibly feel like at Mach 2.5 in an F-15? Ferrari 308s and F-15s - these are the conveyances of free men. What do the Bolshevik automatons know of destiny and its control? What have we to fear from the barbarous Red hordes? (p. 108-109)

More places follow. Dallas! Calsbad! Guadalupe Peak! El Paso!! They go by mistake from New Mexico into actual Mexico, to a place called Juarez.

Juarez, incidentally, greatly testifies to the value of western civilization by exhibiting no sign of it anywhere. (p. 111)

Then on to Las Vegas!!! And finally we read the following. Officer Huyenga, I should explain, gave them their one speeding ticket, for going ten above the ludicrous official American limit of 55 mph, on the final evening of their journey, on their way into Los Angeles (!!!!).

Juan hit the record high speed of our trip — 140, on I-10 going into Deming, New Mexico. And at Lordsburg we turned off onto U.S. 70 up into the mountains and Indian reservations east of Phoenix and from there across the desert all the way to Lake Mead. And we didn't meet a single dislikable person. Not that day or any other, from the puzzled receptionist at Ferrari North America to Officer Huyenga of the California Highway Patrol. Fine, upstanding, friendly, outgoing Americans who wanted to know how fast it would go, every one. It was truly heartening. The nicest bunch of people you'd ever care to meet. It made me wish I didn't belong to the Republican Party and the NRA just so I could go out and join both to defend it all. And rolling through the desert thus, I worked myself into a great patriotic frenzy, which culminated on the parapets of the Hoover Dam (even if that was kind of a socialistic project and built by the Roosevelt in the wheelchair and not by the good one who killed bears). With the Ferrari parked up atop that orgasmic arc of cement, doors flung open and Donna Summer's "Bad Girls" blasting into the night above the rush of a man-crafted Niagara and the crackle and the hum of mighty dynamos, I was uplifted, transported, ecstatic. A black man in a big, solid Eldorado pulled up next to us and got out to shake our hands. "You passed me this morning down in New Mexico," he said. "And that sure is a beautiful car. And you sure must have been moving because I've been going ninety on the turnpike all day and haven't stopped for anything

but gas and I just caught up with you now." But we haven't been on the turnpike, we told him. We'd been all through the mountains and had stopped for lunch and have been caught up in Phoenix traffic half the afternoon. "Goddam!" he said. "That's *beautiful!*" Now where on the face of God's green earth are you going to find a country with people like that in it? Answer me that and tell me anyplace but here and I'll strangle you for a communist spy. (p. 111-112)

O'Rourke's piece is about more than a mere car trip. It's also about why the Americans are even now winning the Cold War. (It was written before the USSR gave Eastern Europe back to its locals.) Simply, in the West people are allowed to enjoy themselves, and to obtain the appropriate machinery to do that. Don't get me wrong. Like most of the citizens of London, England, I have the heartiest contempt for any nerd who gets his thrills by careering around London or its environs in a red Ferrari at a speed any greater than our relatively sane legal limit. Red Ferraris, for me, mean flaired trousers and platform shoes, worn by oil rich Middle Eastern Englebert Humperdinck clones reading Air Traffic Control at London University, or some similarly daft type of person. Such people should go to New Mexico where they belong, where real driving in real cars makes real sense. They should not weave about on the North Circular and cause pile-ups.

Nevertheless, O'Rourke's point stands. When you do what you really and truly believe in doing, and have all the right kit to do it with, you feel very, very good, at ease with your fellow tribesmen and ready to take on any other tribe in the universe that even thinks about taking your toys away from you. It is thus that wars are won, cold or otherwise.

THE PERFECT SOUND CAPSULE

There's another manifestation of Western materialism that has been giving me exactly the same happy feeling. Compact discs!

Once upon a time there were gramophone records, and then there were gramophone records and cassette tapes. Records go wrong by emitting rhythmic artillery barrages. Tapes get chewed up and spat out in concertina form, or wound around the wheels of the tape machine. Tapes hiss predictably, and records hiss and crackled unpredictably, like bonfires.

