

# Conspicuous Consumption versus the Protestant Ethic: The View from Pepys's Diary

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*There is an inherent contradiction between Veblen's "conspicuous consumption" and the belief in thrift, discipline, and hard work that Weber associates with the Protestant ethic. The period encompassed by Samuel Pepys's remarkable diary, 1660 to 1669, immediately follows the time of the greatest Puritan influence in England. When the diary begins, Pepys is young, nearly penniless, and has a new wife to support. When the diary ends, he is highly respected and has a substantial fortune. The extraordinary increases in Pepys's wealth during his rapid rise in status provide an opportunity to investigate the interplay between contemporary religious teachings on which Weber's theory is based and the consumption patterns characteristic of London life after the Civil War.*

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**T**he Reformation that came to England in the 1530s led to the creation of the Church of England. However, Puritanism, the British version of Calvinism, conflicted with many aspects of the established church. The Puritans gained considerable influence during the sixteenth century and by the mid-seventeenth century had beheaded Charles I and established a Commonwealth. The Cromwell government attempted to force a moral revolution characterized by an austere life in which the improvident consumption of goods had no part.

Religious teaching emphasizing the duty of diligence in a vocation and a simplicity of life is exemplified by Baxter's ([1673] 1925) *Christian Directory*, which Weber (1930, 155) considered "the most complete compendium of Puritan ethics." Weber asserted that the *Christian Directory* "is dominated by the continually repeated, often almost passionate preaching of hard, continuous bodily or mental labour. . . . But the most important thing was that . . . labour came to be considered in itself the end of life" (pp. 158-59). Actually, Baxter's argument is rather different. Certainly, "Idleness also and negligence in our Callings is sinful wastefulness and prodigality" (Baxter [1673] 1925, 169). But the duty to labour is "not only for labour's sake" but also to achieve "that honest increase and provision, which is the end of our labour" (p. 170). Since wastefulness and prodigality in consumption interfere with this "increase and provision," Baxter objected to excessive meat or drink, needless social intercourse,

entertainments and recreations, sumptuous buildings, and costly apparel.

The Restoration of Charles II in 1660 brought with it a strong reaction to Puritan restraints that provided an opportunity for conspicuous consumption to emerge. Veblen ([1899] 1931, 31) asserted that once a person has reached "the normal pecuniary standard of the community, or of his class in the community," there will be "a restless straining to place a wider and ever-widening pecuniary interval between himself and this average standard." This behavior occurs in response to social forces. Those who stand at "the head of the social structure in point of reputability" establish social norms so that "each stratum accept as their ideal of decency the scheme of life in vogue in the next higher stratum, and bend their energies to live up to that ideal" (p. 84).

Veblen ([1899] 1931) maintained that both conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption are means of indicating one's wealth, but as societies develop, conspicuous consumption becomes more prevalent. One reason is that personal interaction with one's neighbors declines as urbanization increases. Moreover, there is "a more frequent attendance at large gatherings of people to whom one's everyday life is unknown." Thus, "The only practicable means of impressing one's pecuniary ability on these unsympathetic observers of one's everyday life is an unremitting demonstration of ability to pay" (Veblen [1899] 1931, 87). Apparel is an excellent means of demonstration: "The great and dominant norm of dress [is] the broad principle of conspicuous waste" (p. 172).

Veblen's ([1899] 1931, 102) definition of conspicuous consumption as "expenditure in excess of what is required for physical comfort" seems identical to Baxter's concept of "wastefulness or prodigality." However, Veblen offered no parallel to Baxter's duty to apply oneself to one's Calling. Veblen did identify an "instinct of workmanship," which "disposes men to look with favour upon productive efficiency and on whatever is of human use" and to "depreciate waste of substance or effort." But the most significant impact of this "alien factor" is not on labor but on expenditures, so that "however wasteful a given expenditure may be in reality it must at least

have some colourable excuse in the way of an ostensible purpose" (Veblen [1899] 1931, 93).

This article considers the interplay of the Protestant ethic and conspicuous consumption in the diary kept by Samuel Pepys, pronounced "Peeps," most recently edited in 1971 (Latham and Matthews 1971). Pepys's early years coincided with the heyday of Puritan influence. He begins his diary at the age of 27 on the same day that General Monk, commander of the English forces in Scotland, led his army southward into England to end the political struggle that followed the death of Oliver Cromwell. Thus, the diary encompasses the beginning of the Restoration period that was characterized by behavior that seems to be in accord with Veblen's conspicuous consumption.

### PEPYS AND HIS DIARY

The diary makes it easy to underestimate Pepys's historical importance. Although we know more about him than we do about any other Englishman of his time, the private person that emerges from the diary is vastly different than the man known to his contemporaries. Pepys was a man of outstanding achievements and was highly respected by those whose esteem was worth having, including the kings whom he served. At his death, a eulogy reported by Braybrooke (1828, lviii-lix) emphasized his contribution to naval affairs, for which he is best known: "He was, without exception, the greatest and most useful Minister that ever filled the same situations in England." However, this was not all:

Besides this, he was a person of universal worth and in great estimation among the Literati, for his unbounded reading, his sound judgment, his great elocution, his mastery in method, his singular curiosity, and his uncommon munificence towards the advancement of learning, arts, and industry, in all degrees, to which were joined the severest morality of a philosopher, and all the polite accomplishments of a gentleman, particularly those of music, languages, conversation and address.

The private thoughts and actions reported in the diary bare Pepys's soul. A wealth of detail about his everyday life is presented with an amazing intellectual honesty that recognizes contradictions of his own behavior that many persons would not wish to face. His disclosure of matters that expose him to contempt can easily lead to an unbalanced view. Pepys certainly had a keen desire for enjoyment, including music and the theater, to an extent that he often regretted his indulgence, resolved to change his behavior, broke these resolutions, and remade them. His many surreptitious liaisons with servants, shopgirls, barmaids, prostitutes, and others, which by no stretch of the imagination can be called romantic, are difficult for the modern reader to comprehend. Even when taken in the context of Restoration England, his furtive lecheries pose

contradictions that challenge one's understanding. But such challenges are the secret of the long-standing fascination with Pepys.

