

# Transcendental Ethos: A Study of Thoreau's Social Philosophy and Its Consistency in Relation to Antebellum Reform

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## I. Introduction: Thoreau Historiography in Retrospect

Popular perceptions of Henry David Thoreau may shape the way that scholars interpret or wish to interpret his ideas, which are often associated with the 1960's, the civil rights movement and Vietnam War protestors. Members of both movements referred to his essay on "Resistance to Civil Government." Martin Luther King, Jr., gives specific credit to the essay and its subsequent influence on his civil rights campaign. Protestors of the Vietnam War could easily refer to such passages in *Walden* as: "Only the defeated and deserters go to the wars, cowards that run away and enlist." Or: "Patriotism is a maggot in their heads."<sup>1</sup> Thoreau at other times has been associated with radical politics and anarchism. Many adherents believe his ideas are universally applicable over time. Today he is regularly associated with the environmental movement and such popular culture movements as rock-singer Don Henley's Save Walden Woods Project.

While he has gained popular recognition, Thoreau was relatively unknown to the general public during his own lifetime. Perhaps the greatest boon to his popularity in our own time has been his association with Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent resistance campaign, known as *Satyagraha*, against the British government in South Africa and in India where it reached full fruition. Gandhi cited Thoreau as one of the foremost influences in his life. He had read "Resistance to Civil Government" as it appeared posthumously under the title of "Civil Disobedience" in an 1866 anthology of Thoreau's excursions and political essays entitled *A Yankee in Canada*, and borrowed the term *civil disobedience* as an English equivalent of his own term *Satyagraha*. While Gandhi gave him full credit for the term, scholars cannot establish with certainty whether Thoreau ever used the term himself or whether it was an anonymous editorial addition to his essay.

The title, too, is an important consideration that should not be entirely overlooked or misjudged in its importance. In the term *civil disobedience*, the word *civil* can refer to citizens who resist an unjust law either violently or nonviolently, or it can mean polite and non-violent disobedience. If the phrase *resistance to civil government* is used, the ambiguity is removed. All governments are civil in this sense as they govern citizens; but not all governments are polite or nonviolent. Historians, however, often refer to it by its 1866 title, "Civil Disobedience," rather than by its 1849 title, "Resistance to Civil Government,"

as it appeared in its only publication during Thoreau's lifetime in Elizabeth Peabody's *Aesthetic Papers*.

Because many scholars have specifically linked Thoreau to Gandhi's political movement it presents a challenge to review his ideas in their historical context detached from predetermined critical perceptions, as in any field is so often the case. Arthur M. Schlesinger, for instance, in his well-received book *The American as Reformer*, refers to Thoreau's doctrine of "inner regeneration," as a doctrine of passive resistance. Schlesinger concluded that Thoreau's view on "'Civil Disobedience' had more influence on modern India than on his countrymen. . . ."2 Nor is he alone in his appraisal. Walter Harding, perhaps the best known Thoreau scholar and biographer, wrote of Gandhi: "We know of no other who so well carried out the principles of Thoreau."3 True, Gandhi tried to live a virtuous life; however, Thoreau never attempted, nor ever considered, leading a national politically based movement.

When Wendell Glick, the editor of the Princeton edition of Thoreau's reform papers, decided on the 1849 title, "Resistance to Civil Government," rather than the 1866 title, "Civil Disobedience," he was criticized by Harding, the former editor-in-chief. Harding argued that Thoreau changed the original title of the essay before his death in 1862. He defends his position by noting that such stylistic changes are consistent with Thoreau's writing process. True enough, perhaps, yet this assumption nonetheless ignores the historical context in which the essay was first published. Glick defends his position by arguing that his decision was in accordance with standard editorial practice, the Greg theory of copy-text editing.<sup>4</sup> While the Princeton edition of Thoreau's work is historically accurate, several other anthologies still carry the title "Civil Disobedience."

While Gandhi may have found Thoreau's essay insightful, he never gave it full credit for influencing all aspects of *Satyagraha*. He called it a "masterly treatise" on the duty of civil disobedience, but recognized that Thoreau confined his disobedience to non-payment of his poll tax. *Satyagraha* distinctly covered all forms of civil disobedience against an unjust law and was not limited to non-payment of taxes. Also, Gandhi recognized that "Thoreau was not perhaps an out-and-out champion of non-violence," and determined that his position represent only "a branch of satyagraha."<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, Gandhi wrote: "The statement that I had derived my idea of civil disobedience from the writings of Thoreau is wrong."<sup>6</sup> He explains his resistance efforts were well on their way in South Africa before he had read Thoreau's essay.

This is not to say that he did not admire Thoreau, and, in this respect, Harding is correct. Gandhi ranked Thoreau among the greatest of several influences in his life. He admired his courage and practical ideals, his virtue, and refers to them often in his own writings. Yet to imply that Thoreau's notions of civil disobedience are analogous to *Satyagraha*, a national collective political movement, is simply not true. Rather than helping us better to understand Thoreau, such notions may, instead, detract from it.

Much of the debate on Thoreau's consistency has focused on his essays defending John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia. On the eve of the Civil War in 1859, Brown and his band of men used physical force in a failed attempt to arm and liberate Southern slaves. In "A Plea for Captain John Brown," Thoreau unmistakably sanctions the use of forcible resistance, writing: "I do not wish to kill or be killed, but I can foresee circumstances in which both these things would be by me unavoidable."<sup>7</sup> While heroism is a constant theme, either on or beneath the surface of his writing, Thoreau never before gave such a pointed remark on the use of physical force. In discussing this episode, Harding wrote: "The same Thoreau who has so often been associated with the nonviolent resistance of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., clearly went beyond his earlier views of reform in his championing of Brown."<sup>8</sup>

Scholars wishing to compare Thoreau and Gandhi should keep in mind that Gandhi's notion of nonviolence was as an active rather than a passive force. "It has no room for cowardice, or even weakness," wrote Gandhi, "there is hope for a violent man to be some day non-violent, but there is none for a coward. . . . if we do not know how to defend ourselves, our women and our places of worship by the force of suffering, i.e. non-violence, we must, if we are men, be at least able to defend all these by fighting."<sup>9</sup> Thoreau and Gandhi would have both agreed on this point.

At other times, Thoreau has been associated with dangerous politics — radicalism and anarchy. Some critics have tried to show that his principles and tactics were subject to change with little or no basis. Vincent Buranelli, one of Thoreau's staunchest critics, charged him with practicing radical, if not dangerous politics. In "The Case Against Thoreau," Buranelli wrote of Thoreau's political theory: "It points forward to Lenin, the 'genius theoretician'; whose right it is to force a suitable class consciousness on those who do not have it, and to the horrors that resulted from Hitler's 'intuition' of what was best for Germany."<sup>10</sup> Buranelli cites Thoreau's defense of John Brown as evidence attesting to his radicalism and criticizes him for his "allegiance to inspiration rather than to ratiocination and factual evidence"; and concludes, "Thoreau's commitment to personal revelation made him an anarchist."<sup>11</sup>

Referring to him as an anarchist, solely, presents some difficulties, however, as it ignores the variegated aspects of Thoreau's social philosophy. His desire for self-cultivation and a better government, a free and enlightened State, if you will, is not entirely anarchical. In purely political terms, too, the designation does not seem to suit him well either. Myron Simon's essay on "Thoreau and Anarchism," for example, argues convincingly that Thoreau was not an Anarchist. And today most historians agree with this appraisal. Simon wrote: "One may believe, as such opposed figures as Thomas Aquinas and Hugo Grotius did, in a Higher or 'Natural' Law to which civil laws are subordinate, and not be in any sense an anarchist. And one may be an anarchist, as Godwin and Tucker surely were, without subscribing to any manner of Higher Law."<sup>12</sup> Tucker, a New Englander, and other contemporary individualistic anarchists, he points out, do not refer to

Thoreau in their writings. Simon adds, the fact that Thoreau “adhered to no recognizable political position made him in his purity an easily appropriated, modifiable symbol of conscientious protest as available to the civil rights and student movements of the 1960’s as he had been to Gandhi.”<sup>13</sup>

Nor is anarchism a useful term to apply to nineteenth-century American politics. This is because libertarian politics were confined to adopt the term socialism for their left-wing political movements. George Woodcock noted that “Proudhon was the first man voluntarily to adopt this name of ‘anarchy’ for the form of society he envisaged, and actually to mean by that word — philological stickler that he was — a society without government.”<sup>14</sup> Proudhon’s work was not translated into English until 1876.

