

Why is there Socialism in the United States? Social Science and Industrial Society in Thorstein Veblen's Line of Thought

Clemente Parisi

Submitted: May 3, 2020 – Accepted: July 9, 2020 – Published: July 14, 2020

Abstract

The article deals with Veblen's vision of social conflict and provides a critical reexamination of his political thought. Retracing his intellectual biography, it focuses on three related aspects: a twofold vision of social conflict that emerges from his reinvention of evolutionism; his reading of socialism in an industrial society; and the relevance of an evolutionary concept of technology in order to understand new forms of conflict within the transition to a cooperative working process that is associated with scientific organization and planning. These elements are used to highlight Veblen's stance towards Progressive Era social sciences and also towards institutional and intellectual attempts to control the vagaries and conflicts of industrial capitalism.

Keywords: Thorstein Veblen; United States; Social Sciences; Industrial Society; Technology.

Clemente Parisi: University of Bologna (Italy)

✉ clementeparisi@outlook.it

Clemente Parisi is currently a PhD student in Global Histories, Cultures and Politics at the Department of Histories and Cultures, University of Bologna. He obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Political Sciences and a Master's Degree in History at the University of Bologna. Between 2014 and 2016 he attended in Buenos Aires a Maestría in International Relations between Europe and Latin America. His main research interests include the history of political and social thought, 18th- and 19th-century American History and Latin American Social and Political History.

1 Introduction

In 1906, Werner Sombart, who was just back from an overseas trip, tried to answer a question that became famous: Why is there no socialism in the United States? The essay went through the full range of reasons associated with American exceptionalism and the conclusion was quite simple: “all Socialist utopias came to nothing on roast beef and apple pie.”¹ Two years before Sombart's observations, Thorstein Bunde Veblen had already published in the United States *The Theory of Business Enterprise* (1904), which anticipated, in reverse form, Sombart's question: why, despite roast beef and apple pie, does socialism exist also in the United States? At the beginning of the twentieth century, both Sombart and Veblen considered the United States as the most highly advanced point of industrial and financial capitalism. However, Sombart's view was primarily based on the idea that in the New World consumption and affluence are the seal of social cohesion, whereas Veblen had developed an outlook that was more internal to the “Gilded Age crisis of American exceptionalism” triggered by an outstanding season of social conflict. At the turn of the century, this crisis strongly affected American social sciences, threatening to efface the clear lines of the peaceful American experiment and its extraordinary destiny in history.²

In this context, Veblen is one of the very few theorists who stands outside the liberal ideological boundaries of social sciences of the time. He embraces the three “clusters of ideas” and “social languages” of the progressive era: the rhetoric of anti-monopolism; an emphasis on social bonds and the social nature of human beings; as well as the language of social efficiency.³ At the same time, he constantly investigates and elaborates their theoretical, ideological, and cultural foundations in order to deconstruct their progressive surface and to find hidden paradoxes and contradictions. During an age when evolutionary discourse blends with both reactionary individualism and social and progressive reformism, he reinvents an original and radical evolutionary framework for his social theory that moves away from both. Throughout his work, he maintains an overly critical stand towards both competitive market mechanisms and the full range of theoretical and institutional solutions introduced to regulate them and to ensure the smooth continuity of liberal economic and social order. He insists that the price system produces an unmanageable disorder which cannot be regulated through any form of bargaining or administrative tool, because it stems from irredeemable antagonism between different aptitudes and cultural products. The definitive overcoming of competitive institutions, first of all that of private property, is the only way to attain an order that suits a qualitatively new industrial society.

For these reasons, Veblen has barely found a place within a narrative which sees the American cultural tradition as a space marked by liberalism. For decades scholars have fed the myth of his intellectual and academic marginality in order to explain his most radical stands.⁴ Moreover, the most radical and visionary trait of his work has often been diluted and neutralized in partial interpretations that are dependent on the use of his social and political thought after his death. These readings have emphasized either one part or another of his work. First, the association with Institutional Economics and the documented influence on the New Dealers⁵ has resulted in prolonged attention on Veblen's harsh condemnation of money, power and business. The so-called “Veblenian dichotomy,” between business and industry, has casted a shadow on every interpretation until recent times,⁶ reducing Veblen to a sort of muckraker whose thought has to be cleansed from moralistic incrustations in order to be used to correct dysfunctions of competitive and technological capitalism. Second,

1. Werner Sombart, *Why is there no Socialism in the United States?*, (London: MacMillan, 1975), 106.

2. Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

3. Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History*, 4(1982): 113–132.

4. See, for example, David Riesman, *Thorstein Veblen: A Critical Interpretation*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953).

5. Walton H. Hamilton, “The Institutional Approach to Economic Theory,” *American Economic Review*, 9(1919): 309–18. On the relationship between Veblen and the New Deal see Rick Tilman, “Thorstein Veblen and the New Deal: A Reappraisal,” *The Historian*, 2(1988): 155–72.

6. William T. Waller, “The Evolution of the Veblenian Dichotomy: Veblen, Hamilton, Ayres and Foster,” *Journal of Economic Issues*, 3(1982): 757–71.

a posthumous association with the Technocratic Movement has influenced interpretations of later works, making his political thought an elitist and palingenetic utopia inspired by technological determinism.⁷ These readings tend to conceal the main result of Veblen's evolutionism, that is, a dynamic and open-ended social model. Recent attempts to investigate his political thought have produced complex works, which often include his radical theoretical outcomes. Nevertheless, they often overlook the continuity of Veblen's thought and focus on extremely specific aspects or neglect the importance of technology in Veblen's evolutionism to not cast a shadow of technological determinism over him.⁸

Generally speaking, Veblen's thought has often been analyzed starting with his critics of business methods and the rebuke against the vagaries of competitive market. This essay holds this trait in the background and uses Veblen's vision of social conflict to critically reexamine his political thought. Retracing his intellectual biography, the essay focuses on three connected aspects: a twofold vision of social conflict that emerges from Veblen's social model and from a reinvention of evolutionism; the reading of socialism in an industrial society; the relevance of an evolutionary concept of technology in order to understand new forms of conflict within the transition to a cooperative working process that is associated with scientific organization and planning. Each one of these aspects gains a specific relevance when related to the tendencies in American social sciences of the Progressive Era.

