

VICIOUS ABSTRACTIONISM AND THE DARWINIAN STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE OF VEBLER'S AND DURKHEIM'S IDEAS

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Abstract: Durkheim's sociology is read in a post-Darwin context, and then compared and contrasted with Veblen's post-Darwinian sociology. Both Durkheim and Veblen are contrasted with the typical, Kantian, rationalist, and pre-Darwinian readings of them. Additionally, the pragmatism of William James, is used as a new context to capture the "struggle for existence" of ideas, particularly Durkheim's and Veblen's unusual ideas. This new reading illustrates the continued relevance of Durkheim's and Veblen's central ideas (such as anomie, barbarism, conspicuous consumption) to contemporary social life. These insights are illustrated with regard to current economic crises, the ongoing war on terror, and education.

Key Words: Veblen, Durkheim, anomie, conspicuous consumption, pragmatism

Fasit Soyutçuluk ve Veblen ile Durkheim'in Fikirlerinin Yaşaması için Darwinci Çatışma

Özet: Bu yazıda Durkheim'in sosyolojisi Darwin sonrası bir bağlamda okunup ve ardından Veblen'in Darwincilik sonrası sosyolojisi ile karşılaştırılmıştır. Durkheim ve Veblen'in her ikisi de tipik Kantçı, akılcı ve Darwincilik öncesi okumaları ile karşılaştırılmaktadır. Buna ek olarak William James'in pragmatizmi fikirlerin, özellikle Durkheim ve Veblen'in olağan dışı fikirlerinin, "yaşam mücadelesi"ni anlamak üzere yeni bir bağlam olarak kullanılmıştır. Bu yeni okumalar Durkheim ve Veblen'in anomi, barbarlık ve aşırı tüketim gibi merkezi fikirlerinin çağdaş sosyal yaşama halen devam eden uygunluğunu göstermektedir. Bu anlayışlar cari iktisadi krizler, devam eden terörle savaş ve eğitim gibi konularla ilişkili olarak ele alınmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Veblen, Durkheim, anomi, aşırı tüketim, pragmatizm

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It is frustrating to observe how neglected, misunderstood, and under-appreciated Emile Durkheim and Thorstein Veblen have been and continue to be. They both lived, taught, and wrote approximately a century ago, yet their greatest ideas and insights seem more relevant to the new millennium than the times in which they wrote. Durkheim's central idea is that chronic anomie is a modern problem that prevents harmonious functioning in all areas of social life, from the economy to families, politics, and even academia. Veblen's central idea is that the predatory or barbarian temperament similarly forces most of the world's population to be treated and to act like the "prey" in relation to social institutions that have perfected the use of force and deception.¹ Both thinkers aimed their sharpest barbs at corporations, the business world, and governments. It seems inexplicable that Durkheim has been mislabeled as a social conservative while Marx has been given the "credit" for revolutionary, avant-garde thinking. In fact, Durkheim was correct in his prediction that communism and socialism would also succumb to anomie, and that anomie afflicts all modern social institutions, regardless of political leanings to the Right or Left. It is equally incredible that contemporary economists ignore Veblen almost completely when he correctly predicted that the business institutions would devise and perfect new methods of force and "chicanery" to exploit ordinary, working people. Durkheim's remarks about the "struggle for survival" of *ideas* apply to Durkheim's and Veblen's ideas: "How many healthy ideas which ought to have survived to maturity have been cut down in their prime!"²

For example, as I write this essay in the year 2009, the entire world is feeling the effects of the Great Recession that many people feared and some people still fear could have been or will become the Second Great Depression. Everyone knows and admits that this crisis was caused by lack of regulation of the markets, the invention of "derivatives" as "products" whose value cannot be traced or understood in commonsense terms, and other unscrupulous, predatory behaviors that are not tolerated in everyday life outside the business world. The "captains of industry" and "robber barons," as Veblen called them, were rescued

¹ Veblen writes: "The predatory phase of culture is attained only when the predatory attitude has become the habitual and accredited spiritual attitude for the members of the group; when the fight has become the dominant note in the current theory of life; when the common-sense appreciation of men and things has come to be an appreciation with a view to combat" (Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, New York: Penguin, [1899] 1967, p. 19).

² Emile Durkheim, *The Evolution of Educational Thought*, London: Routledge, [1938] 1977, p.13.

by governments with taxpayer money with the explanation that the bankrupt corporations were “too big too fail.” But no governments sought to rescue ordinary people who lost pensions, jobs, homes, and whose lives were destroyed by these predatory practices. And no one invoked Veblen to ask the question: How can society reverse these chronic predatory practices? No one invoked Durkheim’s admonition that justice can never be achieved by granting one portion of society the lion’s share of benefits at the expense of the rest of society.

Similarly, the War on Terror has lasted longer than World Wars I and II combined, and shows no signs of ending. On the contrary, as I write this essay, the war is expanding in Afghanistan and Pakistan, with the constant danger of spilling into Iran. The opinion-makers who continue to fuel the war are not challenged on the fundamental premise that “terror” can be defeated militarily. Durkheim’s and Veblen’s writings on war and peace are completely ignored on this subject. Durkheim and Veblen traced the origins of war to social attitudes which hold that a particular nation is “above the law,” attitudes which Durkheim labeled as anomic and Veblen as predatory. Eight years of reporting on this current war demonstrate clearly that the Geneva Conventions have been ignored, torture became policy³, and that the names “Abu Ghraib” and “Guantanamo” will remain infamous in history because of the force and fraud that accompanied the abuse at those sites.⁴ For both Durkheim and Veblen⁵, wars end and peace is maintained when nations are embedded in a functional and harmonious division of labor that benefits all members. Their ideas are not even invoked in these important discussions.

In summary, Durkheim and Veblen gave pointed perspectives on the root causes of these and other repetitive problems of modernity. Economic crises and wars have followed one another in waves since they wrote. Durkheim wrote that anomie exists in a chronic state in modern economic institutions (both socialism and capitalism), and that anomie is the underlying cause of recurring economic crises. To fix the economic crises, once and for all, one should first try to fix the underlying anomie. No contemporary economist cites Durkheim on this issue.

