

**“Political Correctness and Leftist Contributions to American Anti-Intellectualism”**

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The recent election spawned a reconsideration of the position of anti-intellectualism in American society. Sarah Palin, a marginally educated, bible-thumping, gun-toting, “dems and does” former beauty pageant contestant, nominated for the Vice Presidency by the Republican Party, exemplified for many Americans, a decline in the nation’s perception of the importance of education. Her candidacy also confirmed what many Americans had seen in the Republican Party’s relatively recent embrace of evangelical Christians – that America’s conservatives opposed free inquiry and academic rigor in addressing issues of policy, preferring easy answers to complex questions.

That pairing of conservatism with anti-intellectualism is not new; nor is the assertion that evangelicalism is at the roots of America’s anti-intellectualism. Richard Hofstadter made that argument in 1962 in his brilliantly-conceived, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life.<sup>1</sup> Before that, Margaret Fuller noted the difficulty of pursuing academic interests in a society dominated by economic considerations:

In a word, the tendency of circumstance has been to make our people superficial, irreverent, and more anxious to get a living than to live mentally and morally.

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They see that political freedom does not necessarily produce liberality of mind.<sup>2</sup>

Implicitly, Fuller associates morality with liberal mindedness, and contrasts both with the pursuit of economic gain. In this, she prefigures not only Hofstadter’s argument, but also the position of American liberals for most of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A common feature of American leftist movements from the Pragmatists to today is their reliance upon morality as prescriptive for public policy as well as private behavior. The American left is, and traditionally has been, quite comfortable in telling others what they should feel, what they should do, and even what they should believe. Of these, the last, what should be believed, is the least important to contemporary leftists. Amidst the current post-

modernist derogation of ideology, feelings and actions take priority over beliefs. This emphasis of acting and feeling over thinking is supported by an underlying embrace of communitarian ethics and prescriptive uniformity. In these factors lie the roots of contemporary anti-intellectualism.

Hofstadter attributes Americans' anti-intellectualism to evangelicalism in the form that arose during the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s. Yet, in framing anti-intellectualism in America, he specifically exempts more recent anti-rationalist intellectuals from his derisive study. He notes the anti-rationalist ideas of men like Emerson, Whitman, James, and Dewey as founts for the perspectives offered by anti-intellectuals; but, deems these thinkers, in his words, too "highbrow" to be part of his story. Today, I want to bring them back into it. I contend that the anti-intellectualism that prevails in America today is a direct product of the ideas of the Pragmatists and the liberals who followed them.

The moral teachings of both evangelical Christians and the Pragmatists derogate individuality by prescribing "proper" thoughts and feelings necessary for the good of the whole. Each school of thought also denigrates reason by asserting a substantial role for emotion or affective knowing in its teachings. Hofstadter recognizes that it is the moral teachings of evangelicalism that render anti-intellectualism acceptable to large numbers of Americans; yet he wants to preserve the morality without the rejection of reason:

If anti-intellectualism has become, as I believe it has, a broadly diffused quality in our civilization, it has become so because it has often been linked to good, or at least defensible, causes. It first got its strong grip on our ways of thinking because it was fostered by an evangelical religion that also purveyed many humane and democratic sentiments. It made its way into our politics because it became associated with our passion for equality. It has become formidable in our education partly because our educational beliefs are evangelically egalitarian. Hence, as far as possible, our anti-intellectualism must be excised from the benevolent impulses upon which it lives by constant and delicate acts of intellectual surgery which spare these impulses themselves.<sup>3</sup>

In this assertion, Hofstadter sounds a great deal like John Dewey does when he encourages Americans to separate their religious sentiments from religion itself or, in other words, to construct a new basis for religiosity rooted in a practical communitarian ethic. Dewey writes that what he advocates: "is the emancipation of elements and outlooks that may be called religious from religion itself."<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, the ability to prescribe benevolence as a proper basis for social action requires the existence of an elite. The idea of elite rule mocks every aspect of democratic self-government, but nonetheless finds a receptive audience among American liberals when the elite is the intelligentsia rather than a propertied class. Not surprisingly, Hofstadter considers Puritan New England as an early case of elite governance in America. Interestingly, despite its repression of dissent and its intolerance of non-conformity, Hofstadter finds little to criticize in seventeenth-century Puritan society, holding his condemnation for the rise of the evangelicals in the next century. He writes, almost wistfully, “the Puritan clergy came as close to being an intellectual ruling class – or more properly, a class of intellectuals intimately associated with a ruling power – as America ever had.”<sup>5</sup>

Evangelicals and the Pragmatists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries alike, were comfortable with an elite imposing moral values upon the population as a whole, all-the-while proclaiming the democratic nature of such impositions. In each case, the imposition was justified on the basis of morality, not of reason. The differences between these groups of thinkers arise in their conceptions of morality, or actually in the derivation of morality, for their actual moral teachings are amazingly compatible.

