

# **The Theory of the Leisure Class Study Guide**

**The Theory of the Leisure Class by Thorstein Veblen**

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# Plot Summary

The Theory of the Leisure Class by Thorstein Veblen is a work of economic analysis conducted in the prose of social satire. The purpose of the book is given in the preface. Veblen seeks to determine the value of the leisure class as an economic factor. In doing this, he must look at how the leisure class evolved. In his examination of the leisure class, he must also look at non-economic features of their social life. The author draws on the experiences of everyday life and observation in his analysis. As such, there are no cited sources in his work.

The Theory of the Leisure Class is a study in economics despite its style of satire and its lack of the traditional economic jargon. Veblen examines the demand and consumption of the upper classes of society in terms that are not the traditional economic terms, and he does this without the use of data.

He begins by looking at how the leisure class came into existence. Veblen begins with a primitive society in which there are no class distinctions or forms of ownership. When the institution of ownership begins, with women seized by victors, then class distinction begins. This barbarian society has different characteristics than the primitive society does, and this is where the basis of the leisure class is found.

In order to examine the consumption and leisure habits of the leisure class, Veblen must look at their lifestyles. In doing so, he examines not only their characteristics but also their activities, manner of dress, religions, and pursuit of activities of higher learning. He views the activities and spending habits of this leisure class in terms of conspicuous and vicarious consumption and waste. Both are related to the display of status and not to functionality or usefulness. They avoid any kind of employment that is productive, since these are not considered to be honorable activities. This is the basis on which society forms and economic life functions.

The book is basically a satire on the upper classes and on modern society. In spite of its humor, Veblen intended for the work to be a serious economic analysis of modern society, even though there is no use of the terms demand and supply. At first there is a tendency not to take Veblen's works seriously, but with a little understanding of basic economics, it is clear what Veblen is saying.

Veblen's book is a different way of analyzing economic behavior. It is interesting reading, especially if one has some background in economics.



# Chapter 1 Introduction

## Chapter 1 Introduction Summary and Analysis

"The institution of a leisure class is found in its best development at the higher stages of the barbarian culture; as, for instance, in feudal Europe or feudal Japan. In such communities the distinction between classes is very rigorously observed; and the feature of most striking economic significance in these class differences is the distinction maintained between the employments proper to the several classes" (Chap. 1, p. 1). The upper classes did not hold industrial positions but only positions with prestige associated with them. The honorable occupations included warfare and the ministry.

India, with its rigid caste system, has many different social groupings, among which is a leisure class. The class structure resulted in different occupations for different castes. Again, the groups considered to be the leisure class work in non-industrial occupations. In Polynesia and Iceland, there were different classes. The lower classes worked at manual labor. In these societies, men from the upper classes were actually barred from manual forms of labor. They basically work in government, warfare, ministry, or sports.

The leisure class developed from the lower barbarian classes. In hunting cultures, the leisure class did not exist yet. There was a differentiation of functions among the tribe members, but nothing that yet qualified as a leisure class. As development proceeds, there is a differentiation and specialization of labor until there is eventually an industrial and non-industrial class. He groups industrial labor as being a form of woman's work in the primitive communities.

In the primitive culture, most of the men's work was geared toward food production. The woman's work consisted of drudgery, even though both were required to support the culture. There was a distinction between man's work and woman's work. In primitive savage communities there was no leisure class or ownership of private property.

From this analysis, Veblen ascertains that the leisure class began to develop during the transition from primitive savagery to barbarism. This is also when communities became more warlike. There were two conditions necessary for its development. The community had to have a predatory nature and subsistence had to be easy enough to obtain without requiring the entire community. With this came a distinction between worthy and unworthy employments, with the unworthy being those concerned with the everyday lack of prestige tasks associated with subsistence.

Industrial labors are those in which man exhibits his power over nature. Veblen goes on to make a distinction between animate and living. Animate refers to things like storms and waterfalls, not things like animals. The barbarian culture directs itself toward inanimate things. Their activities could be classified in the categories of exploit and industry or exploit and drudgery, and this has to do with the difference between the



sexes. Men have different physical characteristics and are more aggressive than women. The men do the fighting and hunting while the women do the other work. The weaker of the men do the other work with the women. This develops into the employments of industry and drudgery.

Man has the instinct for workmanship, and the differences in the efficiencies or abilities of the different men become apparent in their endeavors. Within this context, man becomes more predatory or warlike as a result of technical knowledge and the use of tools. The predatory culture comes into effect gradually.

# Pecuniary Emulation

## Pecuniary Emulation Summary and Analysis

When ownership became a part of the community, so did the leisure class. Both developed from the same set of economic forces. A person who doesn't work out of neglect is not a member of the leisure class. The earliest form of ownership was of women, and this began in the lower barbarian stages of culture. Men took their enemy's women and used them as trophies and evidence of their exploits.

The beginning of private ownership led to the struggle for the possession of goods. As technology progresses, man has time for more than just activities devoted to subsistence. The possession and consumption of goods brought with it some physical comforts. This means that accumulation of goods is desirable. Emulation is the basic motive for ownership since wealth is honorable. The desire to own property is an incentive to work. Property is now the trophy and the individual members of the community were compared in terms of ownership of property.

Possessions have now come to indicate the power of the possessor. Man comes into possession of property by peaceful means, and property becomes an indicator of success and the basis for esteem. Possession determines the individual's standing in the community. The possession of wealth for itself becomes a meritorious act. Wealth that is acquired by inheritance is valued more highly. A certain standard of wealth comes into existence for the community, and anything beyond this level is considered meritorious. Those below the certain level suffer in terms of less respect and esteem. Thus, property is a requisite for respect and self-esteem. The required level for the standard keeps increasing. People strive to achieve the standard, and once achieved, they then strive to place themselves above the standard. The members of the community are judged and ranked in terms of their wealth.

Veblen's purpose in this chapter has been to show how private property came into being and how it led to accumulation and different levels of social standing in the community based possessions.



# Conspicuous Leisure

## Conspicuous Leisure Summary and Analysis

The effect of the conditions described in the previous chapter should be to make men frugal and want to work hard. This is what happens in the laboring classes, especially in the agricultural stages of industry. The labor effort is not viewed as undignified within their class, and they take pride in their work effort. This kind of labor is looked down upon by the superior classes and they make themselves absent from productive forms of work. The avoidance of labor becomes a form of class distinction for the superior class. Labor is dishonorable.

In the predatory culture, hunting did not have any pecuniary motive. It was a form of sport. The avoidance of labor becomes the basis for class distinction, and those who need to work to survive and don't want to work have a life of being beggars and poor. Those who can afford to avoid work engage in conspicuous leisure. Leisure is basically the act of using time in non-productive ways. They can do this because they can afford to do so.

For the superior class, a portion of their life is spent in public and their leisure should not be in the eyes of the public. Leisure becomes a form of employment for the upper class. Since leisure does not result in material production, there has to be some criteria of past-leisure that is in the form of immaterial goods, and these usually took the form of scholarly or artistic feats. These accomplishments are an expression of status.

The men of leisure must live according to a certain manner. They must also act in a certain way, or with decorum that is consistent with their position. Manners are indicative of breeding, and the person is placed by the manners he exhibits. This code of proprieties is a form of social status. The higher up on the social ladder the individual is, the greater the degree of decorum.