Others have tried to link Thoreau exclusively to the image of a solitary individualist contentedly residing at Walden Pond or confining himself to nature excursions free from societal cares. Mark Van Doren, the first to offer an extensive study of Thoreau’s journal, concluded: “certainly the troubles of mankind caused him no disturbance.”<sup>15</sup> James Goodwin, in “Thoreau and John Brown: Transcendental Politics,” argues that Thoreau did not act from “any widespread historical precedents,” nor did he “advocate *revolution* in any understanding of the term commonly held in his time.”<sup>16</sup> Goodwin believes Thoreau followed, what he terms, a politics of “separation and seclusion,” and that Thoreau was not a social reformer as is commonly assumed. Nevertheless, his ideas were not formed in a vacuum. Such interpretations ignore Thoreau’s lifelong commitment to reform. His association with the Lyceum for over twenty-three years is enough to illustrate at least a commitment if not an interest in society, we must grant, and certainly an interest in his hometown of Concord, the political hotbed of New England Yankees and Antebellum reformers.

The most comprehensive study of his consistency is Wendell Glick’s 1950 Ph.D. Dissertation, “Thoreau and Radical Abolitionism: A Study of the Native Background of Thoreau’s Social Philosophy.” Glick argues that Thoreau’s consistency can be judged by his connection with Northern Abolitionism, a nineteenth-century political movement that was essentially nonviolent. The study was perhaps ground breaking in its day, but the debate on Thoreau’s consistency needs to be reexamined under the light of recent scholarship.

Glick says he agrees with Amos Bronson Alcott in calling Thoreau the “‘best sample of an indigenous American;’ in other words, a synthesis of various native influences which his environment supplied him.”<sup>17</sup> His personal feeling is that Thoreau was influenced by radical abolitionism to such an extent that it led him to defend John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry. He argues “A Plea for Captain John Brown” is an indication of just how far Thoreau had departed from his “long-cherished faith in the adequacy of the Moral Law to satisfy all man’s individual and collective needs”; and writes: “There are no two ways about it; in defending Brown Thoreau sacrificed the ‘truths’ of his ‘reason’. . .”<sup>18</sup>

Still, his conclusion is largely undisputed. It is true that Thoreau, like Emerson, refused to be intimidated by “foolish” consistencies. Walter Harding, in *The New Thoreau Handbook*, writes:

Thoreau . . . never claimed to be a systematic philosopher, and he made no attempt to resolve the many competing ideas and attitudes he recorded during his lifetime. Like most of the Transcendentalists, he was essentially eclectic, and as his reading indicates, he was fully capable of adapting ideas from various sources that seemed to be mutually exclusive. In addition, like most other people, he sometimes changed his mind as he grew older or as issues evolved.<sup>19</sup>

Elsewhere, however, Harding alludes to a possible basis for consistency in Thoreau’s thought. In *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, Harding writes: “Whether he was experimenting in life at Walden Pond, going to jail for refusing to pay his poll tax, or defending John Brown’s action at Harper’s Ferry, he was operating from a base of Transcendentalist principles.”<sup>20</sup>

1). Is Glick’s assessment of Thoreau accurate? Thoreau’s defense of John Brown may not be entirely inconsistent with the epistemology or moral sentiment of his earlier works. Native influences, I agree, played an important role in the development of his social philosophy. Certainly, he was exposed to radical abolitionism. His mother, Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau, and several of his aunts were members of Abolition societies. Thoreau, however, never joined an Abolition society himself. And this was not due to any abstract eccentricities on his own part, but because he was committed to individual reform and motivated by an idealism distinct from Garrison’s Abolitionism.

2). What constitutes Transcendentalist principles and how do they apply to Thoreau’s social philosophy and his attitude toward reform in practice, if at all? Several indigenous influences, for instance, Unitarianism and Scottish Common Sense taught at Thoreau’s alma mater, Harvard College, and French Eclecticism, popular then among Unitarians, suggest that Abolitionism was not the sole influence on his political thought. French Eclecticism, which was generally adapted to New England thought, and Unitarianism in particular were springboards to Transcendentalism and are a key to understanding Transcendental principles. Although Thoreau renounced involvement with the church during his lifetime, he was baptized a Unitarian and buried in a Unitarian cemetery. Concerning Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: “He was a born protestant. If he slighted and defied the opinions of others, it was only that he was more intent to reconcile his practice with his own belief.”<sup>21</sup>

3). Is Thoreau’s social philosophy consistent? Thoreau was not content to withdraw himself completely from society and saw himself as an active citizen committed to individual reform. Various cross currents were at work during the Antebellum period. One can note hints of republican themes, themes of Jacksonian Democracy, and the ideas of manifest destiny, Abolitionism and nonviolence in his writing. Thoreau works these themes into a spiritual or

religious context that reflect his special breed of practical idealism and attempts to embrace natural paradoxes over a less real, more artificial model. For this reason, it is difficult to classify him or even speak of his ideas as political doctrines. It is the consistency of his ideas, their internal coherence, and their relation to Antebellum society that concern us, and not a political theory as such.

4). Does Thoreau's defense of John Brown necessarily contradict the earlier political views of his work, most notably his essay "Resistance to Civil Government?" If we are to understand Thoreau, we must try to understand his relation to Antebellum society and why, if he was indeed committed to nonviolence, he changed so completely by 1859. Again, his connection to Unitarianism will help to elucidate this point. According to James Duban, "Conscience and Consciousness: The Liberal Christian Context of Thoreau's Political Ethics," Thoreau seems to have accepted "a rather conservative notion — but one nonetheless espoused by Unitarians . . . that the dictates of conscience correspond to universally prescribed standards of morality."<sup>22</sup> Nonviolent or active, even violent resistance measures are consistent with Unitarian ethics.

The following chapters generally follow the outline of my questions, which are in no way mutually exclusive inquiries.

## II. Antebellum Reform

Thoreau lived during a period of unprecedented change, a time of rapid industrialization, urbanization, and geographic mobility. Slavery was expanding and becoming more profitable in the South.<sup>23</sup> The first factory systems were introduced in towns just outside his hometown of Concord. At Waltham, the Boston Manufacturing Company utilized a power loom, turning southern cotton into valuable products for sale in the North and abroad. In Boston, population estimates between 1790 and 1830 roughly tripled as renewed opportunities and prosperity after the Revolutionary War and the need for workers increased.

It was a time of great optimism. There was a renewed sense of confidence in the American system of government. By 1845, when Thoreau began his sojourn at Walden, the Republic had survived for nearly sixty years, a mark of its durability. The uncertainty of the early Republic diminished as states learned to legislate on local and national levels. New industrialization, along with internal improvements, the building of roads, canals, and railways, promised an expansive America.

The decades preceding the Revolutionary War marked a period of intense theological speculation that produced an ever-widening chasm within the Calvinist Orthodoxy. The period produced the first of two Great Awakenings in American history. No other figure had a more lasting influence than did Jonathan Edwards. He determined the future course of theology. Concerned with doctrinal heresies of Arminianism and apathy among the clergy, Edwards wrote a number of treatises directed at rejuvenating spiritual awareness in

the colonies. *The Freedom of the Will* challenged the Arminian contention that Christ died on the cross for the redemption of all humanity, not for an exclusive elect. Edwards applied the philosophy of John Locke in rejecting the idea of distinct faculties such as the reason, the will, and the appetites.<sup>24</sup> This was also an area of speculation that would later engage New England Transcendentalism. By denying the existence of free will, Edwards wanted to undermine the Arminian heresy and preserve the doctrines of Determinism, the Elect, and Human Depravity.

He confronted apathy among New England clergymen by demonstrating the importance of emotion or “affections” in religious devotion and by reasserting the ideas of divine perfection and human depravity.<sup>25</sup> His work was instrumental in bringing about the first Great Awakening. Edwards’ clerical descendants, the New Calvinists, continued his debate. Gradually, with passage of time, and with America’s spirited victory over the British, Orthodox ideas lost some of their appeal. Doctrinal disputes continued as conservative and liberal strains within the clergy forced a gradual schism out of which Evangelical Protestantism and Unitarianism emerged.

The Cane Ridge revival in 1801 marked the beginning of the Second Great Awakening, and the first of a series of camp meetings that were to follow. These meetings have been noted for their vast displays of emotional and religious fervor, and for the extraordinary role they played in motivating Antebellum reformers. In 1818, Adin Ballou, then age 15, participated in a revival near his hometown in Rhode Island. Years later, he recorded his youthful conversion. “Whatever my folly or imperfection, I have never regretted the step I then took, but have been devoutly thankful to the author of all good that thus early in life I committed myself to His service under the leadership of Jesus Christ.”<sup>26</sup> Ballou went on to found the community of Hopedale based on the principles of universal salvation, Christian socialism, and nonresistance and was the most persistent advocate of pacifism during the Antebellum period.

