

Introduction

Beer is sublime in its simplicity and spiritual in its boundless complexity. It is a democratic drink, but it is also complicit in the tyranny of civilization.

Sometimes beer delivers the best life can offer, while other times it is insufferably disappointing. In this book, I attempt to illuminate some of beer's virtues and to encourage a move away from the corporate-led global industrial capitalism that debases beer-drinking culture.

Fermenting Revolution is not an ordinary "beer book." It is not a technical guide to brewing or a history of brewing, at least not in a strict sense. It's not a beer adventure tale, or an academic study of beer or brewing during a specific period in a particular place. Even though beer is mentioned on virtually every page, this book is about more than beer. It is also about saving the world. But neither is it an "environmental book," per se. For example, it is not about saving the alligator snapping turtle in Mississippi, although I do briefly cover that topic. *Fermenting Revolution*, as its subtitle suggests, is about how to drink beer *and* save the world. Maybe I'm a hopeless victim of the age of multitasking, but I love doing these two things at the same time.

After years of consuming it, beer took me by surprise when I realized it could do more than muddle my consciousness. Beer nurtures and soothes, inspires and excites. It can be creative and fulfilling, both spiritually as well as materially. Beer is diverse and yet unifying. It is the past, the present, and the future. Beer is the nearest I have ever come to finding God.

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I realize that last sentence makes me sound like a lunatic, but such is the lot of a zealot.

So as is the wont of a zealot, I will proceed with due hyperbole. More so than ever before, the world today needs beer. In the age of globalization, we humans have become capable of the wholesale destruction of life on Earth. We are in bad need of some life-affirming energy to counterbalance our penchant for mass annihilation. With global climate change dominating the headlines, and ever-worsening prospects of a military debacle pitting America against developing nations and the Middle East, we face questions about the very survival of our species. And as a wise friend once said to me, beer seems to have all the answers.

What this book proposes is a vision of the world where there is greatness in something common. It is a manifesto for building a better world with beer. In short, my thesis is this: beer is good for people and the planet. This book is my attempt to explain how and why.

Fermenting Revolution is filled with meanderings, postulations, proclamations, controversial claims, and radical ideas. Kind of like a good rap session among friends over a couple of beers. Truth be told, I drank more than just a couple of beers while assembling this one-point platform of the Fermenting Revolution. And now that you have it in your hands, I hope we might become friends over the next couple of hundred pages. Consider it our own beer-infused bull session. And feel free to tell me what you think by visiting my Website: <www.beeractivist.com>.

I've tried hard not to weigh you down with loads of scientific mumbo-jumbo, including just enough to establish that my assertions of beer as the planet's best ameliorative are affirmed by so-called "objective" researchers. For the most part though, I've stuck to good, honest, bar-thumping beer proselytizing. Here and there you will find some facts and figures, thrown in to satisfy the scientifically-minded, but rest assured, these are only the most selectively chosen numerical forays.

Much of what you will read here is not original. I really only have one idea, and you've already heard it: beer is saving the world. But mostly what I have chosen to do is tell two well-worn stories as one brand-new tale. There must be thousands of books about beer and many more about saving the world. But I haven't come across a single one yet that combines the two.

I began envisioning this book when I was working for a group called Co-op America. Their mission is to harness the power of the marketplace to

promote social justice and ecological sustainability. During my years there I had the great pleasure of working with hundreds of small-business owners who are trying to save the world. Some of their companies have become household names, like Patagonia and Ben and Jerry's, but most are tiny and unknown. Though small, these micro-business entrepreneurs have spawned a whole new generation of "green" and "fair trade" businesses. Sustainable businesses embody the simple idea that business is an endeavor meant to sustain us, not harm us. Business activities should be conducted according to the same ethical and moral principles that guide everyday life. Basically, people and the businesses they build should help people and sustain the planet, not exploit people and damage the Earth. The craft-brewing revolution is part of this sustainable business phenomenon and serves as the inspiration for this book.

There is a distinct gender theme in this narrative: beer used to be "feminine" and now it is "masculine." At the risk of stating the obvious, this is a simplification based on generalizations and I implore you to read it as such. References to gender traits should be read with the caveat that I believe more in the human will than I do in determinism, and I don't think there are many innate differences between men and women, other than some minor biological quirks. Even these, I believe, are less than we make them out to be. Generally speaking, society has invented the roles assigned to women and men, and we have the power to reinvent them if we so choose. So when I characterize women as more cooperative and compassionate, as I do, I do not mean to imply that this is innate, or that it applies to all women (imagine!), nor that it somehow makes women better than men. Neither do I mean to imply that men never display these virtues. But I do think these generalizations stand up to the test of the real world. I don't know exactly why most women are more cooperative than men. Is it nature or nurture? I'm really not sure, although I tend to think it's the latter. Regardless, that is not the debate I intend to address. Rather, "feminine" traits being what they generally are agreed to be, I attempt to make the case that human society would benefit from a stronger feminine influence in beer-drinking culture. I hope this assertion might provoke some debate. And again, I encourage you to get in touch via my Website. We can continue the debate — over beers, I hope.

Directly related to the gender dialogue is the great globalization debate. The masculinization of beer is part of globalization. Beer has inspired mystical transcendence while also unlocking the secrets of nature's bounty. For

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millennia it has empowered women while nourishing the human body as well as spirit. But beer plays both sides of the fence, and when society shifts toward centralized authority and industrialized production, beer becomes a tool of exploitation and injustice. Organized religion, centralized politics, and industrial capitalism have used beer as a tool of enslavement. Today, beer can be found serving the masters of corporate industrial capitalism as well as engendering community power, a shift toward sustainable production, and a return to healthful drinking. Small brewers are offering solutions while corporate brewers continue blindly down the dead-end path of exponential growth.

The world is undergoing two revolutions, one with bad global corporate beer, and one with good, local beer. To put a new spin on Emma Goldman's famous quote: If I can't drink good beer, it's not my revolution. So here's to all the beer activists fermenting revolution!