2 A Twofold Vision of Social Conflict

Veblen started his academic career as an economist while evolutionary naturalism came to a poignant halt in the Gilded Age's social and intellectual crisis.⁹ At the University of Cornell (1891–1892) and the University of Chicago (1892–1906) he met the most prominent exponents of the natural and social sciences of his time and acquired the conceptual tools to carry out a project regarding the refoundation of economic science on an evolutionary basis.¹⁰ The city of Chicago also provided an encounter with the conflicts and contradictions of industrial society. When he arrived in 1892, the city was still mindful of the events of Haymarket Square and it was the theater for a huge concentration of businesses. The following year, a massive strike overwhelmed the Pullman Company's experiment with a company town and marked the American imaginary of the decade, making clear that optimistic ideas of development needed to go through strong social strife.¹¹

Beginning with his academic career in the 1890s, Veblen had to come to terms with the interwoven body of ideas and events of the time, struggling with contradictory impulses to deal with the challenges of class conflict, populist protests¹² and labor organizations. In fact, during a period that spanned roughly the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the transition toward an urban, mass industrial society produced a general reorientation of the social and political American life. Reform-minded intellectuals and politicians outlined projects of social and economic rationalization in order

7. Daniel Bell, "Veblen and the New Class," *The American Scholar*, 4(1963): 616–638; Edward Layton, "Veblen and the Engineers," *American Quarterly*, 1(1962): 64–72.

8. Don R. Stabile, "Veblen's Analysis of Social Movements: Bellamyites, Workers, and Engineers," *Journal of Economic Issues*, 1(1988): 211–26; Sidney Plotkin and Rick Tilman, *The Political Ideas of Thorstein Veblen*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Francesca L. Viano, *Thorstein Veblen. Tra utopia e disincanto*, (Aosta: Stylos, 2002).

9. Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); Daniel E. Bender, *American Abyss: Savagery and Civilization in the Age of Industry*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Robert C. Bennister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010).

10. Thorstein Veblen, "Why is Economics not an Evolutionary Science?," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 4(1898): 373–397. The recent Veblen Renaissance has investigated minutely Veblen's influences and contacts in American intellectual life to get rid of the myth of his marginality. See Simon Edgell and Rick Tilman, "The Intellectual Antecedents of Thorstein Veblen: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Economic Issues*, 4(1989): 1003–26; Erik S. Reinert and Francesca L. Viano, eds., *Thorstein Veblen. Economics for an age of crisis*, (London: Anthem Press, 2013), chapter 2.

11. David Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!*, (Boston: South End Press, 1997); Ferdinando Fasce, *Dal mestiere alla catena. Lavoro e controllo sociale in America (1877–1920)*, (Genova-Ivrea: Herodote Edizioni, 1983).

12. On populist movements and 'producerism' see Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion. An American History*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

to govern the transition through an increasing role of administrative branches,¹³ while the most part of social scientists promoted their expertise as a theoretical and operational tool to regulate social strife through sophisticated forms of social control, conflict resolution and integration.¹⁴ Within this scenario, Veblen was one of the few who maintained a critical stance towards any attempt to evade, enter or control the vagaries and conflicts of social change through the prescriptive role of social science. In order to understand this position, this essay extrapolates from his work a twofold framework within which he analyzed social conflict, which reflected the reality of social unrest within the qualitatively new social fabric of industrial capitalism.

First, Veblen's vision of social conflict particularly stresses the importance of elements that he considers "of a subjective origin"¹⁵—i.e., habitual forms of behavior, systems of beliefs, modes of knowledge, ideological products. This focus stems from a general trend of late-nineteenth century American social sciences, in which the concept of human nature, the human mind and the role of individual voluntary action were major battlegrounds within the emancipation of evolutionary discourse from the monistic reading of Herbert Spencer and from the liberal individualism, social conservatism and laissez-faire that it supported.¹⁶ The debate regarding human nature allowed the social and natural sciences to reject representations of biological determinism and to point out the social and cultural aspects of individual adjustments, while functional psychology and the pragmatist social philosophy developed criticism of the idea of the "mind as correspondence" and of the knowing-subject as a "mirror floating with no foot-hold."¹⁷

Veblen helps to extend these theories into social and political analysis, driving a new 'psychological' and evolutionary frame for social and political phenomena toward the most radical consequences. His method for scientific inquiry of society, that he considers as the proper result of a post-Darwinian approach,¹⁸ makes the adaptive relation between mind and the social environment the core element of the social order, framing the most important questions of politics not only in terms of power or wealth but, instead, in terms of an individual and collective production of beliefs and habituation from experience and from repeated practices. Taking advantage of evolutionary naturalism's capacious elasticity,¹⁹ in Chicago Veblen elaborated a social model where instincts, habits and institutions constitute a flywheel that leads, without interruption, from the individual to social determinants.²⁰ In this scheme, evolution becomes the selection of "habitual methods of carrying on the life process of the community in contact with the material environment in which it lives,"²¹ that is, an adaptive process of production and selection of institutions, habits of thought and behavioral patterns.

This model is relevant because it can be read as an attempt to frame a massive and nation-wide season of insubordination and social conflict in renewed evolutionary terms. Since his first academic interventions, Veblen considered the psychological outline as an updating of the method for reading

13. Raffaella Baritono, *Oltre la politica. La crisi politico-istituzionale negli Stati Uniti tra Otto e Novecento*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993); Stephen Skowronek, *Building a new American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Raffaella Baritono, "Ordine, efficienza e democrazia nelle scienze sociali americane (1890–1929)," in *Strategie dell'ordine: processi, fratture, soggetti*, edited by Raffaella Baritono, Maurizio Ricciardi (Quaderni di Scienza & Politica, n. 8, 2020), 163–185.

14. Ross, *The Origins*; Alessandra Lorini, *Ingegneria umana e scienze sociali negli USA (1980–1920)*, (Firenze: D'Anna, 1980).

15. Thorstein Veblen, "Some Neglected Points in the Theory of Socialism," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 2(1891): 345–362, 348.

16. See, for example, Andrew Carnegie, "The Gospel of Wealth," *The North American Review*, 599(1906): 526–37.

17. William James, "Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind As Correspondence," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 1(1878): 1–18. On human nature and human mind, see Carl D. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Antii Gronow, *From Habits to Social Structures: Pragmatism and Contemporary Social Theory*, (Helsinki: Peter Lang, 2011).

18. Thorstein Veblen, "The Place of Science in Modern Civilization," *American Journal of Sociology*, 5(1906): 585–609.

19. Bender, *American Abyss*.

20. Geoffrey Hodgson, *The Evolution of Institutional Economics: Agency, Structure, and Darwinism in American Institutionalism*, (New York: Routledge, 2004); Tony Lawson, "Process, order and stability in Veblen," *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 4(2015): 993–1030.

21. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

social facts which is necessary to explain an apparent dilemma within American exceptionalism: that is, the existence of “unrests” which are at the core of a social system that has experienced the fastest advancement ever in average wealth and industrial efficiency. Mounting social protests in the United States, Veblen claims, are not reactions to deprivation, but a social fact mediated by constructions “of a subjective origin,” such as “jealousy,” since, indeed, the industrial system does not make the industrious poor absolutely poorer in terms of subsistence, but relatively poorer “in terms of comparative economic importance.”²² Thus, the social conflict imposed by “economic cephalization” is read as a perceptive transformation, or even as a change of “concepts.”²³ In this way, economic interest is excluded as the basis of individual and collective action; as such, interest must be balanced with other elements of a different nature and cannot be used as an eternal psychological category, as “Professor Clark” and marginalist economists do.²⁴ Moreover, interest itself must be explained from a historical dimension, from which the meanings of action are determined. Echoing a criticism to Marx that was quite common in American radical and socialist thought of the time,²⁵ Veblen defines historical materialism as a “sublimated materialism,” because it ignores that “the sentiment which animates men, singly or collectively, is as much, or more, an outcome of habit and native propensity as of calculated material interest.”²⁶ A concept such as class behavior is not enough to account for either cultural expressions or political positions.