Having individuals as property for the services they perform is a part of the economic development process. Owning slaves illustrated wealth and division of labor represented the importance of the slave. Some waited on the master; others engaged in drudge work or protective activities. The chief wife doesn't engage in any productive employment and is usually of good breeding. The degree of her freedom from employment depends on the wealth of her husband.

Servants represent the conspicuous leisure of the master. Veblen's satire is evident in the way he talks about the valuation of servants. Big and strong footmen have more physical strength than do women, so they should cost more. Some servants have more productive duties than others do. This results in a derivative or subsidiary leisure class: "This vicarious leisure class is distinguished from the leisure class proper by a characteristic feature of its habitual mode of life. The leisure of the master class is, at least ostensibly, an indulgence of a proclivity for the avoidance of labour and is



presumed to enhance the master's own well-being and fullness of life; but the leisure of the servant class exempt from productive labour is in some sort a performance exacted from them, and is not normally or primarily directed to their own comfort. The leisure of the servant is not his own leisure" (Chap. 3, pp. 59-60).

Servants are also expected to conform to a certain code of conduct based on their status. Veblen refers to this as conspicuous subservience. The servant should know his place. Any deviation results in a decrease in what Veblen calls mechanical efficiency. Servants who don't behave according to the code of conduct are a bad reflection on their master, who people will think can't afford to pay for servants with the proper behavior. The social arrangement is referred to as the stage of status.

The reason for keeping servants in the modern day is that the household members can't perform the household work without discomfort. There are too many social duties for the household members to perform, and they find the household chores to be menial.

Leisure time is then described as the time that is left over after performing chores and making goods for the master of the household. Household chores fall into the category of vicarious leisure and may be classified as drudgery. Some of this is wasted time and has no pecuniary advantage to the master. This develops into a derivate or subsidiary leisure class.





# Conspicuous Consumption

## Conspicuous Consumption Summary and Analysis

As the vicarious leisure class comes into being, so do distinctions among servant classes. Those taking part in vicarious leisure begin to engage in the vicarious consumption of goods. This refers to the costumes they wear and the size of their servant's quarters. This is the stage where there is a differentiation in consumption. Consumption yields utility to the individual and it is a by-product of wealth. In the early predatory culture, it was the work of women to produce the goods that the men consumed. The consumption of women was related to their work. It wasn't directed to giving them pleasure or comfort.

Unproductive consumption became an indication of dignity and was honorable in itself. Jewelry and choice items of food were not available to the lower classes. The luxuries were only supposed to be for the leisure class. This also applied to intoxicating beverages and narcotics. It was the role of women to administer these things to the gentlemen of the leisure class. The women were considered to be chattel, and only consumed what was required for subsistence. Women were expected to consume only what was required for their masters.

The men of the leisure class consumed beyond their need for subsistence. His consumption consisted of the best of food and luxuries. The man is considered to be inferior if he doesn't consume at a certain level. He has to live his life in a certain way. This is where manners and decorum originated. The man must consume certain items and give away certain kinds of gifts to indicate his position. This is conspicuous consumption. His wealth must be displayed and there must be witnesses to this display of wealth.

As the leisure class develops, differentiation occurs into different ranks. This is based on inheritance. Inheritance carries with it an obligatory leisure and gentle blood. The lower ranks are considered to be marginal men of leisure and they affiliate themselves with those in higher positions. The marginal members are considered to engage in vicarious consumption. This reflects on the patron as a measure of his standing.

As the group around the patron grows, more distinctions occur. Costumes worn determine the standing of the individual. Tasks and services are divided into noble and ignoble. The predatory services are viewed as noble. Productive and industrial tasks are classified as ignoble. This was true of their dependents also.

When servitude ended, the groups around the patron diminished. The patron now had fewer dependents to perform vicarious leisure for him. The chief wife was the last to lose her role. At lower levels of the social ladder, vicarious consumption and vicarious leisure were both the functions of the wife. There was no one else to perform these functions. Even though there is no leisure at this level, the wife still performs these



functions for the good name of the household. The wife now consumes the goods the husband produces. This is the vicarious consumption.

Each level of the social structure accepts their condition. They each conform to the code of conduct that is acceptable at their level. They all consume certain goods for the sake of appearance until the lower levels of the social structure or slum life is reached. Then there is very little consumption for the sake of appearance.

Conspicuous consumption is more prevalent in urban than rural areas. The families of farmers dress less modernly than the families of city dwellers. Each class has a higher level of the standard of decency that they must conform to. The standard is higher in the city than it is in rural areas. There is a higher value on articles of conspicuous consumption than there is on saving.

Leisure arose as a way of the individual showing he was free of ignoble employments. Consumption goods result from those engaging in ignoble employments producing more than their subsistence. The concept of conspicuous waste is introduced by Veblen to indicate the workers don't always perform efficiently. Conspicuous waste also refers to spending on items that are not really necessary. Eventually the wasteful expenditures become a necessity of life and become a part of customary expenditures. This is not using the word in its technical sense.



# The Pecuniary Standard of Living

## The Pecuniary Standard of Living Summary and Analysis

Most people spend in excess of what is required for their physical comfort. They do this because they must live up to the code of decency. Once an individual attains a given level of consumption, it is hard to give it up and move to a lower level. Veblen goes on to say that it is not the current level of consumption expenditures that guides behavior but rather the level that is just beyond the reach of the individual.

It is the community that decides the standard of consumption that it feels is honorable. Once the standard of living is determined, it is difficult to change. Changing habits is a slow purpose. The wider the distance between the classes and the slower the degree of class mobility, the slower the process of change. The standards are determined by conspicuous waste and workmanship. These and the predatory animus shape the standard of life.

The necessities of life are the consumption articles that are most important to the consumer and the ones he hangs on to the most. Expenditures on items that are not necessities become habitual expenditures, and these are hard to give up. Habits are hard to break and these various habits comprise the individual's standard of living. The individual will give up most of his habitual consumption before giving up the necessities of life.

Habits are formed by the temperament and aptitude of the individual, and this determines which habits dominate the life of the person. The standard of living for the individual consists of these habits. Whenever an individual has a greater ability to pay, it will take the form of more items of conspicuous consumption. Every community has a propensity for emulation, which leads to conspicuous waste. This is why all of the industrial production is absorbed by the community. Members of the community conform to the standard of spending, and this determines their standard of living. When children enter the picture, the individual has the necessary expense of the child, which limits the amount of his conspicuous consumption.

People engaged in scholarly activities are considered to be of a higher social grade despite their lower earnings. They are expected to have a higher level of expenditures on conspicuous items in line with their social standing.



# Pecuniary Canons of Taste

## Pecuniary Canons of Taste Summary and Analysis

"The caution has already been repeated more than once, that while the regulating norm of consumption is in large part the requirement of conspicuous waste, it must not be understood that the motive on which the consumer acts in any given case is this principle in its bald, unsophisticated form. Ordinarily his motive is a wish to conform to established usage, to avoid unfavourable notice and comment, to live up to the accepted canons of decency in the kind, among, and grade of goods consumed, as well as in the decorous employment of his time and effort" (Chap. 7, p. 115).

