The Generic Ends of Life: Their Place in Social Analysis[1]

Erik Dean

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Abstract

Institutional economics concerns itself with the analysis of the 'nature and causes of the growth of institutions,' taking the settled habit of thought, or institution, as its basic unit of analysis. An indispensable component of this method is the Veblenian dichotomy, by which institutions are understood in terms of their instrumental and ceremonial characteristics. As Tilman (2004) has correctly noted, this distinction ultimately falls on the relationship of these institutions to the 'generic ends of life;' what these ends are, however, has been left largely unexamined. This paper argues that the generic ends of life constitute the intrinsic needs and proclivities common to mankind—that is, human health and human nature. With this methodological argument in hand, it is argued that institutional economics should be directed at understanding settled habits of thought in terms of their role in constraining and enabling the satisfaction of needs and the expression of intrinsic propensities. Moreover, questions of human nature and health are ultimately empirical matters, requiring a transdisciplinary approach. Finally, contemporary work in social psychology is discussed as it relates to basic psychological needs, the similarities of this literature to Veblen, and the implications of such for social analysis.

I. - Introduction

Institutional economics concerns itself with a broad-based inquiry into the "nature and causes of the growth of institutions," (Veblen 1914: 2; see Twomey 1998 for further remarks). In sharp contrast to orthodox economic theory's pecuniary myopia and mulish adherence to 'rationality,'[2] the institutional approach has always been open to alternative views and developments in outside disciplines. Moral science, Dewey wrote, is not a separate province from physiology, psychology, chemistry, or any of the other areas of human knowledge. Rather, "it is physical, biological and historic knowledge placed in a human context where it will illuminate and guide the activities of men," (Dewey 1922: 295-6). This chapter will argue that this 'transdisciplinary' approach is a requirement of social analysis in terms of institutions, and that such necessarily follows from the application of Veblenian dichotomy.

[1] The author is immensely indebted to the members of the workgroup, both faculty and student (as discussed in the preface of this volume), not only for helpful comments in the writing and revision processes, but to a considerable extent for much of the foundational conceptual work as well. All errors, misunderstandings, and inconsistencies are, of course, mine.

[2] *Cf*. Stanfield, Carroll, and Wrenn (2007, esp. pp. 251-3) regarding Polanyi's treatment of the 'economistic fallacy' and the subject of institutional analysis.

As Tilman (2004) has noted, the analysis of institutions in terms of ceremonial and instrumental[3] characteristics must ultimately make reference to their relationship to the 'generic ends of life.' In the following this term is taken to denote those processes which our best understanding of humans suggests is in line with healthy functioning. Naturally, human health spans the consideration of many scientific disciplines— radioactivity in physics, and metabolism in biochemistry and physiology are only a couple of examples. This paper, however, will look at recent research in basic psychological needs. While this focus is not intended to diminish the importance of some of the most pressing social issues as they concern human health, a look to intrinsic needs at the psychological level affords a number of interesting insights important to institutional analysis.

First, research in the social psychology literature under the heading 'self-determination theory' can illuminate a number of areas of contemporary social customs and values in terms of the impact on health and well-being. This work, moreover, is surprisingly consistent with the analytical method of Veblen and other key figures in institutional economics—particularly as regards the Veblenian dichotomy and its relation to the 'generic ends of life.' Second, this psychological literature may help us to understand what is herein termed the 'analytical circle' of human behavior. Here, the analysis begins with an exposition of innate, species-typical propensities; these are Veblen's instincts or Dewey's impulses, and they are an essential component of an evolutionary theory of human nature. Moving around the circle, and as Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922) best explains, these impulses are organized through habit, including the 'habit of intelligence,' which then forms the basis for institutional structure. These institutions, in turn, return us to the origin of the circle through their consequences on people. These consequences are understood in terms of human health and well-being, which, it will be argued, constitutes the flip-side of human nature *qua* innate propensities or 'instincts.'

[3] It should be noted at the outset that 'instrumental' in the institutionalist tradition (see, e.g. Junker 1981) is used in a very different way than elsewhere. Particular to the content of this paper, the meaning of 'instrumental' herein should not be confused with the distinction between instrumental, or extrinsically motivated, activities (as contrasted with intrinsically motivated behavior, enjoyable in its own right) in the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) literature. In the institutionalist terminology, 'instrumental' is used to delineate those characteristics of institutions that promote the life process, which, at the psychological level, involves the satisfaction of intrinsic needs; whereas, in the SDT literature the term refers to those values or goals serving some more basic goal or value, which may in fact thwart intrinsic needs (see Ryan, Huta, and Deci 2008). Thus, it would appear that the term has almost perfectly opposite meanings. Again, the meaning intended herein is in the institutionalist tradition.

Through this framework, we may analyze the ceremonial and instrumental characteristics of institutions in terms of their effects in enabling and constraining the expression of human capacities and the satisfaction of human needs. Section two of this chapter discusses the Veblenian dichotomy and institutions as here conceived, in a 'transdisciplinary' approach. Section three provides an introduction to the self-determination theory research on basic psychological needs, relating such work to Veblen's own. The final section discusses the more general implications of this framework for social analysis.

II. - The Veblenian Dichotomy, Needs, and Integrated Social Theory

The Veblenian Dichotomy is a tool for analyzing the character of institutions from an evolutionary perspective. Through the lens of the dichotomy, institutions are viewed in terms of their initial development and dissemination for instrumental purposes, followed by the collection of vested interests in their perpetuation regardless of their general benefit to society. As our understanding of our world advances, these 'vested interests' resist change to better methods of coordinating the behavior of people toward each other and the material world. The habits of thought to which these interests come to cling are then said to take on a ceremonial character in their ineptitude in maintaining and promoting the general standard of living, as compared to the potential of human understanding. That is, while the state of the community's knowledge *could* afford a greater general well-being than is currently enjoyed, the presence of these 'imbecile institutions,' these unconstructive, deleterious, or inefficient habits of thought, impedes the realization of such potential (see Throntveit 2008, esp. pp. 528-9). Accordingly, extant institutions tend to have both instrumental and ceremonial properties, and the Veblenian analytical tool is held as a dichotomy of historically developed characteristics, rather than a dualism of *either* instrumental *or* ceremonial institutions.

This brief description, which it is hoped the reader finds fairly intuitive, involves a number of less apparent but still quite important implications. First, the use of the word 'better' denotes the presence of a value theory with regard to the efficiency with which patterns of behavior promote instrumental outcomes.[4] This instrumental character, to which the aforementioned ceremonial character of any given habit of thought is contrasted, necessarily

[4] For further discussion of value theory in the institutionalist tradition, see Webb in this volume.

involves a judgment by the community that ultimately rests on the maintenance or advancement of the 'life process' (Tilman 2004). The life process in turn implies that humans, as all living things, have certain needs, the fulfillment of which—though mediated by habit—is the general driving mechanism behind our behavior. Following an analytical approach to society (or living systems in general) in terms of evolving, self-reproducing, and self-augmenting systems, characterized by emergent properties, processes, and entities, we may expect that these needs span not only the physiological, but also into the psychological. As such, identifying the human needs, the 'generic ends of life,' that form the bedrock of the life process further suggests that a transdisciplinary approach—in which the traditional lines separating subjects and postulates by discipline are traversed—is a requisite for social theory. That is, in order to understand institutions in terms of the people who hold and are affected by them, we must understand their relation to people in terms of both human nature and human health. This necessarily involves all 'disciplines' whose subjects touch on these issues. As such, the general topic of needs and scientific disciplines is handled first.

In the ongoing work of scientific inquiry disciplines have been defined, differentiated, isolated, and synthesized for any number of reasons practical and political. While Wilson (1998, esp. 11) heralds the natural sciences for continually blurring disciplinary boundaries and promoting a theoretical coherence he terms consilience, Ross (1991) analyzes the development and compartmentalization of the social sciences in terms of the larger ideological controversies of class conflict, social progress and harmony, and so on. Further examples should not be difficult to find.

To be sure, libraries have been written in the history of science, and controversies regarding a theoretical unity will continue long into the future. For present purposes however it need only be posited that we find the world to be a complex of ongoing processes in time, that these processes are generally found to be emergent—that is, ontologically irreducible—phenomena defined by the relationships of their constituent entities, and that the analysis of such in contemporary science has been divided into disciplines, for better or worse. Digestion, for instance, is a physiological process involving certain chemical, physical, and mechanical processes; but which, for animals such as humans, generally also requires certain social relationships toward procuring, distributing, and consuming food. These relationships, in turn, often manifest in settled habits of thought, or institutions, which are social phenomena.

