Veblen's Attack on Culture

Remarks Occasioned by the Theory of the Leisure Class

By T. W. Adorno

Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* became famous for its doctrine of conspicuous consumption, according to which the consumption of goods to a large extent takes place not to satisfy any true wants, or what Veblen chooses to call the "fullness of life," but rather to maintain social prestige or "status." This applies to the whole history of mankind from the very early stage which Veblen characterized as the "predatory" up to the present. From his critique of consumption as a mere ostentation, Veblen has derived inferences that are in the aesthetic sense close to those of functionalism (as these were formulated about the same time by Adolf Loos) and in the practical sense to those of technocracy. Historically effective though they were, however, these elements of Veblen's sociology do not sufficiently point up the objective motives underlying his thinking. His attack is directed against the barbarian character of culture. The term "barbarian culture," which occurs in the very first sentence,[1] crops up again and again throughout his main work. In its precise meaning the term applies only to one particular phase of history, an exceedingly broad one, however, extending from the time of the ancient hunter and warrior to that of the feudal lord and the absolute monarch, whose relation to the capitalist age is purposely left obscure. Yet there is an obvious intention, in numerous passages, to denounce the modern era as barbarian at the very points where it most solemnly raises the claim to be culture. The very features through which this era appears to have escaped bare utility and to have reached the humane level are supposed to be relics of historical epochs long past. Emancipation from the realm of utility is regarded as nothing but the index of a uselessness deriving from the fact that cultural "institutions" as well as anthropological qualities do not change simultaneously with or in conformity with economic modes of production, but lag behind them and at times openly contradict them. If one follows the trend of Veblen's ideas rather than the statements which waver between the vitriolic and the cautious,

[1]Cf. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, The Modern Library, New York 1934, p. 1.

one might say that those cultural characteristics in which greed, the desire of advantage, and confinement to the immediate appear to be overcome are nothing but the residues of objectively obsolete forms of greed and desire of advantage and bad immediacy. They originate from an urge to prove to men that one is exempt from crudely practical considerations; more specifically, that one can spend one's time on the useless in order to enhance one's position in the social hierarchy and widen the measure of one's social honor, and thus finally reaffirm one's power over others. Culture turns against utility for the sake of an indirect utility. It is marred by the "life-lie." In tracking down this life-lie Veblen's analysis penetrates to the most harmless-looking phenomena of culture. Under his gloomy gaze the walking stick and the lawn, the umpire and the domesticated animal become significant allegories of the barbarian essence of culture.

This method, no less than the contents of his teaching, led people to attack Veblen as a crazy and destructive outsider. At the same time, however, his theory has been assimilated. Today it is widely and officially recognized, and his terminology, like that of Freud, has permeated journalism. This may be regarded as an example of the objective tendency to disarm a tiresome opponent through accepting his views and labeling them according to standard formulas. Yet Veblen's thought is not wholly out of harmony with this scheme of acceptance; he is less of an outsider than he seems to be at first sight. The idea of conspicuous consumption has its long history. It goes back to the postulate of Greek ethics that the true life be one according to the pure nature of man rather than to values arbitrarily posited by him. In its Christian form the critique of waste plays a great role in the works of the patristic writers who accept art only in so far as it "produces the necessary and not the superfluous."[2] Nowhere was irrationality in culture more clearly denounced than by some sceptical humanists of the sixteenth century.[3] It permeates the whole occidental philosophy and theology. The attack on culture was sustained by the intellectual movement which in the second half of the nineteenth century challenged the official morals of the prevailing order as hypocritical and impotent and pointed to the com-

[2]Johannes Chrysostomos, *Kommentar zum Evangelium des heiligen Matthäus*, Kempten and Munich 1916, 3, p. 93.

[3]Thus Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535) criticizes conspicuous wastefulness in architecture "which is of no use whatsoever to men and serves only for being looked at and admired, or, as Plinius says, is built up with great expense only for the sake of pomp and ostentation, that is, in order to show that somebody has a lot of money. . . . Here belong also our proud and magnificently constructed churches and bell towers." Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Die Eitelkeit und Unsicherheit der Wissenschaften*, ed. Fritz Mauthner, Munich 1913, 1, p. 111f.

ing crisis of European civilization, a movement that counts among its protagonists the foremost writers of the period. Veblen incorporated some of the underlying motives of this movement into sociology. Scientifically he depended largely on Spencer and Darwin, the German historical school of Gustav Schmoller and above all on American pragmatism.[4] "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 the environment which has progressively changed with the growth of the community and with the changing institutions under which men have lived."[5] The concept of adaptation or adjustment is central. Man is subject to life as to the experimental conditions set down by some unknown laboratory director. The achievement expected of him if he is to survive is to adapt himself to the natural and historical conditions imposed upon him. The implicit measure of the truth of ideas is whether they further this adaptation and contribute to the survival of the species.[6] Veblen's critique always applies to the failure of this adaptation. He is quite aware of the difficulties the doctrine has to face within the societal realm, realizing that the conditions to which men have to adjust themselves are largely produced by society. He knows of the interaction between the internal and the external and this compels him steadily to refine and modify the adaptive doctrine, but he hardly ever reaches the point where the absolute necessity of adaptation itself is called into question.

[4]Apart from William James (cf. Wesley C. Mitchell, *What Veblen Taught*, New York 1936, p. xxvi) one has to think chiefly of Peirce's writings here. Pragmatism is meant in a somewhat broader sense, derived from Veblen's concept of the interconnection between intellectual functions and evolutionary adaptation. Veblen conceives this adaptation, it should be emphasized, as involving the totality of the societal process, measured by the stage of technological productive powers, in avowed contrast to the isolated, particular interest of groups or individuals. Hence Veblen in his essay, "The Place of Science in Modern Civilization," has attacked pragmatism of the kind represented in Dewey's earlier works. In the American discussion he has been numbered among the anti-pragmatists. Although his critique of the "practical" spirit doubtless expresses an anti-pragmatist impulse, Veblen's subsumption of truth under its usefulness for the societal whole may suffice to justify the underscoring of the pragmatist aspect in the present study.

[5]Veblen, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

[6]Thus, Veblen's critique of erudition in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* centers around the antagonism of honorific and useful learning without asking whether some third might not exist, the objective character of Truth (cf. p. 394). Inasmuch, however, as Veblen urges the spirit of an objective science the "idle curiosity" of which is emphatically distinguished from any immediate practical interest, his theory contains the counter-motive as well. He thinks more dialectically than his official anti-Hegelianism leads one to believe.