The consumer is aware that his consumption is observed by others. His habits are directed by the principle of conspicuous waste. Property becomes sacred and this is where crimes against property begin. Wealth becomes a measure of good standing and is obtained through conspicuous consumption.

Part of conspicuous waste represents spending on ornate churches and buildings. This is what Veblen refers to as devout consumption. There is always a respectable amount of wasteful expenditure. The devout structures are always more ornate than the other buildings in the community and there is little attention paid to the comfort of the member.

Serving in the clergy is an employment of honor. The members wear certain manners of dress to designate their position and rank, and they engage in vicarious leisure. Their activities are nonproductive as they rehearse for their ceremonial activities. According to their canons of belief, there are holidays and the one day of week during which people should not engage in work.

The members of the divinity use many articles of beauty made of gold and precious stones. Silver spoons have no greater usability than machine made spoons. They have utility and serviceability, but are items of conspicuous waste. There is an aesthetic quality to items of beauty, but it does not enhance their usefulness.

Lawns and public grounds are also considered to be things of beauty. To Veblen, they are imitations of a pasture. Instead of cows trimming the grass, men perform the task, even though it is at a greater expense. These are all things of pecuniary beauty. Pecuniary beauty supplements aesthetic beauty.

Dogs are also items of conspicuous consumption. Veblen views them as dirty but they serve a need for their owners, as do horses. A race horse can also be used as an instrument for gambling and is an example of conspicuous waste. They are forms of pecuniary respectability.

Items can also be ornate and expensive and serve no economic purpose. Thrifty goods are unattractive if they don't have a certain amount of expensiveness. The owner doesn't get the same amount of utility from them and seeks out more expensive goods.

Innovation must appeal to the principle of conspicuous waste. These are the various considerations that go into taste.



# Dress as an Expression of the Pecuniary Culture

## Dress as an Expression of the Pecuniary Culture Summary and Analysis

"It will be in place, by way of illustration, to show in some detail how the economic principles so far set forth apply to everyday facts in some one direction of the life process. For this purpose no line of consumption affords a more apt illustration than expenditure on dress" (Chap. 7, p. 167). Dress is an example of conspicuous waste. The manner in which people dress is always on display and represents the pecuniary standing of the individual. Dress is more for show than for protection. Many times people do not protect themselves from the weather because they are more concerned with their appearances. They want to appear to be fashionable.

Veblen talks about dress being a spiritual need. The individual has a need to conform to the standards of taste. If an item of clothing is cheap, it is considered to be unworthy and inferior. Cheap imitations of expensive hand-made items don't have the aesthetic quality that the original items do. Individuals should wear expensive clothes that indicate that they do not engage in any form of productive employment.

This is more evident in women's clothing than in men's. Veblen uses women's hats and shoes as an example. Both exhibit the fact that there is no productive employment. Skirts also indicate the same thing, since all of the items make it difficult for the woman to move around easily. The corset is the most constricting of garments. The woman wears them for show, despite the amount of discomfort involved.

The fact that fashion styles change from season to season and the well-dressed person must keep up with the current styles is a form of conspicuous waste. The urban areas are more up-to-date with changes in fashion than are the rural areas. Styles do not stay in vogue for long. Old styles are grotesque after several years. The wealthier the community is, the greater the amount of conspicuous waste in dress. This applies more to women than to men.

The women of the household do most of the vicarious consumption. This is done for the head of the household and is most obvious in the area of dress and fashion. Respectable women are expected to be more showy about their leisure than men are. The woman is not supposed to work. She is supposed to be beautiful and concerned with activities within the household. The woman is representative of the household's wealth. The more unproductive the woman is, the greater the respectability of the household.

Everything about the woman's manner of dress indicates that she is economically dependent on the man. There are servants that the man pays for so the woman can

maintain her non-productive functions. Liveried servants are an example, and their manner of dress is like that of the woman in terms of the amount of comfort allowed. The dress of the divinity also indicates their role as subordinates to the moneyed class. Their dress is very ornate and expensive, but all indicates their lack of productive employments.



# Industrial Exemption and Conservatism

## Industrial Exemption and Conservatism Summary and Analysis

In this chapter Veblen is applying the principles of Darwin to society and its social structure. Man struggles for existence in society and survives by the process of selective adaptation. Social structure has evolved by the process of natural selection of institutions. The fittest of habits survive as society changes. The institutions that shape the thoughts are the result of the natural selection process themselves. As the institutions change, there is a new selection of the fittest which leads to the adaptation in habits and thoughts, and this leads to new institutions.

The existing institutions will always favor the propagation on a particular type of individual because he promotes the institution itself. But the adaptive process means that change occurs in the institutions. If the institutions don't adapt and change, they will cease to exist. These developing institutions represent the development of society and the institutions that exist in the present determine the shape of the institutions that will exist in the future.

Institutions always carry elements of the past, even as they adapt to changing circumstances. They are never fully caught up-to-date with the present. Man too will cling to his habits until he is forced to change. Veblen refers to this as a variety of different terms—social inertia, psychological inertia, and conservatism. The changes that take place come through changes in the habits of different social classes that come about due to the stress involved in clinging to old habits.

Communities are made of institutions and it is these institutions which embody the mechanism for the carrying on of habits. Eventually the old habits don't yield the same results due to new conditions, so people begin to change their habits. The pressure to change takes the form of pecuniary exigencies. It is economic forces that bring about a change in society.

There was a quasi-peaceful stage in which status was the dominant feature of life. It is in this stage from where the elements of Western culture were formed.

The leisure class does not feel the same economic pressures as do other classes. They do not have to struggle for survival and should therefore be less responsive to these economic exigencies. They are the conservative class and are more or less insulated from the economic pressures of the community. The leisure class is outside of the industrial community and not subject to the same economic pressures. They thus slow down the process of change because they have a greater interest in maintaining the status quo.





The wealthy class sets the pace for the rest of society. Any kind of change calls for a readjustment. There is resistance to change because change requires time and effort. Innovation is hindered by privation. For the lower classes, what remains after providing for their subsistence is usually devoted to comfort, not conspicuous consumption.

The economic institutions can be divided into the groups of acquisition (pecuniary) and production (industrial). The leisure class has a pecuniary relationship to the economic forces and the pecuniary institutions are based on factors of the past. The impetus for change comes from the leisure class's interest in acquisitions as the pecuniary institutions change to accommodate the interests in acquisitions. Their interest in growth has to do with their interest in the pecuniary aspects of society.



# The Conservation of Archaic Traits

## The Conservation of Archaic Traits Summary and Analysis

"The institution of a leisure class has an effect not only upon social structure but also upon the individual character of the members of society. So soon as a given proclivity or a given point of view has won acceptance as an authoritative standard or norm of life it will react upon the character of the members of the society which has accepted it as a norm" (Chap. 9, p. 212).

The institutions change and that brings about a change in habits and thoughts. Changes in the institutions bring about a change in human nature. There is a natural selection process among the ethnic types. Veblen distinguishes three ethnic types: the dolichocephalic-blond, the brachycephalic brunette, and the Mediterranean. Each of these types contains the elements of variation between peaceable or ante-predatory and predatory. The ante-predatory variant is similar to those in the earlier stage of development and the ancestor from the primitive savage stage. The predatory variant came about as a result of selective adaptation from the predatory culture. The dolicho-blond has more of the predatory traits. The selection process seems to apply more to the ante-predatory and predatory than it does to the ethnic types.

