

Mark Twain's Writing During his Last Twenty Years: The Conflicts of a Moralist

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Unlike much of his earlier writing, most of Mark Twain's later work presents a grim view of the human race. From roughly 1895 onwards, Twain's writing contains few of the features for which it first gained recognition: frontier humor, as in "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1867); commentary on rural American life, as in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884); and satirical social criticism, as in *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) and *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881). Rather, many of his later works deal with philosophical concerns: psychological egoism (the theory that all acts are primarily self-interested), determinism, and solipsism. These concerns appear in Twain's later correspondences; in *The Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts* (published posthumously in 1969), a collection of three unfinished narratives; and in *What Is Man?* (1906), a Socratic dialogue which Twain called his "Bible" ("535. Clemens To Howells" 689). By reviewing the philosophical ideas in these works we can gain insights into several conflicts in Twain's writing which brought about a dramatic shift in style and a radically different depiction of the human race.

Despite the wealth of criticism on Twain's later works and views and on the conflicts inherent in them, few critics have explored in depth the significance of Twain's passionate interest in several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideas and movements for his later thought, writing, and response to injustice and personal tragedy. A review of Twain's letters, as well as a list of the authors he read and revisited, reveals that he held, especially later in life, a strong interest in rationalism, realism, Darwinism, social Darwinism, and empirical science. His works and ideas also bear many of the marks of naturalism, although he did not himself identify with the movement (*Mark Twain and Science* 210). On the whole, Twain's interests reveal a predominantly materialistic conception of the universe. These interests and this conception, in

conjunction with Twain's devout sense of morality, may account for what is often perceived to be a cynical, deterministic, and solipsistic worldview, and for Twain's tendency, in his later writing, to reduce immoral deeds and personal tragedies to explainable and unavoidable phenomena. On the one hand, these responses seem perfectly understandable, especially for a devoted moralist and family man like Twain. On the other hand, the passion and insistence with which Twain held to his theories and to his opinions of the human race, until his death, betrays both his desperation to prove their validity and his ambivalence towards them (Parsons 71). Seen from this perspective, Twain, as a moralist, intuitively revolted against the beliefs and theories which he upheld so vigorously for over fifteen years. In much of his later work, naturalistic and materialistic obsessions affect Twain's writing: as Twain suffers tragedies and frustrations he encodes deterministic and solipsistic worldviews which conflict with his strong sense of morality.

Among the works often assumed to reflect Twain's late-life worldview are *The Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts*, which Twain wrote but never finished, and *The Mysterious Stranger, A Romance* (1916), a posthumously published and extensively edited short story which is a combination of the *Manuscripts*. William Gibson, editor of Twain's *Manuscripts*, writes that *The Mysterious Stranger* "is an editorial fraud perpetrated by Twain's official biographer and literary executor, Albert Bigelow Paine, and Frederick A. Duneka of Harper & Brothers publishing company" (1). Specifically, Gibson and others charge Paine and Duneka with changing the names and roles of several characters, rearranging and grafting portions of the manuscripts, and greatly shrinking the manuscripts—notably by cutting passages which may have offended Catholics and Presbyterians (Gibson 2-3). In order to publish *The Mysterious Stranger* as Twain's work (i.e. as a story completed by Twain but left unpublished), Paine and Duneka synthesized

the *Manuscripts*, drawing heavily from the plot of *The Chronicle of Young Satan* to fill much of the narrative and using the solipsistic ending of *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*.

Because the solipsistic ending of *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* connects almost seamlessly to the unfinished narrative of *The Chronicle of Young Satan*, *The Mysterious Stranger* would likely appear, to those unaware of the bowdlerization of the *Manuscripts*, to be an authentic text. Hence, as Gibson notes, the changes to the *Manuscripts*, although made largely by Paine, who was Twain's biographer and loyal to him for many years, were made "in a fashion that almost certainly would have enraged Clemens" (3). Twain's outrage would have surely been due in large part to his intentions for the *Manuscripts*, which he sought to combine into a narrative, as he writes in an 1899 letter to his friend William Howells,

What I have been wanting is a chance to write a book which should take account of no one's feelings, and no one's prejudices, opinions, beliefs, hopes, illusions, delusions; a book which should say my say, right out of my heart, in the plainest language and without a limitation of any sort. I judged that that would be an unimaginable luxury, heaven on earth. (Fussell 96)

Twain's sense that it would be difficult for him to publish the *Manuscripts* as a book proves prophetic, as he never finished the *Manuscripts*, and they were never combined into a narrative that can be taken to convey accurately his beliefs. Nonetheless, the *Manuscripts* are unequivocally authored by Twain, and would seem, when taken together with *What is Man?*, to be his definitive statement from the last years of his life.

