THE PRAIRIE DICHOTOMY: AN AMERICAN CULTURAL PATTERN

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[Signatures]

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THE PRAIRIE DICHOTOMY: AN AMERICAN CULTURAL PATTERN

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The "gilded age" produced two of America's greatest intellects: Thorstein Veblen and Mark Twain. These men, although they probably never met, viewed the American culture with analytic minds and piercing eyes.

Twain presented social problems in the form of novels and short stories to the people of the world, using a language and style that could be understood by almost any auditor. This resulted in people laughing at themselves and not realizing it, still even now, forty-two years after his death, people still do not understand that they are the sources of their own humor.

Although Twain's presentation of social problems is not in the complicated language of the formal student, his clear, precise analysis of American economic problems reaches far more people and perhaps would have had, if understood, a much greater effect on the reformation of the culture than that of the serious student.

Twain's political ideas were very similar to those of another "river man," Abraham Lincoln, and his predecessor Andrew Jackson.  

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1 Vernon L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, III, p. 124.
Twain's own radicalism was... Jeffersonian, and philosophically he was as old-fashioned as Jackson. But he had moved to Connecticut when they were making mass-production possible by the precision tool and interchangeable parts, which hasten a revolution compared with which the dictatorship of the proletariat is as old-fashioned as Jeffersonian political democracy. The second American Revolution, this time without bloodshed or political theory, was to be based upon technology. 2

Twain's books, as easily understood as they were, were misunderstood and mistaken for children's books. It was useless to point this out to his auditors, for they thought of him as a humorist, and nothing else. The following letter points out the sarcastic way in which he answered his critics for thinking him only a "joker."

Dear Sir:

I am greatly troubled by what you say. I wrote *Tom Sawyer & Huck Finn* for adults exclusively, & it always distresses me when I find that boys and girls have been allowed access to them. The mind that becomes soiled in youth can never again be washed clean. I know this by my own experience, & to this day I cherish an unappeasable bitterness against the unfaithful guardians of my young life, who not only permitted but compelled me to read an unexpurgated Bible through before I was 15 years old. None can ever draw a clean, sweet breath again this side of the grave.

Most honestly do I wish that I could say a softening word or two in defense of Huck's character since you wish it, but really, in my opinion, it is no better than those of Solomon, David, & the rest of the sacred brotherhood.

If there is an unexpurgated (Bible) in the children's department, won't you please help that

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2 Henry S. Canby, *Turn West Turn East*, p. 162.
young woman remove Tom & Huck from that questionable companionship.

Sincerely,

3

S. L. Clemens

Mark Twain began his career as a humorist, and as he saw more and more of life, he began to be more and more pessimistic. He considered the "damned human race" to be slaves to their non-functioning minds, but was never quite convinced that they could not be salvaged if they were educated enough to see their own stupidity. He failed to make them see their stupidity, but he did make them laugh. The "damned human race" remembered the laugh but not the subject of the laughter.

Both of these men were the product of a frontier culture. This frontier culture was steeped in equalitarianism, Calvinism, and utilitarianism. The pleasure-pain doctrines of the English "natural rights" Philosophers, seemed to have a new meaning to a people who had to seek their pleasure from nothing and pay for it with much pain. The main pleasure on the frontier was in knowing that you were doing your job well. Work became the pleasure of the men of the frontier, and the deification of that work was quick to take its place in the legends and folk tales of that area. The Indian fighter, the hunter, and the soldier

3 Albert B. Paine, Mark Twain, A Biography, p. 1281.
were the heroes of this country. They had the glamor, and the fame.

The good hunter, or the good Indian fighter, or the good trapper, took delight in "a job well done," for what more pleasure was there?

The frontier was, at this time, traditionless, semi-classless, and was dominated by physical strength of the members of the communities. The lack of tradition and social classes in this culture made possible a sub-degree of open-mindedness, a virtue little known in the world before and since. 5

Thorstein Veblen was a social philosopher, a formal student with an inquiring mind, of whom it is said, "he was the last man who knew everything." 6 Veblen's work would be confusing to almost any auditor. His style of writing

4 See A. B. Gutherie, The Big Sky, and The Way West, and Devoto, Mark Twain's America.

5 Parrington, op. cit., p. 87. "Mark Twain was the child of a frontier past—just as Lincoln was, as the Gilded Age was,—and America of today could no more breed him (Twain) than it could a Lincoln or a Greeley...his Americanism was the reflection of an environment that is no longer ours, in the slack folk-ways of the frontier that we have outgrown."

6 Max Lerner, The Portable Veblen.

7 Ibid., p. 43. "He is not a graceful writer, nor is he one for the slack mind and the unwary spirit. Reading Veblen means following a sustained argument, penetrating an oblique and highly individual vocabulary, snaring overtones that may be now derisive and now indignant and now gently playful."
is difficult to understand, and his vocabulary is one of the most extensive ever known, for he believed that there were no synonyms in the English language.

Twain and Veblen's economic ideas are so similar that it is interesting to speculate upon this similarity, with an eye to trying to understand the cultural reasons for the close relation in their thinking.

Twain could see the predatory nature of the peoples of the world by observation, while Veblen used cultural anthropology to show that the world's culture was predatory. Twain and Veblen found the same things wrong with society, but only Veblen discovered why the culture was out of adjustment.

At Carlton College, a small Lutheran school in Minnesota, Veblen studied economics under the brilliant classical economist, John Bates Clark. Later at Johns Hopkins University, he came under the influence of Charles S. Peirce, the founder of American Pragmatism, who called his attention to the deep philosophical problems that underlay scientific thought: what is meant by scientific truth and how does the scientist go about revealing that type of truth? Above all Peirce insisted that scientific truth is derived from two sources, namely the observed data and the general outlook or orientation of the scientist.

Veblen continued his graduate work at Yale College, where he studied cultural anthropology with William G. Summer.

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8 Joseph Dorfman, Thorstein Veblen and His America, Chapter XV.

9 Allen Gruchy, Modern Economic Thought, p. 32.
He absorbed the cultural anthropologist's view of culture and civilization as an evolving process and the idea that

... the material framework of modern civilization is the industrial system, and the directing force which animates this framework is business enterprise. Industry receives its scope and method from the machine. 10

Grounded in pragmatism, evolutionism, and nineteenth century German idealism, Veblen started a scientific and systematic analysis of American culture.

Veblen lived in an era of growing intellectual ferment. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century a new American outlook was being fashioned on the basis of scientific and philosophical insights. The new American outlook was more realistic and more certain than the naive, romantic outlook which it was replacing. It heralded the development of philosophical sophistication that had been so long lacking in the United States. 11

Twain and Veblen saw the contradiction of the ideals on which the nation is founded and the business principles or social mores with which it is governed. The conflict between these ideals and the predatory instincts of business enterprise was the criteria of the confusion of the nation. The contradictions caused by these conflicts caused their pessimism, their condemnation of the human race, and the faint spark of hope that through education and recognition and partial solving of these problems, the human race would develop into a peaceful race, and live by the government of the machine.

Veblen's faith in technology was dimmed in the latter part of his life, for he could see that the engineers, who were the only group capable of taking over our technology without taking over the "imbecile institutions," did not choose to do so because of their complete domination by business enterprise.

Both Twain and Veblen's ideas took the form of a dichotomy, in which there are two sides of society, just as there are two sides of a coin. These sides are both vying for the control of society. One of these sides is antiquated and obsolete, while the other is progressive, and it is the conflict of these sides that determines whether we advance or retreat in social progression.

This study is an attempt to show the similarity of these dichotomies, and to explain their cultural bearing on economic thought.

Lerner, op. cit., p. 12. "Knowing that there was no revolutionary potential either among American farmers or workers, he turned to the engineers. There were the creative master technicians whose brains and skill dominated the state of the industrial arts, and they alone could take over the going technology without any of the pecuniary institutional encumbrances. . . ."
CHAPTER II

VERLEN'S DICHOTOMY

(Thorstein Veblen's economic thinking was a two-sided arrangement in which the two opposing factors were sparring for the control of society. These two opposing forces were often mentioned as the conflicts between business and industry, "the pecuniary calculus" and "the instinct of workmanship," superstition and science, ceremonialism and science, and "the instinct of workmanship" and "the imbecile institutions."²

Veblen's dichotomy is based on the conflict between the technological and ceremonial or "imbecile institutions" of society. The technological side of this action being dynamic or changing, while the "imbecile institutions" are the "dyed in the wool" habitual thoughts of the culture that the members and participants of the culture refuse to part with even though they are obsolete.

¹C.E. Ayres, The Theory of Economic Progress, p. 101. "This difficulty could be resolved if it could be clearly understood that the distinction of the technological and ceremonial aspects of society is a dichotomy, but not a dualism. That is, it undertakes to distinguish two aspects of what is still a continuous activity both aspects of which are present at all times."

²Veblen, The Instinct of Workmanship, p. 41. "An 'imbecile institution' is an 'addiction to magical superstition or religious conceptions' that might keep the technology of the community from increasing at its natural rate.
Social advance, especially as seen from the point of view of economic theory, consists in a continued progressive approach to an approximately exact adjustment of inner relation to outer relations are subject to constant change as a consequence of the progressive change going on in the inner relations. 3

Any community, according to Veblen, could be viewed "as an industrial or economic mechanism, the structure of which is made up of what is called its economic institutions." 4 These institutions are the traditional or habitual ways of working, living, and thinking in the community.

The industrial institutions of the community would be those institutions which are essentially engaged in the production of commodities, and the non-industrial institutions of the community would be those which have nothing to do with the production of commodities, such as being engaged in superstitious activities, magical incantations, devout observances, sports, warfare, and other types of ceremonial behavior.

According to Veblen, men are born with an "instinct of workmanship" 5 and a "propensity for idle curiosity," and it is

4 Ibid., p. 194.
5 Veblen does not at any place in The Instinct of Workmanship define "instinct." To him it is an a priori concept which enables man to act in an adaptive manner apart from either experience or learning. It is an hereditary drive.
these things that cause the knowledge, technology and standard of living to increase in any culture.

Like the other instinctive propensities, it is to be presumed, the idle curiosity takes effect only within the bounds of that metabolic margin of surplus energy that comes in evidence in all animal life, but that appears in larger proportions in the higher animals and in a peculiarly obtrusive manner in the life of man.

The instinctive curiosity, then, comes in now and again serviceably to accelerate the gain in technological insight by bringing in material information that may be turned to account, as well as by persistently disturbing the habitual body of knowledge on which workmanship draws. 6

The main conflict is between these two sides of the culture; the industrial and non-industrial segments of our society.

In both The Instinct of Workmanship and The Theory of the Leisure Class, Veblen points out that the rise of the industrial classes and the rise of exploitation of these industrial classes, as we now know them are due to the contamination of "the instinct of workmanship" in the early periods of the transition between peaceful savagery and predatory barbarianism, by obsolete habits and obsolete ways of thinking. 7

Veblen believed that man was basically a peaceful animal with peaceful instincts, but the institutions of

6Veblen, The Instinct of Workmanship, p. 96.