The concept of emergence would therefore suggest an 'ontology of levels' as an analytical tool with which to approach the world (Emmeche et al. 1997). Here, the sociological analysis could be placed 'on top' of the psychological, which in turn could rest on neurological, physiological, and biological analyses, and so on down to the physical (see also Sheldon 2004: 17, fig. 2.1 and discussion). It should be cautioned, however, that while the human being, for example, as an emergent phenomenon is no less real than its constituent atoms, cells, organs, &c. the hierarchical arrangement of these is not to be taken as anything more than an analytical device. Inquiry does not come to a world neatly arranged for us in terms of successively baser entities to which we can reduce the more complex; and the evolutionary nature of the world forbids the reification of a static hierarchy and the 'universal laws' that it might purport to offer. Moreover, this 'hierarchy' should not suggest that any level is more important than another or that the scientific inquiry of any level is more authoritative or 'closer to the truth' (*cf*. Emmeche et al.1997: 94-6). To avoid this, the term 'resolution' is preferred over 'level.'[5] In this manner we can work from the lower resolution of, e.g., the social institution to the higher resolution of the psychological processes involved and back again as it fits our explanatory needs. One purpose of this approach is to show the possibility and necessity of building coherence between the disciplines (Twomey 1998). Thus, far from an invidious comparison of the sciences, this paper will argue for the importance of understanding the interconnected nature of the world—a concept intimately related to the 'life process' in institutional analysis.

Arranging the subject of inquiry into interconnected processes emerging from constituent entities and their relationships exposes the importance of the interrelated nature of events at one resolution, level, or area of inquiry to events at other resolutions. This in combination with the method of abduction[6] suggests that the elaboration of a theory involves continual identification of processes and hypotheses to explain why things are as they are in terms of their causal and constitutional relationships within and across resolutions. Proceeding in our analysis from the subject to its constituents, we find a mandate of coherence from one resolution to the next (e.g. from the social to the psychological). Just as our understanding of contemporary processes

[5] These I suspect would not be a necessary qualifications were it not for arguments such as can be found in Wilson (1998) that do in fact appear to privilege the natural sciences over the others (*cf.* Sheldon 2004: 15-16).
[6] The abductive method is here taken from Classical Pragmatism (see Webb 2007: 1074-6); however, I believe very similar arguments could be drawn from the Critical Realist tradition utilized by many heterodox economists.

ought to agree[7]—or perhaps, not disagree—with our understanding of how these developed through time (and vice versa), these processes must also be verified through our understanding of the lower relations from which they emerge.

Likewise, looking from constituent parts to emergent properties, entities, &c., the abductive method would have us identify a process or relationship at one resolution of analysis and ask 'what relationships or processes, with regard to its constituents, are allowing this to exist?' And it is at this point that a working concept of *needs* emerges. Here, needs are those relationships and circumstances which must be present for the observed processes to function. Thus, the biological processes that constitute a plant do not occur without the chemical process of photosynthesis; which, in turn, does not occur without light; which, in turn, is driven by the thermonuclear processes of the sun. All of these are, following Veblen's term, tied up with the 'life process' of the plant. To say that these relationships and circumstances *must* be present is not to say that they are the one and only configuration. On the contrary the possibility of multiple states producing an emergent phenomenon is an important part of the explanatory autonomy of emergent phenomena (Bedau 2003). Thus, the plant can survive without sunlight if we put it under a lamp; however, we would hope that in the process of inquiry moving the plant under a lamp and identifying the plant's need for light would follow, the one from the other.

From this definition of needs, and recognizing in the Darwinian tradition that humans are simply another form of natural living organism (Webb 2007), it follows that *the life process entails certain needs which are defined at the psychological level and below, and are fulfilled or not fulfilled* via *these and higher levels—particularly, the social levels with which economics, sociology, &c. are traditionally concerned.* This framework is found to be very much in accord with the institutionalist tradition concerning the Veblenian Dichotomy and the 'generic ends of life.' In his analysis of the intellectual commonalities of Veblen, Dewey, and C. Wright Mills, Tilman notes the importance of Veblen's rejection of the neoclassical and classical Marxist theories of value in favor of one based on the 'generic ends of life,' which in the Darwinian tradition implies "the existence of some transcultural set of values…embedded in workmanship, parenthood and intellectual curiosity," (Tilman 2004: 6). "In the final analysis," Tilman (2004: 8) continues, the distinctions made by way of the Veblenian dichotomy "can only be ascertained

[7] This is an explicit rejection to a common argument in economics (see, e.g., Machlup 1946) that the realism of the fundamental assumptions of a theory is unimportant. (See also Simon 1979.)

by reference to these ends." In short, as inquiry is done *of* people *by* people (if we may assume that theoreticians are people) then the valuing process involved in inquiry must ultimately fall on the efficiency or lack thereof with which peoples' needs are met. We have in all the disciplines of science the means to begin the effort of understanding society in terms of this efficiency of maintaining and promoting the life process.

The institutionalist approach then does not simply find interdisciplinary discourse an interesting line of inquiry; rather it *requires* such discourse in order to understand its subject. Thus, while this chapter discusses possible connections between institutional economics and social psychology, other aspects of the structure within which humanity is built should not be neglected. The physiological needs of the sick or starving across the globe and the ill ecological consequences of our system of industrial production should be enough to make this point clear.

The second implication of the short description of the Veblenian Dichotomy that began this section concerns social stratification. To point, the interests that resist the abandonment, curtailment, or modification of existing institutions usually affect different groups within the community differently. This in turn implies the division of the community into groups based on the myriad distinctions in their roles and activities—as exemplified by Veblen's (1904) analysis of the engineer and machine process versus the 'undertaker' and business enterprise. The processes by which an institution accrues ceremonial properties thus tends also to stratify society along the same instrumental-ceremonial lines.

This brief exposition is very much in line with Bowles (this volume). The institutional approach allows for an integrated theory of the classical dimensions of stratification (power, wealth, and prowess) and a means of analyzing their historical development. It is the purpose of this paper to further explicate how institutional economics can understand these institutions in terms of individual action and with explicit and systematic attention given to human needs as a central part of the life process. Such requires an understanding of the Veblenian Dichotomy as applied to the finer resolution of discrete and identifiable patterns of the behavior of individuals, particularly toward others. This in turn requires consideration of Veblen's definition of 'invidious,' Commons' definition of 'institutions,' and the social psychology literature concerning psychological needs and goals.

A key focus in Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* was the institutions according to which people rate their own inherent value against the value of others and *vice versa*:

> Wherever the circumstances or traditions of life lead to an habitual comparison of one person with another in point of efficiency, the instinct of workmanship works out in an emulative or invidious comparison of persons. (Veblen 1899a: 9-10)

The instinct of workmanship has been discussed elsewhere in this volume and will be further considered shortly. For present purposes we will focus on Veblen's explicit definition of 'invidious.' The term, he explained,

> is used in a technical sense as describing a comparison of persons with a view to rating and grading them in respect of relative worth or value—in an aesthetic or moral sense—and so awarding and defining the relative degrees of complacency with which they may legitimately be contemplated by themselves and by others. An invidious comparison is a process of valuation of persons in respect of worth. (Veblen 1899: 22)

The 'technical sense' in which the term is used implies that Veblen's analysis is grounded in the particular behaviors of individuals toward others (though it is surely not resigned to such—looking on the whole at the evolution of larger and more complex institutions). Thus, the divisions of society into inferior and superior identities or groups—viz. the processes creating inequality and stratification—are rooted quite clearly in the invidious habits of the members of society (*Cf.* Sturgeon, Bowles, and Jumara 1997).

Without belaboring the point much further it is well to note this argument's importance in reestablishing the invidious habit of thought to the level of the instrumental habit of thought in the analytical dichotomy. As Horner has noted (in discussion of J. Ron Stanfield), "the Veblenian dichotomy is often misunderstood. The ceremonial function is not just ritual behavior that retards progress; rather, it is more often an expression or a reinforcement of invidious uses of power," (in Dugger (ed.) 1996). That is, the invidious comparison is an actual, purposeful, and identifiable behavior that is, moreover, at the heart of the ceremonial branch of the dichotomy as applied to the actions of people toward each other.

This point is found to be an extension of Bowles's analysis as presented in Figure 2 of his work in this volume. The differentiation therein between Instrumental and Pseudo-Instrumental alignments makes explicit the instrumental nature of all institutions *as perceived by* the actors engaged in the knowing and valuing associated with these institutions. Thus, for instance, the conspicuous display of possessions or leisure time may be quite necessary for a person given the social circumstances in which he finds himself—even if it proves an ultimately unfulfilling

activity. The arguments laid out in the paragraphs immediately above are thus in agreement in positing the invidious comparison as a *purposeful—that is perceived instrumental—*action of valuing humans. Invidious comparisons and emulative behavior thus constitute a key set of social activities and relationships in social stratification. Moreover, this approach allows for the explanation of inequality where the absence of a 'class consciousness' is salient. That is, the 'settled habits of thought' that are common to people on both sides of a socioeconomic cleavage are commonly of the nature of these invidious comparisons and emulative behavior. They are simply a way of acting, or valuing, the result of the institutional evolution of a society; and we would not expect, in the absence of another mitigating factor, that the classes derived thereby would develop a solidarity or 'class consciousness.'