Evangelicals understand morality to derive from the truth of Jesus’ teachings as contained in the Bible. Christian morality is predicated upon the existence of God as not only creator but rule-maker, and recognizes mankind’s duty to obey divine law. Finding a moral way of life is a deductive process that depends upon a given truth.

Pragmatists counter that the quest for a moral life is an inductive process dependent upon experience. William James argues that morality is built from both personal and shared experiences. Morals in turn become the building blocks for asserting truths – those things that experience shows to be in “agreement” with reality and to positively affect human life. From this perspective, man does not discover truth but creates it through moral judgment, or in James’ words, “engenders truth upon [the

world].”<sup>6</sup> But, the formation of truth only has meaning in its creation of duties to act in accordance with it – duties to build a society consistent with morality using truth as a constructed justification for social action.

Pragmatism, since the work of Randolph Bourne in the 1920s, if not before, has been linked to social engineering. The underlying assumption supporting social engineering is a belief that experts are best able to determine policy, even that policy which depends upon moral choices. Pragmatism expresses an acceptance of an intellectual, or even a cultural elite, and of its ability to make decisions for others that is Platonic in every aspect but its rejection of absolutes. Pragmatists express tremendous confidence in the willingness of the masses to follow the elite. As David A. Hollinger writes, “ ... Dewey’s social engineering was only one example of pragmatism’s confidence in the responsiveness of nature to human purpose. This confidence was equally hard to miss in James’s ‘voluntarism’.”<sup>7</sup>

Certainly the voluntary deference of the masses to greater ideas of an elite need not be considered anti-intellectual. However, the argument that an elite few are better able to determine what others should do excuses a large number of people from the need to think about their own social or moral choices. Pragmatism comes perilously close to presenting justification of both social and mind control of the masses by an elite in order to serve a greater good. The argument for creation of a usable truth implies both: (1) that the created truth will encourage certain forms of thinking and behaviors; and (2) that the created truth supports the socio-political goals of its creators. These implications subordinate the exercise of individual rational judgment to an elite conception of the social good. Moreover, since the 1960s, pragmatism has largely deviated from its roots in science and positivism, each of which imposed a rational framework upon pragmatist thought, toward a postmodernist humanism. Thomas Kuhn’s, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962), is credited, by David DePew and Robert Hollinger, for asserting that: “scientific theories do not organize data in ways that are any more, or any less, rational than political ideologies, religious beliefs, and aesthetic movements, and therefore that those who would strongly demarcate the rationality of science from the alleged irrationality of the other dimensions of life

were misguided.”<sup>8</sup> These authors further contend that: “Postmodern pragmatists are convinced that the full scope of self-creation, self-interpretation, and self-expression will be granted only when liberalism has liberated itself from the earnest appeals to human nature and natural rights that bewitched our founding fathers, and from the religious conception of the human condition that modern philosophy both displaced and at the same time preserved.”<sup>9</sup> In fact, many contemporary scholars find the roots of postmodernism in classical pragmatism.<sup>10</sup> Its recognition of emotional response as a means of knowing, its rejection of value in rational contemplation, its embrace of plural and relative truths, its call for morality to govern the conceptions and administration of justice, and its emphasis on language as a means of shaping perceptions are all indicative of postmodernist thought that eschews reason and rationality.

DePew asserts that Dewey advocated nothing less than a “redescription of experience in which individual life is characterized as social and in which social life is described in interactive and cooperative terms that foster ongoing projects of social reconstruction through experimental inquiry and democratic decision-making.”<sup>11</sup> He adds, that this “[c]ooperative democratic experience in political, economic and educational, even private spheres, was for Dewey, to replace the comforts of religion.”<sup>12</sup> Ironically, there is in this communitarian emphasis something reminiscent of early New England theocracies, in its celebration of a holistic society melded by shared attitudes and beliefs reinforced by prescription in all aspects of social life – business, politics, education, and family relations. Both schools of thought attempt to impose a moralistic system of values as parameters upon individual thought and action. This is exactly the basis from which Hofstadter launches his attack on evangelicals as anti-intellectualist.

