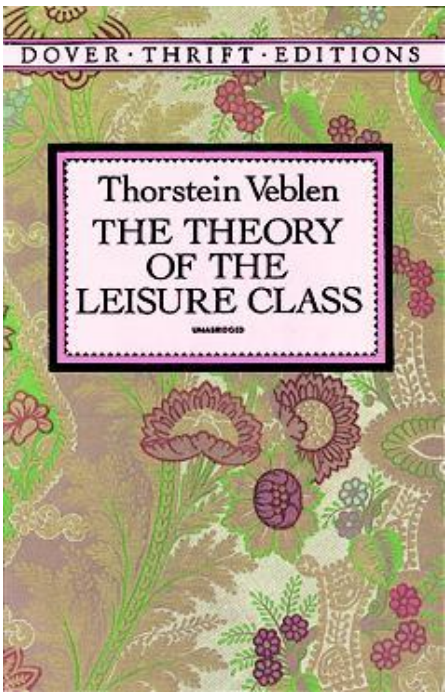

The Theory of the Leisure Class

Thorstein Veblen

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"The most impressive satirist of his day." — *Time Magazine*

With devastating satiric wit, this book examines the hollowness and falsity suggested by the term "conspicuous consumption" (coined by Veblen) and exposes the emptiness of many cherished standards of taste, education, dress, and culture. Since its original publication in 1899, the work has become a classic of social and economic thought and policy and exerted an influence widely felt beyond the sphere of economics.
For Veblen, the shallowness and superficiality of society resulted from the tendency to believe that true accomplishment lay in arriving at a condition of ostentatious wealth and status. In developing this thesis, he traces the origins and development of ownership and property, offering extraordinary insights into the phenomenon of consumerism, the evolution of class structure, the rise of leisure time and how modern societal goals are grounded in pecuniary aspirations and achievements.
Students, sociologists, historians, economists — anyone interested in the motives and behavior of human beings within a large-scale social context — will find this time-honored investigation still relevant and readable over a century after its first appearance. It belongs in the library of every thinking person.

The Theory of the Leisure Class Details

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From Reader Review The Theory of the Leisure Class for online ebook

Robert Jerome says

I think this book is classified as being in the field of economics just because the author was teaching economics, not because of its content. The famous biography style intro to economics book "The Worldly Philosophers" puts Veblen in line with the great economists probably more because of his entertaining life story than because of continued citation in the field. I think this book is best classified as turn of the century reductivism. Freud thought everything broke down to sexual instincts, Marx thought it all had class struggle as its base, Lacan thought it was avoidance of reality, Alfred Adler thought it was will to power, Thorstein Veblen thinks everything is rooted in a desire to display wealth. I think it's definitely a novel way to look at the world. It's neat. Like the other reductive theorists, however, it has the tendency to draw the reader into a narrow form of thinking. So far as I know this is the only American example of this style of writing.

Edward says

Introduction
Note on the Text
Select Bibliography
A Chronology of Thorstein Bunde Veblen

--The Theory of the Leisure Class

Explanatory Notes

Erik Graff says

The first thing I ever read of any substance about Veblen was his brief biography in Dos Passos' USA trilogy (The Great American Novel!). It was highly complimentary and its subject was Norwegian and neglected just like me.

I actually got around to reading The Theory of the Leisure Class some time after Dave Schweickart's courses in political economy got me interested in the subject and the reading of Kapital and re-reading of On the Wealth of Nations got me less intimidated by the subject area.

Back in '87 Dad and his third wife, Lene, were living in a log cabin, a very fancy log cabin, in "The Galena Territories" outside of the town of that name in NW Illinois. Planning an extended summer visit, I brought Thorstein along, probably thinking the two of them would be impressed. I particulary recall reading it besides the, ah, "territorial" pool, thinking that being stuck there for the day would ensure that the boring tome would be gotten into substantially. What a surprise then to discover that Veblen's most popular and perdurant book is really more sociology, even cultural anthropology, than the usual economics!--and it was fun, even funny, to boot.

Jan-Maat says

Polysyllabic.

Veblen was the stand out interesting figure for me from reading "The Worldly Philosophers" having read that I was led to read "Theory of the Leisure Class". After that I read "The Spirit Level" and you can see ideas like the invidious comparison borne out in some of the findings discussed in that book.

Nicole says

Everybody knows conspicuous consumption, but that is not the idea from this book that should have survived. Sign me up for pecuniary decency any day -- or rather don't, since it is far more insidious and its explanatory value far better.

Our old friend conspicuous consumption appeals to us, taken out of its context, of course, because it looks so much like an individual decision that we can avoid. You add the complete lack of context to the fact that talking about structural issues rather than individual decisions to americans is the equivalent of blowing a great big dog whistle, and you get a comforting, easy moral imperative that virtually any one can follow by simply carefully describing their motivations. We don't do THAT, we only buy what we really need, plus some occasional treats, but it's all okay. Pecuniary decency, by contrast, would have us interrogating that word "need" instead, a far more troubling proposition. Pecuniary decency explains why you can't wear that sweater with the hole in it, even if it still functions fine as a sweater. It tells you why you think you need a smart phone even if you don't, why everyone thinks they need one even if they don't, until everything is finally set up so that you actually DO need a smartphone but it's only because people thought they needed them when they didn't. Pecuniary decency makes a mess of the world where the primary goal is to buy different stuff instead of less stuff, because maybe you find you don't really need those things after all. Maybe your needs were actually keeping up with the Joneses and you didn't even realize.

I also very much like the tone of this; Veblen is able to say unbelievably devastating things without the slightest hint of upset or perspiration. The things he is able to say about religion, about sports, about a university education, about the status of women in society, about tradition; somehow if he were riled up he simply couldn't have done it, but the tone he uses makes anything possible. I aspire to that tone. One day, perhaps, if I am very smart and very diligent, I will arrive where Veblen left us a century ago: a forgotten paradise where people express their ideas without fear or ad hominem attack. Send me a key to this place, Thorstein, and I will sit with you of an evening, and we will talk.

Will says

Woody Guthrie observed, "Some will rob you with a six-gun, and some with a fountain pen." Bob Dylan quoted these lyrics and added, "Didn't take too long to find out, just what he was talking about." Thorstein Veblen, who found this situation to be bemusing if absurd, undertook to explain the social conventions and values that lead people to tolerate it. He presented a picture of society in which routine, casual, legally sanctioned predation is the object of honor and adulation.