The *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) is the major result of this attempt to draw up a new geography for social conflict, which has expanded beyond socio-economical positioning and involves collective elements that give order and meaning to individual and social experience. Indeed, conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption produce the image of a society in which the game of representations and reciprocal signification assumes major importance in defining social hierarchies through emulation.²⁷ Emulative dynamics set a sort of “symbolic order” of status and consumption that functions as a systematically organized device for the transmission of power in production and society. From this point of view, the book can be considered an original—and generally overlooked—intervention in the inchoate political and intellectual debate regarding the so-called ‘labor problem,’²⁸ i.e. the widespread resistance to the work ethic within the industrial workforce. In a long anthropological section, Veblen explains why “employment in industry becomes correspondingly odious,” suggesting that the “irk-someness of labor” threads through the entire social fabric because the institutions of private property and economic competition redirect the “instinct of workmanship,” that is, the “sense of the merit of serviceability or efficiency and of the demerit of futility, waste, or incapacity,” toward “a straining to excel others in pecuniary achievement.”²⁹ This makes individuals reluctant to work, and the difference between those who can afford leisure and those who cannot defines social hierarchies and social power. According to Veblen, the main trait of social and industrial conflict is definitely rooted in psychological dynamics that are fully embedded in the social institution of private property and the associated habits of thought.

The second aspect of Veblen’s vision of social conflict stems from the conception of social dynamics as “a cumulative process of adaptation of means to ends that cumulatively change as the process goes on, both the agent and his environment being at any point the outcome of the last process.”³⁰ Post-Darwinian social sciences must investigate this scheme through a “genetic account,” in order to understand how institutions that have been inherited from the past determine current behavior and

22. Thorstein Veblen, “Some Neglected Points,” 349–354.

23. Thorstein Veblen, “The Army of the Commonwealth,” *The Journal of Political Economy*, 2(1894): 456–461.

24. Thorstein Veblen, “The Limitations of Marginal Utility,” *Journal of Political Economy*, 17(1909): 620–36.

25. Cristiano Camporesi, *Il marxismo teorico negli USA, 1900–1945*, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1973).

26. Thorstein Veblen, “The Socialist Economics of Karl Marx and his Followers. The Later Marxists (Part II),” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 21(1906): 299–322, 305.

27. Veblen, *Leisure Class*.

28. Richard T. Ely, et al., *The Labor Problem. Plain Questions and Practical Answers*, (New York: Harper & Bros, 1886).

29. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 16–27.

30. Veblen, “Why is Economics not an Evolutionary Science?,” 391.

produce a movement aimed at their overcoming.³¹ On this basis, conflict arises as a clash between the network of knowledge and behavioral patterns inherited from the past versus the adaptation needs determined by the present. The genetic approach sets up a historically designed plot as the sedimentation of human activities.

Using this pattern to understand the social reality of his time, Veblen offers an evolutionary theorization of how past and present are intertwined. The result is a scheme in which evolution is not a smooth path toward progress that constantly devours the past, but rather a blind process of sedimentation of layers. In Veblen's evolutionism, the past works both as a "restraining dead hand"³² on the possibilities that are open in the present as well as a "repository of social knowledge,"³³ an awareness of hereditary adaptive solutions. The tangle of past and present always takes the form of a social puzzle, because the adjustment of individual inner relations and outer relations "is never definitely established" and "cannot be determined."³⁴ Veblen constantly set in motion society by delicate balances, such as, inertia and adaptability, stability and dynamism, rigidity of the past and potentialities in the present. However, he believes that historical and genetic inquiry can reveal the general direction of social change but cannot disclose any internal dynamic or a transhistorical agent or process whose imperatives the individual and society must obey in the evolutionary process. The "inteleological" and cumulative character are two fundamental traits of Veblen's idea of social evolution mechanisms.³⁵ For this reason, modelling social sciences in emulation of post-Darwinian natural science means assuming the indeterminacy of social reality and the scarcely predictive character of knowledge.

These elements become relevant when considering that, at the turn of twentieth century, progress, time lags and historical design were a rhetorical and political battleground on both sides of the Atlantic. For many American and European intellectuals socialism and class conflict were relics of the past, corporate remnants to be reabsorbed by liberal institutions, while anthropological and psychological studies about the permanence of archaic traits often welded to a conservative discourse in which insubordination and deviance of the lower classes were associated with the resurgence of ancestral and non-rational instincts.³⁶ In this framework, Veblen provides a systematic explanation of social evolution which turns the dominant evolutionary narrative upside down. Echoing and escalating avant-gardist and socialist positions that polemicize with conservative and upper-class use of evolutionary naturalism,³⁷ he plays the idea of cultural remnants with the wealthy and upper class. Bankers and businessmen turn out to be the expression of ancestral virtues "of the predatory man," such as, "ferocity, self-seeking, clannishness, and disingenuousness—a free resort to force and fraud."³⁸ As a social group of wealthy parasites, "sheltered from the action of the environment"³⁹ and by selection, they constitute a non-contemporary nucleus that is at the heart of evolutionary social dynamics. Moreover, they are responsible for censoring the industrious instincts throughout society, imposing the persistence of barbaric aptitudes and the irksomeness of labor. They are, therefore, destined to conflict with "socialism," which is no longer a remnant of the past, but an extreme form of adaptation to the needs of the industrial society.

31. Ibid, 388.

32. Thorstein Veblen, *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution*, (New York: Macmillan, 1915).

33. Hodgson, *The Evolution*, 181–184.

34. Veblen, *Leisure Class*, 127.

35. Veblen, "The Place of Science."

36. Arnaldo Testi, "Perché negli Stati Uniti non c'è il socialismo? Conflitti sociali, vita politica e scarti temporali nell'America di fine Ottocento," in *Nazionalizzazione e modernità. Italia, Europa e Stati Uniti (1861–1901)*, edited by Tiziano Bonazzi et al. (Aracne Editrice, Roma, 2014), 191–202; Bender, *American Abyss*; Damiano Palano, *Il Potere della moltitudine: l'invenzione dell'inconscio collettivo nella teoria politica e nelle scienze sociali italiane tra Otto e Novecento*, (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2002).