The current ethnic types are variations of the primitive ethnic types. The archaic traits are the carryovers from the earlier stages of development, and they survive the different changes that take place and seem to be hereditary. The peaceful traits include good-will and an interest in others. The predatory stage contained a change in human nature. They exhibited traits of clannishness, self-seeking, and ferocity.

Industrial efficiency is the center of modern communities. The value of the individual is determined by his efficiency. It is the best interests of the community that the individual not be self-seeking. He should be hard working, peaceful, and honest. The greater the convergence of these traits, the more successful the community is.

The institutions of acquisitions are concerned with employments that revolve around ownership and acquisition. Those institutions that have to do with production are concerned with employments that involve production. How does one move from the industrial class to the leisure class? One does this by pecuniary employments. The purpose of pecuniary employments is to promote the predatory aptitudes and predatory animus. This refers to the work that has to do with ownership. There are also subsidiary groups that have to do with acquisition and accumulation in competitive industry. Financing is a good example.

The leaders of the competitive industries are engaged in pecuniary employment. Other activities, like divinity, politics, and the military are categorized as pecuniary employments. The more the employment has to do with ownership, the more

respectable the employment is considered to be. Occupations like banking and law are next in the order because they are subservient to ownership.

Those who are admitted to the leisure class are those that are fit in a pecuniary sense. They have been shaped by the forces of natural selection and selective adaptation through the pecuniary employments. This is a continual on-going selection process. The leisure class is expected to have the pecuniary traits and the industrial class is considered to exhibit the peaceful traits.



# Modern Survivals of Prowess

## Modern Survivals of Prowess Summary and Analysis

In Veblen's view, the leisure class does not live in the industrial community even though they live near it. The term martial spirit refers to man's predatory or fighting nature, and it is a trait more of the leisure class than of the middle or lower classes. Government is their most serious occupation. When it comes to fighting, the lower-class delinquents are the only ones that rival the leisure class. This is the only element of the industrial class where the martial spirit is obvious.

The fact that the different classes have different temperaments is attributed in part to hereditary and in part to ethnic differences. They have a readiness for fighting, which is evident in the duel. Dueling is considered to be a leisure class activity wherein the men fight to settle their differences. The exceptions to the duel being the domain of the leisure class are the military and the lower-class delinquents. Other members of the community don't usually fight unless they are angry or under the influence of alcohol.

The lower-class delinquents tend to be rowdy, and they exist in many societies. For them, fighting and dueling tends to be a social obligation and a way of asserting manhood. Boys develop more of a fighting spirit than girls do. Some have the fighting spirit throughout their life. Many join pseudo-military organizations where their martial spirit is exhibited. This is like the college spirit in sports.

"These manifestations of the predatory temperament are all to be classed under the head of exploit. They are partly simple and unreflected expressions of an attitude of emulative ferocity, partly activities deliberately entered upon with a view to gaining repute and prowess" (Chap. 10, p. 255). Sports games also fall into this category. They are based on danger and the ability to cause damage. There are elements of exploit and ferocity. Sports activities are given the decorum that they require to be respectable and are therefore a part of the code of reputable living. Sports activities fit the code of reputable waste and are a form of decorous recreation.

Sports games represent the way in which predatory behavior enters into the modern peaceful community. The games are the acceptable way of exhibiting this behavior, since the predatory impulse is always present in man. Veblen uses a walking stick as an example of this. The walking stick is usually carried by men of the leisure class, men who are active in sports, and the lower class delinquents. Men in pecuniary employments carry walking sticks, but men in industrial employments do not and neither do women unless they have a physical impairment that requires one.

The involvement and addiction to games and sports is basically an addiction of the leisure class. It is one of the traits that the leisure class and lower class delinquents have in common. For the industrial classes, sports are an occasional diversionary feature of life, not an addiction.



# The Belief in Luck

## The Belief in Luck Summary and Analysis

"The gambling propensity is another subsidiary trait of the barbarian temperament. It is a concomitant variation of character of almost universal prevalence among sporting men and among men given to warlike and emulative activities generally. This trait also has a direct economic value. It is recognised to be a hindrance to the highest industrial efficiency of the aggregate in any community where it prevails in an appreciable degree" (Chap. 11, p. 276).

The reason for gambling is the belief in luck, and the activity isn't confined to the leisure class. Veblen says that this belief in luck predates the predatory culture. It is considered to be an archaic trait and is basically considered as a hindrance to the community.

When betting is applied to sports, luck isn't the only factor in play. There is also the pride in the strength and skill of the winners. Gambling is an element of the predatory character of man. Gambling activities affect the economic efficiency of the community.

Many men engaged in sports wear talismans or other kinds of good luck charms. The sports event has to have a given end. This is taken as a belief in a preternatural agency and is based on animistic belief. There is a belief that the outcome can be influenced by some factor. This belief is known as hamingia, and it dates back to the days of the Icelandic sagas and German folklore. It leads to a lowering of efficiency or industrial usefulness when the population has this animistic view.

The workman with this animistic view behaves differently. He deviates from the matter-of-fact sequence, and this lowers his efficiency. He believes that there are factors other than his own actions that are directing the industrial effort. This is what Veblen calls an unseen hand. When this occurs on a collective basis, the overall efficiency of the organization is affected. The real issue, according to Veblen, is the fact that there is such a belief.

This belief developed at the predatory stage of culture. It accompanies the development of status. The animistic belief exists in people in the ante-predatory culture. It was not an important factor with the primitive savage where there were no class distinctions in a culture that was peaceful.

The fact that animism is prevalent in man leads man to gamble.



# Devout Observances

## Devout Observances Summary and Analysis

Anthropomorphic cults are a carry over from earlier cultures and they exist in the forms of various institutions. "Without any intention to command or to deprecate the practices to be spoken of under the head of devout observances, or the spiritual and intellectual traits of which these observances are the expression, the everyday phenomena of current anthropomorphic cults may be taken up from the point of view of the interest which they have for economic theory. What can properly be spoken of here are the tangible, external features of devout observances" (Chap. 12, p. 293).

Veblen says that his point isn't to depreciate the practices of devout observances but to show how they are a part of the culture. It is the mind that is gratified by devout observances, and in many cases it is based on superstitions. The two groups that engage in sports, the leisure class and the lower class delinquents with their belief in an unseen hand, both tend to have an inclination to devout observances.

Veblen gives examples of various organizations whose existence is related to the practices of devout observances. He mentions the Young Men's Christian Association, and the Young People's Society for Christian Endeavour and says their purpose is to advance the practice of religion. These organizations tend to organize sporting activities for their members. Religious organizations also have various gambling activities, like the church raffles and bazaars. These, like sporting activities, appeal to sense of luck.

According to the anthropomorphic creed, God represents the habit of dominance and functions as a preternatural agent. Worshipping is a way of appealing to the sense of status, although the practice of worship is a relic of the barbarian era. Many of their habits are not in keeping with the modern day and have outlived the scheme of status. The indirect and direct effects of devout observances is to lower the economic efficiency of the community.