His explanation is applicable to all sorts of social phenomena, wherever the status system makes distinctions. For instance, it is no accident -- going on Veblen's logic -- that golf is the sporting activity *par excellence* of the jet set. Golf requires the wasteful setting aside of huge tracts of valuably situated land, the artificial maintenance of grassy fields, water traps, and patches of sand, it requires mastery of a sport-specific vocabulary, the possession of a (leather) bag of valuable golf clubs, carried about by a paid laborer, and an entire (ludicrous) wardrobe to be worn only on the links. It will be objected that people play golf because it's a fun game -- well, perhaps so, but why do they choose this game rather than basketball, or bocce ball, or Parcheesi? (Nothing is more fun than bocce ball.) Golf demonstrates status and prestige because it is wasteful and useless on such a grand scale.

Similarly, we have the great importance attached to the wearing of lightly colored, collared shirts. The modern-day collar doesn't even have a practical function. And yet, it has the social function of advertising the wearer's wealth, since collars quickly become yellow with sweat, if not carefully maintained and/or frequently replaced.

The beauty of this presentation is that it transcends cultural and temporal differences. It explains the behavior on display in the old TV show "Cribs" just as it explains the faux European castles that robber barons of the late 19th century had built for themselves. It explains why Japanese businessmen go for Scotch as their drink of choice just as why fur clothing was once so fashionable. It explains the mania for the latest cell phone technology (the cell phone being a possession displayed publicly). It explains the excessive cocaine use and whoring of Wall Street bigwigs during the housing bubble, as relayed in the movie Inside Job.

The strength of Veblen's story relative to the story told by other thinkers in his vein is that it does not predict class solidarity. Quite the opposite. If the poor buy into the notion of status, then their object becomes the attainment of some status for themselves relative to their fellows -- and this precludes challenging the power structure in any meaningful, open way. In emulating the mores of the leisure class, the lower classes actually bolster their power and legitimacy. This argument seems more persuasive to me than Gramsci's idea of hegemony. In like fashion, the problems Veblen describes can be addressed by adapting institutions to function differently. They do not necessarily require a revolution, violent or otherwise.

Veblen relies on a conjectural history -- informed as much as it could be by the history and anthropology available in his day -- that puts him in a long tradition of thinkers such as Aristotle, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Hobbes, Charles de Montesquieu, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Adam Smith (and it is probable that Aristotle was relying on older works that have not come down to us). This tradition sought to show how society first came to produce a surplus above its subsistence needs, and how the present arrangement for distributing the surplus was working out (whether examined in terms of abstract justice, utility, or putatively objective virtue ethics). Although subsequent research in anthropology and history would allow much more fleshing out of such an approach, it seems largely defunct among modern-day intellectuals (especially economists, among whom the maxim prevails that "bygones are bygones"). Alas.

Some favorite quotations:

"Freedom from scruple, from sympathy, honesty and regard for life, may, within fairly wide limits, be said to further the success of the individual in the pecuniary culture. The highly successful men of all times have commonly been of this type; except those whose success has not been scored in terms of either wealth or power. It is only within narrow limits, and then only in the Pickwickian sense, that honesty is the best policy." (p. 137)

"The profession of law does not imply large ownership; but since no taint of usefulness, for other than the competitive purpose, attaches to the lawyer's trade, it grades high in the conventional scheme. The lawyer is exclusively occupied with the details of predatory fraud, either in achieving or in checkmating chicane, and success in the profession is therefore accepted as marking a large endowment of that barbarian astuteness which has always commanded men's respect and fear." (p. 142)

"In order to satisfy the requirements of the leisure-class scheme of life, the servant should show not only an attitude of subservience, but also the effects of special training and practice in subservience. The servant or wife should not only perform certain offices and show a servile disposition, but it is quite as imperative that they should show an acquired facility in the tactics of subservience -- a trained conformity to the canons of effectual and conspicuous subservience. Even to-day it is this aptitude and acquired skill in the manifestation of the servile relation that constitutes the chief element of utility in our highly paid servants, as well as one of the chief ornaments of the well-bred housewife." (p. 38)

"It is scarcely necessary to go into a discussion here of the particular points at which, or the particular manner in which, the canon of honorific expenditure habitually traverses the canons of moral conduct. The matter is one which has received large attention and illustration at the hands of those whose office it is to watch and admonish with respect to any departures from the accepted code of morals. 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 or 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 good repute to be gained through its conspicuous consumption. Most offences against property, especially offences of an appreciable magnitude, come under this head. It is also a matter of common notoriety and by-word that in offences which result in a large accession of property to the offender he does not ordinarily incur the extreme penalty or the extreme obloquy with which his offence would be visited on the ground of the naive moral code alone. The thief or swindler who has gained great wealth by his delinquency has a better chance of escaping the rigorous penalty of the law; and some good repute accrues to him from his increased wealth and from his spending the irregularly acquired possessions in a seemly manner." (p. 72)

"But the function of dress as an evidence of the ability to pay does not end with simply showing that the wearer consumes valuable goods in excess of what is required for physical comfort. Simple conspicuous waste of goods is effective and gratifying as far as it goes; it is good *prima facie* evidence of pecuniary success, and consequently *prima facie* evidence of social worth. But dress has subtler and more far-reaching possibilities that this crude, first-hand evidence of wasteful consumption only. If, in addition to showing that the wearer can afford to consume freely and uneconomically, it can also be shown in the same stroke that he or she is not under the necessity of earning a livelihood, the evidence of social worth is enhanced in a very considerable degree. Our dress, therefore, in order to serve its purpose effectually, should not only be expensive, but it should also make plain that the wearer is not engaged in any kind of productive labour... Much of the charm that invests the patent-leather shoe, the stainless linen, the lustrous cylindrical hat, and the walking-stick, which so greatly enhance the dignity of a gentleman, comes of their pointedly suggesting that the wearer cannot when so attired bear a hand in any employment that is directly and immediately of any human use." (pp. 104-105)