Progress is adaptation and nothing else. The world to which he wants men to adjust themselves is the world of industrial technics. Concretely, progress means to Veblen assimilating the forms of thought and of "life"—that is to say, the sphere of economic consumption—to those of industrial technics. The tool of this assimilation is Science. Veblen conceives it as the universal application of the principle of causality free of archaic animistic habits of thought. Causal thinking means thinking in terms of objective, quantitative relations deriving from the process of industrial production, rather than in personalistic terms. The notion of teleology in particular is to be strictly excluded.

In order to come face to face with the force responsible for the conjunction of all the motives in Veblen's thinking, one has to look for his basic intellectual experience. It may be characterized as that of false uniqueness. As the mass production of identical goods and their monopolistic distribution advances and as the framework of highly industrialized life permits less and less the genuine individuation of a *hic et nunc*, the pretension of the *hic et nunc* to escape universal fungibility becomes more illusory. It is as if each thing's claim to be something special were mocking at a situation in which everyone and everything is incessantly subject to a perennial sameness. Veblen cannot stand this mockery. His rebellion actually lies in his obstinate insistence that this world present itself with that abstract sameness of its commodities which is prescribed by its economical and technological condition. In the present phase, in which "deliciously different" and "quaint" have become frozen standard patterns of advertising for a long time, this insight of Veblen's is easily accessible. He attained it, however, at a time when it was not yet so obvious. He saw through the pseudo-individuality of things long before technics had abolished their genuine individuality altogether. He exposed the sham of the unique through the inconsistency in unique objects themselves, through the contradiction between their esthetic form and their practical function. Their human functions are repudiated by the inhumanity of their forms.

He discovered an aspect of idle show which has largely escaped aesthetic criticism but which may well contribute to explaining the shock and catastrophe which so many buildings and interiors of the nineteenth century express today. The mark of the oppressive is on them. Under Veblen's glance their ornaments become menacing because they manifest their relation to old models of violence and domination. Nowhere does he indicate this more strikingly than in a passage on charity buildings: "Certain funds, for instance, may have

been set apart as a foundation for a foundling asylum or a retreat for invalids. The diversion of expenditure to honorific waste in such cases is not uncommon enough to cause surprises or even to raise a smile. An appreciable share of the funds is spent in the construction of an edifice faced with some aesthetically objectionable but expensive stone, covered with grotesque and incongruous details, and designed, in its battlemented walls and turrets and its massive portals and strategic approaches, to suggest certain barbaric methods of warfare."[7] The emphasis laid upon the threatening aspects of pomp and ornamentation is significant in relation to the deeper, hidden and perhaps unconscious notion of the trend of history that underlies his theory. The images of aggressive barbarism which he dug up in the false glitter of the nineteenth century, and particularly the decorative ambitions of the years after 1870, struck his sense of progress as relics of past epochs or as "reversions" on the part of those who did no productive work themselves, the "industrially exempt" who were, so to say, behind their time. Yet these selfsame features which he called archaic express in his vision the dawning horror of the future. His sad glance disavows his progressive philosophy.[8] The sinister aspect of the fortresslike foundling asylum, which struck him as a sign of oppression, has since revealed itself as the herald of the sinister reality practiced today in the torture palaces of the National Socialists. Veblen sees all the culture of mankind assuming the aspect of terror that has come into the open during its last phase. The fascination of the impending doom explains and justifies the injustice Veblen does to culture. This culture, which has today taken the form of advertising merely to keep men in line from day to day, was never anything else to Veblen but advertising, the display of booty, power and appropriated surplus value. In grandiose misanthropy he neglected everything which goes beyond this display. His obsession prompted him to see the bloody traces of injustice even within the image of happiness. The metropoles of the nineteenth century phantasmagorically assembled the pillars of the Attic temple, the Gothic cathedrals and the spiteful palaces of the Italian city states in order to demonstrate their unlimited command over the history of mankind and its goods. Veblen pays them back. To him the original

[7] *Op. cit.*, p. 349.

[8] In Veblen's last writings his straightforward, optimistic belief in progress breaks down. "All of his other works suggest the imbecility of modern business enterprise and an expectation that the underlying population will take matters in hand, but the tone of *Absentee Ownership* suggests more the imbecility of the underlying population for continuing to put up with the current state of affairs, and an expectation that business enterprise will tend to become more feudalistic in character until modern civilization collapses." (Josef Dorfman, *Thorstein Veblen and his America*, New York 1934, p. 467.)

temples, cathedrals and palaces are already as false as their imitations. He explains culture through the trash, not vice versa. One could not express this universal hypostasis of the monopolistic phase in which culture is swallowed up by advertising more simply than Stuart Chase in his preface to the *Theory of the Leisure Class*: "People above the line of bare subsistence, in this age and all earlier ages, do not use the surplus, which society has given them, primarily for useful purposes."[9] With regard to "all earlier ages" Veblen neglects all traits of cultural objects which are different from today's commodity culture. In so far as the products of human industry were not conceived as serving any useful ends, their *raison d'être*, according to this theory, was that of conspicuous consumption. But they express also the belief in the real power of magic rites; the sex motive and its symbolism, which, by the way, is not mentioned throughout the *Theory of the Leisure Class*; the compulsion of artistic expression; all longing to escape the sphere of utility. The arch-enemy of all teleological speculation, he proceeds, against his own will, according to the scheme of a satanic teleology. His subtle wit does not shrink from the crudest rationalism in order ironically to expose the universal command of fetishism over the supposed realm of freedom. In his intransigent concept of world history culture plays the role of advertising from the very beginning: it advertises domination.

The malicious glance is fertile. It gets at phenomena which, though they belong to the *façade* of society, have too serious a societal impact to be coped with through harmlessly progressive slogans. Sport belongs here. Veblen has bluntly characterized every kind of sport as a manifestation of violence, oppression and exploitation, from the children's war games and college athletics to the big shows of football and baseball: "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 for prowess. Sports of all kinds are of the same general character."[10] The passion for sport, according to Veblen, is of a retrogressive kind: "The ground of an addiction to sports is an archaic spiritual constitution."[11] Nothing, however, is more modern than this archaism. The sport displays are models of the fascist rallies. They are "tolerated excesses" combining cruelty and aggression with the authoritarian penchant for discipline. Veblen has an un-