37. Bender, *American Abyss*.

38. Veblen, *Leisure Class*, 148.

39. Ibid, 128.

3 Why is there Socialism in the United States?

This twofold vision of social conflict is a central element of Veblen's understanding of industrial society and it is enough to explain Veblen's reluctance to affirm the regulatory and prescriptive power of his post-Darwinian science. According to his interpretation, modelling social sciences in emulation of natural science means assuming the indeterminacy and blindness of social processes and the scarcely predictive character of every knowledge about social dynamics. Moreover, Veblen believes that the reasons for the refusal of work and social strife are competitive market and private property, so that waste, intemperance and reluctance to work do not depend on unsuitable customs or poor consumer education, but rather on the current form of social institutions, that imposes a 'symbolic order' in which waste and leisure are socially ratified conventions. This means that social control and sociological knowledge cannot promote an adequate adjustment of individuals and social institutions in order to attain a socially efficient order,⁴⁰ since a new order can only be attained by overcoming private property and pecuniary logics.

These assumptions about social sciences underlie every later attempt by Veblen to explain capitalistic relations and the growth of socialist and labor organizations in the United States. *The Theory of Business Enterprise* (1904) provides the most systematic insight on these issues.⁴¹ Although it has generally been read with an emphasis on the heated and naïf rebuke of businessmen, other important aspects emerge if we consider the book as the outcome of Veblen's intellectual dialogue and connection with European social and political theorists like Gustav Schmoller or Werner Sombart.⁴² Through this "Atlantic Crossing,"⁴³ Veblen imports part of the German debate regarding the origins of capitalism and its 'spirit' to the American soil. A quarrel about capitalism and its relationship with political power—in its modern connection between law, sovereignty, state and society—is translated into a language that pays more attention to the interrelationship between individual psychological processes and evolutionary social and collective dynamics.⁴⁴ Capitalism becomes a set of regulatory ideas, behaviors and institutions that underpins human behavior and attitudes, legitimizing social roles, functions, and positions.

The core of this set of ideas is what Veblen defines as a 'theory of property.' Deepening his focus on immaterial aspects of authority and power relations, the symbolic space outlined in *The Theory of Leisure Class* by consumption and emulative rules becomes a sort of 'ideological body.' This body is located at the core of the "system of business enterprise" and it is composed of distinct parts, including "common sense," "metaphysical" fundamentals, up to the "point of view" of science itself.⁴⁵ Starting from these assumptions, the history of capitalism turns out to be the history of the institution of private property which becomes dominant in each of these levels.⁴⁶ In the "era of handicraft"⁴⁷ the three above-mentioned elements remained in a functional equilibrium. The dominance of the theory of property trickled down from a pre-Darwinian scientific point of view, which, in turn, supported metaphysical preconceptions of ownership and individualistic and liberal political ideas.⁴⁸ On the contrary, the industrial society is a qualitatively new society in which the relationship between these ideological elements takes the form of conflict, and this conflict expands into social and political

40. See, for example, Edward A. Ross, *Social Control*, (New York: MacMillan, 1901); Albion W. Small, "A Vision of Social Efficiency," *American Journal of Sociology*, 4(1914): 433–445.

41. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of Business Enterprise*, (New York: Barnes&Noble, 2011).

42. Thorstein Veblen, "Gustav Schmoller's Economics," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 1(1901): 69–93, 89; Thorstein Veblen, "Review of *Der Moderne Kapitalismus* by Werner Sombart," *Journal of Political Economy*, 11(1903): 300–305, 302.

43. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings. Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2000).

44. Some translations in Veblen's commentary on *Der Moderne Kapitalismus* are significant: *Kapitalismus*, he says, should be translated in English as "business enterprise," while the *Geist* would be "the habit of mind involved in diligently seeking gain for gain's sake." See Thorstein Veblen, "Review of *Der Moderne Kapitalismus*," 328.

45. *Ibid.*, 37.

46. Veblen, *Business Enterprise*, ch. 4.

47. Thorstein Veblen, *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of Industrial Arts*, (New York: MacMillan, 1914).

48. Veblen, *Business Enterprise*, ch. 4 and 7.

dynamics. The 'ideological body,' in fact, is not monolithic, but rather it is the main ground where evolutive adjustments occur, and this process animates conflict among social groups. The ideological framework of each society—industrial society included—is indeed constantly on the move. It guarantees both discipline and adherence, at the same time, to the institutions of a certain social order and checks the results according to effectiveness criteria, which leads to disaffection with older institutional structures. Veblen calls "socialism" the ideological effect of this movement within industrial society.

The vehicle of this major ideological shift is what Veblen calls "machine process," i.e. that process of mechanization and rationalization of production systems that in 1904 was fully in operation and would eventually lead to scientific management and Taylorism.⁴⁹ Investigating machine process' effect on psychology, habits and institutions, he concludes that "the standardization of workmen's intellectual life" would bring about a scheme of knowledge and of inference "based on the laws of material causation, not on those of immemorial custom, authenticity or authoritative enactment." The new "discipline of everyday life" produces the "iconoclastic discipline" of socialism and under its wing the preconceptions of private property and natural rights, inculcated by the discipline of everyday life in the eighteenth century, would be the first institutions to fall.⁵⁰

Through the Atlantic crossing, therefore, socialism acquires a new meaning. It becomes an anti-proprietary expression of the new scientific and managerial content of production and of a general spread—among tendencies and counter-tendencies—of "materialistic, matter-of-fact pre-conceptions."⁵¹ It is a proper cultural and ideological factor, a practice of disallowance of existing institutions that has nothing to do with socio-economic or class categories, but, instead, with the new content of labor process. "Trade-unionism," which is still imbued with a sense of ownership of tools, knowledge and skills, is an intermediate phase during which the denial of received natural-rights dogma is still linked to business attitudes.⁵²

This argument has some important political implications, which better define the place of Veblen among the intellectual and political tendencies of the beginning of the century. The fact that socialism arises on a psychological and cultural basis, which involves the formation of a new metaphysics, a new scientific point of view and a new everyday discipline, means that social conflict is understood exclusively in terms of its antagonistic content. Proper socialism does not allow any outlet in mediation or bargaining since it originates from an irredeemable conflict with the foundations of ownership and profit. Transformations in institutions and habits due to new solicitations from social environment constitute the only ground for a transition within the industrial society toward a new social order. This stance places Veblen at odds with later canonizations of Institutional Economics, committed to a pronounced preference for bargaining practices,⁵³ but also with the reformist social and political thought of his time that strived for administrative and social tools of conflict resolution in order to organize and control economic relations.⁵⁴ On the contrary, Veblen considers unionism and industrial agreements on matter of wage and workhours as a hindrance to the realization of a new social order that can only be attained by overcoming the institution of private property⁵⁵ and the associated habits of thought.