"Besides servants, currently recognized as such, there is at least one other class of persons whose garb assimilates them to the class of servants and shows many features that go to make up the womanliness of

woman's dress. This is the priestly class. Priestly vestments show, in accentuated form, all the features that have been shown to be evidence of a servile status and a vicarious life. Even more strikingly than the everyday habit of the priest, the vestments, properly so called, are ornate, grotesque, inconvenient, and, at least ostensibly, comfortless to the point of distress. The priest is at the same time expected to refrain from useful effort and, when before the public eye, to present an impassively disconsolate countenance, very much after the manner of a well-trained domestic servant. The shaven face of the priest is a further item to the same effect. This assimilation of the priestly class to the class of body servants, in demeanour and apparel, is due to the similarity of the two classes as regards economic function. In economic theory, the priest is the body servant, constructively in attendance of the person of the divinity whose livery he wears. His livery is of a very expensive character, as it should be in order to set forth in a beseeching manner the dignity of the exalted master; but it is contrived to show that the wearing of it contributes little or nothing to the physical comfort of the wearer, for it is an item of vicarious consumption, and the repute which accrues from its consumption is to be imputed to the absent master, not to the servant." (p. 112)

"The process of readjustment of the accepted theory of life involves a degree of mental effort -- a more or less protracted and laborious effort to find and keep one's bearings under the altered circumstances. This process requires a certain expenditure of energy, and so presumes, for its successful accomplishment, some surplus of energy beyond that absorbed in the daily struggle for subsistence. Consequently it follows that progress is hindered by underfeeding and excessive physical hardship, no less effectually than by such a luxurious life as will shut out discontent by cutting off the occasions for it. 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." (p. 126)

"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 kins are of the same general character, including prize-fights, bull-fights, athletics, shooting, angling, yachting, and games of skill, even where the element of destructive physical efficiency is not an obtrusive feature. Sports shade off from the basis of hostile combat, through skill, to cunning and chicanery, without its being possible to draw a line at any point. The ground of an addiction to sports is an archaic spiritual constitution -- the possession of the predatory emulative propensity in a relatively high potency. A strong proclivity to adventuresome exploit and to the infliction of damage is especially pronounce in those employments which are in colloquial usage specifically called sportsmanship." (p. 156)

"Sacred holidays, and holidays generally, are of the nature of a tribute levied on the body of the people. The tribute is paid in vicarious leisure, and the honorific effect which emerges is imputed to the person or the fact for whose good repute the holiday has been instituted." (p. 188)

"The priestly servitor of the inscrutable powers that move in the external world came to stand in the position of a mediator between these powers and the common run of uninstructed humanity; for he was possessed of a knowledge of the supernatural etiquette which would admit him into the presence. And as commonly happens with mediators between the vulgar and their masters, whether the the masters be natural or preternatural, he found it expedient to have the means at hand tangibly to impress upon the vulgar the fact

that these inscrutable powers would do what he might ask of them. Hence, presently, a knowledge of certain natural processes which could be turned to account for spectacular effect, together with some sleight of hand, came to be an integral part of priestly lore. Knowledge of this kind passes for knowledge of the "unknowable," and it owes its serviceability for the sacerdotal purpose to its recondite character. It appears to have been from this source that learning, as an institution, arose, and its differentiation from this its parent stock of magical ritual and shamanistic fraud has been slow and tedious, and is scarcely yet complete even in the most advanced of the higher seminars of learning." (p. 224)

"As has already been indicated, the distinction between exploit and drudgery is an invidious distinction between employments. Those employments which are to be classed as exploit are worthy, honourable, noble; other employments, which do no contain this element of exploit, and especially those that imply subservience or submission, are unworthy, debasing, ignoble. The concept of dignity, worth, or honour, as applied either to persons or conduct, is of first-rate consequence in the development of classes and of class distinctions, and it is therefore necessary to say something of its derivation and meaning. Its psychological ground may be indicated in outline as follows.

"As a matter of selective necessity, man is an agent. He is, in his own apprehension, a centre of unfolding impulsive activity -- "teleological" activity. He is an agent seeking in every act the accomplishment of some concrete, objective, or impersonal end. By force of his being such an agent he is possessed of a taste for effective work, and a distaste for futile effort. He has a sense of the merit and serviceability or efficiency and the demerit of futility, waste, or incapacity. This aptitude or propensity may be called the instinct of workmanship. Wherever the circumstance or traditions of life lead to an habitual comparison of one person with another in point of efficiencty, the instinct of workmanship works out in emulative or invidious comparison of persons. The extent to which this result follows depends in some considerable degree on the temperament of the population. In any community where such an invidious comparison of persons is habitually made, visible success becomes an end sought for its own utility as a basis of esteem. Esteem is gained and dispraise is avoided by putting one's efficiency in evidence. The result is that the instinct of workmanship works out in an emulative demonstration of force.

"During that primitive phase of social development, when the community is still habitually peaceable, perhaps sedantary, and without a developed system of individual ownership, the efficiency of the individual can be shown chiefly and most consistently in some employment that goes to further the life of the group. What emulation of an economic kind there is between the members of such a group will be chiefly emulation in industrial serviceability. At the same time the incentive to emulation is not strong, nor is the scope for emulation large.

"When the community passes from peaceable savagery to a predatory phase of life, the conditions of emulation change. The opportunity and the incentive to emulation increase greatly in scope and urgency. The activity of the men more and more takes on the character of exploit; and an invidious comparison of one hunter or warrior with another grows continually easier and more habitual. Tangible evidence of prowess -- trophies -- find a place in men's habits of thought as an essential feature to the paraphernalia of life. Booty, trophies of the chase or of the raid, come to be prized as evidence of preeminent force. Aggression becomes the accredited form of action, and booty serves as *prima facie* evidence of successful aggression. As accepted at this cultural stage, the accredited, worthy form of self-assertion is contest; and useful articles or services obtained by seizure or compulsion, serve as a conventional evidence of successful contest. Therefore, by contrast, the obtaining of goods by other methods than seizure comes to be accounted unworthy of man in his best estate. The performance of productive work, or employment in personal service, falls under the same odium for the same reason. An invidious distinction in this way arises between exploit and acquisition by seizure on the one hand and industrial employment on the other. Labour acquires the

character of irksomeness by virtue of the indignity imputed to it.

"With the primitive barbarian, before the simple content of the notion has been obscured by its own ramifications and by a secondary growth of cognate ideas, "honorable" seems to connote nothing else than an assertion of superior force. "Honourable" is "formidable": "worthy" is "prepotent." A honorific act is in the last analysis little if anything but a successful act of aggression; and where aggression means conflict with men and with beasts, the activity which comes to be especially and primarily honourable is the assertion of the strong hand. The naive, archaic habit of construing all manifestations of force in terms of personality or "will power" greatly fortifies this conventional exaltation of the strong hand. Honorific epithets, in vogue among barbarian tribes as well as among peoples of a more advanced culture, commonly bear the stamp of this unsophisticated sense of honour. Epithets and titles used in addressing chieftains, and in the propitiation of kings and gods, very commonly impute a propensity for overbearing violence and an irresistible devastating force to the person who is to be propitiated. This holds true to an extent also in the more civilised communities of the present day. The predilection shown in heraldic devices for the more rapacious beasts and birds of prey goes to enforce the same view.

