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# Conscience & Determinism: Mark Twain's Attempt to Resolve the Problem of Man's Sense of Moral Responsibility in a Deterministic World

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1977

CONSCIENCE AND DETERMINISM:  
MARK TWAIN'S ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE  
THE PROBLEM OF MAN'S SENSE OF MORAL  
RESPONSIBILITY IN A DETERMINISTIC WORLD

A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Department of English  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
R. Kathleen Raisor  
August 1977

CONSCIENCE AND DETERMINISM:  
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CONSCIENCE AND DETERMINISM: MARK TWAIN'S  
ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM OF MAN'S SENSE  
OF MORAL RESPONSIBILITY IN A DETERMINISTIC WORLD

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77 pages

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Beneath the placid surface of books such as The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, there are the seeds of a darker, yet more profound Twain than a cursory reading yields. From a point beginning about 1876 until his death in 1910, there is in Twain's major works a progressively darker, more intensely pessimistic view of the human condition, for Twain increasingly saw man as circumscribed and imprisoned by mechanistic determinism. This study provides a chronological examination of Twain's attempt to resolve the problem of man's sense of moral responsibility in a deterministic world. The development of Twain's thinking on man's conscience and determined behavior falls into three stages that form the basis for the three major chapters of this thesis. In Twain's primary stage he initially grappled with the problem of determinism and moral responsibility. In the second stage Twain recognized the control determinism exercises and the guilt that socially engrained conscience imposes on man, yet he still insisted on man's ability to rise above these things and impose his own concept of morality. In the final stage Twain relinquished the lingering vestiges of his belief in man's control of his life and actions and depicted man as unable to move above his guilt because of circumstances he cannot control.

## INTRODUCTION

Mention of the name Mark Twain still conjures up images of barefoot, freckle-faced boys--with ragged overalls rolled to the knee and straw hats on tousled hair--drifting lazily upon a homemade raft on the Mississippi River on an idyllic summer day. Twain is variously called a "writer of boys' books" and a major American humorist and "funny man." However, critics have more and more insisted that to see Twain as merely a purveyor of nostalgic glimpses of the past or as a comic is to misread his so-called "boys' books" and misunderstand his humor that so often yields pathos beneath the comic veneer, for Twain cannot be analyzed, packaged, and shelved in so simplistic a fashion. Twain undeniably was a master of wit and humor, and vividly recalls the joys of childhood to his reader, but he was infinitely more than this as a writer. Beneath the placid surface of books such as The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, there are the seeds of a darker, yet more profound Twain than a cursory reading yields. From a point beginning about 1876 until his death in 1910, in Twain's major works critics have noted a progressively darker, more intensely pessimistic view of the human condition, for Twain increasingly saw man as a prisoner of the moral sense (the conscience), and yet he described man as circumscribed and imprisoned by mechanistic determinism.



The use of the term "mechanistic determinism" is appropriate in defining Twain's outlook on man in that Twain came to believe that "whatever 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."<sup>1</sup> Sherwood Cummings has noted that "Mark Twain swam during his whole career in the mainstream of ideas that produced the naturalistic writers."<sup>2</sup> An important factor in preparing the American mind for acceptance of the determinism that was central to the naturalistic movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century was Calvinistic predestination. Coleman O. Parsons notes that Twain, though undeniably influenced by Calvinism, "transformed predestination into determinism"<sup>3</sup> and Hyatt Waggoner has stated that Twain "arrived at an unshakable belief in absolute determinism; and his belief was scientifically grounded. If it was not inspired by science, it found, at any rate, ample support therein, especially in the emphasis on heredity and environment postulated by Darwin's theory of evolution."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mark Twain, "What Is Man?" in What Is Man? and Other Essays (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1917), p. 5. All future citations to "What is Man?" are from this volume and are referenced only in the text.

<sup>2</sup>Sherwood Cummings, "What Is Man?: The Scientific Sources," in Essays on Determinism in American Literature, ed. Sydney J. Krause (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1964), p. 114.

<sup>3</sup>Coleman O. Parsons, "The Devil and Samuel Clemens," Virginia Quarterly Review 23 (Autumn 1947): 591.

<sup>4</sup>Alexander E. Jones, "Mark Twain and the Determinism of 'What Is Man?'," American Literature 24 (March 1957-January 1958): 5.

Therefore, the primary interest of this discussion when dealing with his determinism, will rest upon Twain's thinking in conjunction with the mechanistic ideology of his time that led eventually to naturalistic writing, rather than emphasizing the metaphysical or religious ramifications of determinism.

This study will focus on representative works on the genesis, development, and emergence in full bloom of Twain's dual idea of man as a machine that must act as he does, and that at the same time remains a creature accountable for his actions by possessing what Twain interchangeably termed "the moral sense" or the "conscience"--that is, man's ability to distinguish right from wrong. A chronological examination of Twain's developing thinking on man's conscience and determined behavior will be undertaken in three major chapters. First, Twain's primary stage in which he initially grappled with the problem of determinism and moral responsibility will be considered in "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut" (1876), The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876), and The Prince and the Pauper (1881). In the second stage Twain recognized the control determinism exercises and the guilt that socially engrained conscience imposes on man, yet he still insisted on man's ability to rise above these things and impose his own concept of morality. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884) will be discussed as the primary manifestation of this stage. Finally, the culmination of Twain's view, in which the lingering vestiges of his belief in man's control of his life and actions disappear and man becomes unable to move above his

guilt (because of circumstances he cannot control), will be explored in the transitional Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894), in "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg" (1899), "The Damned Human Race" (1905-1909), "What Is Man?" (1906), "The Mysterious Stranger" (1916), and "Letters From the Earth" (ready for publication in 1939; suppressed by Clara Clemens Samossoud until 1962).

## CHAPTER I

### PRELIMINARY THINKING: THE LINES ARE DRAWN

I felt a cleavage in my mind  
As if my brain had split;  
I tried to match it, seam by seam,  
But could not make them fit.

The thought behind I strove to join  
Unto the thought before,  
But sequence unravelled out of reach  
Like balls upon a floor.<sup>5</sup>

The preceding words by Emily Dickinson are uncannily applicable to Mark Twain. Over and over the "cleavage" of Twain's thinking manifests itself in his works: his use of twins, his contrasting of appearance with reality, and his shifting attitude on God and immortality are but a few of the "splits" apparent in Twain's writing. Theodore Dreiser astutely counseled readers to Mark (observe) the Twain (two) in Twain's works.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps one of Twain's most interesting dualities is the idea of man as a determined being whose life and actions are completely manipulated and regulated by forces beyond his control while paradoxically remaining accountable for his actions because of his possession of the Moral Sense-- the ability to distinguish right from wrong. Edward Wagenknecht

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<sup>5</sup>Emily Dickinson, The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, with an Introduction by Martha Dickinson Bianchi (Little, Brown, and Company, 1924), p. 57.

<sup>6</sup>Theodore Dreiser, "Mark the Double Twain," The English Journal 24 (October 1935): 615.

precisely noted this division in Twain's thinking by saying: "His deterministic philosophy being what it finally was, he knew he had no right either to praise man or to blame him, yet he went right on doing it just the same."<sup>7</sup>

Critics have long observed the darkening strands of pessimistic determinism that run through Twain's works and climax in his later writing. Twain himself said in 1907: "I have talked my gospel [speaking here specifically of the determinism of "What Is Man?"]<sup>7</sup> rather freely in conversation for twenty-five or thirty years and have never much minded whether my listeners liked it or not."<sup>8</sup> The purpose of this study is to examine the works of those years wherein Twain discussed not only his "gospel" of man's determinism, but also expressed his parallel yet contrasting idea of man as possessor of "the moral sense" or "conscience," to note the stages of development his thought underwent, and to observe where the "cleavage" in the mind of Twain ultimately led him in relation to the question of man's moral responsibility in light of his determined life. What better place can an investigation of this conflict begin than at that point at least a quarter of a century previous to his statement of 1907 where Twain himself admitted his deterministic thought began, and where also his struggle with the moral accountability of man ensued: ushering

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<sup>7</sup>Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain: The Man and His Work, 3rd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), p. 120.

<sup>8</sup>Mark Twain in Eruption, cited by Alexander E. Jones, "Mark Twain and the Determinism of 'What Is Man?'," American Literature 24 (March 1957-January 1958): 2.

in this first stage of his developing thinking on conscience and control was "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut."

Justin Kaplan notes that during the course of "The Facts," Twain "tried to explain his feelings of duality and conflict, of having a demon inside him. He called this demon conscience."<sup>9</sup> In "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut," published in 1876, the reader is introduced to a man whose conscience, by his own admission, was "torpid."<sup>10</sup> This numbness and ineffectiveness of conscience, that may tend to be overlooked at first, interestingly leads to the eventual annihilation of conscience by the end of the tale. Immediately after the unnamed narrator's proud statement of the ineffectuality of his aunt's appeal to him to stop smoking, a strange visitor entered the narrator's office uninvited and unannounced.

Straightway the door opened, and a shriveled, shabby dwarf entered. He was not more than two feet high. He seemed to be about forty years old. Every feature and every inch of him was a trifle out of shape; and so, while one could not put his finger upon any particular part and say, "This is a conspicuous deformity," the spectator perceived that this little person was a deformity as a whole--a vague, general, evenly blended, nicely adjusted deformity. There was a foxlike cunning in the face and sharp little eyes, and also alertness and malice. And yet this vile bit of human rubbish seemed to bear a sort

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<sup>9</sup>Justin Kaplan, Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), p. 341.

<sup>10</sup>Mark Twain, "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut," in Tom Sawyer Abroad, Tom Sawyer, Detective and Other Stories, Etc. Etc., Author's National Edition, vol. 20 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1896; reprint ed., Grosse Pointe, Mich.: Scholarly Press, n.d.), p. 305. All future citations to "The Facts" are from this volume and are referenced only in the text.

of remote and ill-defined resemblance to me! It was dully perceptible in the mean form, the countenance, and even the clothes, gestures, manner, and attitudes of the creature. He was a farfetched, dim suggestion of a burlesque upon me, a caricature of me in little. One thing about him struck me forcibly, and most unpleasantly: he was covered all over with a fuzzy, greenish mold, such as one sometimes sees upon mildewed bread. The sight of it was nauseating. (pp. 306-307)

This ugly intruder persecuted the unsuspecting narrator mercilessly about incidents, great and small, from the narrator's past and did not hesitate to trespass into the narrator's thoughts to incriminate him. Through the height of the impish dwarf's questionings, the narrator suffered greater and greater pangs of guilt while the dwarf seemed to thrive and grow more bold with every hit on the narrator's points of vulnerability:

Remorse! Remorse! It seemed to me that it would eat the very heart out of me! And yet that small fiend only sat there leering at me with joy and contempt, and placidly chuckling. Presently he began to speak again. Every sentence was an accusation, and every accusation a truth. Every clause was freighted with sarcasm and derision, every slow-dropping word burned like vitriol. (p. 310)

Finally the anguished narrator, declaring his belief that his tormentor was the devil incarnate, cried out for the dwarf to identify himself; whereupon the strange visitor replied: "Well, I am your Conscience!" (p. 312). At this point to an even greater extent than before, the narrator's moldy Conscience showed his maliciousness and cruelty by referring to the narrator as "my good slave" (p. 312) and to himself as the narrator's "master" (p. 313) and "most pitiless enemy" (p. 314). This "slave-master" imagery and the narrator's statement that "my owner was still my prisoner" (p. 313) (referring to the

imprisonment of the Conscience with his paradoxical "slave-owner"--the narrator--in the locked room where they were conversing) is vital. While causing the narrator anguish over his moral flaws, the spiteful two-foot dwarf was, at the same time, relentlessly reminding the man that he was in subjection to and controlled (determined) by his conscience. When the man unwittingly addressed the dwarf as "friend," this control was clearly manifested as Conscience replied:

I am not your friend, I am your enemy; I am not your equal, I am your master. Call me 'my lord,' if you please. You are too familiar. (pp. 314-15)

Although the Conscience told the narrator "when we get hold of a man of a peculiarly sensitive nature, oh, but we do haze him!" (p. 316) he also said that a person may become callous to the prods of his conscience after a period of intense goading, and may lull the conscience to sleep and thereby stop its influence and extinguish its power of inflicting guilt feelings upon the possessor-slave of the conscience.

When the narrator's aunt appeared in his office, the malignant Conscience was at first stunned and stupified because of the guilt that weighted the narrator's heavy heart due to her guilt-inducing questions and statements to the narrator. At last the aunt's reproof centered on the point the narrator revealed at the beginning of the story as being beyond the touch of his lethargic conscience. At this juncture the personified Conscience of the narrator, shrunken from its youthful seven-foot beautiful stature to its present repugnant two-foot slimy form by its possessor-slave's continual hardening to all but a very



few accessible points, sank to the floor in a profound sleep.