Moreover, Veblen's idea of socialism provides an original insight into the historic passage from craftwork to an industrial production line, which he directly observes. His idea of trade-unionism makes an important point when considered in the historical context. It registers the historical persistence of a proprietary culture of work as found among contemporary organizations of industrial

49. Samuel Haber, *Efficiency and Uplift. Scientific Management in the Progressive Era 1890–1920*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

50. Veblen, *Business Enterprise*, 139.

51. *Ibid.*, 165.

52. *Ibid.*, 139–146.

53. See John R. Commons, *Institutional Economics. Its Place in Political Economy*, (New York: MacMillan, 1934).

54. Baritono, *Oltre la politica*.

55. Veblen, *Business Enterprise*, 150–153.

laborers.⁵⁶ Veblen believes this permanence tends to disappear, even among laborers, because of the full deployment of new managerial and organizational skills. Looking at the new industrial processes, he emphasizes a neat qualitative passage, as such, industrial work acquires an ever more impersonal and cooperative character and undermines a direct and foundational relationship of pre-industrial society, which is the one between individual work and individual property. While the industrial proletariat is involved in a massive “struggle for control” over a work process that is considered fragmentary, obtundent and deskilling,⁵⁷ Veblen socially and politically enhances the cooperative character of the division of labor. This is what allows him to elaborate an evolutionary scheme in which workers involved in the machine process become the upholders of an evolutionary, advanced intellectual code.

It must be highlighted that the relationship between Veblen's socialism as a psychological profile and the social fabric is not univocal. Socialist disaffection produces complex stratifications of the social space, which is not a prerogative of an industrial workforce. As a proper post-Darwinian scientist, Veblen looks at the social process without assuming the results and he believed that the effect of the mechanical process is not deterministic. Mechanisms of ideological formation are intricate and stratified since the different elements that make up the ‘ideological body’ arrange themselves in different combinations and balances. Throughout the social fabric, in fact, “the rate of change, the rate at which matter-of-fact ideals are superseding ideals of conventional authenticity, is not the same for all classes.”⁵⁸ Veblen's ‘social topography’ includes a set of positions that range from clerical and military, reactionary temper, up to iconoclastic positions of socialism and anarchism, passing through the conservative bent of businessmen and the positions of workers “who stand in an engineering or supervisory relation to the processes.”⁵⁹ To this last position is attached the maximum of organicity of the matter-of-fact knowledge imposed by the machine process, while other groups preserve a business logic and the awe of businessmen. Social dynamic is, thus, represented once again as a complex mechanism of balances in which social conflict is the outcome of opposing psychological profiles and of misaligned temporalities, of different rates of adaptation to environmental stimuli. From this point of view, the famous dichotomy between “pecuniary or business employments” and “industrial or mechanical employments” is conceptually clear, but practically nuanced. It does not indicate in a deterministic way the psychological profile, but rather the prospect of being penetrated by socialist ideals. With this idea in mind, Veblen temporarily solves the dilemma of discontent in a society marked by industrial opulence, arguing that socialist disaffection also suits a class of experts and technicians that play an increasing role in the organization and definition of tasks within the machine process.⁶⁰

It is significant that Veblen places the highest “coefficient of change”⁶¹ and adaptation in productive activity, alleging that productive activity is where the relationships between man and nature are stabilized and codified, where material and intellectual instruments of practical life are produced in the form of a discipline for everyday life. This emphasis re-articulates a trait of the social and political language of late nineteenth-century America, with its accent on producing classes and producer ethics: it combines these elements of the populist conception of ‘the people’ and of the ‘common man’⁶² with the pragmatist lesson about the priority of the material experience over fixed principles and other levels of knowledge⁶³ and a reinvention of evolutionism in which the producing classes are ranks for the psychologically fittest survive and uphold an ethos of collective responsibility, self-reliance and sacrifice. In Veblen, these elements take an original direction, helping to define an innovative and

56. Fasce, *Dal mestiere alla catena*.

57. Montgomery, *Workers' Control*; Haber, *Efficiency and Uplifts*.

58. Veblen, *Business Enterprise*, 154.

59. *Ibid*, 153–165.

60. Viano, *Thorstein Veblen*, 138.

61. Veblen, *Business Enterprise*, 143–153.

62. Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 13–17.

63. Carlo Sini, *Il pragmatismo americano*, (Bari: Laterza, 1972).

evolutionary concept of technology that has significant political outcomes.

4 Technology and Technologists

At the beginning of twentieth century, industrial conflict was definitely taken on by a group of experts, scientists, professional administrators, technicians and intellectuals who relied upon the capacity of science for solving social problems that capitalist institutions and political parties left unresolved. A diverse collection of experts attained a certain uniformity of thought and action around two elements: first, the importance of management, planning and division of labor to accomplish efficiency both on an individual and social basis;⁶⁴ second, the quest for an active role of the state and its administrative branch in order to attain an orderly and planned management of capitalism.⁶⁵ The burst of hope for Progressive reforms was associated with a conspicuous turn toward scientism and technocracy in which science and administration advocated for themselves the mission to do away with social waste and inefficiency and to organize for social, political and economic rationalization.⁶⁶ Eventually, the First World War accelerated administrative experiments, legitimizing them by an increasing formal involvement of economic and social interests.⁶⁷

The Engineers and the price system (1921), with its long-discussed proposal for a “soviet of technicians,”⁶⁸ has often been referred to as a product of this technocratic and scientist, cultural climate. This reference is appropriate in many ways. The assumption that the kind of ‘technical rationality’ associated with scientific management would have been the counterparts of business waste and inefficiency was a common background of progressive thought.⁶⁹ Moreover, the “soviet of technicians” owe much to Veblen’s personal contact with a group of “revolting engineers” in the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, and with Henry Gantt, one of their leading organizers and theorists.⁷⁰ Like Veblen, this group of technical experts believed that business methods and old-style management were not efficient tools for organizing production, so solutions were required to force the business system to “accept its social responsibility and devote itself primarily to service.”⁷¹ Nevertheless, these overlaps between Veblen’s ideas of technical efficiency and the progressives’ hatred for the vagaries of business is only part of the story. Indeed, a complete understanding of Veblen’s plea for efficiency and technical *expertise* needs to be integrated with a preliminary appreciation of his concept of technology. The concept is framed within a sort of “scientific collectivism,” which is an idea of production that is controlled and planned “by a collective workforce, all of whom would share a common set of scientific values.”⁷² What is relevant is that, in Veblen’s view, this commonality develops along with the new cooperative character of the industrial labor process and the adaptive psychological attitudes of the workforce.

Veblen begins using the term ‘technology’ to fill the “semantic void” produced by the material and technical advancements of the second industrial revolution,⁷³ referring to a combination of forms of

64. Don R. Stabile, *Prophets of Order*, (Boston: South End Press, 1984).

65. Raffaella Baritono, “Ripensare lo Stato: scienze sociali e crisi politica negli Stati Uniti fra Otto e Novecento,” *Ricerche di storia politica*, 3(2013): 301–318; Skowronek, *Building a New American State*.