"Under this common-sense barbarian appreciation of worth or honour, the taking of life -- the killing of formidable competitors, whether brute or human -- is honourable to the highest degree. And this high office of slaughter, as an expression of the slayer's prepotence, casts a glamour of worth over every act of slaughter and over all the tools and accessories of the act. Arms are honourable, and the use of them, even in seeking the life of the meanest creatures of the field, becomes an honorific employment. At the same time, employment in industry become correspondingly odious, and, in the common-sense apprehension, the handling of tools and implements of industry falls beneath the dignity of able-bodied men. Labour becomes irksome." (pp. 9-11)

Miquixote says

Difficult language but very interesting. It needs to be understood as satirical, and it is therefore quite complicated to get the real drift but definitely worth the effort. We are left to ponder some riddles, like if it is only a joke when Veblen states 'if something is more expensive, it is because it less useful'. It leaves a lot of conclusions open, and I tend to think he is mocking the leisure class. It is humorous with complicated yet interesting language. All this in an economics-oriented text.

Justin Cormack says

David Mamet once said that this was the sort of book that you would use on a film set to indicate that someone likes to be thought of as intellectual. Or something like that. Curiously, as I have a degree in economics but had accidentally not finished reading it I acquired another copy. I still havent read it all though, I mislaid it somewhere and it only turned up, reeking of pseudointellectualism and room decoration recently. Should I finish it I wonder? What would that mean?

Tony says

This is the only book I have ever read in which every single solitary sentence absolutely baffles the hell out

of me. I made myself finish it, but I was on autopilot most of the time, just looking at the words rather than reading them. And I've now seen the word "invidious" enough times to last a lifetime.

Sotiris Makrygiannis says

I give 4 stars because of what I read in wikipedia about the subject not because I understood the text of this book. The only thing that I remember is that Old man get woman as trophies because that what we have been doing for 1000s of years. I marked the book as re read, so I can go line by line and translate to modern English and learn new words. If your English are not on the level of Oxford professor dont get the unabridged version. If you want to challenge yourself with this version, you have been warned.

Mark says

I read this on the plane coming down from Portland, sitting beside a couple of software developers discussing their overseas properties- both apparently had second homes outside the US, one in Tuscany (ooh, too outre-cliche!) one in Spain. Both happened to be interested in viticulture and considered themselves amateur vintners. I heard a lot of inside talk (such as I hadn't been exposed to for some twenty years when I was working myself as an interviewing plebe for a high tech market research firm in SF) regarding inner dealings at Sun Microsystems and Microsoft... Needless to say, the irony was NOT lost on me! Here right beside me were evidences in the flesh of Veblen's "society of conspicuous consumption"- status seekers apparently competing not only with each other, but the rest of the world, to see "who dies with the most toys, wins." Neither ever spoke a single word to me, as I had got the window seat. I stifled belly laughs all the way to SFO.

D Finch says

Few books will make you rethink and reorder entire categories of your experience. This is one of them.

The book does suffer from certain limitations: many people will find it difficult to read because the language is antiquated and the argument is at times quite convoluted and repetitive; Veblen's theory is based on observation and logic and does not provide any numerical data to reinforce his claims; he sometimes tries to explain too much and overextends his argument, applying it with a heavy hand to areas of life that are better explained in other ways; and some of the comments about race and gender will be offensive to modern sensibilities.

In spite of these problems, Veblen's concepts have tremendous explanatory power and, while they might not apply with the same force today that they did at the time it was published, they are still surprisingly relevant and illuminating over a hundred years later.

This book is worth reading not because everything he says is true, but because his ideas will help you to think more clearly and critically about the society and culture we live in.

Bob Nichols says

As opposed to an economic theory of the leisure class (non-productive leisure and consumption), Veblen's book might more potently be a theory of human nature. Veblen writes about rank in today's "predatory" culture where those of means display their superior status by not having to perform manual work or any work at all (hence, leisure), by the accumulation of wealth and the honor it brings, and by conspicuous consumption and waste that displays one's status. There is an elaborate system of "rank and grade" within the the leisure class as signified by explicit and not so explict standards of taste and behavior that show whether one is a member and one's relative rank within the class. Even those who support the leisure class "are trained in the practice of subservience." All of this, Veblan believes, comes from an earlier barbarian culture that first establishes ownership of women and slaves, and then culminates today in large-scale ownership of wealth by those who are "exempt from useful employment."

Veblen's references to various stages and substages in the emergence of the leisure class is confusing. The relevance of the second half of the book (sports, women, reversion to archaic traits)to his overall theory is not clear. The strength of Veblen's book lies in the first few chapters where he lays out his argument clearly and powerfully. Here Veblen challenges the reader: Has he captured a fundamental truth? Do we give lip service to equality when we really want the same leisure status that Veblen writes about? Are we all the same or is there a fundamental division within human nature between those who become predators (exploiting others) and those who know this is wrong? And, what might be the evolutionary origins of the need for status and display?

Tuncer ?engöz says

Kitab? orijinal dilinde okumaya ba?lad?m ve üçte birini bitirdi?imde okuduklar?m?n en az yar?s?n? anlamadan geçti?imi fark ettim. Veblen çok karma??k bir dil kullan?yor ve dü?üncelerini çok uzun cümleler halinde yaz?yor. Bunun üzerine kitab?n Türkçe bas?m?na geçtim. Önceleri Türkçe çevirisini de anlamakta çok zorland?m. Kitab? yava? okumaya karar verdim ve böylece 350 sayfal?k kitab? ancak 2 ayda bitirebildim.

Kitab?n Türkçe çevirisi (ufak tefek hatalar olmakla beraber) çok iyi. Zorluk, Veblen'in çetrefil dilinden kaynaklan?yor. Buna kar??l?k Veblen'in görü?leri kesinlikle ö?renilmeye de?er. Mülkiyetin ba?lang?c?, aylak s?n?f?n ortaya ç?k???, aylak s?n?f kültürü, gösteri?çi tüketim, vekil aylak, modan?n geçicili?i, aylak s?n?f giyiminin rahats?zl??? ve kullan??s?zl???, dinsel edim, ?ans, yüksek e?itim gibi konularda oldukça zengin bir bak?? aç?s? edinmek bak?m?ndan yararl? bir kitap.