In earlier publications, I argue that there are two contradictory themes in American intellectual history. One is rooted in reason, the pursuit of objective truth, and a pre-eminent concern for the rights and liberties of the individual. The other is based on an emotional response to the needs and feelings of others – it is inherently subjective and communitarian. The first was born in Enlightenment humanism; the second in Protestant Christianity. But, the communitarian and moralistic components of this second theme have been largely adopted by the left, not the right. What Hofstadter defines as the attack on

reason posed by American evangelism is actually a broader attack upon reason, objectivity, and individualism that can be seen in a history of communitarian thought encompassing evangelicalism, Transcendentalism, and Pragmatism and is expressed today in political correctness.

The Transcendentalists, as part of the romantic ages' intellectual correction of the perceived excesses of rationality and individuality expressed during the Enlightenment, advanced the argument that mankind must develop and utilize the soul as much as reason, both as a means of thinking and of acting. In this, they mirror the assertions of evangelicals throughout American history.<sup>13</sup> To the extent that recognition of the supernatural constitutes a threat to reason, the Transcendentalists are as suspect as the evangelicals. The Transcendentalists used spiritualism as a basis for recognizing human connectedness and interdependence. Despite an obvious reliance upon reason and individual responsibility within Transcendentalist thought, its assertion of human connectedness led invariably to a greater recognition of social duties than private rights. Moreover, sounding much like the Pragmatists, Transcendentalists and the reformers they helped motivate, frequently saw duties originating in a recognition of social evils – be they alcoholism, slavery, or economic despair. In a column in the New York Daily Tribune from 1845, Margaret Fuller wrote: “the want of suitable and sufficient employment is a great evil.”<sup>14</sup> Later, in the same piece, she called for greater public action and sensitive and proactive officials to combat this evil, having no qualms in expressing Americans' duties in such value-laden and judgmental terms was what “should” be done to achieve “permanent good”:

The country, the State, should look to it that only those fit for such officers should be chosen for such, apart from all considerations of political party. Let this be thought of: for without an absolute change in this respect no permanent good whatever can be effected; and farther, let not economy but ability be the rule of expenditure, for here, parsimony is the worst prodigality.<sup>15</sup>

In her call for utilitarian programs to address moral needs, Fuller presages the Pragmatists' message.

The rights-oriented perspective that dominated America's founding era was uncomfortable with imposing prescriptions of what another person “should” do out of moral duty. People are, at least theoretically, born as political and moral equals. Each individual possesses an internal moral compass

that enables him or her to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong. However, as people are equal, no one person can impose moral duties upon another. Moreover, as religious truth is ultimately unverifiable, and therefore a matter of belief, it is an imperfect source of morality. As religious belief must inevitably rest upon an inadequate awareness of truth, religion is an unsound basis for making uniform moral laws. Respect of an individual's freedom of choice, action, and belief necessarily requires a tentative rejection of any moral absolutism, and therefore of any public prescription of moral duty.

The deductive nature of Enlightenment –era thought promotes a specific style of leadership. Truth creates parameters on the authority of leaders. Enlightenment thought, in its respect for human equality and its acknowledgement that individual consciences may come to different conclusions as to matters unknowable, such as religion, restricts the powers given to leaders to make moral decisions for others. Morality is a private concern derived from individual belief. The respect of individual rights, including the right of conscience, precludes any assertion by one party as to what another equal party “should” do. Adam Smith expressed this perspective in contrasting the legitimacy of invoking moral duties versus legal justice:

Beneficence is always free, it cannot be extorted by force, the mere want of it exposes no punishment; because the mere want of beneficence tends to do no real positive evil ... there is, however, another virtue of which the observance is not left to the freedom of our own wills, which may be extorted by force, and of which the violation exposes to resentment, and consequently to punishment. This virtue is justice; the violation of justice is injury – it does real and positive hurt to some particular persons ... We must always, however, carefully distinguish what is only blamable, or the proper object of disapprobation from what force may be employed either to punish or prevent.<sup>16</sup>

What have become known as “good Samaritan” statutes that impose duties on people to do positive good to prevent harm are the antithesis of Smith's doctrine.<sup>17</sup> The understanding behind them is that some force – the state, an elite few, or a leader – has the authority to compel adherence to a specific moral code and demand behavior consistent with it. Enlightenment thought draws sharp distinctions between public and private spheres as a means of protecting individuals from intrusive public demands.<sup>18</sup> If Hofstadter is correct in attributing the rise of individualism to a reliance upon reason, then Americans

rejection of reason may well be rooted in its embrace of collectivist doctrines. Despite the collectivist tendencies of the Transcendentalists, American philosophy prior to the Civil War remained largely individualistic.