7Ibid., pp. 134-143. The Theory of the Leisure Class, p. 16.
his society being essentially predatory and barbaric, had contaminated these peaceful instincts so that he had become warlike. Thus the institutions prevented man from using one of his most fundamental instincts, the "instinct of workmanship." 

Veblen argues that men did not originally find their labor irksome and disagreeable, but as the institution of the leisure class evolved, they became aware of the irksomeness and disagreeableness of labor because of the very obvious unequal distribution of work, wealth, and status. 

It was the institution of the leisure class that corrupted the "instinct of workmanship" and tried to dominate the technological propensities of the individual, thereby gaining control of the productive factors of the community. 

The evolution of the leisure class from peaceful savagery to predatory barbarianism illustrates the inability of the institutions of the culture to evolve at the same rate of progress as does the technology of that culture. This results in a cultural lag which has, in some instances, been taken over completely by the "imbecile institutions," and remained a static culture with both the institutions and technology at a fixed state. 

The leisure class evolved from the hunting stage of peaceful savagery, in which the male hunter provided

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sustenance for the tribe or family. The hunger, in order to be successful, had to be strong, cunning, and courageous; virtues which have filtered down to us through the ages as the prime virtues of manhood. These qualities were necessary in this state of the industrial arts because of the necessity of the use of primitive tools and weapons.

The industrial or menial work of the community was done by the women, the aged, and the children who were as yet too young to participate in the hunt. The development of productive and industrial work by this class of people set rather rigidly the division of labor between men and women.

The domestication of animals and the development of agricultural techniques made hunting and predatory life obsolete, yet the obsolete institutions still functioned with the new culture, thus creating a leisure class.

The hunt, being an honorific occupation, was clung to by the able-bodied men of the community even though it was obsolete. The honorific occupation of hunters, who by necessity in the past had been cunning, courageous, and strong men in the community, became the leisure class; a leisure class that lived off the "surplus production" of the industrial producers of the community. It must be

remembered however, "that an habitual neglect of work does not constitute a leisure class." Honor, status, and waste have to accompany this habitual neglect of work.

The warlike attitude of the now unemployed hunters began to seep into their institutions. Now warfare was considered by the obsolete hunters a more daring game than the hunt, that is it was the war, the raid, and battle that took the cunning, courage, and strength of the able-bodied men. This resulted in raids on neighboring tribes, in which women were captured as trophies. The women, being industrial producers, were useful trophies. This made the ownership of women one of the first steps in the evolution of marriage. "From the ownership of women the concept of ownership extends itself to include the products of their industry; and so there arises the ownership of things as well as of persons."

In this culture too, the women were the industrial producers. They planted and harvested the crops, made the clothing, and performed other useful and necessary activities for the tribe. The honorific men hunters were too good, too strong, and were endowed with too much status to do the menial industrial work of the community; they used their time in ceremonially adequate waste.

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11 Ibid., p. 22.  
12 Ibid., p. 24.
This stratification of employment led to the choosing of professions that would be ceremonially adequate and honorific to the leisure class. Ceremonial adequacy being the chief prerequisite for choosing occupations, warfare, government, devout observances, and sports became the most acceptable occupations for the honorific class.

Ownership developed out of this culture through the seizing of women slaves which were held in the nature of trophies. Previously men had brought home tusks and horns of animals to prove their hunting ability. Now they brought home greater and more honorific trophies, women slaves.

Property is still of the nature of a trophy but with the cultural advance, it becomes more and more a trophy of success scored in the game of ownership. 14

The accumulation of property is a trophy because it is proof of a man's pecuniary gain in buying and selling the community's resources to his own advantage. Property is a trophy also, in that it shows a differential pecuniary worth of one member of the community towards another member of that community.

The development of the leisure class as a parasitic class points out the fact that the leisure class is based on waste. 15 The maintenance of such a class shows that the

13 Ibid., p. 2. 14 Ibid., p. 28. 15 Ibid., p. 97.
community is so richly endowed with resources that it can afford to throw them away by keeping up a class of non-producing consumers that take the prime production without any type of productive effort at all.

Unproductive consumption of goods is honorable, primarily as a mark of prowess and a prerequisite of human dignity; secondarily it becomes substantially honorable in itself, especially the consumption of choice foods, and frequently also of rare articles of adornment, becomes taboo to the women and children; and if there is a base servile class of men, the taboo holds for them. 16

Waste is honorific and shows the other members of the leisure class and the rest of the world that the "waster" is a man of great pecuniary wealth, capable of throwing away much of the production that he controls. Waste, too, is in the form of a trophy, as it is proof of a man's wealth and ability to waste.

Members of the leisure class are peculiarly terrified by productive endeavor, and as a general rule, are conspicuous in their avoidance of it. Hired liveries are on hand to keep their physical exertion at a minimum and their desires at a maximum, thus leaving them free for ceremonial endeavor.

The leisure class is the most conservative of all social classes because any upheaval in the class structure might unseat these non-productive consumers. Therefore,

16 Ibid., p. 69.
fear of the loss of status makes them the staunch defenders of the status quo. Thus the defense of the existing system is the prime objective of the leisure class. They defend it with an instinct similar to the "instinct of self preservation," an instinct considered by most to be stronger than the "instinct of workmanship."

Conservatism being an upper-class characteristic is decorous; and conversely, innovation being a lower-class phenomenon is vulgar. The first and most unreflected element in that instinctive revulsion and reprobation with which we turn from all social innovators is the sense of the essential vulgarity of the wrongs. . . . Innovation is bad form. 17

One of the most dominating institutions in our society is business enterprise. With its metaphysical basis firmly grounded in the natural rights doctrine of the utilitarian philosophers, and in the Calvinistic doctrines of Protestantism, business enterprise is not merely a way of acquiring pecuniary gain, it is a way of living, thinking, and acting. Our conversation and thinking are filled with the concept of profit and loss in pecuniary terms. We speak of "deals," "putting on the pressure" and "selling a bill of goods," in almost all types of non-business and non-pecuniary conversation. Business enterprise assumes the accepted side of the dichotomy, that of the traditional institutions, and is a

parasite living off the "surplus production" of industry because of its traditional predatory patterns of behavior.

The indirect or incidental bearing of business enterprise is wide reaching and forceful business principles have a hold of the people as being something intrinsically right and good. They are therefore drawn on for guidance and conviction even in concerns that are not conceived to be primarily business concerns.19

The primary motive of business enterprise is, of course, pecuniary gain.20

The motive of business enterprise is pecuniary gain, the method is essentially purchase and sale. The aim and usual outcome is an accumulation of wealth. Men whose aim is not increase of possessions do not go into business, particularly not on an independent footing.

The primary method of fulfilling this motive is buying and selling.

Business enterprise as it is used is essentially commercial enterprise. It does not deal with 'raw materials' and finished products. The buying and selling of these commodities requires no productive effort on the part of the commercial man, thus divorcing him from productive usefulness. 21

Business enterprise, by the use of banking, investment, and ownership, has gained control of the industrial facilities and production in a pecuniary culture. That is, they dominate the industry financially, thus giving them control of the "machine process."

19 Ibid., 20.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., p. 20.
The scope and method of modern industry are governed by the machine. This may not seem to hold true for all industries, perhaps not for the greater part of industry as rated by the bulk of the output or by the aggregate volume of labor expended. This dominance of the machine process in industry marks off the present industrial situation from all else of its kind.

The business man, especially the business man of wide and authoritative discretion, becomes a controlling force in industry, because, through the mechanism of investments and markets he controls the plants and processes, and these set the pace and determine the direction and movement of the rest. His control in those portions of the field that are not immediately under his hand is, no doubt, somewhat loose and uncertain, but in the long run his discretion is in a great measure decisive even for the outlying portions of the field, for he is the only large self-directing economic factor. 22

Thus we see the control of the business enterprise over the industrial process, and in particular over the machine process.

Veblen gives the following definition of business enterprise:

The welfare of the community at large is best served by a facility and uninterrupted interplay of the various processes which make up the industrial system at large; but the pecuniary interests of the business men in whose hands lies the discretion in the matter are not necessarily best served by an unbroken maintenance of the industrial balance. Especially is this true as regards those greater business men whose interests are very extensive. The pecuniary operations of the latter are not of a large scope, and their fortunes commonly are not permanently bound up with the smooth working of a given subprocess in the industrial system. Their fortunes are rather related to the larger conjunctures of the

22 Ibid., pp. 1-3.
industrial system as a whole, the interstitial adjustments or to the conjunctures affecting the ramifications of the system. Nor is it uniformly to their interest to enhance the smooth working of the industrial system at large in so far as they are related to it. Gain may come to them from a given disturbance of the system whether the disturbance makes for heightened facility or for widespread hardship, very much as a speculator in the grain futures may be either a bull or a bear. To the business man who aims at differential adjustments or disturbances of the industrial system, it is not a material question whether his operations have an immediate furthering or hindering effect upon the system at large. The end is pecuniary gain, the means is disturbance of the industrial system, except so far as the gain is sought by the old-fashioned method of permanent investment in some one industrial plant, a case which is for the present left on one side as not bearing on the point immediately at hand. 23

The business man then is essentially, according to Veblen, a "disrupter" of the balance of the industrial system. Not only does the business man hamper the balance but he controls the "machine process," the basis of industrial civilization.

In its bearing on modern life and modern business the machine process means something more comprehensive and less external than a mere aggregate of mechanical appliances for the mediation of human labor. The scope of the process is larger than the machine. 24

The industrial community is made up of a vast industrial machine which is governed by interstitial or "trigger-like" adjustments. Business men, whose function

23 Ibid., pp. 27-28.  
24 Ibid., p. 6.
is pecuniary gain, tamper with these adjustments controlling the balance with an eye toward pecuniary gain. The business institutions acquire their money by the fluctuation of the price system, which is composed principally of business institutions. "Any fluctuation of disturbance in this balance means pecuniary gain (or loss) for the business man." Of course the

... means by which this balance is kept is business transactions and the men in whose keep it lies are the business men. The channel by which the disturbances are transmitted from member to member of the comprehensive industrial system is the business relations between the several members of this system; and, under the modern conditions of ownership, disturbances, favorable and unfavorable, in the field of industry are transmitted by nothing but these business relations. 25

"The balance throughout its sequence is a delicate one, and the transmission of a disturbance often goes far." Thus it would be to the business man's advantage to keep the system in constant disturbance and in constant disruption as much of the time as possible. "His gains (or losses) are related to the disturbances that take place rather than to their bearing upon the welfare of the community."26

Every time the system goes out of balance, that is every time production is sabotaged by the business man's

25 Ibid., p. 29.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., p. 29.
tampering with the interstitial adjustment of industry, these business men gain a differential advantage or disadvantage, usually used of course, for the further exploitation of the industrial system.

In Veblen's view, business enterprise is compelled by its basic position of exploitation of the industrial process to sabotage "the machine process." In order to survive, business enterprise must fight against the authoritative productivity of the machine by keeping prices high and production limited.