³ James P. Pfiffner, *Torture as Public Policy*, Boulder: Paradigm, 2010.

⁴ For an extended discussion of how social theory in general, and Durkheim and Veblen in particular, may be applied to the current war on terror, see Stjepan Mestrovic, *The “Good Soldier” on Trial*, New York: Agora, 2009.

⁵ Thorstein Veblen, *The Nature of Peace*, New York: Macmillan, 1917

Similarly, in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, as well as many other works, Veblen isolated the “barbarian temperament” of the “captains of industry” and the “robber barons” as the root cause of chronic economic crises and inefficiency. His proposed solution was to promote what he called a peaceful culture. The same problem exists with regard to incorporating their thought with regard to social institutions and multitude of social problems, which are not fundamentally different from their era. Durkheim and Veblen were both “grand theorists” who connected many different cultural patterns to the root causes of anomie and the barbarian temperament, respectively. In Veblen’s words:

As it finds expression in the life of the barbarian, prowess manifests itself in two main directions—force and fraud. In varying degrees these two forms of expression are similarly present in modern warfare, in the pecuniary occupations, and in sports and games.⁶

It is more true than it was a century ago that force and fraud characterize contemporary warfare, economic markets and the business professions, advertising, sports, gambling, and other institutions that are modeled on war, money-making, and sports. The problem is that Durkheim, as the first professor of sociology in the world and one of its founding fathers, and Veblen, as one of the world’s greatest sociologists and social critics, are regarded as classic figures whose insights are either not taken seriously or hardly known. In the words of Mark Twain, a classic is “a book which people praise and don’t read.” His sardonic characterization of a classic applies to the classics by Durkheim and Veblen.

Why have Durkheim’s and Veblen’s useful insights almost reached the point of extinction? One possible reason may be found in the concept of “vicious abstractionism” William James coined this phrase:

Let me give the name of “vicious abstractionism” to a way of using concepts which may be thus described: We conceive a concrete situation by singling out some salient or important feature of it, and classing it under that, then, instead of adding to its previous characters all the positive consequences which the new way of conceiving it may bring, we proceed to use our concept privately, reducing the originally rich phenomenon to the naked suggestions of the name abstractly taken, treating it as a case of ‘nothing but’ that concept, and acting as

⁶ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, p.273.

if all other characters from out which the concept is abstracted were expunged ... Abstraction, functioning in this way, becomes a means of arrest far more than a means of advance in thought. It mutilates things, it creates difficulties and finds impossibilities ... The viciously private employment of abstract characters and class names is, I am persuaded, one of the great original sins of the rationalistic mind.⁷

Durkheim similarly wrote about the tendency of intellectuals to “seek to violently exterminate the past” and with regard to classical ideas, “they make war on them totally and mercilessly.”⁸ Scholars do not typically think of themselves as warriors, despite the fact that they build intellectual empires and “wage war” on competing empires. For the purposes of the present discussion, the merciless, vicious abstractionism has to do with attempts to reduce Durkheim and Veblen to “nothing but” positivists, Kantians, and disciples of the Enlightenment project. Space does not permit us to pursue the important point that the Enlightenment project was a drop in the bucket of human history of culture, and has been rightly indicted by critical theorists as responsible for many ills in modernity.⁹ A reader is confronted by any number of “concrete situations” for the purposes of this discussion: he or she is reading a book by Durkheim or Veblen, and is aware of numerous social problems, from wars to economic crises, which seem chronic in modernity. Any attempt to pursue leads in Veblen and Durkheim that do not fit the “nothing but” constraints imposed upon them by academics is met with resistance or aggression.

My goal in the remainder of this discussion is to think “outside the box,” and retrieve some other ways to read Durkheim and Veblen which have been eclipsed by the vicious intellectuals—specifically, the cultural contexts of Schopenhauer, Darwin, and Nietzsche. My purpose is not to replace one set of vicious abstractionism (the Enlightenment project) with another (the legacy of Darwin). Rather, the goal is to retrieve the emphasis on cooperation, compassion, and good-will which tends to be overlooked in Darwin’s legacy; which helps to explain Durkheim’s and Veblen’s theories; and which constitutes the direct antithesis to vicious abstractionism. Veblen supported the idea of

⁷ William James, *The Meaning of Truth*, Amherst: Prometheus Books, [1884] 1997, p.249.

⁸ Emile Durkheim, *The Evolution of Educational Thought*, London: Routledge, [1938] 1977, p.17.

⁹ It is beyond the scope of this discussion to pursue this theme in the writings of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Zygmunt Bauman, Erich Fromm, and others who are more or less associated with a tradition called critical theory.

“idle curiosity,” which implies that there are numerous other ways to read them than I can treat in this brief essay. My goal is to pursue curiosity about them, not restrict it.

Veblen and Durkheim: Their Common Cultural Context

Commentators and analysts typically place Durkheim and Veblen into the conceptual “boxes” of Comte, Kant, Hegel or some other promulgators of an Absolutist agenda based upon the so-called Enlightenment project that actually began to crumble long before the Enlightenment, with Copernicus. (And most intellectuals seem to forget that the so-called Enlightenment included witch-hunts and brutal, religious wars.) In other words, textbooks *force* the student to view Durkheim and Veblen as followers of the ideas by Comte that societies are becoming more positivistic and scientific; by Kant that ideas of time, space, and even morality are innate; and by Hegel that all of Western culture has arrived at the “end of history” of pure democracy. These views are as naïve and quaint as the pre-Copernican beliefs that the Earth was the center of the universe. Textbooks generally fail to mention the obvious discrepancy that Durkheim criticized Comte, Kant, Hegel and other absolutists at every opportunity. And one cannot find Veblen praising any of these icons of a pedantic and narrow understanding of the Enlightenment. Whether one likes it or not, the post-Copernicus revolution continues, and has shown that Comte was wrong and that theology continues to exist alongside science; that categories of time, space, and morality vary greatly with one’s culture; and that democracy is in peril due to apathy, lobbies, and other cultural factors.