There is something particularly frightful about a scratched record or a partially mangled tape. A cough in a concert hall is a shame, but a scratch on a beloved record means that from then on that particular bit is always going to be an ordeal instead of a delight. And of course it's always your favourite bits that suffer the most. Luddite hi-fi maniacs will tell you that if you pay proper attention to your equipment, use the right this together with the correct that, and make sure that you regularly remove the whosit from the thingamy by regular use of your whosit, while all the time making sure that your whosadaisy is correctly adjusted, then all will be well, your records will never be scratched, your tapes will never get eaten. But I'm a music fan, not a brain surgeon. I just want to shove it in and listen to it.

In the rare first edition of this I gave all the credit for compact discs to the Japanese, but apparently it was the Dutch who first devised the CD. The Japanese merely "stole" it, which presumably means made it catch on ten years quicker. Anyway, whichever consortium of capitalist exploiters it was that made CDs what they are, here's to them! Voila! The perfect sound capsule. Indestructible, silent, "programmable", infinitely reusable, twenty minutes longer than records, and no silly nonsense turning it over half way through.

I first got kitted up with a CD player in the summer of 1989, and immediately began to rebuy all my favourite music, and, when that proved less than wholly wonderful, to buy more music that I previously didn't know well, or in some cases at all. The symphonies of Carl Nielsen and Bohuslav Martinu. The string quartets and piano sonatas of Mozart. The piano trios and string quartets and sextets of Brahms. Piano trios and piano quartets by Dvorak. The Liszt piano sonata. Busoni's *Fantasia Contrapuntistica*. Lesser known Haydn symphonies, without nicknames, recorded in

Hungary, dirt cheap. The complete piano sonatas of Beethoven, Barenboim on EMI, ditto. Beethoven's arrangement for piano and orchestra of his violin concerto (Barenboim again). Familiar Beethoven symphonies, but on original instruments. *Fidelio*. *The Magic Flute*. Roy Harris' *Third Symphony*. William Schuman and Aaron Copland, ditto. And as the summer of '89 stretched out into the autumn of '89 I too became aware that the Red Automats were doomed to eventual defeat in their contest with Civilisation, even if their Eastern European surrenders of a few months later were as much a surprise to me as they doubtless were to P. J. O'Rourke.

The choice of music now coming on stream in CD form is prodigious and without precedent. Records and tapes being so perishable, no one but a fool (or a collecting maniac) buys them from any shop he can't revisit to create hell when the damn thing turns out to be scratched or jammed or otherwise screwed up. To cover for all this grief and nonsense, records and tapes had to sell very well to be worth selling at all, plus of course the collecting maniacs (the potential market for less obvious items) are also maniacs at illegal copying. Result: a very restricted range of very restricted record and tape catalogues.

But you can now happily order CDs from anywhere in the world. Result: an unbelievable range of unbelievably varied CD catalogues. When classical CDs first happened, the obvious first step was to emit yet another barrage of Beethoven and Brahms symphonies, and this was duly done. Those commentators wanting to persuade themselves that CDs were foreign and horrible and generally a bad thing announced that CDs would *restrict* the range of music available. But they aren't saying that now. By God they aren't. Peculiar new foreign labels that you've never before heard of now spring out from the magazines on a monthly basis.

A typical beneficiary of the age of CD has been the Hyperion label. Hyperion make a point of recording almost entirely unobvious music. Their latest advert, in this month's *Gramophone* (April 1990), includes number 6 in their massive Schubert song project being masterminded by ace piano accompanist Graham Johnson, the complete organ music of Durufle, some string quartets by Robert Simpson, a thing called *The Courts of Love* which turns out to be "Music from the time of Eleanor of Aquitaine", some choral music by Lassus, and the string quartet version of Haydn's *Seven Last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross*. Hardly unadventurous. The entire Hyperion catalogue is like this. On the other hand if you *want* to be unadventurous, and merely lack money, we learn in the same issue of *Gramophone* that good old safe and solid Deutsche Grammophon are offering, at a fiver each, 25 excellent Mozart CD reissues, including some fabulous performances like Mozart's piano concertos numbers 19 and 23 by Maurizio Pollini, and number 27 by Emil Gilels. And so it goes on, and on, and on.