Many critics have attempted to account for the discrepancy between the tone of Twain's writing prior to the last decade of the century and that during his last fifteen years. Some point to the hardships suffered by Twain during the last fifteen years of his life—his severe financial

troubles, his old age and declining health, the nervous breakdown of one of his daughters, the death of two others, and the death of his wife—as an explanation for the often bitter and despairing outlook of his later writing (Waggoner 370). Others believe that Twain’s later writing reveals his exasperation as a moralist in a seemingly immoral and unjust world. Interestingly, as critics of this belief note, the theory of determinism expressed in some of Twain’s works is often accompanied by an allowance for moral improvement (Jones 15). This paradox suggests that perhaps Twain, a moralist at heart, grudgingly adopted a deterministic worldview as a retreat from his own hardships and from the moral depravation of the human race (“The Theology of Mark Twain” 180). Moreover, Twain’s determinism, as still other critics note, conflicts, as it is a rational and mechanistic theory, with his imaginative ideas of the “dream-self” and a solipsistic reality, which he includes in the *Manuscripts* and contemplates in his letters (*Mark Twain and Science* 216). Many interpret this conflict, too, as a retreat by Twain—this time not from a tragic and immoral world but from a deterministic theory rendering injustice and immorality irremediable (“Mark Twain’s Theology” 240).

As Twain, in the *Manuscripts* and in much of his other later writing, presents a cynical, deterministic, and solipsistic outlook on the human race and the world, many critics claim that his later work reflects his suffering and sense of guilt following a series of personal struggles and tragedies beginning in the 1890s. After several failed investments, including a \$300,000 loss suffered from his investment in a typesetting machine (550), Twain, mired in debt and furious with businessmen and publishers who he felt had cheated him (Covici 549), traveled around the world with his wife Livy on several lecture tours to raise money. In 1896, while Twain and Livy were away on a lecture tour, one of their daughters contracted meningitis and died. Her death triggered severe emotional problems for Livy, who died while traveling with Twain in 1904. By

1908, another of Twain's daughters, who had recently developed epilepsy, drowned while bathing. Shortly after this, another daughter, with whom Twain had a stormy relationship, suffered a nervous collapse ("Clemens, Samuel Langhorne" 61).

Many critics and biographers believe that Twain felt guilt, as well as sorrow, surrounding these events. Twain, they suggest, felt that he could have done more to prevent the death of his daughter in 1896, as his financial troubles, which forced him to embark on several worldwide lecture tours, were the ultimate reason that he decided to stay abroad rather than return home to be with his daughter during her illness (Covici 551). The choice to continue his lecture tour, as Harold Bush Jr. writes in his essay "'Broken Idols': Mark Twain's Elegies for Susy and a Critique of Freudian Grief Theory," was "one of the many decisions that [Twain] would bitterly regret for the rest of his life" (238). Twain's regrets, as his daughter Clara Clemens notes in her book *My Father, Mark Twain* (1931), were compounded by his inclination to place blame on himself: "Self-condemnation was the natural turn for his mind to take, yet often he accused himself of having inflicted pain or trouble when the true cause was far removed from himself" (Robinson 145). As his tendency to place blame on himself suggests, Twain often showed a deep concern for the moral repercussions of his actions.

Critics sometimes attribute Twain's strong sense morality, as well as his sorrow and sense of guilt, to the bitter and deterministic tone of his later writing. Twain's moral principles, exemplified notably by his defense of social justice, racial equality, and human and animal welfare, are evident both in his writing and his reputation. In *The Prince and the Pauper*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), and even many of his works from 1895 onwards, Twain questions and criticizes cruel and immoral social practices and patterns in human behavior. Because of his social criticism and social activism, Twain acquired the monikers

“Moralist of the Main” (Webb 17) and, during his employment with numerous newspapers and magazines on the Pacific Coast, “Moralist of the Pacific Slope” (Hill 76). His reputation as a moralist is outlined in a eulogy, of unknown authorship, printed in June, 1910, two months after his death,

The cause of political morality, freedom, human equality, honest government, democracy had in him a staunch and courageous defender. He took a deep interest in the social and industrial reforms of the day, and supported children’s theaters, social settlements and similar welfare work. He was an enemy of snobbery, solemn pedantry, cant and corruption in public and commercial life. His death removed a salutary, beneficent force, a rare, if not unique, personality. (“The Death of Mark Twain” 237)

As evidenced by his comments in an 1898 letter to Howells, Twain, as a defender of numerous political, social, and moral causes, was infuriated by the vices and moral depravity of the human race, “I suspect that to you there is still dignity in human life, and that man is not a joke—a poor joke—the poorest that was ever contrived” (Waggoner 370).