Western theorists of the late nineteenth century challenged both man's reliance upon reason and his individualism. By the early twentieth century, many intellectual leaders held that people behave on the basis of irrational and self-interested impulses rooted in group dynamics to create tentative and relative truths that are used by empowered groups to explain that which cannot be understood. In this context, ideas can easily be tools of manipulation and truth can be seen as a fungible entity used to serve immediate goals. Much of twentieth-century history seems, to many, to validate these conclusions of nineteenth-century thinkers. The ideas of Marx, Freud, and cultural anthropologists not only challenged assumptions of man's reason and individuality but also the purpose and scope of philosophy.<sup>19</sup> To the extent philosophy is a quest for truth, the truth that it finds or asserts is constructed by individuals or communities. It is therefore subjective not objective. It exists in the consciousness of individuals or groups of people as a basis for making sense of the world and their place in it. Truth does not exist apart from man, but is a creation of man.

The rise of collectivist thought in the United States may well owe its greatest debt to pragmatists William James and John Dewey. Probably the reason that Hofstadter explicitly had to exclude the Pragmatists from his expose of contributors to anti-rational thought in America is that they are so much like the evangelical Protestants he pillories. Both groups of thinkers not only subordinate individual beliefs, values, and goals to the considerations of the whole; but, both do so with little regard for man's rational abilities. In Pragmatism, William James cites Charles Saunders Pierce for the relatively uncontroversial proposition that "beliefs are really rules for actions". He, however, then proceeds to explain that the idea or thought supporting a belief is of no real value – the value of a belief is solely in the action it produces: "to develop a thought's meaning, we need only determine what conduct it is fitted

to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance”.<sup>20</sup> Later in the same text, he issues a value-laden critique of rationalist philosophy:

A pragmatist turns his back resolutely and once [and] for all upon a lot of inveterate habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reason, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns toward concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power. That means the empiricist temper regnant and the rationalist temper sincerely given up.<sup>21</sup>

Truth then, for James, is clearly not a product of man’s reason as exercised in thinking, reading, and dialectic; nor is it objective. Truth is formed only through the experiences of people, acting in groups, as a means of producing value or serving the “good”. Using an inductive reasoning model, James argues that people must come to moral judgments from specific social experiences. These moral judgments form the basis for constructing truths that are nothing more than tools used to justify social actions productive of a good consistent with morality. Morality does not derive from truth, nor from the belief in it; rather, it serves as the basis for creating truth and belief. James states that a pragmatist “talks[s] about truths in the plural, about their utility and satisfactoriness, about the success with which they work ... Truth, for him, becomes a class-name for all sorts of definite working-values in experience.”<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, Hofstadter writes: “The feeling that ideas should above all be made to work, the disdain for doctrine and for refinements in ideas, the subordination of men of ideas to men of emotional power or manipulative skill are hardly innovations of the twentieth century; they are inheritances from American Protestantism.”<sup>23</sup> James uses the same descriptive language in support of Pragmatism as Hofstadter does in his attack on evangelical Protestantism.

The goal, for James, is to create a generally accepted truth within society that is the product of his moral code – a moral code that would become largely consistent with late twentieth-and early twenty-first-century conceptions of social justice. As he states, “truth is one species of good, and not, as is usually supposed, a category distinct from good.”<sup>24</sup> Truth must result from morality – from conceptions of good and bad. It is a value-laden, subjective creation. Ultimately, it must serve as the basis for people

acting in service of the social good. It is a tool used to motivate. James writes of truth: “it is true because it is useful means the same as it is useful because it is true.”<sup>25</sup>