Most textbooks just as routinely omit the two most important philosophical stars of the nineteenth century, Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a full analysis of the cultural or philosophical discussion of the merits and impact of these two philosophers versus others. It is sufficient to note that both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche discredited the aforementioned Enlightenment philosophers on one fundamental issue: they held that the “mind” and the “brain” were derivatives of and secondary in importance to the passions and the body. In other words, Schopenhauer paved the way for Darwin and the revolutionary idea that the mind and its derivatives that are enshrined by the Enlightenment are mere accidents in the struggle for existence. Humans have large brains compared to

most animals, and know how to use language, concepts, and other products of this Enlightenment. However, humans are not immune from the struggle for existence by virtue of this fact, and are more vulnerable to irrational passions and afflictions of the body than our ancestors precisely because of their superior intellects. In Durkheim's words, the mind expands the horizons of desire for humans, and thereby creates anomie and more unhappiness. Similarly, Veblen followed Schopenhauer, not the Enlightenment thinkers, in positing that the predatory "instinct" becomes stronger, not weaker, in "civilized" societies.

Georg Simmel is another illustrious yet neglected sociologist-philosopher who has been and continues to be the victim of vicious abstractionism. He singled out Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as the exemplars for the cultural wars of the nineteenth century. In one of his least known books, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, he makes a crystal clear and compelling argument for their importance. For example, he writes that Schopenhauer's philosophy was a watershed event in human history: "With some few exceptions, which amount to a *quantite negligeable*, all philosophers prior to Schopenhauer conceived of man as a rational being"¹⁰. Simmel adds that this is because "Schopenhauer's will is not posited against, but outside, rationality and, therefore, outside its contradiction"¹¹. But he also noted two fundamentally different ways of interpreting the revolutionary insight into the primacy of the will over the mind that is shared by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, namely, that of compassion and its derivatives versus the will to power and its derivatives. This difference in interpretation makes a huge difference in interpreting Darwin as promoting a philosophy of "survival through cooperation" (Durkheim's and Veblen's interpretation) or "survival of the fittest" (Spencer's and Nietzsche's interpretations). Simmel writes:

It is just this world, which is moved by goal orientation and yet is deprived of a goal, that is Nietzsche's starting point. *But between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche lies Darwin.*¹²

Darwin's importance--and the differences in interpreting Darwin via Schopenhauer versus Nietzsche—is not usually invoked in interpreting Durkheim. Rick Tilman has demonstrated Darwin's influence on Veblen

¹⁰ Georg Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986, p.27.

¹¹ Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, p.29.

¹² Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, p.5, my emphasis)

admirably, but this link needs to be argued for Durkheim.¹³ And we must be clear on which Darwin—the Darwin of cooperation or the Nietzschean Darwin of “survival of the fittest”—is invoked. Darwin, too, is the victim of vicious abstractionism that continues into the new millennium (witness the debates in public schools over teaching “creationism” versus “evolution”). It is a fact that Durkheim understood and accepted Darwin’s original formulation that *cooperation* among plants, animals, and humans predicts survival. Let us examine a crucial passage by Durkheim in *The Division of Labor*:

Darwin very aptly remarked that two organisms vie with each other more keenly the more alike they are. Having the same needs and pursuing the same purposes, they are everywhere to be found in a state of rivalry.... The situation is totally different if the individuals coexisting together are of different species or varieties.... Moreover, everyone has noticed that in the same field, beside cereal crops there can grow a very great number of weeds. The animals likewise do better in the struggle the more they differ from one another. On an oak tree are to be found up to two hundred species of insects that have no contacts with one another save those of good neighbourliness. Some feed on the fruits of the tree, others on the leaves, yet more on the bark and roots.... *Men are subject to the same law.* In the same town different occupations can coexist without being forced into a position where they harm one another, for they are pursuing different objectives.¹⁴

It is for this reason that Durkheim valued the importance of the division of labor and criticized anomic forms of the division of labor which lead to unfair, unjust, and predatory competition which harms an entire society even if it benefits predators: “If the hypotheses of Darwin have a moral use, it is the moderating influence that society exercises over its members, which tempers and neutralizes the brutal action of the struggle for existence and selection”¹⁵. If Durkheimian scholars have glossed over the importance of Darwin in Durkheim’s thought, his disciples, like Celestin Bouglé, were keenly aware of it: “Here we obviously have a Darwinian law serving as intermediary in the explanation of that progress of division of labor which itself explains so much in the social

¹³ Rick Tilman, *Thorstein Veblen, John Dewey, C. Wright Mills and the Generic ends of Life*, Totowa: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004; Rick Tilman, *Thorstein Veblen and the Enrichment of Evolutionary Naturalism*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007.

¹⁴ Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, New York: Free Press, [1893] 1984, p.209, my emphasis.

¹⁵ Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, p.197.

evolution”¹⁶. Similarly, the careful reader of Veblen will note his approval of tendencies toward peace, cooperation, and “peacable habits” as opposed to the barbaric tendencies of modernity. Veblen’s entire opus may be read as an implicit but sustained polemic against Nietzsche’s “overman” as the barbarian we must all fear and loathe.

Now let us get to the point already uncovered and analyzed by Simmel. Simmel is undoubtedly correct that both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche had destroyed the previous century’s clinging to Absolutism and Rationalism. Both philosophers agreed that we can never discover any absolute or rational truths, and can only confront “representations.” They thereby paved the way for pragmatism, Darwinism, and other assaults on certainty. The “fit” or correspondence between raw experience and concepts or representations is always tenuous at best, and is always subject to the tendency toward vicious abstractionism (reducing all of experience to any one concept). However, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche differed sharply with regard to appropriate responses to chronic uncertainty, and to the other side of the representation, namely, the will. By “will,” they were not referring to rational understandings such as, “I will go to school.” They used the concept of the “will” to refer to non-rational drives of many sorts which bypass the brain or are recognized by the mind after the fact. In Simmel’s words, “will is infinity within us”¹⁷. In line with James and the pragmatists, Simmel held that it was impossible to reduce “infinity” to a specific and finite concept. Simmel adds: “Schopenhauer destroyed the dogma that rationality is the deep-seated and basic essence of man”¹⁸—and Nietzsche and Darwin followed Schopenhauer’s lead. Schopenhauer referred to the will as a shorthand for derivatives of the “will to life” whereas Nietzsche referred to it as derivatives of the “will to power.” Schopenhauer argued that the “will to life” was the basic, irrational drive that bound together plants, animals, humans and inanimate objects. He concluded that this fact—whether it is fully realized or not—should promote compassion, because all of us are “in the same boat” (struggle and suffering caused by the will to life), so to speak. Even plants, which do not have brains, cooperate as well as compete with other plants and the environment for nutrients, sunlight, and other essentials for survival. As an

¹⁶ Celestin Bouglé, “Darwinism and Sociology”, *Darwin and Modern Science*, edited by A.C. Seward, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909, pp.465-76, p.475.