In light of his frustration with the human race, Twain’s theory of determinism rationalizes his anger and thus reduces immoral deeds to unavoidable, and therefore less taxing, events. As a moralist, Twain, perhaps overwhelmed by the seeming cruelty of the human race, adopted, as he writes in his notebook in 1904, a social Darwinian, might makes right view because its moral ramifications,

There is no such thing as morality; it is not immoral for the tiger to eat the wolf, or the wolf the cat, or the cat the bird, and so on down; that is their business. . . . It is not immoral for one nation to seize another nation by the force of arms, or

for one man to seize another man's property or life if he is strong enough and wants to take it. ("Mark Twain's Social Darwinism" 168)

Denying the existence of morality does not seem to have been sufficient, by itself, to satisfy Twain's desired ends, as it appears that he was interested in extricating himself and the human race from responsibility for regrettable or immoral acts. To make a persuasive claim against human responsibility, and to thus assuage his sense of guilt and his anger towards the human race, Twain, as editor Pascal Covici suggests, turned to a set of mechanistic beliefs: "If people are simply the result of what training or environment makes of the original raw material, as Twain's fictions and characters come more and more to suggest and assert, then no basis for moral outrage exists" (549). Covici, however, offers only a broad reference to Twain's deterministic beliefs, which play an important role in much of his later writing.

In his letters and in *What Is Man?*, Twain most clearly details the theory of determinism many believe he adopted to absolve himself and the human race of guilt. In *What Is Man?*, Twain outlines a theory of determinism as he writes on human nature: "Whatsoever a man is, is due to his *make*, and to the *influences* brought to bear upon it by his heredities, his habitat, his associations. He is moved, directed, COMMANDED, by *exterior* influences—*solely*. He *originates* nothing, not even a thought" (337). Twain adds, in a 1909 letter to Howells: "I like to see my mind perform according to the law which I have laid down in 'What Is Man': the law that the mind works automatically, & plans & perfects many a project without its owner suspecting what it is about; the mind being merely a machine, & not in even the slightest degree under the control of its owner or subject to his influence" ("To W.D. Howells" 844). Although the mind, as Twain writes, is "merely a machine" and uncontrollable to its subject, Twain allows, in *What Is Man?*, for "free choice:" "The mind can freely *select, choose, point out* the right and just

[choice]—its function stops there. It can go no further in the matter. It has no authority to say that the right one shall be acted upon and the wrong one discarded. That authority is in other hands.” Namely, as Twain writes, the authority to act on a choice lies with “the machine which stands for [man]. In this born disposition and the character which has been built around it by training and environment” (388). Twain thus eliminates free will, as the mind, while able to differentiate between right and wrong, is powerless to disagree with the course of action prescribed by outside influences, such as “disposition,” “character,” “training,” and “environment.” Hence, Twain describes the human race, as he writes in a 1904 letter to his friend Joseph Twichell, as essentially mechanistic: “For [the human race] did not make itself, it did not make its nature, it is merely a machine . . . moved wholly by outside influences . . . a helpless and irresponsible coffee-mill ground by the hand of God” (Messent 397). These comments to Twichell epitomize the theory of determinism in *What is Man?*.

Those familiar with Twain’s later works note a slight difference between the theory of determinism in *What Is Man?* and that in Twain’s *Manuscripts*. In *The Chronicle of Young Satan*, one of the *Manuscripts*, Satan states that “nothing can change the order of [any creature’s] life after the first event has determined it. That is, nothing *will* change it, because each act unfailingly begets *an* act, that act begets another, and so on to the end . . .” (115). The noteworthy difference between this theory and that in *What Is Man?* lies in Satan’s assertion that humans have volition over their first act. Twain makes no such concession in *What Is Man?* or in his letters, as the external forces of heredity and environment would presumably control one’s first act and, with the addition of experience, all acts thereafter. Despite the differences between the theories, the deterministic ideas espoused consistently by Twain in his letters and in *What Is Man?* correspond. He may have modified his theory for the *Manuscripts* merely to experiment

with his deterministic ideas. In any event, Twain was absorbed with the notion of a deterministic reality.

