The prize for wild misunderstanding from the religiously minded right goes to that astonishing book Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind.* Kirk may or may not have read Dewey, but the two pages of vituperation dedicated to Dewey's memory make about as many mistakes about Dewey's ideas as could well be crammed into the space. Their interest once more lies so much in their erroneous character as in their revelation of what Dewey had come to stand for.

The belligerent expansive and naturalistic tendencies of the era found their philosophical apologist in John Dewey. No philosopher's style is more turgid; but Dewey's postulates, for all that, are simple and quite comprehensive. He commenced with a thoroughgoing naturalism, like Diderot's and Holbach's, denying the whole realm of spiritual values: nothing exists but physical sensation, and life has no aims but physical satisfaction. He proceeded to a utilitarianism which carried Benthamite ideas to their logical culmination, making material production the goal and standard of human endeavor; the past is trash, the future unknowable, and the present the only concern of the moralist. He propounded a theory of education derived from Rousseau, declaring that the child is born with 'a natural desire to do, to give out, to serve,' and should be encouraged to follow his own bent, teaching being simply the opening of paths. He advocated a sentimental egalitarian collectivism with a social dead-level its ideal; and he capped this structure with Marxist economics, looking forward to a future devoted to efficient material production for the satisfaction of the masses, a planners' state. Every radicalism since 1789 found its place in John Dewey's system; and this destructive intellectual compound became prodigiously popular, in short order, among those distraught crowd of the semi-educated and among people of more serious pretensions who found themselves in a withered world that Darwin and Faraday had severed from its roots. Intensely flattering to the presuppositional of the modern mind, thoroughly contemptuous of authority, Dewey's works were a mirror of twentieth-century discontent; and the picture of the Utilitarian future toward which Dewey led the rising generation was not immediately repellent to a people who had subjected themselves to the lordship of sensation. Veneration was dead in Dewey's universe; indiscriminate emancipation was cock of the walk. This was the imperialist craving of America and the twentieth century given a philosophic mask.38

It is not very interesting that this is wrong in every philosophical particular: that Dewey was antiutilitarian, hostile to Marxist economics, a naturalist but not a materialist in the fashion of Holbach, the promoter rather than the destroyer of spiritual values, and so on indefinitely. It is more interesting that Dewey was so much the emblem of an ideal of progress for which American conservatives had a visceral loathing. There is a great divide between the consciousness of a writer like Dewey and that of a sentimental conservative imbued with a real hatred of the modern world like Russell Kirk. Nor is the difference wholly in Dewey's favor. And perhaps that matters more than a pedantic accuracy.

The conflict between those who believe that the phenomenal world is self-sufficient and those who believe it is radically incomplete cuts across political divisions. For example, Dewey was sharply criticized by Reinhold Niebuhr for not taking the doctrine of original sin seriously enough. This irritated him a great deal. He and Niebuhr were politically on the same side; they both were members of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and Niebuhr had joined in the defense of Trotsky. Niebuhr held, however, just those views that Dewey had described as the cause of the "inward laceration" of his youth. Human beings were radically sinful. Their motives were so mixed that few of us could ever be sure whether we had acted well for bad reasons, whether kindness masked pride and contempt, and so on. Politics was essentially a realm of impure motives, and Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* preached a spectacularly deflationary kind of progressivism: We must struggle to achieve justice while not fooling ourselves about the likelihood of achieving much of it. Dewey stuck Niebuhr as shallow, unable to confront the depth of evil in the world, unwilling to face the doubleness of the human heart. Dewey could hardly see what Niebuhr was talking about. It seemed to him that Niebuhr clung to a Protestant obsession with sin that he had no need of and in whose intellectual foundations he had long ceased to believe.39

