

## Darwinian Ideas in Twain's *What Is Man?*

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In August 1906, Twain published privately and anonymously two hundred and fifty copies of *What Is Man?*<sup>2)</sup> The publisher was the De Vinne Press, and the copyright was held by J. W. Boswell. Twain intended to distribute them only to his close friends.

The text consists of a quasi-Socratic dialogue between an "Old Man" and a "Young Man." In the face of the Old Man's argument, the Young Man's view of man is greatly changed. Twain called the work his "gospel" (Twain, *Eruption* 239, 241). The expression "gospel" stems from "the Gospel of Self-Approval" (Twain, *Man* 148) which the Old Man calls the deterministic principle of man's actions. In a letter to Howells, his friend, Twain also called the principle of Self-Approval his "Bible" (Paine 1080). From the names mentioned above, it is clear that for Twain the work is the culmination of much reflection on the philosophy of man and that Twain regarded it as very important. The philosophy is not, as the Old Man says, "a new one" but "an old one." The work is seen as a failure because in terms of contemporary philosophy it lacks new thoughts as a philosophical treatise. And Twain is regarded as "a second-rate thinker (Cummings, "*What Is Man?*: The Scientific Sources" 115).

As is clear from Twain's use of the terms, "my gospel" and "my Bible," this work is deeply related to the Bible. Ensor points out that the title *What Is Man?* derives from the sentence, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" in the Book of Psalms 8:4 (Ensor 111). The expression, "[Adam] is accounted a little lower than the angels...." (Twain, *Man* 471) seems to have its origin in the Psalms 8:5 "For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour." Then are the arguments of the dialogue between the two based upon the biblical view of man with glory and honor? Absolutely not. I will examine their discussion in detail later.

First I will investigate the course of its publication. Twain wrote the first version of *What Is Man?* in Vienna in 1898, revised it, and added some parts in 1902 and 1905. It was in his later years that Twain promulgated his bleak determinism in the work. Therefore, it makes the impression upon the reader that his philosophy wholly differs from that in his early writings, tall tales and humorous burlesques. However, this is not the case. In the

preface of *What Is Man?* Twain says that his nihilism was engendered “twenty-five or twenty-seven years ago” (Twain, *Man* 124). He had stated his deterministic creed in conversation between himself and his family and friends for many years. Speaking of “twenty-seven years ago,” 1879 was the year of Twain’s meeting with Darwin.

It was the speech of 1883 given in public that led to *What Is Man?* It was the address “What Is Happiness?” that he delivered on January 19, 1883, in the Monday Evening Club. The club was the society of the most intellectual minds in Hartford, whose members were “Warner, Twichell, Professor Calvin E. Stowe, Dr. Horace Bushnell, J. Hammond Trumbull, Rev. Dr. Parker, Rev. Dr. Burton, and Charles H. Clark” (Long 187; Paine 542). Twain was elected and became a member of the club in January 1873. At club meetings he sometimes gave addresses, including “License of the Press” and “The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut.” “What Is happiness?” of January 19, 1883, whose record was jotted down in his notebook,<sup>2)</sup> was the skeleton of the Old Man’s arguments in *What Is Man?* It is as follows:

That was the chapter denying that there is any such thing as personal merit; maintaining that a man is merely a machine automatically functioning without any of his help or any occasion or necessity for his help, and that 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. Incidentally, I observed that the human machine gets all its inspirations from the outside and is not capable of originating an idea of any kind in its own head; and I further remarked, incidentally, that no man ever does a duty for duty’s sake but only for the sake of the satisfaction he personally gets out of doing the duty, or for the sake of avoiding the personal discomfort he would have to endure if he shirked that duty; also I indicated that there is no such thing as free will and no such thing as self-sacrifice. (Twain, *Eruption* 240)

In the speech above all the Old Man’s familiar doctrines in *What Is Man?* appear. The man-as-machine theory, man influenced by the environment, man’s lack of creativity, the denial of free will, the lack of responsibility for his actions, and the principle of self-gratification as motivation. The man-as-machine theory is a naturalistic, deterministic view of man influenced by Darwinism. As early as the late 1870s or the early 1880s, the primary points of Twain’s philosophy, which was in the 1920s and 1930s presumed to be a product of personal despair of the late years,<sup>3)</sup> had already been formed.