FREEDOM IN AMERICA AND FREEDOM IN EUROPE

There are lots of reasons why I prefer classical music to faffing about in a Red Ferrari, the price of the latter being only one of them. What it comes down to is this. So far as transport is concerned I am a European rather than an American. I do not drink in the glory that is Europe by climbing into a car; I merely go by car from one bit of Europe to another. Also, being European, my head is stuffed full of rules, such as are necessary for us Europeans to inhabit Europe all at the same time without getting completely on each other's nerves, such as nevertheless happens from time to time of course. More, I am inculcated with the *idea* of rules. Sincerity must always be moderated and in many instances utterly overwhelmed by good manners. Clothes are worn, so. Knives and forks are held, so. Foul language is avoided. We Europeans all have our own opinions about Porsches, but under no circumstances would we describe such a vehicle as a "Nazi slot car". The German capacity for wickedness is, for us, too serious a thing to be used as mere verbal spice for a magazine article. Nor, in Europe, does one slaughter one's local indigenous natives, nor confine them to reservations, not if one is behaving properly; one is, within moderate limits, descended from these people. (When we Europeans behave *improperly*, there is nothing we can't do.) Freedom, for an Ameri-

can, means defying conventions and striking out on one's own. Freedom, for a European, means recognising the necessity of conventions and embracing them, while nevertheless somehow contriving to remain free, and to be oneself.

And there is, for me, no more perfect reconciliation of convention with individuality than Western classical music, no more wondrous marriage between the classical and the romantic, between the demands of them and of me, of us and of him. Mercifully one is not obliged to know one's absolute favorite piece of music; one can simply gather up all one's different current favourites and luxuriate in all of them, but I think that if I were obliged at gunpoint to name my favourite piece of music of all, that piece would be the third movement, the minuet, of Mozart's penultimate symphony, number 40 in G minor. This sublime movement is both absolutely conventional, and absolutely individual. It transports me immediately to a unique corner of paradise, but disobeys not one single rule of the road.

CDs enable me to contemplate such wonders through a window that I know will not be smashed, nor even seriously scratched. I also have some headphones, so the neighbours need never be disturbed.

"... THE CD WAS AN UTTER REVELATION"

You can tell that CDs are great, because articles have started appearing in the *Guardian* rubbishing them, along with junk food and aerosol spray cans.

There are various complaints about CDs, mostly to do with the fact that like any new recording medium, it takes people time to get acclimatised. The basic problem of CDs is that they are so incredibly accurate. Previous recording methods superimposed a layer of hiss over everything and were thus able to cover up any number of page turnings, car noises outside, or tuneless groanings from the likes of Rudolf Serkin or Glenn Gould, to say nothing of more fundamental things like a basic lack of realism caused by technicians fancying themselves able to do the job of the conductor on the cheap. The consensus among the classical music commentators is that recording quality has never been better than in the years just after stereo was first invented. The recordings of Benjamin Britten's music made by Decca in the sixties and seventies, or John Culshaw's wonderful Decca Solti *Ring Cycle*, are as good as anything done since, and compared to lots of recent recordings far, far better. With CDs we're back to a situation where only the best will do, because the knowledge of what corners *can* now be cut that couldn't be cut before does not yet exist. Some CD reissues of classic recordings have emerged horribly diminished, atmospheric babies being hurled out with the bath water of tape hiss. With the new medium of delivery, new techniques both of recording and re-processing are having to be learned, and it makes no sense to compare the crassest early errors of the CD era with the greatest achievements of the age of vinyl. The best CDs have been great from the start; soon almost all of them will be. (The above paragraph is a non-technical summary of the article "CD Sound: The Defence" by Alan Shaw, which appeared in *Hi-Fi News and Record Review*, April 1990. Shaw goes into the whole vexed question of the old "analogue" method of recording versus the new "digital" method, arguing that the significance of this change is somewhat exaggerated. Of the Decca recording of Britten's *Peter Grimes* he says: "It was with some trepidation and reverence that we auditioned the CD version: the vinyl version was outstanding, but the CD was an utter revelation. Proof again that there is nothing inherently wrong with CD.")