[9] *Op. cit.*, p. xiv.
[10] *Op. cit.*, p. 255.
[11] *Ibid.*

failing sense of the affinity between the sport excess and the manipulating élite. "If a person so endowed with a proclivity for exploits is in a position to guide the development of habits in the adolescent members of the community, the influence which he exerts in the direction of conservation and reversion to prowess may be very considerable. This is the significance, for instance, of the fostering care latterly bestowed by many clergymen and other pillars of society upon 'boys' brigades' and similarly pseudo-military organizations."[12] His insight goes even further. He recognizes sport as pseudo-activity, as canalization of energies which otherwise might become dangerous, as the investiture of meaningless action with the spurious insignia of seriousness and significance. He deduces sport from the nature of the leisure class. The less one has to earn one's own living the more one feels called upon to give the illusion of serious, socially reputable, yet unprofitable work. At the same time, however, sport is adequate to the practical, efficient, "predatory" spirit. It brings the antagonistic desiderata of purposeful behavior and waste of time to their common denominator. Thus, however, it becomes an element of swindle, of "make believe." In the light of this analysis sport loses its harmlessness. To be sure, the analysis ought to be supplemented in order for it to obtain its full societal weight. For sport is not merely characterized by the desire to do violence to others, nor even by the desire to obey and to suffer, but by the productive forces inherent in sport though mutilated by sport itself. Only Veblen's rationalist psychology forbids him to acknowledge the element of bad pliancy in its full significance. It is this element which characterizes sport apart from its being a vestige of some past social form as a means of adaptation to the rising industrial spirit, an adaptation the lack of which troubles Veblen. Modern sport, one might say, attempts to restore to the body a part of the functions it has been deprived of through the machine. This attempt, however, is made in order to train men the more inexorably to serve the machine. Sport virtually transforms the body itself into a kind of machine.

Another complex in Veblen's critique of culture appears less timely, the so-called woman question. The socialist programs regard the final emancipation of women as such a truism that for a long time analysis of the concrete position of women has been dispensed with. In middle class literature the woman question has been regarded as comical ever since Shaw. Strindberg perverted it into the man question just as Hitler perverted the emancipation of the Jews into an emancipation from them. The impossibility of liberating

[12] *Op. cit.*, p. 254f.

women in an unfree society is ascribed by that society not to itself but to the advocates of freedom. The frailty of the ideals of emancipation which brings them close to neurosis is taken as their refutation. The erotically unprejudiced girl who approves of the world as long as she can go to the movies with her date has supplanted Ibsen's Nora and Hedda. If she knew of them she would, in racy lingo, reproach them with lacking a sense of reality. Veblen, who has much in common with Ibsen[13] also in other respects, is one of the last significant philosophers of reform who dares to take the woman question seriously. He is a belated apologist of the feminist movement, who, however, had to do justice to misogynous experiences such as those expressed in the work of Strindberg and Weininger. Thus woman becomes to him the enigmatic image of an antagonistic society. He knows of her patriarchical humiliation. Her position, which he numbers among the throwbacks to the age of the hunter and the warrior, reminds him of that of the servant. She enjoys free time and luxury only in order to enhance the status of her master. This implies two contradictory consequences. In some independence from Veblen's wording, they may be stated as follows: on the one hand the woman is exempted in a certain sense from "practical life" by her very position of slavery and as an object of ostentation—no matter how humiliating it may be. She is, or at least was in Veblen's time, not exposed to economic competition to the same degree as the man. In certain social strata and at certain epochs she was well enough protected not to develop the qualities which Veblen calls those of the predatory spirit. Through her aloofness from the social process of production she maintains the traits of a person not yet completely "possessed," not yet completely shackled by society. Thus the female member of the leisure class is the one who appears particularly fit to desert her class and to contribute to a more humane and more reasonable society. In all this, however, there lies a counter-tendency the most striking symptom of which is, according to Veblen, the pervasive conservatism of woman. She has no important part in the historical development of productive forces. This, and the state of dependency in which she is kept, produces a mutilating effect which overbalances the opportunity offered her by her aloofness fom economic competition. "The woman finds herself at home and content in a range of ideas which to the man are in great measure alien and imbecile."[14] If one would follow this trend of thought further, one might say that women have escaped the sphere of capitalistic production only to fall the more completely into the clutches of the sphere

[13] As to Veblen's knowledge of Ibsen, cf. Dorfman, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
[14] *Op. cit.*, p. 324.

of consumption. They are fascinated and restricted by the immediacy of the surface world of commodities no less than men are fascinated and restricted by the immediacy of profit. Women mirror back to male society the injustice it does to them and assimilate themselves to the commodities among which they are imprisoned. Veblen's critical insight is not a whit behind the Freudian one of the ultimate identity of the male and female structures of drives. It indicates, however, a far-reaching change within the Utopia of emancipation itself. Hope can no longer content itself as easily as it could during the age of woman's emancipation. The idea of emancipation today seems merely to assimilate the mutilated social character of women to the mutilated social character of men. In a free society the face of the efficient, shrewd, practical man ought to disappear together with that of the suffering woman.

Veblen, however, did not draw these consequences. To be sure, his critique of the existent is based upon the insight that it tends to cripple men by denying fulfillment to them and manipulating them as mere tools of the felicitous few—"the trouble is that business enterprises are run for profit, not to meet human needs."[15] Veblen certainly would have endorsed the ideal of human happiness as against the principle of exploitation which refuses such a happiness not only to what he calls the "underlying population" but also, according to his analysis, to the "leisure class" itself. Closer scrutiny, however, shows that the goal of happiness is not so concretely omnipresent in his writings as one might expect it to be. His critique of "institutions" is uncompromising, but he seems to be so fascinated by societal organization that it remains hypostatized even in his own image of rationality and endangers the humanity which a rational societal organization is supposed to serve. This may best be demonstrated through a passage in one of his later writings, where he appears most emphatically to formulate human fulfillment and—implicitly—happiness as his ideal: "The mechanical technology is impersonal and dispassionate, and its end is very simply to serve human needs, without fear or favor or respect of persons, prerogatives, or politics. It makes up an industrial system of an unexampled character—a mechanically balanced and interlocking system of work to be done, the prime requisitive of whose working is a painstaking and intelligent co-ordination of the processes at work, and an equally painstaking allocation of mechanical powers and materials. The foundation and driving force of it all is a massive body by technological knowledge, of a highly impersonal and altogether unbusinesslike nature, running

[15]Wesley C. Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. xliii.