Twain's theory of determinism, further, implicates *self-interest*—as shaped by uncontrollable external influences—as the primary factor in deciding behavior. Within his discussion of determinism in *What Is Man?*, Twain presents a theory of psychological egoism: “*From his cradle to his grave a man never does a single thing which has any FIRST AND FOREMOST object but one—to secure peace of mind, spiritual comfort, for HIMSELF*” (343-44). “Spiritual comfort,” he explains, is attained by placating one’s conscience; he describes the conscience as follows: “Conscience—that independent Sovereign, that insolent absolute Monarch inside of a man who is the man’s Master. There are all kinds of consciences because there are all kinds of men” (347). Heredity, environment, and experience, then, are determining factors, as they establish one’s self-interests and direct one’s conscience; they set the lengths to which one must go to satisfy “the imperious necessity of securing [one’s] own approval, in every emergency and at all costs” (352). A similar theory of psychological egoism is, moreover, suggested in *The Chronicle of Young Satan*, as Theodor Fischer, the narrator, explains: “In any community, big or little, there is always a fair proportion of people who are not malicious or unkind by nature, and who never do unkind things except when they are overmastered by fear, or when their self-interest is greatly in danger, or some such matter as that” (82). Self-interest, or the need to content oneself, is thus a primary motive, in these works, regardless of the apparent altruism of an act.

As Twain depicts all acts as self-interested and determined by heredity, environment, and experience, he renders human pride absurd and contemptible. William Macnoughton summarizes, in his book *Mark Twain’s Last Years As a Writer*, what many take to be Twain’s

outlook on human pride, as he writes, “Man’s pride is unwarranted . . . because human achievements . . . depend to such a large extent on the luck of the draw in the games of heredity (which [Twain] calls temperament) and environment (or training)” (84). Twain seldom portrays humans as having no control over or responsibility for their acts without also commenting on human pride. For instance, in *What Is Man?* Twain writes:

[Man’s] pride in himself, his sincere admiration of himself, his joy in what he supposed were his own and unassisted achievements, and his exultation over the praise and applause which they evoked—these have exalted him, enthused him, ambitioned him to higher and higher flights; in a word, made his life worth the living. But by your scheme, all this is abolished; he is degraded to a machine, he is a nobody, his noble prides wither to mere vanities . . . (397)

Furthermore, in an 1899 letter to Howells in which Twain lists his intentions for the *Manuscripts*, he writes, “I believe I can make it tell what I think of Man, & how he is constructed, & what a shabby poor ridiculous thing he is, & how mistaken he is in his estimate of his character & powers & qualities & his place among the animals” (“536. Clemens To Howells” 698-99). Often, as in Satan’s remarks in *The Chronicle of Young Satan*, Twain comments on the baseness of the human race’s prized possession: the moral sense, “And yet [man] is such an unreasoning creature that he is not able to perceive that the Moral Sense degrades him to the bottom layer of animated beings and is a shameful possession” (73). As he represents all accomplishments as driven solely by external influences, Twain portrays human pride, especially towards the moral sense—which he associates with vice and immorality—as contemptible.

At first glance, Twain’s criticisms of human pride and the moral sense may appear to conflict with the deterministic theories presented in his works, in which humans are not

responsible for their character or behavior. In his book *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor*, James Cox comments that such a conflict does in fact exist in Twain's writing:

He is never able to integrate the two concepts. For the Moral Sense has to do with man's pride, folly, and self-deception, whereas the deterministic thesis rests upon the undefined concept of a 'first' act which determines the rest of man's existence. The Moral Sense is calculated to expose the folly of man; the deterministic thesis, on the other hand, must—if it is to be effective—be the plot of God. (280-81)

Though one can gather from many of Twain's remarks that he places blame on the human race, Twain seems to disapprove of, rather than blame, human beings for their immoral acts and feelings of pride. Indeed, he writes in a 1904 letter to Twichell, "I wish I could learn to remember that it is unjust and dishonorable to put blame upon the human race for any of its acts" (Messent 396). Twain's contempt, it seems, is not for humans themselves, who as he writes "originate nothing," but rather for their odious pride and "shameful" moral sense, cultivated in them entirely from the outside.