Kitab?n yaz?ld??? ça?a ait ?rk teorileri günümüzde geçerli kabul edilmiyor. Ancak bu teorilere dayanarak yaz?lm?? bölümler de kitab?n de?erini dü?ürmüyor. Okuyup bitirmek iki ay?m? ald?, ancak kesinlikle de?di.

John Hively says

This is a great read if you have a dictionary handy. Microeconomics is the study of why people purchase stuff. This is the best micro-economic book ever written. I studied micro-economics in college, both on the

undergraduate and graduate levels. The theories I studied were stupid, generic marginal utility theories. Those theories told you nothing of why people do things. Veblen's classic was published 111 years ago and it's still light years ahead of the valueless micro-economics being produced at elite universities such as Harvard, Yale and the University of Chicago.

Essentially, it's all about keeping up with the Joneses, something that academic economists have never figured out.

Richard Thompson says

Veblen's basic concepts are beyond brilliant. According to Veblen, the upper classes must engage in conspicuously unproductive activities to show that they do not have to work in order to distinguish themselves from the masses and one another, and since great wealth cannot be productively consumed, they must engage in unproductive consumption to show that they can. It isn't enough for the rich man to do these things on his own; he must engage in vicarious leisure through the unproductive activities of his wife, family and retainers, and all of those people must also engage in varying degrees of wasteful conspicuous consumption. These concepts become a Swiss Army Knife for explaining every aspect of society, including both the leisure class and the laboring classes. In applying his theories to fashion, culture, taste, manners, and grammar, Veblen is completely persuasive. In the areas of religion and scholarship, he has some telling points. I found him less convincing in his application of his theories to gambling and sports, and there is a point in the middle of the book where he slips into sloppy Spenserian Social Darwinism in analyzing "ethnic types" that is completely off the mark. But none of this detracts from the power of the basic theory which provides an interesting lens for looking at almost anything. I think that for the next few months I am going to be looking at every book I read, every film I see and every business deal that I do through the lens of Veblen, seeking the "conspicuous waste" and "pecuniary merit" that lie behind more conventionally described motivations. It will at the least be an amusing game and with any luck will give me some new insights.

One other thing worth a brief note is Veblen's interesting writing style. It is very jargony, and yet completely comprehensible. He builds up a vocabulary of charged terms, such as "predatory fraud", "vicarious waste" and "anthropomorphic cults", which he innocently asserts mean nothing more than he defines them to mean, but of course they are carefully chosen to demean his targets. The way that he recombines and reuses his terminology builds on itself to create a complex but understandable vocabulary. Anyone who jumped into this book at the fourth chapter would have a hard time understanding what is going on, but as long as you start at the beginning at let Veblen paint the picture for you, it all makes sense and is very effective, although somewhat understated, as a polemical technique.

Trevor says

I recently read Mills' 'White Collar' and couldn't get over how often he referred to this book. All the same, I hesitated before reading it, not least since my concern that Mills' book was 'a bit old' was obviously multiplied by the age of this one. But this is brilliant. Now, you know when people tell you that you should read a book because it is 'a classic' you are likely to think – yeah, that just means you've read it and so either want to just show off or you think that 'if I've put myself through it, you might as well too' – well, no, you should read this one, not just because it is good for you, but because it is seriously interesting.

The most obvious point people will bring up about this book is the idea of conspicuous consumption – and why not, it really is such a useful idea. But I think to understand that you need to first get that the major point of this book is the idea that society develops in ways that are similar to Darwinian evolution – not least, that it, that society isn't in a fixed state, but rather that it develops and changes as it goes on through adaptations given the environment society finds itself in. So, rather than society 'progressing', it is in fact evolving. I mean, rather than moving towards increasing perfection, it is instead passing through stages of equilibrium until those equilibriums are disturbed and forced into a new equilibrium.

And so to understand how the leisured class manifests today, it helps to understand the history that has produced that class. To explain this Veblen starts his analysis by considering communal, hunter/gatherer societies and discusses divisions of labour and the impact these had on social standing. The most important early division of labour being that between men and women, leading to the higher social standing of men and 'men's work'. But also through higher prowess in achieving one's ends.

Veblen makes it clear that it requires a certain level of development of the productivity of labour before mere prowess stops being enough to ensure social esteem. As society becomes more productive and certain people are able to keep a larger and larger shares of what society produces, the major way that the ruling classes have of showing their position in society is by conspicuous leisure. But this is a complex thing – it is actually hard work to do nothing at all. Veblen uses the idea of the division of labour to show that it is not that the leisure classes do nothing at all, but that what they do can't be considered 'productive'. So, he talks of a French king who basically cooks to death beside a fire, rather than move his royal person away from the heat, as this is the job of a footman – or I think a Polynesian king who starved to death rather than lift the food sitting beside him to his royal mouth. The point being that the leisured classes avoiding anything that could be considered productive work – and after a while avoiding such work does not remain an affectation, but rather becomes a dire necessity of self-definition.

The notion of conspicuous leisure is really interesting – in classes below the ruling ones, a person's status is often not defined by one's own leisure, since they are likely to not be high enough up the social ladder to be able to afford to avoid work entirely, but rather in your ability to allow the vicarious leisure of your wife. Again, not that 'running the house' is pure leisure, but since it brings nothing into the house per se it can be seen as a kind of leisure as conspicuous expense. And again, women are likely to be lavished with trinkets and 'nice' things and that their consumption of these are the last things families give up, as it is a vicarious way to show the social standing of the whole family.

This then transfers to goods – he discusses spoons, as an instance, that might be either hand or machine made and although both kinds might look exactly the same, more or less, the more expensive hand-made ones are considered more beautiful. Here it is conspicuous consumption proper that we are observing, but it is unlikely that those engaged in the purchase perceive it as such. That is, you are likely to see your purchase of the equally serviceable, but much more expensive spoon as simply an aesthetic choice, rather than one allowing you to show off your wealth. This part reminded me very much of Sennett's Craftsmen, the idea of a craftsperson incorporating little flaws in the material being worked because these show the individuality of the piece is also discussed here too.