There is always the element of conspicuous waste in the religion buildings. They are overly ornate and not consistent with the surrounding buildings. The persons who serve in the divinity also wear ornate garments. Members who come to worship also tend to wear more expensive clothing than they wear on a daily basis. There must be no suggestion of any form of industrial employments in their garb.

The practice of devout observances also means recognizing sacred holidays. This means special foods and clothing and practices. This, to Veblen, is a form of conspicuous waste and vicarious leisure. An example of a holiday of vicarious leisure is Labor Day. It is celebrated by abstaining from labor.

The divinity does not engage in labor, even if it is lucrative. It is considered to be below them even if it contributes to the betterment of mankind. They engage in vicarious



consumption but still are supposed to eschew the good things of the word. In addition, beyond the human members of the divinity is what Veblen calls the subhuman vicarious leisure class. This consists of angels, saints, and whatever there is in the set of beliefs. They have their own hierarchy. They have their followers who practice vicarious leisure.

The practice of religious observances is not just observed by the leisure class. It is also a practice of the lower classes. In many cases in European culture, the lower classes and criminal engage in devout practices more than the leisure class does. Modern day clergy claim that they are losing their hold over the people. The artesian class was the first to fall away, followed by the middle class. This is particularly true of adult males.

Veblen goes on to talk about the differences in the degree of devoutness in the American South and the American North. The South tends to pay more attention to religious observations than those in the North do. Class differences are also a factor in the degree of devout observations.



# Survivals of the Non-Invidious Interest

## Survivals of the Non-Invidious Interest Summary and Analysis

The anthropomorphic cult and the divinity disintegrate as time goes on. "Among these alien motives which affect the devout scheme in its later growth, may be mentioned the motives of charity and of social good-fellowship, or conviviality; or, in more general terms, the various expressions of the sense of human solidarity and sympathy" (Chap. 13, p. 333).

There are certain aptitudes and habits of life which appear to be antithetical to the leisure class. The leisure class is characterized by waste and abstention from the industrial employments. Their class tends to propagate the traits of earlier cultures, and these traits tend to survive because of the sheltering of the leisure class through the mechanism of reputable life. Change comes about when there are changes in economic development. This happens when there are fewer wars, less proprietary government, and decay in the divinity.

Women in the upper levels of the industrial class tend to be somewhat exempt from pecuniary pressures. They tend to be less non-invidious than men are. As far as the men go, the greater their pecuniary interest in the industrial enterprise, the more pride they take in the work.

Some people devote time to charitable actions. Most of the involved organizations tend to be semi-religious and have both men and women involved in their charitable work. They work for goals like social reform, prison reform, disarmament, the avoidance of war and other objectives.

Since women are dependent on men, they don't require large expenditures or salaries. Like the clergy, upper class women are in the vicarious leisure class and both are afforded a higher level of social status than the average man. Many members of the vicarious leisure class engage in devout observances and works of piety. When the motive of the workers is ostentatious, then the organization tends to decline. It doesn't matter if the organization is funded by donations.

The leisure class reverts to the non-invidious characteristics of the ante-predatory stage. Their principles are waste, ferocity, and futility. The role of women is shaped by traditions and these come from an earlier stage of development. Modern women want to know why they should be content with this situation. She is expected to engage in conspicuous consumption and is barred from useful employment.





# The Higher Learning as an Expression of the Pecuniary Culture

## The Higher Learning as an Expression of the Pecuniary Culture Summary and Analysis

"To the end that suitable habits of thought on certain heads may be conserved in the incoming generation, a scholastic discipline is sanctioned by the common sense of the community and incorporated into the accredited scheme of life" (Chap. 14, p. 363). Education results in the formation of habits and thoughts, and this has an economic value for the community. These different values are imparted by the institution and contribute to the doctrine of pecuniary merit. These institutions are where the ideals of the leisure class are learned and passed on to the culture.

Learning, according to Veblen, is closely related to observance of devotional functions. Learning is considered to be a form of vicarious leisure and is tied to the supernatural agent which he has discussed in previous chapters. The purpose of the supernatural was for the individual to put himself in a position where he could utilize their powers of intercession. The person had to have knowledge in order to do this. Learning evolved as a by-product of the divine class and the need for knowledge for devout observances.

Veblen makes a distinction between esoteric and exoteric knowledge. Esoteric knowledge refers to knowledge that has to nothing to do with economics or industry. Exoteric knowledge is the knowledge of industrial processes. This also is the difference between high and lower forms of learning. This group adheres to the precepts of ritual, rank, and other things of that nature.

Learning is an outgrowth of what Veblen calls sympathetic magic. It arises from the rites and ritual of the occult, which lead to the development of the study of magic and science. Higher learning also contains its rites and rituals in the form of caps and gowns, graduation ceremonies and the like, and all of these usages and features are derived from the practice of priestly duties.

Many of the schools founded for the education of the lower classes to impart useful knowledge developed into institutions of higher learning. School teaches a learned ritual, and as soon as the surrounding community begins to acquire wealth and becomes somewhat dependent on the leisure class, there is an increasing dependence on ritual. As the reliance on rituals, like caps and gowns increases, it more and more becomes a part of the leisure class life of conspicuous waste. The adoption of the cap and gown indicates that the school is a leisure class institution.

In time, the pecuniary comes to substitute for the sacerdotal as the leaders of industry take over from the priests. This also represents a shift from conspicuous leisure to conspicuous consumption as an indicator of reputability.



In the beginning, women were barred from educational institutions. They were considered to be subservient and it was felt that they would be demeaning to the learning craft. Women only needed the kind of knowledge that related to household duties and anything else was considered to be unfeminine.

The scholar who attends these institutions of higher learning does so for the benefit of his patron. They study in the areas that benefit the leisure class so that they can serve the leisure class in these areas. This helps to propagate the institution of the leisure class.

The purpose of the study of classics is to shape the intellect of the learner and to lower their economic efficiency. They form an aversion to what is useful since they favor what is honorific. It also wastes the learner's time in that he doesn't learn anything useful. Examples of this are learning ancient languages. Then as time goes on, conspicuous consumption becomes more important than conspicuous leisure. Eventually these classic studies of dead languages no longer serves its purpose and things begin to change. The leisure class continues to use an elaborate form of elocution to indicate their position.



# Characters

## Barbarian

The barbarian culture is the stage of development where class distinctions begin. Men of different abilities engage in different kinds of activities. Advances in tools and technology means that not all of their time is spent on activities associated with survival. They have time for other activities, or leisure activities. Ownership of property has also emerged. Ownership of property began with women, as the victor would claim the women of the defeater. The women were basically trophies and evidence of the power and strength of the victor. This was the basis for the establishment of wealth. Other forms of property came into being as part of the ability to have leisure time.

A distinction is made between kinds of employment. There is men's work and woman's work. The men work at war, hunting sports, and religious observances. They may make toys, weapons, and sporting goods. There is a certain amount of prestige and honor that goes with certain forms of employment. The more unproductive the employment is, the greater the amount of prestige and honor associated with it.

At this time, the nature of the community shifts from being peaceful to being predatory and warlike. Property becomes the sign of the strength of the captor. The strongest of the men who have the best ability are good warriors. They become the basis for the leisure class.

## Leisure Class

The leisure class is the upper class of society. They have emerged in the process of development as the strongest and most able of men and the ones who accumulated possessions. The wealth of the different members of the community is now measured in terms of the number of servants they own. Not only is the number of servants important, but also the behavior of the servants as members of this class; in addition, their servants are judged by their decorum or manners. Manners determine where the individual ranks in the society.