Twain’s literary reputation grew higher and higher at home and abroad by such works as “Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog” (1865) and *The Innocents Abroad* (1869). However,

we have to pay attention to the fact that in spite of his literary success, Twain in reality went through a series of extreme difficulties. Dreaming of getting a large sum of money, Twain invested vast sums in the Paige Typesetter in the 1880s and the 1890s, which was never completed. Because of the reckless investment he went bankrupt in 1894, and owed a huge sum of money. In 1895 he started a round-the-world lecture tour in order to meet the debt. In 1904 Livy became critically ill, and died in Florence. Twain came to embrace a bleak pessimism earlier than he experienced his financial difficulties. Therefore, we may safely assume that his pessimistic philosophy, which he proclaimed as early as 1883, had fundamentally nothing to do with his personal unhappiness in the 1890s and the 1900s.

Here let us see the reactions of the people around him to Twain's philosophy or "gospel." The reactions of the audience to "What Is Happiness?" in the Monday Evening Club were not sympathetic. People's attitudes were cold and emotional.<sup>4)</sup> As the Old Man and the Young Man discuss the problems of man's dignity and the value of life, so Twain and the members of the club talked about such issues.<sup>5)</sup> Twain made the most of the people's reactions in the dialogue between the Old Man and the Young Man. Obviously the people had a biblical view of man, and believed the glory of man made after the image of God. Twain's determinism based on Darwinism made a cold chill run through their bones. It was natural that they should emotionally react against Twain's "gospel."

Twain's determinism appears in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (CY)* as well as in "What Is Happiness?" Hank Morgan, protagonist of *CY*, considers the problem of what builds the character of Morgan le Fay, who stabbed a page to death but does not consider that it is a crime. Hank's thought is as follows:

Training - training is everything; training is all there is *to* a person. We speak of nature; it is folly; there is no such thing as nature; what we call by that misleading name is merely heredity and training. We have no thoughts of our own, no opinions of our own; they are transmitted to us, trained into us.(Twain, *Yankee* 90)

Here the same man-as-machine theory as the Old Man's is stated. Man is only a product of heredity and environment, and cannot create anything. His opinions are acquired or formed by heredity or exterior influences. In Twain's time some people, including Herbert Spencer, believed in Lamarckianism, or the theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. According to the theory, mental faculties are inheritable. It was

generally believed that opinions were transmittable. As Cummings has pointed out, Lamarckianism had an influence on Twain (Cummings, *Mark Twain and Science* 170). The passage that follows in *CY* is in reference to the problem of conscience. The chapter of *CY* also deals with the same theme as that of *What Is Man?*

Next let us see the reactions of his family to Twain's determinism. Twain often read the manuscripts of his works to his wife and daughters. This was true in the case of *What Is Man?* Livy, his wife, would not even hear Twain's *What Is Man?*, since she loathed the deterministic philosophy. Her reaction to it was emotional. Since she had been brought up in the Eastern United States, with genteel traditions, she couldn't bear its profane contents. In letters to Twichell and Howells Twain said that Livy forbade him to publish the work.<sup>6)</sup> He clarified the reason why she would not allow him to print it.<sup>7)</sup> Considering the reaction of the audience to "What Is Happiness?," he thought that if he published *What Is Man?*, he would be regarded as "a lunatic" (Twain, *Eruption* 241). In the preface of *What Is Man?* he claimed that the reason why he had not published it so far was "the disapproval of the people around [him]" (Twain, *Man* 124). This preface is the forerunner of the Old Man's philosophy, that is, the argument over the relationship between self-approval and conformity, and Twain intensifies it to a high degree. The work was issued after his wife's death of June 6, 1904, caused by syncope. We can say that the primary reason why Twain hesitated to bring it out was the opposition of Livy.

How did people respond to it when the work was published? Archibald Henderson said as follows: "he was 'startled to discover that your observations made from a close and direct study of man *au naturel*, so to speak, coincide at most points with the views of the greatest modern thinkers,..." (Twain, *Man* 16). In regard to other scientists' and thinkers' influences upon this work, Cummings points out Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*, Oliver Wendell Holmes' *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*, Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, W. E. H. Lecky's *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne*, John Lubbock's *Ant, Bees, and Wasps*, and Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* (Cummings, "What Is Man? : The Scientific Sources" 110-14). The number of people who, like Archibald Henderson, esteem Twain's philosophy highly in relation to other philosophers, was very few. Darwinism was still sensational and caused much controversy in the 1880s, when Twain gave the address "What Is Happiness?" But in the year of 1906, when *What Is Man?* was published, the controversy over Darwinism was over, and the theory of evolution was accepted to some

degree in the United States. At that time it was not, therefore, a new theory. Moreover, as to the man-as-machine theory, de La Mettrie, a materialist, states in *L'homme-machine* (1747), with antipathy against religion, that man is a very complicated machine and that he is only one animal among many. In such a situation, Andrew Carnegie made the following remarks on *What Is Man?*: “the book ‘will startle the ordinary man, but I don’t see that it goes much deeper than we were before...’” (Twain, *Man* 17). The *New York Sun* and the *New York Times* viewed the argument Twain elaborated in the work as “no new ones” (Twain, *Man* 17). This phrase has been repeated in its criticism.

