

The Volokh Conspiracy

P.J. O'Rourke on Koch v. Cato

Jonathan H. Adler • March 17, 2012 9:12 am

P.J. O'Rourke, who has been designated an [H.L. Mencken Research Fellow](#) at the Cato Institute, [discusses the Koch-Cato kerfuffle](#) in *The Weekly Standard*. It begins:

Ideological snits and quarrels are the rightful province of feckless leftists. Their neverending dissensions give them something to Occupy (as it were) their time and distract them from making mischief. Sometimes these leftists are not so feckless and make the mischief of seizing power. Then they chop off each other's heads with their logic-chopping, to the general relief of their neighbors. Ideological snits and quarrels are goods upon which a high value may be placed. And I, for once, am willing to be a socialist and freely redistribute them to our enemies.

We who hold the truth to be self-evident that all men are created equal and endowed with unalienable rights to life, liberty, and no less than an 8:1 ratio of gin to vermouth in our martinis stand above such petty arguments of political doctrine. Except when we don't. And now we have in our midst a knockdown, a drag-out, a Katy-bar-the-door.

The wonderfully conservative Koch brothers are trying to take control of the magnificently libertarian Cato Institute, a spectacularly stupid thing to do.

O'Rourke also addresses his own relationship with Cato:

And because I know these people I won't pretend I don't have a dog in the fight. I've been friends with Ed Crane and Cato executive vice president David Boaz for 25 years. Cato has aided me with almost everything I've written about politics. Maybe saying so will lower the institution's prestige

enough that the Koch brothers will leave it alone. If they prevail they'll lose Cato's H.L. Mencken Research Fellow. (The position—unpaid and worth it—was conferred on me by Crane back when the insensitive language in Mencken's diary was shocking the kind of people who'd later forget to be shocked by Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky.)

More to the point, the Koch brothers will lose the think tank's impressive roster of thinkers and scholars. I haven't polled them as to who would stay and who would go under a Koch regime. But, as I said, I know libertarians. If the Kochs win the pot, they'll have to piss in it. It will be empty otherwise.

O'Rourke concludes observing that the Kochs may be "good citizens with honest wealth who've put their money where their minds are," but with the Cato Institute, they are acting like "fools."