This was where Dewey and his opponents ceased to communicate. Dewey thought the world was self-sufficient; it posed no cosmic problem, other than that of emancipating ourselves from the habit of thinking it did. There is in Dewey a strain of cosmic optimism, a confidence that the world we live in needs no further support and no further justification than it receives as we live our everyday lives. C. E. Ayres described Dewey as the “Master of the Commonplace” in an admiring 1938 article in the *New Republic.* He remarked on Dewey's success in banishing “Awful Powers” from his mind. “[W]e might argue that whenever science does penetrate the unknown the newly discovered territory always turns out to be exactly like our own backyard. But for some reason we never do. That takes genius, Dewey's kind of genius, a special affinity for the commonplace. Most people are still sure, in spite of a thousand contrary demonstrations, that Mystery lies just beyond the latest scientific fence.”40 The “commonplace” here is an interesting idea since it does not mean “what everyone already knows”; rather the thought is that Dewey—for all his talk of “natural piety” and his fondness for Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Emerson—wanted to say, as others had before him, that appearances do not deceive, that the world is as it seems to be, and that there is no deep mystery at the heart of existence. It does not take much imagination on the part of anyone deeply committed to a traditional religious perspective to see Dewey's attitude as a hubris inviting retaliation from the “Awful Powers” so slighted. Anyone
who thought that modern American society displayed an extreme cultural arrogance, a feeble sense of the limitations of human nature, and few resources to deal with the inevitable disappointments of human life might well think Dewey was both a symptom and a cause of the trouble.

An amusing feature of Kirk's complaints is that they so mirror those of the far left. The orthodox Communist view was that pragmatism was American capitalism and imperialism reduced to ideological disguise. George Novack wrote Pragmatism versus Marxism as late as the early 1970s to argue one last time that pragmatism was the ideology of bourgeois capitalist liberal democracy.41 It was not only orthodox Marxists who said as much. We have already seen that as far back as 1923 Dewey was irrationally defending himself, Peirce, and James against Russell's cheap gibes about pragmatism and American capitalism. We cannot entirely blame Russell; when writers who were commonly thought of as fellow-traveling pragmatists, such as Justice Holmes, defended freedom of speech in the idiom of "the marketplace of ideas," it was not just the critics of pragmatism who thought that the philosophers' ideal of truth had been sacrificed to the pragmatists' concept of "success" in a pretty down-to-earth sense. After Dewey's decisive swing away from the sympathy with the Soviet Union that he had felt after his visit of 1928, he was always condemned by Marxists as a bourgeois lackey and an apostle for the Americanization of the world.

Dewey's emphasis on the connection of the world of work and the world of the school has also continued to be assailed by the left in much the same way as it is by the conservatives. Dewey was accused of reducing the educational system to a crude vocational training designed to turn out docile workers in capitalist enterprises. What is curious is how few critics made the more plausible and in many ways more damning complaint that although Dewey insisted every time he discussed the subject that this was exactly what he did not have in mind and that the object of vocational education in his account of it was to humanize the subjects that people needed to know in order to fit into the working world, he never said how it was to be done and never understood how easily his views would be vulgarized into the utilitarian doctrines he deplored. Critics were not quick to point out that Dewey accepted the common assumption—itself very challenging—that there were many children who were not intellectually inclined and for whom "book learning" was unattractive—and thus himself seemed to accept the familiar division between vocational and nonvocational education while protesting that he did not accept it in its present form.

Leftish Objections

The middle-of-the-road American left largely forgot Dewey until the 1960s. Then the most interesting criticism of his views was offered by Christopher Lasch in The New Radicalism in America and a little later in The Agony of the American Left.42 Lasch got Dewey in the right place in the political spectrum, seeing him as a liberal of the same stripe as Herbert Croly and Richard T. Ely, though not with exactly their allegiances.43 However, Lasch accused the whole group of espousing a politics that would make the world safe for the emerging corporation. The key notion that Lasch seized on was that of social control through education. "[T]he new liberalism advocated by Edward A. Ross, Herbert Croly, Richard T. Ely, Newton D. Baker, and even by Jane Addams and John Dewey sought not so much to democratize the industrial system as to make it run more efficiently." The conclusion Lasch came to would have astonished both Dewey and his antagonists on the right: "Manipulative and managerial, twentieth-century liberalism has adapted itself without difficulty to the corporation's need to soften conflicts and to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable forces—capital and labor, bureaucratic efficiency and personal intimacy, the life of the production line and the life of the spirit—to which it has given rise."44 The obvious objection to this is that it is too sweeping to be plausible, and in the case of Jane Addams, whose allegiances were more Tolstoyan than Taylorist, just silly.