Although Twain's remarks on human pride and on the moral sense do not in fact seem to conflict with his deterministic obsessions, his suggestion, in *What Is Man?*, the human race seek moral improvement appears problematic for his theory. In *What Is Man?*, Twain, who earlier states that the human mind "is worked *solely from the outside*," (338) includes a "plan for the general betterment of the race's condition:" "Diligently train your ideals *upward* and *still upward* toward a summit where you will find your chiefest pleasure in conduct which, while contenting you, will be sure to confer benefits upon your neighbor and the community" (367). This code would seem difficult for the human race to carry out, as Twain is clear and consistent in his

discussion of the relationship between humans and their minds: “you not only did not make that machinery yourself, but you have *not even any command over it*” (338). Alexander Jones, in “Mark Twain and the Determinism of What is Man?,” notes this conflict: “This concept of a self-training machine may be untenable as a philosophical doctrine” (15). Despite the seeming contradiction in his ideas, Twain, after disclosing his “plan for the general betterment,” gives little clarification on the matter of externally operated “mental machinery” internally training its ideals (337). He suggests, in a parable, that humans seek external influences that will affect their “mental machinery” so that their self-interests will come more nearly in line with the interests of others, but fails to explain how an externally influenced machine can seek anything of its own accord. As he gives a vague explanation of the matter of an externally-operated machine capable of “training its ideals upward,” Twain does little to dispel the sense that his theory of determinism is incompatible with his “plan for the general betterment.”

This contradiction may reveal something of Twain’s ambivalence, as a moralist, towards his own philosophy. In “The Theology of Mark Twain: Banished Adam and the Bible,” Stanley Brodwin suggests that Twain’s deterministic doctrine is a means of coping with the moral depravity of the human race: “The determinism of *What is Man?* (1906) is merely a philosophic surrender to the theological truth of man playing and replaying Adam’s inevitable fall” (180). Twain’s subsequent efforts, then, to incorporate moral improvement into his deterministic worldview may suggest his awareness and concern that, as ethicist Kristin Shrader-Frechette argues, “failure to criticize indefensible or questionable values gives implicit assent to them” (636). Perhaps Twain, overwhelmed by the cruelty of the human race, devised a theory by which, in his own words, “it is unjust and dishonorable to put blame upon the human race for any of its acts,” and then, pained by the immorality his doctrine permitted, attempted to reconcile his

mechanistic ideas with his “plan for the general betterment” of the human race. If Twain were able to achieve persuasively this synthesis, his theory would abrogate guilt and responsibility from human affairs while preserving moral improvement. In his efforts to pardon the human race for its cruel acts, Twain recoils to a theory of determinism, often, more specifically, by placing blame for the cruelty of human acts not on their perpetrators but on the moral sense. In *The Chronicle of Young Satan*, for instance, Satan says of the moral sense, “Now what advantage can [man] get out of that? He is always choosing, and in nine cases out of ten he prefers the wrong. There shouldn’t *be* any wrong; and without the Moral Sense there *couldn’t* be any” (72-73). While Twain’s claim that the moral sense and other externally-driven influences control human behavior may, by itself, be tenable, it is hardly compatible with his hopes for humanity’s moral improvement.

The perceived inability of Twain’s philosophy to reconcile moral improvement and determinism may explain his receptivity to the idea of a solipsistic reality. In his article “Mark Twain’s Theology: The Gods of a Brevet Presbyterian,” Brodwin considers this possibility: “if human character is the creation of circumstances and ‘outside’ influences, then authentic reform will never be realized. There is little doubt that Twain recognized this problem, which is reflected in the final attempt to achieve reform . . . by at last retreating from the ‘real’ world into solipsism” (240). Yet Twain, as John Tuckey writes in *Mark Twain and Little Satan: The Writing of the Mysterious Stranger*, “was probably more at home in the real world than his own words would sometimes suggest,” and doesn’t appear to have completely adopted a solipsistic worldview (81). Nonetheless, Twain, as he writes in his notebooks, pondered the existence of a dream-self capable of roaming freely across time and space, “When my physical body dies my dream body will doubtless continue its excursion and activities without change, forever” (Gibson 27).