Evangelical ministers and theologians challenged the old Calvinist doctrines. New Haven’s Nathaniel Taylor, a theologian at Yale University, attacked the doctrines of Original Sin, Determinism, and Infant Damnation. Because he accepted the notion of free will, Taylor argued sin was voluntary not predetermined. Revivals, he believed, united people within the spiritual and ecumenical context of the Christian community and helped to lead the way to salvation. Congregationalism prevailed at Yale while its rival, Harvard College, embraced the more liberal doctrines of Unitarianism.

The paragon of frontier revivalism was the great evangelist Charles Grandison Finney. Without having had any formal theological training, he was ordained a Presbyterian minister and later was elected president of Ohio’s Oberlin College from 1851 to 1856. He was a fierce opponent of slavery, and Oberlin disseminated numerous amounts of anti-slavery propaganda throughout the region. Paul E. Johnson, an historian of Finney’s Rochester revival, argues convincingly that Finney’s 1831 revivals had an indelible effect on Antebellum reform.<sup>27</sup> Revivals

propagated the ideas of moral perfection and the coming biblical age of human perfection — the millennium.

Rapid expansion and new problems associated with industrialization and slavery prompted concern for many Americans. New England became the center of Antebellum reform. The rich Puritan tradition of the region provided impetus for a reform impulse that was reinforced by current optimism and a belief in perfectibility. The temperance movement led by Lyman Beecher gained national attention. Drunkenness was often tolerated in an agrarian society, but an industrial one necessitated punctuality and sobriety. Horace Mann led the movement for educational reform, believing childhood education could prepare the young for responsible adulthood and citizenship. Of all reform movements, Abolitionism led by William Lloyd Garrison had the greatest sense of immediacy. Garrison called for nothing less than the immediate, non-compensatory, and complete abolition of slavery.

Lockean thought continued its influence during the Antebellum period with the opposite results of Edwards' era. Most reformers believed human behavior was malleable. They believed temperate parents would raise temperate children. Early childhood development and education would mold law-abiding citizens. Abolition of slavery would lead to peace and equality. And benevolent institutions would encourage benevolence. Charles Dickens while visiting Boston in 1842 commented on the phenomenon of the city's alms houses, prisons, juvenile facilities, and hospitals: "I sincerely believe that the public institutions and charities of this capital of Massachusetts are as nearly perfect, as the most considerate wisdom, benevolence, and humanity, can make them."<sup>28</sup> Reformers generally stressed the connection between the individual, the environment, the importance of collective involvement, and institutional reform.

The old Calvinist triangle was turned on its head. Alexis de Tocqueville while visiting America in 1831 wrote: "It is hard to realize how much follows naturally from this philosophic theory of the indefinite perfectibility of man and what a prodigious influence it has even on those who, concentrating solely on action to the exclusion of thought, act according to this theory of which they know nothing."<sup>29</sup> Most reform movements sought mass appeal. They appealed to the impetuosity of perspective converts. Religiosity they wanted, yes, but not a nation of philosophers. The old Calvinist notions of human depravity were superseded by a typical belief in human perfection.

Antebellum reformers generally relied on scriptural authority in support of their proposed projects. Abolitionists were no exception. Arthur Tappan, Lyman Beecher, and Charles Gradison Finney were all evangelicals and leading members of Abolitionism. Tappan controlled the movement's programs in the southwesterly portion of the northern United States, disseminating pamphlets in that region and into the southern Border States. Finney conducted frontier revivals in the emerging West. Beecher served in the eastern portion of the country. The prevalence of evangelical thought within Abolitionism should not be denied, overlooked, or misjudged, for Transcendental thought follows its own



distinct category.

In Boston, Beecher was a commanding figure appealing mostly to middling and lower classes. His Boston was not the Brahmin Boston of William Ellery Channing or Ralph Waldo Emerson. While at Yale, Beecher befriended Nathaniel Taylor whose pro-revival theology kindled the flames of Finney's revivalism. Beecher's Hanover Street congregation was also the site of several revivals, which never gained much favor among the city's Unitarian population. In 1829, when Garrison first came to Boston, he was inspired by Beecher and not the Unitarians. He referred to Channing's "icy system" and noted enthusiastically, "Beecher has no equal."<sup>30</sup> It was Beecher's evangelical simplicity that moved young Garrison.

While it is true that his pertinacious insistence on immediacy and the disparaging and sensationalistic language of the *Liberator* led to an eventual cooling of relations between himself and many denominationalists including Beecher, Garrison's commitment to the Gospels of Christ as the touchstone of his own moral philosophy persisted unabated. Nothing illustrates this more than his relationship with John Humphrey Noyes of Vermont, beginning in 1837 when the two men met for the first time. Noyes went beyond the perfectionism of Finney by proclaiming that he himself had reached perfection. Believing Christ to be the supreme authority in the world, he explained: "*My hope of the millennium begins where Dr. Beecher's expires* — viz., AT THE TOTAL OVERTHROW OF THIS NATION."<sup>31</sup> Shortly after their meeting, Garrison wrote his devoted disciple Henry Wright, a Connecticut farmer, to proclaim the good news.

The remedy . . . will not be found in anything short of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Human governments will remain in violent existence as long as men are resolved not to bear the cross of Christ, and to be crucified unto the world. But in the kingdom of God's dear Son, holiness and love are the only magistracy. It has no swords, for they are beaten into plough shares — no spears, for they are changed into pruning-hooks — no military academy, for the saints cannot learn war any more — no gibbet, for life is regarded as inviolate — no chains, for all are free. And that kingdom is to be established upon earth, for the time is predicted when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ.<sup>32</sup>

Transcendentalists were also optimistic; however, their optimism was generally tempered by a sense of a gradual progressiveness and an unfolding of the ideal in history, which, as many of them well recognized, could be facilitated or hindered in its material manifestation. Maintaining the autonomy of the individual, Thoreau was inclined to assert the purity of the soul along with other Transcendentalists, agreeing that individuals should act in the moment according to their nature, without succumbing to the vogue of opinion. Garrison, on the other hand, asserting the fundamental importance of the Gospels, soon united Abolitionism to Ballou's New England Nonresistance Society with absolute, albeit admirable, material designs in mind.

The two movements were united in common cause shortly after the 1837 slaying of Elijah P. Lovejoy. Lovejoy was gunned down by an angry pro-slavery mob in Alton, Illinois, while protecting his printing press. Garrison and Ballou were determined to keep Abolitionism free from violence. Their credo was the words spoken by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. “Ye resist not evil” and “turn the other cheek” became the watchwords of the united movement.

Garrison set the agenda for Abolitionism at the 1838 Peace Convention held in Boston. Desiring a peaceful solution to slavery, he delivered his “Declaration of Sentiments” address, a manifesto outlining the goals of the his movement.

The Prince of peace, under whose stainless banner we rally, came not to destroy, but to save, even the worst of enemies . . . We register our testimony, not only against all wars, > whether offensive or defensive, but all preparations for war . . . We believe that the penal code of the old covenant, An eye for an eye, [*sic*] and a tooth for a tooth, has been abrogated by Jesus Christ; and that, under the new covenant, the forgiveness, instead of the punishment of enemies, enjoined upon all his disciples, in all cases whatsoever.

Clearly favoring nonviolence, Garrison goes on to explain: “We shall employ lecturers, circulate tracts and publications, form societies, and petition our state and national governments in relation to the subject of Universal Peace.”<sup>33</sup> In the aftermath of the convention, Ballou published “Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments,” another exemplary pacifist tract in addition to Garrison’s. Ballou wrote: “Non-Resistants are required by their principles not to resist any of the ordinances of these governments by physical force, however unjust and wicked; but to be subject to the *powers that be*, either *actively* or *passively*.”<sup>34</sup>

Thoreau never joined Abolitionism or the Peace Society. The reason is simple: he never accepted their view of the Moral Law and was moved by a subtle, nonetheless distinct, difference in principle. Transcendentalism will be examined in the next chapter to discuss Thoreau’s connection with it, as indeed he was, and to distinguish him from other reformers of the time who fell outside the Transcendental fold. And there were differences. Ballou himself was incensed with Transcendentalism. Referring to its “pernicious” errors, he wrote:

I had to withstand . . . an incoherent Transcendentalism which made every individual his own prophet, priest, king, and God; a rabid anti-bibleism, which treated the scriptures of the two Testaments indiscriminately as a jargonic mass of pseudo-sacred rubbish, of no divine authority whatever; and a gross anti-Sabbatarianism, which left no use for any sort of Sabbath, even for the moral and religious improvement or physical comfort of needy humanity.<sup>35</sup>

Antebellum reform was an outgrowth of Enlightenment ideas. Calvinism gave way to a liberated theology after the Revolutionary War. Evangelical Protestantism was the birthchild of the Second Great Awakening. Unitarianism was distinct from Evangelical Protestantism, as we will see, in rejecting the

Trinitarian nature of Christ and in embracing a far more speculative theology. It was limited geographically and scarcely embraced revivalism. Thoreau himself once noted that “a camp-meeting must be a singular combination of a prayer-meeting and a pic-nic.”<sup>36</sup> Transcendentalism developed out of Unitarianism, while Abolitionism was essentially a product of Evangelical Protestantism.