The narrator was gleeful:

With an exultant shout I sprang past my aunt, and in an instant I had my lifelong foe by the throat. After so many years of waiting and longing, he was mine at last. I tore him to shreds and fragments. I rent the fragments to bits. I cast the bleeding rubbish into the fire, and drew into my nostrils the grateful incense of my burnt offering. At last, and forever, my Conscience was dead! (p. 324)

Van Wyck Brooks calls the story of the slaughter of conscience "one of the most ferocious of his [Twain's] tales."<sup>11</sup> Alexander E. Jones says "this symbolic annihilation of Conscience may have been emotionally satisfying to Twain when he composed the sketch, but he eventually realized that his guilt complex could not be resolved so easily."<sup>12</sup> Coleman O. Parsons notes that "the comic extreme of Clemens' wistful moral anarchy is achieved in 'The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut'; the author outlives his morbid scrupulousness and slays his shrunken, persecuting Conscience."<sup>13</sup> Here, at the conclusion of "The Facts," as Twain allowed the narrator as "a man WITHOUT A CONSCIENCE!" (p. 325) to indulge in a rampage of theft and murder completely without any form of remorse, the preliminary stage of Twain's thinking on man's moral accountability reflects the possibility of the complete destruction of the accusing conscience. As Parsons notes, this is the "extreme" and "wistful" beginning of Twain's thinking on conscience in a

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<sup>11</sup>Van Wyck Brooks, The Ordeal of Mark Twain (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1933), p. 23.

<sup>12</sup>Jones, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup>Parsons, "The Devil and Samuel Clemens," p. 590.

determined world, and he soon moved to the more realistic position where socially engrained conscience prompted action. Such is the case with Twain's 1876 publication of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.

Summarizing Robert Wiggins' thought in Mark Twain, Jackleg Novelist, Milton Rickels notes Wiggins' comment that Twain, as a believer in determinism, rejected the idea of the moral responsibility and freedom of man while violating his beliefs in some of his works by presenting characters "who have moral choices and occasionally act morally."<sup>14</sup> Tom Sawyer is such a character with moral obligations and actions. A romantic rogue, who is seen by many critics as an autobiographical sketch of Twain himself, Tom is not only the "gang's" leader, but also, as Wiggins and Rickels note, a morally responsible agent.

Tom's conscience or moral accountability is seen as operative in two ways during the course of Tom Sawyer. First, Tom's conscience is seen in relation to his personal actions, especially as they adversely affect women in the story. The reader is told that "Tom's heart smote him"<sup>15</sup> when he inadvertently told Becky Thatcher of his previous "engagement" to Amy Lawrence. Later, again in a place where he sought the approval

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<sup>14</sup>Milton Rickels, "Samuel Clemens and the Conscience of Comedy," Southern Review 4 (April 1968): 564.

<sup>15</sup>Mark Twain, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Author's National Edition, vol. 7 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1903; reprint ed., Grosse Pointe, Mich.: Scholarly Press, n.d.), p. 89. All future citations to Tom Sawyer are from this volume and are referenced only in the text.

of Becky, Tom was plagued by his conscience as he realized that his "use" of Amy to spite Becky would eventually lead from Amy's "grateful happiness" to her rejection and despair as soon as Becky was wooed back to his favor (p. 188).

In an attempt to escape the responsibility of commitments to the two girls and his Aunt Polly, Tom organized a pirate escapade on Jackson's Island. Once on the island, however, Huck Finn, Joe Harper, and Tom Sawyer were visited by one for whose appearance they were not prepared:

An intruder came, now, that would not "down." It was conscience. They began to feel a vague fear that they had been doing wrong to run away; and next they thought of the stolen meat, and then the real torture came. They tried to argue it away by reminding conscience that they had purloined sweetmeats and apples scores of times; but conscience was not to be appeased by such thin plausibilities; it seemed to them, in the end, that there was no getting around the stubborn fact that taking sweetmeats was only "hooking," while taking bacon and hams and such valuables was plain simple stealing--and there was a command against that in the Bible. So they inwardly resolved that so long as they remained in the business, their piracies should not again be sullied with the crime of stealing. Then conscience granted a truce, and these curiously inconsistent pirates fell peacefully to sleep. (pp. 142-43)

Though the pangs of conscience arising from their thievery were fairly easily dispelled, Tom and Joe were genuinely concerned for the people at home who feared them drowned after their sudden, unexplained disappearance. Tom stole away one night to return home and learn first hand of his Aunt Polly's grief over his "death." Though at one point selfishly mourning his aunt's misunderstanding of him, Tom, Twain noted, "was sufficiently touched by his aunt's grief to long to rush out from under the bed [where he was hiding] and

overwhelm her with joy" (p. 156) and when Aunt Polly lovingly prayed for Tom "he was weltering in tears again long before she was through (p. 157)."

The second and more important way that conscience functions in Tom Sawyer is in the prodding of the sense of honesty and justice, mingled with personal concern and responsibility, that moves Tom to testify against Injun Joe and in behalf of Muff Potter. When Muff, Injun Joe, and the young Dr. Robinson were in the process of robbing a grave one night, a fight broke out and the Doctor was killed by Injun Joe who told whiskey- and blow-befuddled Muff that, in a semi-conscious stupor, Muff himself had murdered the doctor. Huck and Tom, witnesses to the entire sordid scene, ran from the cemetery in fear for their lives and signed an oath, in their own blood, that they would never divulge what they had seen in the moonlit graveyard. Twain notes that "Tom's fearful secret and gnawing conscience disturbed his sleep for as much as a week after this" (p. 123) and the naturally curious Tom avoided inquests on dead cats held by his companions in imitation of the adult murder inquest until "even inquests went out of vogue at last, and ceased to torture Tom's conscience" (p. 124). Tom's frequent trips to Muff's place of imprisonment to smuggle him small gifts "greatly helped to ease [emphasis mine] Tom's conscience" (p. 124) but did not erase the gnawing knowledge that he must not let an innocent man hang.

As Muff's trial approached and began, "every reference to the murder sent a shudder" (p. 216) through Tom's tortured

conscience, and he sought out Huck Finn to discuss the secrecy they had sworn, and the near-certain fate of Muff if they remained silent. At the conclusion of their talk in which they enumerated Muff's numerous small kindnesses to them, the boys went to see Potter. Twain noted:

His gratitude for their gifts had always smote their consciences before--it cut deeper than ever, this time. They felt cowardly and treacherous to the last degree. (p. 219)

As Tom's relentless conscience battered him by day and night, he became more and more miserable and finally "Tom's harrassed conscience . . . managed to drive him to the lawyer's house by night and wring a dread tale from lips that had been sealed with the dismalest and most formidable of oaths" (p. 226). By night Tom was terrified that Injun Joe (who had escaped the courtroom at the grisly height of Tom's incriminating testimony) would return and murder him, but by day he basked in the glow of being the town's hero and Muff's deliverer.

In Tom Sawyer, Twain abandoned his wishful, quasi-serious notion of "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut" that persecuting conscience could be murdered and obliterated, and moved to the more realistic position where personal conscience prompted Tom's remorse in his dealings with Becky, Amy, his thefts, and his Aunt Polly, and where social and personal conscience drove Tom to explain the true circumstances surrounding the murder of Dr. Robinson. Charles Neider notes that "Tom, for all his truancy and lies and pranks, belongs to the Village, and his conscience is a

sound, . . . , Village conscience."<sup>16</sup> This compelling drive to do the correct thing, as taught by a person's society, and thereby to placate one's conscience is also manifested in The Prince and the Pauper (1881).

The Prince and the Pauper is Twain's marvelous "children's" classic that reveals again his interest in duality and "cleavage." In this tale two boys, strikingly similar in physical appearance, exchange clothes and, in a development they did not anticipate, temporarily are forced also to exchange identities. What may at first appear as a youthful prank of mistaken identity involves life-changing complexities for Twain's characters because the principals involved in the switched identities are Tom Canty, pauper resident of Offal Court and Edward Tudor, Prince of Wales and heir to the throne of England.

Tom became "Prince" after the true royal lad stormed out of the palace to berate a gruff guard for his ill-treatment of the beggar-boy. Forgetting his playful change of clothing with the boy who so closely paralleled his royal features, the rightful Prince was abused by the guard he went to reprove and ejected from the palace gates. Tom Canty, dressed in the true prince's regal apparel, was pronounced "mad"<sup>17</sup> when he denied his royal identity, and was gently but firmly subjected

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<sup>16</sup>Charles Neider, Mark Twain (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), p. 18.

<sup>17</sup>Mark Twain, The Prince and the Pauper, Author's National Edition, vol. 15 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1909; reprint ed., Grosse Pointe, Mich.: Scholarly Press, n.d.), p. 44. All future citations to The Prince and the Pauper are from this volume and are referenced only in the text.

to a ceaseless effort to "remind" him of what he had forgotten and "restore" his mind gripped by the malady of what was thought to be insanity, but what was in reality, truth.

Though the true Prince felt pangs of compassion and conscience when he beheld the plight his country's laws imposed on the poor and "criminal" populace, and later took steps to correct injustices he had observed and experienced personally, Twain's major concern with conscience in The Prince and the Pauper centered upon Tom Canty and his mock position as prince and king. Though Tom had, to a large degree, successfully abandoned conscience at the time of his assumed royalty, an encounter with reality "smote him to the heart" (p. 273). As the coronation procession for the new king moved through great throngs:

The mock king's cheeks were flushed with excitement, his eyes were flashing, his senses swam in a delirium of pleasure. At this point, just as he was raising his hand to fling another rich largess, he caught sight of a pale, astounded face which was strained forward out of the second rank of the crowd, its intense eyes riveted upon him. A sickening consternation struck through him; he recognized his mother! and up flew his hand, palm outward before his eyes--that old involuntary gesture, born of a forgotten episode, and perpetuated by habit. In an instant more she had torn her way out of the press, and past the guards, and was at his side. She embraced his leg, she covered it with kisses, she cried, "O, my child, my darling!" lifting toward him a face that was transfigured with joy and love. The same instant an officer of the King's Guard snatched her away with a vigorous impulse from his strong arm. The words "I do not know you, woman!" were falling from Tom Canty's lips when this piteous thing occurred; but it smote him to the heart to see her treated so; and as she turned for a last glimpse of him, whilst the crowd was swallowing her from his sight, she seemed so wounded, so broken-hearted, that a shame fell upon him which consumed his pride to ashes, and withered his stolen royalty. His grandeurs were stricken valueless; they seemed to fall away from him like rotten rags.

The procession moved on, and still on, through ever-augmenting splendors and ever-augmenting tempests of welcome; but to Tom Canty they were as if they had not been. He neither saw nor heard. Royalty had lost its grace and sweetness; its pomps were become a reproach. Remorse was eating his heart out. He said, "Would God I were free of my captivity!" . . .

"Long live Edward of England!" It seemed as if the earth shook with the explosion; but there was no response from the king. He heard it only as one hears the thunder of the surf when it is blown to the ear out of a great distance, for it was smothered under another sound which was still nearer, in his own breast, in his accusing conscience--a voice which kept repeating those shameful words, "I do not know you, woman!"

The words smote upon the king's soul as the strokes of a funeral bell smite upon the soul of a surviving friend when they remind him of secret treacheries suffered at his hands by him that is gone.

New glories were unfolded at every turning; new wonders, new marvels, sprung into view; the pent clamors of waiting batteries were released; new raptures poured from the throats of the waiting multitudes; but the king gave no sign, and the accusing voice that went moaning through his comfortless breast was all the sound he heard. (pp. 273-75)

After the soul-rending encounter with his mother, the Pauper-Prince was conducted to the Abbey where coronation ceremonies were performed and where "Tom Canty grew pale, and still paler, and a deep and steadily deepening woe and despondency settled down upon his spirits and upon his remorseful heart" (p. 281). Though Tom immediately was stricken by guilt as he denied his mother, yet his situation demanded the remark because acknowledgement of the woman would have meant reimposition of his "demented" status, and further possible harm for his mother who had already been treated roughly by a guard. At the point where the Archbishop of Canterbury held the crown above his head, just as it appeared that Tom Canty of Offal Court would become king and circumstances would overpower his conscience-stricken heart, the true Prince appeared, and Tom gratefully



acknowledged him as liege and rightful monarch. It is important to note that here in The Prince and the Pauper circumstances over which Tom had no control threatened to torment his conscience, yet still determine his fate. In the passage already cited, this point is vividly illustrated: it is stated that "remorse was eating his Tom's heart out" while he pleaded to be freed from the "captivity" of circumstances he was tormented by and yet was helpless to control since his position was one of "compulsory greatness" (p. 274). In the Abbey, as determined actions seemed about to triumph while inflicting agony upon the boy helpless to alter them, Twain suddenly halted the machine-like activities and allowed Tom's honest identification of the apparent pauper as true king to triumph over the controlling circumstances.