A businesslike control of the rate and volume of output is indispensable for keeping up a profitable market, and a profitable market if first and remitting condition of prosperity in any community whose industry is owned and managed by the business men. And the ways and means of this necessary control of the output of industry are always and necessarily something in the nature of sabotage—something in the way of retardation, restriction, withdrawal, unemployment of plant, and workmen,—whereby production is kept short of productive capacity. 29

The price system then, in most cases, controls the industrial output of the culture, but does not necessarily contribute to the production of the industrial output. The business man is merely seeing that he can get something for nothing without the productive effort of producing it and doing it. He is "getting something for nothing from the

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unwary of whom it is considered by experienced persons that
there is one born every minute." 30

In his capacity of business man he does not go
creatively into the work of perfecting mechanical
processes and turning the means at hand to new or
larger uses. That is the work of the men who have
in their hands the devising and oversight of mechan-
ical process. The men in industry must first create
the mechanical possibility and correlations, before
the business man sees the chance, makes the neces-
sary business arrangements, and gives general direc-
tions so that contemplated industrial advance shall go
into effect.

The industrial system is organized on business
principles and for pecuniary ends. The business man
is at the center; he holds the discretion and he
exercises it freely, and his choice falls out now on
one side, and now on another. The retardation, as 31
well as the advance, is to be set down to his account.

Veblen makes it clear that the control of the industrial
process by business enterprise is the control of the tech-
nological resources of the community by the "imbecile in-
stitutions." Thus the primary goal of business enterprise
being pecuniary gain, necessitates the advancement or re-
tardation of the technological process being under the
control of the business man.

The causes of the disturbances of the economic system
then take the form of the withdrawal of technological knowl-
edge, and more often than not are the causes of the in-
dustrial sabotage by the business men.

30 Veblen, Absentee Ownership, p. 143.
The traditions of the past dominate the world we live in just as business enterprise dominates the industrial machinery of the community. "The growth of business enterprise depends upon technology." The only way business enterprise can grow without being replaced by the "machine process" is to control the development of technology.

"The effects of business enterprise upon the habits and temper of the people, and so upon their institutional growth, are chiefly of the nature of sequelae."

The domination of society by the "imbecile institution" is due to the governing of the state of the industrial arts by the status system. The governing of obsolete institutions could result in nothing except confusion, productive sabotage, or cultural stagnation.

People tend to emulate those of higher status, their logic being that those of the higher pecuniary worth must have served their communities exceedingly well or else their pecuniary rewards would not be so great and honorific.

The "instinct of workmanship" or the bent towards workmanship is probably, according to Veblen, one of our most native drives. It is on this concept of the instinct of workmanship that Veblen bases the whole optimistic side of his dichotomy, and if this "instinct of workmanship" does not

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32 Ibid., p. 375.  
33 Ibid.
exist, his dichotomy can have only one conclusion, stagnation. Veblen means here, however, that man has a creative desire, and that desire for creation is one of most dominant drives. The fulfillment of this desire usually takes the form of the improvement of "gadgets", thus linking constructively the creative bent and the "instinct of workmanship."

Veblen defined institutions as the customs, habits, and traditional ways of doing things as long as these things have the approval of the community. Veblen stressed the concept of instinct and habit as being the same relation as that between the institutions and technology. Technology being the result of the "instinct of workmanship" and the institution being the habits that had corrupted the instincts. To Veblen, institutions were little more than encrustations of habit and thought that had originated with man's native endowment of instincts.

Veblen's thought is deeply dualistic, and is stated in unending struggles that go on in the cultural arena. One struggle revolved about how man shall conceive their experiences. It is the conflict between the animistic and the matter-of-fact.

The animistic bent is to satisfy the magical and spiritual things residing in objects of perception, thus

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34 Ibid., pp. 16-23.

human behavior becomes a problem of perpetuating these spirits or habits of thought associated with these magical and spiritual objects. The matter-of-fact bent is to see things in the mechanical or scientific terms of cause and effect. The "imbecile institutions," such as warfare, private property, and "the price system" still are dominant because they carry over the residues of the animistic, giving the magical power of ownership and patriotism to the culture. Veblen thought that "idle curiosity" was the great moving force in history, and that the matter-of-fact scientific attitude sticks, in most cases, to what can be expressed in terms of cause and effect. "Thus to Veblen, the importance of science in modern civilization is not that it makes for progress, but that it replaces the magical with the matter-of-fact."36 Since the institutions that control men and sabotage the functioning of their natural instincts are based on the imbecile institutions, only a replacement of the "imbecile institutions" will bring about a replacement of the magical by the matter-of-fact; thus science is evolutionary rather than utilitarian.

The machine has its effects on members of the institutions and on the institutions day after day. A man cannot live with a machine, work with it, and be entertained

36 Ibid., p. 24.
by it, without coming under the effect of the machine's matter-of-factness.

The only theory ever offered of learning in this sense is the theory of association. This has had a very long history and many illustrations of explanation in terms of association are to be found in the writers of any period. 37

"This is what Veblen means by the 'cultural incidence' of the machine process." 38

What men do, how they grow accustomed to working, thinking and acting, shapes their thoughts about matters other than those of earning a livelihood. The machine process tends to take away the impetus of the "imbecile institutions" such as waste, warfare, private property rights, and religious observances; "the right to get something for nothing from the unwary" is no longer logical.

Veblen saw the whole character of the historical period changed by its technology. But he did not necessarily see it as a direct cause of the change, but as a consequence of that change. A machine technology "does not automatically create a system of law and politics of education and religion to further its goals of abundance." 39 It creates instead, an antithesis for the old institutions. The traditional institutions in the beginning of this

38 Ibid., p. 24.
39 Ibid., p. 25.
conflict usually tightened up their institutional organization and reaffirmed the principles they were striving to maintain, and gained control of the technological processes. There becomes here, at least, an alliance between the ideas of the community and the "vested interests" of the community; the ideas of course, after their domination, would not refute the ideology of that culture.

At some points in his analysis, Veblen believes that ideas and technology might reshape the institutions in its own image, while at other times, he seems to take the opposite view. This will be discussed in greater detail below.

During the process of reshaping these institutions, however, we still have the cultural lag, which Veblen presumed to be the strongest and most strategic position the imbecile institutions might possibly have.

The propensity towards "idle curiosity," was to Veblen a peaceful instinct. It held in it the economic and social advances of all communities and institutions. The "instinct of workmanship" and the propensity towards "idle curiosity" have caused most, if not all, of the advancement of our society, and most of this has been done in the face of hostile imbecile institutions.

The Veblenian definition of technology runs back to the impulsive native traits of human nature, that of the
"instinct of workmanship" and "idle curiosity," which could be compared very favorably with Quesney's "net product."

Human curiosity is doubtless an 'idle propensity,' in the sense that no utilitarian aim enters in its habitual exercise; but the material information which is by this means drawn into the agent's available knowledge man none the less comes to serve the ends of workmanship. 40

Knowledge is idle, in that it is sought impersonally and not as an end in itself, not for conspicuous or pecuniary gain. The "instinct of workmanship" is not directly connected with pecuniary emulation except through its corruption. Pecuniary emulation was considered a reward for a job well done by the utilitarian school of economic theorists. Because of their concept of reward and emulation, they are generally considered to have given capitalism its philosophical basis.

Utilitarianism is the name applied to most modern theories of hedonism. The best known philosophers who concerned themselves with this ethical theory were Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, and John Stewart Mill. Of these, the first and last are better known. The utilitarian school stressed the importance of social welfare in terms of the pleasure of the greatest number of people. The term 'utility' means according to Bentham, 'That property of any object whereby it tends to produce benefit or advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness.' 41

40 Veblen, The Instinct of Workmanship, p. 88.

Technological knowledge is the result of "idle curiosity" because idle curiosity fulfills a psychological need for the satisfaction of the "instinct of workmanship," thus making Veblen's dichotomy a psychological conflict of man against his culture.

The important factor in systematizing knowledge is the current technological scheme of ownership and pecuniary value, which is alien to the "instinct of workmanship," "idle curiosity," and the current "state of the industrial arts."

To Veblen, modern technology is a matter-of-fact, impersonal pursuit of knowledge, "and requires of modern man, in so far as they are modern, a testing by cannons of mechanistic effectiveness." But the American community appears to be divided between "patriotism in the service of the captains of war, and service in the captains of finance."

Technological knowledge is free, it is the collective property of the whole culture, and it is the aggregate knowledge of the community as a whole.

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42 Note the dynamic appeal of hobbies to men who perform menial work and clerical work. In order to satisfy their desire for the instinct of workmanship, they build models, take up woodwork, or have gardens and pets.


44 Veblen, The Instinct of Workmanship, p. 103.
Technological knowledge is of the nature of a common stock, held and carried forward collectively by the community, which is in this relation to be conceived as a going concern. The state of the industrial arts is a fact of group life, not of individual or private initiative or innovation. It is an affair of the collectivity, not a creative achievement of individuals working self-sufficiently in severalty or in isolation. In the main, the state of the industrial arts is always a heritage out of the past; it is always in process of change, perhaps, but the substantial body of it is knowledge that has come down from the earlier generations. New elements of insight and proficiency are continually being added and worked into this common stock by the experience and initiative of the current generation, but such novel elements are always and everywhere slight and inconsequential in comparison with the body of technology that has been carried over from the past.

Each successive move in advance, every new wrinkle of novelty, improvement, invention, adaptation, every further detail of workmanlike innovation, is of course made by individuals and comes out of individual experience and initiative, since the generations of mankind live only in individuals. But each move so made is necessarily made by individuals immersed in the community and exposed to the discipline of group life as it runs in the community, since all life is necessarily group life. The phenomena of human life occur only in this form. It is only as an outcome of this discipline that comes with the routine of group life, and by help of the commonplace knowledge diffused through the community, that any of its members are enabled to make any new move that may in this way be traceable to their individual initiative. 45

Veblen thought that any change was an improvement because it necessarily meant that the people of the community would have to change their way of thinking, and that this would necessarily cause an improvement or alteration in the "state of the industrial arts;" "Every

45 Ibid., p. 103.
expedience or innovation, great or small, that is hit
upon goes into effect by going into the common stock of
technological resources carried by the group."

The scheme of technology so worked out and car-
rried along in the routine of getting a living will
be serviceable for current use and have a substantial
value for a further advance of technological effi-
ciency somewhat in proportion as the knowledge so em-
bodied in technological practice is effectually of
the nature of matter-of-fact. 47

Technological development rests essentially on man's
ability to be a tool-using animal. This is the basis of
the "instinct of workmanship," and the basis of all tech-
nological advancement, for technology is the tool of
society.