John Dewey, often recognized as the father of contemporary American education, endorses this same value-laden approach to the construction of truths. Knowledge, or belief in a truth, he argues, must be “a product of the cooperative and communicative operations of human beings living together. Its communitarian origin is an indication of its rightful use.”<sup>26</sup> Advocating the need for a communitarian ethic, he urges the development of a religiosity rooted not in doctrine or belief in the supernatural, but rather in “the attachment of emotion to [realizable social] ends.”<sup>27</sup> He wants this religious zeal to mobilize people in the pursuit of a social ideal rooted in morality. “All modes of human behavior are affected with a public interest; and full realization of this interest is equivalent to a sense of a significance that is religious in its function.”<sup>28</sup>

Though holding relativist positions on truth, Dewey and James argue for a normative, and even universal, conception of morality. James even writes of a universal moral understanding forming the basis of a different type or “better” truth – “an ideal ... at which all our temporary truths will one day converge.”<sup>29</sup> The Pragmatists are comfortable, to an extent that no rights-oriented theorist ever could be, with a third party, even one possessing the power of an educator, a governor, or a social leader, prescribing moral judgments for others. James and Dewey assert that people “should” feel, react, think, or even believe certain things in response to stimuli rooted in social experiences. To the degree that these experiences become shared, morality becomes more universal, and more likely to function, in Dewey’s terms, as a “common faith.”

The Pragmatic school of thought asserts that truth is subjective not objective. Man creates truths to serve his needs. Pragmatists also argue that there is an identifiable public good that is largely consistent with popular conceptions of social justice. The good is rooted in values and morals that are learned or derived from personal experience rather than from books or contemplation. These moral

lessons are perceived emotionally. Pragmatists emphasize the “heart” over the “head” and rely on human empathy as the basis for establishing moral perspectives. Pragmatists rely on inductive reasoning to come to judgment, building from myriads of personal experiences a moral awareness that can serve as the basis for creating usable truths.

Pragmatism offers an empowering attitude, rooted in an acceptance of man’s ability to empathize with his fellow man and create social progress from a moral compulsion to do so. It adapts the nineteenth-century reliance upon science and engineering to moral uses in what has come to be known as social engineering. Pragmatism is ultimately problem-oriented and moralistically judgmental. It seeks to eliminate poverty, disease, crime, and hatred because they are “evils” without regard to the origin of the evil or the extent to which the means necessary to eliminate it might contravene some ideology or belief.

Today’s culture reflects the success of James and Dewey. Contemporary society in the United States embraces a shared morality without a shared understanding of the basis of that morality. Political correctness, as a popular expression of post-modernist thought, tells each of us what to say, write, think, and feel, but leaves the issue of what is true unaddressed. Ideology has become a code word for close mindedness. Beliefs are seen as polarizing and divisive – destructive of consensus building. Extremists are not pragmatic. High school and college students are taught to engage in the intellectual exercise of deconstruction. If ideologies are nothing more than created rationalizations to justify some desired action, then expressed ideologies need to be deconstructed to understand the psychological, economic, emotional, or other self-focused bases for their having been created. Students need not read philosophy, much less develop one of their own, because ideas and beliefs do not matter. Action matters; ideology does not. Young people today are taught that their identity is formed not by what they believe, but by what group (race, class, gender, ethnicity) they belong to. They are taught not that people are equal, but that they are inherently different – and that difference is rooted in group identification. This teaching serves as the basis for diversity programs in businesses and schools throughout the country. Blacks think differently than whites. Poor people think differently than rich people. Men think differently from women.

Accordingly, we need diversity so as to gain exposure to these different ways of thinking. Group identity determines who one is, what one values, and how one thinks. In this context, why read Plato or Rousseau? Their works merely convey how rich white men in their respective ages rationalized their psychological needs and selfish desires.

A recent survey of college freshmen in 2005 found that only 45% of that year's incoming college students believed that it was "essential" or "very important" to develop a meaningful philosophy of life. This contrasts with 85.8% of similarly situated freshmen in 1967.<sup>30</sup> For many years in the 1960's and 1970's high school seniors were asked to describe their worldviews or philosophies of life in college application essays. Today, most aspiring college students are asking to describe their recent charity work. The emphasis is on doing, not thinking; and doing in a way that demonstrates conformity to prevailing moral imperatives. Young people are told that they have duties and responsibilities, which they are far more aware of than their rights and freedoms. They have grown up in a world of political correctness in which they are compelled to conform their words and behaviors to accepted moral norms. Diversity is accepted, but deviation from prescribed values is not. The New York Times from April 5, 2009 reported that English students at the Scarsdale Middle School discussed "whether Friar Lawrence was empathetic to Romeo and Juliet." The paper asserted that students "are learning to be nicer this year."<sup>32</sup> Left unanswered is the degree to which "niceness" is universally defined. People can have different views on what is fair or right – is niceness much different? Moreover, does everyone, or should everyone even value or desire niceness? In the same New York Times article, it was reported that:

Los Angeles is spending nearly \$1 million on a nationally known program for 147 middle schools, called Second Step: Student's Success Through Prevention, which teaches empathy, impulse control, anger management, and problem solving. In Seattle, seven public elementary schools are using a Canadian-based program, Roots of Empathy, in which a mother and her baby go into a classroom to explore questions like "What makes you cry?"<sup>33</sup>

What a society teaches its young reflects its current cultural values. In corporate conference rooms, faculty meetings, and even neighborhood dinner parties, dissent from or antagonism to the generally accepted position is unacceptable. We even have come to term the leaders of meetings or

training sessions “facilitators”, a reflection of how easy we want it to be for all to understand or come to the accepted conclusion. These facilitators are trained to ask repeatedly if everyone agrees before moving on to the next point. If any disagreement is expressed, the entire group must revisit the issue until that disagreement is eliminated or muted. Consensus is valued; an honest difference of opinion is not. There can be no winners and losers when everyone agrees – nobody can be right or wrong when there is consensus. How different is this from giving trophies to a child who finishes fifty-first among fifty-two competitors in an athletic competition? How different is it from the tendency of teachers to issue high grades or to accept all opinions from their students (even those that make no sense) so as not to bruise delicate egos or discourage fragile psyches? When leaders require “buy-in” from their followers, just whose ego or psyche is really being protected? How did the generation that took pride in “telling it like it is” become dependent upon positive “self-talk” to make it through the day? Who would have guessed that forty years later, “Momma’s little helper” would be “Chicken Soup for the Soul”?

Not only the judgments of America’s young people are being formed in the way James and Dewey prescribed – that is by coming to moral conclusions from individual experiences. No greater example of this process at work exists than the current “talk show” on TV, such as that of Oprah Winfrey or Dr. Phil. A few dozen people, constituting the adult student audience, are seated together to consider an issue, personalized in the experience of a guest. The issue is developed from that guest’s experiences, conveyed in such a way as to generate a predictable emotional response. The studio audience shares the experience and reacts to it in dialogue, tears, and laughter that initiates a group dynamic that inevitably creates near universality in the attendees’ feelings. The host then assumes the responsibility to channel these shared feelings into moral outrage. Moral judgment is the call to order – the resolution of the issue is clear. Ideology is irrelevant. Rational debate is pointless. Inductive reasoning from specific case study to general policy conclusion combines with moral sentiments to resolve the matter. The same scenario is repeated in classrooms that rely on student testimony to explain topics under discussion. In most classrooms across the country, teachers value the students’ personal engagement with the course material

more than a full understanding of that material. This emphasis on personal feelings as a basis for action rooted in created truths has even made its way into political campaigns. President William Clinton initiated the practice of telling the story, almost always a sad one, tempered by hope for change, of a single person from a town that he was visiting as a means of clarifying the issues he wanted to address. The individual story always elicited emotional responses from the audience that served as the basis for social action. Today, seemingly every candidate uses the same ploy.

A quick walk down the aisle of a bookstore or a perusal of listings on Amazon.com indicates that many, and perhaps even a majority of the authors, and presumably the buyers, of leadership texts published today conceive of leadership primarily as an acquired interpersonal skill for motivating others.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, leadership training and coaching programs encourage business managers to appreciate the desires, goals, and concerns of co-workers as the basis for developing initiatives to build greater efficiency and productivity. Indications from the 2008 presidential primaries found that voters supported “change agents” who appeared “likeable”, seemingly relatively unconcerned about experience or positions on issues of policy.<sup>35</sup> These conclusions support an understanding of leadership as rooted in group dynamics. Leadership can be understood as a relationship between leaders and followers predicated upon shared values and goals. The leader utilizes these shared values and goals as a basis for encouraging or motivating his or her followers. Leadership, in his view, involves the acceptance of the understandings, values, and priorities of the people who will be led. Leaders do not change or improve people; they work with them to pursue common interests. As Tim Parks asks in his recent novel, Cleaver, “... do you think that in a democracy it’s inevitable that the successful politician will be no more than a choirmaster for the loudest chorus?”<sup>36</sup> And seemingly today, everything is a democracy – churches, little league teams, classrooms, and business offices employ leaders who take as well as give direction. This is a conception of leadership rooted in a worldview that prioritizes experiences over contemplation and emotion over reason.