¹⁷ Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, p.26.

¹⁸ Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, p.28.

aside, it should be noted that Darwin seemed to be more interested in the struggle for existence among plants than animals and humans.

But Nietzsche understood the will to power, in Simmel's words, as "an increase, maximization and growing concentration of the surrounding power of the universe in the subject" (p. 6). Nietzsche self-consciously and explicitly mocked Schopenhauer's emphases on compassion and cooperation. He rejected all variations of compassion in Schopenhauer as well as Christianity, other religions, Socrates, and all cultural aspects as weakness and "herd morality."¹⁹ Whatever Nietzsche meant by "will to power," it is clear that he was rejecting empathy, compassion, cooperation, and other elements that Simmel, Durkheim, and Veblen thought were essential for any society to thrive. The more important point is that, in Simmel's words, "the sympathy of modern man will tend to favor Nietzsche"²⁰ even though Schopenhauer and Darwin were more correct about the importance of cooperation for survival. Simmel was prophetic, in that Nietzsche is the main inspiration for contemporary postmodernism; Schopenhauer is forgotten; and Darwin continues to be misunderstood and loathed by religious fundamentalists. But the ordinary person can relate to Nietzsche's focus on growth and maximization in relation to the self, consumer goods, and visible signs of "progress," even if these are harmful to the environment, the planet, and the future of humankind. It should be obvious that Nietzsche's "will to power" was redescribed as "the barbarian temperament" by Veblen and "anomie" by Durkheim.

This brief discussion of the fundamental difference between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche is not an exercise in academic pedantry. Nor is it yet another example of vicious abstractionism, because the point is to highlight the difference between Nietzsche's approval of viciousness and Schopenhauer's admonition toward compassion. It may be necessary to invent the term, "compassionate intellectualism," in order to counter the Nietzschean, "vicious abstractionism" which disturbed James. The important point is that the twentieth century followed Nietzsche in most aspects of culture, and succumbed to the "will to power" in all its manifestations. One can trace Nietzsche's *cultural* influence—and it does not matter what Nietzsche intended—through Nazism, Communism,

¹⁹ I have addressed these issues pertaining to Nietzsche vis-à-vis the themes of modernity and postmodernity in Stjepan Mestrovic, *The Barbarian Temperament*, London: Routledge, 1993; Stjepan Mestrovic, *Postemotional Society*, London: Sage, 1997

²⁰ Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, p.12.

Hiroshima, the Cold War, narcissism, consumerism, and other cultural phenomena up to and including postmodernism. I invite any reader to Google the two words, "Nietzsche" and "postmodernism" as illustration. Over one and a half million entries emerge for this search. The cluster, Nietzsche-Derrida-Baudrillard, has ravaged twentieth century culture with its teachings that there is no truth despite an overabundance of information; that everything is simulacra; that all representations must be de-constructed but none may be re-constructed. In popular culture, these philosophical assumptions are re-worded as spin, and talking points. The postmodernist credo is that there is no truth in a world of random, circulating fictions. Baudrillard echoes Nietzsche in claiming that the "implosion of meaning" comes from an overabundance of "truths," none of which seem to be more or less true or false than any other. To the extent that one accepts this Nietzschean credo, it follows that the predator who uses force and fraud will have the best chances of survival in a social world conceived as a jungle. Far from being random, the simulacra emanate and are controlled by the power elites that govern corporations, governments, media, and other control centers of the culture industry. The result is what I have called postemotional society²¹, by which I mean that cultural representations are deliberately and systematically manipulated by the power elite in their expression of the will to power.

Space does not permit anything approaching the full consequences of these insights. By necessity, I must be succinct in tracing the consequences for apprehending Durkheim and Veblen, in the context of this seismic shift from a Schopenhauerian to a Nietzschean world-view: First, along with some of their contemporaries (Simmel, James, Dewey, Freud, the pragmatists), Durkheim and Veblen represent the Schopenhauerian cluster of cultural values which focus on compassion, empathy, and society as possible due to a vast and interlocking cooperation. I regard their approach as one of compassionate intellectualism in that they sought cooperation, taking the role of the other, empathy, good-will, and Eros both in terms of ideas and the reality of functional, thriving, societies. Second, because the Nietzschean cultural world-view nearly exterminated the Schopenhauerian world-view, Durkheim's and Veblen's sociologies have been systematically de-constructed and distorted along with the twentieth century sociologists and anthropologists who absorbed and promulgated their points of

²¹ Mestrovic, *Postemotional Society*.

view, namely, Talcott Parsons, David Riesman, and C. Wright Mills among others. Third, and finally, it is ultimately futile to pursue the Schopenhauerian world-view and compassionate intellectualism which is the heart of Veblen's and Durkheim's thought. In the language of popular culture, such an undertaking amounts to "going against the wind" of the Nietzschean world-view. Borrowing Durkheim's language²², until and unless the "old gods die" (the Nietzschean cluster) and "new gods" appear, the clusters of thought represented by Durkheim, Veblen and their contemporaries cannot be resurrected or re-appreciated. There is no going back from Durkheim's and Veblen's insights that "collective representations" and "habits of thought" depend on society's "will." Durkheim and Veblen are decidedly out of fashion, and their most original insights are nearly extinct. We shall pursue this project despite this stark realization.