Here let us review several scholars' criticism of *What Is Man?* Harris remarks that “[t]he major character, an Old Man, expounds the determinist creed that Twain had absorbed from reading popular expositions of Lockean and Benthamite psychology” (Harris 142). She emphasizes the importance of the role of empirical philosophy in the Old Man's argument. Jones explains Twain's three motivations of writing *What Is Man?* First it is an escape from Twain's conflict with religion. “One possible explanation, of course, is that Twain found determinism a refuge from the ravages of his ‘trained Presbyterian conscience’” (Jones 7). Twain sought a way of reconciliation or compromise with his conscience, having suffered from the sense of guilt. DeVoto articulates the same opinion also. “...*What Is Man?* is also a plea for pardon” (DeVoto 148). Wagenknecht views Twain's “gospel” as “inverted Calvinism” (Wagenknecht 216). Jones claims that what the work means is “the distance with which he viewed the smug self-righteousness of bourgeois Protestant society,” and “an attack upon human pride” (Jones 11). Cummings agrees with his opinion (Cummings, “*What Is Man?*: The Scientific Sources” 108). How do Japanese critics see the work? Matsumoto states that *What Is Man?* is an effort to make man's soiled mind clean (松本 71). Nasu maintains that Twain grieves about man's helplessness and apathy and becomes angry with the corruption of the world, and that the fundamental purpose of the work is to present a new concept of man and to reform the world. He thinks of *What Is Man?* not as an attack on man but as a criticism of God (那須 109). Tanabe considers that the work is Twain's own “gospel” and an attempt to ask for salvation by making God take responsibility for a series of the miseries he experienced in the late days and his own sin which he had committed (田部井 205).

Here we sum up the main points of the Old Man's argument. Man is just a machine which is governed by the irresistible powers of heredity and environment.<sup>8)</sup> He creates

nothing. His only motivation is to seek his approval. Altruism and self-sacrifice do not exist. His internal peace is sometimes secured by the approval of his fellows. Conscience cannot become the standard of morals. It is necessary for man to be trained to lead a virtuous life for the benefits of the others around him. His mind functions automatically.<sup>9)</sup> He is not endowed with free will. There is no intellectual boundary between man and beast. Man's self-approval does not always lead to doing good. Man is a blank tablet. He can be steeped in vice or live a lofty life. Man's virtue is not the glory about which he can boast. His vice is neither shameful nor blamable. His glory and shame are attributed to God. This is the synopsis of the Old Man's argument.

The Old Man and the Young Man have no name. There are few hints which suggest their background except that an old woman is employed as a servant in the Young Man's house. Who is the Old Man? Judging from the contents of *What Is Man?*, Twain's autobiography, letters, and Darwin's writings, the Old Man's (Twain's) deterministic philosophy is deeply connected with Darwin's. The Young Man attacks the Old Man for the man-as-machine theory, which has deprived man of the dignity and the honor which the Bible says were conferred by God. In history Darwin was a philosopher who denied the biblical view of man like the Old Man and secularized religion. Therefore, the character of the Old Man has a Darwinian hue to an extreme degree. For example, the Old Man's notion that man is a product of heredity and environment is a necessary result of the Darwinian doctrine of evolution.

At the end of the discussion with the Old Man, the Young Man sees himself as "the Soul" (Twain, *Man* 205). He himself cannot account for "the Soul," but in [Draft of the Moral Sense] he articulates that it is "something in us which enables us to know God and adore Him" (Twain, *Man* 471). He means something very religious and spiritual by the words. His conservative view of man based upon the Bible is strikingly contrasted with the Old Man's man-as-machine theory.

Darwin's ideas and the theme of *The Descent of Man* are taken up in *What Is Man?* For example, as Cummings has pointed out, the Young Man's idea of instinct, expressed as "inherited habit," is the same as Darwin's an "inherited habit or instinct" (Cummings, *Mark Twain and Science* 170; Twain, *Man* 189; Darwin 80). The intellectual continuity between the higher animals and the lower animals becomes supporting evidence of the advent of man by evolution. In Darwin's time the intellectual continuity was shocking to some people.