in close contact with the material sciences, on which it draws freely at every turn—exactingly specialized, endlessly detailed, reaching out into all domains of empirical fact."[16] It is more than doubtful whether one is entitled to attribute to mechanical technology *in abstracto* any "end" of its own without relating it to the concrete nature of the society within which it functions. As far as technology has such an end, it is production *per se*, only indirectly related to those very needs which it ought to fulfill. Technological planning as advocated by Veblen has at least an intrinsic tendency to treat human needs as a function of the process of production, whereas this dependence of men on the mechanisms of industrial production is symptomatic of the present state of affairs and ought to be reversed. Veblen, however, is ready to regard the engineers and technicians as a kind of élite to whom the rational organization of society might be entrusted. But he does not realize that the distinction between such an élite and the rest of mankind is irrational itself and tends to perpetuate the very same hierarchy of "status" which he expects will disappear through the materialization of his technological order. "This will call for diligent teamwork on the part of a suitable group of economists and engineers, who will have to be drawn together by self-selection on the basis of a common interest in productive efficiency, economical use of resources, and an equitable distribution of the consumable output."[17] The Saint-Simonist conception of the suitable group of economists and engineers is a highly dubious one. Economists and engineers, by virtue of their objective functions, occupy a relatively high place in the very same hierarchy Veblen attacks. He does not differentiate between their technological function and their intrinsic social character. To be sure, their functions are upset by today's irrational economy but this in no way qualifies them to select themselves as dictators. Like all subservience, their subservience to technology contains potential domination, and prepares them to take things into their own hands. It is characteristic that "equitable distribution" appears only as incidental, as it were, within Veblen's technological scheme, instead of determining its every step. Veblen is always tempted to make a fetish of production. This is grounded in his anthropology the supreme category of which is the "instinct of workmanship." His idea of happiness always remains related to this category. He never reaches an unequivocal decision as between the glorification of labor as such and the plea for the final aims of this labor. Beneath the outer armor of this rebellious arch-enemy of the theological tradition of New England hides the asceticism of the

[16] Veblen, *The Engineers and the Price System*, New York 1934, p. 132.
[17] *Op. cit.*, p. 152.

Lutheran peasant, not only as a psychological force but as a pervasive element of theory. Though he incessantly attacks taboos, his analysis stops short at the idea that labor is sacred. He feels that this culture does not attribute enough honor[18] to its own work but finds its nefarious prestige in exemption from work, in leisure.

The truth herein is that leisure as practiced reflects the pressure on human labor which makes leisure possible. Veblen stands for the bad conscience of leisure. He confronts middle class society with its own principle of utility and demonstrates to it that according to its own criteria its culture is waste and sham, that it is so irrational as to refute the rationality of the whole system. He has something of the quality of the burgher who takes the postulate of thrift quite seriously. Thus, he reads the whole culture as the senseless expenditure of the show-off if not of the bankrupt. The one-track persistence with which he plays on this motif helps him to reveal the antagonistic character of a society which can maintain its own interest of profit only by trespassing at every step upon its own calculus, building up a whole system of Potemkin villages. Veblen was not a bad musician in the sense of the dictum, according to which one has to play their own melody to petrified conditions in order to make them dance. But he was a musician capable of reading his own part only and not the full score of the devilish concert. Hence his overemphasis on the limited sphere of production. There is implicit in his doctrine a distinction similar to the one between *raffend* and *schaffend*. He distinguishes two categories of modern economic institutions, "pecuniary" and "industrial"[19] and divides according to these categories the occupation of men and the behaviors supposedly corresponding to them. "So far as men's habits of thought are shaped by the competitive process of acquisition and tenure; so far as their economic functions are comprised within the range of ownership of wealth as conceived in terms of exchange value, and its management and financiering through a permutation of value; so far their experi-

[18]Whereas Veblen violently attacks the "honorific" institutions of exploitive society, he maintains the traditional protestant conception of the dignity of labor and expresses the hope that this dignity will finally be recognized under socialism. "Under such a social order [the socialist] where common labor would no longer be a mark of peculiar economic necessity and consequent low economic rank on the part of the laborer, it is even conceivable that labor might practically come to assume that character of nobility in the eyes of society at large, which it now sometimes assumes in the speculations of the well-to-do, in their complacent moods." (Veblen, *The Place of Science in Modern Civilization*, New York 1932, p. 401.) It is highly significant that his critical analysis at this point stops at the concept of nobility which he elsewhere would not hesitate to unmask as the product of predatory "status."

[19]*The Theory of the Leisure Class*, p. 229. Cf. Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. xxxviii. The distinction has a long prehistory in America as well as in Europe. We mention here only two of the authors known to Veblen who make this distinction: Lester Frank Ward and Boehm-Bawerk.

ence in economic life favours the survival and accentuation of the predatory temperament and habits of thought."[20] The passage alludes to Marxian terminology. Because, however, he did not visualize the social process as the totality which it is, Veblen was led to divide human activity within the given social system into a productive and an unproductive part with the tacit implication that one could dispense with the latter and maintain the former. He furthermore directs his criticism of the capitalistic mode of production, not so much against appropriation as against the mechanism of distribution.[21] That this is actually at the bottom of his critique he demonstrates by talking about "that class of persons and that range of duties in the economic process which have to do with the ownership of enterprises engaged in competitive industry; especially those fundamental lines of economic management which are classed as financiering operations. To these may be added the greater part of mercantile occupations."[22] Only in the light of this distinction can one succeed in grasping what Veblen actually has against the leisure class, or as he prefers to call it in his later writings, "the kept classes." He does not object so much to the pressure which it exercises but to the fact that there is not sufficient pressure upon the leisure class itself in line with his own puritan ethos of workmanship. He implicitly chides the leisure class for its chance to escape, no matter how twisted this chance may be. He regards it as an archaism that the economically independent are not yet completely beset by the exigencies of life: "An archaic habit of mind persists because no effectual economic pressure constrains this class to an adaptation of its habits of thought to the changing situation."[23] Veblen advocates this adaptation all the time. To be sure, the countermotive, leisure interpreted as the prerequisite of *humanitas*, is not alien to him. But a typical mechanism of the positivist approach becomes effective here: he thinks pluralistically. He is willing to concede its right to leisure and even to waste, but merely "aesthetically." As an economist he does not want to have anything to do with it. One must not ignore the pathetic position to which the aesthetic category is relegated by this half-ironical division of interests, but the more urgent problem comes to the fore, namely, what the term economic actually means to Veblen. The question is not how far Veblen's institutionalism falls within the academic discipline of

[20] *Op. cit.*, p. 229f.

[21] Here, too, the countermotive as well occurs in Veblen, in his critique of the captain of industry. By favorably contrasting the engineer to the latter, Veblen still appears to maintain the first motive as the stronger one.

[22] *Op. cit.*, p. 230.

[23] *Op. cit.*, p. 319.

economics proper but the meaning of his own concept of the economic. This concept, however, in the last analysis comes very close to that of the business man he despises elsewhere, who protests against unnecessary expense as uneconomic. What Veblen dislikes about capitalism is its waste rather than its exploitation. He dislikes every superfluous action. The concepts of the useful and the useless here presupposed are not analyzed. This makes for the pluralism of Veblen's method. He succeeds in proving that society proceeds uneconomically according to its own criteria. The proof is both much and little. Much, because it makes the irrationality of reason glaringly visible; little, because it falls short of grasping the close relation between the useful and the useless. Veblen leaves the problem of the useless to categories predefined by the special sciences and alien to his own basic concepts, while he himself takes on the role of an efficiency expert whose vote may be overruled by his aesthetical colleagues. He does not recognize the contradictions among scientific departments as an expression of those fundamental societal antagonisms the symptoms of which he otherwise excoriates. While as an economist he takes culture too lightly, striking it as "waste" from the budget, he secretly surrenders to its mere existence in society outside the range of budget making. He fails to see that through the departmental limitations of the observer no decision as to the ultimate right or wrong of cultural phenomena can be reached.