In The Prince and the Pauper, Twain's developing thought on man's position as governed by environmental, hereditary, and social forces while remaining a possessor of conscience (or sensibility to right and wrong) is displayed in a fashion similar to the outlook of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer: conscience is quieted by a person's compliance with its proddings, not by the unrealistic assassination of moral values that the narrator accomplished in "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut." The Prince and the Pauper marks the conclusion of the phase of Twain's thinking where he moved from the embryonic stage of "The Facts" where plaguing conscience is simply removed, toward the more realistic response to conscience as exemplified in Tom Sawyer and The Prince and the Pauper.

This first section of Twain's thinking deals primarily with conscience, or man's sense of what is right and wrong and his ability to act in the conventional bounds of "good" behavior, rather than dealing principally with man's position as a controlled or determined being. Of course, the deterministic concern was present since Tom Canty and Tom Sawyer acted to reveal their respective truths because they felt they must obey the impulses of their environment and heredity, but the determinism of this period of Twain's thinking was controlled, submerged, and even subordinated to his interest in man, who at this point Twain saw as able to act "morally" according to the dictates of his conscience and in harmony with the accepted morality of his environment.

With the advent of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn in 1884, a new emphasis in Twain's thinking emerged. Tom Sawyer and Tom Canty obeyed the social moral standard that, in their cases, produced correct actions. Huck, however, found that socially "correct" behavior may run counter to a higher form of personal, internal morality. Prodded to act in accordance with his socially conditioned conscience, Huck rejected society's code of right and wrong that often reflected only local prejudice, not necessarily what was right. Also in this second major area of Twain's thought, the determinism that was submerged in his preceding works surfaced in more pronounced form. It is toward an exploration of this second step in Twain's thought on man's control and conscience that attention is now directed.

## CHAPTER II

### TRIUMPH OF A SOUND HEART

Considering the impact of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), Leo B. Levy observes that: "Conscience indeed makes cowards of us all--except that, rarely it also creates heroes of the stature of Huckleberry Finn."<sup>18</sup> The heroic nature of Huck Finn is indicative of Twain's second major stage of thinking on man's conscience and mechanistic control. During this second period, Twain acknowledged the control determinism exercises over man, yet he still insisted on the presence of some internal sense of right and wrong beyond the boundaries of man's conscience, which Twain had come to see, by this time, as the product of one's environment and training--a form of environmental determinism.

Perhaps the key word in understanding Huckleberry Finn is conflict in the realm of man's conscience. Edgar M. Branch notes a "contrast . . . between spontaneous human feeling and the inhumanity of conventional or violent action"<sup>19</sup> in the novel. Coleman O. Parsons states that Huck "is the protesting battleground on which conscience, custom, and law (the Moral Sense

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<sup>18</sup>Leo B. Levy, "Society and Conscience in Huckleberry Finn," Nineteenth Century Fiction 18 (March 1964): 391.

<sup>19</sup>Edgar M. Branch, "The Two Providences: Thematic Form in 'Huckleberry Finn'," College English 11 (January 1950): 190.

in different aspects) clash with primal sympathy, the impulsive will to freedom, [and] . . . the Moral Sense goes down in defeat."<sup>20</sup> DeLancey Ferguson calls Huckleberry Finn the "story of a healthy boy's dealings with his conscience."<sup>21</sup> Twain himself referred to Huckleberry Finn as "a book of mine where a sound heart & a deformed conscience come into collision & conscience suffers a defeat."<sup>22</sup>

Milton Rickels notes that Twain's conscience was "complex" and "central to his work."<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the complexity of Twain's conscience is best exemplified in Huckleberry Finn for in Huck Finn's experience there is the dual compulsion to do the socially acceptable thing that conscience desires (as did Tom Sawyer and Tom Canty), at the same time that an inner code cries for action contrary to the duty demanded by the social conscience. During this second period of his thinking concerning conscience and control, Twain saw conscience as equivalent to determinism because here, as Levy notes, "synonymous with society is conscience as Twain conceives it, the 'unerring monitor' that at once educates the individual and enslaves him."<sup>24</sup> As opposed to the socially engrained conscience that is the product of

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<sup>20</sup>Parsons, "The Devil and Samuel Clemens," p. 591.

<sup>21</sup>DeLancey Ferguson, Mark Twain: Man and Legend (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), p. 229.

<sup>22</sup>Notebook #28a I, Ts, p. 35, cited by Leo B. Levy, "Society and Conscience in Huckleberry Finn," Nineteenth Century Fiction 18 (March 1964): 383.

<sup>23</sup>Rickels, p. 561.

<sup>24</sup>Levy, p. 383.

environment and training and that is not always reliable as a guide to correct action, Huck responds to a deeper commitment to a sense of right and wrong. Huck's response cannot be termed the activity of "conscience" or use of the "moral sense" since Huck's deportment runs counter to what society has taught is good or moral behavior. Twain referred to Huck's actions as the response of a "sound heart."<sup>25</sup> Branch observes that the complexity and conflict of Huckleberry Finn center on "Huck's serious struggle to follow the promptings of his heart despite internal and external checks."<sup>26</sup>

From the action early in the book, J. R. Boggan notes that "Huck admittedly has a struggle with his conscience (between what he feels in his heart toward Jim and what he thinks, according to society, he ought to feel toward him)."<sup>27</sup> The distinction between Huck's feelings and actions as opposed to his social sense of right and wrong is illustrated in the dialogue between Huck and Jim immediately after Huck's discovery of Jim on Jackson's Island. Jim has confessed to Huck that he is a runaway:

"Jim!"

"But mind, you said you wouldn't tell--you know you said you wouldn't tell, Huck."

"Well, I did. I said I wouldn't, and I'll stick to it. Honest injun, I will. People would call me a low-down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum--but

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Branch, p. 194.

<sup>27</sup>J. R. Boggan, "That Slap, Huck, Did It Hurt?," English Language Notes 1 (March 1964): 212.

that don't make no difference. I ain't a-going to tell, and I ain't a-going back there, anyways. So, now, le's know all about it."<sup>28</sup>

Hannah Arendt's statement that Huck "knows how he feels about Jim, but he also knows what he is expected to do about Jim"<sup>29</sup> is illustrated in the two places where Huck protected Jim prior to his final decision in chapter thirty-one to be eternally condemned rather than betray the slave. Minor emphasis was placed, at the time, on Huck's guilt concerning his warning Jim of the men approaching Jackson's Island in search of the runaway. However, by the time Huck had to decide whether to report Jim to the slave hunters in the skiff, the boy was stricken with remorse over his neglect of obedience to conscience. Jim had just been rejoicing over the fact that he was nearly free when Huck observed:

Well, I can tell you it made me all over trembly and feverish, too, to hear him, because I begun to get it through my head that he was most free--and who was to blame for it? Why, me. I couldn't get that out of my conscience, no how nor no way. It got to troubling me so I couldn't rest; I couldn't stay still in one place. It hadn't ever come home to me before, what this thing was that I was doing. But now it did; and it stayed with me, and scorched me more and more. I tried to make out to myself that I warn't to blame, because I didn't run Jim off from his rightful owner; but it warn't no use, conscience up and says, every time, "But you knowed he was running for his freedom, and you could 'a' paddled ashore and told somebody." That was so--I couldn't get around that no way. . . .

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<sup>28</sup>Mark Twain, The [7] Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Author's National Edition, vol 13 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1899; reprint ed., Grosse Pointe, Mich.: Scholarly Press, n.d.), pp. 68-69. All future citations to Huckleberry Finn are from this volume and are referenced only in the text.

<sup>29</sup>Between Past and Future, p. 157, cited by Neil Schmitz, "The Paradox of Liberation in Huckleberry Finn," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 13: 126.

I got to feeling so mean and so miserable I most wished I was dead. I fidgeted up and down the raft, abusing myself to myself, and Jim was fidgeting up and down past me. We neither of us could keep still. Every time he danced around and says, "Dah's Cairo!" it went through me like a shot, and I thought if it was Cairo I reckoned I would die of miserableness. . . .

. . . My conscience got to stirring me up hotter than ever, until at last I says to it, "Let up on me-- it ain't too late yet--I'll paddle ashore at the first light and tell." I felt easy and happy and light as a feather right off. All my troubles was gone. I went to looking out sharp for a light, and sort of singing to myself. By and by one showed. (pp. 125-26)

Though Huck had decided to report Jim at the first opportunity, he found his resolve crippled when he realized the extent of Jim's trust in him.

[Jim] . . . jumped and got the canoe ready, and put his old coat in the bottom for me to set on, and give me the paddle; and as I shoved off, he says:

"Pooty soon I'll be a-shout'n' for joy, en I'll say, it's all on accounts o' Huck; I's a free man, en I couldn't ever been free ef it hadn't ben for Huck; Huck done it. Jim won't ever forgit you, Huck; you's de bes' fren' Jim's ever had; en you's de only fren' ole Jim's got now."

I was paddling off, all in a sweat to tell on him; but when he says this, it seemed to kind of take the tuck all out of me. I went along slow then, and I warn't right down certain whether I was glad I started or whether I warn't. When I was fifty yards off, Jim says:

"Dah you goes, de ole true Huck; de on'y white genlman dat ever kep' his promise to ole Jim."

Well, I just felt sick. But I says, I got to do it-- I can't get out of it. (p. 127)

Though Huck told himself he must report Jim, when the opportunity presented itself, he protected Jim by inventing the story of a raft bearing smallpox victims. As the slave hunters departed, the conflict between what Huck had been taught was right (his social conscience) flared against what he intuitively knew to be right (his sound heart). Henry Nash Smith observes that "Huck's conscience is simply the attitudes he has taken

over from his environment. What is still sound in him is an impulse from the deepest level of his personality that struggles against the overlay of prejudice and false valuation imposed on all members of the society in the name of religion, morality, law, and refinement."<sup>30</sup>

Huck recounted his experience with the slave-hunters and his struggle with himself in the following manner:

They went off and I got aboard the raft, feeling bad and low, because I knowed very well I had done wrong, and I see it warn't no use for me to try to learn to do right; a body that don't get started right when he's little ain't got no show--when the pinch comes there ain't nothing to back him up and keep him to his work, and so he gets beat. Then I s'pose you'd 'a' done right and give Jim up, would you felt better than what you do now? No, says I, I'd feel bad--I'd feel just the same way I do now. Well, then, says I, what's the use you learning to do right when it's troublesome to do right and ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same? I was stuck. I couldn't answer that. So I reckoned I wouldn't bother no more about it, but after this always do whichever come handiest at the time. (pp. 129-30)

In interpreting this key passage from Huckleberry Finn, Neil Schmitz underscores the fact that "Huck is harassed from all sides, within and without. He not only defies his social conscience in shielding Jim from capture, but also, to a large extent, his own inner needs."<sup>31</sup> Huck blamed his inability to turn in Jim upon the upbringing that shaped his social conscience. Though Huck wanted to "learn to do right" (pp. 129-30) he noted that "a body that don't get started right when he's little

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<sup>30</sup>Henry Nash Smith, Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer (New York: Atheneum, 1972), p. 123.

<sup>31</sup>Neil Schmitz, "The Paradox of Liberation in Huckleberry Finn," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 13: 134.



ain't got no show-- . . . so he gets beat" (p. 130). Huck's lack of proper childhood training, therefore, determined his failure in "the pinch" (p. 130) of moral decision. Yet, Huck was aware that he "had done wrong" (p. 130) in the eyes of society. Here Huck confronted and acknowledged his double predicament--he was void of proper training while young, and thereby was not able to fall back on his previous instruction to prevent his error in not reporting Jim; yet, he was also aware of the violation of his "conventional conscience"<sup>32</sup> that pressed him for the correct action--that of reporting Jim as a runaway slave. Both internally, through his desire not to be wicked, and externally, through the expectations of society engrained in the boy, Huck was besieged by opposition to his sound heart.