I'm going to quote a couple of paragraphs from the excellent introduction to this book to show some of the scope of what Veblen discusses here:

"Do not think that the ideas Veblen introduced in his first two chapters complete the shocks The Theory of the Leisure Class has to offer. Twelve more tightly packed chapters lie ahead, each with insights (both subtle and biting) into matters that affect (and infect) our own times. Among his conclusions are the following: (1)

to be seen doing work is to be lowered in social esteem; (2) ceremonial labour is executed only for show, in concert with the busy idleness of conspicuous leisure; (3) the superficial display of good manners and good forms is a waste of time, yet clung to as an enhancement of one's social prestige; (4) although modern-day gentlemen may not wolf down their caviar, their gluttony is merely more discreet than that of feudal lords who gnawed on beef-bones; (5) the host who displays expensive forms of hospitality expects this to demonstrate that he owns so much he cannot consume it all himself; (6) the obsessive decoration of homes is too often the sad result of desperate house-wives whose lives are defined by the wasteful expenditure of time and money; (7) the poor cling to cheap gewgaws in an attempt to emulate upper-class habits accepted as the sign of social respectability; (8) when educated to believe that to save their earnings is not a good, people buy useless products that only bring profit to their manufacturers; (9) the age-old craving for gold and diamonds (breeders of wars and misery, lacking all social use) is supplemented by the modern hunger for brand-names that give objects a value they do not actually possess.

"By Chapter VI—'Pecuniary Canons of Taste' where the intensity of Veblen's critiques continues to be quietly raised to new levels of outrage—the trajectory of his thesis is well underway. Church worship encouraged by religious institutions is yet another form of 'honorific waste'. The worship of God is based on the public's attempt to emulate His high status in the hope of winning His esteem, despite the fact that He is but another genteel gentleman of leisure. Team sports and gambling follow the same impulse that leads to belief in God, since all are based on 'animistic beliefs and anthropomorphic creeds'. Veblen likens the ornate robes worn by churchmen to the clothes that restrict women's mobility (those corsets!) to suggest that neither group has any useful work to pursue. He names the mutual devotion by priests and women to 'doing good' through ineffectual reforms and philanthropies as further proof of their social inadequacies. As for the ritualistic pursuit of academic honours by university professors, their efforts—like those of fraternities and college athletics— have little use in the modern world."

As you can see, there is lots of interesting stuff here – with even God and His representatives coming under the sway of their power so as to display their own conspicuous consumption and leisure.

The bits of this I found most remarkable where the bits that most reminded me of Bourdieu's sociology. Basically, Bourdieu argues that different social classes find ways to display their status by the things they prefer. He talks about how the working class think people that would spend as much as they earn in a year on a watch seem utterly incomprehensible to them, while those buying the watch see a beauty in the watch that is mostly hidden from the working class by the 'opportunity costs' that amount of money could buy of things other than the watch. For Bourdieu taste is formed out of habit and out of the need to display one's position – however unconsciously. And Veblen says much the same thing. Here habits and class rituals become second-nature and common sense. The preference for one thing over another is rarely understood in terms of outright conspicuous consumption, but rather as a kind of necessity. This provides a dark vision of society, since capitalism constantly creates new needs, making old ones simultaneously repulsive. This is more than mere fashion – but the active definition of one's identity within society.

He twice discusses how English spelling – and the very difficult to learn rules that govern it's 'beauty' – are part of the busy work involved in being able to display social distinction – all matters of taste, such as the archaistic rules of English spelling – allow those allowed the leisure to learn such rules the ability to judge those as manifestly inferior given their clear inability to master these rules. Hard to imagine something more like Bourdieu's ideas of cultural capital, habitus, symbolic violence and distinction.

This book is surprisingly modern in its outlook. And really worth the read.

Bill FromPA says

Conspicuous Leisure
This is the book that coined the term "conspicuous consumption". My own stance in regard to this practice is demonstrated in the fact that I read this book in a "Dover *Thrift* Edition"; so, I started reading the book with the expectation of it explaining *other people's* behavior. However, before getting to conspicuous consumption, Veblen describes what he calls "conspicuous leisure"; this is significant time spent in ways which are not aimed a earning money, either immediately or at some future date.

> But leisure in the narrower sense, as distinct from exploit and from any ostensibly productive employment of effort on objects which are of no intrinsic use, does not commonly leave a material product. The criteria of a past performance of leisure therefore commonly take the form of "immaterial" goods. Such immaterial evidences of past leisure are quasi-scholarly or quasi-artistic accomplishments and a knowledge of processes and incidents which do not conduce directly to the furtherance of human life. So, for instance, in our time there is the knowledge of the dead languages and the occult sciences; of correct spelling; of syntax and prosody; of the various forms of domestic music and other household art; of the latest properties of dress, furniture, and equipage; of games, sports, and fancy-bred animals, such as dogs and race-horses. In all these branches of knowledge the initial motive from which their acquisition proceeded at the outset, and through which they first came into vogue, may have been something quite different from the wish to show that one's time had not been spent in industrial employment; but unless these accomplishments had approved themselves as serviceable evidence of an unproductive expenditure of time, they would not have survived and held their place as conventional accomplishments of the leisure class.

Could it be that the many hours I have spent and continue to spend in reading and learning about the various arts were in fact a form of "conspicuous leisure"? Though I resist the idea, by the end of the book, I was sure Veblen would say yes. It's possible then, that people who ask incredulously, "Where do you find the time to read?" are actually expressing envy over my demonstration of conspicuous leisure, much as admiring comments about a new Gucci bag express envy of another's conspicuous consumption. Perhaps, too, the increasing length of newer novels is not, as I had assumed, due to reduced editorial attention, but a response to a market need for readers who want to display their conspicuous leisure via thicker books.

Pecuniary Aesthetics
Veblen examines how the values promoted by the leisure class permeate a number of areas of a society, such as sports, religion, and education, beyond what we usually think of as consumption. I was particularly interested to see what he had to say about the arts. He mentions limited edition hand bound books produced using earlier techniques of printing, such as those created by William Morris, as prestige items and points out that such volumes are less convenient and more difficult to read than the mass produced equivalent.
He also creates a thought experiment which would fit into a book on the aesthetics of art forgery. Imagine two metal spoons of elaborate design, indistinguishable to the eye. When told that one is silver and hand-crafted and the other aluminum and machine-made, the viewer would inevitably express an aesthetic preference for the silver spoon. In this way the pecuniary values which distinguish the leisure class affect judgments outside the monetary realm.

> The superior gratification derived from the use and contemplation of costly and supposedly beautiful products is, commonly, in great measure a gratification of our sense of costliness masquerading under the name of beauty.