Commons defined institutions as follows:

> If we endeavor to find a universal circumstance, common to all behavior known as institutional, we may define an institution as collective action in control, liberation and expansion of individual action…. Collective action ranges all the way from unorganized custom to the many organized going concerns, such as the family, the corporation, the trade association, the trade union, the reserve system, the state. The principle common to all of them is greater or less control, liberation and expansion of individual action by collective action. (Commons 1931: 649)

With the earlier discussion of 'needs' in hand we can turn our focus to this definition of institutions with specific reference to the 'control, liberation and expansion of individual action'—or, if it may be put more simply without losing too much, the role of settled habits of thought in enabling and constraining human action.

To point, accepting that people are motivated toward various ends-in-view, we may begin to see that the habits organizing their action toward arriving at these goals can be understood in terms of either promoting or retarding the realization of these goals. These habits could thus, on first pass, be characterized as instrumental or ceremonial (or non-instrumental) in accordance with their role in enabling or constraining the individual in coming to his or her end-in-view. Further distinctions could be drawn as subsets of the basic dichotomy with regard to the subject on which the individual acts: habits regarding non-human things that enable successful action are termed 'industrial arts,' whereas those concerning interaction with other people are termed 'arts

of associated living;' likewise, on the ceremonial (non-instrumental) side, in which habits impede the realization of goals, 'ceremony' and the 'invidious distinction' could be used for the non-human/human (respectively) distinction.

If we were to stop here, however, the analytical dichotomy would be dangerously incomplete. Classifying those habits of thought that are 'instrumental' (in the common sense of the term) versus 'ceremonial' or ineffective to the individual without regard for 1) the basis of that motivation, and 2) the impact of the correlated action on others, leaves us with nothing more than a device with which to compare rational *versus* irrational, sane *versus* insane, behavior at the individual level. To the contrary, the analytical dichotomy as conceived in terms of enabling and constraining individual action necessarily requires, first an understanding of the institutional evolution responsible for the end-in-view; second, the possibility of conflicting ends-in-view when multiple parties are involved; and finally, the implications for the needs or 'generic ends of life' of all of those affected by the action. A fuller statement tying Veblen's dichotomy and Common's definition of institutions can be found in Dewey:

> Our moral measure for estimating any existing arrangement or any proposed reform is its effect upon impulse and habits. Does it liberate or suppress, ossify or render flexible, divide or unify interest? (Dewey 1922: 293-4)

Liberation and suppression of basic psychological proclivities, or satisfaction of their correlated desires, will be the focus of this paper; however, further work will require also a deeper understanding of the instrumental-ceremonial dichotomy in terms of the flexibility of habit, the expansion of technical capabilities, the alignment of purposes, the fostering of intelligent thought, and all other facets of human living.

It could perhaps be said then that, while the dichotomy can be understood at the individual level or resolution, it cannot be isolated in any meaningful way from a broader, perhaps 'ecological,' understanding of the system of cause and effect in which all action is embedded. Thus for instance, salient features of the employment or occupation structure include the skills required to efficiently carry out given jobs and the discrimination that prevents certain people from holding certain positions. The former involves the cooperation of individuals (perhaps on-site training as an example) allowing each to accomplish their goals. The latter, while *enabling* the employer to define the composition of his employees in terms of race, gender,

and so on,[8] *constrains* the applicant from taking the job for which he is qualified other than in the dimension or dimensions of identity to which the employer takes exception.

However, it must be understood that the social processes with which analysis is generally concerned involve many iterations of these actions. For example, "the possession of wealth," Veblen (1899: 17) wrote, "confers honour; it is an invidious distinction." At the resolution of analysis expounded above, the actual possession of material wealth may involve any number of discrete habits which may have no particularly ceremonial or constraining properties; but it likely also involves ceremonial action toward these materials, toward the promotion of an invidious comparison between the wealth holder and others in the community. As a brief example, the construction of a façade on a man's house may involve the industrial knowledge necessary to effectively build the thing, while at the same time its primary function may be a display of wealth, sophistication, and perhaps other forms of prowess—each of which entails an accepted habit of valuing those people with the means to make such displays as fundamentally of greater 'worth' than those without such means (viz. an invidious distinction).

All of this may appear tedious or trite. Certainly we do not need to examine the minutia of every social behavior to identify those habits of thought that are harming or hindering the life process of the community. Just the same, analysis at this higher resolution may be useful if for no other reason than to know that, where there is confusion in the complexities of social processes, we have recourse to the particular habits involved in the creation and perpetuation of these processes. Moreover, it makes explicit the place of invidious distinctions and emulative behavior as purposeful actions which, as will be discussed in subsequent sections, necessarily prevent some, and perhaps all, individuals from fulfilling their basic needs.

To recapitulate, scientific analysis of social institutions will eventually require an understanding of the influence from and on human behavior, nature, and health. However intensely the social sciences may try to avoid these matters, they are inseverably joined with the life process of the human species. The Veblenian dichotomy is an analytical tool that has been passed through a century of institutionalists precisely for understanding these connections. The framework presented here is an attempt to explicate some of the implicit methods and arguments

[8] The employer's perception of this behavior may thus be instrumental; however, the key point is that it is not instrumental to all parties involved. See Bowles's discussion of pseudo-instrumentality in this volume.

of this tradition—specifically with regard to the relationship between the instrumental and ceremonial characteristics of institutions and the 'generic ends of life.'

Finally, this framework allows us to begin a discourse between institutional economics and contemporary social psychology which has for the most part been lacking. Particularly, this approach may permit us to begin a systematic examination of social processes in terms of their relationship to psychological propensities and needs. This in turn will shed light on the meaning of the 'generic ends of life' and its implications for the Veblenian dichotomy and social analysis. In preface to an excursion into the relatively uncharted areas between economics and psychology some 50 years ago, Hickman and Kuhn (1956) noted that such work was effectively a wager that at least *some* fruits would come of the attempt. Whether the approach given here will further our understanding of the social world is subject to the same unfortunate uncertainty.

III. - The Social Psychology of Veblen and Self-Determination Theory

Human needs have in the common sense been too often conceived primarily in terms of quantities of material things—a certain minimal caloric intake, adequate shelter, minimum wage, &c. In contrast we would be better served in developing our theory to consider needs as verbs or processes, not nouns or things; e.g., we do not have a need for food as such, but for the process of acquiring, eating, and metabolizing food for energy, which in turn is needed to continue activity (or living), part of which will in turn involve more eating, &c. This may help us to break from our tendency of thinking in terms of moving things (coal, food, money, information) between actors, and put in its place a focus on the processes[9]—the relationships through time—which will, in the bulk of the economist's work, amount to a focus on 'prevalent habits of thought' and baser proclivities of the individuals of a society. As Hill (1958: 134-6) correctly

[9] As an example directly relevant to the institutionalist literature, Davis (1944) expressed confusion as to what Veblen regarded as waste, suggesting that anything over a subsistence level of consumption was wasteful in Veblen's thinking. This suggests that the reader had not freed himself from understanding the concepts of consumption, waste, and so on in terms of quantities as opposed to processes. Where human needs and health are taken as complicated processes to be understood through scientific analysis in their complex and temporal nature, the notion of consumption and subsistence as nominal measures loses most of their import in social analysis.

Likewise, Geras has argued that,

> for all his well-known emphasis on the historical variability of human needs, he still conceives the variation as falling within some limits and those not just the limits of a bare subsistence. Even above subsistence level, too meager provision for, equally repression of, certain common needs will be the cause of one kind and degree of *suffering* or another. (Geras 1983: 73)

noted, Veblen argued in this manner for basing the value judgments inherent to social inquiry in the community's best knowledge of the life process.[10]

From this view then it should become apparent that 1) needs and instincts are in fact intimate and inseparable concepts, and 2) the theories of disciplines generally isolated from economics are vital to our own work. As such, I will discuss the contemporary work in personality and social psychology falling under the heading of Self-Determination Theory, which, holds an explicit and well-explored concept of basic psychological needs.