Huck's struggle with social conscience--the product of environment and training--against the feelings of his deeper commitment to right and wrong as reflected in his sound heart centers principally on Jim. Neil Schmitz describes Jim as "the dark tutor who helps unlock the 'sound heart' imprisoned in Huck's breast."<sup>33</sup> This struggle introduced in the episode involving the Negro-hunters culminates in the climactic "You Can't Pray a Lie" chapter. However, before the finale of the combat between conventional or social conscience against Huck's inner moral code, three incidents occur that test Huck's sound heart and prepare the reader for Huck's ultimate resolution of

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<sup>32</sup>Branch, p. 188.

<sup>33</sup>Schmitz, p. 127.

the conflict. Huck's sound heart triumphed in relation to his refusal to abandon the marooned murderers, his remorse for fooling Jim, and his prevention of the robbing of the Wilks sisters.

One test of Huck's sound heart occurred when Huck and Jim boarded the wrecked steamboat "Walter Scott" and found three criminals inside a lighted cabin room. Two of the murderous thieves were arguing over the fate of their partner who was bound hand and foot upon the floor. When their raft broke its mooring and drifted away in the current, Huck and Jim took the outlaws' boat and left the men, without any means of escape, upon the vessel that was momentarily to break apart and float away. When Huck and Jim were in pursuit of their raft, Huck began to worry about the thieves: "I begun to think how dreadful it was, even for murderers, to be in such a fix" (p. 104). Huck's sound heart troubled him so intensely that he invented a story to incite the watchman on a ferryboat to go to the wreck, thus providing the outlaws with a means of escape from the sinking boat. While reflecting on his action to save the murderers, Huck said: "I was feeling ruther comfortable on accounts of taking all this trouble for that gang, for not many would 'a' done it" (p. 108). Though Huck remarked that the Widow would have been proud of him for his efforts and thus his action would have been in accord with social conscience, primarily Huck's action was the result of his inner feeling or sound heart. The men he made an effort to save were guilty of transgressing

the conventional code of right and wrong, and Huck notes that few people would have felt compelled, as he did by his heart, to have aided the criminals.

The second instance of the triumph of Huck's sound heart occurred at the time when Huck convinced Jim that the nightmare of their separation in a dense fog was merely the result of Jim's superstitious dreaming. When Jim saw the leaves and refuse that betrayed the reality of his "dream" and the falsity of Huck's description of what had happened, Jim strongly denounced Huck's mischievous foolery. Jim simply but sternly rebuked Huck for his lie.

Then he got up slow and walked to the wigwam, and went in there without saying anything but that. But that was enough. It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed his foot to get him to take it back.

It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterward, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd 'a' knowed it would make him feel that way.  
(pp. 122-23)

Huck's inner sensitivity to right and wrong prompted him to apologize to the Negro that society viewed as an inferior being whose feelings were of no significance. Huck obeyed the promptings of his heart rather than the impulse of his social conscience in relationship to Jim.

Finally, the third instance reflecting the influence of Huck's heart on his actions occurred at the Wilks sisters' home. Huck and Jim had been joined on the raft by the king and the duke, two small time confidence men adept at defrauding towns along the river. Bernard DeVoto called them "two rogues . . .

formed from the nation's scum."<sup>34</sup> The frauds' most lucrative opportunity was their planned swindle of the bereaved Wilks family. The "royal" pair intended to steal dead Peter Wilks' gold from his daughters by impersonating Harvey and William Wilks, the dead man's English brothers. Huck was immediately disgusted with the imposters as they masqueraded as Rev. Harvey Wilks and his deaf and dumb brother, William. Huck noted that their actions were "enough to make a body ashamed of the human race" (p. 216). Huck's reaction to the king and duke's robbery of the innocent girls soon moved from disgust to remorse. He decided to help the three girls: "I felt so ornery and low down and mean that I says to myself, my mind's made up; I'll hive that money for them or bust" (p. 231). Huck's endangerment of himself as he did successfully retrieve the girls' money illustrates again the existence of the sound heart that emerges fully developed in the chapter "You Can't Pray a Lie."

The full impact of the battle between his social conscience and his inner moral gauge struck Huck when the king and duke sold Jim into slavery for forty dollars. Huck realized his decision not to report Jim opposed his social conscience and carried an awful stigma with it.

It would get all around that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom; and if I was ever to see anybody from that town again I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame. That's just the way; a person does a low-down thing, and then he don't want to take no consequences of it. Thinks as long as he can hide it ain't no disgrace. That was my fix exactly. The more I studied about this the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more low-down and

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<sup>34</sup>Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1932), p. 319.

ornery I got to feeling. And at last, when it hit me all of a sudden that here was the plain hand of Providence slapping me in the face and letting me know my wickedness was being watched all the time from up there in heaven, whilst I was stealing a poor old woman's nigger that hadn't ever done me no harm, and now was showing me there's One that's always on the lookout, and ain't a-going to allow no such miserable doings to go only just so fur and no further, I most dropped in my tracks I was so scared. Will, I tried the best I could to kinder soften it up somehow for myself by saying I was brung up wicked, and so I warn't so much to blame; but something inside of me kept saying, "There was the Sunday-school, you could 'a' gone to it; and if you'd 'a' done it they'd 'a' learnt you there that people that acts as I'd been acting about that nigger goes to everlasting fire." (p. 277)

An interesting exchange occurred in the above passage as Huck offered the excuse of his upbringing as a justification for his actions while something within reminded him of his neglect of Sunday School instruction. Huck offered the wickedness of his past as the shaping influence that regulated his conduct and, because of his past's control over him, absolved him of responsibility for his action. Something else within him, the standard of social conscience, insisted that his poor background and evil life could have been neutralized and overpowered by his attendance of Sunday School. At any rate, Huck was caught again on twin horns of a deterministic dilemma: he was doomed to failure both because of his training at home and his lack of spiritual guidance. Soon however, Huck was to reject the determinism of social conscience as well as his lack of home training in favor of the influence of his inner feelings, or his sound heart.

The torment of social conscience caused Huck to write a brief note to Miss Watson informing her of her runaway slave's location. As he obeyed the direction of his societal sense of

right and wrong by deciding to report Jim, Huck was elated that he had overcome both the determined evil of his background and the lack of socially expected religious training, and had done what social conscience and "Sunday School standards" told him. The exuberance was momentary, however, for soon Huck's sound heart was in rebellion against the "correct" decision of his social conscience.

I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now. But I didn't do it straight off, but laid the paper down and set there thinking--thinking how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell. And went on thinking. And got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me all the time: in the day and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a-floating along, talking and singing and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n, 'stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had smallpox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the only one he's got now; and then I happened to look around and see that paper. (pp. 278-79)

Huck's decision to "go to hell" (p. 279) rather than report Jim has been termed his renunciation of "the commercial morality of the South"<sup>35</sup> and the ultimate victory of "moral intuition" over the "conventional code."<sup>36</sup> Levy notes: "Huck, after heroic struggles with the internalized form of society,

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<sup>35</sup>"The Bear' and Huckleberry Finn: Heroic Quests for Moral Liberation," Mark Twain Journal 12 (Spring 1963): 12.

<sup>36</sup>Branch, p. 189.

his conscience, flows as the perfectly natural being whose decency and humanity guide him through the circles of hell that make up the evils and terrors of organized society."<sup>37</sup>

Huck described his point of decision in vivid detail:

It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:

"All right, then, I'll go to hell"--and tore it up.  
(p. 279)

Lionel Trilling notes that here "Huck discards the moral code he has always taken for granted and resolves to help Jim in his escape from slavery."<sup>38</sup> R. P. Adams commends Huck's choice by saying: "If it is fine to follow as Thoreau does the dictates of conscience over law, it is finer and much more difficult to follow those of the right over conscience and law combined."<sup>39</sup> Huck's victory was over the unreliable social conscience whose "right" action really was opposed to natural goodness and the sound heart. Levy notes: "The triumph of decency is the shedding of conventional morality; immorality, paradoxically, is the source of virtue."<sup>40</sup>

After Huck's decision in favor of his sound heart, he decided to pursue wickedness wholesale from that point in his

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<sup>37</sup>Levy, p. 388.

<sup>38</sup>Lionel Trilling, Introduction to Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, by Mark Twain (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, n.d.; New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1948), p. xi.

<sup>39</sup>"The Unity and Coherence of Huckleberry Finn," cited by Leo B. Levy, "Society and Conscience in Huckleberry Finn," Nineteenth Century Fiction 18: 389.

<sup>40</sup>Levy, p. 388.

life forward:

It was awful thoughts and awful words, but they was said. And I let them stay said; and never thought no more about reforming. I shoved the whole thing out of my head, and said I would take up wickedness again, which was in my line, being brung up to it, and the other warn't. And for a starter I would go to work and steal Jim out of slavery again; and if I could think up anything worse, I would do that, too; because as long as I was in, and in for good, I might as well go the whole hog. (p. 279)

Huck's commitment to engage in "whole hog" wickedness reflects the sentiments and sense of release the narrator achieved in "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut." In "The Facts" the narrator was freed from remorse and restraint after he killed and burned his impish Conscience. He was then able to indulge in activities that previously his Conscience would have tormented him about and kept him from doing. Similarly here in Huckleberry Finn, Huck declared his intention to shun reform and engage entirely in devious activities since he had chosen what in his sound heart was right, yet what his socially determined conscience pronounced wicked and damnable. However, Huck's decision to abandon conscience was completely different from that of the narrator of "The Facts." The narrator's actions in Twain's earlier short story were the result of Twain's unrealistic wish that conscience could be destroyed. Huck, though able to cast aside the trappings of conventional conscience, was not able to dismiss his sound heart. Soon the reader knows that despite Huck's avowed life of wickedness, the boy will be unable to live in the remorseless world of the narrator in "The Facts." Illustration of the abiding presence of Huck's sound heart occurred when the king



and duke were caught in their fraudulent "Royal Nonesuch" performance and were tarred and feathered. Smitten with the scene before him, Huck said:

Well, it made me sick to see it; and I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals, it seemed like I couldn't ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world. It was a dreadful thing to see. Human beings can be awful cruel to one another. . . .

So we poked along back home, and I warn't feeling so brash as I was before, but kind of ornery, and humble, and to blame, somehow--though I hadn't done nothing. But that's always the way; it don't make no difference whether you do right or wrong, a person's conscience ain't got no sense, and just goes for him anyway. If I had a yaller dog that didn't know no more than a person's conscience does I would pison him. It takes up more room than all the rest of a person's insides, and yet ain't no good, nohow. (pp. 299-300)

Huck's opinion on conscience is echoed in the narrative related by Hank Morgan, the nineteenth century Yankee transplanted into Arthurian England in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1889). While discoursing on conscience, Hank observed:

If I had the remaking of man, he wouldn't have any conscience. It is one of the most disagreeable things connected with a person; and although it certainly does a great deal of good, it cannot be said to pay in the long run; it would be much better to have less good and more comfort. Still, this is only my opinion, and I am only one man; others, with less experience, may think differently. They have a right to their view. I only stand to this: I have noticed my conscience for many years, and I know it is more trouble and bother to me than anything else I started with. I suppose that in the beginning I prized it, because we prize anything that is ours; and yet how foolish it was to think so. If we look at it in another way, we see how absurd it is: if I had an anvil in me would I prize it? Of course not. And yet when you come to think, there is no real difference between a conscience and an anvil--I mean for comfort. I have noticed it a thousand times. And you could dissolve an anvil with

acids, when you couldn't stand it any longer; but there isn't any way that you can work off a conscience--at least so it will stay worked off; not that I know of, anyway.<sup>41</sup>

Hank, like Huck Finn, concludes that no matter how unreliable and burdensome a person's conscience is, there is simply no way to escape the prompting of a sound heart and permanently "work it off" as did the narrator in "The Facts" in Twain's early, wistful tale about conscience.

By 1890, Mark Twain had grappled with his preliminary thinking on conscience as exemplified in "The Facts," Tom Sawyer, and The Prince and the Pauper. Also, he had recognized and explored the distinction central to Huckleberry Finn: the socially engrained conscience in opposition to man's sound heart. In 1894 the transitional work, Pudd'nhead Wilson ushered in the third and final period of Twain's thinking on man's control and conscience. From the bridge of ideas that Pudd'nhead Wilson provided, Twain culminated his thinking on man as a creature of conscience, yet one controlled by mechanistic determinism. In his late writing Twain removed man's few remaining intuitive controls over his life by placing him in a wholly mechanistic world where he still was subject to guilt, but was powerless to rise above it because of circumstances beyond his control. Such was the thinking of Pudd'nhead Wilson, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," "The Damned Human Race," "What is Man?" "The Mysterious Stranger," and "Letters from the Earth" that will be considered in the concluding chapter.