Looking Back to the Golden Age of Twentieth Century Social Theory

It is well-known that Durkheim's thought was popularized in twentieth century sociology primarily through the works of Talcott Parsons²³ and structural-functional social theory. Parsons reflected many of Durkheim's central ideas into his own claims that society is like a biological organism; that society is a self-regulating system; and that social structure precedes individual agency, thereby resulting in what he called rational social action. All of these insights presuppose the "cooperation" angle on Darwin's fundamental insight into the struggle for existence: individuals and societies that have the best chances for survival are the ones that cooperate, that are integrated, that balance biological, social, cultural, and psychological needs. These insights form the basis for Parsonian systems theory. However, it is curious that Parsons omitted Darwin, Veblen and Simmel completely from his theories of social action and social systems. Moreover, by aligning Durkheim in a paradigm of "rational" social action that included economists as well as Max Weber, Parsons influenced several generations of sociologists to esteem Durkheim and Weber but to ignore Simmel and Veblen. And Parsons undoubtedly confused several generations of sociologists by using the word "rational" to describe systems, even though it is clear that he was making Darwinian assumptions about cybernetics,

²² Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, New York: Free Press, [1912] 1965.

²³ Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, New York: Free Press, 1937.

cooperation, and integration which have nothing in common with the “rationality” of Comte, Kant, and Hegel.

On the other hand, Veblen’s influence re-emerged briefly and can be traced through the important works by C. Wright Mills on the power elite and the sociological imagination. Fairly or unfairly, Mills was extremely critical of Parsons, and introduced thinkers whom Parsons ignored, especially the pragmatists and Veblen.²⁴ Mills is clear on his debt to Veblen, among others, for exposing the barbaric tendencies of the power elite even within so-called democratic societies. But here again, both Parsons and Mills, and the sociologists they influenced, were caught in Nietzschean “social currents” which pitted Mills against Parsons instead of finding common ground between them. In sociology courses, Mills is typically described as trying to violently exterminate Parsons, to borrow Durkheim’s terminology. But is this, viciously intellectual mode of reading Mills versus Parsons the only way to read them? Both Mills and Parsons subscribe to the idea of the “sociological imagination,” which attempts to link every individual’s personal trouble—such as divorce, suicide, alcoholism, bankruptcy or whatever—to social issues and general trends towards divorce, suicide, alcoholism, bankruptcy and so on. Both Mills and Parsons imply Durkheim’s and Veblen’s views that cooperation and not predation are the essence of social life. Nevertheless, history and textbooks establish Mills as the nemesis of Parsons, and thereby imply that Durkheim (who was important for Parsons) was the nemesis of Veblen (who was important for Mills). This is a tragic misunderstanding.

The Chicago School was responsible for its own Schopenhauerian take on the origins of sociology. In the world’s first sociology textbook—which is over one thousand pages long—Park and Burgess²⁵ are comprehensive in their treatment of the many voices that went into sociology, from Simmel, Durkheim, and Tonnies, to Darwin and Schopenhauer. They definitely focus upon the theme of cooperation in Darwin. It is remarkable that they quote long passages from Schopenhauer! It is clear that they emphasize pragmatism, but this is a philosophy that teaches the importance of empathy, taking the role of the other, and respecting the importance of culture and the “generalized other.” To their

²⁴ see Tilman, *Thorstein Veblen, John Dewey, C. Wright Mills and the Generic ends of Life*.

²⁵ Robert Park and Everett Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1921] 1972.

credit, the Chicago School cited John Dewey, William James, Royce, Pierce and other pragmatists in addition to George Herbert Mead. Their concept of “social disorganization” seems to capture the anomic and predatory aspects of dysfunctional society captured by Durkheim and Veblen.

However, it is very instructive to compare and contrast any contemporary sociology textbook with the first textbook in sociology. Contemporary textbooks routinely divide the field into competing paradigms (Conflict, Symbolic Interactionism, Structural-Functionalism) whereas Park and Burgess apparently could not even imagine such divisions. The Chicago School saw no essential discrepancies among Durkheim, Veblen, James, and others even if they pointed out differences in interpretation. It is as if Park and Burgess were following the Darwinian maxim that survival stems from cooperation, even in intellectual thought, whereas contemporary textbooks implicitly follow the Nietzschean model of the will to power as applied to academia and sociology. This is true even within the three major paradigms. For example, contemporary symbolic interactionism typically lionizes Mead, and ignores Dewey, James, Royce, and Pierce. The end result is that the typical student is unable to find affinities or common ground between, let us say, Mead and Durkheim. Indeed, one such effort to find possible common ground sabotages its intent in its title: Stone and Farberman’s “On the Edge of Rapprochement: Was Durkheim Moving toward the Perspective of Symbolic Interaction?”²⁶ It is not a question of Durkheim or Mead moving toward the other, implicitly superior perspective. Rather, it should be a question of the common ground between pragmatism and Durkheim, which is demonstrated amply in Durkheim’s neglected book, *Pragmatism and Sociology*²⁷.

Another twentieth century classic that is esteemed but hardly read is David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd*²⁸. In this best-selling sociology book of all time, and in general, Riesman shows that he was influenced by Veblen, Durkheim, Tocqueville, Marx, Freud, Weber, the Chicago School and his friend and therapist, Erich Fromm. Riesman’s approach is not only eclectic, but cooperative: he manages to find common patterns among these seemingly diverse thinkers to establish his own, original take on the issues that have

²⁶ Gregory P. Stone, and Harvey A. Farberman, “On the Edge of Rapprochement: Was Durkheim Moving toward the Perspective of Symbolic Interaction?” *Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1967, pp.149-64.

²⁷ Emile Durkheim, *Pragmatism and Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1955] 1983.