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) literature uses a number of concepts to define and elaborate psychological needs posited to be universal to humans. Kasser (2002: 24) defines a need as "something that is necessary to [a person's] survival, growth, and optimal[11] functioning."[12] Moreover, as argued by Deci and Ryan, these psychological needs mediate physiological needs (see also Cordes 2005). They contend that, contrary to drive theory, which is based in physiological needs and sees humans as passively driven, behaving only when there is a deficiency of need satisfaction, SDT is growth-oriented: people are not waiting to be out of equilibrium, they are "naturally inclined to act on their inner and outer environments, engage activities that interest them, and move toward personal and interpersonal coherence," (Deci and Ryan 2000: 230).

Kasser explains further:

> Just as a plant must have air, water, light, and a certain soil chemistry to survive and thrive, all people require certain 'psychological nutriments' for their health and growth. Furthermore, just as a plant turns toward light and reaches its roots down to find water and minerals, needs direct us to behave in ways that increase the likelihood that they will be satisfied. Thus needs motivate behavior and require fulfillment for psychological growth to occur. (Kasser 2002: 24)

Similarly, Sheldon (2004: 54) discusses the 'human universal' as "a psychological process, need, or tendency that is evidenced by every human being," (emphasis removed). "All humans," he

[10] *Cf.* discussions of Ayres's concept of 'the life process of mankind' in Junker (1981) and Rutherford (1981). Herein, the focus will be on those psychological aspects which, evidence suggests, constitute important facets of human nature and the implications of such for scientific inquiry. This, however, need not be divorced from the larger realm and 'richness' of scientific inquiry as understood through the principle of continuity (Junker 1981).

[11] Note, use of the term 'optimal' will be discussed shortly. For the time being it is worth cautioning that the term should not be understood as it is used in neoclassical economic theory.

[12] Compare to Deci and Ryan's definition (2000: 229), which also notes that these needs are not acquired, but innate. This article may also be of interest for a brief account of the history of needs in the psychology literature.

continues, "have the needs, but their cultures constrain them to obtain satisfaction in differing ways."

Thus, while needs in the SDT literature may generally be conceptualized in the common sense of the term, their links to the ongoing and purposeful activity of the individual—to the motivations behind, and consequences of, action—are explicitly considered throughout (see also Ryan, Huta, and Deci 2008). Moreover, the above quote from Sheldon recognizes that culture—which we may take for present purposes as 'settled habits of thought' in the Veblenian tradition—mediates the influence and fulfillment of these needs. That is, institutions enable and constrain, allow and suppress, the manifestation and realization of psychological needs inherent to all people.

When compared to Veblen's introductory discussion of instincts in his *Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts*, the similarities between SDT and institutional theory should become clear:

> [Instincts] are the prime movers in human behaviour, as in the behaviour of all those animals that show self direction or discretion. … Nothing falls within the human scheme of things desirable to be done except what answers to these native proclivities of man. These native proclivities alone make anything worth while, and out of their working emerge not only the purpose and efficiency of life, but its substantial pleasures and pains as well. (Veblen 1914: 1)

Veblen continued:

> These various native proclivities…have the characteristic in common that they all and several, more or less imperatively, propose an objective end of endeavour… [W]hat distinguishes one instinct from another is that each sets up a characteristic purpose, aim, or object to be attained, different from the objective end of other instincts. Instinctive action is teleological. (Veblen 1914: 3)

In Veblen, as in SDT, the analysis is a dynamic one of agential humans,[13] with recognition of the universal, organismic, transcultural, or instinctive bases common to everyone. It follows that needs in SDT and instincts in Veblen's work can be brought together in

[13] See also Veblen (1898: 389-91) for his discussion of human nature in which "it is characteristic of man to do something, not simply to suffer pleasures and pains through the impact of suitable forces," as in the standard economic psychology of both then and now.

understanding individuals and society in terms of experiences that people both commonly desire and are commonly motivated toward.[14]

The importance of understanding these experiences is nothing short of the importance of the 'generic ends of life' in Veblen's method of analysis. As Tilman explains, Veblen rejected the classical Marxist and neoclassical theories of value, favoring one based on the 'generic ends of life' which, in the post-Darwinian tradition, implied "the existence of some transcultural set of values…embedded in workmanship, parenthood and intellectual curiosity," (Tilman 2004: 6).[15] As discussed in the previous section, these values are necessarily the ultimate reference point in the application of the Veblenian dichotomy to social inquiry (Tilman 2004: 7-8).

Essentially the same issue—viz., of understanding what constitutes a 'good' or preferred way of living—has been an important component of the human potential movement in psychology, as exemplified by the work of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow (Sheldon 2004: 8). Rogers posited the 'fully functioning person,' in touch with his or her needs and capable of satisfying them as circumstances change. These needs are not just individual pleasure, but also involve relationships with others and society in general. Similarly, the crown of Maslow's hierarchy of needs was self-actualization, "the pinnacle of psychological health, the state attained by people motivated by growth, meaning, and aesthetics, rather than by insecurity and the attempt to fit in with what other people expect," (Kasser 2002: 7).

In this tradition Sheldon has advanced the concept of 'optimal human being.' By this term Sheldon does not mean to imply any particular person, or a particular 'optimal' person. Rather, the term is intended to denote "the empirically documented features that tend to

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[14] Cordes (2005) gives a somewhat different, perhaps more general or basic, but presumably compatible, definition of instincts in Veblen's work. Here, instincts are "present cognitive mechanisms focusing an individual on particular perception and generating impulses or actions in response to stimuli," (Cordes 2005: 11).

[15] This approach should not be taken to contravene all Marxian theory, or even Marx himself. Indeed, Norman Geras (1983) has argued convincingly that, contrary to popular reading, Marx did *not* reject the idea of an innate human nature; and, in fact, held the concept as an integral part of historical materialism:

> A concept of human nature, encompassing at once the common needs and the general and distinctive capacities of humankind, plays an important, a quite fundamental, explanatory role in accounting for those specifically human social relationships that are production relations, and for that specifically human type of process of change that is history. (Geras 1983)

Moreover, a number of other points at which Marx, Veblen, and SDT may be in agreement are salient—particularly in the areas of relatedness, autonomy and liberty (see Geras 1983: esp. p. 70, 73, 82-6), human development, and health beyond certain 'survival needs.' Substantial exploration of these connections must, unfortunately, be left for another time.

characterize high-quality human functioning."[16] 'Optimal' denotes not perfection, but "a reasonably successful and rewarding means of functioning, in the face of whatever circumstances one encounters." 'Human' denotes the existence and importance of a 'core human nature,' and 'being' denotes a "person's 'way' of being" as opposed to a "passive state or condition," (Sheldon 2004: 4-5).

That the question of what constitutes 'optimal human being' is an empirical—as opposed to self-evident, assumed, or 'revealed'—one is crucial; indeed, if it were otherwise, we could not claim to be doing scientific inquiry in the post-Darwinian or evolutionary tradition. On this point it is of acute importance to qualify Sheldon's use of 'optimal'—a term which likely has few rivals in its disquieting effect on heterodox economists. Optimal human being as it is considered here should *not* be taken to mean an ultimate and resolute criterion of value to which, by some supposedly scientific decree, the general life process tends to be or otherwise ought to be directed. Rather, each of these terms is intended to conceptualize processes of continued functioning and growth as opposed to stymied operation and arrested development—health as opposed to pathology (see Sheldon 2004: 12; and, for a more extensive discussion of the eudaimonic approach to wellness, Ryan, Huta, and Deci 2008). Thus, just as issues of neurological or physiological health and disease are ongoing empirical questions, so too are issues of psychological health given social considerations, or optimal human being.

With these prefatory remarks in mind we can turn to an explicit consideration of the sets of basic psychological needs examined in SDT, and their relationship to Veblen's instincts. Noting the ongoing controversies of which and how many needs are to be properly considered in a theory of basic psychological needs, Kasser argues for four sets[17] of needs: for 1) "safety,

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[16] Geras (1983: 99-100), again, makes much the same argument with regard to Marx's argument for an innate need for "breadth and variety of activity."