### PEPYS'S RELIGIOUS VIEWS

The diary does not report Pepys's religious views in any detail, but one diary entry reviewing his financial situation is characteristic: "So with praise to God for this state of fortune . . . desiring God to give me the grace to make good use of what I have and continue my care and diligence to gain more" (July 31, 1664).

Pepys is Anglican, but as a young man attended Puritan services during the Commonwealth when Anglicanism was proscribed. He begins attending Anglican services even before the Restoration but never becomes a regular member of a congregation. Pepys often goes to church but on one occasion fails to attend services for "nine or ten weeks" (April 17, 1664) and in other instances reports that he has not attended for "many weeks" (July 31, 1664; March 29, 1669). He also is rather diffident about religious practices. On March 30, 1662, he goes to church to "take the Sacrament—which I blame myself that I have hitherto neglected all my life." Six more years pass before he begins "calling upon God upon my knees in prayer" before going to bed (November 20, 1668).

Pepys's behavior is consistent with Veblen's ([1899] 1931, 305) assertion that when church attendance is common in a society, an individual's "devout habit of mind . . . must be taken simply as a detail of the prevalent habit of life." Church, then, is little more than one element in the social structure. A characteristic comment on a church service is "a good sermon, a fine church, and a great company of handsome women" (January 13, 1666). Certainly Pepys does not seem to consider religious teaching as a moral guide.

Although Pepys is diligent, there is little evidence of an explicit acceptance of the Protestant ethic's duty of labor. Pepys finds pleasure in his work, but many other activities also are pleasurable. This conflict is explicit in a description of his feelings at his office on April 17, 1666: "Lord! What a conflict I had with myself, my heart tempting me 1,000 times to go abroad about some pleasure." However, he reproaches himself, "and prevailed with difficulty and did not budge, but stayed within, and, to my great content, did a good deal of business."

### PEPYS'S CAREER PATH

As the diary begins, Pepys is employed as a household steward in the residence of Edward Montagu, his first cousin and patron, where Pepys and his young wife are provided with a room. When Montagu obtains an additional part-time position for Pepys in the Exchequer, Pepys and his wife lease

a small house in Axe Yard, opposite Whitehall Palace. Pepys next serves as Montagu's secretary when the latter commands the fleet that brings Charles II from exile in Holland. Montagu's service to the king is rewarded by an earldom, and as the Earl of Sandwich, his patronage is of the utmost importance to Pepys.

In July 1660, Montagu establishes Pepys' career by gaining him a position as the Clerk of the Acts for the Navy. Now Pepys becomes one of the four senior members of the Navy Board, which is responsible for the construction and repair of the navy's ships, the supply of everything needed to sail them, and the recruitment and payment of some categories of personnel. As the Clerk of the Acts, Pepys holds a position of great significance; all the navy's orders and contracts pass through his hands so that he is ultimately responsible for the Navy's accounts and correspondence. Pepys receives a substantial salary and is provided with an official residence in Seething Lane, near the Tower of London, where the Pepyses remain throughout the remainder of the diary period.

Pepys has very little knowledge of the Navy and lacks many of the skills needed to perform his duties. As he comments on November 1, 1665, "Chance, without merit, brought me in." Nevertheless, because of his energy and ability, Pepys rapidly becomes the foremost member of the Navy Board and gains wide respect. On April 9, 1661, Pepys reports his pleasure "to see how I am respected and honoured by all people; and I find that I begin to know now how to receive so much reverence, which at the beginning I could not tell how to do." And yet, Pepys never loses sight of his origins. On May 12, 1665, while at the Exchequer carrying out his duties, Pepys recalls that he had been a part-time clerk there and remarks that his dramatic change in status is "a testimony of the goodness of God to me; that I, from a mean clerke there, should come to strike tallies myself for that sum, and in the authority that I do now."

### PEPYS'S FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The diary contains a month-by-month record of changes in Pepys's financial situation. When serving as Montagu's household steward and as a clerk in the Exchequer, his annual income is little more than £50, and Pepys considers himself very poor. On January 9, 1660, Pepys is "much troubled with thought how to get money to pay them that I have borrowed money of." When he joins the fleet bringing Charles II to England in March 1660, his net worth is £25. However, his position of influence as Montagu's secretary rapidly brings financial rewards. He already has received small amounts to put in a good word with Lord Sandwich; now he is in a position to do other types of "favors." At the end of March, he receives two pieces of gold "from some that I had done a favor to" (March 30, 1660). Cash on hand grows throughout the voyage, and a few days after the fleet returns to England, Pepys finds himself "to be worth near £100, for which I bless Almighty God,

it being more than I hoped for so soon" (June 3, 1660). Nevertheless, he continues to actively seek further opportunities: "To my Lord's where much business and some hopes of getting some money thereby" (June 18, 1660). After July 1660, he receives an annual salary of £350 as Clerk of the Acts, but as Montagu explains on August 16, 1660, "It was not the salary of any place that did make a man rich, but the opportunity of getting money while he is in the place." Like most public officials, Pepys can expect many additional sources of income, such as fees, presents, perquisites, and straightforward bribes.

Pepys's position on the Navy Board and the associated move to his official lodgings bring him into close contact with the social, political, and commercial elite. The style of life commensurate with his new social position cannot be supported on his salary alone, and yet Pepys wants to accumulate an estate that will support him if he loses his position. His practical statements about the need to increase his wealth do not reflect contemporary religious teaching such as Allaine (1674, 109), who stated that "the eighth Commandment requireth the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others." This requires being "frugal and thrifty in our expences" and avoiding "prodigality, idleness, wastefulness in gaming, and company-keeping, riot, carelessness, living above our estates" (pp. 110-11).