Dewey's case is less clear-cut than Jane Addams's, but Lasch's critique is a nice example of how Dewey looks when he is read with certain preconceptions. The 1950s and 1960s were the years of David Riesman's The Lonely Crowd and William H. Whyte's The Organization Man. Those of us who got our education from such sources all believed that Americans were "other-directed," manipulated by social forces which they did not understand, conformists with no inner resources with which to lead their own lives. It was easy to believe that the ideology of "social control" had triumphed. These were also the years of a search for consensus—or "The End of Ideology"—when it was easy to imagine that everyone who talked the language of social efficiency must have meant that democracy should be supplanting the bureaucratic management of a capitalist welfare state. Critics would have had a case if they had only complained that Dewey was so unclear about what he was after that the manipulators, indoctrinators, and inegalitarians who were intent on subverting his vision of education and replacing it by the production of a docile work force had an easier time than they ought. That is a plausible objection. But the idea that Dewey set out to provide an ideology for the modern capitalist corporation beggars the mind, and the idea that he sacrificed democracy for the sake of efficiency is bizarre.

The criticisms we have considered thus far rest on a detestation of Dewey's entire world view. Dewey's atheistic and destructive philosophy entailed for one class of critic that Dewey's educational theories are wickedly atheistic and destructive; his supposed advocacy of an ethics and politics of "control" entailed for another class of critic that Dewey must have intended education to mold the passive beneficiaries of "corporate liberalism." The supposed educational disasters attendant on "Deweyism" are explained in terms of a defec-
of practical training and much of adjustment and thus seems squarely in Hofs-
tadder's sights. It is ironic that the emblematic figure on the other side of the
divide is Dewey's friend and mentor William T. Harris; Harris, who was both
a Hegelian philosopher and a school superintendent, fought a losing battle
both in St. Louis and as U.S. commissioner for education for "mind culture"—
that is to say, for the creation and strengthening of an academic high school
curriculum. As Hofstadter observed, the terms of the argument between
Harris and his opponents were the same a century ago as they were in 1962.
Nor has much changed since 1962. On the one hand stood those who thought
the aim of education was to get the child to master an intellectual discipline;
on the other, those who thought of the "needs" of the child. Hofstadter's
enthusiasm for what came to be called life adjustment as an educational goal
can be gauged from his quip "Life adjustment educators would do anything
in the name of science except encourage children to study it."

Unlike the complaints from the right, Hofstadter's complaints against
Dewey are deliberately and carefully put. They are not that Dewey set out to
courage the expulsion of academic subjects from the high school curricu-
lum—Dewey had almost nothing to say about high schools—or that Dewey
was himself an anti-intellectualist. Rather Dewey made the first fatal step by
putting into circulation a romantic and Rousseauist conception of the child
and the child's growth as the be-all and end-all of education and then more
fatally by erecting a framework—the obsessive harping on "growth" that we
saw earlier—that other people would clothe with the ideas of "life adjust-
ment." Lawrence Cremin had already argued that the standard complaints
against Dewey ought rather to have been directed against W. H. Kilpatrick,
but even Cremin had admitted that "however tortuous the intellectual line
from Democracy and Education to the pronouncements of the Commission on
Life Adjustment, that line can be drawn." Hofstadter went on to say, "That it
is fact an unduly tortuous line one may be permitted to doubt." Hofstadter
saw what others also observed: that the awkwardness of Dewey's exposition
of his ideas suggests some real gaps and difficulties in the ideas themselves.
When these gaps had been filled by people with clearer, if crueler, ideas than
Dewey's, the direction in which what one might call the theory-as-received
was pushed was toward the view that the task of education was to elicit
from the child the naturally valuable characteristics that traditional education
 cramped but that progressive education would turn to social use.