The leisure class engages in conspicuous leisure. Much of their time is spent in the public view. Their leisure time is spent in private and there must be some trophies of their leisure, just as the women were trophies of ownership. Their leisure time is spent in art or scholarly activities, sports, devout observances, and scholarly learning.

The women exist as dependents on the men. They run the household, and all of their activities are devoted to vicarious leisure. They are not expected to engage in any productive activities.



## Slave

The slave is the human that is owned by the master. They represent the wealth and power of the master as they are his possessions. Slaves are rated on their closeness to the master. Some just serve the master. Others do productive work and are lower on the social order pertaining to slaves. Those lowest on the social order have little or no contact with the master.

Slaves have their own code of decorum or manners. They are expected to behave in certain ways and their behavior reflects on their owner. The pricing of slaves depends on their value. A big strong fleshy footman should cost more than a weak woman.

Since slaves also have their own leisure time, this represents a subsidiary or derivative leisure class. The slave's leisure is not his own since it is directed at fulfilling his master's needs. The slave must know his place in all things as his behavior and manners reflect on the master.

## Primitive Savage

A primitive culture is one in which there is no ownership. This is viewed as the lowest stage of development. There is no defined leisure class or any other class. The community or tribe members do what they have to for survival. Each individual has his own level of ability and skill. The men who are able hunt for the community's food supply. The women and the lesser able men perform the other chores. All members of the community engage in productive work. The community is basically peaceful. There is no desire to accumulate any goods. They have no need for wealth or power. When their actions become predatory, they transform to a different level of development.

## Woman of the Household

The woman of the household is still considered to be a chattel. She is the one that is most responsible for displaying the wealth of the household. The more unproductive the woman is, the greater the wealth of the household. This is indicated by her manner of dress. The hats, shoes, skirts, and corsets all restrict free movement and are uncomfortable. But they indicate the current fashion, and the woman's purpose is to engage in vicarious consumption for the household. Since ostentatious dress is a form of pecuniary respectability, the season to season changes in fashion represent conspicuous waste.

## Master

The master is the slave owner. He is a member of the leisure class and the slaves represent his level of wealth and therefore his social standing within the community. The behavior of the slave is also a reflection on him. There is a prescribed code of conduct



for both master and slave. If the slaves don't exhibit the proper behavior, then others think that he is too poor to obtain well-behaved slaves.

## **The Divinity**

The divinity, or those employed in devout occupations, represent a special class within society. They are members of an honorable occupation. They have buildings or devout structures that are more ornate than the other buildings in the community which are the product of wasteful consumption. The members of the divinity engage in vicarious leisure.

## **Lower Class Delinquents**

The lower class delinquents are seen to share some predatory tendencies with the leisure class. They have the same fighting spirit. This is evident in some of their exhibited behavior, such as carrying a walking stick and their participation in sports. They have the same belief in the unseen hand that guides activities and they also have the same inclination toward the practice of devout observances.

## **Modern Day Servant**

The servant is the modern day counterpart of the slave. The servant is hired to do various chores because members of the leisure class don't have the time or don't want to do them. They are active in too many social activities.

## **Labor Class**

The labor class consists of those who do the productive work of the society. They have to work in order to survive. The labor they do is disdained by the leisure class.



# Objects/Places

## Andamans

Andamans is used as an example of a place with a primitive savage culture.

## Europe

Europe is used as an example of where class distinction began in feudal times.

## Japan

Feudal Japan is used as an example of the existence of classes.

## India

India, with its caste system, is given as an example of the existence of a rigid class structure.

## Polynesia

The Polynesian Islands are used as an example of the existence of different classes.

## Iceland

Iceland is used as an example of the existence of different class structures.

## Hawaii

Hawaii is used as an example of where beautiful and ornate items come from that are outside the habits of more people.

## China

China is used as an example of a country that has ancestor worship.

## Africa

Africa is used as an example of a country with slavery.

## America

America is used as an example of men who exhibit the martial spirit.



# Themes

## Economics

The Theory of the Leisure Class is a book about economics, in spite of Veblen's style of writing. Even though there is no use of the terms demand and supply, the book is an analysis of the modern lifestyle in Veblen's time. Veblen is analyzing the economic life of societies. He is studying the class distinctions that exist in society and where they came from. How did the leisure class develop? How did the institution of property come into being and why?

In using the terms conspicuous and vicarious consumption and leisure, Veblen is basically doing a demand and supply analysis of the classes of society. He looks at the consumption patterns of the upper class because this affects the rest of society through the mechanism of emulation.

Societal change is the result of the forces of economics. Many changes come about in response to pecuniary pressures. Since the upper classes are not as subject to these pressures as other elements of society, they are the most resistant to change because change affects their habits and lifestyle. But change does occur and this is one of the things that Veblen looks at.

## Lifestyles

The book is basically a study of the different lifestyles in the different stages of development and focuses on the upper classes in the modern society. From this point of view, it is a sociological study since it looks at the development and the evolution of the modern class system.

Society began consisting of people living in communities. This stage was called the primitive savage stage of culture, in which all activities were directed to the subsistence of the community. The community was basically peaceful and there was no ownership or class distinction.

As the tools and technology developed, not all activities had to be subsistence oriented. Aggressive tendencies in man developed as his fighting tendencies were revealed. This led to the seizure of women as trophies and this led to the development of ownership. Man's wealth and status were soon determined by the quantity of possession he owned. This led to class distinctions and the development of the leisure class.

Once the leisure class existed, how did they distinguish themselves from the other classes and how did they propagate their values? They avoided any kind of vulgar industrial employments because that was considered to be below them. The honorable occupations were the areas of sports, politics, government, and the divinity. They distinguished themselves in any way they could from the lower classes.



## Satire

Another prevailing theme of the book is the use of satire. Even though Veblen intended the book as a serious form of economic analysis, it is still humorous. The satire and humor are evident not only in the portrayal of the leisure class but also in Veblen's use of language.

He portrays the leisure class as a foppish group of people who are pretentious and ostentatious. Everything they do is for show to display their superior social and financial status. They engage in certain activities and forms of consumption for the purpose of exhibiting their higher level class distinction. This is where the terms conspicuous and vicarious consumption and leisure come from. The leisure class only engages in honorable activities and consumption. Having anything to do with productive employments is below them. What would people think if they were found chopping onions?!

The leisure class contains elements of the past. This is how they preserve their status. Because of this, they tend to be rather resistant to change and hinder the process of economic development and progress.



# Style

## Perspective

The book is written from the point of view of economics and sociology. It is a study of the different classes of society and how they developed and evolved due to changes in economic forces. Veblen examines the economic characteristics of the leisure class and determines why they do the things that they do and how they affect the rest of society and its progress. He employs a Darwinian approach to his analysis, which adds to the humor and satire.

Veblen is an academic who is qualified to write such a book. He was educated at Carleton College, Johns Hopkins University, Yale University, and Cornell University. He had a PhD in philosophy and was teaching at the University of Chicago when he authored the book. He is not an economist or a sociologist, but both fields basically evolved from the field of philosophy.