[17] That these are more or less general sets of needs rather than crystal clear distinctions is notable in light of Veblen's discussion of instincts:

> these simple and irreducible psychological elements of human behaviour fall into composite functional groups and so make up specific and determinate propensities, proclivities, and aptitudes that are within the purview of the social sciences to be handled as irreducible traits of human nature. Indeed it would appear that it is in the particular grouping and concatenation of these ultimate psychological elements into characteristic lines of interest and propensity that the nature of man is finally to be distinguished from that of the lower animals. (Veblen 1914: 3; see also pages 11-12 and 27-28)

That is, while the psychological architecture of needs, tropisms, instincts, and so on is surely of a more complex, interdependent, and shifting nature than such a simple classification would suggest, this method, as an analytical device, is nonetheless invaluable in considering this baser psychological content in relation to the broader social experience (see also Cordes 2005).

security, and sustenance," e.g., food, shelter, warmth; 2) "competence, efficacy, and self-esteem;" 3) connectedness with others; and 4) for "autonomy and authenticity," (Kasser 2002: 24).[18] For the purposes of this discussion the first set will be dropped and the latter three condensed to the terms used in Deci and Ryan (2000): *competence*, *relatedness*, and *autonomy* (respectively). As Deci and Ryan (2000: 229) note, these needs are taken over alternatives precisely because there is substantial evidence suggesting that their joint fulfillment is vital to health and development.[19] Considered as such, the connection between these needs and the 'generic ends of life' are further supported analytically as well as empirically. Each of the latter three sets will be discussed in turn, showing how surprisingly close they are to Veblen's instinct of workmanship, parental bent, and idle curiosity.

Following the earlier work of R. W. White, Deci and Ryan have argued that humans have a basic psychological need for competence, "a propensity to have an effect on the environment as well as to attain valued outcomes within it," (Deci and Ryan 2000: 231). Consistent with this, Kasser defines competence[20] as involving "a feeling that we are capable of doing what we set out to do and of obtaining the things we value," (Kasser 2002: 24). In addition to the evidence that fulfillment of this need is important for the mental and physical health of the individual, Deci and Ryan argue that we might expect competence to have been selected for in the course of human evolution. More specifically, "an interested, open, and learning organism can better adapt to new challenges in changing contexts," (Deci and Ryan 2000: 252).

On comparison we see part of Veblen's instinct of workmanship reflected in the notion of competence as a basic psychological need:

> The instinct of workmanship…occupies the interest with practical expedients, ways and means, devices and contrivances of efficiency and economy, proficiency, creative work and technological mastery of facts. (Veblen 1914: 33)

> By selective necessity [man] is endowed with a proclivity for purposeful action. He is possessed of a discriminating sense of purpose, by force of

[18] Kasser notes that these sets of needs are influenced by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, but avoids the controversial idea of ordering them in such a hierarchy (see Kasser 2002: n. 4, p. 121). Notes 5 through 8 in Kasser (2002: 122) also discuss the intellectual antecedents for each set of needs. No mention, however, is made of Veblen or Dewey.
[19] See also Kasser (2002: 10-1) for the correlation of satisfaction of these needs to both mental and physical health.
[20] Kasser includes self-esteem in the set of needs with competence. For present purposes I have omitted this, to be taken up later in this section.

> which all futility of life or of action is distasteful to him. (Veblen 1898a: 188-9)

Stated in the positive, Veblen's creativity and mastery may be identified with competence in the SDT literature with some facility.[21] Indeed, throughout Veblen's work the instinct of workmanship is considered the fundamental source of technological progress just as Deci and Ryan's evolutionary analysis places competence at the center of the human capacity to adapt to the material environment. On the negative side however, the aversion to waste and futility that is part and parcel to the instinct of workmanship may require more explanation. To point, we need to explore more fully the relation of these concepts to the community, as perceived by the individual.

While the instinct of workmanship is undoubtedly the primary native proclivity in Veblen's analysis, the 'parental bent' comes in a close second. As Veblen argued, both,

> spend themselves on much the same concrete objective ends, and the mutual furtherance of each by the other is indeed so broad and intimate as often to leave it a matter of extreme difficulty to draw a line between them. (Veblen 1914: 25-6)

Veblen is careful to note, however, that the parental bent or solicitude extends beyond a concern for the well-being of one's immediate family. Rather, this instinct involves also a concern for the welfare of the larger community or all of humanity. Moreover, it is the mutual reinforcement of the instinct of workmanship and the parental solicitude that Veblen credits as the source of "that sentimental approval of economy and efficiency for the common good and disapproval of wasteful and useless living that prevails so generally," (Veblen 1914: 27).

This is an opportune time to introduce the phrase "serviceability…for the life purposes of the community," (Veblen 1899: 418-9) and similar passages throughout Veblen's work. All of these, it is argued, denote the final arc in the analytical circle running from basic human psychological needs and proclivities to motivations, regulation, and behavior, through the institutions of culture, and back to their consequences for the needs of the individual constituents of the community.[22] Serviceability, the 'life process,' optimal human being, and so on all reflect empirical questions as to what constitutes the healthy functioning of human beings in the dual

[21] See Cordes (2005) for additional connections between Veblen's instinct of workmanship and contemporary research in the cognitive sciences.

[22] In this reading of Veblen I may be taking some liberties. Veblen tended to use the term 'life process' or 'life purposes' in conjunction with terms like 'collective' (see several instances in Veblen 1899a) which may have been intended to denote only the survival of the community, rather than the more specific issue of the fulfillments of individual needs in the community.

sense of our innate propensities *and* needs. That is, the approach outlined herein suggests that, e.g., the instinct of workmanship and the parental solicitude are species-typical impulses which learned habit mediates to produce behavior. This behavior in turn has consequences for the satisfaction or thwarting of our intrinsic needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy. These needs can thus be understood as the flip-side of our innate proclivities.[23] Our best understanding of these social processes and their relationship to intrinsic needs and proclivities is then an ultimate reference point in applying the Veblenian dichotomy to social analysis (more on this in the final section).

With regard to contemporary evidence suggesting a general concern for others, there is a good deal of support for this solicitude as a basic psychological element.[24] Indeed, Self-Determination Theory posits relatedness, the need "to be connected to people—to love and care, and to be loved and cared for," (Deci and Ryan 2000: 231), as an innate psychological need. While relatedness appears to take a number of different forms, including the focus on intimate personal relationships and "the assimilation and integration of oneself within the social community," (Deci and Ryan 2000: 242), Kasser's (2004) treatment is most relevant here. In the author's discussion of the relationship between materialistic values and psychological needs (to be discussed shortly) the concept of relatedness is dealt with in terms of interpersonal relationships as well as contributions to the community. This approach to relatedness is further buttressed by the cross-cultural work of Shalom Schwartz (1992), which finds that a solicitude for both those with whom one is in frequent contact and for all people are mutually compatible with each other and *in*compatible, or in conflict, with materialistic values (Kasser 2004; Schwartz 1994; see also Kasser et al. 2007a and 2007b for further discussion and references).[25]

The third and final psychological or organismic need is for autonomy—the "desire to self-organize experience and behavior and to have activity be concordant with one's integrated sense

[23] Perhaps the best statement of this is to be found not in discussion of Veblen, but in a discussion of Marx, in which Geras (1983) finds the 'nexus of (innate) needs and capacities' to be a central component of Marx's theory.

[24] *Cf.* Twomey (1998: 434 n.) who notes that "recent research from a number of disciplines is corroborating the idea of a 'cooperative instinct'…which roughly corresponds with Veblen's 'parental bent' and 'instinct of workmanship'.".

[25] While the values in Schwartz's work are distinguished from needs such as thirst (see Schwartz 1994: 20), they are, nonetheless, derived from the "universal requirements with which all individuals and societies must cope," that is, organismic needs, coordinated social interaction, and the survival of groups (Schwartz 1994). As regards the broad conception of relatedness discussed here, it is interesting to note that the sources of Schwartz's 'pro-social domain' of values of benevolence and universalism are found both in the requirements of group survival and organismic needs for affiliation and belongingness (Schwartz and Bilsky 1987).

of self," (Deci and Ryan 2000: 231; *Cf.* Self-direction in Schwartz 1994 and Schwartz and Bilsky 1987). A felt sense of agency in one's actions has been shown to have positive impacts on creativity, problem solving, and similar functions (Deci and Ryan 2000: 234). Moreover, it has been argued that such a need or proclivity is important for social interaction in allowing individuals to break free of culturally established habits of thought (Sheldon 2004: 173). It should be understood, however, that autonomy is not used here to denote individualism or independence from others. In fact, social connectedness and autonomy tend to be positively correlated, and to a high degree (Sheldon 2004: 70; Deci and Ryan 2000).

Satisfaction and thwarting of the needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence is important for the health of individuals and for their behavioral development. However, while the need for autonomy is less prevalent in empirical psychology (Deci and Ryan 2000) and generally more controversial (Sheldon 2004), it is nonetheless important, especially due to its unique place relative to the three needs as a group. As Deci and Ryan (2000) argue, humans have a natural tendency toward intrinsic motivation—that is, motivation toward those activities found to be interesting or fulfilling in themselves, without the imposition of external consequences. Likewise, people tend toward the integration or internalization of external regulations, seeking self-determination and authorship of their lives (Sheldon 2004: 10). Autonomy is important in this regard in that, while relatedness and competence can be fulfilled in the absence of autonomously motivated behavior, self-determination and its associated optimal outcomes require also that the behaviors which fulfill these needs are autonomous, emanating from the self, not from without (see Deci and Ryan 2000: 242-3).[26]

The matter of intrinsic *versus* extrinsic—or autonomous *versus* external—motivation is worthy of further discussion. The 'self-determination continuum' (Deci and Ryan 2000), or in Kasser's (2002: 82-3) term, the 'continuum of autonomy,' maps motivation and associated reasons behind our behavior on a dimension according to the degree to which the behavior is self-determined or to which the motivation is internal to the individual. Here the scale begins with highly external, *extrinsic motivation*, associated with extraneous (e.g. monetary) rewards and the avoidance of punishment. Moving along the gradient, *introjected regulation* is somewhat less external and associated with guilt, maintenance of self-esteem, and like processes.