66. Borgognone, *Tecnocrati del progresso*.

67. James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State: 1900–1918*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968); Guy Alchon, *The Invisible Hand of Planning: Capitalism, Social Science, and the State in the 1920s*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

68. Thorstein Veblen, *The Engineers and the Price System*, (Kitchener: Batoche Book, 2001).

69. Borgognone, *Tecnocrati del progresso*, ch. 6.

70. Edward Layton, *The Revolt of the Engineers. Social Responsibility and the American Engineering Profession*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986); David F. Noble, *America by Design: Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

71. Henry L. Gantt, *Organizing for Work*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1919), 15.

72. Don R. Stabile, “Veblen and the Political Economy of the Engineer,” *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 1(1986): 41–52, 42.

73. Leo Marx, “Technology. The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept,” *Technology and Culture*, 3(2010): 561–577.

primitive labor techniques, as well as forms of agriculture and breeding, large electrical and railway systems, mass production machines and management techniques.⁷⁴ Veblen updates the semantic content of an already existing term,⁷⁵ thus moving towards a first, comprehensive American theorization regarding the link between technical progress and social relations.

Veblen's idea of technology is not associated with scientific knowledge since he states that science is a form of knowledge inspired by an instinct of "idle curiosity," a pure and not interested vocation.⁷⁶ Technology, instead, refers to a series of expedients for solving practical problems, a systematic expression of the instinct of workmanship. It is the product of "pragmatic knowledge," of "an obscure system of generalizations in terms of matter-of-fact," which can eventually be the basis for higher and scientific inquiry.⁷⁷ Veblen interprets the separation between science and technology, which is a peculiar character of the American intellectual world,⁷⁸ by making the "technological domain, in point of habituation," the closest to "the center of disturbance."⁷⁹ Integrating it into his evolutionary model, he conceives technology as an adaptive and cumulative tool, the systematic accumulation of knowledge and efficient solutions to practical problems. The class of producers daily creates and renews this hereditary apparatus, reproducing the skills which form technological equipment. Veblen especially highlights the collective character of this production:

Without access to such of this common stock of immaterial equipment no individual and no fraction of the community can make a living, much less make an advance. [...] It is held as a common stock, pervasively, by the group as a body, in its corporate capacity, as one might say; and it is transmitted and augmented in and by the group, however loose and haphazard the transmission may be conceived to be, not by individuals and in single lines of inheritance. The requisite knowledge and proficiency of ways and means is a product, perhaps a by-product, of the life of the community at large; and it can also be maintained and retained only by the community at large.⁸⁰

Tangible productive assets constitute the material and partial character of the community's set of technological knowledge. They are intimately linked to the social dimension of human life and of producing activity. Ownership of a physical object for productive purposes also means the possession of part of the "common stock of knowledge" that has allowed its production and guides its use. Therefore, from an evolutionary point of view, technology involves a constant warning that productivity has a social character and it is not the product of individual work or individual ownership of the means of production. This is all the more true for the mechanical process, in which productive activity is collective and cooperative at every stage and deprives the institutions of the business system of their residual resources of legitimation:

since there is no individual production and no individual productivity, the natural-rights preconception that ownership rests on the individually productive labor of the owner reduces itself to absurdity, even under the logic of its own assumptions.⁸¹

Veblen gives technology a coherent role in his social model. In fact, the concept fits neatly into his evolutionary framework and the twofold vision of social conflict outlined above: technology definitely sets the battleground of an industrial and technological society on the changing interaction between mechanisms of habit adjustment, cultural and ideological formations, and a technical level of production. It descends upon the present from the past as a heritage of efficient and collective knowledge,

74. Veblen, *Imperial Germany*.

75. Eric Schatzberg, *Technology: Critical History of a Concept*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

76. Thorstein Veblen, "The Place of Science."

77. Thorstein Veblen, "The Evolution of the Scientific Point of View," *University of California Chronicle*, 4(1908): 395–416, 403.

78. David F. Noble, *America by Design*, 27.

79. Veblen, "The Evolution," 415.

80. Thorstein Veblen, On the Nature of Capital I," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 22(1908): 517–42, 518–519.

81. Thorstein Veblen, "The Beginnings of Ownership," *American Journal of Sociology*, 3(1898): 352–65, 354.

contributing to mold a producing class that delegitimizes private property institutions and profit motives. Unlike the leisure or business classes, which act in the present as 'non-contemporary' elements, relics of a barbaric era and sheltered from adaptive stimuli, technology provides a pathway for future advancements toward social efficiency and the full expression of the instinct for workmanship. In Veblen's view, technology is not associated with an imagery of conquest for a "Western Leviathan" that "like time, devours the old,"⁸² but rather it relies on the past and its legacy; it does not disintegrate individuality or human traits, but rather it emerges from certain human characteristics, such as the instinct of workmanship; it does not emancipate because it frees from fatigue and heavy workloads, but, instead, because it immediately results in efficient work that is oriented toward the maximum expression of social productive potential.

This concept of technology adds depth and nuances of meaning that highlight a radical trait of Veblen's technocratic turn and offset some entrenched interpretations. Daniel Bell's charge of elitism,⁸³ for example, at once appear out of focus, as it does a general association of Veblen with Progressive Era scientism. Indeed, the technician—whom sometimes Veblen calls "technologist"—is not a scientist, but the symbol of technology. Veblen does not legitimize his role due to the autonomy or objectivity of his knowledge, but due to its pragmatic and factual orientation, which is the expression of the instinct of workmanship and work ethic. In contrast to progressive engineers and their "techno-corporatism,"⁸⁴ Veblen does not believe that harmony can be attained by imposing superior and neutral rules of technical efficiency, but that such rules are spontaneously produced and institutionalized during the transformation of productive systems and the cumulative refinement of collective technological knowledge. Social efficiency must be the outcome of new social institutions and the eradication of hindrances to the natural instinct of workmanship, such as private property. Production engineers can be the vanguard of a process that, at every stage, collectively involve producing classes. The aim of their upheaval, for Veblen, is not simply to sell society on their expertise and a rational science of production, but rather to give expression to actual and latent forms of social relations that are already embedded in material conditions of productive industry and are hindered by "Vested Interests." A technicians' revolutionary overturn, Veblen says, would actually be an "act of disallowance," "subversive and revolutionary only in a figurative sense."⁸⁵

This assumption of the prominent role of the producer's class within the evolutionary process does not mean that Veblen can be considered *tout court* as a socialist enthusiast or an "anarcho-syndicalist," as Rick Tilman has stated.⁸⁶ The same idea that those who engage with the machine process uphold an evolutionary, advanced knowledge and moral code, also explains Veblen's profound mistrust—which shines throughout his work—against every form of labor organization of his time. Again, the issue of the work ethic is a pivotal one. At the beginning of the century, in fact, labor responded to social and economic transformations by denying all Veblen's predictions in 1904. On the one hand, the industrial workforce did not develop an anti-propriety attitude and unionism processes were assimilated into the essential dynamics of the economy as a whole. 'Business unionism' of the American Federation of Labor, among others, was directly involved in projects of social cooperation and bargaining, pursuing voluntary collaboration with other functional interest represented by capital.⁸⁷ Since *The Theory of Business Enterprise*, Veblen explicitly considered this attitude as being conservative, in which the ethical content of work is affirmed within the rules and boundaries set by business enterprises for profit motives. On the other hand, movements such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) played radical experiments of direct action and self-organization. Nevertheless, their rejection of the craft and proprietary ethic did not end up in a disciplined rediscovery of industriousness and effi-

82. Charles A. Beard, "Time, Technology, and the Creative Spirit in Political Science," *The American Political Science Review*, 1(1927), 1–11, 5.