Furthermore, he often contemplated the notion of a solipsistic universe, as in a 1904 letter to Twichell:

(A *part* of each day—or night) as they have been looking to me the past 7 years: as being NON-EXISTENT. That is, that there is *nothing*. That there is no God & no universe; that there is only empty space, & in it a lost & homeless & wandering & companionless & indestructible *thought*. And that I am that thought. And God, & the Universe, & Time, & Life, & Death, & Joy & Sorrow and Pain only a grotesque & brutal *dream*, evolved from the frantic imagination of that insane Thought. (Messent 395)

This passage bears a strong resemblance to 44's comment at the end of Twain's manuscript *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*: "there is no God, no universe, no human race, no earthly life, no heaven, no hell. It is all a dream—a grotesque and foolish dream. Nothing exists but you. And you are but a *thought*—a vagrant thought, a useless thought, a homeless thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities!" (405). Indeed, the *Manuscripts* reveal much of Twain's fascination with the idea of a dream universe: *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* and *The Chronicle of Young Satan* take place mostly in "Austria . . . far away from the world, and asleep" in a village which "drowsed in peace in the deep privacy of a hilly and woodsy solitude where news from the world hardly ever came to disturb its dreams" (35, 221). It appears, then, that Twain was fond of the idea of a solipsistic, dream universe in which cruelty, immorality, determinism, and other "news from the world" could be but minor disturbances.

Some critics have traced Twain's apparent interest in solipsistic and deterministic ideas to his engagement with many rational and scientific movements of the nineteenth-century and with the undercurrent of scientific thought that would reach its apex towards the end of the century. In his book *Mark Twain and Science*, Sherwood Cummings notes the impact of science in

American thought in the late nineteenth-century: “science around 1870. Its authority was immense. It was based on the compelling idea that the creation was reasonable, whole, and orderly. What is more, it worked. The marvelous technological progress of the time proved it” (10). As Paine indicates, Twain, who was fascinated with many of the technological advancements of his time, held an interest in science which “amounted to a passion” (“Mark Twain’s Social Darwinism” 165). Furthermore, Twain is said to have read scientific articles and books assiduously, including those of nineteenth-century thinkers such as astronomer Simon Newcomb, geologist Nathaniel Shaler, biologist Ernst Haeckel, astronomer Garrett Serviss, physicist Sir Oliver Lodge, biologist Sir John Lubbock, Darwin, and T.H. Huxley (Waggoner 361). Most significant among these names for Twain and his later writing are perhaps Darwin and Huxley.

Twain’s theory of determinism, for instance, seems to bear the influence of Darwinian and evolutionary ideas. His theory, as it suggests that human beings are “moved, directed, COMMANDED, by *exterior* influences—*solely*” (337) and that the human “brain is so constructed that *it can originate nothing whatever*,” (“What Is Man?” 339) would seem to carry Darwin’s ideas on human evolution and natural selection to an extreme by attributing all human behavior and thought to natural, external influences such as heredity, training, and environment. Some of Twain’s interpretations of Darwinian and evolutionary ideas, in addition, evoke his theory of determinism, as in a remark to Paine in 1906 on his feelings regarding Darwin’s theory on the descent of man, “We don’t create any of our traits; we inherit all of them” (“Mark Twain’s Social Darwinism” 167). This comment undeniably parallels passages in *What Is Man?* such as, “*Personally* you did not create even the smallest microscopic fragment of the materials out of which your opinion is made . . .” (337). The psychological egoism Twain includes in his theory

of determinism, moreover, may have been derived from Darwin's ideas on natural selection. As Michael Flescher and Daniel Worthen note in their book *The Altruistic Species*, natural selection is commonly taken, as a belief, to exclude altruistic behavior, "A Darwinian world is a world of strife and competition, not a world of peace and self-sacrifice. So even if it seems that people occasionally act for the welfare of others, they are really motivated by some self-interested end" (59). It is reasonable to believe that Twain may have come to a similar conclusion, and thus incorporated self-interest into his theory of determinism. Furthermore, Twain's theory of determinism is reminiscent of some of Huxley's evolutionary ideas, as evidenced by Huxley's comments on natural causation in his book *Evolution and Ethics* (1894): "If the world is full of pain and sorrow; if grief and evil fall, like the rain, upon both the just and the unjust; it is because, like the rain, they are links in the endless chain of natural causation by which past, present, and future are indissolubly connected" (Waggoner 366). Like Darwin and Huxley, Twain, in a sense, crafted a theory of natural causation, albeit a radical, deterministic one.