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<sup>41</sup>Mark Twain, A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court, Author's National Edition, vol. 16 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1899; reprint ed., Grosse Pointe, Mich.: Scholarly Press, n.d.), p. 146.

### CHAPTER III

#### MAN: VAGRANT, USELESS, HOMELESS AMONG THE EMPTY ETERNITIES

The concluding phase in the development of Twain's thinking on the relationship between man's conscience and his lack of control in a mechanistic world is bleak and complex. It is during this period that Twain spoke so caustically of the "damned human race" of which he was a member. As he vehemently condemned man, he also insisted on the complete determinism of man's life and actions. Paradoxically, while he condemned man, Twain also pleaded for man's release from responsibility for his actions since life is determined by exterior forces, and man is no more or less than the sum total of the influences brought to bear upon him through heredity and environment. In the midst of this convolution of thought Twain added another element: conscience or the moral sense. In addition to expanding man's determinism and calling for man's absolution from responsibility, Twain also discussed the guilt that conscience inflicts upon man, despite his inability to either rise above his guilt or alter his determined course of life and action. Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894) spans the gap between Twain's idea of the possible victory of a sound heart over determinism and the culmination of his thinking on mechanism and moral responsibility detailed in the late Twain writings. Important as a transitional piece between Twain's

second and third major stages of thinking on man's conscience in a deterministic world, Pudd'nhead Wilson provides a meaningful framework for discussion of "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" (1899), "The Damned Human Race" (1905-1909), "What Is Man?" (1906), "The Mysterious Stranger" (1916), and "Letters From the Earth" (1962).

Pudd'nhead Wilson is the triple-strand story of David (Pudd'nhead) Wilson, the laughing stock of Dawson's Landing, who becomes the town's hero through using finger prints to solve a murder; Luigi and Angelo, Italian twins who come to the river town; and Thomas à Becket Driscoll (Tom) and Valet de Chambre (Chambers), master and slave look-alikes who are switched in their cradles soon after their births, thus exchanging identities. The dominant theme is that involving the boys whose identities were changed; the stories of Pudd'nhead and the twins are intertwined with, but secondary to, the major plot. Louis H. Leiter says that both Tom and Chambers are subject to "enslavement to inherited attitudes, ideas, traditions, self-delusions, and the like, which goes beyond actual enslavement of the Negro."<sup>42</sup> Marilyn G. Rose says: "Both boys are victims of their environment."<sup>43</sup> Tom and Chambers are chained to their surroundings because of the actions of Roxana (Roxy), a beautiful slave only one-sixteenth black. When her

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<sup>42</sup>Louis H. Leiter, "Dawson's Landing: Thematic Cityscape in Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson," Mark Twain Journal 13 (Winter 1965-1966): 8.

<sup>43</sup>Marilyn G. Rose, "Pudd'nhead Wilson: a Contemporary Parable," Mark Twain Journal 13 (Summer 1966): 7.

master's son and Roxy's own son were only a few months old, the slave woman switched the nearly identical slave and white babies so her child could not be sold South--a fate worse than death to the slaves. The usurpation was not detected, and the boys grew up assuming each other's position in the stratified slave-master society of the town. Though Tom (the real slave Chambers) was upon occasion struck with "a sort of echo in his conscience"<sup>44</sup> and, upon learning of his true identity, said the information on his background would change his entire life, "the main structure of his character was not changed, and could not be changed" (p. 92) by the revelation of his identity. Wendy A. Bie notes: "Tom Driscoll matures in one of the most rigidly moral of atmospheres, that of the Southern Gentleman. Yet in spite of his teaching's emphasis on mercy, kindness, and honor, Tom is thoroughly sadistic and brings both dishonor and death to his family."<sup>45</sup> Tom therefore was governed by forces of heredity as well as being controlled by favorable factors in his environment that had temporarily elevated him from slavery to freedom. In discussing the effects of heredity and environment on Tom and Chambers, Robert A. Wiggins notes:

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<sup>44</sup>Mark Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins, Author's National Edition, vol. 14 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1899; reprint ed., Grosse Pointe, Mich.: Scholarly Press, n.d.), p. 76. All future citations to Pudd'nhead Wilson are from this volume and are referenced only in the text.

<sup>45</sup>Wendy A. Bie, "Mark Twain's Bitter Duality," Mark Twain Journal 16 (Summer 1972): 15.

One is damned because one thirty-second part of him was black, though he was raised as white, and the other damned because he was raised as a black, though all his ancestry was white. On one hand heredity is the factor determining character, and on the other it is environment.<sup>46</sup>

The central concern of Pudd'nhead Wilson is obviously determinism, but a major question arises concerning the type of determinism that is primary to the work. Given the nature of the work itself, one would expect the dominant form of determinism to be environmental, since the main point Twain made is the importance of environment in a person's development. The switched identities of Tom and Chambers were apparently intended to bear out this very point. Yet, a complication occurs because of Twain's introduction of Roxy's comment to Tom about the effect of his "nigger" blood upon his behavior.

Thirty-one parts o' you is white, en on'y one part nigger, en dat po' little one part is yo' soul. 'Tain't wuth savin'; tain't wuth totin' out on a shovel en throwin' in de gutter. (p. 92)

This statement raises a critical question of interpretation. Did Twain actually expect the reader to accept literally the validity of Roxy's statement? Is he satirizing the Southern delusion that the blood of a particular race is either privileged or degraded? Or is Twain deliberately ambiguous in an effort either to gain wider acceptance among Southern readers or to stimulate greater discussion of an issue he believed needed re-examination?

Leslie Fiedler's comments are important in dealing with this difficult ambiguity concerning Twain and his position

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<sup>46</sup>Robert A. Wiggins, "Pudd'nhead Wilson: A Literary Caesarean Operation," College English 25 (December 1963): 183.

in Pudd'nhead Wilson. Fiedler says:

Perhaps the supreme achievement of this book is to have rendered such indignities [Roxy's statement] not in terms of melodrama or as a parochial "social problem" but as a local instance of some universal guilt and doom. The false Tom, who is the fruit of all the betrayal and terror and profaned love which lies between white man and black, embodies also its "dark necessity"--and must lie, steal, kill and boast until in his hybris he reveals himself as the slave we all secretly are.<sup>47</sup>

Fiedler's view echoes a passage in Twain's notebook:

"The skin of every human being contains a slave."<sup>48</sup> The inborn characteristic of mankind's guilt, expressed by Twain as the "slave" in each person, or the "nigger" in every individual, is a vital part of Pudd'nhead Wilson. Tom, therefore, may be symbolic of the darkness that lurks in every person's composition as a member of the marred human family.

Twain in Pudd'nhead Wilson is concerned with two aspects of determinism. His central assertion on the importance of one's environment in determining his fate is expressed with less clarity because Twain was convinced that all men, regardless of environment are victimized in their being human and thus are subject to human failings. Therefore, while environmental determinism predominates, the influence of heredity also presents itself as a very real force that must be reckoned with in Twain's thinking and works. Here is the ambiguity of Tom's position as one environmentally privileged, yet one shackled by

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<sup>47</sup>Leslie Feidler, "As Free As Any Cretur . . .," New Republic, 22 August 1955, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup>Leslie Feidler, "As Free As Any Cretur . . .," New Republic, 15 August 1955, p. 18.

the influence of something hereditarily endowed by his membership in the human race.

Tom's marred conscience was a relatively insignificant factor in his behavior. Even when he sold his own mother down the river into slavery because his circumstances appeared to him to offer no alternative, he was troubled for a very short period by any type of remorse over his deed. Twain noted: "For a whole week he was not able to sleep well, so much the villainy which he had played upon his trusting mother preyed upon his rag of a conscience; but after that he began to get comfortable again, and was presently able to sleep like any other miscreant" (p. 162).

The most activity of Tom's "rag of conscience" was apparent during the trial of his uncle's "murderers," and one may well question Tom's depth of a sense of guilt even then in light of his past callousness to his misdeeds:

He was playing a part, but it was not all a part. The picture of his alleged uncle, as he had last seen him, was before him in the dark pretty frequently, when he was awake, and called again in his dreams, when he was asleep. (p. 193)

Pudd'nhead Wilson solved not only the puzzle of Judge Driscoll's murder, but also revealed the switched identities of Tom and Chambers. The false "Tom" confessed the murder and his various crimes and was sold down the river as a slave. "Chambers," the real Tom, was elevated to his rightful position, but the influence of environment overcame his "white" heredity and the true Tom was placed in a terrible situation that he could not overcome because of the impact and power of his environmental



training as a slave:

The real heir suddenly found himself rich and free, but in a most embarrassing situation. He could neither read nor write, and his speech was the basest dialect of the Negro quarter. His gait, his attitudes, his gestures, his bearing, his laugh--all were vulgar and uncouth; his manners were the manners of a slave. Money and fine clothes could not mend these defects or cover them up; they only made them the more glaring and the more pathetic. The poor fellow could not endure the terrors of the white man's parlor, and felt at home and at peace nowhere but in the kitchen. The family pew was a misery to him, yet he could nevermore enter into the solacing refuge of the "nigger gallery"--that was closed to him for good and all. (p. 224)

Twain's view in Pudd'nhead Wilson eliminates response of the sound heart that Huck Finn was able to employ because the characters in Pudd'nhead Wilson are completely determined by heredity and environment. The real slave Chambers' downfall comes about because of his inborn traits that he could not overcome in spite of every advantage environment could offer; the real Tom's control by determinism comes because environment overcomes hereditary rank and privilege. In both cases, determinism was responsible for every facet of the characters' lives and actions. As Wiggins notes: "The conclusion of the book . . . affirms . . . that the individual is not responsible for his character; he is the product of forces outside his control."<sup>49</sup> The triumph of ethically based social conscience and the victory of the sound heart over misguided social standards possible in Twain's earlier writings are abolished in the wake of absolute determinism during the period Pudd'nhead Wilson introduces.

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<sup>49</sup>Wiggins, p. 183.

An interesting parallel may be noted between the dismissal of conscience in Pudd'nhead Wilson and the annihilation of conscience in "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut." In "The Facts" the narrator obliterated his conscience. However, Twain soon realized that destruction of conscience was a fanciful unreality and began, in Tom Sawyer and subsequent works, to deal realistically with the presence of conscience. Once more, however, Twain reverted to the position of virtual absence of conscience in Pudd'nhead Wilson. Again, Twain realized that this was an implausible situation. Though by this time Twain accounted man under the total domination of determinism, he also realized that, though he pleaded that man was not responsible for his actions, guilt produced by some form of moral sensitivity was still very real. Conscience could not simply be excised from experience as it had largely been in Pudd'nhead Wilson. With "The Man That Corrupted Hadleburg" Twain was again portraying the presence of conscience more realistically. Conscience in "Hadleyburg" is not a force prompting positive action like that Twain worked out in his two previous stages of thinking. Rather, presence of conscience produces a sense of guilt and remorse that plague individuals in spite of their inability to change their activities or dismiss their remorse.

Albert B. Paine described "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" by saying: "Human weakness and rotten moral force were never stripped so bare or so mercilessly jeered at in

the marketplace."<sup>50</sup> DeLancey Ferguson agrees that Twain's story carries universal applications. He notes that though Hadleyburg is just as realistically sketched as many of Twain's other fictitious towns, "it is also a place where the whole damned race is at home."<sup>51</sup> Hadleyburg mirrors not only the depravity of humanity, but also the reason for the town's degradation: determinism. Ferguson says that if the reader is honest with himself, he will come away from "Hadleyburg" realizing his envelopment in determined circumstances and admitting: "There, with or without the grace of God, go I,"<sup>52</sup> for the theme of the story, as Henry Nash Smith notes, is human bondage.<sup>53</sup>

Hadleyburg, a town renowned for its spotless honesty, was shaken to its core by the public revelation of eighteen of its nineteen prominent residents as frauds and attempted thieves. When an unknown man left a bag of gold to be claimed by the one who had shown him kindness long ago, the "upright" citizens of "incorruptible Hadleyburg" were revealed as "in reality the slaves of their own avariciousness."<sup>54</sup> Clinton Burhans notes that Twain's view of conscience in "Hadleyburg" was that of an environmentally determined morality. Hadleyburg falls, says

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<sup>50</sup>Albert Bigelow Paine, cited by Van Wyck Brooks, The Ordeal of Mark Twain (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1933), p. 234.

<sup>51</sup>Ferguson, p. 279.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Smith, p. 183.

<sup>54</sup>Levy, p. 389.