While man is conventional he is distinguished
from brute creation as a tool-using animal, his
early progress in the devising and efficient use of
efficient tools, taking the native sense, seems to
have gone forward very slowly, both absolutely and
as contrasted with those lines of workmanship in
which he could carry his point by manual dexterity
unaided by cunningly devised implements and mechani-
cal contrivances, and still more is the contrast
between the incredibly slow and blindfolded advance
of savage culture shown in the sequence of those
typical stone implements which serve conventionally
as landmarks of the early technology, on the one
hand, and on concomitant achievements of the same
stone-age people in the domestication and use of
plants on the other hand. 48

Technological advancement is limited by the waste of
the technological resources by the "imbecile institutions"

46 Ibid., p. 104. 47 Ibid. 48 Ibid., p. 62.
of the culture in respect to the tools and materials of
the community, or by the limitation of the culture by
physical forces such as climate, location, etc.

Given the material environment, the rate and
character of the technological gains in any com-
munity will depend on the initiative and applica-
tion of its members, in so far as the growth of
institutions has not seriously diverted the genius
of the race from its natural bent; it will depend
immediately and obviously on individual talent for
workmanship—on the workmanlike bent and capacity
of the individual members of the community. 49

The material environment is a major factor, but the
neglect of the "instinct of workmanship" or diversion of
the "instinct of workmanship" and rejection of "matter-
of-fact knowledge will cancel all advancement.

Technological efficiency rests on "matter-of-fact"
knowledge, as contrasted with knowledge of the traits
imputed to external objects in making acquaintance with
them.

Therefore, substantial advance of technological
mastery necessarily adds something to this body of
opaque fact, and every evidence proportionately less
than the behavior of inanimate things will come to be
constructed in terms of an imputed workmanlike tech-
nological bent. 50

The "instinct of workmanship" is sponsored by the
"propensity towards idle curiosity," then as the "idle
curiosity" unfolds the technological facts, either positive

49 Ibid., p. 110. 50 Ibid.
or negative, the knowledge of the community, or the technology of the community is increased in proportion.

Technology then, is a dynamic thing, and grows with the discovery of new methods, materials, techniques, and inventions, with each discovery dependent on some previous technological discovery or series of technological discoveries for its own place in the chain of evolution.

The instinctive curiosity, then, comes in now and again serviceably to accelerate the gain in material information that may be turned to account as well as by persistently disturbing the habitual body of knowledge on which workmanship draws. Human curiosity is doubtless an idle propensity, in the sense that no utilitarian aim enters in its habitual exercise; but the material information which is by this means drawn into the agents' available knowledge may none-the-less come to serve the instinct of workmanship.

Of the material so offered as knowledge, or fact, workmanship, makes use of whatever is available . . . . for the large generality of human knowledge this will mean that the raw material of observed fact is selectively worked over, connected up and accumulated on lines of a putative teleological order of things, cast in something like a dramatic form. From which it follows that the knowledge so gained is held and carried over from generation to generation in a form which lends itself with facility to a workmanlike manipulation; it is already digested for assimilation in a scheme of teleology that instinctively commends itself to the workmanlike sense of fitness. But it also follows that in so far as the personalized teleological or dramatic order so imputed to the facts does not by chance, faithfully reflect the casual relations subsisting among these facts, the utilization of them as technological elements will amount to a borrowing of trouble. 51

51 Veblen, The Instinct of Workmanship, pp. 88-89.
Veblen implied the defeat of the "instinct of workmanship" by the "pecuniary calculus." "Business principles have a peculiar hold on the affections of the people as something intrinsically right and good." They are, therefore drawn to the business men of the community for advice and suggestions on civic, religious, and social matters; institutions that are not usually conceived to be business institutions.

Veblen maintained that there would be a victory of the "imbecile institutions" over technology because of the sabotage of productive efficiency in an industrial civilization.

Depression and industrial stagnation follow only in case of the pecuniary exigencies of the traffic of the business community in an inhibitory way. But business is the quest of profits, and an industrial depression and stagnation means that the business men engaged do not see their way to derive as satisfactory gain from letting the industrial process go forward on the lines and in the volume for which the material equipment of industry is designed. It is not worth their while, and it might even work them pecuniary harm. Commonly their apprehension of the discrepancy which forbids an aggressive pursuit of industrial business is expressed by the phrase 'over production.' An alternative phrase, intended to cover the same concept but less frequently used, is 'under-consumption.'

The return of business enterprise to the patriotic nationalistic spirit of imperialism could save business

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53 Ibid., pp. 213-214.
enterprise from the machine process, but it would keep us in war, and give us a militaristic attitude, all for the sake of the business men.

The largest and most promising fact of cultural discipline—most promising as a corrective of iconoclastic vagaries—over which business principles rule is national politics.

Business interests urge an aggressive national policy and business men direct it. Such a policy is warlike as well as patriotic. The direct cultural value of a warlike business policy is unequivocal. It makes for a conservative animus on the part of the populace. During war time, and within the military organization at all times, under martial law, civil rights are in abeyance; and more warfare and armament the more abeyance. Military training is a training in ceremonial precedence, arbitrary command, and unquestioning obedience. A military organization is essentially a servile organization. In subordination is the deadly sin. The more consistent and the more comprehensive this military training, the more effectually will the members of the community be trained into the habits of subordination and away from the growing propensity to make light of personal authority that is the chief infirmity of democracy. This applies first and most decidedly, of course, to a soldiery, but it applies only in a lesser degree to the rest of the population. They learn to think in warlike terms of rank, authority, and subordination, and so grow progressively more patient of encroachments on their civil rights.

... Warlike and patriotic preoccupations fortify the barbarian virtues of subordination and prescriptive authority. Habituation to a warlike, predatory scheme of life is the strongest disciplinary factor that can be brought to counteract the vulgarization of modern life wrought by peaceful industry and the machine process and to rehabilitate the decaying sense of status and differential dignity.

... In this direction, evidently lies the hope of a corrective for 'social unrest' and similar disturbances of civilized life. There can, indeed be no serious question but that a consistent return to the ancient virtues of allegiance, piety, servility, graded dignity, class prerogative and prescriptive authority would greatly conduce to popular content
and to the facile management of affairs. Such is the promise held out by a strenuous national policy. 54

Veblen's views here are extremely gloomy, as he goes on to say:

It seems possible to say this much, that the full domination of business enterprise is necessarily a transitory dominion. It stands to lose in the end whether the one or the other of the divergent cultural tendencies wins, because it is incompatible with the ascendancy of either. 55

Veblen's implied victory of the imbecile institutions would result in the complete domination of culture, and the complete domination of the machine process by the imbecile institutions. This is the only way business enterprise can keep from being ousted by industry.

Veblen's attitude on the reversion to the militaristic state seems to be almost a prediction of what is and has happened to the culture of the United States. Wars are keeping the wheels of business turning, and the wheels of business are keeping the wars going.

... if peace is not desired at the cost of relinquishing the scheme of competitive gain and competitive spending, the promoters of peace should logically observe due precaution and move only so far in the direction of a peaceable settlement as would result in a sufficiently unstable equilibrium of mutual jealousies; such as might expeditiously be upset whenever discontent with pecuniary affairs should come to threaten this established scheme of pecuniary prerogatives. 56

54Ibid., pp. 392-393. 55Ibid., p. 400.
CHAPTER III

TWAIN'S DICHOTOMY

Mark Twain reflected the undisciplined thought and actions of the "gilded age." He, in the literary style of a frontier humorist, analyzed the institutions of American culture in almost the same manner as did Thorstein Veblen. Both of these men were products of the frontier, and of a frontier culture that was steeped in the equalitarian attitudes and open-mindedness of that period.

In this culture, Twain could see the same transition from peaceful savagery to predatory barbarianism as did Veblen in the study of cultural anthropology. The difference mainly was that Twain viewed the transition as it took place in the nineteenth century, supposedly a more advanced stage of development.

Class lines were being drawn rather rigidly in the United States after the midway mark of the nineteenth century; the "rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer"—it seemed to the poor that the rich were setting every obstacle in the way of their gaining economic security that was possible for them to use.
Mark Twain believed "greed, sordidness, envy, hate, malice, and murder" were the offspring of poverty. In this belief he was quite correct, but poverty itself is the offspring of great and conspicuous wealth.

Standing in the shadows of great and conspicuous wealth were the grim poverty-ridden slums of the large and small towns. The rich people, Twain claimed, are, in general, always ready "to instruct the people and glorify honest poverty," but are never quite able to help destroy this poverty.

Stealing from the poor took place through the status system according to Twain, more than it did through other commercial channels, but, as he was essentially a moralist, he could not see the institutions as the molders of the men, but to him, the misbehavior of the men forged the institution.

Twain conceived in man a "moral sense;" this moral sense told him what was right and what was wrong, and if he would adhere to this moral sense, he would not, as a general rule, go wrong. The "moral sense" is

\[ \text{... a sense whose function is to distinguish between right and wrong, with liberty to choose which of them he will do. Now what advantage can he get} \]

1 Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography*, p. 1194.

2 *Mark Twain, Mark Twain's Travels with Mr. Brown*, p. 236.
out of that? He is always choosing and in nine cases out of ten he prefers the wrong. 3

The traditional status system of the east coast would not function in the untamed lands of the Western United States because co-operation was necessary for the survival of the community as a whole. Thus in the development of the West, the status system was not arrayed on a pecuniary basis, but on a basis of strength, courage, and cunning. This arrangement of status occurred because of the dependence upon the hunter for meat and the Indian fighter for protection.

This led to a rigid division of labor into "man's work" and "woman's work;" man's work consisting of protecting the family and hunting for food, while the woman kept house, tended the garden, cut the wood and did the other menial jobs around the farm.

The obsolescence of the hunters and the Indian fighters left the distinction of the hunt as being honorific and requiring great strength, cunning, and intestinal fortitude for its successful completion.

Here, however, the comparison stops, for instead of turning into a leisure class, these hunters and Indian fighters were plagued with imported aristocrats, who in their own pecuniary interests, had come West to set up

3Mark Twain, "The Mysterious Stranger," The Portable Mark Twain, p. 670.
their shops and stores in order to further exploit the original pioneers. Along with these shopkeepers, came the predatory and honorific institutions that had been originally left behind as surplus baggage, thus causing an increase in the exploitation of the pioneer classes by the newly arrived leisure classes.

Social stratification always presents a difficult problem, and Mark Twain, an equalizer who was naive enough to think that all men were equal, was faced with such an obviously inequitable system in the United States that his hope for the survival of the "damned human race" was extremely pessimistic.

Twain's equalitarian ideas met with fierce delusion when he saw that seven tenths of the people of the United States were a poverty-ridden mass. In A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, Twain satirized their position as follows:

Seven tenths of the free population of the country were just their class and degree; small independent farmers, artisans, etc.; all of it that was useful, or worth saving, really respect worthy, and subtract the nation and leave behind some dregs, some refuse, in the shape of a king, nobility and gentry, idle, unproductive, acquainted mainly with the arts of wasting and destroying, and of no sort of use or value in any rationally constructed world, and yet, by ingenious contrivance, this gilded minority, instead of being the tail of the procession where it belonged, was marching at the other end of it; had elected itself to be the nation, and these innumerable clams had permitted it so long that they had
become, at least, to accept it as a truth; and not only that, but to believe it right and as it should be.4

With this condition in the world, Twain looked upon the class struggle as one major struggle in civilization; like Veblen, he found the class struggle only an attribute of a much deeper and graver problem, that of the "imbecile institutions" and the moral sense.