There's also been much moaning about how expensive CDs are. Nonsense. For starters, CDs usually play for longer. Include inflation in the calculation and full price CDs are now cheaper than full price LPs were fifteen years ago. The *Gramophone* of April 1975 cost 30p, and the full-price LPs reviewed in it then cost £3, i.e. ten times as much. *Gramophone* of April 1990 cost £1.70, and full price *compact discs* now cost £12, which is only *seven* times as much. Include the fact that most of the best older recordings and not a few of the newest ones are available at around half full price, and the claim becomes even more ludicrous. And it becomes *totally*

ludicrous if you include that wonder of the nineteen nineties, the CD *second hand market*, which is just beginning to take off. For nearly nothing, you can now buy CDs that manifested themselves off the backs of lorries, confident that they'll sound okay. Only idiots or specialised collection freaks buy second hand tapes or LPs. Of course that creates a CD security problem, because anything worth buying second hand is worth stealing, but you can't have it both ways.

All that's really being said by the people moaning about the price of CDs is that people who do fabulously good work shouldn't be fabulously rewarded, a proposition with which I heartily disagree. And, triflingly cheap though CDs already are, these one-off payments to the deserving CD pioneers will soon end, thanks to the ever greater competitiveness of the CD market, and CDs will then become *even cheaper*. Soon beggars will have them.

THE FALLACY OF ANTI-MATERIALISM

So, having shrugged off all the incidental attacks on this latest triumph of Western materialism, let's get to the heart of the case against CDs, which is that they are bad *because* they are so good, and thereby encourage people like me to wallow about in a giant bath tub of crass consumerist materialism. And so are Ferraris, cheap houses, central heating, deep freeze machines, filofaxes, colour printing, *television*, Janet Reger underwear, and everything - every *thing* - else you can think of that is any fun. Civilisation, goes this line of complaint, deserves to lose against the Red Automaton *because* it is so good at making things, and *because* the Red Automaton are so bad at it. At least in the land of the Red Automaton "spiritual values" are safe, because for all their discomforts the people are at least undistracted by mere things.

The basic error made by the anti-materialists, it seems to me, is that they speak about materials and about "spiritual values" as if these things occupied different universes. But they inhabit the same universe, and the materials are all shaped the way they are in order to tune in to the spiritual values, the way a radio tunes into a radio programme. When I listen to Mozart on my CD I'm not listening to the plastic, I'm listening to Mozart!

In a free world, one is necessarily surrounded by a mass of objects whose true meaning is not clear, and whose mere physicality is thus all that is there to be experienced. This is because although these things each mean a great deal to someone, they mean nothing to you. If you care nothing for music, then my CD collection is nothing but a meaningless collection of plastic circles with holes in the middle and with pointless ink marks on. But just because their materialness may be all that you see, you should not for a moment suppose that this is all that concerns me. I am no plastic fetishist. It is the "spiritual" world to which the plastic disks are my entry tickets that concerns me, not the material from which the tickets are made or the words on the tickets.

In most moan lists about materialism, the anti-materialists tell us of allegedly "spiritual" things like ballet dancing, string quartets, novels and the like, and contrast these with non-spiritual items such as Ferraris and Ford Cortinas. But this is merely a fancy way of saying that they see the point of string quartets, but not of Ford Cortinas. The "anti-materialist" who lives in a free world is allowed by his fellows humans to decide for himself which material objects he will invest with spiritual significance. He decides that some physical objects, including the ones upon which he inscribes his anti-materialist opinions, are meaningful and spiritual, while seeing nothing but paint and metal when he contemplates a Ferrari. And all that the average Ferrari man sees when he looks at the anti-materialist's writings is paper with silly black marks on it.