²⁸ David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.

emerged since Darwin. It is simply impossible to force-fit Riesman into any of the three dominant paradigms in sociology. It is equally impossible to summarize his theory in a few paragraphs or type-cast any of his three social types (tradition-, inner-, and other-directed) as entirely good or bad, positive or negative, helpful or detrimental in the struggle for existence. I will note briefly the obvious insights he borrows from his eclectic list of influences. He expands Veblen's notion of "conspicuous consumption" to include the consumption of media images, the approval of peers, and other intangibles. He adds the idea of "narcissism of small differences," from Freud, to discuss how individuals compete with each other for small gains in prestige based upon what they consume and display. Riesman posits that anomie feels different in each of his three types of societies. Tocqueville—who is completely ignored by sociologists today—adds the dimension of "tyranny of the majority" to understandings of how contemporary individuals succumb to the "jury of their peers" in terms of conformity to mass society. He aligns Max Weber's ideal type of the Puritan to the inner-directed type and his rigid, metaphorical gyroscope or apparent certainty as to character traits and values. He accepts from Marx and Fromm the idea that "false consciousness" enslaves individuals and societies to dysfunctional responses. Riesman accepts the basic premises of the pragmatists and the Chicago School that one must look beneath and beyond appearances to determine any approximations of what people feel. In general, his post-Darwinian take seems to be that every historical era produces its own, unique social character and unique expressions of love and aggression that are the ingredients of the struggle for existence.

Riesman's entire approach, as a teacher and scholar, was that of promoting dialogue, finding connections, and emphasizing the importance of cooperation—even with the ideas of dead colleagues. For this reason, his survival-through-cooperation approach was doomed to extinction in a social climate that promoted and continues to promote the Nietzschean outlook. A modern-day Nietzsche would no doubt have listed Riesman among the dogooders he despised, from Socrates to Jesus.

Since the 1980s, sociology has been dominated by various theorists who promote some version of postmodernism: Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Richard Rorty, and others.²⁹ It is true that

²⁹ Stjepan Mestrovic, *Durkheim and Postmodern Culture*, Berlin: Aldine de Gruyter, 1992)

Giddens re-names postmodernity as “high modernity,” but both promote the image of modernity as the “juggernaut” that crushes all opposition. Does anyone notice the violence and viciousness in his depiction of modernity?³⁰ Giddens concludes that we must “ride the juggernaut,” not that we should try to stop it. Baudrillard denied that he was a postmodernist even as he promoted it, but this is not surprising given the postmodern emphasis on language games. Bauman seeks to celebrate the chaos that ensues from postmodernism even as he condemns it in some of his other writings. He is inconsistent, which is a consistent trait of postmodern writers. All these writers share in common the postmodern contempt for clarity with regard to writing, thinking, communicating, or acting. Their immediate responses to any efforts toward such inner-direction include deconstruction and de-centering. It is the Nietzschean agenda all over again, with new terminology.

At times, it seems frankly impossible to recommend reading Durkheim and Veblen (or anyone else) with the goals of finding common ground between them or practical applications of their theories to contemporary problems. Such efforts will be sabotaged immediately by a predictable postmodern program.³¹ For example, scholars will object that Durkheim and Veblen are privileged, because postmodernism holds that no one’s viewpoint is privileged or better than anyone else’s. Ultimately, the reader or listener has the right to interpret as they please in line with the “death of the author” theme. Others may object that anomie and the predatory temperament are not central to Durkheim’s and Veblen’s thought, respectively, because no “narrative” has a real center. They would look to the “margins” of their thought, which immediately sets the stage for deconstruction. Deconstruction holds that a text or narrative must be criticized and torn down with regard to its assumptions, but forbids that it can or should be reconstructed. One must fight a tendency to succumb to “learned helplessness” in the face of these predictable, vicious, postmodern tendencies. One knows that no matter what one says, writes, or does—it will be subjected to *systematic and organized* vicious abstractionism.

My intent here is not to analyze postmodernism on its own terms or even in orthodox academic terms. In the context of the preceding analysis, the important points are the following: Durkheim would probably view postmodernism as a

³⁰ For a fuller discussion, see my analysis of Giddens in Stjepan Mestrovic, *Anthony Giddens: The Last Modernist*, London: Routledge, 1998.

³¹ Pauline Rosenau, *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

form of anomie that is dysfunctional for academics and society as a whole. Veblen would most likely note the predatory attitudes in postmodernism (forcing deconstruction, appealing to chicanery and provocation). Postmodernism as a cultural attitude seems to reflect the “will to power” far more than any theme derived from compassion or cooperation. From a Darwinian point of view, one wonders whether postmodernism can serve any function that promotes survival of any species or even the planet. It should be obvious that outside of academia, one cannot apply postmodern assumptions or attitudes in every day life and hope to survive even for a day. The average person must find the “central” point of a child telling his or her parent that they are ill. The average teacher must “reconstruct” a student’s self-esteem after finding fault or deconstructing their essay. No one wants to believe that their love for someone is just a “simulacra.” And so on.

Re-Reading Durkheim and Veblen in the Context of Compassionate Intellectualism

Despite the real obstacles that I have noted in finding common ground between Durkheim and Veblen, and applying their insights to pressing social problems, I will propose briefly a program for achieving these goals. Perhaps I am aiming for the reader who is moved emotionally and viscerally both by their writings and the seeming helplessness in ameliorating social problems. If one reads Durkheim and Veblen with sensitivity to their passions, perceptions, and their nuances in choosing words and describing social phenomena, one is capable of re-discovering them. And once one comprehends their struggles with the issues unleashed by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Darwin, it is possible to realize that these issues are with us still.

Durkheim and Veblen isolated the economic sphere as the most important part of modern but not traditional societies; as influencing all other social institutions; and as most vulnerable to anomie and the predatory instinct. For example, both thinkers agree that the market mentality is far more influential than religious, family, traditional, educational or any other social institution. In fact, all these other, traditional social institutions gradually come to be run as if they were businesses or corporations, so that their traditional functions become less important at the same time that they take on the characteristics of business. Thus, Durkheim writes in *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*: “This lack of

organization in the business professions has one consequence of the greatest moment: that is, that in this whole sphere of social life, no professional ethics exist³². He is referring to the obvious fact, still extant today, that business “professionals” are motivated primarily by greed, self-interest, and unchecked ambition. An excellent illustration of this is found in the film, “Wall Street,” wherein the main protagonist, Gordon Gekko, declares “Greed is good.” Durkheim declares: “This amoral character of economic life amounts to a public danger³³. Durkheim makes it clear that this immoral, anomic tendency in economic life is “contagious” and spills over into other areas of society that are supposed to be altruistic and concerned with general well-being. For example, he writes, regarding scientific research:

Even science has hardly any prestige in the eyes of the present day, except in so far as it may serve what is materially useful, that is to say, serve for the most part the business professions.³⁴