[26] Geras notes a very similar notion in Marx's description of the laborer "deprived of 'all semblance of self-activity'," having his work "'forced upon him'," (Geras 1983: 73).

Somewhat internal, *identified regulation* involves activities that may not be pursued solely for inherent enjoyment, but are nonetheless endorsed as being in line with the person's values. Finally, *intrinsically motivated* behavior is fully internal and entails activity pursued for no other reason than that it is interesting, enjoyable, or challenging in its own right (Kasser 2002).[27]

The extent to which one's goals are self-concordant—that is, gathered on the latter, more internal side of the continuum—is argued to reflect how well these goals represent the person's basic needs. This self-concordance[28] of goals has been shown to have significant independent effects on endurance of effort in pursuance of these goals, goal attainment, need satisfaction, and a number of measurements of psychological health (Sheldon 2004: 104-9). It can therefore be said that the pursuance of intrinsically motivated activities and the internalization or integration of some external regulations are important components of the life process.

There are, however, a number of more explicit points on which the continuum of autonomy is directly relatable to the literature in institutional economics. First, Veblen's 'idle curiosity' is notable for being pursued for no particular 'utilitarian aim' (Veblen 1914: 88)—that is, as in the direction of activity by intrinsic motivation, the nature of man's pursuit of knowledge is 'idle' in that it is done for its own sake, its own enjoyment.[29] Indeed, while it would appear a curiosity in its own right that Veblen did not explicitly note the intrinsic or 'idle' nature of *all* of his 'instincts,' it could be argued that this nature was actually part and parcel to his concept of humans as proactive, growth-oriented creatures (as discussed above).[30]

Second, intrinsic motivation and autonomy have direct implications for the analysis of institutions as enabling and constraining individual action as discussed in the previous section. Understanding the common habits of thought of a society in terms of the autonomous *versus* controlled, or intrinsic *versus* extrinsic, motivation behind them may offer insights into the impact of these institutions at the individual level (see Moller, Ryan, and Deci 2006) as well as

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[27] See Deci and Ryan (2000) for a more thorough treatment than has been given here.

[28] Self-concordance has been found to be an important motivational resource in its own right, but not to the neglect of others such as efficacy expectations (Sheldon 2004: 108).

[29] *Cf.* Sheldon (2004: 173): "Another benefit of the search for psychological autonomy is that autonomy is typically associated with cognitive flexibility and knowledge integration… Perhaps as a result of this, autonomy in personality is substantially associated with trait intrinsic motivation and creativity…" See also Throntveit (2008) for a much more thorough treatment of Veblen's idle curiosity, his psychology, and his contention that humans are active, rather than passive, agents with a native concern for serviceability to the community. The connection drawn in the present work between SDT and Veblen's idle curiosity is admittedly the most perfunctory of sketches compared to what could be done.

[30] Consider Veblen's comment that this idle curiosity has been tacitly assumed throughout his argument in *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts* (1914: 85). See also Throntveit (2008)

the social level (more on this shortly). In this way we can realign the discourse in stratification toward 'settled' habits of thought—that is, shared even by those who are patently injured or disadvantaged by them—without losing the concept of coercion or power.

Finally, there is a remarkable coherence between the oft-cited critique of neoclassical economic theory made in "The Instinct of Workmanship and the Irksomeness of Labor" (Veblen 1898a) and the arguments of Self-Determination Theory. As Veblen argued, we would not expect the self-interested, work-averse human nature assumed in neoclassical theory to be selected for in the evolutionary process. On the contrary, mankind is endowed with the instinct of workmanship, motivated toward efficient utilization of means to the benefit of the community; and the ignoble place of serviceable labor is rather a vestige of our institutional evolution, built on habits of invidious comparison and emulation. This 'spiritual fact' of the irksomeness of labor, the result of historically developed ceremonial malignancies in the institutional structure of society, speaks quite clearly to the supplantation of intrinsic motivations by external rewards in the reasons for work. The motivation to labor has thus come to be principally a matter of monetary reward (an extrinsic motivation), and of maintaining self-worth as defined by the esteem of others (an introjected motivation), often through the acquisition of material possessions displaying wealth (*cf.* Moller, Ryan, and Deci 2006: 105).

This argument is perhaps best summed up by remarks made in Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct*, which I indulge myself in quoting at length:

> A skilled artisan who enjoys his work is aware that what he is making is made for future use…[but] morally, psychologically, the sense of the utility of the article produced is a factor in the present significance of action due to the present utilization of abilities, giving play to taste and skill, accomplishing something now. The moment production is severed from immediate satisfaction, it becomes 'labor,' drudgery, a task reluctantly performed.
>
> Yet the whole tendency of modern economic life has been to assume that consumption will take care of itself provided only production is grossly and intensely attended to… As a result most workers find no replenishment, no renewal and growth of mind, no fulfillment in work. They labor to get mere means of later satisfaction…. Socially, the separation of production and consumption, means and ends, is the root of the most profound division of

> classes. Those who fix the 'ends' for production are in control, those who engage in isolated productive activity are the subject-class. But if the latter are oppressed the former are not truly free. Their consumptions are accidental ostentation and extravagance, not a normal consummation or fulfillment of activity. The remainder of their lives is spent in enslavement to keeping the machinery going at an increasingly rapid rate. (Dewey 1922: 271-2)

Thus, finally,

> If productive activity has become so inherently unsatisfactory that men have to be artificially induced to engage in it, this fact is ample proof that the conditions under which work is carried on balk the complex of activities instead of promoting them, irritate and frustrate natural tendencies instead of carrying them forward to fruition… If there are difficulties in the way of social alteration—as there certainly are—they do not lie in an original aversion of human nature to serviceable action, but in the historic conditions which have differentiated the work of the laborer for wage from that of the artist, adventurer, sportsman, soldier, administrator and speculator. (Dewey 1922: 123-4)

IV. – Implications for Social Analysis

Much has now been said about the congruence of Veblen's instincts and the basic psychological needs of Self-determination theory at the psychological level, or resolution, of analysis. Both of these approaches begin with a concept of human nature in which people are naturally self-directing, growth-oriented, striving to be effective in their work and to work for the benefit of their families and communities. From there, the question becomes, what impact do our goals and cultural norms have on our well-being. This question can be addressed, at least in part, in the psychological literature regarding individual psychological well-being. However, analysis done in sociology, economics, and the like has not been replaced here by a purely psychological-level framework. Indeed, the importance of this approach is in integrating the social- and psychological-level analyses, showing the potential for each to contribute to the other. In the remainder of this piece I would like to focus on implications of this analytical framework, giving greater attention to matters more intuitively or traditionally under the purview of social-level analysis.

With so much talk of needs, instincts, proclivities, &c. the impression may have been given that no quarter is given here to the role of habits in individual and social behavior. On the contrary, habit has lost no ground in this framework; it remains the central organizer of action and, where it manifests as a common or shared habit of thought in the community, the implications of the concept are of primary importance for social analysis. My intention here is to show how the continuum of autonomy and the Veblenian dichotomy can help us organize our analysis of the "nature and causes of the growth of institutions," (Veblen 1914: 2)[31] through understanding the impact of these institutions on the life process. This life process, as has been argued, is intimately tied to the basic psychological needs and intrinsic motivation discussed in Self-determination Theory. These needs and correlated propensities are at one end of an analytical circle which wraps around from our innate proclivities towards the socially constructed habits of thought, or institutions, that mediate them. These institutions thus define the 'proximate ends' (Veblen 1914) to which we direct our conduct. This conduct, in turn, wraps back around in its consequences for physiological and psychological health or well-being, the satisfaction of the needs of the individuals in the community.