Despite his growing influence, Pepys's net worth increases slowly at first. He holds several government appointments concurrently with his position as Clerk of the Acts, but these additional salaries and fees are wholly inadequate. On March 1, 1661, he "sat up late, spending my thoughts how to get money to bear me out in my great expense." It takes some time to discover the means by which supplementary income can be obtained and to establish the right contacts, and on October 31, 1663, he is very troubled: "I must look about me to get something more then just my salary, or else may resolve to live well and die a beggar."

At first, many of the "presents" that Pepys receives are of relatively little monetary value: "five couple of Duckes" (February 13, 1663), a Blackbird, "he doth so whistle" (May 22, 1663), "an excellent Mastiffe, his name Towzer" (February 17, 1664), and "a great barrel of Oysters" (March 16, 1664). However, presents to recognize courtesies that Pepys does for naval contractors soon become more substantial. Two important contractors, Sir W. Warren, the Navy's principal supplier of timber, and Captain John Taylor, a preeminent shipbuilder, make the first major offers. Warren brings Pepys a silver plate and cup with Pepys's arms engraved on them, "a very noble present and the best I ever had yet" (February 10, 1663). Another important present is received on November 7, 1663: "Captain Taylor brought me a piece of plate, a little state dish, he expecting that I should get him some allowance for demorage of his ship . . . which I shall, and may justly do." On July 21, 1664, the diary provides another example of a courtesy that Pepys provides:

to the office, where we sat all the morning; among other things, making a contract with Sir W. Warren for almost 1000 Gottenburg masts, the biggest that ever was made in the Navy and wholly of my composing and a good one I hope it is for the King.

Although giving and receiving presents is customary, and condoned by eminent persons, many diary entries justify such actions because Pepys is fully aware that they may be subject to criticism. However, these justifications do not reflect any concern that his actions might contravene religious teachings. Pepys argues that it is suitable for a contractor to pay him a reasonable amount to acknowledge his effort in negotiating a contract when that contract provides a good quality product at a fair price that meets the needs of the Navy. Also, a subtle distinction is made between bribes, which are offered prior to an action, and presents that are received afterward, but this distinction is not always honored. Although it is improper to accept money on the condition that he will favor the presenter, when politely rejecting a bribe, Pepys is fully aware that it is very likely that he will receive the proffered amount after the contract is approved.

Prudence also makes it possible to limit one's risks. Pepys sometimes refuses an offer because the nature of the presenter makes the projected relationship too risky. He rejects "a barrell of Sturgion" because he considers the presenter to be corrupt (June 13, 1663) and refuses a proffered gift of £100 from others, "not thinking them safe men to receive such a gratuity from." His intention is "to keep myself free from their reports and to have it in my power to say I had refused their offer" (February 5, 1667).

Pepys also tries to reduce risk by avoiding any evidence that he receives presents. For example, when he finds that a "neat Silver watch" has been delivered to his home in his absence, he is angry at his wife "for receiving, or at least for opening the box wherein it was, and so far witnessing our receipt of it as to give the messenger 5s for bringing it" (April 17, 1665). Presents of money often are treated in secretive ways, some of which are ludicrous. When Pepys is given a letter:

I discerned money to be in it and took it. . . . But I did not open it till I came home; and there I broke it open, not looking into it till all the money was out, that I might say I saw no money in the paper if ever I should be Questioned about it. (April 3, 1663)

Another present is delivered at a tavern "where he brought to me, being all alone, £100 in a bag . . . he himself expressly taking care than nobody might see this business done" (September 16, 1664).

It was not until mid-1664 that Pepys's net worth exceeds £1,000, "which is the height of all that ever I have for a long time pretended to." Nevertheless, he hopes "to lay up something more in a little time" (July 31, 1664). The Second Dutch

War, beginning in November 1664, brings a dramatic increase in Pepys's income because he is well placed to profit from the enormous costs of the war's naval engagements. Throughout 1665, the award of contracts for shipbuilding, repairs, and supplies generates a flood of presents. After ten months of war, Pepys's net worth is £4,400; by the end of 1666, it reaches £6,200.

Pepys's immediate response to increases in income is consistent with Veblen's ([1899] 1931, 75) assertion that as a person's wealth accumulates, he must "put his opulence in evidence." On September 5, 1660, long before the rapid rise in his income, Pepys buys his wife a pearl necklace "because I have lately got money." But there are other motives as well. On June 9, 1665, he buys "a silke suit, which though I had one lately, yet I do, for joy of the good newes we have lately had of our victory over the Dutch, which makes me willing to spare myself something extraordinary in clothes."

The remainder of this article attempts to identify behavior consistent either with the Protestant ethic or with Veblen's conspicuous consumption by examining some of Pepys's expenditure categories used as examples in the *Theory of the Leisure Class* (Veblen [1899] 1931).

## PEPYS'S CLOTHING EXPENDITURES

Veblen ([1899] 1931, 167) considered clothing expenses to be especially significant: "Expenditure for display is more obviously present and is, perhaps, more universally practiced in the matter of dress than in any other line of consumption." The reason for this is that "our apparel is always in evidence and affords an indication of our pecuniary standing to all observers at the first glance."

As Clerk of the Acts, Pepys requires more respectable attire because of the new social milieu in which he finds himself. Veblen ([1899] 1931, 102) spoke of achieving a consumption pattern appropriate to the next highest social stratum and pointed out that this can be achieved "if only time is allowed for habituation to any increase in pecuniary ability and for acquiring facility in the new and larger scale of expenditure that follows such an increase." But Pepys has very little time to emulate the higher social stratum in which he has been thrust. On July 1, 1660, he buys a "fine camlett cloak with gold buttons, and a silk suit, which cost me much money, and I pray God to make me able to pay for it." Four days later he buys a "jackanapes coat with silver buttons," and on August 21, a "velvet coat (the first that ever I had) and a velvet mantle" are acquired. Pepys imitates the dress of his patron, Lord Sandwich, members of the Navy Board, and the Court. He also seeks advice from others; in one instance, he accepts advice from a colleague "as to some things of clothes which I purpose to wear, being resolved to go a little handsomer than I have hitherto" (October 31, 1663). Another diary entry mentions a talk with a friend about "the convenience and necessity of a man's wearing good clothes" (September 12, 1664).