Twain recognized the fact that the culture must be altered if there was to be any equality of opportunity. It stood to reason that since it was the fault of the culture that we had inequality, poverty, social classes, and injustice, that culture would have to be changed from the roots up.

In The Connecticut Yankee, Twain re-organized the institutions of society and started mass education projects. Without education there could be no machine production and without education, all social and economic reforms would fail.

Providing an equality of opportunity through education would mean a collective enterprise, thus making the logical conclusion to be drawn from the equality of opportunity collectivism, not laissez faire. Since this type of collectivism would be advantageous to the community as a whole

by increasing the productive efficiency of that community, it would mean the loss of economic and social status for members of the leisure class. 5

The non-productive upper classes of the community live, eat, drink, and dress well, while their productive brothers live in hovels and suffer with malnutrition.

Twain saw that the leisure classes did nothing for their sustenance, yet lived off the fat of the land, and maintained a rigid suppression of the lower classes, for they would

... grovel before the king and church and noble, to slave for them, sweat blood for them, starve that they might be fed, work that they might play, drink misery to the dregs that they might be happy, go naked that they might wear silks and jewels, pay taxes that they might be spared from paying them, be familiar all their lives with the degrading language and postures of adulation that they might walk in pride and think themselves the gods of this world. And for all this, the thanks they got (and get) were cuffs and contempt; and so poor spirited were they that they took even this sort of attention as an honor. 6

Twain sees the class conflict as one of the great struggles of the human race. The institutions of men, such as the church, army, and feudalism, were to Twain the major "imbecile institutions" of society.

5 Note the opposition to public education in its inception in the last century, and the opposition to educational reform and modern education at present by the leisure class.

In The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain showed the contradiction of the institutions of society and the "moral sense;" or the intelligent instincts of the human race.

Huck Finn is the embodiment of this conflict, and as he is floating down the Mississippi River with the "runaway" Negro slave, Jim, his conscience is torn between his "moral sense" and the "imbecile institutions." The community had instructed him that he was to apprehend any "runaway slave" and turn him over to the law in order that he might be returned to his "rightful owners;" and if this more was not enforced by the white members of the society, the offending "shites" would go to hell. With the fear of hell in him, Huck wrote to Miss Watson, Jim's owner, and informed her that he was turning Jim over to the proper authorities. Then his inner self, his "moral sense," rose up in a mighty protest,

It was a close place. I took (the letter) up, and held it in my hands. I was a-trembling because I'd got to decide forever betwixt two things, and I knewed it. I studied for a minute sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:

"ALL RIGHT THEN I'LL GO TO HELL!" and tore it up.

It was awful thoughts and awful words, but they was said, and I let them stay said; and never thought no more about reforming. 7

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7 Twain, "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," The Family Mark Twain, p. 593.
This was a victory for Huck over the tribal law of the village, and was a mirror of Twain's own feelings toward the domination of the "imbecile institutions," and the tribal rule of the village *mores*, over a man's own will and "moral sense."

David Wilson met the tribal customs of "the country town" and suffered almost complete social ostracism because of a misunderstood joke. This misinterpreted joke caused the society to think him unfit to practice his law profession, and made him the subject of much humorous and injurious conversation.

David Wilson had walked up the street of a new town, an ordinary frontier town. A dog barked at him, made unfriendly gestures in the general direction of his legs. Wilson, being startled, and angered by the dog, said:

'I wish I owned half that dog.'
'Why?' someone asked.
'Because I would kill my half.'

The group searched his face with curiosity and with anxiety even, but found no light there, no expression that could be read. They fell away from him as something uncanny, and went into privacy to discuss him. One said
'Pears to be a fool.'
'Pears?' said another, 'Is I reckon you better say.'

These things, thought Twain, showed the domination of cultural institutions over the "moral sense" and rationality of man. Things of this nature robbed men of the

initiative and the spirit. Without these, a technological civilization cannot be built.

Men, in a stratified culture, are spiritless; their spirit has been broken by the subjugation of their masters, the leisure class. There is little hope for a human race which is bothered with a conscience and a sense of duty toward the "patrons" of the community. Twain believed that there "can be such a thing as a slave who will remain a man until he dies, whose bones you can break, but whose manhood you cannot," but unfortunately these men were few in number. Their fellow subjects of the community in their fear of the church and feudal lord, felt a sense of duty and love toward their exploiters. This sense of duty had been built into them by the church, and their parents as something good, and they accepted it.

Generation after generation, this system held.

For a million years the race has gone monotonously propagating itself and monotonously performing this dull nonsense—to what end? No wisdom can guess! Who gets a profit out of it? Nobody but a parcel of usurping little monarchs and nobilities who despise you; would feel defiled if you touched them; would shut the door in your face if you proposed to call; whom you slave for, die for, and are not ashamed of it, but proud; whose existence is perpetual insult to you and are afraid to resent it; who are mendicants supported by your alms, yet assume toward you the airs of bene­factor toward a beggar; who address you in the language of a master to a slave and are answered in the language of a slave to master; who are worshipped by you with

your mouth while in your heart—if you have one—you despise yourselves for it. The first man was a hypocrite and a coward, qualities which have not yet failed in his line; it is the foundation upon which all civilizations have been built. 10

It is the spiritlessness of the decadent culture and domination of the "imbecile institutions" that cause the poor of the community not to demand their rights. They did not know, even, that they deserved them.

The exploitation of the workers of the world offended Twain's equalitarianism and his "moral sense." The workers who produced the coal, iron, textiles, and other commodities were exploited like cattle. Twain described the working conditions in American factories during the "gilded age" in the following passage from The Mysterious Stranger:

In a moment we were in a French village. We walked through a great factory of some sort, where men and women and little children were toiling in heat and dirt and a fog of dust; and they were clothed in rags and drooped at their work, for they were worn. . . .

It is some more moral sense. The proprietors are rich and very holy; but the wage they pay to these poor brothers and sisters of theirs is only enough to keep them from dropping dead with hunger. The work hours are fourteen per day, winter and summer—from six in the morning until eight at night—little children and all. And they walk to and from the pig sties which they inhabit—four miles each way—through mud and slush and rain and snow, sleet and storm, daily, year in and year out, they get four

10 Ibid., p. 836. 11 Ibid., p. 713.
hours sleep. They kennel together three families in a room, in unimaginable filth and stench; and disease comes; (sic) and they died off like flies. What have they done that are punished so? Nothing at all, except getting themselves born into your foolish race. You have seen how they treat a misdoer there in the jail; now you can see how they treat the innocent and worthy. Is your race logical? 12

Twain was very emphatic in his position regarding the exploitation of the workers; he was against it.

The "imbecile institutions" controlled the citizenry and their sustenance. Twain saw the exploitation of the citizens of the United States by the joined forces of the business men and politicians during and after the Civil War first hand. This angered him and made him hate the sufferings, the injustices, and the inequalities that capitalism produces, "but he never went so far as to doubt the capitalististic view of society." 13

Twain, being an equalitarian, was opposed to the exploitation not only because it was immoral and devoid of moral sense, and denied men the right of manhood, but it also prevented men from pursuing the Jeffersonian principle that "all men are created equal."

As a reaction against this feudalism, Mark Twain wrote A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, a

12 Mark Twain, "The Mysterious Stranger," The Portable Mark Twain, p. 670.

... book on democracy vs. feudalism, meaning by
democracy, equal opportunity for man to be won by
technology. He outlived the philosophy of produc-
tivity and prophesied the triumph of the gadget. 14

Twain argued in The Connecticut Yankee that his story
is motivated by technological advancement, and it is the
changes in science and applied science that change the
political theory and philosophical attitudes of the society.

It is probable that Mark Twain had never heard of the
Industrial Revolution, 15 technological determinism, or Karl
Marx, but his observations were very similar to those of
16 Marx.

Twain's Utopia, the sixth century republic in The Con-
nnecticut Yankee, was gained through a victory of applied
science and education over the traditional institutions.
Twain transformed an agrarian community, governed by feudal
lords and a Catholic clergy, into an industrial republic,
but could not entirely defeat superstition and the "imbecile
institutions," and in the end, the intelligence and mechani-
ization of the new state was defeated by the old traditional
institutions.

14 Henry S. Canby, Turn West, Turn East, p. 161.
15 The industrial revolution is a term used by Engles,
and popularized by Toynbee. Since Engles was not familiar
to Twain, and since Twain did not read German, it is doubt-
ful that he could have been familiar with that particular
concept.
16 Parrington, op. cit., p. 125.
The Roman Catholic Church, according to Twain, was the heart of feudalism, and its strongest defender. It destroyed the manhood of men, and made them servants to the ruling clergy and nobility. *The Connecticut Yankee, is an attack on thirteen centuries of reputed civilization; thirteen centuries heavy with sorrow, and frustrated hopes.* A meaningless succession of futile and foolish generations wandering in fogs of their own brewing, bag ridden by superstitions descended and exploited by priest and noble, with no will to be free—here is a perspective to correct our "hollow enthusiasms, our revolutionary hopes."

We can see here that Twain was not acquainted with economic theory, but was acquainted with culture. His observations of our culture had made him see the fallacies and injustices of our system, but could not make him see that it was the whole institutional set-up that needed changing. Twain believed that our present institutions could be cleaned up and did not need replacement.

Twain wanted to believe that man could develop a utopia, but empirical evidence prevented his believing that the "damned human race" was capable of doing such an intelligent thing. *Utopian novels were being produced at intervals throughout the century but it was not until the* 

eighties that utopianism became the vogue,” and it was not until the eighties that Twain published The Connecticut Yankee.

Twain thought that knowledge would always, at least whenever possible, be withheld from the producing classes by the aristocracy and clergy because knowledge might make the workers and tenant farmers dissatisfied with their lot in life. "Knowledge was (and is) not good for the common people and could make them discontented with their lot which God has appointed for them, and God will not endure discontentment with His plans." 19

Not only would knowledge make them discontented with their lot, but it would motivate technological advancement which would modify the existing social relationship, thus causing a re-stratification of society. This is what happened in The Connecticut Yankee.

Mark Twain would never admit being a reformer because he believed that men were incapable of reform, and that they were not intelligent enough to adjust to a basic change even if it were for the best. But Twain could never get rid of the idea that some day men might become intelligent enough to see that they were being robbed and do something about it.

18 Vernon L. Parrington, Jr., American Dreams, p. 57.

19 Mark Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, p. 632.
Twain's utopianism was little more than an idealized frontier community in which people had more or less, an equal opportunity. He could see the frontier community as having a minimum of the socially artificial arrangement such as rigid stratification based upon the ownership of real estate and family backgrounds; so he idealized it.

Twain was convinced that decent living standards would produce more useful and productive citizens, but that decent living standards included self-respect, tools, sustenance, and shelter. None of which could be omitted if the citizens were to be of high quality.