Burhans, because the people's training had consisted of embedding the "moral ideal of honesty"<sup>55</sup> without allowing any type of test of their teachings' strength, and because "Hadleyburg forgets that man is determined by heredity as well as by environment, that human nature is potentially petty and selfish as well as noble and kind."<sup>56</sup>

Twain focused attention on the Richards, an elderly couple who lived in Hadleyburg. Through Edward and Mary Richards, Twain not only hammered home the determinism of man, but also he illustrated the presence of conscience in human experience. Conscience, shaped by the environment of the citizens of Hadleyburg, was unable to produce correct behavior, and instead functioned as a source of an intense sense of guilt and remorse for the Richards, though due to their determinism, they were helpless to act any other way.

As Smith notes: "Richards calls himself a 'slave' to the bank president Pinkerton, and all the leading citizens, including Pinkerton, are enslaved by greed."<sup>57</sup> Burhans says "despite the warnings of his conscience, each is driven by his desires for wealth, security, and social position to rationalize and then to lie about his right to the gold."<sup>58</sup> Richards' conscience was impotent against the determinism of events that

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<sup>55</sup>Clinton S. Burhans, Jr., "The Sober Affirmation of Mark Twain's Hadleyburg," American Literature 34 (March 1962-January 1963): 378.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>57</sup>Smith, p. 183.

<sup>58</sup>Burhans, p. 380.

he faced and Twain noted: "Edward fell--that is, he sat still; sat with a conscience which was not satisfied, but which was overpowered by circumstances [emphasis mine]." <sup>59</sup> The conscience shaped by the community was insignificant in the face of circumstances that controlled Richards' decision not to reveal his true involvement in dishonesty. As the town praises the couple for their honesty and awards them proceeds from the auction of gold-plated lead coins in the stranger's bag, Smith says "Richards succumbs again to the more grievous temptation of being publically acclaimed for his integrity, receives a fortune together with the praise of the community, and dies from the pangs of guilt and shame. It is hard to conceive of a more tightly mathematical demonstration of human depravity." <sup>60</sup>

As the depravity of the town is complete, so is the determinism of events surrounding Hadleyburg's fall. As Richards and his wife were dying from their remorse and sense of guilt, they revealed the truth surrounding their actions that they thought were already known by the town, but ironically were first exposed by the guilt-stricken couple.

Six days passed, then came more news. The old couple were dying. Richards' mind cleared in his latest hour, and he sent for Burgess. Burgess said:

"Let the room be cleared. I think he wishes to say something in privacy."

"No!" said Richards: "I want witnesses. I want you all to hear my confession, so that I may die a man, and

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<sup>59</sup>Mark Twain, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," in The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Essays and Stories, Author's National Edition, vol. 23 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1903; reprint ed., Grosse Pointe, Mich.: Scholarly Press, n.d.), p. 69. All future citations to "Hadleyburg" are from this volume and are referenced only in the text.

<sup>60</sup>Smith, p. 184.

not a dog. I was clean--artificially--like the rest; and like the rest I fell when temptation came. I signed a lie, and claimed the miserable sack. Mr. Burgess remembered that I had done him a service, and in gratitude (and ignorance) he suppressed my claim and saved me. You know the thing that was charged against Burgess years ago. My testimony, and mine alone, could have cleared him, and I was a coward, and left him to suffer disgrace--"

"No--no--Mr. Richards, you--"

"My servant betrayed my secret to him--"

"No one has betrayed anything to me--"

--and then he did a natural and justifiable thing, he repented of the saving kindness which he had done me, and he exposed me--as I deserved--"

"Never!--I make oath--"

"Out of my heart I forgive him."

Burgess's impassioned protestations fell upon deaf ears; the dying man passed away without knowing that once more he had done poor Burgess a wrong. The old wife died that night.

The last of the sacred Nineteen had fallen a prey to the fiendish sack; the town was stripped of the last rag of its ancient glory. (pp. 82-83)

The determinism of circumstances that caused Richards to lie in the first place, suffer remorse because of what he had been forced to do, and confess his dishonesty as he died had come full circle. The Richards were forced to dishonesty by circumstances beyond their control; they were consumed by grief over something they were helpless to regulate; they were exposed and dishonored by cold mechanistic forces that made ludicrous their suffering and death. Hadleyburg certainly represents a "damned human race." The town's downfall came because its citizens prided themselves on a virtue they, in actuality, did not possess. Both conscience and determinism play a role in the story, but it is determinism that triumphs. Though the changing of the town's motto suggests a possibility of a different mode of conduct for later citizens, the outlook for Hadleyburg, and the entire human family, continues to deteriorate in Twain's works.

If Pudd'nhead Wilson may be seen as the bridge connecting Twain's second and third facets of thinking on conscience and deterministic control, and "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" may be viewed as the path leading directly to an abyss, then "The Damned Human Race" is certainly Twain's plunge into the persuasion and thinking that produced his final bleak writing. Van Wyck Brooks notes that Twain's "withering contempt for humankind . . . was . . . expressed more and more openly, as time went on."<sup>61</sup> By the years 1905 through 1909, when Twain wrote "The Damned Human Race," his ideas on the depravity of man's character were fully developed and devastatingly presented:

Edward Wagenknecht discusses Twain's use of animals as contrasted to man in this period of late writings by saying:

There is something very touching about Mark Twain's attitude toward animals at the end of his life: as his pessimism grew upon him, as he became more and more disgusted with the damned human race, he turned to them for comfort. They delivered him from the domination of the Moral Sense, for, like the angels, they never sinned and therefore are sure of heaven.<sup>62</sup>

Twain's statements on man's thievery, greed, revenge, war, slavery, and cruelty in "The Damned Human Race" certainly make the animal existence look more desirable than humanity. Twain's comment on man's cruelty foreshadows the statements of Satan in "The Mysterious Stranger" regarding so-called "inhumane actions" that are paradoxically characteristic only of man. In "The Damned Human Race" Twain said:

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<sup>61</sup>Brooks, p. 239.

<sup>62</sup>Wagenknecht, p. 134.

Of all the animals, man is the only one that is cruel. He is the only one that inflicts pain for the pleasure of doing it. It is a trait that is not known to the higher animals. The cat plays with the frightened mouse; but she has this excuse, that she does not know that the mouse is suffering. The cat is moderate--unhumanly moderate: she only scares the mouse, she does not hurt it; she doesn't dig out its eyes, or tear off its skin, or drive splinters under its nails--man-fashion; when she is done playing with it she makes a sudden meal of it and puts it out of its trouble. Man is the Cruel Animal. He is alone in that distinction.<sup>63</sup>

Twain also pronounced "man . . . the only Slave" (p. 179).

Brooks says: "Mark Twain's view of man, in short, was quite rudimentary. He considered life a mistake and the human animal the contemptible machine he had found him."<sup>64</sup> Man's slavery was due to his mechanism, Twain insisted. In the section entitled "In the Animals' Court" of "The Damned Human Race," Twain's trial questioning of the final animal interrogated--man thinly disguised as "the machine"--provokes this response from the defendant man.

I am a machine. I am slave to the law of my make, I have to obey it, under all conditions. I do nothing, of myself. My forces are set in motion by outside influences, I never set them in motion myself. (p. 172)

Man, "the lowest animal," (p. 175) is a machine invested with a terrible defect none of the other animals possess: the Moral Sense. Twain explained:

One is obliged to concede that in true loftiness of character, Man cannot claim to approach even the meanest of the Higher Animals. It is plain that he is constitutionally

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<sup>63</sup>Mark Twain, "The Damned Human Race," in Letters From the Earth, ed. Bernard DeVoto, with a Preface by Henry Nash Smith (Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., n.d.; Fawcett Publishers, Inc., 1962), p. 179. All future citations to "The Damned Human Race" are from this volume and are referenced only in the text.

<sup>64</sup>Brooks, p. 295.



afflicted with a Defect which must make such approach forever impossible, for it is manifest that this defect is permanent in him, indestructible, ineradicable.

I find this Defect to be the Moral Sense. He is the only animal that has it. It is the secret of his degradation. It is the quality which enables him to do wrong. It has no other function. It could never have been intended to perform any other. Without it, man could do no wrong. He would rise at once to the level of the Higher Animals. . . .

. . . The Moral Sense enables a man to do wrong. It enables him to do wrong in a thousand ways. Rabies is an innocent disease, compared to the Moral Sense. No one, then, can be the better man for having the Moral Sense. What, now, do we find the Primal Curse to have been? Plainly what it was in the beginning: the infliction upon man of the Moral Sense; the ability to do evil; for there can be no evil act without the presence of consciousness of it in the doer of it. (p. 181)

Though man possesses the Moral Sense, and is able to distinguish right from wrong, it is important to notice Twain's explanation of its "infliction upon man" (p. 181) underscoring the idea that man is a machine and is in bondage to his composition as a mechanism. Therefore, Twain insisted that even though man is a despicable, paltry, most abject animal, he is a determined being who acts as he does because of his composition, and hence cannot be held accountable for his cruelty, greed, thievery, and multitudinous other vices. As man, because of his mechanism cannot be held accountable for atrocities he commits, neither can he be responsible for things he has omitted doing, according to Twain. Brooks says: "How much it meant to him, [Twain] the thought that man is a mere machine, an irresponsible puppet, entitled to no demerit for what he has failed to do!"<sup>65</sup> Twain said that the man-machine's plea of complete domination

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 316.

by exterior forces is sufficient to absolve the defendant from charges in the animals' court:

You are discharged. Your plea is sufficient. You are a pretty poor thing, with some good qualities and some bad ones; but to attach personal merit to conduct emanating from the one set, and personal demerit to conduct emanating from the other set would be unfair and unjust. To a machine, that is--to a machine. (p. 172)

In "The Damned Human Race," Twain presented the ideas of the total determinism of man's life and the supposed release from responsibility that this mechanistic control provides man. This brief but vital essay provides a lucid introduction to Twain's deterministic "Gospel":<sup>66</sup> "What Is Man?".

The central theme of "What Is Man?" is man's determinism and position as a machine. Twain allowed this essay to germinate and grow quietly in his thinking for years before placing it in its final written form and anonymously publishing the explosive piece he feared to publish in his name. Alexander E. Jones notes that Twain felt, at this time, that "man is a machine, and all his actions are controlled by the workings of another machine within him--a mechanism which Twain refers to as 'Conscience,' 'Interior Monarch,' or 'Master Passion'--which blindly seeks to content itself at any cost."<sup>67</sup> In "What Is Man?" Twain stated that every area of human life is controlled.

Whatever a man is, is due to his make, and to the influences brought to bear upon it by his hereditaries, his habitat, his association. He is moved, directed, COMMANDED, by exterior influences--solely. (p. 5)

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<sup>66</sup>Smith, p. 171.

<sup>67</sup>Jones, p. 14.

Conscience, the "absolute Monarch inside of a man, who is the man's Master" (pp. 20-21) is wholly the product of determinism according to Twain during this period of his thinking. Without training, conscience is impotent. According to Twain, "as a guide or incentive to any authoritatively prescribed line of morals or conduct (leaving training out of the account), a man's conscience is totally valueless" (p. 21). Conscience is, said Twain, the product of a man's environment and is of itself not able to produce correct action since it is a machine just as man is a machine. In 1898 Twain wrote concerning conscience:

It is a mere machine, like my heart--but moral, not physical; and being moral is teachable, its action modifiable. It is merely a thing; the creature of training; it is whatever one's mother and Bible and comrades and laws and system of government and habitat and heredities have made it.<sup>68</sup>

Though the machine of Conscience is trainable, man still is not to be credited for his acceptable behavior since "machines may not boast, nor feel proud of their performance, nor claim personal merit for it" (p. 9). Alexander Cowie says "an obvious corollary of this proposition is that for any 'worthy' deeds done by a man he himself deserves no credit."<sup>69</sup> Twain himself said: "No machine is entitled to praise for any of its acts of a virtuous sort nor blamable for any of its acts of the opposite sort."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Mark Twain's Notebook, cited by Alexander E. Jones, "Mark Twain and the Determinism of 'What Is Man?'," American Literature 29 (March 1957-January 1958): 9.

<sup>69</sup>Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York: American Book Company, 1948), p. 636.

<sup>70</sup>Mark Twain in Eruption, cited by Alexander E. Jones, "Mark Twain and the Determinism of 'What Is Man?'," American Literature 29 (March 1957-January 1958): 2.

Justin Kaplan notes: "Without choice there can be no responsibility, and--as if Clemens dimly perceived the logical goal of his illogic--without responsibility guilt has no meaning."<sup>71</sup> Jones has said that Twain may have hoped to quiet his own tormenting conscience by proposing the mechanism of both man and his conscience.<sup>72</sup> Bernard DeVoto interprets "What Is Man?" as a plea for Twain's personal pardon as well as a cry for the pardon of the entire miserable human race:

In describing man's helplessness, it ["What Is Man?"]<sup>7</sup> pleads that man cannot be blamed. In asserting man's cowardice, it asserts also that man is not responsible. . . . If man is not responsible, then no man can be held responsible. No one, I think, can read this wearisomely repeated argument without feeling the terrible force of an inner cry: Do not blame me, for it was not my fault.<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, since man and his conscience are machines, and are controlled by forces exterior to them, Twain insisted that man should be neither praised nor blamed for his actions.

