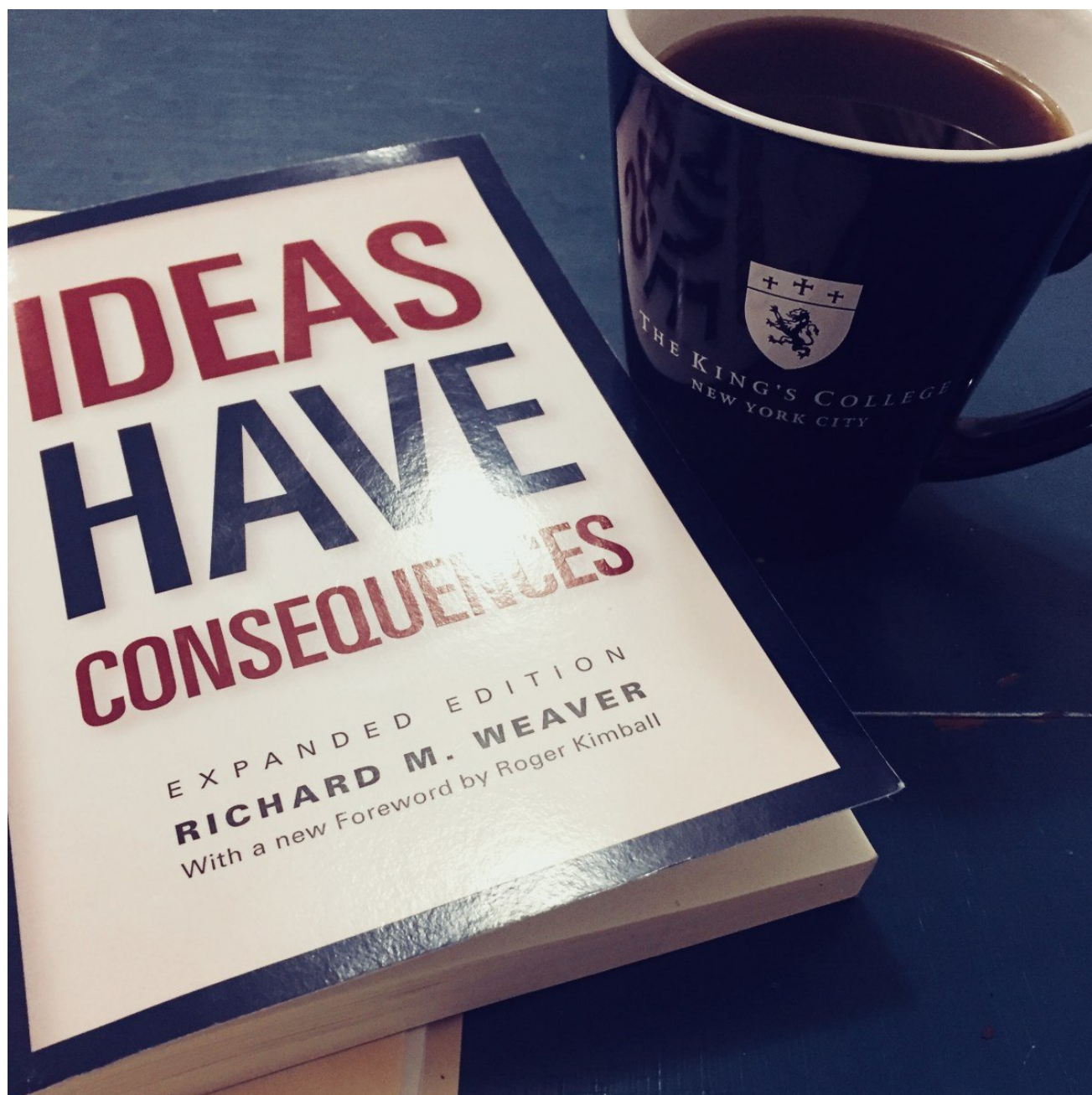


On the Infantile Leftism of the Rich

by Fergus Downie



Ideas have consequences. Yup, especially bad ones. It's a truism and also the title of a great book by an American reactionary who Ill deserves his oblivion, the more so as he possessed the Nietzschean gift of being able to skewer mob delusions with an acid phrase. Richard Weaver's little gem is

full of them and being a prematurely aged misanthrope it's a joy to experience the exquisite sensitivity of a man who could imagine middle America was lurching towards sentimentalised barbarism in the 20s and all courtesy of a philosophical error in medieval Europe.

Like all great writers he was ahead of his time, it is our grave misfortune that when they became 'current' it's too late. Habit and apathy have wrought their worse amongst your fellow citizens and by then all you are left with is the aesthetics.

It's a beautiful elegy all the same and speaks to a time when highly cultured Americans expressed their alienation from their country by being Tories rather than Marxists. Daniel Bell was another great in that tradition and an anecdote from Christopher Hitchens shows the searing barb can be very short.

The hugely overrated Hitchens was like most of his ex-Trotskyite ilk obsessed with his dark tea party of the soul once he discovered (after a life's sermonising) that communism wasn't kosher, and he bored me endlessly with his pious recantations, particularly when, with Bolshevik style tedium he conjured up pretentious aphorisms to hammer home his navel gazing. Having a 'Kronstadt moment' was how this narcissistic epiphany was frequently described and being as sophisticated as he was he had to wait til the 90s for it to dawn. Bell, he noted, had less long lasting illusions and when asked what prompted his Kronstadt moment he was to the point; 'Kronstadt'

He was an old man but it still has some piquancy now that American millennials are storing up their worst. The creed of resignation, envy and despair is by all accounts deep set on American campuses and this is how it should be. The shrinking western proletariat are actually largely immune to these vices, the pullulating hordes of humanities students feel them up close and personal because their feeble scraps of knowledge and accomplishment weigh heavily in these industrial

warehouses of mediocrity. I felt it in the 90s at college and when in the ripe period of middle-aged decay you see someone manoeuvre a sofa up the stairs without smashing your walls and bannisters you tend to think every working man was born in Renaissance Italy. Any chance of imagining yourself being the vanguard goes after that. It's damned useful stuff and you know he'll have another idiot to educate after you. Stunned by his innate geometric mind I had to ask him what he thought of Trump.

'He's a bit of a nob on Twitter but when he actually does something it's not too shabby. You don't have to go to Eton to tell China to f... off and kill terrorists.'

I put down the books after that. Pericles was in the house and he plastered a wall after that.