Garrison embraced the doctrine of nonviolence based on his reading of the Gospel of Christ. His “Declaration of Sentiments” address, and his cooperation with Ballou clearly demonstrate his early commitment to the peace movement. Thoreau, who is often associated with pacifism, never attended the Peace Convention. He, and other Transcendentalists, essentially rejected revivalism, a fundamentalistic interpretation of scripture, and defined perfectionism and the Moral Law according to their own unique transcendental idealism.

### III. Transcendental Ethos

Wendell Glick writes: “Transcendentalism and radical Abolitionism were in so many respects twin movements, based upon the same presuppositions and having the same altruistic aims, that it is difficult to avoid making the generalization that a consistent radical Abolitionist was, in the broad interpretation of the term, a Transcendentalist.”<sup>37</sup> By classifying Garrison and Thoreau together, Glick is led to believe that each of them was philosophically alike in defining their conception of the Moral Law. He writes: “There was simply no way to reconcile the methods of Brown with their faith in the irresistibility of the Moral Law the keystone of their early philosophy.”<sup>38</sup> His general argument, however, avoids some important particulars that divided the two movements.

New England Transcendentalism was yet another reform-oriented movement. Unlike other reform movements of the time, Transcendentalism is not easily defined, and by itself represents a significant challenge to properly understanding Thoreau. The movement was interested in all areas of reform as Abolitionism was also concerned with temperance, education, and slavery. Loosely defined, it was as much a philosophy as it was a religion. Some Transcendentalists, like Bronson Alcott, who derived surprising answers from his young students on the nature of Christ using the Socratic method, appealed to the Gospels more than others, but without subscribing wholly to scriptural authority. One thing is certain; Transcendentalism was never an Evangelical movement.

To understand Transcendentalism, it is necessary to understand that it was an offshoot of New England Unitarianism, which in turn, was a reaction against Calvinism and distinct from Evangelical Protestantism. The majority of Transcendentalists were Unitarians or those, like Emerson and Thoreau, who were dissatisfied with the Church and officially left organized religion. It may also be of some interest to note, as Harold Clarke Goddard did in his book on Transcendentalism, that New England Unitarianism differed from the English Unitarianism of Priestley in that “it exhibited practically none of his materialistic

and Socinian tendencies.”<sup>39</sup>

Unitarians rejected Calvinism on moral and speculative grounds. They objected to the idea of determinism because without some concept of free will it is difficult to hold individuals accountable or responsible, morally, for their actions. In rejecting the Trinitarian character of God’s nature, they stressed a peculiar religious doctrine that went against the current of evangelical thought, believing, instead, in the oneness or Unitarian character of His nature. This was an important speculative idea for Transcendentalism as well because Emerson predicated his notion of the “Oversoul” on a similar assumption.

Within the Unitarian clergy, some argued that Religious dogma, the Old and New Testaments, and Jesus were not infallible. For example, in his “Discourse of the Transient and Permanent in Christianity,” Theodore Parker writes: “If Christianity were true, we should still think it was so, not because its record was written by infallible pens, nor because it was lived out by an infallible teacher. . . . If it rest on the personal authority of Jesus alone, then there is no certainty of its truth.”<sup>40</sup> Parker was a Transcendentalist and a practicing Unitarian minister. Although his view is representative of the most liberal branch of Unitarianism and its clergy at that time, his remark, here, illustrates just how far a Unitarian could go in rejecting scriptural authority. Unitarianism was generally less inclined to fundamentalism than Evangelical Protestantism, and Transcendentalism, further still.

Emerson agreed with Parker’s view and described like no one before him an interpretation of Christ that took by storm the religious community of Boston. He likened Jesus Christ to a true prophet who “saw with open eye the mystery of the soul.” Audiences were stunned to hear Emerson say that Christ “saw that God incarnates himself in man, and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of his World.”<sup>41</sup> Christ recognized the divinity incarnate in all persons. “The stationariness of religion; the assumption that the age of inspiration is past, that the Bible is closed; the fear of degrading the character of Jesus by representing him as a man; — indicate with sufficient clearness the falsehood of our theology.”<sup>42</sup> This should not be confused with pantheism. The individual has a divine nature, according to Emerson, but is not the divinity itself.

Questioning scriptural authority was important for Transcendentalism because on either side of the slavery controversy proponents of slavery or abolitionism could refer to scripture as the ultimate authority for defending their cause. Since the Reformation, Protestantism has generally encouraged individual interpretation of the Bible. Transcendentalism did not necessarily make a radical break with tradition. After all, most of the founding fathers were deists in rejecting Biblical authority over natural laws. Transcendentalists were well aware of the implications of the new science and wanted to reaffirm revelation against uncertainty but also outside the traditional religious understanding. Philosophically, they were interested in confronting the extreme skepticism of Hume against the existence of the mind, and the sensualism of Locke, and the current wisdom of Scottish realism. They wanted to establish the existence of

inherent knowledge and the validity of, what can be termed, their conscience theory.

Certain Unitarian ministers helped pave the way. William Ellery Channing, the Federal Street Church minister from 1803 until 1842, whose “icy system” it was that displeased young Garrison, is an important transitional figure. He was the chief spokesperson for Unitarianism during his time and a forerunner of Transcendentalism. Channing, in his later years, was present at the earliest of the informal gatherings of the Transcendentalists. The “Hedge Club,” as the group came to be known, typically met when Fredric Henry Hedge, a Bangor minister, came to town. Hedge said Channing “could from the spiritual height on which he stood, by mere dint of gravity, send his word into the soul with more searching force than all the orators of the time.”<sup>43</sup> Emerson called him “our bishop” and continually stressed his importance to Transcendentalism. It should be emphasized that, while Channing was progressive among Unitarians, he was not, however, a Transcendentalist.

Channing went against the logic of most Unitarian and evangelical ministers by questioning the philosophy of John Locke. His ideas ripened the future appeal of German Idealism and French Eclecticism for Transcendentalism. In *Human Understanding*, Locke had argued that the mind is *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, until sense experience records its events. Most followers of Locke believe that our knowledge is derived solely from our observation of the material world. Channing, on the other hand, argues that knowledge is derived from “our own soul,” that “the divine attributes are first developed in ourselves, and thence transferred to our Creator.” He is close to suggesting that all persons have a “spark of divinity.” But he also adds “an important caution” against “extravagance” cautioning his listeners to reverence human nature and not to do it violence. He writes: “Our proper work is to approach God by the free and natural unfolding of our highest powers — of understanding, conscience, love, and the moral will.”<sup>44</sup>

During the Antebellum period, the Scottish Common Sense philosophy of Dugald Stewart and Sampson Reid was taught at most universities, including Thoreau’s Harvard, as the prevailing model. Edward H. Madden, an historian of civil disobedience, explains that while Kantian idealism and French Eclecticism gained some favor during the 1840’s and 1850’s the prevailing wisdom of the time was Scottish realism.<sup>45</sup> Few academics outside the fold of Transcendentalism embraced Kantian Idealism. While reformers and Transcendentalists alike subscribed to some concept of Moral or Higher Law of conscience, the Transcendentalists, and particularly Thoreau, supported their view according to the dictates of transcendental reason.

Scottish realism was an attempt to defend Locke against the scepticism of Hume. Stewart, in *Dissertation: Progress of Metaphysical, Ethical, and Political Philosophy*, argued that Locke’s theory on the role of the senses was misunderstood by Gassendi, Condillac, and Diderot, all of whom were followers of Locke who adopted and simplified his method. Stewart shows that Locke accepted the validity that knowledge arises from both the senses and reflection,

and quotes his position on the latter:

The other function, from which experience furnishes the understanding with ideas, is the perception of the operations of our own mind within us, as it is employed about the ideas it has got: which operations, when the soul comes to reflect on and consider, do furnish the understanding with another set of ideas, which could not be had from things without.<sup>46</sup>

Stewart brought Locke's philosophy back on his own terms. Emerson was impressed by his emphasis on individual consciousness, the power of memory, and his belief that nature exists independent from the mind and consists of eternal laws.

Stewart's system on the whole, however, did not offer a tenable solution to Hume's skepticism in the view of most Transcendentalists. It affirmed consciousness and a sense of universal morality but lacked a satisfying concept of free will. In favoring Locke, it dismissed Kant and diminished the importance of Eastern, especially Hindu, thought, and pure idealism. More importantly in their view, Stewart's system offered no moral basis to dispute the existence of the institution of slavery.