Darwin insists on it in Chapter Three and in Chapter Six.<sup>10</sup> Darwin thinks that we cannot justify the distinction among the Animal Kingdom, the Vegetable Kingdom, and the Human Kingdom. He takes an example of ants. They communicate to each other, construct magnificent buildings, capture slaves, recognize their fellow-ants after a long absence (Darwin 147). Darwin considers that the intellectual breaks in animals stem from missing links which have perished. Surprisingly, the Old Man discusses the same problem, and declares three times that there is no frontier between man and the lower animals.<sup>11</sup> The Young Man is much astonished to hear his declaration. The Old Man also gives an example of ants, and claims that their activities are as intellectual as man's (Twain, *Man* 195-7). Darwin quotes Archbishop Whately's words,<sup>12</sup> and observes that not only man but also some animals have language, drawing examples of monkeys, dogs, parrots, and cats. The Old Man humorously describes several cases of hens, cats, and dogs that can speak and communicate to each other.<sup>13</sup>

What is the difference between man and the lower animals? Darwin considers that it is the moral sense or conscience<sup>14</sup> because self-sacrifice on the basis of the moral sense may drive man to die for others. The Old Man agrees with the Young Man's opinion that the main difference between man and the lower animals is the moral sense.<sup>15</sup> The dialogue between the two is mainly about the moral sense. Chapters Two and Three especially deal with the question of self-sacrifice and duty in relation to the moral sense or conscience. Unless they do deeds which are considered to be self-sacrificial, some people feel uncomfortable. Feeling pain, they cannot gain their internal peace and tolerate in such a situation. The Old Man maintains that self-sacrifice, love, charity, and humanity are all self-deceptive and false. They derive from the only desire for contentment which drives man.

As we have seen, in many ways the Old Man's philosophy is very similar to Darwin's. However, the Old Man completely differs from Darwin at this point. Darwin considers that it is the moral sense or conscience that confers dignity and honor on man.<sup>16</sup> He observes that man's moral sense has come from a certain amount of sympathy, one of the social instincts, which he regards as hereditary. Darwin shows his idea that man's moral sense has been and will be heightened.<sup>17</sup> He is very optimistic and progressive in regard to man's morals. He is convinced of man's moral superiority over the other animals. On the contrary, the Old Man is pessimistic and anti-progressive. It is true that man can make a

distinction between good and evil with the moral sense or conscience, but conscience turns out to be man's miserable characteristic according to the Old Man. The lower animals can not distinguish good from evil. This is why they cannot do wrong. On the other hand, in spite of his perception of good and evil, man dares to do wrong to secure self-gratification. The Old Man observes that man becomes all the worse for the moral sense or conscience.<sup>18)</sup>

There are seven fragments of *What Is Man?* in the Iowa-California edition of *What Is Man?* They were not included in *What Is Man?* when it was published. Twain was going to remove them on account of their "riotous" note, but in fact kept them.

The three pieces among them deal with the problem of man's moral sense. The other pieces are partially in reference to it, too. The pieces of the moral sense were written in 1898 when he began to work on *What Is Man?* As is evident from the fact mentioned above, Twain was greatly concerned with the moral sense, and his motivation of writing *What Is Man?* was to study the moral problem. In those fragments the idea is displayed that man is morally rotten and inferior to the lower animals.<sup>19)</sup> The expression "the lower animals" in "God," one of *What Is Man?* fragments, suggests that it was Darwin's *The Descent of Man* that led Twain to consider the problem of man's moral sense and to wrote *What Is Man?* The concept of the "lower animals" is a counterpart of the higher animals, and was used in Darwin's evolutionary theory.

The Old Man refers to the expression four times in "God" (Twain, *Man* 484, 490, 492), and makes an objection to the use of it, saying that the standard of man's morals is lower than that of the other animals. Man has "all the immortal qualities." He massacres people in wars, slaughters beast "for mere pleasure," takes property from the weak, has the institution of slavery, and oppresses heretics. Man is the only animal that is "cruel, malignant, and vengeful." Taking these things into consideration, the Old Man remarks that man is "riff-raff," and far from a higher animal. On the other hand, even though the so-called lower animals kill each other (at this point the Old Man introduces Darwin's concept of the struggle for existence), they never commit such sins as man's, since they do not know good from evil without the moral sense. They are perfect in the moral faculties. Adam and Eve come to perceive the difference between good and evil by eating the apples of the tree of knowledge in Eden. This is the first step toward man's shameful immorality. God knew beforehand that Adam and Eve would be tempted by the serpent and would commit the sin of eating the apple. The Old Man considers that God is responsible for their fall because

God made human beings who were inclined to yield to temptation.<sup>20)</sup> Therefore, God is also blamable for man's immorality, vice, and crime which stem from Adam's and Eve's fall and the knowledge of good and evil.