Veblen's intended audience is those in academia. He wrote the book as a serious academic study of the economics of the leisure class. Due to his use of satire and humor, the book was more popular in sociological circles and became a best seller. Even though the book wasn't popular with the audience he had originally intended, it still became a classic of economics.

## Tone

The tone of the book tends to be subjective even though it was written as an academic work. The book is based on the views of the author. It is written from his own observations and thoughts. There is no research and no cited sources in the book. This is a departure from the usual academic works, which are the result of research. The only citations are forms of poetry or things like that and they include nothing that is citable.

The fact that the book is written in this manner adds to its humor and satire. It is based totally on Veblen's views of the leisure class and their activities. He develops his own jargon to describe the behavior of the different group, such as conspicuous waste, and this adds to the impact on the reader. Nowhere in the book will the reader find any of the typical jargon of economics.

Even though Veblen's work was not taken as a serious analysis by economists of the time, it was popular due to his writing style and his portrayal of the leisure class. He makes no secret of his views of the upper classes. They are ostentatious and pretentious. The book was more popular with sociologists and the public than it was with economists and went on to become a best seller of the time.

## Structure

The format of the book is quite simple. It consists of a Preface and fourteen chapters. Each chapter is devoted to covering a particular topic in the development and analysis of the role of the leisure class in society. Each chapter gives thorough coverage to its topic. There is really no other format that Veblen could have chosen.

The format of the book is a departure from the usual analytical academic works in that there are no cited sources. All of the material is strictly due to the observations and views of the author with no research involved.

The format works well for the type of book that Veblen has written. The book tends to be wordy throughout. It is not written in everyday language, and sometimes the reader has to reread sentences or paragraphs in order to grasp the meaning that Veblen is trying to convey. Much of this is due to the wordy nature of the book.



## Quotes

"Manual labour, industry, whatever has to do directly with the everyday work of getting a livelihood, is the exclusive occupation of the inferior class. This inferior class includes slaves and other dependents, and ordinarily also all the women. If there are several grades of aristocracy, the women of high rank are commonly exempt from industrial employment, or at least from the more vulgar kinds of manual labour. The men of the upper classes are not only exempt, but by prescriptive custom they are debarred, from all industrial occupations. The range of employments open to them is rigidly defined. As on the higher plane already spoken of, these employments are government, warfare, religious observances, and sports." Chap. 1, pp. 2-3

"The evidence for the hypothesis that there has been such a peaceable stage of primitive culture is in great part drawn from psychology rather than from ethnology, and cannot be detailed here. It will be recited in part in a later chapter, in discussing the survival of archaic traits of human nature under the modern culture." Chap. 1, p. 21

"In the sequence of cultural evolution the emergence of a leisure class coincides with the beginning of ownership. This is necessarily the case, for these two institutions result from the same set of economic forces. In the inchoate phase of their development they are but different aspects of the same general facts of social structure." Chap. 2, p. 22

"So soon as the possession of property becomes the basis of popular esteem, therefore, it becomes also a requisite to that complacency which we call self-respect. In any community where goods are held in severalty it is necessary, in order to his own peace of mind, than an individual should possess as large a portion of goods as others with whom he is accustomed to class himself; and it is extremely gratifying to possess something more than others. But as fast as a person makes new acquisitions, and becomes accustomed to the resulting new standard of wealth, the new standard forthwith ceases to afford appreciable greater satisfaction than the earlier standard did." Chap. 2, p. 31

"After some considerable advance has been made in the practice of employing a special corps of servants for the performance of a conspicuous leisure in this manner, men begin to be preferred above women for services that bring them obtrusively into view. Men, especially lusty, personable fellows, such as footmen and other menials should be, are obviously more powerful and expensive than women. They are better fitted for this work, as showing a larger waste of time and of human energy. Hence it comes about that in the economy of the leisure class the busy housewife of the early patriarchal days, with her retinue of hardworking handmaidens, presently gives place to the lady and the lackey." Chap. 3, p. 57

"That is to say, since vicarious leisure is possible only on a basis of status or of hired service, the disappearance of the relation of status from human intercourse at any point



carries with it the disappearance of vicarious leisure so far as regards that much of life. But it is to be added, in qualification of this qualification, that so long as the household subsists, even with a divided head, this class of non-productive labour performed for the sake of household reputability must still be classed as vicarious leisure, although in a slightly altered sense. It is now leisure performed for the quasi-personal corporate household, instead of, as formerly, for the proprietary head of the household." Chap. 3, pp. 66-67

"In what has been said of the evolution of the vicarious leisure class and its differentiation from the general body of the working classes, reference has been made to further division of labour - that between different servant classes. One portion of the servant class, chiefly those persons whose occupation is vicarious leisure, come to undertake a new, subsidiary range of duties - the vicarious consumption of goods." Chap. 4, p. 68

"Leisure might then be expected gradually to yield ground and tend to obsolescence as the economic development goes forward, and the community increases in size; while the conspicuous consumption of goods should gradually gain in importance, both absolutely and relatively, until it had absorbed all the available product, leaving nothing over beyond a bare livelihood. But the actual course of development has been somewhat different from this ideal scheme. Leisure held the first place at the start, and came to hold a rank very much above wasteful consumption of goods, both as a direct exponent of wealth and as an element in the standard of decency, during the quasi-peaceable culture. From that point onward, consumption has gained ground, until, at present, it unquestionably holds the primacy, though it is still far from absorbing the entire margin of production above the subsistence minimum." Chap. 3, pp. 91-92

"Even in articles which appear at first glance to serve for pure ostentation only, it is always possible to detect the presence of some, at least ostensible, useful purpose; and on the other hand, even in special machinery and tools contrived for some particular industrial process, as well as in the rudest appliances of human industry, the traces of conspicuous waste, or at least of the habit of ostentation, usually become evident on a close scrutiny. It would be hazardous to assert that a useful purpose is ever absent from the utility of any article or of any service, however obviously its prime purpose and chief element is conspicuous waster; and it would be only less hazardous to assert of any primarily useful product that the element of waste is in no way concerned in its value, immediately or remotely." Chap. 4, pp. 100-101

"For the great body of the people in any modern community, the proximate ground of expenditure in excess of what is required for physical comfort is not a conscious effort to excel in the expensiveness of their visible consumption, so much as it is a desire to live up to the conventional standard of decency in the amount and grade of goods consumed. This desire is not guided by a rigidly invariable standard which must be lived up to, and beyond which there is no incentive to go. The standard is flexible; and



especially it is indefinitely extensible, if only time is allowed for habituation to any increase in pecuniary ability and for acquiring facility in the new and larger scale of expenditure that follows such an increase." Chap. 5, p. 102

"In any modern community where there is no priestly monopoly of these occupations, the people of scholarly pursuits are unavoidably thrown into contact with classes that are pecuniary their superiors. The high standards of pecuniary decency in force among these superior classes is transfused among the scholarly classes with but little mitigation of its rigour; and as a consequence there is no class of the community that spends a larger proportion of its substance in conspicuous waste than these." Chap. 5, pp. 113-114

"In modern communities, where the dominant economic and legal feature of the community's life is the institution of private property, one of the salient features of the code of morals is the sacredness of property. There needs no insistence of illustration to gain assent to the proposition that the habit of holding private property inviolate is traversed by the other habit of seeking wealth for the sake of the good repute to be gained through its conspicuous consumption. Most offences against property, especially offences of an appreciable magnitude, come under this head." Chap. 6, p. 117