Veblen illustrates Durkheim’s concerns especially in his book, *On the Higher Learning*, in which Veblen points out that schools and universities increasingly take on the predatory habits of the business world: administrators become more important than teachers, evaluations are based upon machine-like evaluations, the institutions are run for a profit, promotions and graduations are based upon competition much more than cooperation, and so on. All of his observations are relevant to understanding contemporary schools and universities. For example, football teams are emphasized over libraries because they bring in more money, and are also based upon predatory values. Professors live in a “publish or perish” atmosphere. Teachers must bring in “research grants” or other external money in order to be valued and promoted, because mere teaching is not considered “honorific.” Most science graduates in the United States take jobs that involve research for the government in some fashion, and most of this research is devoted to making weapons. Mills was right to connect Veblen’s writings to the hidden realities of the military-industrial complex and the power elite. I leave it to the reader to find other contemporary examples of Veblen’s insights.

³² Emile Durkheim, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*. London: Routledge, [1950] 1983, p.9.

³³ Durkheim, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, p.12.

³⁴ Durkheim, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, p.11.

The parallel books in Durkheim's opus are *Moral Education* and *The Evolution of Educational Thought*. In both works, Durkheim decries the anomie that has been imported from the business world into schools, which leads to lack of emotional attachment, lack of discipline, and lack of moral teachings that are necessary for societies to function. Let us be clear that Veblen thought that education *should* promote what he called "idle curiosity." Similarly, Durkheim believed that education should promote "spontaneous" emotional attachments to one's country, family, and workplace, and that these attachments were the basis for what he called "morality." Both seem to be refracting Schopenhauer and Darwin, who believed that the "will to life," if left to its own devices, will spontaneously seek out and find what it needs for collective survival. Both scholars lament that an over-emphasis on narrow, "machine-like" intellectualism leads to anomic or predatory variations of education and approaches to social life in general. Thus, Veblen writes: "So it has come about that modern civilization is in a very special degree a culture of intellectual powers, in the narrower sense of the term, in contrast with the emotional traits of human nature"³⁵. Again, the parallels to Durkheim are that in *Suicide*, he argues that modern education leads to anomie and higher suicide rates, and that in *The Division of Labor*, he argues that civilization in general leads to decreased unhappiness and increased social problems of many sorts.

It is important to avoid imposing an artificial taxonomy onto the writings of Durkheim and Veblen. In truth, both scholars offer similar grand theories in each and every one of their books, which, in turn, touch upon a multitude of topics and cultural patterns simultaneously. They implicitly promote Darwin's model of survival through cooperation at all times, and just as consistently, they criticize anomic and predatory perversions of Darwin's model. For example, Durkheim repeats his overall argument in *Suicide* that "in one sphere of social life, however—the sphere of trade and industry—it [anomie] is actually in a chronic state"³⁶. But he applies this insight to a host of other areas and institutions in social life which promote unbridled consumerism, ranging from a "thirst for novelties" to dissatisfaction with one's marriage partner. In all these cases, "inextinguishable thirst is constantly renewed torture"³⁷. The business model, which enshrines Nietzsche's maxim of the will to power—that an

³⁵ Veblen, 2003, p.56

³⁶ Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, New York: Free Press, [1897] 1951, p.254.

³⁷ Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, p.247.

increase in wants and desires is good in itself—spills over into other arenas of social life: “A thirst arises for novelties, unfamiliar pleasures, nameless sensations, all of which lose their savor once known”³⁸. In general, Durkheim holds to Darwin’s and Schopenhauer’s maxim that “no living being can be happy or even exist unless his needs are sufficiently proportions to his means”³⁹. But herein lies the rub: the modern world is more oriented toward Nietzschean *wants* as opposed to Darwinian *needs*. It is beyond the scope of this essay to do justice to Durkheim’s deep and complex discussion of human and animal nature versus modern, anomic perversions of human needs in *Suicide*, *The Division of Labor*, *Professional Ethics*, and other books. I urge the reader to read these discussions in the context of interpreting Darwin through the lens of Schopenhauer versus Nietzsche. In general, Durkheim’s conclusion still rings true today: “Government, instead of regulating economic life, has become its tool and servant”⁴⁰.

Like Durkheim, Veblen was essentially writing the same book throughout his many books. Each of his books touches on a multitude of topics ranging from pets, religion, sports, war, education and so on because he consistently follows the same model. Following Darwin, Veblen seems to agree that for animals as well as humans in traditional societies, the distance between *needs* and *wants* is very small. Animals and traditional humans generally want what they need, and therefore do not waste. The development of the brain and its mental functions gives rise to the “need” for prestige associated with conspicuously wasteful and therefore “honorific”⁴¹ objects of desire. It is important to reflect carefully on Veblen’s precise definition of “waste” in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*:

It is here called “waste” because this expenditure does not serve human life or human well-being on the whole, not because it is waste or misdirection of effort or expenditure as viewed from the standpoint of the individual consumer who chooses it.⁴²

Clearly, Veblen’s assessment has a Durkheimian as well as Darwinian tone to it. Veblen is saying that the conspicuous consumption, conspicuous leisure, and

³⁸ Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, p.256.

³⁹ Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, p.246.

⁴⁰ Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, p.255.

⁴¹ It is important to note that Veblen uses “honorific” as a synonym for predatory and aggressive: “A honorific act is in the last analysis little if anything else than a recognized successful act of aggression” Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, p.17.

⁴² Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, p.98.

conspicuous waste—all of which are interrelated for him—that characterize all aspects of modern life are harmful to human life on the whole. He is more concerned with the general lack of “cooperation” involved in “wasting” effort and expenditure on “useless” behaviors and goods than with how such activities might benefit an individual’s will to power. Thus, the rampant consumerism involved in the useless consumption of fine cigars, whiskies, beer, silk stockings, pets, and other “honorific” goods all signify the eruption of the “predatory instinct” for him. Overall, his moralism and insistence on living a life wherein wants and needs are in sync with each other is very similar to Durkheim’s sense of morality. Note that by “morality” they are implying a compassionate, caring, altruistic concern for the welfare of all human life, not just one’s self.