A string quartet is just as material a thing as a car, and a car is just as spiritual as a string quartet. A string quartet involves metal music stands, timber to make violins and cellos, cats' insides and horse hairs to make the actual noise (noise being the word used to describe music that one does not care for), paper and ink for the score, as well as plastic and miscellaneous electronic gadgetry if it's being recorded. Books are material objects, including the *Koran*, the *Bible* and the *Book of Common Prayer*. So are cathedrals. So

are crucifixes. "Materialism" simply means the meanings that others see, but which you don't.

It is, for me, an essential part of the meaning of the word "adult" that an adult understand such things, and does not spend his entire life yearning for his preferred meanings to be enforced upon everyone else, for everyone to be made to like the things he likes, and to be forbidden from indulging in any of the things he doesn't like. In short, adults are content to live in a world stuffed with "mindless materialism".

WHY CIVILISATION IS WINNING THE COLD WAR

Red Automatism being what it is, the Red Automaton must necessarily echo all this anti-materialist material. Being so hopeless at providing any other sort of materials, what else can they do? But the people ruled by the Red Automaton are even now engaged in making their verdict on this kind of thinking very plain. They want lots of different materials to choose between, now.

More to the point, the Red Automaton themselves have finally cracked. The latest round of victories scored by Civilisation against the Reds was much more than a matter of mere NATO strategy, Berlin airlifts, Oliver North in Nicaragua and Angola, ground-to-air missiles for Afghans and so forth, vital though all such stuff surely is. There were also all those Ferraris and CD players.

At the level of grand strategy, the existence of a huge swathe of the world devoted not to "winning to Cold War" but to making machines of materialistic indulgence for the masses, and getting stinking and deservingly rich as a result, was surely decisive when it came to breaking the nerve of the Bolsheviks. Christ, they said to themselves, not only do we have to win the Cold War against the Americans and close them down. We have to win it damn quick, so that we can then close down all these other damn places that are making nothing but fun for everyone. If we don't do this double quick, then in twenty years time the damn Taiwanese will be able to outspend us on tanks and aeroplanes, and exporting particle beam weapons as children's toys. And then where will we be? Flat broke, and a threat to nobody, is where. Without this huge third force of mere fun-makers, the whole geometry of the Cold War would have been different. Essentially, the USSR could have waited until the Americans got bored and surrendered. But while Brezhnev's arms negotiators lied away at their arms limitation conferences, while the Red arms factories churned out *their* things, while the KGB grimly suppressed the locals, and while the Pentagon did its usual Pentagonal stuff in response with F-15s and B2 stealth bombers, Civilisation was up, up and away.

It isn't only crazed leftists who have been moaning on about mindless materialism; this has also been the constant refrain of the orthodox Cold Warriors. The people of the West, it was said, were lolling about in mindless luxury and thus neglecting their grim Cold War duties, which were the True Meaning of Life in Our Time. The Italians, said the Cold Warriors, should have been making anti-tank weapons, not Ferraris. The Japanese should have spent another 1% of their GNP on soldiery, instead of applying their hyper-intelligence and hyper-finance to mere CD machines and Ferrari clones. They should have held conferences about "regional security", instead of mere conferences to decide on international standards for Video Camcorders.

I agree, the fact that the Italians, the Japanese, the Taiwanese and the rest of them all had their formidable minds on other things besides wars and weapons made it difficult for the Cold Warriors, but it also made the Cold War *worth* winning, not just for the Cold Warriors themselves but for mere fun-lovers like me and P. J. O'Rourke. At this critical juncture in the Cold War we now very much want our side to win. Our equivalents in the USSR are now saying: screw the Cold War, *give us CD players and give us some decent cars*. America, having lots of fun-mongers as well as Cold Warriors, is still a country that the Russians *want* to copy, by kicking out the Red Automaton and setting up some decent stockmarkets and gas stations and shopping malls. And Western Europe is more than ever the place that the Eastern Europeans want to rejoin.