This is of a piece with his earlier description of how wealth is capable of bestowing virtue through a kind of transitive property:

> When accumulated goods have in this way once become the accepted badge of efficiency, the possession of wealth presently assumes the character of an independent and definitive basis of esteem. The possession of goods, whether acquired aggressively by one's own exertion or passively by transmission through inheritance from others, becomes a conventional basis of reputability. The possession of wealth, which was at the outset valued simply as an evidence of efficiency, becomes, in popular apprehension, itself a meritorious act. Wealth is now itself intrinsically honourable and confers honour on its possessor. By a further refinement, wealth acquired passively by transmission from ancestors or other antecedents presently becomes even more honorific than wealth acquired by the possessor's own effort; but this distinction belongs at a later stage in the evolution of the pecuniary culture and will be spoken of in its place.

Racism and First-Wave Feminism

Modern readers will find his references to "races" irrelevant, if not odious; the so-called races he speaks of at any length, "the dolichocephalic-blond, the brachycephalic-brunette, and the Mediterranean", would today all be subsumed under the term "Caucasian". Whatever racial theorizing he does turns out not to invalidate any modern applications of his argument, nor, in fact, to really have much relevance at all to his theses. It is as if he wanted to suggest a relationship of his work to one of the leading "scientific" trends of his day without it really having any relevance at all, as one would after all suspect given the completely bogus nature of "racial science".

On the other hand, his discussion of "the new woman", as a first hand account of the reception of first-wave feminism is of continuing relevance. Veblen sees the new women's demands for "emancipation" and, especially, "work" as direct challenges to the ethics of the leisure class where wives were designated "vicarious consumers" to publicize their husbands wealth and were required to engage only in non-productive occupations.

Veblen's Style

This book made for slow reading with me and proved quite a slog in the second half. Veblen's style is rather clotted and repetitious. I often found myself re-reading paragraphs to parse their meanings; then, moving on to the next paragraph, found the author repeating the point I had just laboriously extracted. He also tends to write in generalities, which makes comprehension more difficult; this is unfortunate since, when he does clarify his meaning with a specific example, his argument is usually then made quite cogent, as with the silver spoon example above.

Explication, Polemic, or Satire?

There is probably enough internal evidence in this book to explain Veblen's sometimes vague and inelegant style, either as a way of "encoding" his actual message or as expressing disdain for elegance and precision in verbal communication. Some vagueness and generalizing is no doubt due to the fact that he is criticizing and calling into question the continued existence of his society's most powerful elements, what came to be called "the Establishment", and it would not do for the assault to be too direct. For example, attacking religion's detrimental effect on human reasoning power, he never refers to "Christianity", but always "anthropomorphism".

He also tries to on occasion to mollify any reader who may be feeling the sting of his language, explaining that his use of negative terms such as "invidious" and "wasteful" are merely descriptive and not judgmental. But there is a certain vehemence that comes through on occasion which makes his denials of negative evaluation unconvincing, such as when he compares the leisure class with the criminal element, as he does at several points:

> The ideal pecuniary man is like the ideal delinquent in his unscrupulous conversion of goods and persons to his own ends, and in a callous disregard of the feelings and wishes of others and of the remoter effects of his actions; but he is unlike him in possessing a keener sense of status, and in working more consistently and farsightedly to a remoter end. The kinship of the two types of temperament is further shown in a proclivity to "sport" and gambling, and a relish of aimless emulation. The ideal pecuniary man also shows a curious kinship with the delinquent in one of the concomitant variations of the predatory human nature. The delinquent is very commonly of a superstitious habit of mind; he is a great believer in luck, spells, divination and destiny, and in omens and shamanistic ceremony. Where circumstances are favorable, this proclivity is apt to express itself in a certain servile devotional fervor and a punctilious attention to devout observances; it may perhaps be better characterized as devoutness than as religion.

I had an occasional suspicion during my reading that Veblen may have been practicing an elaborate irony: that his book was a satire in the form of an essay on economics. In this case his uncongenial style and rather far reaching racial and historical theses would conform to his mocking idea of academic respectability:

> The recondite element in learning is still, as it has been in all ages, a very attractive and effective element for the purpose of impressing, or even imposing upon, the unlearned; and the standing of the savant in the mind of the altogether unlettered is in great measure rated in terms of intimacy with the occult forces.

He is also quite perceptive of irony, at least when it comes to instances where the values of the leisure class directly conflict with their stated goals:

> 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 surprise 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. The interior of the structure shows the same pervasive guidance of the canons of conspicuous waste and predatory exploit. The windows, for instance, to go no farther into detail, are placed with a view to impress their pecuniary excellence upon the chance beholder from the outside, rather than with a view to effectiveness for their ostensible end in the convenience or comfort of the beneficiaries within; and the detail of interior arrangement is required to conform itself as best it may to this alien but imperious requirement of pecuniary beauty.

If however his book as a whole is not intended ironically, he can be seen as attempting to lay the foundations of a genuinely revolutionary change to society, one at least as sweeping as that of the Jacobins and Communists.

"The Higher Learning as an Expression of the Pecuniary Culture"

The nature of this revolutionary change became most evident in Veblen's final chapter in which the earlier quote listing "dead languages", "correct spelling", and "syntax and prosody" as activities highlighting "conspicuous leisure" is expansively elaborated upon.

The criticism of the complexities of English orthography may simply reflect a specific bugbear of the time; one is reminded of similar objections raised by George Bernard Shaw and the revolutionized spelling of 1998 discovered by Max Beerbohm's Enoch Soames during his trip to the future.

However, Veblen's attacks on the study of classics and the language arts anticipates modern "reformers" of higher education who would have universities become advanced vocational / technical schools, relegating the humanities to a much reduced role, if not eliminating them altogether. He considers that "a familiarity with the animistic superstitions and the exuberant truculence of the Homeric heroes" reinforces and institutionalizes the values of the leisure class and objects to how the study of classical languages

> has by convention become incorporated into the sum of learning required of the scholar, and has thereby affected the terminology and diction employed in the useful branches of knowledge. Except for this terminological difficulty—which is itself a consequence of the vogue of the classics of the past—a knowledge of the ancient languages, for instance, would have no practical bearing for any scientist or any scholar not engaged on work primarily of a linguistic character. Of course, all this has nothing to say as to the cultural value of the classics, nor is there any intention to disparage the discipline of the classics or the bent which their study gives to the student. That bent seems to be of an economically disserviceable kind, but this fact—somewhat notorious indeed—need disturb no one who has the good fortune to find comfort and strength in the classical lore. The fact that classical learning acts to derange the learner's workmanlike attitudes should fall lightly upon the apprehension of those who hold workmanship of small account in comparison with the cultivation of decorous ideals

Note that closing self-exculpation from any malicious intent which a concerned reader might read into the foregoing passage, a demurral typical of Veblen on the attack.
Even study of Arnold's "the best which has been thought and said" as a means of sharpening one's own thinking and expression is considered worthless by Veblen.