The Boss, in *The Connecticut Yankee*, as a workman, had learned to make anything a person could want. "He was the son of a blacksmith and the nephew of a veterinarian," therefore, he was a mixture of both. "The boss is, of course, Tom Sawyer grown up part way and thoroughly satisfying his desire to show off. He is Huck Finn in ingenuity, with the technique of a machinist substituted for the skills of the river."

One of the first steps in the re-organization of King Arthur's feudal government was the establishment of the patent office; "for I knew that a country without a patent

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21 Ibid., p. 168.
office and good patent laws was just a crab, and couldn't travel any way but sideways or backwards." After the patent office came the Department of Public Morals and Agriculture because "the first thing you want in a new country is a patent office; then work up your school system, after that, cut with your paper."

Newspapers in this culture would be educational organs, this would help the diffusion of technological knowledge and form a better educated community.

Twain and Veblen both realized that there was no revolutionary potential among the laborers or the farmers in the United States. They both turned to technicians because these technicians controlled the nation's production and could take over the productive forces without also obtaining the "imbecile institutions." This was what the Yankee tried to do.

The Yankee patiently and systematically then started to undermine the church. He considered the church the seat of reaction and stiff maintainer of the status quo, and the chief exploiter of the proletarian.

I was afraid of a United Church; it makes a mighty power, the mightiest conceivable, and then

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23 Ibid., p. 690.
when it by and by gets into selfish hands, as it is always bound to do, it means death to human liberty and paralysis to human thought. 24

The church is the strongest imbecile institution, and the strongest force of tradition, it is the most powerful anti-progressive institution that there is.

The Yankee did not want to attack the church directly but attempted to subvert it by an evolutionary process. The first thing he attempted was the setting up of clandestine factories and schools, hoping that an educated people would revolt against the churches. He brought mining up to a productively efficient level, 25 started a newspaper, 26 instituted a telephone system 27 that solidified the whole Island of Great Britain, and gave the citizens that could take it, an education. The rapid mechanization of the Island of Great Britain was accomplished without the benefit and knowledge of the clergy.

In Tom Sawyer Abroad, Twain predicted the obsolescence of national boundaries because of the advancement of technology.

Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, traveling over the world in a balloon, were discussing "running " cargo over the frontiers of countries in order to beat those countries out of their customs tax. Huck said,
"... we can sail right over their old frontiers; how are they going to stop us."

This sentence expresses the problem of many nations since the development of air transportation. Twain thought that it had made the nation obsolete, and it remained only as an "imbecile institution." The technological revolution, if not arrested by the "imbecile institutions" would destroy the old concept of national government and institute a technologically efficient government.

Twain saw the necessity for a high velocity money for the maintenance of trade and commerce. In a period of recession, he found it necessary to put new life in the blood lines of the economy.

In order to freshen up commerce and to increase that flow of money and goods, the Yankee injected a Greenbacker idea of priming the pump, and putting more money into circulation, thereby causing good times.

In a week or two now, cents, nickels, dimes, quarters, and half dollars and also a trifle of gold would be trickling in thin but steady streams all through the commercial veins of the kingdom, and I looked to see the new blood freshen up its life. Twain knew that more money meant more jobs, more production, more buying and selling, and more prosperity.

Twain thought that if you gave the poor peasants, "who were exploited as if they were cattle, the tools they needed, 

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28 Twain, "Tom Sawyer Abroad," The Family Mark Twain, p. 1051.
29 Ibid., p. 711.
and self respect and the conception of equality, they would lift themselves, from the depths of degradation in which they were held by the clergy and feudal nobility. He knew that it could be done by decent currency and machines that would increase production, and laws that would secure these gains for them. Also they would need weapons to defend themselves against the predatory nations that neighbored them, above all they needed knowledge with which they could defeat superstition.

In the thoroughly developed industrial utopia of the sixth century, the church was losing its influence, and the nobility was losing its exalted position as the aristocracy.

There was hardly a knight in all the land who wasn't in some useful employment. They were going from end to end of the country in all manner of useful missionary capacities; their penchant for wandering and their experience in it made them altogether the most efficient spreaders of civilization we had. They went clothed in steel and equipped with sword and battle-ax, and if they couldn't persuade a person to try a sewing-machine on the installment plan or a melodeon, or a barbed-wire fence, or a prohibition journal, or any of the other thousand and one things they canvassed for, they removed him and passed on.

Some of the knights were traveling salesmen, others were conductors on trains, while the higher knights converted the round table to the stock exchange. "Slavery was

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., pp. 858-859.
now dead and gone; all men were equal before the law; taxation had been equalized." Twain's utopia had been built.

Twain had created a utopia that was the result of mechanization and the "cultural incidence of the machine process." In this utopia, he tried to give every one useful and productive jobs. Of course, his definition of a useful occupation included commercial pursuits, so the traveling salesmen were really not, in Twain's eyes, parasites on the community.

Science had defeated, temporarily at least, the church and the kings, and a new era welcomed in the rule of the industrial process. Twain built an industrial revolution that freed men from exploitation through a bloodless revolution. The industrial revolution had brought more equality than Marxian doctrine would dare admit, and Twain saw the reason why.

Equality was too much for these people; however, the members of the "damned human race" could not break away from superstition, and the hero-worship, the emotionalism, and the traditions of the "imbecile institutions," and the knowledge and technology fell under the impact of the "vested interests."

32 Ibid., p. 858.
Twain felt that this was mainly class conflict, but not in the Marxian sense. He saw the control of ideology, and the thinking of the people by their institutions. The King in *The Connecticut Yankee* was a pretty good fellow, but his institutionalized superiority made him a villain. Twain found himself in the very common position of liking individuals and hating their institutions.

Christianity was one of the forces that controlled man's ideology, and kept him subjugated. "In two or three little centuries the Roman Catholic Church transformed a nation of men into a nation of mice."³³

Because of their naive faith in human nature and "the inborn sense of fairness" and good fellowship in men, Edward Bellamy and the other utopians did not take into consideration what Twain designated as "the damned human race," or what Veblen called the domination of the "imbecile institutions."

*Human nature being what it is, I suppose we must drift into monarchy by and by. It is a saddening thought but we cannot change our nature—we are all alike, we human beings; we carry the seeds out of which monarchies and aristocracies are grown; worship of gods, titles, distinctions, power. We have to worship these things and their possessors, we are all born so and cannot help it.*

In public we scoff at titles and hereditary privilege, but privately we hanker after them, and when we get a chance we buy them for cash and a daughter. ³⁴

³³Ibid.

³⁴Mark Twain, *Mark Twain, Interruption*, p. 65.
There was no hope for this "damned human race" because of the reign of superstition over science, and ignorance over intelligence. We have progress not because of the human race, but in spite of it.

The very history of man is a history of violence, class violence, and institutional violence, such as the church, and feudalism, against the proponents of social change and scientific progression.

Christianity was born, then ages of Europe passed in review before us and we saw Christianity and civilization march hand and hand through those ages, leaving famine and death and desolation in their wake, and the other signs of human progress.

And always we had wars and still other wars, and more wars—all over Europe, all over the world. Sometimes for the private or royal families, sometimes to crush a weak nation; but never a war started by the aggressor for any clean purpose—there is no such war in the history of the race.

Now... you have seen your progress down to the present and you must confess that it is wonderful in its way. We must exhibit the future.

He showed us slaughters more terrible in their destruction of life, more devastating engines of war, than any we had ever seen.

You perceive... that you have made continual progress, Cain did his murder with a club; the Hebrews did their murders with javelins and swords; the Greeks and Romans added protective armour and the fine arts of military organization and generalship, the Christian has added the gun and gunpowder; a few centuries from now he will have so greatly improved the deadly effectiveness of his weapons of slaughter that all men will confess that without Christian civilization war must have remained a poor and trifling thing to the end of time.

It is a remarkable progress. In five or six thousand years five or six high civilizations have risen, flourished, disappeared, and not one of them except the latest ever invented any sweeping and adequate way to kill people. They all did their best—to kill being the chiefest ambition of the human race.
and the earliest incident in its history--but the Christian civilization has scored a triumph to be proud of. Two of three centuries from now it will be recognized that all competent killers are Christians, then the pagan will go to school to the Christian--not to acquire his religion--but his guns. The Turk and the Chinaman will buy those to kill the missionaries and converts with. 35

Twain thought that the Church had formulated many of the wars to keep the patriotism and feudal attitudes and love of the church functioning properly among the lower classes.

Twain thought that the Church, as the chief "imbecile institution," was a moral police force that guarded against ideas as well as actions. The relationship of the church and the population was changed in The Connecticut Yankee because of education, but the educational process failed, and education failed because it could not educate the superstition out of the people.

Twain built his whole utopia on the maxim that "Somehow, every time the magic of fol-de-rol tried conclusions with the magic of science, the magic of fol-de-rol got left." 36

But because the human race is not logical, this never came to pass. The "interdict" caused the failure of his utopia, and the "imbecile institutions" were victorious over

35 Mark Twain, The Mysterious Stranger, pp. 718-720.

intelligence. "The quest for certainty" returned to the superstition and magical incantations of devout observances, and the engineers and technicians died in battle.
CHAPTER IV

A COMPARISON OF TWAIN AND VEBLEN'S DICHOTOMIES

In the last two chapters I have discussed the dichotomy theory of Thorstein Veblen and the dichotomy theory of Mark Twain. Both of these men looked at society as if it were a coin, one side heads and the other tails. The head side of the coin is emblematic of the traditional way of thinking and acting, while the tails side is its antithesis; it is science and education. Both of these men thought that if this coin were flipped into the air, "it would come up heads," and the technology of the community would be crushed by the weight of tradition and the "imbecile institutions."

In this chapter I will attempt to compare these sides, and to point out the similarities and the dissimilarities of these two dichotomous theories.

It is quite obvious that Twain and Veblen both thought that the leisure class was a waste, a parasite that lived off the productive members of society, contributing nothing yet taking the prime production for its own consumption and waste.

This abhorrence of waste could very logically be the Calvinistic influence on both of these men, and a reflection of the hardships of the frontier life. In the period of
development of the Western States, rations were often short, and the conservation of food became a major necessity. Waste of food or of any other article was looked down upon by the community with a religious fervor. Calvinism, itself, was a parsimonious religion, and believed in saving everything possible, thus naturally when Twain and Veblen viewed the leisure class as the wasting class, they could not help from viewing it with the frontier notion that waste is one of the major sins.

The leisure class is the most wasteful of the "imbecile institutions" and probably the most obsolete. Twain believed the leisure class to be an insult to the productive members of the community. The world's monarchs and nobles, he said, "exist as perpetual insult to you, and you are afraid to resent it." Veblen, on the other hand, thought of the leisure class as a gigantic form of waste and a source of constant exploitation of the productive members of society. Twain agreed with this conception, but his was a moral quarrel and not a technological one. Although Twain was essentially a moralist, and Veblen essentially a social scientist, both of them agreed that the leisure class was dispensable and had outlived its usefulness in human society.

If the leisure class were to be dropped from the world, and exterminated from the earth, there would be no loss of production or productivity, and productively the world would never know it; as the leisure class had been judicious in its attempt to produce nothing, and consume everything.