In *What Is Man?* the Old Man repeats this argument, saying in a modified tone that Adam does not know the distinction between right and wrong before fall<sup>21)</sup> and that God created man, a machine.<sup>22)</sup> The Old man puts the responsibility for man's vice on God in a more moderate fashion. His criticism of God is not so severe as the Old Man's in the section entitled "God."

The Old Man's remarks about the moral sense in "God" are parallel to Twain's in [Man's Place in the Animal Life].<sup>23)</sup> It is extremely worth paying attention to this similarity in exploring Twain's principal motive for writing *What Is Man?* Like the Old Man, Twain censures man for his vice, crime, and depraved institutions, and attributes them to the moral sense, that is, "the Primal Curse" and "the Immoral Sense" in [Man's Place in the Animal Life]. As is obvious from Twain's statement in it that he once held full allegiance to Darwinian evolutionary theory and studied man's character.<sup>24)</sup> Therefore, it is clear that Twain's consideration of humanity derives from reading Darwin's writings, especially *The Descent of Man*. Thus we can safely assume that the Old Man's argument in "God," [Draft of The Moral Sense]; "The Moral Sense," "The Quality of Man," and *What Is Man?*, which is very similar to Twain's, also stems from *The Descent of Man*. The Old Man insists that man's "the Master Passion - the hunger for Self-Approval," which he emphasizes as the only and most influential law of human actions, is situated in "the man's moral constitution."

We can say that as a whole *What Is Man?* deals with the problem of the moral sense and the matters which are related to it. For example, self-sacrifice is generally seen as an act of doing good for others which is against the benefit of his own. However, the Old Man expounds that self-sacrifice is just an act of self-gratification. The Young Man, with an innocent spirit, views the Old Man's philosophy as "an infernal philosophy," but the Old Man says that it is not a philosophy but "a fact."

We can postulate that the Old Man's theory of Self-Approval is also grounded on Darwin's ideas in *The Descent of Man*. Internal peace is sometimes attained by the conformity to a society or public opinion. The Old Man draws a few examples of such a case. "A timid and peaceful man" participates in a war and risks his life. In spite of the

religious teachings, Alexander Hamilton dared to duel. In these cases, they are very anxious about public opinion, and act to secure public approval, that is, to obtain their own approval.

On the other hand, there are several cases in which people performs acts of self-sacrifice to avoid spiritual pain. A man gave a quarter, all his money, to a poor old woman, and returned home on foot without taking a horse-car. A man lost his life to rescue a child from a fire. The mother can put up with any self-sacrifices for her child. The philanthropists. Duty for duty's sake. A wage-earner and lay preacher abandoned his job, and went to the East Side to preach Christ to foreigners. An infidel regrets that he took a little boy's religious belief and made him and his mother unhappy. A missionary regrets that he robbed a pagan boy of his faith and made him and his mother miserable. The Young Man follows the custom of servant-tipping in Europe. In all these cases the Old Man explains that human motivation is a selfish impulse, that is, self-approval and that therefore self-sacrifice does not exist.

Surprisingly, this kind of philosophy of self-approval and avoiding pains is seen in Chapters Two and Three of *The Descent of Man* which take up the problem of the moral sense. Darwin considers that conscience is attained by the intellectual powers and a certain amount of sympathy which is social instinct.<sup>25)</sup> According to Darwin, man's sympathy consisting of conscience is greatly influenced by his fellow's approval, wishes, and censure.

Instinctive sympathy would also cause him to value highly the approbation of his fellows; for, as Mr. Bain has clearly shewn, the love of praise and the strong feeling of glory, and the still stronger horror of scorn and infamy, "are due to the workings of sympathy." Consequently man would be influenced in the highest degree by the wishes, approbation, and blame of his fellow-men, as expressed by their gestures and language.... but his actions are in a higher degree determined by the expressed wishes and judgement of his fellow-men, and unfortunately very often by his own strong selfish desires. But as love, sympathy and self-command become strengthened by habit, and as the power of reasoning becomes clearer, so that man can value justly the judgments of his fellows, he will feel himself impelled, apart from any transitory pleasure or pain, to certain lines of conduct. (Darwin 109-10)