Furthermore, Veblen emphasizes the conspicuous nature of consumption. Fine foods, wines, and other consumer goods must be seen by others in order to give one fleeting satisfaction. Without a doubt, Veblen was describing collective narcissism, and foreshadowing Riesman’s other-directed type, who is always and at all times keenly aware of the gaze of others in everything they do.⁴³ The important point is that Veblen links the waste of conspicuous consumption in everyday life to similar behaviors by corporations. In his other books, he criticizes salesmanship, advertising, the use of credit, and “sabotage” in industry as common practices that are wasteful in his sense of the term (detrimental to humanity as a whole).⁴⁴ Each and every one of these insights is more relevant today than in his time. For example, he forecast correctly that “salesmanship” would expand into the realm of the predatory class getting “something for nothing,” which is evidenced by high-tech trades on stock exchanges which create huge profits but zero value due to the use of computers. Veblen could not have known that computers would be able to buy and sell stocks in fractions of seconds with the sole aim of making a profit that old-fashioned trades could not achieve. But he was right about the principle of “salesmanship,” in its broadest sense, as obtaining benefits through exaggerating future earning power, qualities in a product, or the use of other half-truths and spin. He was right to point out that advertisements take up more space in newspapers than actual news stories without adding value to society. He was correct that the use of credit creates false value and benefits the “captains of industry” at the cost of exploiting the

⁴³ Stjepan Mestrovic, *Thorstein Veblen on Theory, Culture and Society*, London: Sage, 2003.

⁴⁴ See Veblen

masses, who are perceived as the prey. Nowadays, banks charge interest rates that have surpassed traditional understandings of usury. Veblen understood “sabotage” as the willful refusal to exert effort by labor as well as corporations with the aim of harming the other side. It seems impossible to imagine animals using “sabotage” in this sense, or it serving any useful functions in terms of Darwinian survival. But it is abundantly clear that corporations, oil cartels and other “captains of industry” deliberately withhold production for the sake of profit as a routine part of business practices. I leave it to the reader to find other illustrations of Veblen’s points.

All social phenomena are connected to all other social phenomena for Durkheim and Veblen, with an anomic and predatory business culture at the apex. Similarly, they treat warfare as both the conventional understanding of war and also as an extended practice in all social institutions. I urge the reader to self-consciously seek out Durkheim’s use of “warfare” with reference to business and labor, in families, among families (as in the vendetta), and other refractions of vengeance. Durkheim cites the Bible to illustrate the “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” mentality which does *not* disappear in modern societies. For Durkheim, the “forced” division of labor is a form of violence and warfare that occurs daily in the modern workplace. Durkheim writes: “For the division of labor to engender solidarity, it is thus not sufficient for everyone to have his task; it must also be agreeable to him”⁴⁵. One should perform the thought-experiment of wondering how many contemporary workers feel that their jobs and work environments are agreeable or disagreeable to them, in all sense of those terms. Durkheim insists that, ideally, the worker “is not therefore a machine who repeats movements the sense of which he does not perceive”⁴⁶.

Similarly, Veblen links warfare to a host of other social institutions, all of which are subsumed under the predatory instinct. For example, he describes the close alignment of religions with war by referring to “the barbarian conception of the divinity as a warlike chieftain inclined to an overbearing manner of government”⁴⁷. He illustrates this with a popular American religious hymn: “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; He hath loosed the fateful

⁴⁵ Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, p.311.

⁴⁶ Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, p.308.

⁴⁷ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, p.303.

lightning of his terrible swift sword; His truth is marching on”⁴⁸. Furthermore, he connects warfare to predatory habits in sports, business, fashion, and other aspects of social life. For example, he observes that military uniforms are “useless” for combat but that they exhibit “conspicuous consumption” and prestige by virtue of polished brass buttons, medals, ornamental caps, and other details that reflect the “useless” yet conspicuously expensive business suit.

In general, Veblen literally depicts warfare—in both senses, as orthodox war and as a general tendency in predatory culture—as madness. Referring to World War I, Veblen wrote: “The current situation in America is by way of being something of a psychiatric clinic”⁴⁹. His several books on Imperial Germany and Japan, and *The Nature of Peace*, focus on the irrationality of war by virtue of its antithesis to the need for cooperation that is the fundamental basis for human survival. For example, Veblen writes:

Taken in the large, the common defense of any given nation become a detail of the competitive struggle between rival nationalities animate with a common spirit of patriotic enterprise and led by authorities constituted for this competitive purpose.⁵⁰

For this reason, Veblen abhorred all patriotism as “useless” and potentially dangerous, because it keeps the population ready for war at any time. Similarly, Durkheim decried “narrow nationalism”⁵¹ whose only logical outcome was war.

Conclusions

I have used William James’s concept of vicious abstractionism as a tool for understanding and hopefully, remedying, dysfunctional attitudes toward the works of Durkheim and Veblen. It would be a sad misunderstanding of my intentions if the reader were to replace the existing varieties of vicious abstractionism with new varieties based upon my reading of James. I have tried to show that Durkheim and Veblen are still relevant in the new millennium, and particularly with regard to the economy and war (broadly defined). Furthermore, their concepts of anomie and the barbarian temperament,

⁴⁸ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, p.304.

⁴⁹ in Mestrovic, *Thorstein Veblen on Theory, Culture and Society*, p.129

⁵⁰ in Mestrovic, *Thorstein Veblen on Theory, Culture and Society*, p.110.

⁵¹ Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, p.222.

respectively, hold common ground with each other, and may be related to numerous contemporary, social problems. I have also traced the conceptualizations of Durkheim and Veblen from Parsons to Giddens to suggest that some readings of them are productive and useful, while other approaches are aggressive and dismissive. Overall, I have suggested that the scholar is not immune from the aggression and war-like spirit that has consumed the twentieth century outside of academia. Following Durkheim, I have suggested that scholars, too, wage “total wars” on each other and on ideas. I conclude that cooperative approaches to ideas and scholarship, what I have termed compassionate intellectualism, might be more in line with readings of Darwin, Veblen, and Durkheim which suggest that the struggle for survival, in general and also with regard to ideas, is enhanced through cooperation.