Man's actions are basically self-centered according to Twain: "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" (p. 15).

Sherwood Cummings notes that in "What Is Man?" "man's impulses are invariable selfish and that he is motivated by self-satisfaction and public opinion. Every act of apparent self-

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<sup>71</sup>Kaplan, p. 340.

<sup>72</sup>Jones, p. 10.

<sup>73</sup>Mark Twain at Work, cited by Alexander E. Jones, "Mark Twain and the Determinism of 'What Is Man?'," American Literature 29 (March 1957-January 1958): 10.

sacrifice can be explained as gratification of an inner need."<sup>74</sup> Twain simply said "a man cannot be comfortable without his own approval" (p. 17) and stressed man's search for self-gratification. Twain noted that "a man often honestly thinks he is sacrificing himself merely and solely for some one else, but he is deceived; his bottom impulse is to content a requirement of his nature and training, and thus acquire peace for his soul" (p. 20). While emphasizing man's primary drive to content himself, Twain also discussed his belief that man's mechanical conscience is malleable through training and can be channelled so that other people might be benefited. The Old Man of the "What Is Man?" dialogue issued the Young Man the admonition to direct his self-gratification in a beneficial channel. The Old Man advised: "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" (pp. 54-55).

Twain recognized that the Master Passion or Conscience may be trained (determined by environment), but he stressed that Conscience "does not distinguish between good morals and bad ones, and cares nothing for results to the man provided its own contentment be secured; and it will always secure that" (p. 99). According to Jones: "In other words, the human mechanism can be trained in virtue but deserves no personal credit for righteous

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<sup>74</sup>Cummings, p. 111.

behavior"<sup>75</sup> since ultimately man's own good is the epitome of all his activity and desire.

The Moral Sense is mentioned several times in "What Is Man?". The Moral Sense is man's ability to discern right and wrong that distinguishes him from animals. Twain relates that in 1904 he removed the final chapter entitled "The Moral Sense" from "What Is Man?". In this chapter Twain explained man's unique position as judge between right and wrong, and bitterly related man's constant choice of wrong over right. He removed the chapter himself saying: "I couldn't even stand that chapter myself; all the other chapters were sweet and gentle. . . ."<sup>76</sup> Twain reserved most of his comment on the Moral Sense for "The Mysterious Stranger," but in "What Is Man?" he did comment sufficiently on the subject to strike a severe blow to man's pride--"The fact that man knows right from wrong proves his intellectual superiority to the other creatures; but the fact that he can do wrong proves his moral inferiority to any creature that cannot" (p. 89). As William E. Davidson notes: "Better an ox or a dog or a rat that has no moral sense"<sup>77</sup> than a man that knows to do right and does wrong. Again here, however, it is important to emphasize Twain's position that as a machine with the Moral Sense, man was despicable because he chose wrong over right, but he was also not to be held accountable for his actions

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<sup>75</sup>Jones, p. 16.

<sup>76</sup>Mark Twain in Eruption, cited by Alexander E. Jones, "Mark Twain and the Determinism of 'What Is Man?'," p. 3.

<sup>77</sup>William E. Davidson, "Mark Twain and Conscience," The Twainian 1 (April 1942): 3.

because he was a machine, and as such he was without control over any phase of his life. As the Young Man tells the Old Man, the "desolating doctrine . . . takes the glory out of man; it takes the pride out of him, it takes the heroism out of him, it denies him all personal credit, all applause; it not only degrades him to a machine, but allows him no control over the machine" (p. 102). The mechanistic philosophy of the Old Man strips man of all his achievements and glories, charged the Young Man. The Old Man simply replied: "He hasn't any to strip" (p. 76), starkly illustrating man's depravity due to his determined life.

Markedly similar to "What Is Man?" in perspective are Twain's "Letters From the Earth" that were not published until 1962. In an echo of "What Is Man?" Twain proclaimed in "Letters":

The human being is a machine. An automatic machine. It is composed of thousands of complex and delicate mechanisms, which perform their functions harmoniously and perfectly, in accordance with laws devised for their governance, and over which the man himself has no authority, no mastership, no control.<sup>78</sup>

In "Letters" Twain again argued against man's guilt and responsibility for his actions since he is completely determined. To illustrate the unreasonableness of blaming a machine for its determined activities, Twain compared the lecherous goat with "that cold calm puritan" (p. 41) the tortoise. Twain pleaded for man's release from accountability because some men, like the

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<sup>78</sup>Mark Twain, "Letters From the Earth," in Letters From the Earth, ed. Bernard DeVoto, with a Preface by Henry Nash Smith (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., n.d.; Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1962), p. 32. All future citations to "Letters" are from this volume and are referenced only in the text.

goat, are endued with completely different drives than those that are impressed on other men more temperamentally akin to the tortoise (pp. 40-41).

The Moral Sense is also touched upon in "Letters." Again paralleling the thinking of "What Is Man?" and foreshadowing "The Mysterious Stranger," Twain called the Moral Sense

that sense which differentiates man from the beast and sets him above the beast. Instead of below the beast--where one would suppose his proper place would be, since he is always foul-minded and guilty and the beast always clean-minded and innocent. It is like valuing a watch that must go wrong, above a watch that can't. (p. 23)

In Twain's last complete and extended essay "What Is Man?" and in the posthumous publication "Letters From the Earth," the mechanism of man's life and mechanical nature of the Moral Sense or Conscience were used to strip away the veneer of man's dignity and pride and expose him as a being wholly controlled by heredity and environment. Though man was seen as entirely a product of forces beyond his control, and therefore qualified for freedom from responsibility for actions and behavior, Twain still railed against the degradation of man. He bitterly denounced man's position as the lowest, most despised animal due to his choice of wrong above right. The condemnation of man because of his misuse of the Moral Sense intensifies through "What Is Man?" and "Letters From the Earth" and devastatingly culminates in Twain's "dark star":<sup>79</sup> "The Mysterious Stranger."

John S. Tuckey's article on the "scissors and paste" construction of the Paine-Duneka edition of "The Mysterious

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<sup>79</sup>Jones, p. 1.



"Stranger" is not only a fascinating textual study, but is also vital when considering how faithfully the text represents Twain's position. At the time of Twain's death in 1910, there were three versions of the work now known as "The Mysterious Stranger." Bernard DeVoto named and catalogued the three versions as: the "Hannibal" version of 15,000 words; the "Eseldorf" version of 55,000 words; and the "Print Shop" version of 65,000 words. Albert B. Paine, Twain's official biographer and literary executor, and Frederick A. Duneka, the general manager of Harper & Brothers publishing company, worked together to compile the 1916 version of "The Mysterious Stranger" from its multiple, scattered, unfinished forms among the Twain papers. The "Eseldorf" version was used by Paine and Duneka. They exercised great liberties with the text, removing one quarter of the words Twain had written for the Eseldorf version, and entirely creating and inserting the astrologer (who was not even present in the "Eseldorf" manuscript) so that the astrologer could do the evil things Twain had credited to the priest. The final chapter of the Paine-Duneka edition may have been written by Twain in 1904 in Florence during Olivia Clemens' last illness, and John Tuckey notes that there is "positive evidence that he wrote it as a conclusion for the 'Print Shop' version."<sup>80</sup> In order to make the "Print Shop" conclusion fit the "Eseldorf"

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<sup>80</sup>John S. Tuckey, "The Mysterious Stranger: Mark Twain's Texts and the Paine-Duneka Edition," in Mark Twain's The Mysterious Stranger and the Critics, ed. John S. Tuckey (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1968), p. 87.

body of their edition, Paine and Duneka substituted the "Eseldorf" names "Theodor" and "Satan" for the "Print Shop's" "August" and "44." Tuckey notes that

despite its imperfections, it is also the only existing form of the story that has the coherence and completeness of a realized literary work. . . . Corrupt as it is, the Paine-Duneka edition has held a place in our literature for more than half a century. Generally regarded as the most important work of Mark Twain's later years, it has received and is receiving much critical attention.<sup>81</sup>

Henry Nash Smith also defends the Paine-Duneka edition. Especially important is his statement that "in all versions Mark Twain clearly intends to adopt the perspective of a transcendent observer in order to depict human experience as meaningless,"<sup>82</sup> and the concluding chapter of the 1916 version of Paine and Duneka certainly accomplishes what Nash sees as Twain's goal of discrediting humanity.

In 1899 Twain wrote a revealing letter to his friend, William Dean Howells, in which he described work on his current project now known as "The Mysterious Stranger." Though there are many questions surrounding "The Mysterious Stranger's" composition and exact meaning, Twain's intention is clearly and forcefully stated in his correspondence with Howells:

. . . What I have been wanting is a chance to write a book without reserves--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.

It is under way, now, and it is a luxury! an intellectual drunk. Twice I didn't start it right; and got pretty far in, both times, before I found it out. But I am sure

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>82</sup>Smith, p. 186.

it is started right this time. It is in tale-form. I believe I can make it tell what I think of Man, and how he is constructed, and what a shabby poor ridiculous thing he is, and how mistaken he is in his estimate of his character and powers and qualities and his place among the animals. . . .

I hope it will take me a year or two to write it, and that it will turn out to be the right vessel to contain all the abuse I am planning to dump into it.<sup>83</sup>

Twain's interpretation of his own purpose in writing "The Mysterious Stranger" is vital. The clear-cut precision of Twain's intent is central in assessing various critical approaches to this complex work. Bernard DeVoto believed "The Mysterious Stranger" resulted from the multiple tragedies that befell Twain's personal life during the 1890's, and Twain's salvation of himself developed when the conclusion of "The Mysterious Stranger" exploded the world in which he lived.

If he were to go on functioning, he must convince his "trained Presbyterian conscience" that he was not to blame for these sorrows. He exhausted every conceivable excuse, even that offered by his "gospel" of determinism, but none of them would serve. There remained one last possibility. "If everything was a dream, then clearly the accused prisoner must be discharged." He saved himself by detonating the moral universe.<sup>84</sup>

John S. Tuckey interpreted Twain's solipsism--a belief that the self is the only reality--as a way out of the mechanism surrounding man--a way the soul or "me" of man could foil the universe and survive. Tuckey saw the conclusion of "The Mysterious Stranger" as Twain's final position of being "not

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<sup>83</sup> Mark Twain's Letters, vol. 2, cited by E. S. Fussell, "The Structural Problem of 'The Mysterious Stranger'," Studies in Philology 49 (January 1952): 96.

<sup>84</sup> Bernard DeVoto, cited by Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel: From the Birth of the Nation to the Middle of the Twentieth Century (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1952), p. 124.

confirmed in despair, not barred from seeing and representing human life as having value and significance."<sup>85</sup> Coleman O. Parsons also saw ambiguity in Twain's solipsistic final chapter calling the conclusion "one of his final words, for he liked to have two such words--a hopeful and a hopeless one."<sup>86</sup> E. S. Fussell noted that "certain values and a limited dignity emerge"<sup>87</sup> in the bleakness of "The Mysterious Stranger."

Twain methodically destroyed every vestige of human freedom and dignity in progressive degrees throughout his works and codified his determinism in his self-styled "gospel" "What Is Man?". Did he then conclude "The Mysterious Stranger," wherein he demolished completely the Moral Sense (or conscience) of man, on an ambiguous or hopeful note? The answer, chilling though it is, is found in Twain's own words. His intention in "The Mysterious Stranger" was to present "a book which should say my say, right out of my heart, in the plainest language and without a limitation of any sort,"<sup>88</sup> and the language and ideas of the work are plainly and honestly bleak, deterministic, and pessimistic. Therefore, based on Twain's stated objectives in writing "The Mysterious Stranger" and the destructive nature of the work's conclusion, one may firmly assert that Twain's concluding thoughts in the work represent a bleak but logical

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<sup>85</sup>John S. Tuckey, "Mark Twain's Later Dialogue: The 'Me' and the Machine," American Literature 41: 542.

<sup>86</sup>Parsons, "The Devil and Samuel Clemens," p. 603.

<sup>87</sup>E. S. Fussell, "The Structural Problem of 'The Mysterious Stranger'," Studies in Philology 49 (January 1952): 104.