Another thinker whose theory of natural causation had a significant influence on Twain's thought is Hippolyte Taine, a French philosopher who was an important figure in the nineteenth-century American realist movement. "The French intellectual Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893)," as Sherwood Cummings writes in *Mark Twain and Science*, "was, through his writings, a major shaper of Mark Twain's ideas." Cummings describes Taine's theory of natural causation as follows:

All aspects of existence—whether things or events, individual acts or historical epochs, natural objects or works of art, measurable phenomena or private thought—are related. They are all parts of a rational, pantheistic universe and are joined by chains of cause and effect. Every fact is at the same time the effect of its

cause and the cause of a new but predictable effect. If people had enough information and wisdom, they might look ahead along the chain of cause and effect to see future developments. (68)

Taine's theory of natural causation closely resembles the theory of determinism in *The Chronicle of Young Satan*, in which the angel Satan tells Theodor Fischer, "That is human life. A child's first act knocks over the initial brick, and the rest will follow inexorably. If you could see into the future, as I can, you would see everything that was ever going to happen to that creature; for nothing can change the order of its life after the first event has determined it" (115). Although this passage and Twain's ideas on determinism may appear deistic or pantheistic, Twain never makes definitive claims about a Creator or deity. As the theory of determinism in the *Manuscripts* approximates Taine's theory of natural causation, Twain's deterministic obsessions likely owe much to Taine's realist philosophical doctrines, which drew interest in America beginning around 1870 (*Mark Twain and Science* 69).

Naturalism, as well as philosophical realism, seems to have provided the framework from which Twain constructed his late-life ideas and theories. Although Twain did not formally associate himself with the nineteenth-century, American literary naturalist movement, many of his works and comments reveal sympathies with naturalist views (*Mark Twain and Science* 209-10). E.M. Adams, in his book *Ethical Naturalism and the Modern World-View*, classifies a naturalist position as one that "holds that human behavior (along with all other events) is, in principle at least, subject to scientific explanation and thus to its underlying naturalistic (or what I have called in a somewhat liberalized sense 'mechanical') theory of change." Further, he adds, "If this is so, every human act is determined by antecedent conditions in the physical world in accordance with the laws of 'mechanical' causality" (214). A naturalistic view in which "every

human act is determined by antecedent conditions” would seem related to that expressed by Twain in many of his deterministic passages on the human race; for instance, “[Man] is a chameleon; by the law of his nature he takes the color of his place of resort. The influences about him create his preferences, his aversions, his politics, his tastes, his morals, his religion. He creates none of these things for himself” (“What Is Man?” 360). Interestingly, Twain’s own experience, especially in his later years, appears to substantiate his deterministic obsessions.

A strong case can be made that late in life Twain embodies his own doctrine, as it appears that, in accepting naturalistic views, he took “the color of his place of resort” and that outside influences then shaped his beliefs and theories. The outside influences of personal tragedy and human cruelty seem to have precipitated Twain’s change of focus, informed by a naturalistic perspective, first to a set of deterministic ideas then, despairing of the moral ramifications of a deterministic universe, to a set of solipsistic ones. Twain, as Coleman Parsons notes in his book *The Background of the Mysterious Stranger*, “tinkered with ideas, hoping to put together a combination that would make life bearable.” The ideas with which Twain tinkered seem to have been realistic and naturalistic ones, the prevailing ideas of late nineteenth-century America. Perhaps not coincidentally, then, as Parsons adds, Twain’s later “thought was not constructive but destructive, its end being exculpation and protection, its means negation of free will, conscience, and finally life itself” (69). Ultimately, a realistic and naturalistic perspective seems to have been at the foundation of the mechanistic and “destructive” focus of Twain’s later writings.

The destructive, reductionist nature of Twain’s later writing contributes to its bitter and despairing commentaries on the human race, the world, and the universe. A deterministic

perspective reduces all experience, in the terminology of economist E.F. Schumacher, to a series of “convergent problems:”

Convergent problems . . . do not, as such, exist in reality, but are created by a process of abstraction. When they have been solved, the solution can be written down and passed on to others, who can apply it without needing to reproduce the mental effort necessary to find it. If this were the case with human relations—in family life, economics, politics, education, and so forth—well, I am at a loss how to finish the sentence. There would be no more human relations but only mechanical reactions; life would be a living death. (*Small is Beautiful* 102-03)

Although he likely crafted his theory in order to abolish his sense of guilt, Twain’s deterministic obsessions appear to have either been unsuccessful in dispelling his sorrow and sense of guilt or, perhaps due to their reductive implications, to have further embittered him. Twain’s later notebooks reveal many of his opinions following his construction of a deterministic view: he writes, for instance, that “there is nothing kindly, nothing beneficent, nothing friendly in Nature toward any creature, except by capricious fits and starts; and that Nature’s attitude toward all life is profoundly vicious, treacherous, and malignant” (Waggoner 366), and notes in 1895, as he was on the verge of beginning the *Manuscripts*, “It is the strangest thing that the world is not full of books that scoff at the pitiful world, and the useless universe and violent, contemptible human race—books that laugh at the whole paltry scheme and deride it” (Tuckey 26). As they were written following his construction of a deterministic theory, the bitter opinions in Twain’s later notebooks seem to have been effected by his deterministic obsessions.

