

**IS CIVILIZATION
A DISEASE?**

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Is Civilization a Disease? by Stanton Coit

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IS CIVILIZATION A DISEASE?

I. TRADE TYPICAL OF CIVILIZATION

IN choosing "The Morals of Trade" as the general title of the Weinstock Lectureship, I am informed that its founder meant the word "Trade" to be understood in its comprehensive sense, as commensurate with our whole system of socialized wealth — at least, upon the present occasion I shall interpret it in this broad way.

I shall furthermore ask you to consider our system of socialized wealth —

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its practice and principles — in relation to the whole of that vast artificial structure of human life which is labelled "Civilization," and which began to prevail some ten thousand years ago. Such a comprehensive sweep of vision is, in my judgment, necessary if we are to view trade in true human perspective; nor can we estimate the degree of praise or blame we ought to confer upon it until we have determined the worth of civilization itself. For trade is not only bound up inextricably with the whole of our social order, but, as it seems to me, manifests in a most acute form the universal character of civilization in general. We must therefore discover the structural principle which

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began to co-ordinate the lives of any group of human beings when their tribe finally passed out of barbarism. Having discovered this, we shall be able to judge whether by its ever-advancing application to the life of men, and its ever-increasing domination over their wills, it has furthered the cause of ideal humanity or not. If we find that it has been essentially humane, we shall have arrived at the conclusion that its offspring, trade, is moral. If, however, we unearth in the very principle of historic civilization something radically wrong, anti-human and inhuman, and if we can discover another co-ordinating principle which is humane and feasible, civilization will then be seen to be a thing