Pepys repeatedly insists that he intends to limit expenditures so that his savings will accumulate, but at the end of 1661, he admits that he has been a very great spendthrift. Again, on May 30, 1662, he has “laid out much money in clothes” so that his net worth has not greatly increased. Nevertheless, clothing expenditures continue at rapid rate while he continues to remonstrate with himself.

Veblen ([1899] 1931, 172) noted that “dress must not only be conspicuously expensive and inconvenient; it must at the same time be up to date.” Pepys’s purchases often are explicitly influenced by fashion. On October 7, 1660, he purchases a short cloak, “long cloaks being now quite out.” A year later another change is required, and he acquires a “new Coate of the fashion, which pleases me well” (October 29, 1661). And one certainly cannot appear in society without one’s cloak. Once, when abroad without the appropriate garment, he sends his footboy home for the proper cloak so that he can attend a dinner with the Lord Mayor. In June 1662, he notes that “close knees” are coming in, and on August 17, 1663, he acquires a “new low-crowned beaver according to the present fashion made.” On October 21, 1663, Pepys purchases “a good velvet cloak . . . and other things modish.”

On a Sunday in 1661, Pepys begins “to go forth in my coate and sword, as the manner now among gentlemen is” (February 3, 1661). The sword serves only for decoration; when a dog attacks Pepys on May 11, 1663, he never thinks to draw his sword to protect himself. In 1663, fashion dictates a short sword, so on March 30, Pepys buys “a little sword with gilt handle.” This new sword is first worn on Easter Sunday, April 19, 1663: “This day put on my close-kneed coloured suit, which, with new stockings of the colour, with belt and new-gilt-handled sword, is very handsome.” Shoulder belts become fashionable in 1668, and on Sunday, May 17, Pepys dresses in his “new stuff suit” with a shoulder belt “according to the new fashion” and the sword that he has just had gilded. “And so, very handsome, to Church.”

Many diary entries reporting clothing purchases are consistent with Veblen’s ([1899] 1931, 93) contention that the instinct of workmanship leads to the requirement that even a wasteful expenditure must at least have “an ostensible purpose.” On October 21, 1663, Pepys reports, “Having lately considered with my wife very much of the inconvenience of my going in no better plight, we did resolve of putting me into a better garbe.” Nine days later he comments,

My mind very heavy, thinking of my great layings-out lately, and what they must be still for clothes; but I hope it is in order to getting of something the more by it, for I perceive now how I have hitherto suffered for lack of going as becomes my place. (October 30, 1663)

The next day he hopes to have “better success in obtaining money then when, for want of clothes, I was forced to sneak like a beggar” (October 31, 1663). This argument, that one

must be properly dressed to project the status necessary to receive presents from naval contractors, is often repeated. In 1664, Pepys buys new clothes “which will cost me money, but I find that I must go handsomely, whatever it costs me; and the charge will be made up in the fruits it brings” (October 21, 1664), and on December 28, 1664, he comments that “clothes, I perceive more and more every day is a great matter.” Again on May 12, 1665, he finds it “so necessary to have some handsome clothes, that I cannot but lay out some money thereupon.”

Pepys’s feelings also are consistent with Veblen’s ([1899] 1931, 168) comment that “probably at no other point is the sense of shabbiness so keenly felt as it is if we fall short of the standard set by social usage in this matter of dress.” In one instance, Pepys wants to meet with the king about naval business,

but my linen was so dirty and my clothes mean, that I neither thought it fit to do that, nor go to other persons at the Court with whom I had business, which did vex me, and I must remedy it. (March 20, 1667)

Thus, some aspects of Pepys’s behavior seem consistent with Veblen’s ([1899] 1931, 167-68) assertion that “the greater part of the expenditure incurred by all classes for apparel is incurred for the sake of a respectable appearance rather than for the protection of the person.” However, the term *respectable* must be placed in context. Sometimes Pepys is interested in “making a great show,” especially at church. On Sunday, June 11, 1665, he is “out of doors a little, to shew, forsooth, my new suit which was very handsome,” and four days later, he comments that this new suit “becomes me most nobly, as my wife says.” On Sunday, March 31, 1667, Pepys goes to church “very handsome . . . made a great shew.”

But clothing that “makes a show” is not the same as that needed to achieve a respectable appearance at the office. On November 15, 1664, Pepys reports “that I might not be too fine for the business I intend this day, I did leave off my fine new cloth suit.” On January 15, 1666, Pepys has only two suits that he considers appropriate for the office; he is “busy all morning in my chamber in my old cloth suit, while my usual one is to my tailor’s to mend.” Apparently his other suits are too grand for everyday wear. And clothing can be too grand for *any* occasion. On May 1, 1669, Pepys realizes that his suit with gold lace on the sleeves may be too ostentatious, and for some time, he is “really afeard to be seen in it.” When he does wear this suit, he is warned by a colleague that the gold lace is too ostentatious, “which vexed me also, so as to resolve never to appear in Court with them, but presently to have them taken off, as it is fit I should” (May 10, 1669).