These limitations deny Veblen any insight into the truth hidden even within the illusionary sphere. He remains blind to the motives for the attitude against which his basic experience rebels. In a fragment written by the German poet, Frank Wedekind, and published after his death, there occurs the remark that *Kitsch* is the Gothic or the Baroque of our time. The historical necessity of such *Kitsch* has been misjudged by Veblen. To him, the false castle is nothing but a reversion. He knows nothing of its intrinsic modernity and visualizes the illusionary images of uniqueness in the era of mass production as mere vestiges instead of "responses" to capitalistic mechanization which betray something of the latter's essence. The realm of objects which function in Veblen's conspicuous consumption is actually a realm of artificial imagery. It is created by a desperate compulsion to escape from the abstract sameness of things by a kind of self-made and futile *promesse de bonheur*. Men prefer to embody the hope of childhood in products of their craft and then believe in their own fiction, rather than cast away that hope. The artificial imagery into which commodities are transshaped is not only the projection of opaque human relationships upon the world of things; it serves also to create the chimerical deities of

that which cannot be expressed in terms of production and adaptation to production, but which still obeys the principle of the market. Veblen's thinking bogged down before this antinomy. Still, the antinomy is what makes show a "style." Show is more than a mere false investment of labor. It represents the universal endeavor to summon into reality the idea of that which cannot be exchanged. This futile endeavor is universal and a "style" because the pressure and drudgery which it counteracts is universal. The reversion to the distant past upon which Veblen puts the main emphasis is but another aspect of the futility of this endeavor. The relationship of progress ("modernity") to retrogression ("archaism") may be put in the form of a thesis. In a society in which productive powers develop and are fettered at the same time and as a result of the same principle, each progress in technics always means an archaic reversion somewhere else. It is this "balancing up," this equivalence which invests class society with what is essentially "historyless" and ever the same, and which justifies calling it, in a gigantic abbreviation, "pre-history." Veblen's talk about the barbarian normal[24] exhibits an inkling of this. Barbarism is normal because it does not consist in mere rudiments but is perpetually reproduced in proportion to man's dominion over nature. Veblen has taken this constant balance too lightly, however, no matter how close he comes to acknowledging it. He has noticed the temporal disparity between the castle and the railway station but not the law behind this disparity. The railway station assumes the aspect of the castle but this aspect is its truth. Only when the technological world is a direct servant of domination is it capable of shedding the disguise. Only in fascism does it equal itself.

Veblen overlooks the compulsion within modern archaism. He believes that the artificial imagery may be eliminated by simple institutional changes within the existing society. This is, in the last analysis, why he stops short at the societal *quaestio iuris* of luxury and waste which, with the zeal of a world reformer, he longs to abolish. One may well speak of the double character of luxury. One side of it is that on which Veblen concentrates his attack: the section of the social product that is not expended to fulfill human wants and human happiness but is wasted in order to maintain obsolete and shackling production relations. The other aspect of luxury is the expenditure of parts of the social product that aid the reproduction of human working capacity neither directly nor indirectly but serve man as a man in so far as he has not completely fallen victim

[24] *Op. cit.*, p. 218.

to the principle of usefulness even in class society. While Veblen does not explicitly distinguish these two sides of luxury, he undoubtedly intends to abolish the first as conspicuous consumption and to retain the second in the name of the fullness of life. But the blunt character of this intention makes manifest the weakness of the theory. For in capitalistic society one can as little isolate *faux frais* and happiness in luxury as one can isolate exchange value and use value in labor. Whereas happiness occurs only when men intermittently escape the stranglehold of society, the concrete form of their happiness always contains the totality of social conditions of the situation in which they live.[25] Thus the lover's happiness does not relate merely to the beloved as a human being in herself, not even to the body in itself, but to the beloved in all her social concreteness and in her social appearance. Walter Benjamin once wrote that it is erotically as important to the man that the woman he loves appear in his company as that she give herself to him. Veblen would have joined in the bourgeois jeering at this statement and would have talked about conspicuous consumption. But the happiness that man actually finds cannot be severed altogether from conspicuous consumption. Men themselves are products of the given society. Theirs is no happiness which is not related to their cravings conditioned by this society, just as they know of no happiness which would not transcend these limitations. Abstract utopian thought which fails to take this paradox into account readily turns against happiness and supports the very same order of things against which it contends. For as the abstract utopia starts to wash out of happiness the hallmarks of the existent, it is forced to renounce every concrete claim to happiness. Even as they destroy their own happiness and replace it with the prestige of things—Veblen here speaks of social confirmation[26]—they somehow give testimony of the secret underlying all pomp and ostentation, that there is no individual happiness which does not virtually imply the happiness of society as a whole. Even the invidious, the display of status, and the urge to "impress,"

[25]The fact that Veblen does not sufficiently articulate the dialectics of luxury comes to the fore in his attitude towards the beautiful. He attempts to purge the beautiful of pomp and ostentation. Thus, however, he derobes it of every concrete societal quality and falls back to the pre-Hegelian standpoint of a purely formal concept of beauty based on categories of mere nature, such as mathematical proportion. His discussion of beauty is so abstract because there is no concrete beauty without an intrinsic element of injustice. Consequently he ought, like Tolstoi in his late period, to advocate the abolition of art. Yet, he avoids this conclusion. Here his pluralism comes into play. He supplements his economic principle of thriftiness by an aesthetic principle of the nonillusionary, the functional. But in being torn apart from each other both these postulates approach absurdity. The complete expediency of the beautiful contradicts its aimlessness, its being non-practical. Veblen's idea of the economic *qua* the thrifty contradicts the idea of a non-oppressive society which otherwise guides him.

[26]*Op. cit.*, p. 136.

by which the manifestations of happiness are invariably disfigured in a competitive society, implicitly contains the recognition that true happiness would exist only if the joy of the individual were free of its privational character. The features of luxury that Veblen calls invidious, the bad will, not only reproduce injustice but also express a disfigured appeal to justice.