83. Bell, "Veblen and the New Class," 617.

84. Noble, *America by Design*, 88.

85. Veblen, *The Engineers*, 98.

86. Rick Tilman, "Veblen's Ideal Political Economy and Its Critics," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 31(1972): 307–317, 312.

87. Fasce, *Dal mestiere alla catena*, 88.

ciency, as foreseen by Veblen, but in a massive refusal of work and an attempt to overturn efficiency and its social power with the tools of strike and sabotage.⁸⁸ Veblen did not see or could not legitimize this behavior as being subjective and politically significant because he did not manage to explain the refusal of work outside of a social and cultural determination of emulative and leisure attitudes, that is, as a form of waste. He perhaps had some sympathy for the IWW, but he completely overlooked the political significance of their experiment. In a *memorandum* from 1918, for example, he reduced their claims to “reasonable hours and good wages” and he went so far as to propose the employ of Wobblies as “a permanent body of workmen [...] which can be shifted readily to any point where they are needed.”⁸⁹

In 1921, Veblen resumed that these tendencies of American society were like a “timeworn fabric,” shifting his polemic vein from money and business power to a compact plan of coordination. This fabric was allowing a “moving equilibrium of sabotage that is required to preserve the business community from recurrent collapse or stagnation.”⁹⁰ Hence, the articulation of a political and economic structure of ‘corporate capitalism’ was, according to Veblen, a support for a “conscientious withdrawal of efficiency” from the economic system. But sabotage “is not revolution. If it were, then the A. F. of L., the I. W. W., the Chicago Packers, and the U. S. Senate would be counted among the revolutionists.”⁹¹ In contrast to the major groups of progressive administrative professionals and technocrats, Veblen believed that the reformist agenda—i.e., administrative practices, organization of tasks and social bargaining—was designed to actually provide tutelage for inefficient business institutions.

In taking these controversial stances, Veblen typifies a complex and multifaceted character of progressive scientism and technocratic ideals. For this reason, what should be reconsidered is the proper political significance of the soviet of technicians in the context of the post-war United States. On one hand, the war had already highlighted the decisive importance of planned productive efficiency. The growing importance of transportation, mining and supplies made clear that the interconnection and interdependence of production processes were not related any more to a factory system. Veblen saw production evolving into a complex apparatus of monitoring, forecasting and quantification for the management of resources,

a mechanically balanced and interlocking system of work to be done, the prime requisite of whose working is a painstaking and intelligent co-ordination of the processes at work, and an equally painstaking allocation of mechanical power and materials.⁹²

On the other hand, the Russian Revolution of 1917 posed, in the United States, the political dilemma of revolution in a society fully dependent on the material abundance guaranteed by integrated industrial production.⁹³ Indeed, in Veblen’s view, the Russian Revolution had succeeded *thanks* to the industrial backwardness of the country, which would not depend on “materials and wrought goods drawn from foreign ports and distant regions, that is characteristic of the advanced industrial peoples.”⁹⁴ The “soviet of technicians” was an attempt to propose a theory of social change for advanced industrial countries. Here the need was not a takeover of political power by the producers’ class—which would be noxious for the smooth functioning of the system—but rather a reorientation of tools for planning and logistical integration toward overcoming profit practices.

Thus, Veblen shifts the question of revolution from a political basis to that of sustainability, in line with a theory that values the past and does not venture into the future. The ‘revolutionary’ event itself is planned, hypothetically, with military rigor, in order to avoid a systemic crash which would alienate

88. Mike Davis, “The Stopwatch and the Wooden Shoe: Scientific Management and the Industrial Workers of the World,” *Radical America*, 1, (1975).

89. Thorstein Veblen, “Using the I.W.W. to Harvest Grain,” *Journal of Political Economy*, 6(1932): 797–807, 800.

90. Veblen, *The Engineers*, 14.

91. *Ibid.*, 58.

92. *Ibid.*, 81.

93. See, for example, Gantt, *Organizing for Work*.

94. Veblen, *The Engineers*, 60.

popular support. In this sense, the reference to the 'soviet' is undoubtedly a significant one. It does not express any sympathy for communism or Bolshevism, whose historical and political significance Veblen completely neglects⁹⁵. Rather, the soviet vehiculates the idea of a social upheaval which occurs entirely on a social level, without any need for state control or state mediation, thus taking advantage of a fully-integrated production system. Coherent with this, Veblen does not think of collectivization or social reform in order to tear the worn fabric, but rather he considers a "conscientious withdrawal of efficiency," a "general strike" where the vanguard of technological knowledge affirms its increasing positional power.⁹⁶

Veblen's technocratic stance, thus, holds some relevant nuances of meaning that can be appraised only within the framework of his earlier evolutionary understanding of social conflict and starting with the concept of technology. Giving a specific political value to the scientist ideals of his time, Veblen's later works are an engagement with the puzzle of social transformation and social conflict within a system where wealth, planning and specialist knowledge increasingly become tools of order and social legitimacy.