There is a problem even with this view, however. It implies two rather
contradictory complaints. The complaint against life adjustment is a complaint
against a manipulative conception of education; the complaint against Rou-
seauian romanticism is a complaint against an excessively liberationist con-
ception. Of course, Dewey might have held two firmly opposed views; people
often do. Yet it seems unlikely, considering his emphatic distancing of himself
from both. Life adjustment was a movement that proposed, as the name
suggested, to send children into the world ready to fit in with the mores of

Dewey's educational views from a friendlier direction and from a critic who does not call
up question Dewey's philosophical views. Indeed, this is a critique that captures
very well the anxiety that Dewey's ideas can induce in a friendly reader. Richard
Hofstadter's Anti-intellectualism in America argues at length that Dewey's
contribution to education in the United States was to render it anti-intellec-
tual. I have some sympathy with this complaint. There is a view of education
that is "intellectualist" in a tough sense; what it values is the promotion of
sheer cleverness and the inculcation of enough factual and theoretical raw
material for a developing student to employ his cleverness on, and it is quite
true that Dewey was wholly hostile to this view of education. I am not, though,
I would not wish to impose it on everyone. To wish for such education to be
offered even to some children means that we must reject at least some of
Dewey's moral and social vision, perhaps rather a lot. We shall find ourselves
differing from Dewey over the goods and bads of a more competitive class-
room or a more selective higher education system. We may also quarrel over
the possibility of a wholly democratic culture. A taste for intellectual fierecenes
is likely to coincide with a belief in an elite culture—not a belief in snobbery
but at least a readiness to recognize a cultural aristocracy. Dewey's antipathy
to the distinction between high and low culture thus comes under threat, as I
think it must and as Dewey very much thought it ought not.

This does not threaten social democratic politics, though it may well alter
our view of their value. If we are anxious about how to maintain a distinctively
"high" culture in a modern industrial society without creating an educational
and cultural class system defined by the different esteem in which different
artistic allegiances are held, we must be anxious about how to reconcile class-
lessness and high culture. We need not sit paralyzed before this tension; one
way out is to give government—not "the state" but public agencies of many
different kinds—resources for promoting high culture so that its enjoyment
does not depend on high income, high managerial status, years of higher
education, and access to corporate entertainment budgets. In this respect every
European country save Great Britain does much better than the United States,
and even Great Britain does better.

All this is to run ahead of the argument that Anti-intellectualism in America
made when it was published in 1962. Hofstadter's book is a wonderfully en-
livening and entertaining essay in social and intellectual history. Its concern
was with the way an appeal to "democracy" has resulted in what others have
called "the dumbing down of America" in religion, politics, and education.
Hofstadter's account of American education at all levels complains of the
neglect of the academic side of education in favor of practical training on the
one hand and "life adjustment" on the other. Dewey, of course, talked much
1950s American middle-class life. Hence the proliferation of high school classes in how to get on with other people and the obsession with personal hygiene and conventional political loyalties that marked classes in health and civics. Nobody thought Dewey wanted to promote that sort of thing. It was politically bland, if not in an orthodox sense conservative, and its democratic pretensions were nil. Indeed, it was a plausible target for Christopher Lasch’s complaints against education as a means of social control since it took the status quo for granted and thought of education as a way of teaching children to “go along to get along”; its values are consumer-oriented, and its occupational aspirations limited. The romantic, Rousseauist vision was quite different. It protected the child against society and tried—at any rate Rousseau’s imaginary experiment in Émile tried—to produce a child who would be a good citizen of an ideal state but otherwise entirely self-reliant. It was, so far as Rousseau was concerned, an education of counteradjustment. There is much to be said against Rousseau’s project, too, but the only point that matters is that even Dewey was unlikely to have subscribed simultaneously to the extreme versions of the oversocialized and antisocialized visions of education.