And yet, Pepys’s motivations are more complex than Veblen would suggest. Pepys continues to express concern regarding his expenditures for clothing because of his objective of building an estate, so that although he does dress well,

there remains an element of frugality. His old suits and other material are often reused. The "fine cloth suit" first worn on April 29, 1660, is made from a cloak that had been damaged. On September 23, 1660, he has a black cloth coat "to walk up and down in" that has been converted from a short cloak. He wears a faced white coat on June 13, 1661, that is "made of one of my wife's petty coates," and on March 30, 1662, he wears an "old black suit new-furbished" to church. This frugality extends throughout the diary period despite the dramatic rise in his income. On June 26, 1667, an "old silk suit and cloak" is turned into a suit and vest in response to a new fashion. Such behavior is not consistent with Veblen's argument that clothing must be expensive to project the proper image.

### MRS. PEPYS'S CLOTHING

Veblen ([1899] 1931, 179) asserted that "the office of the woman [is] to consume vicariously for the head of the household; and her apparel is contrived with this object in view." Mrs. Pepys requires new clothing if she is to be appropriately dressed for her new status and Pepys is very conscious of her attire. He often compares his wife's appearance with that of others. On November 22, 1660, after attending a court event, Pepys comments, "The Princess Henrietta is very pretty, but much below my expectation. . . . But my wife standing near her with two or three black patches on, and well dressed, did seem to me much handsomer than she." In another instance he notes, "My wife extraordinary fine today in her Flower tabby suit . . . and everybody in love with it; and ended, she is fine and handsome in it" (March 26, 1668). On December 21, 1668, Pepys remarks that his wife is as pretty as any of the ladies attending the theater that afternoon. And when Mrs. Pepys is admired by Lord Sandwich, Pepys is "not a little proud" (June 15, 1663).

Mrs. Pepys is quick to recognize new fashions, and it is not unusual for a report of purchases to be accompanied by Pepys's comment about the new fashion. On June 9, 1661, he remarks, "My wife puts on her black silk gown . . . as the fashion is." On Sunday, May 14, 1665, Pepys goes to church with his wife, who is "very fine in a new yellow bird's eye hood, as the fashion is now." And information must be gathered. The Pepyses "walked to Grayes Inn to observe fashion of the ladies, because of my wife's making some clothes" on May 4, 1662. Sometimes Pepys mentions fashion news: "The ladies are to go into a new fashion shortly, and this is, to wear short coats, above their ancles" (October 15, 1666).

Disagreements between the Pepyses that continue throughout the diary period show that Veblen's analysis of fashion overlooks the fundamental problem of defining an appropriate response to changes in fashion. At times, Pepys feels that his wife is much too eager to follow fashion trends and also may disapprove of her choice of apparel. And disagreement

can be vigorous: "I took occasion to fall out with my wife very highly, about her ribbands being ill matched" (December 19, 1661), and on June 15, 1662, "my wife not being dressed as I would have her, and I was angry." There also may be disagreements as to the interpretation of fashion news. On November 22, 1666, Pepys is "displeased" because his wife has cut her gown "down to her breasts almost, out of a belief, but without reason, that it is the fashion." On March 22, 1667, Pepys is angry, "my wife having dressed herself in a silly dress." In another instance, Mrs. Pepys's dress is so awful "that I could not endure to see her . . . so that I was horrid angry and went out of doors to the office" (May 29, 1667). Of course, Mrs. Pepys also has a temper; after a disagreement on March 14, 1664, she "flounced away in a manner I never saw her, nor which I could ever endure."

A further point omitted in Veblen's ([1899] 1931, 180) analysis is that although it may be "the woman's function in an especial degree to put in evidence her household's ability to pay," the head of the household may object to the expense. Pepys certainly spent much less for his wife's clothing than for his own and often refuses to purchase clothing that his wife desires. A typical situation is that of April 15, 1662, when the Pepyses see "some new fashion pettycoats . . . very handsome, and my wife had a mind to one of them, but we did not then buy one." Indeed, Pepys is so stingy regarding his wife's clothing that the wife of Pepys's patron chastises him. On November 9, 1661, Lady Sandwich "did mightily urge me to lay out money upon my wife, which I perceived was a little more earnest then ordinary." The pressure continues on the following day: "My Lady continues upon yesterday's discourse still, for me to lay out money upon my wife. Which I think it is best to do, for her honour and my own." The result is an expenditure of £6; Pepys is "much glad of that it was no more, though in my mind I think too much, and I pray God keep me so to order myself and my wife's expenses that no inconvenience in purse or honour fallow this my prodigality" (November 11, 1661).

Pepys sometimes confesses to his stinginess. On December 30, 1662, he is "in great pain that my wife hath never a winter gowne; being almost ashamed of it that she should be seen in a taffeta one when all the world wears Moyre." But as usual, "we could not come to any resolution what to do therein, other then to appear as she is." But the issue is settled on January 9, 1663, when Pepys buys a gown, although it "troubles me to part with so much money," because "it sets my wife and I to friends again." On May 8, 1663, Pepys is "a little ashamed" that his wife finds herself ill dressed at the theater, "all the ladies being finer and better dressed in the pit." When he observes the wife of a colleague wearing a velvet gown in church, Pepys is troubled "that she should be in it before my wife" (November 29, 1663). And yet, he still is reluctant to spend; on March 26, 1664, his wife has a new gown "which is indeed very handsome but will cost me a

great deal of money, more than I ever intended." And a few days later, he reports that he is "wrangling with my wife about the charge she puts me to at this time for clothes . . . and very angry we were" (March 29, 1664).

These diary entries suggest that Pepys would fail to accept Veblen's ([1899] 1931, 180) assertion that the household's "conspicuous waste of substance and effort should normally be the sole economic function of the wife." On the other hand, Pepys's reluctance to purchase clothing for his wife is not related to contemporary religious teachings that emphasize frugality. His concern seems to be that such expenditures interfere with his efforts to increase his estate.

### DOMESTIC SERVANTS

In the Pepyses' first lodgings in Montagu's residence, Pepys later recalled, "My poor wife, how she used to make coal fires and wash my foul clothes with her own hand for me, poor wretch!" (February 25, 1667). Although a maid is employed in August 1658 when they move to the small house in Axe Yard, Mrs. Pepys continues to do a good deal of household work. On January 16, 1660, Pepys goes to bed after one o'clock in the morning, leaving his wife and the maid "a-washing still." Soon afterward, Mrs. Pepys kills some turkeys because she "could not get her maid Jane by no means at any time to kill anything" (February 4, 1660).