Of course, our institutional structure does not generally afford us the greatest expression of our innate proclivities or the satisfaction of their associated needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence—viz., the pursuit of the 'generic ends of life' in "altruism, critical intelligence, and proficiency of workmanship," (Tilman 2004: 144). Indeed, the unfortunate truth is that society prevents many from satisfying even the most basic physiological needs of security, warmth, sustenance, and so on. We are habituated to pursue the most vacuous of goals by the most disagreeable means, to step on or over those most in need of our care, and to condone the cruelest acts of others. Thus, the central question in understanding the 'nature and causes of the growth of institutions' becomes a question of understanding their relationship to the proclivities and needs of the individuals who perpetuate them, and whom they perpetuate. (Similarly, Sheldon (2004: ch. 10) provides an illuminating discussion, some of which will be discussed shortly, for grounding his 'optimal human being' in organismic needs rather than other 'levels of analysis.')

[31] See Twomey 1998 for further remarks on the relationship of Veblen's psychological framework and his institutional analysis

While institutional analysis is not concerned *solely* with the impact of extant institutional structure on the satisfaction of individual needs, it is *ultimately* concerned with such.[32] This is necessarily the case because what is instrumental and what is ceremonial in the Veblenian dichotomy is, in the last resort, a question of consequences for the 'generic ends of life,' (Tilman 2004). Thus, institutional inquiry will surely involve analysis of the development and augmentation of accepted habits of thought in the dimensions of technology, power, status, and wealth, as well as their interaction through time. However, to go beyond historical and taxonomic work we must integrate our analytical pursuits with the broader spectrum of scientific knowledge, and in particular with the community's best understanding of human nature and health.

Toward these ends, the SDT literature draws a distinction between intrinsic aspirations or need-congruent goals such as personal growth and community contribution, and extrinsic aspirations or need-*in*congruent motives such as acquisitiveness, achievement, and dominance (Deci and Ryan 2000; see also Sheldon 2004: 102 on 'organismic congruence'). Much as Veblen's narrative follows the institutional evolution through which the instinct of workmanship was "contaminated with ideals of self-aggrandizement and the canons of invidious emulations," (Veblen 1914: 216-17), Deci and Ryan argue that "some goals are not integrateable because they are inherently inconsistent with human nature. Accordingly the enactment of need-incongruent goals will engender costs in terms of psychological growth, integrity, and well-being," (Deci and Ryan 2000: 248).

A great deal of work has been done in the SDT line of inquiry on the extrinsic goals of materialism and consumerism. These include the archetypal aspirations for fame, wealth, and image, all of which share "a focus of looking for a sense of worth outside of oneself, and involve striving for external rewards and praise of others," (Kasser 2002: 9). As Kasser further notes, the general literature in psychology has been ambivalent with regard to the value and importance of these extrinsic goals. Evolutionary psychologists such as David Buss have argued that the desire for these materialistic and emulative experiences are innate to mankind, the result of selective

[32] Many readers may find the matters of intelligent deliberation, adaptability to evolving circumstances, and warranted knowledge *versus* myth to be glaring omissions (or near omissions, as it were) in this paper. These issues are certainly not without relevance; however, for the sake of exposition they have largely been abstracted from here. To say that institutional analysis is 'ultimately' concerned with the satisfaction of needs is, thus, not to belie the importance of intelligence and so on, but rather to put the concepts of health, need, and instinct in their proper place within the larger evolutionary framework.

adaptation. Meanwhile, the behaviorist tradition has focused on external rewards in conditioning behavior, and similarly holds this function to be crucial to the survival of our species. The humanistic and existential psychologists, however, posited a different set of basic needs, predicting that materialism would not satisfy these needs and thus would likely not contribute to healthy outcomes (Kasser 2002: 2-3).

Empirical research following this distinction in the content of goals (viz., between need-congruent and need-incongruent) has found evidence supporting the theory that intrinsic aspirations not only satisfy innate psychological needs, but also tend to promote a greater valuing of these need-congruent goals through time. Moreover, it has been shown that attainment of intrinsic aspirations relates positively to several measures of well being, and, moreover, that attainment of extrinsic aspirations has no impact on well-being and may actually contribute to psychological ill-being (Niemiec, Ryan, and Deci 2009). Indeed, there is a mass of evidence to support Kasser's (2002) general thesis, that valuing materialistic, external goals relative to self-concordant and need-congruent goals correlates strongly with diminished psychological health (see also Abela (2006) for an extensive list of such evidence).

Those having even a passive acquaintance with institutional economics have likely already drawn the connection between these extrinsic goals and the invidious, emulative behavior at the core of 'conspicuous consumption,' and similar concepts. Without recapitulating the greater part of Veblen's work, the invidious comparison of others (discussed above), and the emulative drive to be judged 'better' or more 'worthy,' lies at the core of institutions such as the leisure class, ownership, the state and its war-machine (see Veblen 1899a, 1914, 1917; also Throntveit 2008). Interestingly, the concepts are not uncommon in the economics literature. Keynes (1930) speculated that humans have two kinds of needs, basic material needs, and the need to be 'lifted above,' 'made superior to our fellows,' the former of which is satiable, while the latter is not.[33] However, whereas Keynes suggested this invidious emulation was the source of our increasing industrial capacity, Veblen took quite the opposite tack—finding our instinctual drives of workmanship, altruism, and curiosity to be the source of expanding technological knowledge, while institutions based on invidious emulation prevent the full realization of our

[33] Discussed in Lavoie (1994: 551-4). Additionally, Stanfield *et al.* (2007) discuss this issue—viz., of needs and sufficiency versus insatiability and scarcity—, identifying a common thread between Adolph Lowe, J. S. Mill, Simon Nelson Patten, J. K. Galbraith, and Karl Polayni, in addition to Keynes. Veblen (1899: 19-21) also noted the insatiability of emulative desires. See also Tilman 2004: ch. 7 for a related discussion.

capacity to organize and provision for the satisfaction of our needs. Thus, in the Veblenian tradition proper, we might expect precisely what the SDT research finds—that emulatory values such as wealth, power, and image tend to be detrimental to the life process of the individual as well as the community.

If these values tend to be detrimental to our wellness, why do we pursue them?[34] Habituation is the traditional, if implicit, explanation: we do as we are conditioned to do, regardless of the consequences for ourselves or others. While a reasonable approximation for the study of the complex development, interaction, and augmentation of institutions, this explanation must not be the final word if we are to integrate a psychological understanding of impulses and needs with institutional analysis. Fortunately, some headway has been made in this regard. In the most direct explanation, Kasser notes that in present-day consumer cultures "people are constantly bombarded with messages that needs can be satisfied by having the right products," (Kasser 2002: 26). We might then look to Madison Avenue to understand how people are deliberately manipulated into *believing* they are fulfilling their own needs by means of attaining wealth, fame, and image (see Abela 2006).

Additional arguments exist that focus on a more thoroughgoing psychological explanation. The SDT literature argues that insufficient satisfaction of our basic needs may lead us to cling to external measures of esteem, competence, and so on (Deci and Ryan 2000). Thus Sheldon (2004: 156) suggests that the most salient source of emulative behavior and extrinsic motivation may be persistent psychological insecurity owing to unstable or inconsistent environments or relationships. In this way we can see how a culture inundated with messages promoting materialism can create a positive feedback loop in which perpetual discrepancies between what is wanted and what is had lead to thwarted need satisfaction and thus greater reliance on these external measures of satisfaction (Kasser 2002: 51-3).

Much of this matter falls to self-esteem and its relation to the prevalent institutions of our day. As Veblen wrote, once the institution of ownership has matured, property, accumulated through inheritance or exploit, becomes necessary to keep a good name in the community.

> Those members of the community who fall short of this, somewhat indefinite, normal degree of prowess or of property suffer in the esteem of their fellow-men;

[34] This question is in fact explicitly posed in Sheldon (2004: 156).

> and consequently they suffer also in their own esteem, since the usual basis of self-respect is the respect accorded by one's neighbours. (Veblen 1899a: 19-20)

This passage hints at an important distinction made in the psychological literature: between 'contingent self-esteem' and a 'healthy sense of esteem'. Here the former denotes an unstable sense of worth, based in external standards such as academic performance, success in business, body weight, and so on (Kasser 2002: 48-9; see also Pugno 2008). As Crocker argues, pursuit of this sort of self-esteem involves not simply being "competent, right, or good," but also being "more competent than others, right 'over' them, or better than they are." It follows that "life becomes a zero-sum game, with things that bolster my self-worth at the expense of your self-worth, and vice versa…When our superordinate goal is demonstrating our worth or value as a person, we become isolated and disconnected from others," (Crocker 2003: 32). Moreover, Crocker argues that pursuit of self-esteem as a superordinate goal inhibits our ability to learn from mistakes and criticism, and distracts from real (as opposed to illusory) goals of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Thus, while Kasser (2002) includes self-esteem with competence in his list of basic psychological needs, and Sheldon (2004) suggests it may be included along with security, Crocker (2003) is careful to note that beyond some minimal sense of worth required to achieve our goals, we are likely ill-served to pursue self-esteem in and of itself.