What is the underlying difficulty? It is that Dewey relied on something too much like the idea of a preexisting harmony between human nature and democracy: “To believe that Dewey’s synthesis was successful required a certain credulity about the pre-established harmony between child nature and democratic culture which not everyone could share.” That seems to me to be almost right. Only to the extent that it attributes to Dewey an excessively fixed picture of “human nature” as displayed in the child is it not right. Dewey did not share the sentimental enthusiasm for childish innocence that his Chicago colleague Francis Parker did, nor did he share the much more interesting liking for all stages of child development that his teacher Stanley Hall possessed; Hall was years ahead of his time in thinking that the adolescent preoccupation with sex was wonderful and ought to be encouraged rather than subdued. Dewey was more nearly vulnerable to the charge that he was always looking to the ends or goals of education and left little room for the pleasures of any particular stage of it. Even the passages from The School and Society that Hofstadter rightly cites to show how ready Dewey was to let the child’s social development go on for a very long time before particular academic subjects were taught to him do not emphasize a child-centered education so much as a social-centered child.

It is, then, a fair complaint against Dewey that when he wrote Democracy and Education, he allowed “democracy” to act as an all-inclusive goal of the educational process and “growth” to act as an all-inclusive moral end in such a way as to blur serious and difficult problems—such as how much mathematics we can teach the average child, and how painlessly, or how we can trade the benefits of early specialization against a broad curriculum, and so generally on. Was this anti-intellectual? In the sense that as between the defenders of the mastery of an existing discipline as a first educational requirement and their opponents Dewey is with the opponents, yes. In other words it is a harder call. Hofstadter cites Dewey’s student and colleague John Herman Randall, Jr., as the author of the complaint that Dewey’s attitude to history and to the history of philosophy was philistine, and it is true that Dewey treats anything describable as “past thought” with a certain coldness.

The explanation is not hard to find, however. In the first place, Dewey’s rhetoric was always situational. He wrote against what he supposed was the contemporary exaggeration that most needed to be combated. It was not the ideas of Thomas Aquinas that he deplored but Robert Hutchins’s attempt to fix them once and for all as the touchstone of higher education in Chicago and everywhere else. It was not in defense of the view of the child that children came “trailing clouds of glory” that he wrote but against an extreme reliance on rote learning. Considering the extent to which his opponents treated traditional philosophy as a form of Holy Writ, it was not surprising that Dewey comes across as an iconoclast, even though a look at the syllabuses of the courses he taught shows the extent to which he also taught out of a tradition. The second crucial point is that Dewey always emphasized the present use of materials that might be past, present, future, or entirely hypothetical. Plato was important not as a repository of fixed, dead truth but as a living interlocutor. Dewey’s intellectual style is “antimonumental” rather than “presentist” or “antipast.” One might plausibly compare Dewey’s views on the history of philosophy to his views on art: in both fields he was hostile to what one might call museum culture. Ideas were not to be hung on the walls, mummified, set apart to be approached with a reverence that most spectators would have to fake. Paintings were to be enjoyed; ideas were to be rethought. It remains true that Dewey was not good at simply displaying the kind of disinterested pleasure in high culture that critics like Hofstadter and myself would like to encourage in the young, and it remains true that he did not possess the intellectual high spirits that make reading Russell such a pleasure, no matter how abstract the topic, and whose absence leaves Dewey relying entirely on the reader’s sympathy with what he is saying. But one may be more inhibited than Dewey and a very much less s sprightly writer than he without having to plead guilty to charges of anti-intellectualism.