It is most ironic that in Veblen faith in Utopia necessarily takes the form which he so vigorously condemns in middle class society, the form of retrogression, or "reversion." Hope, for him, lies solely with the primitive history of mankind. Every happiness barred to him because of the pressures of dreamless adjustment and adaptation to reality, to the conditions of the industrial world, shows him its image in some early golden age of mankind. "The conditions under which men lived in the most primitive stages of associated life that can properly be called human, seem to have been of a peaceful kind; and the character—the temperament and spiritual attitude—of men under these early conditions or environment and institutions seems to have been of a peaceful and unaggressive, not to say an indolent, cast. For the immediate purpose this peacable cultural stage may be taken to mark the initial phase of social development. So far as concerns the present argument, the dominant spiritual feature of this presumptive initial phase of culture seems to have been an unreflecting, unformulated sense of group solidarity, largely expressing itself in a complacent, but by no means strenuous, sympathy with all facility of human life, and an uneasy revulsion against apprehended inhibition or futility of life."[27] He views the aspects of demythification and *humanitas* exhibited by mankind during the bourgeois age not as symptoms of its coming to self-consciousness but rather as a retrogression to its elysian first stage: "Under the circumstances of the sheltered situation in which the leisure class is placed there seems, therefore, to be something of a reversion to the range of non-invidious impulses that characterize the ante-predatory savage culture. The reversion comprises both the sense of workmanship and the proclivity to indolence and good-fellowship."[28] Veblen, the technocrat, longs for the restoration of the most ancient. He calls the "New-Woman" movement a conglomerate of "blind and incoherent efforts to rehabilitate the woman's pre-glacial standing."[29] Such provocative formulations today appear to strike blows at the posivitist sense of facts. At this point, however, a most curious relationship in Veblen's

[27] *Op. cit.*, p. 219.
[28] *Op. cit.*, p. 351.
[29] *Op. cit.*, p. 356.

sociology comes into the open, that between his positivism and his Rousseauist ideal[30] of the primitive. As a positivist who does not acknowledge any other norm but adaptation, he sardonically raises, in one of the most advanced passages of his work, the question of why one should not also adjust oneself to the givenness of the principles of waste, futility and ferocity which according to his doctrine form the canon of pecuniary decency: "But why are apologies needed? If there prevails a body of popular sentiment in favour of sports, why is not that fact a sufficient legitimation? The protracted discipline of prowess to which the race has been subjected under the predatory and quasi-peacable culture has transmitted to the men of today a temperament that finds gratification in these expressions of ferocity and cunning. So, why not accept these sports as legitimate expressions of a normal and wholesome human nature? What other norm is there that is to be lived up to than that given the aggregate range of propensities that express themselves in the sentiments of this generation, including the hereditary strain of prowess?"[31] Here Veblen's reasoning brings him close to the danger of capitulating before the mere existent, before "normal barbarism." His solution is surprising: "The ulterior norm to which appeal is taken is the instinct of workmanship, which is an instinct more fundamental, of more ancient prescription, than the propensity to predatory emulation."[32] This is the key to his theory of the primitive age. The positivist permits himself to think the potentiality of man only by conjuring it into a given; in other words, conjuring it into the past. He allows no other justification of non-predatory life than that it is supposed to be even more given, more positive, more existent than the hell of existence. The golden age is the positivist's *asylum ignorantiae*. He introduces the instinct of workmanship incidentally, as it were, in order finally to bring paradise and the industrial age to their common anthropological denominator.

It was in theories of this kind, with their impotent auxiliary constructions in which the idea of Novelty tried to make its peace with adjustment to the ever equal, that Veblen exposed himself most dangerously to criticism. It is easy to call a positivist a fool when he tries to break out of the circle of the matter of fact. Veblen's whole work is actually affected by spleen. It is one big parody on the sense of proportion required by the positivist rules of the game. He is insatiable in his broad analogies between the habits and institu-

[30] Veblen's intimate knowledge of Rousseau is corroborated. Cf. Dorfman, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
[31] *Op. cit.*, p. 270.
[32] *Ibid.*

tions of sport and of religion or between the aggressive canon of honor of the gentleman and the criminal. He cannot even refrain from economic complaints about the waste of ceremonial paraphernalia in the religious cults. He is pretty close to the reformers of life. Often enough his utopia of the primitive deteriorates into a cheaper belief in the "natural" and he preaches against the follies of fashion, long skirts and corsets—for the most part attributes of the nineteenth century swept away by the progress of the twentieth without bringing the barbarism of culture to an end. In Veblen conspicuous consumption plays the role of a fixed idea. To understand the contradiction between it and Veblen's keen social analyses one must take account of the cognitive function of spleen. Like the image of a peacable primitive age, the spleen in Veblen—and in other writers as well—is a symptom of too early a slackening of the effort of knowledge. The observer who permits his spleen to guide him attempts to make the overwhelming machinery of society commensurable with human experience. The opaque quality and strangeness of life under monopoly are, as it were, to be grasped with sensory organs, and yet this selfsame strangeness is what escapes immediate experience.[33] The fixed idea replaces the general concept by petrifying and spitefully maintaining a specific and limited experience. The spleen expresses a desire to overcome the inadequacy of any kind of theory in face of universal suffering. Suffering, however, is intrinsic to society as a system and can therefore be adequately identified by theory only and not by the flashlight thrown upon symptoms. As paradoxical as this situation is the endeavor to break through it by means of the spleen. The spleen drafts schemes, so to speak, of a colloquy with the ununderstandable by accusing society in terms of its surface phenomena. Spleen pays for the commensurability of its knowledge with life experience by the manifest insufficiency of knowledge itself. In this the splenetic attitude comes close to that of the backwoods sectarian who ascribes world ruin to a conspiracy of mysterious powers. The splenetic attitude differs, however, from this way of thinking because it confesses to the absurdity of its own whims. When Veblen places the responsibility which actually lies with the economic structure of society on a surface phenomenon, barbarian expenditure, the disproportionality between this thesis and reality becomes an instrument of truth. It aims at a shock. Spleen accompanies itself with impish laughter because its actual object slips through its fingers. Veblen's spleen

[33]One may well seek here the origin of one of Veblen's main polemical concepts, that of absentee ownership. His struggle against the credit function is essentially a protest against the self-alienation of men.

originates in his disgust with official optimism, with the sort of "progressiveness" with which he himself sides as soon as he speaks with common sense.