Even if we say that the excerpt above comes from the Old Man's argument, no one may doubt it. Human actions are determined by sympathy which is influenced by public opinion. Since conscience is rooted in sympathy, it is also influenced by public opinion. The passage that follows the quotation above is in reference to examples of self-sacrifice out of

conscience. A timid mother risks her life in a dangerous situation to save her infant. Darwin explains the origin of the act of self-sacrifice for others as a selfish desire for escaping from spiritual pains: "We are thus impelled to relieve the sufferings of another, in order that our own painful feelings may be at the same time relieved. In like manner we are led to participate in the pleasures of others" (Darwin 106). Twain makes the following comments on Darwin's explanation in the margin of *The Descent of Man*: "Selfishness again - not charity nor generosity (save toward ourselves)" (Baetzhold 56). Twain probably obtains the idea from Darwin that man's motives are all selfish in any case. Darwin and the Old Man hardly differ in the explanation of human motivation of internal peace and evading mental sufferings. Like the Old Man in *What Is Man?*, Darwin draws an example of fighting a duel for avoiding the pain of shame. Darwin maintains that if man does not observe the fundamental law of human actions, he feels remorse. He accounts for conscience as follows:

[Man] will then feel remorse, repentance, regret, or shame; this latter feeling, however, relates almost exclusively to the judgment of others. He will consequently resolve more or less firmly to act differently for the future; and this is conscience; for conscience looks backwards, and serves as a guide or the future. (Darwin 114)

The only difference between Darwin's opinion and the Old Man's lies in whether we call the operation of man's conscience of satisfying a desire for internal peace "selfish" or not. It may be the question of a name. On one hand, the Old Man, as we have seen, considers that all human motives are selfish. On the other hand, Darwin regards conscience as unselfish since it is deeply rooted in man's social instinct.

[t]he social instinct, however, together with sympathy (which leads to our regarding the approbation and disapprobation of others), having served as the primary impulse and guide. Thus the reproach is removed of laying the foundation of the noblest part of our nature in the base principle of selfishness; unless, indeed, the satisfaction which every animal feels, when it follows its proper instincts, and the dissatisfaction felt when prevented, be called selfish. (Darwin 121)

However, the Old Man is in substantial agreement with what Darwin states in *The Descent of Man* as to the perception of the moral sense satisfying its own desire. Since Darwin thinks that sympathy forming conscience is acquired by natural selection and that the standard of man's conscience will "rise higher and higher," he is much more optimistic than the Old

Man. As we have seen, the Old Man expatiates on the point of Chapters Two and Three of *The Descent of Man*. Though there is a little difference between Darwin's view of conscience and the Old Man's, *What Is Man?* is a huge note on *The Descent of Man*. The title, *What Is Man?*, comes from the Book of the Psalms. The Old Man's man-as-machine theory is a departure from the biblical view of man. At the end of the work Twain ascribes man's moral depravity to the moral sense which Adam's and Eve's fall caused. The start from and return to the Bible in the structure of *What Is Man?* make a strange impression upon the reader.

The conflict between the Darwinian view of man and the biblical view of man occurred not only in American society, but also in the mind of Twain, who was brought up by his mother to be Presbyterian and later became familiar with evolutionism by reading Darwin's books. *What Is Man?* is seen as a result of the tension between those views within Twain. It is true that the Old Man's mechanical determinism is pessimistic and gloomy, but Twain's attitude toward Darwinism in the work is by no means passive.

## NOTES

- 1) As to the situation of the publication of *What Is Man?*, see Paine, 1321; Twain, *Eruption* 242.
- 2) "Is anybody or any action ever unselfish?" (Good theme for Club Essay)" (Twain, *Notebooks* 498).
- 3) Waggoner says that "And Ludwig Lewisohn feels that Mark Twain's pessimism was the result of personal experience,..." (Waggoner 358). DeVote explains Twain's bitter pessimism and philosophy in his later works as follows: "A series of disasters brought about a reorientation of his personality and gave his talent a different shape. His publishing firm failed; his fortune and his wife's were dissipated in the failure of the Paige typesetting machine; his health broke and, a bankrupt at the age of sixty, he had to make a heartbreaking effort to pay off his debts, his oldest daughter died; his youngest daughter developed epilepsy; his wife declined into permanent invalidism. His world toppled in ruins round him, all the bases of his belief were called into question, and his talent was so impaired that for a long time it seemed to have been destroyed. When at last it was integrated again there is no longer to be seen the Mark Twain who had had a coherent development up to *A Connecticut Yankee*. There is a new Mark

Twain, the author of *What Is Man?* and *the Mysterious Stranger*.... [*What Is Man?*, *The Mysterious Stranger*, and the *Autobiography*] begin at the same time, all three originate in the same need, all three are essentially the same thing. They are an interpretation of personal tragedy, a confession of guilt, a plea for understanding and pardon, a defiance of fate, and a judgment passed on mankind and its place in the universe" (Twain, *Eruption* XIX-XX I).