Additional servants are needed to staff the Pepyses' official lodgings on Seething Lane. However, the first person employed is not a household servant but a footboy, to demonstrate Pepys's social status by accompanying him in public. As Veblen's ([1899] 1931, 78) discussion of servant's livery suggests, the footboy's livery represents an excellent form of social competition. On May 4, 1662, the boy begins to wear a sword "to outdo Sir. W. Pen's boy, who this day, and Sir W. Batten's too, begin to wear new livery; but I do take mine to be the neatest of them all."

Throughout most of the diary period, the Seething Lane staff consists of a waiting woman for Mrs. Pepys, three maids—a cook, a chambermaid, and a "middle-Mayd"—in addition to Pepys's footboy. Just before the diary ends, Pepys engages a coachman for a newly acquired coach. The waiting woman dresses Mrs. Pepys's hair, looks after her clothes, and provides her with companionship when required. For instance, Mrs. Pepys would not go to the theatre without her husband unless accompanied by her companion. Mrs. Pepys's waiting woman is not engaged until March 11, 1662, nearly two years after Pepys's footboy is employed, even though she probably is as important for Mrs. Pepys's status as the footboy is for her husband's.

Even with her household staff, Mrs. Pepys continues to perform many household tasks herself. On January 13, 1663, "my poor wife rose by five o'clock in the morning" to go to market to buy "fowls and many other things for dinner." Later that year, Pepys finds "my poor wife all alone at work"

(March 2, 1663). On January 12, 1666, Pepys speaks of his "poor wife who works all day at home like a horse." And very near the end of the diary period, Pepys reports, "My wife and maids busy now to make clean the house above stairs" (November 17, 1668). The household staff also has to be supervised. On February 22, 1664, Mrs. Pepys must "see how the wash goes on," and even on Christmas Day, she "sat up till four . . . seeing her mayds make mince-pies" (December 25, 1666). Moreover, many diary entries report that Mrs. Pepys is making clothing for Pepys and herself, as well as draperies for various rooms. It is extremely difficult to determine the extent to which Mrs. Pepys fits Veblen's definition of conspicuous leisure. Veblen ([1899] 1931, 58) admitted that duties such as she performs "are frequently arduous enough, and they are also frequently directed to ends which are considered extremely necessary to the comfort of the entire household." However, unless these activities "conduce to the physical efficiency or comfort" of the household, they are not productive work but "a performance of leisure."

### HOUSEHOLD FURNISHINGS AND RENOVATION

A great amount of new furniture is needed for the Seething Lane house. Moreover, Pepys begins redecoration and improvements soon after the move and continues alterations throughout the diary period. The impact on Pepys's net worth is not unexpected. On October 1, 1660, he reports, "My layings out upon my house in furniture are so great that I fear I shall not be able to go through them without breaking one of my bags of £100, I having but £200 yet in the world." Purchases in October include general household items, a bed, and furniture for Mrs. Pepys's chamber and green serge drapery and gilt leather for the dining room. In November, Pepys's parlor is gilded and painting begins. In 1661, a new stairway is begun, and in June,

All the morning almost at home, seeing my stairs finished by the painters, which pleases me well . . . and tomorrow hope to be out of my pain of dirt and trouble in my house, of which I am now become very weary" (June 19, 1661).

On January 4, 1662, pewter sconces are purchased to "become my stayres and entry." New pictures and maps also provide great pleasure: "I staid at home all day, pleasing myself with my dining room, now graced with pictures" (February 23, 1662). In the summer, an additional story is added to the house to create a study and a bedroom; Mrs. Pepys converts Pepys's old study on the second floor into a dressing room for herself. These renovations mean new curtains for the study, a new bed and drapery for the bedroom, and other furnishings. On July 18, 1662, Pepys decides to have the dining room wainscoted and then buys a larger dining table. But these and other expenditures are not sufficient.

On January 7, 1666, the Pepyses “consider of laying out a little money to hang our bed chamber better than it is.”

Significant expenditures to renovate and furnish Seething Lane continue throughout the diary period. Such expenditures certainly contravene religious strictures against wasteful spending. On the other hand, the emphasis that the Pepyses placed on the appearance of their residence is in sharp contrast to Veblen’s ([1889] 1931, 154) implication that it is only the external appearance of a residence that is important for conspicuous consumption; his argument is that “the domestic life of most classes is relative shabby, as compared to the éclat of that overt portion of their life that is carried on before the eyes of observers” (p. 112). But the domestic life of the Pepyses hardly can be called “shabby.” The improvements to the Seething Lane residence are important because they bring immediate intrinsic pleasure to the Pepyses.

Moreover, the renovations and furnishings of the residence represent a significant form of conspicuous consumption. For example, a great deal of attention is paid to acquiring silver plate, and at a dinner on September 9, 1664, the Pepyses’ guests “eyed mightily my great cupboard of plate.” Similarly, on February 9, 1666, “a very good supper we had, and good company and discourse, with great pleasure. My new plate sets off my cupboard very nobly.” On December 31, 1666, Pepys acknowledges, “One thing I reckon remarkable in my owne condition is, that I am come to abound in good plate, so as at all entertainments to be served wholly with silver plates, having two dozen and a half.” A primary purpose of all this silver plate is made perfectly clear in a description of a dinner given on April 8, 1667,

Lord, to see with what envy they looked upon all my fine plate was pleasant; for I made the best shew I could, to let them understand me and my condition, to take down the pride of Mrs. Clerke, who thinks herself very great.