Melancholy lurks behind his kind of critique, the attitude of disillusionment and "debunking." It follows a traditional pattern popular in the Enlightenment that religion is a "hoax of the clergy." "It is felt that the divinity must be of a peculiarly serene and leisurely habit of life. And whenever his local habitation is pictured in poetic imagery, for edification or in appeal to the devout fancy, the devout word-painter, as a matter of course, brings out before his auditors' imagination a throne with a profusion of the insignia of opulence and power, and surrounded by a great number of servitors. In the common run of such presentations of the celestial abodes, the office of this corps of servants is a vicarious leisure, their time and efforts being in great measure taken up with an industrially unproductive rehearsal of the meritorious characteristics and exploits of the divinity."[34] The way the angels are blamed here for the unproductivity of their labor has a touch of rationalized swearing in it and is just as innocuous. A practical man beats his fist on the table. He does not fall for the dreams and neuroses of society. His triumph is like that of the husband who forces his hysterical wife to do housework in order to cure her of her caprices. The splenetic attitude clings obstinately to the alienated world of things and makes the malicious object responsible for evil. The debunker follows through. He is the "man with the knack" who does not allow himself to be cheated by the malicious objects but tears the ideological coverings from them in order to manipulate them the more easily. He curses the damned swindle. It is not accidental that the debunker's hatred is always directed against intermediary functions. The swindle and the middle-man belong together. So, however, do mediation and thinking. At the bottom of debunking lies a hatred for thinking.[35] Criticism of barbarian culture cannot be content with a barbaric denunciation of culture. It has to recognize the open, culture-less barbarism and reject it as the intrinsic goal of that culture rather than sullenly proclaim the supremacy of this barbarism

[34] *Op. cit.*, p. 124f.

[35] Veblen's consciousness was quite free from this hatred. To be sure, anti-intellectualism was objectively implied in his struggle against social intermediary functions as well as in his denunciation of "higher learning." The narrow-mindedness of Veblen's theory possibly can be accounted for by his neglecting the problem of mediation. In his physiognomy the zealotry of Scandinavian Protestantism which does not tolerate any intermediary between God and inwardness trains itself to serve the purposes of a society which liquidates the intermediary functions between the omnipotent production and the forced consumer. In a famous excursus in *Absentee Ownership*, Veblen compares the clergyman with a salesman. Both attitudes, the radical Protestant one and that of State Capitalism, are strongly anti-intellectual.

over culture merely because it has ceased to deceive. In a false society the victory of sincerity is the victory of horror. This horror can be sensed in the quips of the debunker, as it can in Veblen's gibe that the dwellers of "celestial abodes" are practising industrial unproductivity. Such jokes appeal to the friends of the existent. Laughter at this picture of beatitude is closer to violence than the picture itself, no matter how much the latter may be bloated by power and glory.

Yet Veblen's insistence upon the world of facts, his all-pervasive iconoclasm, stems from an impulse which can not be overestimated. One might say that all the forces of rebellion against barbaric life have migrated with him into the pressure of adjustment to the exigencies of that life. The pragmatist of his type is really free of illusions. For him there is no "whole": no identity between thinking and being, not even the concept of such an identity. Again and again he comes back to the position that the "habits of thought" and the demands of the concrete situation are irreconcilable. "Institutions are products of the past process, are adapted to past circumstances, and are therefore never in full accord with the requirements of the present. In the nature of the case, this process of selective adaptation can never catch up with the progressively changing situation in which the community finds itself at any given time; for the environment, the situation, the exigencies of life which enforce the adaptation and exercise the selection, change from day to day; and each successive situation of the community in its turn tends to obsolescence as soon as it has been established. When a step in the development has been taken, this step itself constitutes a change of situation which requires a new adaptation; it becomes the point of departure for a new step in the adjustment, and so on interminably."[36] This irreconcilability excludes the abstract ideal or makes it appear a childish phrase. Truth is reduced to the next step, the closest, not the farthest one. The pragmatist can point to the totality as that which is never definitely and finally given. Only the closest can be experienced while that which is farthest, the ideal, is blurred by incompleteness and uncertainty. These objections ought not to be overlooked. To contrast dialectical philosophy with pragmatism it is not sufficient to insist upon the total interest of a "good" society against the practical advantage in a bad one. The bad and the good do not have two truths. The truth of any good society of the future depends, as it were, on every step within "prehistory," on each of its moments.

[36] *Op. cit.*, p. 191.

Thus the difference between pragmatism and dialectics, like every genuine philosophical difference, consists of a nuance, that is to say, the interpretation of the next step. The type of pragmatism here in question interprets this step as an adaptation. This is at the hub of Veblen's critique of Marx. Mitchell sums up the position as follows: "Just before his time the German historical school had perceived the relativity of orthodox economics; but they had not produced a scientific substitute for the doctrine they belittled or discarded. Karl Marx had been more constructive. In Veblen's view, Marx had made a brave beginning in cultural analysis, though handicapped by a superficial psychology derived from Bentham and by a romantic metaphysics derived from Hegel. Bentham's influence led Marx to develop a commonplace theory of class interests that overlooked the way in which certain habits of thought are drilled into business men by their pecuniary occupations and quite different habits of thought are drilled into wage earners by the machine process in which they are caught. Hegel's influence made the Marxian theory of social evolution essentially an intellectual sequence that tends to a goal, 'the classless economic structure of the socialistic final term,' whereas the Darwinian scheme of thought envisages a 'blindly cumulative causation, in which there is no trend, no final term, no consummation.' Hence Marx strayed from the narrow trail of scientific analysis appropriate to a mechanistic age and attained an optimistic vision of the future which fulfilled his wish for a socialist revolution. The Darwinian viewpoint, which supplies the needed working programme, will spread among social scientists, not because it is less metaphysical than its predecessors or nearer the truth (whatever that may mean), but because it harmonizes better with the thoughts begotten by daily work in the twentieth century."[37] The thesis that the "Darwinian viewpoint" is not "nearer the truth" than Marx but merely more adequate to working conditions in present day society implies the decisive shortcoming of Veblen's theory. The "harmony" of thinking and reality for which his doctrine of adaptation stands may finally be a harmony with that selfsame oppression which he elsewhere condemns. It is a harmony that is certainly not superior to the discordant views of Marx. The latter did not have a "superficial psychology." He had no psychology at all, and for good theoretical reasons. The world Marx scrutinized is ruled by the law of value, not by men's souls. Today men are still the objects or the functionaries of the societal process. To explain the world by means of the psychology of its

[37] *Op. cit.*, p. xlvii f.

victims already presupposes an abstraction from the basic and objective mechanisms to which men are subject. The psychology of capitalism for which Veblen stands proceeds as if society were men; as if men were not alienated from themselves and from the whole. By hypostatizing the essentially unfree subjects as the basis of a social theory of the existent, it necessarily contains an element of deception. The doctrine of class interests and class consciousness, however, which Veblen attacks as a rationalistic or hedonistic psychology does not simply refer to the psychology of the proletariat as it is. This psychology might have been visualized by Veblen more adequately than by Marx, with the slight qualification that the very features of the proletariat which Veblen regards as hopeful signs of enlightenment have since[38] obtained a function which Veblen never would have dreamt of. *Per contra,* Marx insists upon the objective interests of the proletariat precipitated out of the objective relationships of the system. That interest is objective notwithstanding the fact that the system is not transparent to the proletariat, that the proletariat's "interest" is by no means automatically given as a psychological motive. For, the lack of awareness on the part of the workers and their unconscious adjustment to prevailing conditions is due to the system itself. Veblen blames Marx for superficiality because Marx, like the classical economists, takes happiness as his starting point. According to Veblen men today are not ruled by the idea of happiness, which is none too close to Veblen himself, but rather by the proper weight of societal and economic institutions. But this is based on a misinterpretation of dialectical philosophy. The latter certainly ought to acknowledge the deformations of consciousness brought to light by Veblen's institutionalism. But it ought to acknowledge them as facts, not accept them as measures of what ought to be. If "certain habits of thought are drilled into the wage earners by the machine process in which they are caught," one does not have to give in to these habits, no matter how practical they might be, but to destroy them because of their objective falsity—because they implicitly contain wrong judgments about the process of society as a whole which cannot be grasped in terms of naive and subservient tool-mindedness. Veblen's critical motive and his reverence for the historically given are irreconcilable.