- 4) "[T]here was not a man there who didn't scoff at it, jeer at it, revile it, and call it a lie, a thousand times a lie!" (Twain, *Eruption* 240). See also Paine, 744.
- 5) "The club handled me without gloves. They said I was trying to strip man of his dignity, and I said I shouldn't succeed, for it would not be possible to strip him of a quality which he did not possess. They said that if this insane doctrine of mine were accepted by the world life would no longer be worth living, but I said that that would merely leave life in the condition it was before" (Twain, *Eruption* 240-1). The response of the audience is very similar to that of the Young Man of *What Is Man?* "It 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;...", "[h]e would never be cheerful again, his life would not be worth the living" (Twain, *Man* 208-9, 211).
- 6) "However, I seem to be going counter to my own Private Philosophy - which Livy won't allow me to publish -..." (Twain, *Letters* 705). "Since I wrote my Bible (last year), which Mrs. Clemens loathes & shudders over & will not listen to the last half nor allow me to print any part of it,..." (Paine 1080).
- 7) "... because [*What Is Man?*] would destroy me" (Twain, *Letters* 705). "... [*What Is Man?*] would have a harmful influence on many people" (Salsbury 396).
- 8) In his autobiography Twain states the importance of heredity as follows: "It is my conviction that a person's temperament is a law, an iron law, and has to be obeyed, no matter who disapproves; manifestly, as it seems to me, temperament is a law of God and is supreme and takes precedence of all human laws" (Twain, *Autobiography* 306).
- 9) Twain says in a letter that man is affected by outside influences as follows: "The simplified English of this proposition is - 'No man's brains ever originated an idea.' It is an astonishing thing that after all these ages the world goes on thinking the human brain machinery can originate a thought. It can't. It never has done it. In all cases, little and big, the thought is born of a suggestion; and in *all* cases the suggestions come

to the brain from the outside. The brain never acts except from exterior impulse.

A man can satisfy himself of the truth of this by a single process, - let him examine every idea that occurs to him in an hour; a day; in a week - in a lifetime if he please. He will always find that an outside something suggested the thought, something which he saw with his eyes or heard with his ears or perceived by his touch - not necessarily to-day, nor yesterday, nor last year, nor twenty years ago, but *sometime* or *other*. Usually the source of the suggestion is immediately traceable, but sometimes it isn't" (Twain, *Letters* 813-4). In the same letter Twain promulgated the man-as-machine theory: "Man's mind is a clever machine, and can work up materials into ingenious fancies and ideas, but it can't create the material; none but the gods can do that" (Twain, *Letters*, 815).

In another letter he states that same opinion: "A curious thing is the mind, certainly. It originates nothing, creates nothing, gathers all its materials from the outside and weaves them into combinations automatically and without anybody's help - and doesn't even invent the combinations itself; but draws the scheme from outside-suggestions;... It does seem a little pathetic to reflect that man's proudest possession-his mind-is a mere machine; an automatic machine: a machine which is so wholly independent of him that it will not even take a *suggestion* from him, let alone a command, unless it suits its humour,..." (Powell 406). There is little difference between Twain's view of man and the Old Man's view of man. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that the Old Man is a representative of Twain.

- 10) "Nevertheless the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, certainly is one of degree and not of kind" (Darwin 126). "... the mental faculties of man and the lower animals do not differ in kind, although immensely in degree" (Darwin 147).
- 11) "Y. M. O, come! you are abolishing the intellectual frontier which separates man and beast.

O. M. I beg your pardon. One cannot abolish what does not exist" (Twain, *Man* 193).

"Y. M. Yes, go back to the ant, the creature that-as you seem to think-sweeps away the last vestige of an intellectual frontier between man and the Unrevealed.

O. M. That is what [the ant] surely does" (Twain, *Man* 195).

"Y. M. ... I am required to concede that there is absolutely no intellectual frontier

separating Man and the Unrevealed Creatures?