Even the laws of the United States have embraced emotion over reason. Is beating up one's spouse any worse than beating up one's neighbor? If so, by what moral scale?; in accordance with whose value system? In years' past, both were considered battery and punishable as such. But such legalistic language did not serve an agenda for those who wanted to limit the occurrence of violence within homes. A more emotional, and value-laden terminology had to be created; and with it a different pattern of sentencing. Today the terms "spousal abuse", "hate crimes", and "child abuse" compel moral outrage. Societal goals are achieved at the expense of reason.

A society that values consensus rooted in a shared morality looks for leaders who endorse and exemplify its morals. A recent poll showed that whether a candidate for president had good relations with his family constituted a larger factor in voting than his or her experience or position on certain policy issues.<sup>36</sup> Americans today seemingly want their business and political leaders to do some of their thinking for them, and to present their thoughts so as to legitimize positions that they, the followers, have already taken. Leaders provide the rationale, a believable basis for the policies consistent with the interests of the followers. Most often, these rationales are rooted in values and morals rather than ideas, ideals, and ideologies. We do not need to hear analytically-reasoned analysis, only that which justifies how we feel.

Plato, in his Republic, used the "Allegory of the Cave" to explain his conception of leadership. He saw people living, for generations, as if in a dark cave, chained to a wall. The only "reality" they knew was that of the shadowy images projected upon a wall in front of them. But, unknown to them, a world of sunshine, green trees and plants, birds and animals of all hues existed. To pull the people out from the comfort of their cave and what they knew to be "real" would cause them pain and confusion. The sunlight would hurt their eyes; the colors would seem strange and alienating. But, that is what the leader, for Plato must do. Why? Because it was the truth – and the leader must show the people the truth even when it hurts them.

Plato accepted that there is an objective “truth”, that it is knowable. Today many Americans doubt that such a truth exists. It is a tool, a creation to be used, and that is all. In this intellectual environment, we expect our leaders to create usable truths. We accept them and their truths so long as they “work” for us; and when they cease to work, we search for new ones. A leader, then, is nothing more than a mouthpiece for individual self interest contextualized in prevailing social values and morals. He or she is a charismatic person able to mobilize groups of people by appealing to their emotions – fears, desires, hopes. We expect our leaders to motivate us by tapping into our psychological, economic, and social needs and providing the rationale for behaving in ways that address them. There is no reason in any of this. To the extent that anti-intellectualism exists in America today, we liberals, just as much as the evangelicals, helped to create it.

## Notes

1. Richard Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life. (NY: Random House, Vintage Books, 1962), vii.
2. Margaret Fuller, letter to William Henry Channing, 1840 in The Portable Margaret Fuller, ed. Mary Kelley (N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1994), 499.
3. Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism, 22-23.
4. John Dewey, A Common Faith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1934), 8.
5. Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism, 59.
6. William James, Pragmatism, ed. Bruce Kublick (Indianapolis: Hackett Publ., 1981), 115.
7. David A. Hollinger, "The Problem of Pragmatism in American History: A Look Back and A Look Ahead", in Robert Hollinger and David DePaw, Pragmatism: From Progressivism to Postmodernism (Westport, CT: Praeger Press, 1995), 24.
8. Hollinger and DePaw, Pragmatism, xvi.
9. Ibid, xvii.
10. See for example, the writings of Richard Porty
11. Hollinger and DePaw, Pragmatism, 6.
12. Ibid, 7.
13. Compare the language of evangelist Rev. Francis Brown in 1819 and Billy Graham in the 1950s, with that of Margaret Fuller in the early nineteenth century.

Rev. Brown:

That the labours of the philosopher were so impotent, and the preaching of the apostle attended with such energy is not strange. The mind of Plato, after all his attainments, was involved in spiritual darkness. Paul, on the other hand, was irradiated with a light from heaven, strong and clear; and the same divine spirit, who at first imparted it to his own mind, accompanied it, as it was conveyed from him to his fellow man ... If instead of placing Paul in contrast with Plato alone, I had supposed all the philosophers of Greece and Rome arrayed on one side against this single apostle, the general result would have been the same. (Rev. Francis Brown, "Sermon Before the Ecclesiastical Convention of New Hampshire", June 3, 1818, at the convention of the Congregational and Presbyterian Ministers in the state of New Hampshire (now in the Presbyterian Historical Library, Philadelphia), 19-20.)