The leisure class is society's most conservative class; Twain thought it conservative because not only would it be lost if the intelligence of the citizenry were aroused, but that the leisure class continuously subjugates the intelligence of the citizenry in order that it might be impossible for the populace to become aware of the facts. Veblen thought the leisure class was the most conservative class because in any change or re-stratification of society in which their position on the social scale would be endangered, they always act in their "vested interests" even though these interests are not necessarily for the good of the community. Usually these interests are diametrically opposed to the best interests of the community.

Perhaps their differences on this issue is mainly due to Veblen's concept of the "instinct of workmanship." This is because of man's propensity to create. His hands and arms become tools that help him accomplish things, finally, he developed tools that helped him accomplish things. This

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1 Twain, "The Connecticut Yankee," Family Mark Twain.
desire to create is his "instinct of workmanship." "Idle curiosity" and the "instinct of workmanship" would result in a scientific society, a culture of cause and effect.

Twain, on the other hand, thinking that it was "moral sense" that told man what was right and what was wrong, considered the "moral sense" to be infallible. All progress, then, according to Twain, was a result of the proper functioning of the "moral sense."

Their conceptions are closely related in that they both have an a priori form of knowledge that requires men to function intelligently. To Twain it was the "moral sense", while to Veblen it was the propensity towards idle curiosity and the "instinct of workmanship."

When testing the institutions, Twain tested them for their "moral sense" while Veblen tested them for their ceremonialism.

Veblen and Twain differed on the matter of business enterprise. Twain conceived business men as the small entrepreneur who bought, sold, and managed his own business. This small entrepreneur had absolute control of his enterprise, and the mal-functioning of his and other related enterprises is the fault of the business men. Twain thought that the mal-functioning of the economy was due to the failure of man's "moral sense" to combat the ceremonialism of society.

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Veblen, on the other hand, looked at the business man as an integral part of the institution of business enterprise. Veblen noted that business men and the price system were essentially opposed to the industrialization of the country because of their fear of the replacement of business enterprise by industry.

Business enterprise was to Veblen a way of thinking, acting, and living, while to Twain it was only a way of "extracting a living from society." Twain did not think of the price system as a discipline that held men in line by the church and aristocracy, however in most cases, Veblen's conception of business enterprise has the same function as Twain's conception of feudalism.

Twain could and did see the institutional problems caused by the church as well as did Veblen; and criticized it just as bitterly and thoroughly as did Veblen. Both Twain and Veblen thought of the church as one of the chief tools of the leisure class that was used to keep the classes in line, and as one of the prime "imbecile institutions."

It is obvious from the evidence presented that religion is unconsciously working in close alliance with capitalism. While there is some conscious pressure by capitalists on church boards, the more insidious and widespread dependency of Religion on Capitalism is largely an unconscious process. . . . Religion acts as a bandage over the eyes of men, preventing them from seeing the world as it is.
One of the products of the capitalistic system is a religion which in the main, supports that system. 4

This fear of replacement prompted their opposition to most of the other scientific advancements as well.

To Twain, business enterprise was an unfortunate tool of men who had lost their "moral sense," and of a leisure class, who in an attempt to dominate the remaining portion of society, found (and finds) it necessary to dominate the productive class through exploitation by business enterprise. This led Twain to say, "Thief has been carried on by our most distinguished commercial men as a profession." 5 Twain was, in a strong sense, a utilitarian, and felt that there was a type of natural law that governed the world. "Pleasure pain" theories of Bentham seem to have had a great effect upon him, as well as did some phases of supply and demand. Opposed to this, Twain believed in the administration of prices for the benefit of the productive class.

4Davis, op. cit., pp. 408-409.

5Mark Twain, Following the Equator.

6Every man is a suffering-machine and a happiness-machine combined. The two functions work together harmoniously with a fine and delicate precision, on the give-and-take principle. For every happiness turned out in the one department, the other stands ready to modify it with a sorrow or pain—maybe a dozen. In most cases the man's life is about equally divided between happiness and unhappiness. When this is not the case, unhappiness predominates—always, never the other.

Mark Twain, "The Mysterious Stranger," The Portable Mark Twain, p. 692.
The leisure class is based upon inequality, subjugation, misery, and deprivation of manhood to the producers of society. To Twain, this was a moral problem caused by the immorality of man, whereas to Veblen, it was an institutional problem caused by the domination of the "imbecile institutions" over the productive forces of society, therefore impeding progress.

Because of the nature of superstition, the dominated classes were held in fear of "burning in hell," thus making the church one of the most effective controls over the population that could be devised. The church was a "dehumanizing agent;" according to Twain, it turned a nation of men into a nation of worms in less than three hundred years. The church condoned slavery; from the pulpits came the cry that slavery was one of the particular pets of the deity. For fear of replacement, both Twain and Veblen thought that the church had been and would be opposed to any change in the political, economic, or social patterns in the culture.

Warfare, to Twain and Veblen alike, was a system for the maintenance of the system in power from both external and internal change. Besides being this, it was one of the most conspicuous forms of waste in organized society. Warfare is the salvation of the leisure class in that it

\[\text{Footnote: Mark Twain, "The Connecticut Yankee," Family Mark Twain, p. 709.}\]
gives it an honorific job to do, and keeps it from being productive. To Twain, it shows the necessity of warfare for the continuance of the leisure class, while for Veblen, it points out the necessity for warfare to maintain business enterprise. To both of them, it was necessary for the maintenance of the chief "imbecile institutions" of society.

The military discipline, to Veblen, was a much greater danger than any of the other patterns of thinking of a given period. Militarism by necessity, is the most conservative and reactionary clique of the leisure class because of their bent towards the maintenance of the status quo at any cost. A militaristically minded nation would be an exploitative nation for in a militaristic society insubordination is the deadly sin and subordination the chief virtue. Subordination is not conducive to the advancement of technology as an inquiring mind is necessary; neither a commanding or a servile one can or will be capable of "lie hunting."

Twain viewed the problem in a like manner as he had the church; he blamed the imperialism of the United States on the mores of the nation as they were controlled by the leisure class by way of the church, government, and price system.

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Twain could not grasp the danger of the militaristic mind until after the Spanish American War. He saw the war as a war for the business men and the addition of the Philippines and Cuba as a start of American imperialism.

If America had been fair, Dewey would have sailed away from Manila as soon as he had destroyed the Spanish fleet—after putting up a sign on the shore guaranteeing foreign property and life against damaged by the Filipinos, and warning the powers that interference with the emancipated patriots would be regarded as an act unfriendly to the United States. 9

This was not done however, but "we paid the Spanish Government twenty millions of dollars conscience money in order to have the right to exploit the Filipinos. We had the desire for further westward expansion, and this was satisfied with the addition of a colonial empire."10

After the Spanish American War, Twain began to see the influence of the business men and patriotism upon "pecuniary emulation." Fighting for profits and country then became synonymous.

Although Twain was unable to see business enterprise as a way of life, he saw very clearly mechanics as a way of life. He was profoundly influenced by the "machine process" in his youth when he was a printer and a river pilot. Both

9 Twain, "To a Person Sitting in Darkness," Europe and Elsewhere, pp. 263-268.

10 Ibid., p. 268.
Veblen and Twain pointed to the dynamic and "lie hunting" nature of technology. Both Twain and Veblen thought it had been proven that every time magic or superstition competed with the magic of science, science won. Unfortunately, this was not true because of the mass hypnotic spell of the magic of "fol-de-rol."

Both of these men recognized the collective nature of the ownership of technology. In order for technology to advance and grow, the institutions of society would have to free the men to experiment. But the results, they often found, were demoralizing to a large group of the "vested interests," thus causing the offending technology to be suppressed by the "vested interests."

The money makers are not much interested in production. They are interested in the arts of acquisition, in rights, sanctity of contract, the spin of the wheel, the stroke of luck, in status, hierarchy, and ritual. 11

Twain thought of the "vested interests" as the leisure class, the church, and politicians, while Veblen thought of them as those interests that were controlling and exploiting a majority of the members of society, who in their quest for a place higher on the economic and social scales, prevent new ideas from crystallizing for fear that these new ideas would hinder, if not ostensibly oppose, their ascension of the social and economic ladders.

11John S. Gambs, Man, Money and Goods, p. 156.
With the addition of business enterprise, both sides of this equation will balance, for then Twain's "imbecile institutions" would be the same as Veblen's.

In technology, both of these men found a way out of the almost certain stagnation of our culture. In technology there are the things utopias are made of. The imaginative mind can see men and machines together in the future forming a utopia; the machine doing the work, and the men enjoying the leisure.

In a utopia similar to this, Twain showed technology freeing mankind from an unjust system; a subordinate status system steeped in the control of the clergy. Through education and the "machine process" he was able to introduce technology and industrialization for a short while to the citizens of sixth century England.

To Veblen, such a thing was possible because he thought the "instinct of workmanship" would loose its "chains and bonds" and be the motivating force of a new mechanized civilization. The "imbecile institutions" proved to be too formidable an adversary for the technology, and Twain saw the defeat of his utopia by the church's interdict. Veblen, at the same time, saw its defeat by an outmoded way of thinking, business enterprise.
CHAPTER V

A CRITIQUE OF DICHOTOMOUS THEORY

The previous chapters of this study have been concerned with the analysis of the dichotomy theories of Thorstein Veblen and Mark Twain.

The concluding chapter will be devoted to an attempt to point out certain points that would seem to undermine and destroy certain portions of these theories, while at the same time setting forth the validity of certain other conceptions.

We have analyzed the dichotomous theories of Mark Twain and Thorstein Veblen as being a means of looking at society as if it were divided into two parts: intelligence and ignorance. We have seen this conflict in the form of industry and business enterprise, "The instinct of workmanship" and "the pecuniary calculus" and the technology and the "imbecile institutions."

There is always a gulf between the makers and predators. To Veblen, all this is not a class struggle in the Marxian sense though there are resemblances. There is now, he says, a widening gulf because of the influence of the machine. Under feudalism and most other isms of the past, the cleavage between the two groups was held within bounds; however, which uses the industrial machine
and promotes the development of science, the cleavage
is and becomes deeper and deeper. 1

Twain and Veblen's notion that the leisure class was
unable to be useful to the community seems to be accurate.
The frontier culture in which they both grew up pointed to
the idleness of any of its citizens as one of the major sins
of mankind. In this culture, men who did not work lived
upon the surplus production of the other members of the
community, and this was considered by most respectable
people of that day and time to be immoral. Veblen and Twain
seem to have been very much impressed by this more, and used
what we could call almost a deification of work to strengthen
their dichotomous theories.

That the leisure class has very little productive or
useful function is not a new idea. The honorific nature of
non-productive consumption has been recognized as a source
of exploitation for many centuries, and has been condemned
for such for the same length of time.