95. Ibid, 98.

96. Ibid, 102.

References

- Alchon, Guy. *The Invisible Hand of Planning: Capitalism, Social Science, and the State in the 1920s*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Bannister, Robert C. *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010.
- Baritono, Raffaella. *Oltre la politica. La crisi politico-istituzionale negli Stati Uniti tra Otto e Novecento*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993.
- Baritono, Raffaella. "Ripensare lo Stato: scienze sociali e crisi politica negli Stati Uniti fra Otto e Novecento," *Ricerche di storia politica*, 3(2013): 301–318.
- Baritono, Raffaella. "Ordine, efficienza e democrazia nelle scienze sociali americane (1890–1929)," in *Strategie dell'ordine: processi, fratture, soggetti*, eds. by Raffaella Baritono, Maurizio Ricciardi. Quaderni di Scienza & Politica, n. 8, 2020, 163–185.
- Beard, Charles A. "Time, Technology, and the Creative Spirit in Political Science," *The American Political Science Review*, 1(1927): 1–11.
- Bell, Daniel. "Veblen and the New Class," *The American Scholar*, 4(1963): 616–638.
- Bender, Daniel E. *American Abyss: Savagery and Civilization in the Age of Industry*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009.
- Borgognone, Giovanni. *Tecnocrati del progresso. Il pensiero americano del Novecento tra capitalismo, liberalismo e democrazia*. Torino: UTET, 2015.
- Brecher, Jeremy. *Strike!*. Boston: South End Press, 1997.
- Camporesi, Cristiano. *Il marxismo teorico negli USA, 1900–1945*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1973.
- Commons, John R. *Institutional Economics. Its Place in Political Economy*. New York: MacMillan, 1934.
- Davis, Mike. "The Stopwatch and the Wooden Shoe: Scientific Management and the Industrial Workers of the World," *Radical America*, 1(1975): 69–95.
- Degler, Carl D. *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Edgell Simon and Rick Tilman, "The Intellectual Antecedents of Thorstein Veblen: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Economic Issues*, 4(1989): 1003–26.
- Ely, Richard T. et al. *The Labor Problem. Plain Questions and Practical Answers*. New York: Harper & Bros, 1886.
- Fasce, Ferdinando. *Dal mestiere alla catena. lavoro e controllo sociale in America (1877–1920)*. Genova-Ivrea: Herodote Edizioni, 1983.
- Gantt, Henry L. *Organizing for Work*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1919.
- Gronow, Antii. *From Habits to Social Structures: Pragmatism and Contemporary Social Theory*. Helsinki: Peter Lang, 2011.
- Haber, Samuel. *Efficiency and Uplift. Scientific Management in the Progressive Era 1890–1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.
- Hodgson, Geoffrey. *The Evolution of Institutional Economics: Agency, Structure, and Darwinism in American Institutionalism*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

- Hofstadter, Richard. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.
- James, William. "Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind As Correspondence," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 1(1878): 1–18.
- Kazin, Michael. *The Populist Persuasion. An American History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Lawson, Tony. "Process, order and stability in Veblen," *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 4(2015): 993–1030.
- Layton, Edward. "Veblen and the Engineers." *American Quarterly*, 1(1962): 64–72, 66.
- Layton, Edward. *The Revolt of the Engineers. Social Responsibility and the American Engineering Profession*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986.
- Lorini, Alessandra. *Ingegneria umana e scienze sociali negli USA (1980–1920)*. Firenze: D'Anna, 1980.
- Marx, Leo. "Technology. The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept," *Technology and Culture*, 3(2010): 561–577.
- Montgomery, David. *Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Noble, David F. *America by Design: Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.
- Palano, Damiano. *Il Potere della moltitudine: l'invenzione dell'inconscio collettivo nella teoria politica e nelle scienze sociali italiane tra Otto e Novecento*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2002.
- Plotkin, Sydney and Rick Tilman. *The Political Ideas of Thorstein Veblen*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.
- Reinert, Erik S. and Francesca L. Viano, eds. *Thorstein Veblen. Economics for an age of crisis*. London: Anthem Press, 2013.
- Riesman, David. *Thorstein Veblen: A Critical Interpretation*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953.
- Rodgers, Daniel T. "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History*, 4(1982): 113–132.
- Rodgers, Daniel T. *Atlantic Crossings. Social Politics in a Progressive Age*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2000.
- Ross, Dorothy. *The Origins of American Social Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Ross, Edward A. *Social Control*. New York: MacMillan, 1901.
- Schatzberg, Eric. *Technology: Critical History of a Concept*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- Sini, Carlo. *Il pragmatismo americano*. Bari: Laterza, 1972.
- Skowronek Stephen. *Building a new American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003
- Small, Albion W. "A Vision of Social Efficiency," *American Journal of Sociology*, 4(1914): 433–445.
- Sombart, Werner. *Why is there no Socialism in the United States?*. London: MacMillan, 1975.
- Stabile, Don R. "Veblen and the Political Economy of Technocracy: The Herald of Technological Revolution Developed an Ideology of 'Scientific' Collectivism," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 46(1987): 35–48.

- Stabile, Don R. "Veblen's Analysis of Social Movements: Bellamyites, Workers, and Engineers," *Journal of Economic Issues*, 1(1988): 211–26.
- Stabile, Don R., *Prophets of Order*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.
- Testi, Arnaldo. "Perché negli Stati Uniti non c'è il socialismo? Conflitti sociali, vita politica e scarti temporali nell'America di fine Ottocento," in *Nazionalizzazione e modernità. Italia, Europa e Stati Uniti (1861–1901)*, edited by Tiziano Bonazzi et al., 191–202. Aracne Editrice, Roma, 2014.
- Tilman, Rick. "Thorstein Veblen and the New Deal: A Reappraisal," *The Historian*, 2(1988): 155–72.
- Veblen, Thorstein. "Some Neglected Points in the Theory of Socialism," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 2(1891): 345–362.
- Veblen, Thorstein. "The Army of the Commonweal," *The Journal of Political Economy*, 2(1894): 456–461.
- Veblen, Thorstein. "The Beginnings of Ownership," in *American Journal of Sociology*, 3(1898): 352–65.
- Veblen, Thorstein. "Why is Economics not an Evolutionary Science?," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 4(1898): 373–397.
- Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of Leisure Class. An Economic Study in the History of Institutions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Veblen, Thorstein. "Gustav Schmoller's Economics," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 1(1901): 69–93.
- Veblen, Thorstein. "Review of *Der Moderne Kapitalismus* by Werner Sombart," *Journal of Political Economy*, 11(1903): 300–305.
- Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of Business Enterprise*. New York: Barnes&Noble, 2011.
- Veblen, Thorstein. "The Place of Science in Modern Civilization," *American Journal of Sociology*, 5(1906): 585–609.
- Veblen, Thorstein. "The Socialist Economics of Karl Marx and his Followers. The Later Marxists (Part II)," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 21(1906): 299–322.
- Veblen, Thorstein. "The Evolution of the Scientific Point of View," *University of California Chronicle*, 4(1908): 395–416.
- Veblen, Thorstein. "On the Nature of Capital I," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 22(1908): 517–42.
- Veblen, Thorstein. "The Limitations of Marginal Utility," *Journal of Political Economy*, 17(1909): 620–36.
- Veblen, Thorstein. *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution*. New York: MacMillan, 1915.
- Veblen, Thorstein. *The Engineers and the Price System*. Kitchener: Batoche Book, 2001.
- Veblen, Thorstein. "Using the I.W.W. to Harvest Grain," *Journal of Political Economy*, 6(1932): 797–807.
- Viano, Francesca L. *Thorstein Veblen. Tra utopia e disincanto*. Aosta: Stylos, 2002.
- Waller, William T. "The Evolution of the Veblenian Dichotomy: Veblen, Hamilton, Ayres and Foster," *Journal of Economic Issues*, 3(1982): 757–71.
- Weinstein, James. *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State: 1900–1918*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1968)