"For a theory of taste the expression of an accepted ideal of archaism, on whatever basis it may have been accepted, is perhaps best rated as an element of beauty; there need be no question of its legitimation. But for the present purpose - for the purpose of determining what economic grounds are present in the accepted canons of taste and what is their significance for the distribution and consumption of goods - the distinction is not similarly beside the point." Chap. 6, p. 165

"It is also true that admitted expenditure for display is more obviously present, and is, perhaps, more universally practiced in the matter of dress than in any other line of consumption. No one finds difficulty in assenting to the commonplace that the greater part of the expenditure incurred by all classes for apparel is incurred for the sake of a respectable appearance rather than that for the protection of the person." Chap. 7, pp. 167-168

"Since the wealthy leisure class has grown so large, or the contact of the leisure-class has grown so large, or the contact of the leisure-class individual with members of his own class has grown so wide, as to constitute a human environment sufficient for the honorific purpose, there arises a tendency to exclude the baser elements of the population from the scheme even as spectators whose applause or mortification should be sought. The result of all this is a refinement of methods, a resort to subtler contrivances, and a spiritualization of the scheme of symbolism in dress. And as this upper leisure class sets the pace in all matters of decency, the result for the rest of society also is a gradual amelioration of the scheme of dress." Chap. 7, p. 187

"The life of man in society, just like the life of other species, is a struggle for existence, and therefore it is a process of selective adaptation. The evolution of social structure has been a process of natural selection of institutions. The progress which has been



and is being made in human institutions and in human character may be set down, broadly, to a natural selection of the fittest habits of thought and to a process of enforced adaptation of individuals to an environment which has progressively changed with the growth of the community and with the changing institutions under which men have lived." Chap. 8, p. 188

"The pressure exerted by the environment upon the group, and making for a readjustment of the group's scheme of life, impinges upon the members of the group in the form of pecuniary exigencies; and it is owing to this fact - that external forces are in great part translated into the form of pecuniary or economic exigencies - it is owing to this fact that we can say that the forces which count toward a readjustment of institutions in any modern industrial community are chiefly economic forces; or more specifically, these forces take the form of pecuniary pressure." Chap. 8, pp. 195-196

"Social evolution is a process of selective adaptation of temperament and habits of thought under the stress of the circumstances of associated life. The adaptation of habits of thought is the growth of institutions. But along with the growth of institutions has gone a change of a more substantial character. Not only have the habits of men changed with the changing exigencies of the situation, but these changing exigencies have also brought about a correlative change in human nature." Chap. 9, p. 213

"The whole question as to a class distinction in respect of spiritual make-up is also obscured by the presence, in all classes of society, of acquired habits of life that closely stimulate inherited traits and at the same time act to develop in the entire body of the population the traits which they simulate. These acquired habits, or assumed traits of character, are most commonly of an aristocratic case. The prescriptive position of the leisure class as the exemplar of reputability has imposed many features of the leisure class theory of life upon the lower classes; with the results that there goes on, always and throughout society, a more or less persistent cultivation of these aristocratic traits." Chap. 9, p. 242

"The leisure class lives by the industrial community rather than in it. Its relations to industry are of a pecuniary rather than an industrial kind. Admission to the class is gained by exercise of the pecuniary aptitudes - aptitudes for acquisition rather than for serviceability. There is, therefore, a continued selective sifting of the human material that makes up the leisure class, and this selection proceeds on the ground of fitness for pecuniary pursuits. But the scheme of life of the class is in large part a heritage from the past, and embodies much of the habits and ideals of the earlier barbarian period. This archaic, barbarian scheme of life imposes itself also on the lower orders, with more or less mitigation. In its turn the scheme of life, of conventions, acts selectively and by education to shape the human material, and its action runs chiefly in the direction of conserving traits, habits, and ideals that belong to the early barbarian age, - the age prowess and predatory life." Chap. 10, p. 246





"The two barbarian traits, ferocity and astuteness, go to make up the predacious temper or spiritual attitude. They are the expressions of a narrowly self-regarding habit of mind. Both are highly serviceable for individual expediency in a life looking to invidious success. Both also have a high aesthetic value. Both are fostered by the pecuniary culture. But both alike are of no use for the purposes of the collective life." Chap. 10, p. 275

"The gambling proclivity is doubtfully to be classed as a feature belonging exclusively to the predatory type of human nature. The chief factor in the gambling habit is the belief in luck; and this belief is apparently traceable, at least in its elements, to a stage in human evolution antedating the predatory culture. It may well have been under the predatory culture that the belief in luck was developed into the form in which it is present, as the chief element of the gambling proclivity in the sporting temperament." (Chapter 11, pg. 276)

"The industrial organization assumes more and more of the character of a mechanism, in which it is man's office to discriminate and select what natural forces shall work out their effects in his service. The workman's part in industry changes from that of a price mover to that of discrimination and valuation of quantitative sequences and mechanical facts. The faculty of a ready apprehension and unbiased appreciation of causes in his environment grows in relative economic importance, and any element in the complex of his habits of thought which intrudes a bias at variance with this ready appreciation of matter-of-fact sequence gains proportionately in importance as a disturbing element acting to lower his industrial usefulness." Chap. 11, p. 284

"The other, complementary element of devout life - the animistic habit of mind - is recruited and conserved by a second range of practice organized under clerical sanction. These are the class of gambling practices of which the church bazaar or raffle may be taken as the type." Chap. 12, p. 300

"It should accordingly be found that the modern industrial life tends selectively to eliminate these traits of human nature from the spiritual constitution of the classes that are immediately engaged in the industrial process. It should hold true, approximately, that devoutness is declining or tending to obsolescence among the members of what may be called the effective industrial community." Chap. 12, p. 318

"All concerned, whether their interest is immediate and self-regarding, or contemplative only, agree that some considerable share of the expenditure should go to the higher or spiritual needs derived from the habit of an invidious comparison in predatory exploit and pecuniary waste. But this only goes to say that the canons of emulative and pecuniary reputability so far pervade the common sense or evasion, even in the case of an enterprise which ostensibly proceeds entirely on the basis of a non-invidious interest." Chap. 13, p. 350

"As the body of systematized knowledge increased, there presently arose a distinction, traceable very far back in the history of education, between esoteric and exoteric





knowledge; the former - so far as there is a substantial difference between the two - comprising such knowledge as is primarily of no economic or industrial effect, and the latter comprising chiefly knowledge of industrial processes and of natural phenomena which were habitually turned to account for the material purposes of life. The line of demarcation has in time become, at least in popular apprehension, the normal line between the higher learning and the lower." Chap. 14, p. 367

# Topics for Discussion

How did the leisure class develop?

What is conspicuous leisure? How did it evolve?

What is conspicuous consumption? In what classes of the social structure does it occur? Explain.

Explain the social structure as it is portrayed by Veblen.

In what ways does Veblen use the principle of Charles Darwin; i.e., natural selection and selective adaptation?

What is the role of sports? How does its function differ depending whether the individual is a member of the leisure class or the industrial class?

What is the role of devout observances in culture? How is this tied to education and higher learning?