As far back as the record runs, long before the
time of the Hebrew prophets, the rich have been the
objects of impassioned denunciation. Their position
has, of course, been extremely vulnerable to such
attack. Some of the rich have always made hogs of them-
selves. Some have found no better use of wealth than
to flaunt it in the faces of the poor, and 'pecuniary
cannons of taste' as Veblen called them, have enforced
quite unnecessarily invidious distinctions throughout
the community. But it is nevertheless true that some
people of wealth and many in comfortable circumstances
have lived exemplary lives, avoiding ostentation in so
far as it was possible for them to do in the limits of

1 Ibid., p. 157.
modes of behavior of which they were the victims along with the rest of the community, and using their wealth to foster beauty and learning. 2

The frontier suspicion of those who received their sustenance for nothing is highly understandable; their folklore had deified work and especially the "job well done." 3 Men living in this culture would naturally be influenced by the mores of that community, and both Twain and Veblen's notion of the inborn desire of man to build and be individualistic could be logically a derivative of that culture.

Although their criticisms seem to be a part of a cultural pattern, they are never the less valid. The leisure class today has little productive function in our society.

The rich enjoy degrees and qualities of freedom which are not shared by the poor. These advantages are positive and substantial. The rich are not merely freed from inhibitions; they are endowed with potentialities of actual experience which do not exist for the poor. They are free to spend their winters in Florida and their summers cruising on the Mediterranean. . . . Over and above the negative equality before the law that all citizens enjoy, they are free to give pain and employ astute counsel. In this sense of their ability to escape the results of their acts, they are even free to commit crime. 4


3 Note the Johnny Appleseed, Paul Bunyan, John Henry, and Pecos Bill legends. All of these men loved their work, and gloried in it; they all felt that their work was instinctive, not learned, not one of them was lazy.

4 Ayres, op. cit., p. 190.
They find themselves doing the very non-productive, honorific and expendable jobs of high governmental positions, generalship, devout observances, and polo playing. The honorific and non-productive classes cannot be divided on socially and traditionally accepted class lines. Ayres points out that employees of the nature of a servant or groom are just as non-productive as their masters.

The question is whether any clear distinction can be made between useful and useless members of the community. Is a stupid bungling workman nevertheless a useful citizen in the sense that excludes everybody who does not work with his hands. Does a man belong to 'labor' if he is employed by a 6 millionairesportsman to groom his race horses?

Veblen's notion that the leisure class was a way of controlling the people of the community seems to be valid also. Twain's ideas were more easily understood but less scientific. Twain's suspicion of the leisure class involves a moral problem, stemming from the Calvinistic doctrine of "an idle mind is the devil's workshop," while Veblen, on the other hand, criticizes the leisure class and leisure class activity on a scientific level, charging waste and exploitation of the community's resources, which he believes to be the common property of the whole culture.


6 Ayres, The Industrial Economy, p. 91.
Veblen's attitude towards the military discipline is more exact and complete than that of Twain, also it is more cogent today than Twain's moral attack on militarism. Militaristic thinking in the United States today is very strong, and a great portion of the population seem to feel that it is not strong enough yet to fulfill our exploitative desires. Warfare in order to prevent depression as Veblen pointed out in *The Theory of Business Enterprise*, contrary to Ayres' opinion in *The Industrial Economy*, is validated especially well by the present Korean conflict.

Because a military program does indeed act as an economic stabilizer, Marxist critics have given a sinister interpretation to the military activities of all Western Nations. Capitalism—so they have constantly declared—can be made to work only by resort to *Wehrwirtschaft*, that is a military economy. Thus they imply and categorically assert that capitalist nations embark upon armament programs quite deliberately for economic purposes. But this is untrue. No government has ever done so.

At the inception of the Korean War, the United States was facing unemployment—almost five million people were looking for jobs.

The Council of Economic Advisers has just presented a three-page analysis of the country's economic problems to the president. Here in brief is what President Truman's advisers told him.

1. The major problem facing the country today is unemployment.

   A. During January, unemployment set a record post-war high with 4,500,000 out of work—

   Ibid., p. 179.
almost 1,000,000 higher than the previous month. Unemployment is now seven per cent of the total labor force as against only a little over four per cent a year ago.

The increase of 1,000,000 in the ranks of the unemployed in a thirty-day period is considerably more than would normally occur at this time of year. . . .

. . . the basic problem is one of expanding the United States' economy fast enough to absorb the ever-increasing number of people available to work. During 1949, for example, the labor force increased by 1,300,000. Today's high level of unemployment is due to the failure of the economy to grow sufficiently during 1949. 8

The Korean War acted as a therapeutic to our industrial system and instantly provided a market for our production.

Since the World War the various peace conferences have been largely a joke. What else could anyone expect when the nations so heavily ensnared in the profits of the munitions makers? At the 1932 conference M. Charles Dumont of Schneider-Creusot was one of the delegates from France. Colonel A. G. C. Darnay, a brother of the director of Vickers Armstrong was a delegate from England. 9

The reason for this is first of all that armies are consumers. A military program of any kind increases consumption, and, proportionately to the scale of the program reduces the discrepancy between production and consumption in the economy. 10

War is in fact a public works project in that it furnishes employment, profits, production, and prosperity to a predatory economic system.

10 Ayres, The Industrial Economy, p. 178.
11 See also The Divine Right of Capital, p. 56 and The Industrial Economy, p. 178.
Besides the rehabilitative power of a war, it has a far greater effect on the economy. It reduces, if not prohibits, development along peaceful scientific lines, and concentrates the production and scientific research on expendable goods for warfare, therefore making it possible to have full production, full employment, fixed status, and a small increase in consumer goods. Under the guise of patriotism, which Samuel Johnson considered "the last refuge of a scoundrel," production of consumer goods is stopped and our most respectable politicians are able to exorcise their enemies by name-calling and witch hunts.

In general, it seems that both Twain and Veblen's attitudes have been documented quite adequately by history since 1929.

To both Twain and Veblen, technology would save the world from the "imbecile institutions." They seem to believe that men have gained all their leisure time, better living and working conditions and increased freedom from the "imbecile institutions" through the development of the technological factors and improvement of the productive facilities of an industrial economy. This can be historically justified and is admitted not only by scholars, but by business enterprise as well.

Twain and Veblen both seemed to believe, however, that intelligence and technological improvements would be controlled
and reduced by the "imbecile institutions." The suppression of technology by the "imbecile institutions" is a matter for serious consideration.

Various reasons can be given for the direction which the advancement of science has followed. To some degree, no doubt, scientific investigation (and technological development generally) has followed the line of least institutional resistance. The logical abstractions of mathematics and the motions of the stars and planets have been permitted subjects long before the human body. But it is also true that technological pressure has been exerted along the same lines. 12

The growth of technology is always surreptitious and apologetic. Thus, for example, scientists have always protested that they have no quarrel with religion. The astronomer only insists that the creation of the earth cannot be conceived to have occurred in six solar days, the geologist that the Red Sea would also have prevented the passage of the hosts of Israel; but each protests that he does so only in the interest of "true" religion and not in a spirit of antagonism at all. 13

The more optimistic proponents of dichotomous theory are sure that technology can, and will, defeat the influence of the "imbecile institutions." They base this attitude on the "cultural incidence of the machine process," the notion that men will absorb cause and effect logic by association with machines and in laboratories, and apply this knowledge to their social problems. Their whole theory at this point rests solely on the "cultural incidence of the machine process" and the "instinct of workmanship."

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This attitude, according to a large segment of modern psychologists, is invalid; they would deny that the machine would have this sort of effect on a workman.

The creative urge finds its satisfaction in workmanship which serves as an expression of individuality. The impulse may find its outlet in the construction of a piece of pottery, in the production of a drama, in the painting of a picture or in the evolution of an idea. The desire to objectify one’s self through some symbol of his own creation spurs a man to externalize an inspiring idea. We are all artists at heart.

The Industrial Revolution which culminated in the mechanized industry of our own day has deprived a vast number of people of any adequate opportunity for this satisfaction of their creative urge. It is one thing to make articles with one’s own hands; it is quite another to fasten nut number sixty-five in the assembly room of a large factory to bolt number sixty-five. Being a mere cog in an overwhelming machine has cramped the creative impulse. . . . We have slain ourselves with our own weapons. We are civilizing ourselves too thoroughly for our own good. 14

Perhaps psychologists such as Vaughn, are a part of a traditional way of thinking, an habitual thought pattern which abhors scientific change, but on the other hand some of his criticism of the “cultural incidence of the machine process” might be valid, and if it is, the optimistic proponents of dichotomy theory are placing their hopes in a false messiah.

14 Wayland F. Vaughn, General Psychology, p. 258.
He (Veblen) argued that the discipline of the machine on the worker would develop the latter's constructive propensities. This was no minor point in his scheme. It is one that finds no support in modern psychology, but modern psychology offers no evidence that the machine process has any special power to instill in man a greater realization of his constructive propensities. 15

The very nature of technology, as defined in a previous chapter, is dynamic, therefore could not be stymied for a great length of time; technology then would defeat the imbecile institutions.

The facts seem to point to a fusion of scientific knowledge and the "imbecile institutions." This fusion in most cases seems to be dominated by the "imbecile institutions" but the influence of the technological factors of those institutions seem to be getting stronger.

Not only have science and technology subjected the institutions of western society to intolerable strain; it is industrial necessity alone which likewise defines the conditions under which alone the strain can be relieved. This does not mean that much (indeed, most) of the institutional content of the past will not be retained in the future. Such has always been the case and doubtless will continue to be. It does not even mean that science and technology will necessarily prevail. Perhaps the world will choose authority rather than plenty. But it does mean that if the institutions are retained under which industry cannot operate, industrial technology will be destroyed. This seems unlikely. More than ever during the period of strain the world seems to be committed to the truth of science and efficiency of the machine. War itself employs technical expedients and reinforces the power of scientific ideals

15 Gambs, op. cit.
while loosening the ties of the ancient institutions. The probability is that these ideas will prevail in the end and when they do the future world state and economy of abundance will reveal their pattern. 16

The defeat of technology is not inevitable for if the "imbecile institutions" were as strong as they were perceived by Twain and Veblen, how have we made as much progress as we have? Why haven't the "imbecile institutions" prevented or arrested science at a much earlier date? The obvious answer to these questions is that the "imbecile institutions" are incapable of arresting science in the past or in the future. This type of reasoning would of course invalidate both Twain and Veblen's conclusions.

The other body of knowledge which maintains that it has clinical proof that there is no such thing as "the cultural incidence of the machine process," would, if correct, invalidate the faith of both Veblen and Twain in "the cultural incidence" and at the same time, validate their conclusions.

If you accept his (Veblen's) system, you have gone as far as you can, and you are lost. All you can do is to sit at the dead end waiting for one of three things to happen: more frequent wars, the reversion to a system of status, the appearance of an industrial republic following utopian hopes. Since it seems to go against human nature to wait for Armageddon without lifting a finger to help one's side

for victory in the final battle, one tends to adopt a more activist attitude—and by doing so one denies Veblen's basic teachings—for he was a determinist. 17

"Which of the two antagonistic factors may prove the stronger in the long run is something of a blind guess; but the calculable future seems to belong to the one or the other." 18

17 Gambs, op. cit., pp. 163-164.

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