Pepys concedes that he has a magnificent collection: “looking over my plate, which ended is a very fine quantity God knows, more than ever I expected to see of my own, and more then is fit for a man of no better quality then I am” (December 15, 1667). But this does not satisfy his desire; Pepys buys still more plate on July 27, 1668: “Cost me £5, which troubles me, but yet do please me also.”

Pepys also discovers other means of social comparison. On January 19, 1663, he marvels at a colleague’s wine cellar “where upon several shelves there stood bottles of all sorts of wine, new and old, with labells pasted upon each bottle, and in that order and plenty as I never saw books in a bookseller’s shop.” By the following October, he had five or six dozen bottles made “with my crest upon them, filled with wine” (October 23, 1663). By July 7, 1665, Pepys reports that he has

two tierces of Claret, two quarter casks of Canary, and a smaller vessel of Sack; a vessel of Tent, another of Malaga,

and another of white wine, all in my wine cellar together; which, I believe, none of my friends of my name now alive ever had of his owne at one time.”

## ENTERTAINING

Veblen ([1899] 1931, 75) asserted that as a person’s wealth accumulates, friends and competitors must help demonstrate this wealth. “Expensive entertainments and feasts” accomplish this because the guest “consumes vicariously for his host at the same time that he is a witness” to the wasteful consumption. Entertaining certainly plays a large part in Pepys’s life. Even before the move to Seething Lane, friends and relatives are entertained at dinner. On January 20, 1660, Mrs. Pepys “got ready a very fine dinner—viz. A dish of marrow bones; a leg of mutton; a loin of veal; a dish of fowl, three pullets, and two dozen of larks all in a dish; a great tart, a neat’s tongue, a dish of anchovies; a dish of prawns and cheese.” At Seething Lane, two years later, there is “a pretty dinner,” again for relatives and old friends. But Pepys now hires a “man-cook” to prepare the meal, and rather than all the dishes being placed on the table all at once, two courses are served (March 27, 1662).

As his income continues to grow, dinner parties become more lavish. A dinner on January 13, 1663, included “after oysters—at first course, a hash of rabbits, a lamb, and a rare chine of beef—next a great dish of roasted fowl, cost me about 30s, and a tart, and then fruit and cheese.” Pepys observes, “My dinner was noble and enough.” Moreover, the day’s entertainment offered an excellent opportunity to show off his residence:

I had my house mighty clean and neat; my room below with a good fire in it; my dining room above, and my chamber being made a withdrawing-chamber; and my wife’s a good fire also. I find my new table very proper, and will hold nine or ten people well, but eight with great room.

Pepys’s guests left at about ten o’clock in the evening, “both them and myself highly pleased with our management of this day.” And, of course, one must keep track of expenses: “I believe this day’s feast will cost me near £5.”

Pepys’s growing stature is apparent from the increasing social status of his guests. On November 28, 1666, his socially prominent guests include men holding responsible positions in the Navy; members of Parliament; and his patron, the Earl of Sandwich. “Noble dishes” are prepared by a man-cook, and “commended, as indeed they deserved.” Pepys comments that he enjoyed himself “with reflections upon the pleasures which I at best can expect, yet not to exceed this; eating in silver plates, and all things mighty rich and handsome about me.” But perhaps the ultimate dinner party occurs on January 23, 1669, when he entertains his patron, the Earl of Sandwich, as well as the Earl of Peter-

borough and some members of the House of Commons: "As noble as any man need to have I think; at least all done in the noblest manner that ever I had any, and I have rarely seen, in my life better anywhere else."

But still, the cost of such entertainments must be considered. On March 6, 1669, Pepys notes that "my late entertainment this week cost me above £12, an expence which I am almost ashamed of." The justification offered is in sharp contrast to the Protestant ethic: "It is but once in a great while, and is the end for which, in the most part, we live, to have such a merry day once or twice in a man's life."

### A COACH IS ACQUIRED

Pepys sets forth three lifetime goals on March 2, 1662: to be worth £2,000, to own a coach, and to be knighted. He never achieves the third objective, but his financial objective is reached in 1665. Finally, on April 21, 1667, he decides to buy a coach: "It is not too much for me now, in degree or cost, to keep a coach." Moreover, he is "almost ashamed to be seen in a hackney" (April 21, 1667). Although Pepys often walks to destinations within London and sometimes travels on the river, he uses a hackney almost daily. However, the diary abounds with unfortunate experiences with hired transport. Sometimes, no transportation is available, especially in bad weather or after the theater, so that it may be necessary to walk in inclement weather. One such episode, on September 9, 1665, spoils Pepys's silk breeches. At other times, arrangements to hire a coach fall through, or journeys are delayed because horses must be changed, or the coach breaks down. Pepys's worst experience occurred on January 12, 1666, when his hired coach "broke," throwing him to the ground. Although these experiences may well have played a part in Pepys's decision to buy a coach, they are not used to justify his decision. The explanations, repeated again and again, are "my condition do require it" (May 8, 1667), and "I am a little dishonoured by going in [hackneys]" (May 11, 1667). Thus, the purchase of a coach represents a significant form of conspicuous consumption.

The decision to purchase a coach is of such great importance that Pepys considers the issue for more than one year; it is not until October 24, 1668, that "this morning comes to me the coachmaker, and agreed with me for £53." A month later, "My coach is come. . . . And as I ordered it, to my great content, it being mighty pretty." But it is not perfect: "The horses do not please me, and, therefore, resolve to have better" (November 28, 1668). Pepys's newly hired coachman thinks that perhaps the coach is too ostentatious: "He tells me, as soon as he saw my coach yesterday, he wished that the owner might not contract envy by it." Pepys repeats his usual justifications: "I told him it was now manifestly for my profit to keep a coach, and that, after employments like mine for eight years, it were hard if I could not be justly thought to be able to do that" (November 29, 1668).