Rev. Billy Graham:

I sincerely believe that partial education throughout the world is far worse than none at all, if we only educate the mind without the soul ... Turn that man loose upon the world [who has] no power higher than his own, he is a monstrosity, he is but halfway educated, and is more dangerous than though he were not educated at all.

[In the place of the Bible] we have substituted reason, rationalism, mind culture, science worship, the working power of government, Freudianism, naturalism, humanism, behavioralism, positivism, materialism, and idealism. (As quoted in William G. McLaughlin, Jr., Billy Graham: Revivalist in a Secular Age (N.Y.: Ronald Press Co., 1960), 5.)

Fuller:

On the subject of Christianity, my mind is clear. If Divine, it will stand the test of any comparison. I believe the reason it has so imperfectly answered to the aspirations of its Founder is, that men have received it on external grounds. I believe that a religion, thus received, may give the life an external decorum, but will never open the fountains of holiness in the soul. (Fuller, "Letter to Channing," 499.)

14. Margaret Fuller, "Our City Charities", New York Daily Tribune (March 19, 1845), in Kelly, The Portable Margaret Fuller, 371.

15. *Ibid.*, 376 (emphasis added).

16. Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, Part II, sect. II, ch.1, par. 3-6 (1759), in republication by Liberty Classics, edited by D.D. Raphael and A.J. Macfie (Indianapolis, 1976), 78-79.

17. Many Americans first learned of these laws in the final episode of the Seinfeld TV show. "The-Finale", Seinfeld. By Larry David. NBC, May 14, 1998.

18. For the American implementation of this distinction see Mark Douglas McGarvie, One Nation Under Law (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004).

19. The role of these three intellectual movements in shaping Western thought is explored in the context of the Jewish Diaspora from nineteenth-century ghettos. John Murray Cuddihy, The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Levi-Strauss, and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1974).

20. William James, Pragmatism, 26.

21. James, Pragmatism, 28.

22. *Ibid.*, 34.

23. Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism, 55.

24. James, Pragmatism, 37.

25. *Ibid.*, 93.

26. John Dewey, A Common Faith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1934), 83.

27. Dewey, Common Faith, 79.

28. *Ibid.*, 80.

29. James, Pragmatism, 95, 100-101.

30. Sharon Jayson, "The Goal: Wealth and Fame", USA Today, January 9, 2007. Lifestyle 1-2.

31. Winnie Hu, "School's Gossip Girls and Boys Get Some Lessons in Empathy," New York Times, April 5, 2009, Section 1, page 1, 23.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. John Adair, Leadership and Motivation: The Fifty-Fifty Rule and the Eight Key Principles of Motivating Others (Philadelphia, PA: Kogan Page, 2006); John Baldoni, Great Motivation Secrets of Great Leaders (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2005); Carl D. Glickman, Stephen P. Gordon and Jovita M. Ross-Gordon, SuperVision and Instructional Leadership: A Developmental Approach, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2006); Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis and Annie McKee, Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2002); John C. Maxwell, The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader: Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999); John B. Miner, Organizational Behavior I: Essential Theories of Motivation and Leadership (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharp, 2005); Lyman W. Porter, Gregory A. Bigley and Richard M. Steers, Motivation and Leadership at Work (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1996); Max Depree, Leadership is an Art (New York, NY: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1989); Peter G. Northouse, Leadership: Theory and Practice (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004).

35. Kirk Johnson, “We Agreed to Agree, And Forgot to Notice”, The New York Times, January 6, 2008, Sect. 1, 4.

36. Tim Parks, Cleaver, (New York, N.Y.: Arcade, 2006), 16.

36. Selzer & Co. Poll conducted May 12-16, 2007 on likely caucus attendees in Iowa Democratic and Republican caucuses. Forty-two percent of respondents said that a candidate who had “messy family relations” would make them less likely to vote for that candidate, contrasted with only six percent who reacted negatively to the absence of experience or fourteen percent who reacted to a candidate’s early position on the Iraq war.