All of this returns us to the consequences of settled, prevalent, or generally-held habits of thought on the well-being of the individuals that constitute the community. It should by now be clear that institutions most often conceived in terms of power relations, in which one group is advantaged at the expense of another, in fact tend to be *generally* deleterious to the well-being of all parties involved. It follows that, through an understanding of the psychological processes involved in holding these habits of thought, we can understand Dewey's argument quoted extensively above. That is, where society is dominated by institutions inimical to human needs, we should not be surprised that oppression is salient—but, more, that this does not free the oppressor.[35] In discussing gender inequalities in the workplace, family, and so on, Tilman in fact draws the same conclusion: the institutions behind these disparities, "leave both men and

[35] *Cf.* Deci and Ryan (2000: 248), who argue that "cultures that either use controlling forms of socialization or endorse goals and values that are unintegrateable tend to foster alienation and anomie and, thus, are inherently less stable."

women less than fully functioning as human beings," that is, constrained from pursuing the 'generic ends of life' (Tilman 2004: 45; *Cf*. Deci and Ryan 2000: 248).[36]

This should not be taken as a refutation of the more common approach to institutions and stratification, in which shared habits of thought are 'good' for the superior class and 'bad' for the inferior. Such an approach is found in the 'enabling myth' of William Dugger. Here the enabling myth leads the inferior class to blame themselves and to rationalize the privilege of the superior class, enabling "one group or individual to get others to do what is wanted of them, even when it is not in the interest of the dominated group or individual," (Dugger and Sherman 1994: 103). To be sure, these institutions exist: international powers allow industrialized nations the benefit of the product of impoverished nations at little or no expense to the former; affluent families adorn their houses by the labor of people lacking even the security of legal residence; and epidemics of treatable and even curable diseases go unnoticed as medical research is directed toward prolonging the lives, and improving the images, of the wealthy.

The enabling myth concept, however, is not the whole story; its insufficiency is found in its lack of an explicit connection to the psychological processes involved in maintaining and perpetuating these institutions of inequality—processes that, it is herein hypothesized, are of a common genus of invidious emulation. Furthermore, there has been a neglect of the *generally* deleterious nature of these institutions as revealed by the psychological literature on human needs and well-being. As such, the framework laid out in this chapter is intended as a supplement to the good work done in the institutionalist tradition so far. Toward these ends it has been shown that it is possible to understand institutions through the lens of the instrumental-ceremonial dichotomy by way of their effects in constraining and enabling action directed toward the fulfillment of human needs.

Additionally, there is reason to believe that this is a more appropriate starting point in any endeavor into social analysis. To explain, social theories have long suffered from being based in ill-begotten criteria of value. These have often been handed down as social-level criteria such as the natural rights doctrine of labor value and a utilitarian psychology noted by Veblen to be a fault both of Marxian (Veblen 1906, 1907) and (neo)classical economic theory (Veblen 1898b, 1904; *Cf*. Stanfield, Carroll, and Wrenn 2007). Likewise, Ryan, Huta, and Deci (2008: 142)

[36] This could also be related in some degree to Foster's principle of recognized interdependence (see Foster 1981) though the argument will not be made here.

have recently noted the not-uncommon acknowledgement that "a focus on hedonic happiness is by no means culturally neutral; it is both presupposed by and a reflection of individualistic, market-based economics."

As a specific example, Locke (2007) has defended 'American Corporate Capitalism' against the claims of its ill effects by Kasser, Cohn, Kanner, and Ryan (2007a), basing his argument Ayn Rand's philosophy, and the natural rights doctrine and psychological assumption of self-interested, rational man therein. Kasser and colleagues, in fact, respond in part by suggesting that Locke's use of Rand's philosophy represents, in its own right, "the use of a particular set of ideological beliefs concerning human nature and social values to support a capitalistic worldview," (Kasser et al. 2007b: 60). For instance, Locke takes exception to the argument that capitalism may inhibit the realization of autonomy, arguing that "capitalism *is* the *system* of freedom," (Locke 2007: 39). Elsewhere, however, Locke defines capitalism in terms of voluntary trade which promotes cooperation so long as it benefits all parties involved, and, from Ayn Rand's definition of capitalism, in terms of private property rights. The nexus of these rhetorical references to the meaning of capitalism provide a good example of a socially-given value theory that does not necessarily constitute warranted knowledge.

In response to Locke, Kasser and colleagues note that the theoretical freedom to choose—e.g. to work in a sweatshop—should not be conflated with a *real* choice, or with the realization of autonomy (Kasser et al. 2007b: 67). We are fortunate to have Dewey's discussion of freedom to illuminate and perhaps even settle this controversy. Dewey described the absolutist's approach to freedom as "action in accord with the consciousness of fixed law; that men are free when they are rational, and they are rational when they recognize and consciously conform to the necessities with the universe exemplified," (Dewey 1919: 373). In contrast, freedom that is consistent with the world as we actually find it, as well as a commitment to democracy as Dewey used the term, involves the "ability to carry out plans…to vary plans," and "the power of desire and choice to be factors in events," all in an uncertain and incomplete world (Dewey 1922: 303; 1919). Thus, "what we want is possibilities open in the *world* not in the will, except as will or deliberate activity reflects the world," (Dewey 1922: 311). Accordingly, while freedom of exchange and security of property may permit a liberty in conforming with the mechanisms of a supposed 'natural order,' it falls short of a true liberty in action and deliberation in an uncertain and changing world. From the discussion given in the previous section, I hope it

is evident that the psychological construct of autonomy in SDT maps to Dewey's freedom quite well, while the absolutist conception put forward by Locke is a good example of the pitfalls of basing inquiry in the received values of absolutist—or perhaps, non-empirical—doctrine. While not without exception, these values are often based in social-level concepts such as freedom of exchange, property, and so on, with little or no reference to the relationship of these social constructs to the nature and health of the individuals within the community at hand.

Sheldon addresses the issue of locating 'optimal human being,' or here, the 'generic ends of life,' at the social resolution. Following this line of reasoning, the value theory of an integrated social analysis would ultimately look only to positive social interactions or integration of cultural norms. The problems with this are twofold. First, granting the existence of innate needs, we would not expect that the cultural norms we identify as 'good,' 'best,' or 'optimal' would be consistent with these needs—nor, it might be added, with the ever-changing circumstance of life. Second, even ignoring the matter of organismic needs, there remains the question of whose relationships, goals, or norms ought to be served (Sheldon 2004: 191). It is precisely because shared habits of thought can—and often do—pit individuals and groups against each other that we cannot directly base an integrated understanding of people in the values, goals, or norms of society or any group therein. Thus, Sheldon (2004: 191) suggests that, while serving social and cultural goals may often be an advisable pursuit for the individual, we cannot neglect the importance of understanding why these goals do not always reward the individual economically or emotionally. This latter issue is precisely the function of the Veblenian dichotomy—that is, to understand how a community's institutional structure enables and constrains its individuals in their dealings with each other and the material world from pursuing health and well-being.

In contrast to social institutions, species-typical needs, by definition, do not vary between cultures (within-population variance notwithstanding). For this reason, Sheldon suggests that the "broadest and most invariant recommendation for achieving optimal human being" is to act so as to satisfy these needs (Sheldon 2004: 193; *cf.* Geras 1983: 70).[37] Likewise, an integrated

[37] A few words of caution may be in order on this point. As Ryan, Huta, and Deci (2008) explicate, the intrinsic values that concern us here are 'first-order values' in that they 1) cannot be reduced to other values, and 2) are not valued for the sake of another value. As an example, the authors posit the 'natural' responses of fear and aggression toward danger. While, these are certainly innate human characteristics, it can be argued that they are for the purposes—and thus second-order to the first-order value—of survival. As a more general point, the argument for a

framework for inquiry will ultimately have to make reference to these needs, as well as their correlates in motivation, in understanding the broader system in terms of healthy functioning. As Sheldon argues, we must consider the 'content' of phenomena at the various resolutions of analysis in terms of their effect on well-being. As I have argued above, this is purpose of the Veblenian dichotomy in understanding the complex relationship between settled habits of thought, action, and the consequences thereof for human health and well-being. Finally, as Sheldon (2004: 192) argues, these relationships are ultimately empirical questions. In the process of inquiry then, our understanding of human nature, needs, and health becomes not the ends of our value judgments, but rather the means. The understanding of these complex processes in turn requires an interdisciplinary discourse that has for too long been something of a peripheral curiosity in the social sciences.

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needs-based theory of value or wellness need not suggest that all that is human nature is of value either for the individual or as an institutional foundation.

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