[38]Mitchell sums up Veblen's psychology of the industrial worker as follows: "They [the masses of factory hands] tend to become sceptical, matter-of-fact, materialistic, unmoral, unpatriotic, undevout, blind to the metaphysical niceties of natural rights." (*Op. cit.*, p. xlvi.) One could not give a more adequate description of the cynical frame of mind of very large sections of the population in present day Germany. It ought to be noted in particular that even the term patriotism has fallen into disfavor with the National Socialist regime.

There is an obvious break in his sociology between his attack on the existent and his avowedly Darwinian detachment.

The concept of adaptation is the *deux ex machina* through which Veblen tries to bridge the gap between what is and what ought to be. But adaptation implies the rule of the ever equal.[39] If dialectics, on its side, were to understand the next step as adaptation, it would be surrendering its very case, the idea of potentiality. But what can the next step be if it is not to be abstract and arbitrary, if it is not to be the brand of those Utopias which the initiators of dialectical philosophy have rejected? Conversely, how can the next step obtain its direction and its aim without one's knowing more than merely what is pre-given?

Varying the Kantian question, one might ask: how is anything novel possible at all? The pointing up of this question defines the seriousness of pragmatism. The pragmatist is conscious of the perennial limits put upon men's attempts to go beyond the existent—limits set to both thought and action. He knows, moreover, that the slightest neglect of these limits, the slightest underestimation of the natural and societal powers-that-be, may lead to impotent phrase and futile behavior, liable to be punished by an all too easy victory on the part of the existent which may be delayed or mitigated by one's patiently taking into consideration the full and inexorable weight of what is given. The seriousness of the pragmatist is a reminder of the sceptical attitude of the physician who refuses to bother about the potentiality of a final abolition of death but prefers to help those who live while he takes the final inevitability of death for granted. Just as the physician speaks often enough as if he were the advocate of death, to the ultimate sovereignty of which he bows, the pragmatist stands for man's kinship with blind nature, as the invariant condition upon which every attempt actually to help those who suffer must be based. What may be doubtful, however, is whether the attitude of the philosopher has really to be that of a diagnostician, whether philosophy is bound to be in harmony with the intrinsic principles of practice as it is. For the practical attitude presupposes a kind of detachment which itself falls within the range of philosophical criticism. To the physician men are cases, and his resignation, no matter how deeply founded in facts it may be, at

[39]Mitchell leaves no doubt that this is actually Veblen's opinion and that the difference between his "Darwinism" and dialectical materialism has to be sought here. "His [Veblen's] evolutionary theory forbids him to anticipate a cataclysm, or to forecast a millenium. What will happen in the inscrutable future is what has been happening since the origin of man." (*Op. cit.*, p. xlvi.) The interconnection between the concept of the next step and the belief in the ever equal could not be expressed more strikingly.

least partly reflects, by his very reference to facts, his implicit conviction that this relation of subject and object cannot possibly be altered. His well-beloved admonition to "keep cool" may be necessary if he is to tender effective aid, but the philosophical equivalent of this attitude tends toward the acceptance of mere fate by theoretically reifying once more those who are already treated as objects by reality. The stubborn facts which are accepted by the observer may finally be recognized as man-made bricks in the wall behind which the stubborn society keeps each of its members. Where the pragmatist sees mere "opaque items"[40] which from the point of view of science are simply data to be organized in a logical context, there the task of philosophy only starts. It is the task of calling things by their names,[41] instead of shelving them in logical files, and of conceiving even their very opaqueness as the outcome of the selfsame social process from which they appear utterly detached. The novel may well consist in what is thus being "named." Nothing, however, is more opaque than adaptation itself wherein mere existence is installed as the measure of truth. The pragmatist wants every statement referred to a specific locus in time and space to get the historical index of every truth. But the pragmatist's own idea of adaptation needs such an index. It is what Freud called the life need. The next step is an adapting one only so far as want and poverty rule the world. Adaptation is the behavior adequate to a situation of "not enough" and the shortcoming of pragmatism lies in the fact that it hypostatizes this situation as an eternal one. This is implied in its concepts of nature and life. Thus, Veblen wishes men "identification with the life process,"[42] thereby perpetuating the attitude practised by men in nature when nature does not allow them sufficient means for their existence. Veblen's attacks against the sheltered whose position of privilege exempts them from having to make any adaptation to a changed situation[43] virtually terminates in a glorification of the Darwinian struggle for existence. This selfsame assumption of a life need is today clearly obsolescent, at least as regards the social conditions of life. It is outdated by the very development of technological productive forces to which Veblen's doctrine counsels men to adjust themselves. The pragmatist thus falls victim to dialectics. Whoever wishes to "live up" to the standard of the present technological situation, with its promises of richness and abundance to men which are kept from fulfillment only by the organization of

[40]Veblen, *op. cit.*, p. 304.
[41]Cf. T. W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard, Konstruktion des Ästhetischen*, Tübingen 1933, p. 88.
[42]*Op. cit.*, p. 335.
[43]Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 193.

society, has to cease obeying the rules of scarcity culture. In one of the most beautiful passages of his work Veblen has realized the interconnection between poverty and the continuance of existing forms. "The abjectly poor, and all those persons whose energies are entirely absorbed by the struggle for daily sustenance, are conservative because they cannot afford the effort of taking thought for the day after to-morrow; just as the highly prosperous are conservative because they have small occasion to be discontented with the situation as it stands to-day."[44] The pragmatist, however, clings retrogressively to the standpoint of those who cannot think for the day after to-morrow—that is to say, beyond the next step—because they do not know what they will live on to-morrow. He represents poverty. This is his historical truth because the organization of society still maintains men in poverty, and his historical untruth because the absurdity of this poverty finally has become manifest. To adapt oneself to what is possible today no longer means adapting oneself at all. It means realizing the objective potentiality.

[44] *Op. cit.*, p. 204.