Channing's view that knowledge is derived from "our own soul" represents an important bridge for Transcendentalism to Immanuel Kant's theory of subjective reasoning. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and his later *Critique of Practical Reason* were viewed by rationalists as important works because they confronted the sensualism of Locke and the skepticism of Hume.

Kant had asserted that transcendental knowledge is known *a priori*. A proposition is known *a priori* if it is known independent of experience. Most followers of Kant would say that mathematics is known in this way. For example, it is not necessary to know that  $2 + 2 = 4$  through observation. Such propositions are known inherently without the aid of observation. Moreover, this had a certain significance for the Transcendentalists. *A priori* knowledge is the same in every individual, and yet it is also independent of every individual. It exists of its own accord. Kant's theory supported the use of reason-based intuitionism and helped to verify the use and validity of inherent concepts in practical ethics for the Transcendentalists.

They received the philosophy of Kant second-hand through the Englishman Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Emerson in his essay on Transcendentalism admits that the Idealism of his time "acquired the name Transcendental from the use of that term by Immanuel Kant," but failed to mention in it the profound importance of Coleridge to the movement.<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere, however, Emerson refers to Coleridge as one of the few who "cannot be matched in America."<sup>48</sup> The reason for Emerson's high estimation of him is because Coleridge made the distinction between the faculties of Reason and Understanding for Transcendentalism in his *Aids to Reflection*, published by 1826 in America.

Coleridge defends idealism against the skepticism of a Hume and upholds the use of Reason or intuitive knowledge over that which is based on observation or reflection alone. When Jonathan Edwards was rethinking Calvinism, he determined the Will was passive. His conclusion is not surprising when it is remembered that he was working under the influence of Locke who had concluded the mind is passive, a blank slate. Coleridge argues something quite different. He believes the mind has the active powers of Reason and Understanding. He writes: "Now as the difference of a captive and enslaved Will, and *no* will at all, such is the difference between the *Lutheranism* of Calvin and the Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards."<sup>49</sup> As Coleridge offered a satisfying concept of free will, the Transcendentalists found a viable philosophy to dispute morally the institution of slavery.

Coleridge believes the "knowledge of *spiritual* Truth is of necessity immediate and *intuitive*: and the World or Natural Man possesses no higher intuitions than those of the pure *Senses*, which are the subjects of *Mathematical Science*."<sup>50</sup> For him, the difference between the Understanding and the Reason is that the first is discursive while the latter is fixed. The Understanding is the faculty of reflection while the Reason exists of its own accord and is known *a priori*. Mathematical equations and spiritual truth, as he terms it, are known through the faculty of the Reason. But the Understanding must refer to "some other Faculty as its ultimate authority."<sup>51</sup> By the phrase, *some other faculty*, he means the various faculties of the senses such as sight, touch, taste, smell, or hearing. For example, the Understanding can reflect on a subject categorically by looking at the qualities of an object, and ask, is it red, blue, or green or some combination of shades? It can ask what relation the object has to time and place. Or it can ask if the object is acting or affected. The Understanding cannot, however, know an object outside of its attributes. Coleridge's approach is ratiocinative and Aristotelian in its method. In this sense, Reason is distinguished from the lowercase reason of the Enlightenment, which referred to a process of intellection rather than to inherent concepts. Together, the Reason and the Understanding form an intuitive and an intellective process.

Thoreau read most of Coleridge's works including *Aids to Reflection*.<sup>52</sup> This was one of many books belonging to the self-education or self-cultivation genre stemming from the German concept of *Bildung* that had gained many adherents in New England during the 1830's and 1840's, especially among the Transcendentalists. Thoreau was undoubtedly impressed by any book that belonged to this genre. He also seems to have readily accepted Coleridge's epistemology when he wrote: "The most distinct and beautiful statement of any truth must take at last the mathematical form."<sup>53</sup> In relation to a single virtue, the scales of justice can serve as an emblematic illustration of his ideal.

Thoreau may have been an idealist, but his nature study reveals that he was methodical and careful to base knowledge of a "spiritual truth" on the observation of the actual world. Robert Richardson, in *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*, wrote of Thoreau's nature work: "It is a huge undertaking, a major

effort, the general purpose of which seems to have been the distillation of ten years' observations into an archetypal year, not impressionistic, but statistically averaged, combining the accuracy of a Darwin with the descriptive flair of a Pliny and the eye of a Ruskin."<sup>54</sup>

Self-cultivation is perhaps the single most important idea governing Transcendentalism, and the concept is especially evident in Thoreau's social philosophy. While some Transcendentalists, such as Bronson Alcott, Theodore Parker, and George Ripley, believed in collective reform toward individual self-improvement, others, such as Thoreau and Emerson, stressed the importance of individual reform. Alcott started his ill-fated Fruitlands experiment in communal living and was a member of Garrison's Abolitionist society. Parker remained an influential Unitarian minister. Ripley founded the Brook Farm community in Roxbury, Massachusetts. When asked to join Brook Farm, Emerson declined. In his journal, he wrote: "To join this body would be to traverse all my long trumpeted theory, and the instinct which spoke from it, that one man is a counterpoise to a city, — that a man is stronger than a city, that his solitude is more prevalent & beneficent than the concert of crowds."<sup>55</sup> Thoreau simply replied: "As for these communities — I think I had rather keep a bachelor's hall in hell than go to board in heaven."<sup>56</sup>

For Thoreau, the implications of individual reform were clear. On January 6, 1841, he wrote a letter to Concord's First Parish declaring himself to be non-member of the Church. His journal for that year specifically approaches the question of religion: "The religion I love is very laic. The clergy are as diseased, and as much possessed with a devil as the reformers — They make their topic as offensive as the politician — for our religion is as unpublic and incommunicable as our poetical vein — and to be approached with as much love and tenderness." For Thoreau, religion was a private affair and intimately connected to his reform ideal. "True reform can be undertaken any morning before unbarring our doors. It calls no convention. I can do two thirds the reform of the world myself. . . . When an individual takes a sincere step, then all the gods attend, and his single deed is sweet."<sup>57</sup>

Thoreau's lectures, essays, and books, it is well to remember, are always personal accounts. He begins *Walden* by noting: "I should not talk so much about myself if there were any body else whom I knew as well." But he also addresses the larger significance of what he is trying to establish: "If I seem to boast more than is becoming, my excuse is that I brag for humanity rather than for myself, and my shortcomings and inconsistencies do not affect the truth of my statement."<sup>58</sup> His lectures followed from his excursions to Cape Cod, Canada, the Maine Woods, Walden Pond, and general sauntering in and about Concord. Thoreau usually presented a topic publically in lecture format before it appeared in print. While he may seem to distance himself from society by advocating individual rather than collective reform, he keeps society close at hand in his overall view.

"Economy," the first chapter of *Walden*, is a long digression on the state



of society, if not civilization, as Thoreau saw it. He finds most of his neighbors are occupied with material pursuits. This is why, in his estimation, most people live lives of “quiet desperation.” Thoreau argues the individual should pursue spiritual ends as well. He writes:

I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings.<sup>59</sup>

He is quick to announce that he knows this much through experimentation. Thoreau is able to objectify an abstract concept such as *the life worth living* through his experiment in living while at Walden Pond. *Walden* can, of course, also be read as part of the self-culture genre; its thesis reads: Simplicity! Simplicity! Simplicity!

The self-cultivation ethic stemmed from Puritanism and influenced both Unitarianism and Evangelical Protestantism. For Transcendentalism, self-culture took on an even more important role because, as Parker asserted, there is no certainty of truth if it is based on scriptural authority alone. Thoreau’s *Walden*, Emerson’s “Self-Reliance,” Alcott’s “Conversations with Children,” and Elizabeth Peabody’s aesthetic principle all deal with self-cultivation. Although progressive for the time, these works do not necessarily indicate a radical break from Unitarianism.

Channing echoes Transcendentalism in his essay on “Self-Culture.” In a Thoreauvian vein, he writes: “A man who rises above himself looks from an eminence on nature and providence, on society and life. . . . Duty, faithfully performed, opens the mind to truth, both being of one family, alike immutable, universal, and everlasting.” And in a Transcendental vein, he goes on to say: “In a word, one man sees all things apart and in fragments, whilst another strives to discover the harmony, connection, unity of all. . . . In looking at our nature, we discover, among its admirable endowments, the sense or perception of beauty.”<sup>60</sup>

The Transcendentalists believed that self-education through meditation, contemplation, reflection, and observation cultivates the higher perceptive powers of the mind and can lead to a greater consciousness of ultimate reality. Their rejection of Lockean wisdom was essential on this point. Transcendentalists argue that nature is a reflection of inherent ideas, and that the individual has some idea of truth, justice, goodness, beauty, love, or mathematics without the aid of observation. For them, we could say, the mind is not analogous to a computer’s hard drive where observations of empirical data is simply stored and processed. Rather, there is an intimate connection, unity, between subject and object, between the knower and the thing known, each emanating from a single

source and reflecting the ideal. Emerson calls it the Oversoul. Thoreau uses the expression “sympathy with intelligence.”