> It is contended, in substance, that a punctilious use of ancient and accredited locutions will serve to convey thought more adequately and more precisely than would be the straightforward use of the latest form of spoken English; whereas it is notorious that the ideas of today are effectively expressed in the slang of today. Classic speech has the honorific virtue of dignity; it commands attention and respect as being the accredited method of communication under the leisure-class scheme of life, because it carries a pointed suggestion of the industrial exemption of the speaker. The advantage of the accredited locutions lies in their reputability; they are reputable because they are cumbrous and out of date, and therefore argue waste of time and exemption from the use and the need of direct and forcible speech.

Though hardly "the straightforward use of the latest form of spoken English", Veblen's style throughout the book shows little care to conform to classic ideas of written communication; neither Gibbon nor Johnson have been studied to learn elegance of style and clarity of meaning.
On balance, I am inclined to consider this book a reformer's polemic rather than a critic's satire. Perhaps because it is defined largely in terms of what would be eliminated, Veblen's efficient and productive new world seems rather joyless, but that does not necessarily mean he did not intend it seriously; other reformers have earnestly proposed less attractive Utopias.

Mark Russell says

A dry and difficult read as one must hack one's way through the arcane language and outmoded concepts, but once one does, one discovers a truly interesting approach to economics.

It must have seemed odd to an economist of the early 20th century, at least one capable of transcending the

views of his times, that while economics and human prosperity values certain activities (i.e. labor, investment, trade and construction), human society seems to value other activities, most of which are downright inimical to these values (i.e. conquest, command and leisure). Thinking purely from a goal of human prosperity, the people whom should be the most admired in human society are those who build the most, work the hardest and prosper through active trade and investment. Instead, the people who command the highest echelons of respect in society are those who destroy the most (military leaders and war heroes), work the least (the genteel nobility) and rule by fiat and command (royalty, emperors and dictators).

From this disparity, Veblen concluded that great wealth is not the goal of human activity, but rather what people aspire to, both in their economic activities and in life, is to be a part of "The Leisure Class." It's important to note that the term Leisure Class does not necessarily apply to the very rich, nor necessarily the very idle, but rather to those whose livelihood is as far removed from mundane labor as possible. By Veblen's standard, a British foreign officer who makes next to nothing but is in command of a small chunk of India is a member of the Leisure Class, whereas a millionaire who spends all day answering phone calls and checking in on his chain of carpet stores is not. The best the working rich can hope to do is to emulate the Leisure Class by spending their wealth on unnecessary, but highly visual, emblems of success in hopes of being mistaken for members of the Leisure Class. Perhaps the most widely known and resilient of his concepts, this is what Veblen coined as "conspicuous consumption."

The key, as Veblen points out, is that for people of the Leisure Class, the essence of their livelihood is tied not to work, but to exploit. A general gets invited to the ball, whereas a rich merchant does not. Why? Because he does not work, but rather merely goes to war from time to time. According to Veblen, this tendency to regard exploit as socially superior to work goes back to our early history as hunter-gatherers and is probably descended from the original division of labor that occurred between men and women. The men went out and hunted while the women stayed home and worked. Despite the fact that the work done by women actually provided far more material support to the community than the occasional caribou or mastodon brought home by the men, it was the hunt that was celebrated in cave paintings and which was valued in the formation of society's oldest political hierarchies. The best hunter usually became the leader of his tribe. As such, men were the world's first Leisure Class.

Perhaps this disparity in regard arose because exploits such as the hunt and war required courage and strength, whereas labor and production merely required effort and the occasional act of ingenuity, but as the distinction between the respect one gets for exploit versus work became more palpable, this division of duty became more rigidly defined to the point where the male hunters refused to even gut or clean their own prey, reserving that less dignified task for the female labor class and thereby preserving the quality of their own status.

As humanity abandoned the Primitive stage of the tribe for the Predatory Stage of the kingdom, and civilization arose with the advent of agriculture and cities, the Leisure Class merely followed along. It was no longer the best hunter, but the best warrior, or the strongest landholder who became the local warlord or king. But the essential fact remained: it was the dangerous exploit that ultimately determined who would claim the top rungs of society for themselves and their descendants. The lower rungs would be reserved, as they always were, for those whom life had selected for mere work.

I'm not sure how relevant Veblen's theories on the Leisure Class are in a society where there is no royalty, hardly anybody can name a war hero, and practically nobody frets about whether they're good enough to warrant an invitation to the cotillion. But his theory is perhaps prescient in that, when you look at the most revered people in American society, they're not our hordes of hard-working suckers like Joe the Plumber, or even our eye-poppingly rich masters of industry like Bill Gates or Donald Trump. They're our celebrities and

sports heroes. We don't wait out in the cold for three hours in order to merely catch a glimpse of the Queen. We wait out there to see Oprah Winfrey, Tom Cruise or the Jonas Brothers.

What separates these celebrities from the everyone else whose corpses we'd gladly step over to see them? In the end, it's exploit. Maybe in our modern information age, it's no longer the best hunter, or the strongest warrior whom we look up to as our natural masters, but the guy with the best three-point shot. The girl who can sing and act and plays Hannah Montana on TV. They're people whom we've recognized as having some ability that, for some reason, removes them from the tedium of work which has claimed the rest of us.

Andrew says

So most of the time, he's kind of riffing, but Veblen does his best writing not when he's theorizing about the nature of the leisure class-- after all, his ideas have become so sublimated into social perception at this point, which I guess speaks to their power-- but when he's going into specifics and demonstrating how they correlate to the broader theory. And when his talking points get Victorian (believing in intrinsic and universal aesthetic values, referring to the savage mind), it seems like it's not fundamental to his case. Really, there's a timeless message here, and it's quite simple. Rich people suck. I've started noticing that even most of the leisure class out here in Seattle, who are a much classier bunch than those in, say, Arizona or Fort Worth, really are a bunch of airheaded pricks who don't read books unless they're afraid their neighbor will read them first.