O. M. That is what you are required to concede. There is no such frontier -..." (Twain, *Man* 198).

- 12) "*Language*. -This faculty has justly been considered as one of the chief distinctions between man and the lower animals. But man, as a highly competent judge, Archbishop Whately remarks, 'is not the only animal that can make use of language to express what is passing in his mind, and can understand, more or less, what is so expressed by another'" (Darwin 84).
- 13) "O. M. ... so far as we can know, there is no such thing as a dumb beast.  
Y. M. On what grounds do you make that assertion?  
O. M. On quite simple ones. 'Dumb' beast suggests an animals that has no thought-machinery, no understanding, no speech, no way of communicating what is in its mind. We know that a hen *has* speech" (Twain, *Man* 194).
- 14) "I fully subscribe to the judgment of those writers who maintain that of all the differences between man and the lower animals, the moral sense or conscience is by far the most important" (Darwin 97). "The moral sense perhaps affords the best and highest distinction between man and the lower animals;..." (Darwin 126).
- 15) "Y. M. [T]hey haven't the Moral Sense; we have it, ....  
O. M. ... The fact that man knows right from wrong..." (Twain, *Man* 198-9).
- 16) "This sense, as Mackintosh remarks, 'has a rightful supremacy over every other principle of human action;' it is summed up in that short but imperious word *ought*, so full of high significance. It is the most noble of all the attributes of man, leading him without a moment's hesitation to risk his life for that of a fellow-creature; or after due deliberation, impelled simply by the deep feeling of right or duty, to sacrifice it in some great cause" (Darwin 97).
- 17) "... as he regarded more and more, not only the welfare, but the happiness of his fellow-men; as from habit, following on beneficial experience, instruction and example, his sympathies became more tender and widely diffused, extending to men of all races, to the imbecile, the maimed, and other useless members of society, and finally to the lower animals, - so would the standard of his morality rise higher and higher. And it is admitted by moralists of the derivative school and by some intuitionists, that the standard of morality has risen since an early period in the history of man" (Darwin 124-

- 5). “Looking to future generations, there is no cause to fear that the social instincts will grow weaker, and we may expect that virtuous habits will grow stronger, becoming perhaps fixed by inheritance. In this case the struggle between our higher and lower impulses will be less severe, and virtue will be triumphant” (Darwin 125).
- 18) “... but the fact that he can *do* wrong proves his *moral* inferiority to any creature that *cannot*” (Twain, *Man* 199).
- 19) “Y. M. You said you were not going to put man and the other animals on the same level morally.  
O. M. I haven’t. I have put man where he belongs—very much below the others” (Twain, *Man* 474).  
“O. M. Morally and in all other details but one—intellect—man is away below the other animals” (Twain, *Man* 475).  
“O. M. In the moral qualities he is infinitely inferior to the other animals, and ...” (Twain, *Man* 488).
- 20) “O. M. [God] created a weak Adam when He could have created a strong one, then laid a trap for him which He foreknew he would fall into. Then He punished him when He was solely responsible for Adam’s crime Himself” (Twain, *Man* 491).
- 21) “He had not a shadow of a notion of the difference between good and evil—he had to get the idea *from the outside*” (Twain, *Man* 130).  
“Y. M. Do you believe in the doctrine that man is equipped with an intuitive perception of good and evil?  
O. M. Adam hadn’t it.... I think he has no intuitions of any kind. He gets *all* his ideas, all his impressions, all his opinions, from the outside” (Twain, *Man* 164).
- 22) “I have not made man a machine, God made him a machine” (Twain, *Man* 210).
- 23) I will draw two examples of the parallel between the Old Man’s argument and Twain’s. “Indecency, vulgarity, obscenity - these are strictly confined to man; he invented them. Among the higher animals there is no trace of them. They hide nothing; they are not ashamed. Man, with his soiled mind, covers himself” (Twain, *Man* 83). “O. M. Indecency, vulgarity, obscenity - these are strictly confined to Man. Among the other animals there is no trace of them. Like Adam when he had an unsoiled mind, they hide nothing and are not ashamed” (Twain, *Man* 489).  
“Man is the only animal that robs his helpless fellow of his country—takes possession of

it and drives him out of it or destroys him" (Twain, *Man* 84). "He is the only animal that robs his helpless fellow of his country-takes possession of it and drives him out of it or destroys him" (Twain, *Man* 489).

- 24) "I have been scientifically studying the traits and dispositions of the 'lower animals' (so-called,) and contrasting them with the traits and dispositions of man. I find the result profoundly the humiliating to me. For it obliges me to renounce my allegiance to the Darwinian theory of the Ascent of Man from the Lower Animals; since it now seems plain to me that that theory ought to be vacated in favor of a new and truer one, this new and truer one to be named the *Descent of Man from the Higher Animals*" (Twain, *Man* 81).
- 25) "... any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, the parental and filial affections being here included, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well, or nearly as well developed, as in man. For, *firstly*, the social instincts lead an animal to take pleasure in the society of its fellows, to feel a certain amount of sympathy with them, and to perform various services for them" (Darwin 98).

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