Sherman Paul, in *Shores of America*, wrote of the Transcendentalist belief in “intuitive apprehension”:

Not only did its synthesizing powers account for the way in which experience becomes meaningful, but being an imaginative faculty as well, it could directly seize reality. And this apprehension of reality, though mystical in the epistemological sense of making the knower one with the thing known, was not the vaporous emotional state usually ascribed to mysticism; it was a cognitive experience, the liberating power of which came from possessing Ideas — not the mere Lockean representative idea, but the Idea in the mind of God, the Idea in the Platonic sense of being the correlative of Reality itself.<sup>61</sup>

Most Transcendentalists claim to have had intuitive apprehensions or mystical experiences. Alcott has been described as the movement’s mystic.<sup>62</sup> Emerson speaks of the “transparent eyeball.” Margaret Fuller claims to have been overwhelmed by a sudden bodily infusion of light. Elizabeth Peabody walked into a tree on Boston Common while having a similar experience. Thoreau records a childhood experience in an 1851 journal entry:

There comes into my mind or soul an indescribable infinite all absorbing divine heavenly pleasure, a sense of elevation & expansion — and have had nought to do with it. I perceive that I am dealt with by superior powers. This is a pleasure, a joy, an existence which I have not procured myself — I speak as a witness on the stand and tell what I have perceived. The morning and the evening were sweet to me, and I lead a life aloof from society of men. I wondered if a mortal had ever known what I knew. I looked in books for some recognition of a kindred experience — but strange to say, I found none. Indeed I was slow to discover that other men had had this experience — for it had been possible to read books & to associate with men on other grounds.<sup>63</sup>

While these experiences do not satisfy our understanding objectively in purely scientific terms, they were unequivocally an important aspect of Transcendentalism that has received little attention from scholars. Yet, subjective vision is as much a part of human existence as is our objective perception of the phenomenal world. Consciousness is proportionate to the balance of the two elements. Experiences similar to those of the Transcendentalists have been recorded for centuries in the works of mystics from several cultures. Nietzsche and Schopenhauer were interested in them as well and referred to Emanuel Swedenborg, whose work was much admired by the Transcendentalists. Emerson included him in “Representative Men.” Kant also mentions him whom he calls “very sublime.”<sup>64</sup>

Intuitive apprehensions gave religious certainty, not of truth per se, but

of existence. The Transcendentalists were optimistic about human nature and feared little the possibility of philosophical anarchism or nihilism. They saw unity in variety. Everything was part or parcel of the higher good, the Godhead, “the Oversoul,” or “Universal Intelligence.” They were realistic, however, recognizing the possibility of human error. Thoreau wrote: “Tell me of the height of the mountains of the moon, or of the diameter of space, and I may believe you, but of the secret history of the Almighty, and I shall pronounce thee mad.”<sup>(65)</sup> For Transcendentalism, religious certainty was not only intuitively but also philosophically and historically based on the literature of the past and confirmed further through daily experience in nature and society. Emerson specifically illustrates this point in the “The American Scholar,” telling his audience to enrich themselves in nature, the literature past, and to affect the progress of society. His emphasis is on self-culture and the American destiny. He writes: “A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.”<sup>66</sup>

Where evangelicals referred to scripture, the Transcendentalists actively turned to nature wishing to break with the shackles of the past and to assert new direction. They saw God everywhere manifest in nature, the epiphany of moral perfection and truth. In his “Nature” address, Emerson proclaims nature is a symbol of ultimate reality. “I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.” The ultimate reality underlying nature is symbolically illustrated by the qualities of nature. He explains how this symbolism is manifest in all language. “*Right* means *straight*; *wrong* means *twisted*. *Spirit* primarily means *wind*; *transgression*, the crossing of a *line*; *supercilious*, the *raising of the eyebrow*.” Elsewhere, he writes: “We make fables to hide the baldness of the fact and conform it, as we say, to the higher law of the mind.” For Emerson, nature conforms to the “premonitions of Reason and reflect the conscience.”<sup>67</sup>

Thoreau sees a similar relationship between nature and language as well. His analogies are not without their ethical implications:

This termination *cious* adds force to a word like the lips of browsing creatures which greedily collect what the jaw holds- -as in the word tenacious the first half represents the jaw which holds the last the lips which collect — It can only be pronounced by a certain opening & protruding of the lips so avaricious — These words express the sense of their simple roots with the addition as it were of a certain lip greediness. hence capacious & capacity — emacity When these expressive words are used the hearer gets something to chew upon.[*sic*] To be a seller with the tenacity & firmness & of the jaws which hold & the greediness of the lips which collect. The audacious man not only dares — but he greedily collects more danger to dare. The avaricious man not only desires & satisfies his desire — but he collects ever new browse in anticipation of his ever springing desires — what is luscious is especially tasted by the lips. The mastiff mouthed are

tenacious. To be a seller with mastiff — mouthed tenacity of purpose — with moose-lipped greediness — To be edacious & voracious is to be not nibbling & swallowing merely — but eating & swallowing while the lips are greedily collecting more food.[*sic*] <sup>68</sup>

In *Walden*, Thoreau writes: “I awoke to an answered question, to Nature and daylight.”<sup>69</sup> Nature was the reality that he craved. The hound, bay horse, and turtle dove that he tracks represent the esoteric qualities in nature. Walden Pond is a place of magic, mystery, and wonder. Thoreau through his use of rich symbolism, wit, and metaphor invites his readers to see the world through the writer’s eyes. His poetic prose abounds in archetypal symbolism. Ponds represent the inner-depth of a man or a woman depending on one’s perspective. Mountains represent aspirations or the sublime; rivers, stream of consciousness or time; the seasons, rebirth and renewal; and a seedling, the wonders of creation. Pickerels, loons, moles, woodchucks, ants, minks, and muskrats all take on qualities mythic in proportion. Nature is the home of Pan, the forest god, who ranks high in Thoreau’s pantheon. A place of wild men “who instinctively follow other fashions and trust other authorities than their townsmen, and by their goings and comings stitch towns together in parts where else they would be ripped.”

Thoreau compares himself with chanticleer bragging on his roost if only to wake up his neighbors, and writes: “Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep.”<sup>70</sup> He wants his readers to be conscious of the reality manifest in nature. He asks: “May we not see God? . . . Is not nature, rightly read, that of which she is commonly taken to be the symbol merely?” At the summit of Mount Ktaadn, rising high above the secluded woods of Maine, Thoreau exclaimed: “What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries! — Think of our life in nature, — daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it, — rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! The *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common sense!* *Contact! Contact!* Who are we? *where* are we?”<sup>71</sup> Thoreau’s experience of the sublime at the summit of Mt. Ktaadn indicates with sufficient force his belief in the awesome presents of an ineffable something, God, in nature. Perfection is not ultimate; existing in moments of becoming, it is derived accordingly from consciousness.

The belief that nature is symbolic of higher spiritual laws — that it reflects the inner-consciousness of an individual and their conscience — was not confined solely to Transcendentalism. Channing expresses similar views in his work, writing: “Scriptures continually borrow from nature and social life illustrations and emblems of spiritual truth.”(72) Unitarians everywhere tended to exalt human nature over sinfulness and many stressed conscience as an ethical imperative. In so doing, however, they also cautioned against excess. Andrews Norton, Dexter Professor of Biblical Literature at Harvard, was incensed by Emerson’s “Divinity” address and with the light-handedness in which Transcendentalism generally viewed the Gospels. Channing was more favorably inclined to the Transcendentalists and their view of nature than his conservative

counterparts, but most would not have disagreed with him when he wrote: "I call that mind free which protects itself against the usurpations of society, which does not cower to human opinion, which feels itself accountable to a higher tribunal than man's, which respects a higher law than fashion, which respects itself too much to be the slave or tool of the many or the few."<sup>73</sup> Unitarian ministers such as Levi Fresbie, Henry Ware, and James Walker continually stressed the importance of conscience.<sup>74</sup>

The Transcendentalists seem to have accepted a Kantian imperative to judge the acceptability of moral action. The logic dictates that men and women should will for themselves only those principles that can be willed for all humanity. In 1843, Thoreau wrote of instances in which the "individual genius" consents "with the universal" that is found in "the scripture of all nations," and that "all expression of truth does at length take this deep ethical form."<sup>75</sup> He sees a correspondence between the inner-most feelings of an individual to the universal laws of scripture as indicating a profound empathy of the human race or, in Jungian terms, a correlation between the collective unconscious and its archetypal symbols. The Transcendentalists did not reject tradition altogether on this account. In fact, history functioned as a corrective measure of their conscience theory. Because they accepted the fixity of natural laws, that transcendental reason, "spiritual truths" and "mathematic formulas," is the same in every individual at all times, they looked to history to find the correlation between the ideas of the past and present, and their universality. This explains not only Thoreau's fascination with the scripture of several nations but with myth as well.

Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* has recently been recognized as a significant contribution to the so-called "new views" controversy that arose within the Unitarian clergy when Transcendentalism began to voice its dissatisfaction with the old theology.<sup>76</sup> Thoreau rejects historical Christianity and Church dogma but not the universality or the applicability of scripture to moral concerns. He writes:

All nations love the same jests and tales, Jews, Christians, and Mahometans, and the same translated suffice for all. All men are children, and of one family.

The hidden significance of these fables which is sometimes thought to have been detected, the ethics running parallel to the poetry and history, are not so remarkable as the readiness with which they may be made to express a variety of truths. . . . In the mythus a super human intelligence uses the unconscious thoughts and dreams of men as its hieroglyphics to address men unborn.

All the events which make the annals of the nations are but the shadows of our private experiences. Suddenly and silently the eras which we call history awake and glimmer in us, and *there* is room for Alexander and Hannibal to march and conquer.<sup>77</sup>

History functions as a standard or as a reference point for Transcendentalism. This is why Emerson wrote his “Representative Men,” and why Thoreau searched the annals of history for figures representative of his heroic ideal. Emerson referred to Plato, Shakespeare, and Napoleon while Thoreau made reference to Aristotle, Chaucer, and the heroic qualities of Cromwell and Raleigh.

The book that produced the greatest stir among Unitarians, especially those who later made the transition to Transcendentalism, was Victor Cousin’s *An Introduction to the Philosophy of History* available by 1832 in America. Cousin argues all history can be combined into a single system known as eclecticism. He gives an outline of the history of philosophy and its general effect by describing his idea of the Useful, the Just, the Beautiful, the Godhead, and the Reflection. The first relates to the physical sciences and political economy; the second to civil society and jurisprudence; the third to art; the fourth to religion; and the fifth to necessity. Humanity has debated these five ideas throughout history using philosophy. Hence, he concludes: “Philosophy is the source of all light.”<sup>78</sup>

Cousin believes history follows a pattern according to four prehistoric archetypal ideas: sensationism, idealism, skepticism, and mysticism.<sup>79</sup> Philosophy began in the East — in India, China, and Persia — as an abstract philosophy and continued to develop as its influence spread westward. His position is not Eurocentric, however. He writes: “History has no golden age.”<sup>80</sup> While he admits philosophy became more concentrated and concrete as it underwent further development in the West, the earlier mythos of the East was retained. He finds truth, equally, in all philosophy at all times. “Philosophy in the East,” he writes, “was, generally speaking, the reflected light of religion.”<sup>81</sup>

Emerson and Thoreau were both particularly moved by the story of Krishna’s council to Arjuna, the reluctant warrior of the Bhagavad-Gita. Cousin recounts the episode as one of sublime mystery. The warrior is told that he must “fight the battle,” otherwise he would fall into disgrace as a coward. Krishna explains to Arjuna that “nothing exists but the eternal principle; being, in itself. . . . We are compelled to do, but as if we did it not, and without concerning ourselves about the result, interiorly motionless, with our eyes fixed unceasingly upon the absolute principle which alone exists with a true existence.”<sup>82</sup>

Cousin supports the idea of individual consciousness — that individuals are conscious of their powers of reason — and believes reason is independent of the individual and exists of its own accord. He does not make a distinction between the faculties of Reason and Understanding, as Coleridge does, but writes, “reason does not modify itself to suit our pleasure; we do not think as we wish to think; our understanding is not free.”<sup>83</sup> Instead, he makes a distinction between, what he terms, the *me* and the *not me*. Kant in Cousin’s opinion led to skepticism; he so proposed a solution by distinguishing between spontaneous and reflective reason. “Reason,” he writes, “is not subjective; what I call a subject, is *me*; it is person, liberty, will. Reason has not any characteristic mark of individual personality, and of liberty. . . . Whoever said *my* truth *your* truth?”<sup>84</sup> For Cousin, reason differs little from what is commonly termed the truth, which is

fixed or absolute. Our capacity for understanding truth is, however, limited and subjective.

Cousin's book influence the earliest works of Transcendentalism, including Emerson's "Nature," Theodore Parker's "A Discourse of the Transient and Permanent in Christianity," and Orestes Brownson's *New Views of Christianity, Society, and the Church*. Perry Miller called Brownson the "self-appointed apostle" of Cousin in America. When Thoreau took leave for a semester to teach in Canton, he stayed with Brownson.

Harvard records show Thoreau borrowed Cousin's *Introduction to the History of Philosophy* from the library of the Institute of 1770 in June 1837 and renewed it again in July.<sup>85</sup> In a June college essay entitled "Barbarities of Civilized States," Thoreau uses the phrase *not me* in reference to nature.<sup>86</sup> He seems to have used the distinction between the *me* and the *not me* as a distinction between consciousness and conscience as well. In a sublime passage from *Walden*, he wrote: "However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of *me*, which, as it were, is *not* a part of *me*, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it; and that is no more I than it is you."<sup>87</sup> In his "Nature Address," Emerson uses the *not me* phrase to denote nature, art, the body, and all persons other than the self.

It is not scriptural authority that establishes truth, per se, but rather the universal forms that are suggested by scripture. Cousin writes: "Faith cannot but be the consent of reason to that which reason comprehends as true. This is the foundation of all faith. Take away the possibility of knowing, and there remains nothing to believe; for the very root of faith is removed."<sup>88</sup> In *Walden*, Thoreau writes: "There is a certain class of unbelievers who sometimes ask me such questions as, if I think that I can live on vegetable food alone; and to strike at the root of the matter at once — for the root is faith — I am accustomed to answer such, that I can live on board nails. If they cannot understand that, they cannot understand much that I have to say."<sup>89</sup> Whether it is a belief in religious dogma or a belief in the absolute precepts of reason, in each case, the keystone is faith, which is needed in order of consent.

Thoreau and Emerson were not eclectic philosophers in the strictest sense. Unlike Cousin, they never wanted to systematize philosophy. They were enthusiastic about his approach to history and with its emphasis on recurring archetypal symbols. Cousin essentially reaffirmed Kantian idealism within an eclectic system that had some of the same tendencies and inclinations as those inherent to Transcendentalism. Emerson had already been engaged in his own exhaustive study of philosophy having read Locke, Hume, Stewart, and Coleridge as well as Plato and the Stoics before he came to Cousin.<sup>90</sup> The importance of French Eclecticism to Transcendentalism was in its affirmation of consciousness and conscience through archetypal symbols found in scripture, myth, and philosophy that recur at all times and in all nations.

Transcendentalism began as a reform movement within the Unitarian

Church. The Transcendentalists wanted to revive religious sentiment outside the traditional conventions and dogma of the Church. When Emerson asserted that the individual partakes in the divinity of God, he was not advocating the perfectionism of Finney or Noyes. Instead, Emerson believes every individual has a so-called “spark of divinity,” but that this is realized by an acceptance of the inner-self or “Oversoul,” as he terms it, and not by an acceptance, per se, of the Holy Spirit or Christ. Emerson’s belief, in this respect, is more akin to Buddhism or Hinduism, which also stresses a belief in the divine perfection of the soul. Using the language of Cousin, Emerson refers to the soul as the *me* and the body as the *not me*. Evangelicals, and particularly Noyes, emphasized the material and utilitarian qualities of perfectionism far more than did Emerson or Thoreau.