If Twain, as a principally realistic and naturalistic thinker, constructed his theory of determinism as a religion, of sorts, to sustain him during a sorrowful period of his life, then it

seems that his strong faith in naturalistic views may have led him, in a time of suffering, to embrace a doctrine of reduction and despair. A despairing outlook, as Schumacher argues in his book *A Guide for the Perplexed*, is bound up with a materialistic worldview:

A person . . . entirely fixed in the philosophy of materialistic Scientism, denying the reality of ‘invisibles’ and confining his attention solely to what can be counted, measured, and weighed, lives in a very poor world, so poor that he will experience it as a meaningless wasteland unfit for human habitation. Equally, if he sees it as nothing but an accidental collocation of atoms, he must needs agree with

Bertrand Russell that the only rational attitude is one of ‘unyielding despair’. (34)

Although it is difficult to speculate on the truthfulness of Schumacher’s absolute statements (e.g. ‘he *will* experience it as . . .’ and ‘he *must needs* agree . . .’), Twain’s late-life writings instantiate Schumacher’s claims. Clearly, Twain, towards the end of his life, found the “only rational attitude” to be one of pessimism and despair. A number of his works and comments evince his belief in the incompatibility of rationality and happiness. For instance, in *The Chronicle of Young Satan*, Satan, aiming to provide Father Peter with a favorable future, contents Father Peter in only way possible: he unseats his reason. After Theodor Fischer asks Satan if there were any other way he could have gone about improving Father Peter’s future, Satan replies, “Are you so unobservant as not to have found out that sanity and happiness are an impossible combination? No sane man can be happy, for to him life is real, and he sees what a fearful thing it is” (163-64). Twain echoes Satan’s remarks, further, in a 1905 letter to Twichell, as he writes, “When a man is a pessimist before 48 he knows too much; if he is an optimist after it, he knows too little” (Messent 400). Although Twain’s comments to Twichell were perhaps made in jest, they nonetheless seem to epitomize his feelings on the effects of knowledge in a deterministic world.

Despite some of its grim ramifications, Twain passionately defended his theory of determinism until his death, steadfastly denying the compatibility of religious ideas with the scientific ideas which seem to have informed his theory. Although he attended church regularly for brief periods earlier in his life, Twain later insisted that “When religion and science elect to live together, it is a plain case of adultery” (Harnsberger 13). He likely held this opinion, or one close to it, for at least the final twenty years of his life. While Twain was able to reason consistently in favor of the opinions and beliefs presented in his writing, some doubt exists as to whether he viscerally accepted them. “The very vehemence with which Twain supported determinism and denied free will operating through conscience and the Moral Sense,” as Parsons notes, “reveals unsureness” (71). Perhaps Twain’s uncertainty, if he indeed had any, towards the deterministic ideas in his works lay in their conflict with his moral principles. His frequent contemplation of solipsistic ideas, after all, would appear to suggest his dissatisfaction with his deterministic doctrine. In his book *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, Schumacher comments on the ambivalence—which Twain perhaps felt—of many towards the leading ideas of the nineteenth-century: “We have become confused as to what our convictions really are. The great ideas of the nineteenth century may fill our minds in one way or another, but our hearts do not believe in them all the same. Mind and heart are at war with one another, not, as is commonly asserted, reason and faith” (98). For Twain, it seems, the more important battle was always that between reason and faith. Despite his despairing comments on the human race and on the universe, he never seems to acknowledge any tension between his convictions and desires. In fact, in *What Is Man?*, he trivializes beliefs as compared to temperament, thus removing any conflict between the two: “Beliefs? Mere beliefs? Mere convictions? They are powerless. They strive in vain against inborn temperament” (398). The irony of this passage lies in Twain’s denial

of the importance of beliefs in a work where he outlines the very justifications he has used to cope with frustration and tragedy. As evidenced by his earlier works and demeanor, the dark vision which Twain's late works reflect coincides with his change in temperament. While some may see this change as a kind of awakening, it is also possible that Twain, having greatly underestimated the significance of his naturalistic convictions, constructed a deterministic theory that placed him in an amoral quandary, leaving him conflicted about his own self and beliefs, and at odds with a misunderstanding world.

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