On December 2, 1668, Pepys takes his wife for a drive, "The first time that ever I rode in my own coach, which do make my heart rejoice, and praise God, and pray him to bless it to me and continue it." One of the reasons that his heart rejoices is the impression that is made. The coach "makes us appear mighty great, I think, in the world; at least, greater than ever I could, or my friends for me, have once expected" (December 3, 1668). But the coach still is not entirely suitable, so that additional decoration is necessary, and the horses must be replaced with finer ones. On May 1, 1669, the Pepyses

went alone through the town with our new liveries of serge, and the horses' manes and tails tied with red ribbons, and the standards there gilt with varnish, and all clean, and green reines, that people did mightily look upon us; and, the truth is, I did not see any coach more pretty, though more gay, than ours, all the day.

But Pepys's coachman proves correct in the end. A close friend tells Pepys that "he hears how fine my horses and coach are, and advises me to avoid being noted for it, which I was vexed to hear taken notice of" (May 10, 1669). It was on the previous day that another friend told Pepys that the gold-lace sleeves on his coat were too ostentatious. Here, Pepys encounters constraints that are not recognized in Veblen's ([1889] 1931, 112) argument that the expenditure for conspicuous waste "is commonly as high as the earning capacity of the class will permit." Although it may be appropriate to emulate the next higher stratum of society, one's consumption expenditures must not represent a challenge to this stratum.

### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The Pepyses' habit of first displaying their new finery at church services on Sundays indicates that church is generally considered an appropriate arena for conspicuous consumption. It is difficult to imagine a more defiant rejection of the frugality that is such an important aspect of contemporary religious teaching. But perhaps the ultimate denial of the Protestant ethic appears near the end of the diary when Pepys passes beyond the fine line between conspicuous consumption and aggressively flaunts his wealth. The explicit criticism of Pepys's coach and the gold lace on his coat represents a constraint on conspicuous consumption that is absent from Veblen's analysis. Otherwise, there is little question but that much of Pepys's behavior can be described as conspicuous consumption, and Pepys's own words often demonstrate the invidious distinction emphasized by Veblen.

However, although much of Pepys's behavior is consistent with Veblen's analysis, it is not fully explained by it. There are many other significant aspects of Pepys's behavior. He often demonstrates that consumption expenditures bring

intrinsic satisfaction rather than being nothing more than means of demonstrating his wealth. And his repeated comments comparing his well-being with that of earlier years suggest that it is not only favorable comparisons with others that bring enjoyment. His pleasure in new acquisitions is especially evident because the diary begins when he is very poor. Several diary entries show that he considers pleasure as one of life's goals. For example, after an evening spent with friends at a tavern on March 26, 1668, he comments,

I did, as I love to do, enjoy myself in my pleasure, as being the height of what we take pains for and can hope for in this world—and therefore to be enjoyed while we are young and capable of these joys.”

Moreover, some of Pepys's clothing expenditures are necessary for him to maintain his position. As his status dramatically increases when he gains the position of Clerk of the Acts, his expenditures must conform to those of higher social strata if he is to be accepted by his new colleagues and others who are important sources of his income. That is, his income is in part a function of consumption expenditures that are required for him to function effectively within the social stratum into which his employment thrusts him. This contrasts to Veblen's analysis, which takes income as exogenous and consumption expenditures as a dependent variable.

Since Pepys's early life coincided with the heyday of Puritan influence in England, one would expect to find some vestiges of Puritan teachings in the diary. Pepys's objective of increasing his estate, an objective overlooked by Veblen, seems to restrain his consumption expenditures to some extent. On December 31, 1666, for example, he notes that during the year he has spent £1,154, “which is a sum not fit to be said that ever I should spend in one year, before I am maister of a better estate than I am.” Also, many diary entries express feelings of guilt when his intended thriftiness is overwhelmed by a desire for pleasure. He also often is loath to buy clothing for his wife, even though her appearance gives so much pleasure to both. Finally, there are the instances of reusing material to make new clothes. Although such behavior is consistent with contemporary religious teachings, the diary does not provide an explicit linkage to these teachings. And certainly, this behavior is not expected of Veblen's consumer, whose sole objective is to display his wealth.

Pepys's work habits are generally consistent with the Puritan emphasis on diligence in one's calling, although diligence had always been part of Christian teaching and can be traced to Old Testament writings, such as the twelfth Proverb. Again, however, there is no explicit linkage between Pepys's professional activity and religious teachings. He expresses guilt when engaging in pleasurable activities at times when he ought to be at the office. On the other hand, he suggests that his work gives him pleasure. Sometimes, this pleasure is

intrinsic, but at other times, it seems to be a matter of the self-esteem gained from his accomplishments. And if self-esteem can be gained from work as well as conspicuous consumption, the link between Veblen's leisure class and conspicuous consumption is weakened significantly.

Whatever the source of Pepys's ethical views, these views do not greatly restrict his emulative consumption. Hence, Weber's thesis regarding the economic impact of the Puritan ethic is flawed because it is based on contemporary religious teaching, and it cannot be assumed that actual behavior accurately reflects these teachings. The inability of either Weber or Veblen to explain Pepys's consumption behavior satisfactorily indicates the importance of reconsidering even time-hallowed theories.

## POSTSCRIPT

Pepys's diary ends on May 31, 1669, because of “the ill condition” of his eyes. Thinking that he was becoming blind, the final words of the diary are “the good God prepare me.” Although Pepys retained his eyesight, problems with his vision continued, and he never again kept a personal diary. Soon after the diary ends, two tragedies shattered his private life. Within six months, Mrs. Pepys died, apparently from typhoid fever. Three years later, his home was destroyed by fire; only his books were saved. His professional career continued, and he was instrumental in establishing Britain as Europe's foremost naval power. In 1684, King Charles placed Pepys in complete charge of the Navy, a position that he held until the overthrow of James II in 1688. Pepys lived quietly in retirement, maintaining an interest in naval affairs, pursuing his varied interests, and cultivating his many friendships. He died in 1703, at the age of 71.

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