<sup>88</sup>Mark Twain's Letters, vol. 2, cited by E. S. Fussell, "The Structural Problem of 'The Mysterious Stranger'," p. 96.

end of his ideas as they developed throughout his life and his writing.

"The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" represents Twain's last portrayal of any struggle between determined man and his conscience. The conscience that grieves the Richards is already determined and while still able to produce remorse, is impotent in producing correct behavior. In "The Damned Human Race," "What Is Man?," and "Letters From the Earth" conscience is not only determined, but like man, is labelled a machine. The struggle of Huck Finn or Tom Sawyer is no longer possible, for every favorable attribute of man, from his freedom to his sound heart, has been removed by Twain. The final blow Twain delivered was to the Moral Sense man claims as his unique and elevating quality among the animals. "The Mysterious Stranger" provided Twain with a vehicle to display and destroy the value of the Moral Sense, for it was man's Moral Sense that "curdled Samuel Clemens' milk of human kindness."<sup>89</sup>

Parsons notes that for "The Mysterious Stranger" "the character Twain needed as a mouthpiece must combine . . . moral ambivalence (i.e., freedom) with lancet-sharp criticism."<sup>90</sup> Satan, the mysterious stranger known as Philip Traum (Dream) by Eseldorf's (Ass Town) inhabitants, is untainted by human moral values, and readily provides revealing commentary on the human race. Satan's amoral nature is displayed as he explained to

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<sup>89</sup>Parsons, "The Devil and Samuel Clemens," p. 589.

<sup>90</sup>Coleman O. Parsons, "The Background of 'The Mysterious Stranger'," American Literature 32 (March 1960): 61.

the three boys he "tutored" (Theodor, Seppi, and Nikolaus) the position of the angels that did not fall with young Satan's famous uncle of the same name: "We others are still ignorant of sin; we are not able to commit it; we are without blemish, and shall abide in that estate always. . . . We cannot do wrong; neither have we any disposition to do it, for we do not know what it is."<sup>91</sup> Satan's distinction from man is unmistakable as he tells the boys: "I am not limited like you. I am not subject to human conditions. I can measure and understand your human weaknesses, for I have studied them; but I have none of them" (p. 23). Satan's opinion of the race he had studied is also vividly apparent. Theodor relates his and his companions' knowledge of Satan's impression of man:

And always when he was talking about men and women here on the earth and their doings--even their grandest and sublimest--we were secretly ashamed, for his manner showed that to him they and their doings were of paltry poor consequence; often you would think he was talking about flies, if you didn't know. Once he even said, in so many words, that our people down here were quite interesting to him, notwithstanding they were so dull and ignorant and trivial and conceited, and so diseased and rickety, and such a shabby, poor, worthless lot all around. . . .

. . . He always spoke of men in the same old indifferent way--just as one speaks of bricks and manure piles and such things; you could see that they were of no consequence to him, one way or the other. He didn't mean to hurt us, you could see that; just as we don't mean to insult a brick when we disparage it; a brick's emotions are nothing to us; it never occurs to us to think whether it has any or not. (pp. 19; 25)

When Satan was replying to Theodor's inquiry on why the angel made such a distinction between himself and man, Satan

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<sup>91</sup>Mark Twain, "The Mysterious Stranger," in The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1922), p. 16. All future citations to "The Mysterious Stranger" are from this volume and are referenced only in the text.

replied that man "has the Moral Sense" (p. 26). Not fully understanding the meaning of the term, Theodor asked Father Peter to explain what the Moral Sense was. After his initial shock, Father Peter replied that the Moral Sense "is the faculty which enables us to distinguish good from evil" (p. 33). Still not satisfied with his grasp of the term, Theodor asked if the Moral Sense was valuable. Father Peter's startled answer to the question was: "Valuable? Heavens, lad, it is the one thing that lifts man above the beasts that perish and makes him heir to immortality!" (p. 34). Father Peter's statement on the value of the Moral Sense, however, was soon ironically destroyed. Parsons notes that a primary tenet in Twain's credo at this time was the utter worthlessness of man, and similar to Swift's comparison of man and animals, Twain's assessment is weighted entirely toward the animals, in inversion of Father Peter's view.<sup>92</sup> When Satan and Theodor viewed the inquisition of a "heretic," Theodor was appalled and remarked to Satan about the brutality of the torture chamber scene they had just witnessed. In reply to Theodor's assessment of the actions as brutal, Satan caustically replied:

"No, it was a human thing. You should not insult the brutes by such a misuse of that word; they have not deserved it," and he went on talking like that. "It is like your paltry race--always lying, always claiming virtues which it hasn't got, always denying them to the higher animals, which alone possess them. No brute ever does a cruel thing--that is the monopoly of those with the Moral Sense. When a brute inflicts pain he does it innocently; it is not wrong; for him there is no such thing as wrong. And he does not inflict pain for the pleasure of inflicting it--only man does that. Inspired by that

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<sup>92</sup>Parsons, "Background," p. 69.

mongrel Moral Sense of his! A sense whose function is to distinguish between right and wrong, with liberty to choose which of them he will do. Now what advantage can he 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. And yet he 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. (pp. 50-51)

To further illustrate man's depravity due to his possession of the Moral Sense, Satan took Theodor to a factory in a French hamlet. The men, women, and children who labored in terrible working conditions fourteen hours each day for a pittance also lived in unspeakable filth and disease. Satan uses this opportunity to again strike out against man and his Moral Sense. It is the factory operators' Moral Sense that teaches them the difference between right and wrong, and the human debris of the factory town is the result. In the face of his treatment of his fellow man, man has the audacity, says Satan, to present himself as superior to the animals who would never treat another animal so cruelly. Satan cries: "Ah, you are such an illogical, unreasoning race! And paltry--oh, unspeakably!" (p. 53). The mechanism of man that renders him so odious does not now point to man's release from responsibility because of moral and biological determinism as did the argument in "What Is Man?". Instead, man's determinism, that includes his possession of the Moral Sense, simply renders him a "suffering-machine and a happiness-machine combined" (p. 77) that positions him as a machine morally and biologically; the Moral Sense merely underscores his depravity. Satan, echoing Twain's view of man during this final period of his thinking, was merciless toward man whom



he knew to be determined and completely controlled by exterior forces, yet whom he despised thoroughly. Theodor notes: "Satan could be cruelly offensive when he chose; and he always chose when the human race was brought to his attention. He always turned up his nose at it, and never had a kind word for it" (p. 62).

The ultimate conclusion of Satan's line of reasoning appears in the final chapter of "The Mysterious Stranger." The idea of the absolute worthlessness of human existence that Twain arrived at in this last step in his long progression of thinking on man is revealed in Satan's last words to Theodor.

It is true, that which I have revealed to you; 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! (p. 140)

Parsons notes that Twain's "thought was not constructive but destructive, its end being exculpation and protection, its means negation of free will, conscience, and finally life itself."<sup>93</sup> These negations rendered the entire scheme of life and reality ridiculous since responsibility is a farce when nothing else exists. The colossal joke on man is that there is no joke--but there is also no laughing, for as Theodor said at the conclusion of Satan's final words: "He vanished, and left me appalled; for I knew, and realized, that all he had said was true" (p. 140).

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

Twain's mechanism had led him to its ultimate limit: the "vagrant," "useless," "homeless," thought of man awash in an empty abyss. Like Macbeth's evaluation of life as "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing,"<sup>94</sup> Twain similarly concluded that man's existence was absurd and absolutely void of meaning.

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<sup>94</sup>Macbeth 5.5.25-27.

## CONCLUSION

William Dean Howells notes in My Mark Twain that  
for Twain

all life seems, when he began to find it out, to have the look of a vast joke, whether the joke was on him or on his fellow-beings, or if it may be expressed without irreverence, on their common creator. But it was never wholly a joke, and it was not long before his literature began to own its pathos.<sup>95</sup>

Certainly a study of the progression in Twain's thinking as he attempted to reconcile the notion of man's having moral prerogatives and responsibilities with the mechanistic concept of his being controlled by external forces bears out Howells' statement on the increasing poignancy exhibited in Twain's writings. Twain initially began wrestling with the issue of man's determinism and moral responsibility with a discussion of socially engrained standards of right and wrong. These moral standards tend to shape what man calls his conscience, which in reality can be either a manifestation of ethical standards or simply a statement of local prejudice. Then Twain recognized the determinism of social values while he insisted on the ability of the sound heart to emerge victorious over trained concepts of right and wrong. In his final stage, Twain viewed man and his conscience

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<sup>95</sup>William Dean Howells, My Mark Twain: Reminiscences and Criticism, with an Introduction by Marilyn Austin Baldwin (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), p. 156.

(socially engrained values) as mechanistic, the influence of the sound heart inoperative, and man's struggle in an indifferent universe as meaningless and absurd. Through the course of his works, Twain's writing became increasingly pessimistic. Was Twain finally, therefore, a bitter misanthrope who shook his fist in the face of God and his universe, cried "unfair," and vented his hostility through his powerful and merciless pen? Or, was Twain, as some contend, from first to last primarily and ultimately a comic who took nothing, including life, seriously?

Neither of the preceding assessments of Twain are entirely true. Howells says that for one view to predominate to the exclusion of the opposite position would be an unrepresentative and tragic view of Twain as only humorist or only pessimist.<sup>96</sup> Twain undeniably was a profound humorist. For humor to be effective, the humorist must be sensitive to man's activities that yield humorous incidents while he must also have insight into man's follies and foibles. This sensitivity to human nature led Twain through the three stages of his thinking on conscience and determinism, and lodged Twain finally in the bleak pessimism of his late years and final works. The prompting of the sound heart of Twain's magnificent central Huckleberry Finn period seemed less and less effectual in Twain's later works influenced by his heightened sensitivity to man's weaknesses and vulnerability to circumstances beyond his control. With the decline of the sound heart's influence, according to Twain's thinking, came also man's increasing lack of control over his

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid., pp. 160-62.

life and actions. As man's self-governing ability decreased, Twain's pessimism increased. The growth of the darkening strands of Twain's increasing disillusionment with humanity may be traced in his succession of works where he maneuvers man from a being guided by social training (conscience), to the heights of the victory of Huck Finn's sound heart, then plunges him into the foreboding realms of mechanism, determinism, and nothingness in the late Twain works.

Twain was influenced by two major outlooks of his time: the traditional Puritan, Calvinistic view of man as morally responsible even in a predestined scheme and the mid-nineteenth century scientific, evolutionary Darwinian view of man as an amoral machine. Although Twain accepted the idea of the mechanistic control to which man was unavoidably subject, he rejected the consequent amorality of the new science and clung to his belief in man's conscience or moral responsibility. Twain could never reconcile the polarity between his belief in man's moral responsibility or conscience and his subscription to impersonal, external control or mechanistic determinism. Only through the extremity of "The Mysterious Stranger" and its complete denial of life and its meaning could this conflict be obliterated.

It was Twain's position as a scientific, mechanistic determinist with a profound and penetrating view of mankind that propelled him to the extreme pessimism of scientific determinism that he may have abhorred personally. Gamaliel Bradford wrote of Twain: "No man ever more abused the human heart, or railed at

the hollowness of human affection, and no man ever had more friends or loved more."<sup>97</sup> Similarly, Howells said of his life-long friend: "One could not know him well without realizing him the most serious, the most humane, the most conscientious of men."<sup>98</sup>

No more succinct description of the position of Twain in American literature may be found than in two lines from Howells' poem to Twain: "The American Joke." In calling Twain's literary creation a mighty Colossus on display for Old World and America alike, Howells may describe Twain's view of mankind:

One eye winked in perpetual eclipse,  
In the other a huge tear of pity stood.<sup>99</sup>

These views are not presented in an attempt to "tone down" or "soften" Twain's dark appraisal of humanity, for his evaluation was lengthy, methodic, and clearly stated. However, behind the scathing pen responsible for stripping away the sham veneers man is so fond of constructing was the sensitive, tender, impressionable man, Mark Twain, who viewed mankind frankly, bitterly, penetratingly, and sorrowfully. He recognized with contempt what mankind is; he recognized with regret what mankind might have been. Rather than being a butcher that displayed the malignant corpse of the civilization he condemned, Mark Twain stands instead as a surgeon who exposed the corruption and

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<sup>97</sup>Gamaliel Bradford, cited by Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain: The Man and His Work (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), p. 121.

<sup>98</sup>My Mark Twain, cited by Milton Rickels, "Samuel Clemens and the Conscience of Comedy," Southern Review 4 (April 1968): 561.

<sup>99</sup>Howells, p. 163.

and disease of his patient, but who revealed raw nerves with a profundity of insight and common bond of humanity few writers have equalled or excelled.

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