Orestes Brownson was probably the greatest advocate of perfectionism among the Transcendentalists. He does not speak in terms of overthrowing the “nation” as Noyes does, but rather of reexamining certain principles. He writes:

Spiritualism and Materialism presupposes a necessary and original antithesis between Spirit and Matter . . . This antithesis generates perpetual and universal war. It is necessary then to remove it and harmonize, or unite the two terms. Now, if we conceive Jesus as standing between Spirit and Matter, the representative of both — God-Man — where both meet and lose their antithesis, laying a hand on each and saying, ‘Be one, as I and my father are one,’ thus sanctifying both and marrying them in a mystic and holy union, we shall have his secret thought and the true Idea of Christianity.<sup>91</sup>

By giving Spirit and Matter equal attention, Brownson believed an individual could balance the competing elements and realize their true nature, which consists equally of the two principles. Brownson, in fact, recognizes the proportional importance of the subject and the object. In order to facilitate their balance, he bespeaks his rather unorthodox plan of revising the Protestant work ethic and reversing the Biblical equation of a week. Instead of one day, an individual should devote six days to reverencing God and one day to work. Impractical or extravagant, perhaps, but Thoreau said as much in his commencement address, writing:

Let men, true to their natures, cultivate the moral affections, lead manly and independent lives; let them make riches the means and not the end of existence, and we shall hear no more of the commercial spirit. The sea will not stagnate, the earth will be green as ever, and the air as pure. This curious world which we inhabit is more wonderful than it is convenient, more beautiful than it is useful — it is more to be admired and enjoyed than used. The order of things should be somewhat reversed, — the seventh should be man’s day of toil, wherein to earn his living by the sweat of his brow, and the other six his sabbath of the affections and the soul, in which to range this wide-spread garden, and drink in the soft influences and



sublime revelations of Nature.<sup>92</sup>

Notice, too, his subversion; Thoreau uses lowercase *sabbath* and uppercase *Nature*. The tone and emphasis that Brownson and Thoreau use are quite different from the sentiment conveyed by Garrison and Noyes, and yet they give as good a picture as any as to how the Transcendentalists believed society could be improved through self-culture.

To suppose that Thoreau relished in languor would be to misjudge the man. He, in his 44 years, left behind a 2.5 million-word journal, 3,000 pages of notes on the American Indian, a 354-page manuscript on *The Dispersion of Seeds*, a 631-page manuscript on *Wild Fruits*, more than 700 pages of notes and charts on the natural history of Concord, and the *Cape Cod, Maine Woods*, and *A Yankee in Canada* manuscripts, and several essays, published or otherwise, on literature, history, nature, and reform, et al., as well as *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* and *Walden*. These, his “sabbath” works, are testimony to his fecundity. As for earning his living by the “sweat of his brow,” Thoreau was a land-surveyor, lecturer, freelance journalist, and a manufacturer of pencils, which rivaled the best European imports.

Because of their emphasis on the individual, the Transcendentalists wanted some assurance, philosophically, that an individual was capable of free moral judgment. They referred not to the Enlightenment notion of reason based on intellection but to an intuitionism based on Kantian idealism and explained in Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection*. Coleridge was not the only source for Transcendentalism, but his view illustrates well the kind of reasoning process in which they themselves engaged. Some intellectual process was necessary if they were to break with scriptural authority. The break was not necessarily complete, however, as the Transcendentalists often referred to the Bible as well as the scripture of several nations for universal notions of the Moral Law. They, no doubt, placed great emphasis on the affections, but without subscribing to the same kind of emotionalism and religious fervor that marked the Second Great Awakening. Nor was Transcendentalism predicated on a strict belief in nonviolence as was Abolitionism under the tutelage of Garrison, but on transcendent idealism, which found perhaps its greatest expression in Thoreau’s rich transcendental metaphor.

#### IV. Early Thoreauvian Themes

Wendell Glick writes of the consequence of Thoreau’s defense of Brown: “It meant that he was admitting that he had been wrong in his life-long estimate of both man and the sort of universe in which he lived, and that, in the final analysis ‘expedients,’ and not ‘principles,’ were the determining agents in the governance of human affairs.”<sup>93</sup> Glick deduces his conclusion from the premise that Thoreau was content to allow “natural forces,” which are inherently omnipotent, good, and universal, to decide the fate of slavery. Thoreau never recognized Brown’s

raid as one of expediency but one of principle. He favored Brown's "cause." Nor did he ever really advocate delay. As early as 1843, he wrote: "The true reformer does not want time, nor money, nor cooperation, nor advice. What is time but the stuff delay is made of?"<sup>94</sup> Thoreau immediately championed the historical, heroic, and natural import of the Harper's Ferry raid as the embodiment of liberty and justice, a view that was eventually almost universally recognized among Transcendentalists and Abolitionists alike, including Garrison.

Thoreau did not remain aloof from the practical cares of society. For example, while at Harvard, he participated in the school's oldest debating society, the Institute of 1770. He was elected a member, July 3, 1834, and participated in the debates over the next three years of his college career with a good attendance record.<sup>95</sup> His involvement with the Institute connected him with the majority of his classmates and illustrates his early commitment to debating contemporaneous issues.

He had a reputation among his fellow students as the man from Concord. In his "Class Book Autobiography," Thoreau wrote: "To whatever quarter of the world I may wander, I shall deem it my good fortune that I hail from Concord North Bridge."<sup>96</sup> He was proud of the involvement of his town in the War for Independence. Reportedly, Charles Theodore Russell once burst into Thoreau's dorm to harass him and a newly arrived Concord freshman because of their town pride. The incident was all in good fun; Russell was closely acquainted with Thoreau. Both were interested in the revolutionary history of their towns and often debated the subject at the club.<sup>97</sup> North Bridge, as Emerson later wrote, and Thoreau quotes him in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, was the site of "the shot heard round the world." Thoreau recorded his feelings after passing beneath the bridge on his river journey.

Ah, 't is in vain the peaceful din That wakes the ignoble town, Not thus did braver spirits win A patriot's renown.<sup>98</sup>

Thoreau's patriotism, his "Concord pride," is often underestimated by those wishing to label him as a pacifist. His essay "Walking" praises westward expansion and American manifest destiny. He writes: "To Americans I hardly need to say, —

"Westward the star of empire takes its way."

As a true patriot, I should be ashamed to think that Adam in paradise was more favorably situated on the whole than the backwoodsman in this country."<sup>99</sup>

His role as a reformer is also sometimes underestimated. Shortly after graduation, Thoreau was elected five times to office in the Concord Lyceum and from 1838 to 1839 served as Lyceum Secretary.<sup>100</sup> He remained an active member of the lecture circuit for the next twenty-three years of his life, which proved to be the cynosure of his lifetime activity in all areas of reform. Like Emerson, Thoreau in his own right was a prodigious lecturer.

Glick suggests that as a young adult Thoreau would not have supported

John Brown's raid because, in 1840, he made "such assertions" with the "blandest confidence" as " 'the strongest is always the least violent.' "101 Thoreau, no doubt, was essentially nonviolent. But he says the strongest is "least violent," not nonviolent. This is clear when we consider another quotation from his 1840 journal: "Let not ours be such nonresistance as the chaff that rides before the gale."<sup>102</sup> Moreover, most scholars recognize that he had an early fascination with war and soldiers rather than an aversion for them, and it was only later that he toned down his language or advocated passive resistance. Linck Johnson, in "Contexts of Bravery: Thoreau's Revisions of 'The Service' for a Week," for example, remarks that "the idealized soldier of Thoreau's youthful dreams of glory had thus been superseded by a grotesque, nightmarish figure conjured up by the injustices of the Mexican War."<sup>103</sup>

The Peace Convention initiatives that Garrison and Ballou spoke of were well known to Concordians. In 1841, the Concord Lyceum records show that non-resistance was a hot topic. On the 13<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of January, the Lyceum held two successive debates on "Is It Ever Proper to Offer Forcible Resistance."<sup>104</sup> The 13<sup>th</sup> shows Frost and Hoar argued the affirmative and Alcott the negative. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, John and Henry Thoreau argued the affirmative and, again, Alcott the negative. Following the debates a month later, Adin Ballou lectured on "Non-Resistance."

Thoreau's early writings show he did not reject violence out of principle. One of his earliest biographers, Frank Sanborn, who knew him personally, believed the "Service" was written, in part, as a response to the tactics of the peace movement. While scholars have sometimes questioned the accuracy of some of Sanborn's claims, the evidence, here, supports the validity of his particular assertion. Thoreau concluded the essay: "Of such sort, then, be our crusade, which, while it inclines chiefly to the hearty good will and activity of war, rather than the insincerity and sloth of peace . . . earnestly applying ourselves to the campaign before us."<sup>105</sup> Again, in his 1840 journal, Thoreau wrote: "I have a deep sympathy with war, it so apes the gait and bearing of the soul."<sup>106</sup>

Thoreau's epistemology differed from that of Garrison and Ballou. He believes religious certainty can be attained without a strict adherence to the Gospels. The Transcendentalists go to great pains to show that moral certainty is necessary because individuals have free will. The moral faculties are cultivated through self-reliance, self-education, and intuitive apprehensions of reality. Conscience is reliable. Individuals can increase the effectiveness of intuitionism by observing the correspondence between nature, society, and the past. These assumptions were based largely on Kantian Idealism and Coleridge's distinction between the Reason and the Understanding. Thoreau believes through faith, conjecture, and empirical evidence that the idealism of Transcendentalism is not only representative of the ideal, the real world as he believes, but the apparent or actual world as well. His political essays are directed toward practical ends and are patterned on these same Transcendental ideals, which are consistent throughout his political essays.

In a college essay written in 1835 entitled “The Comparative Moral Policy of Severe and Mild Punishments,” Thoreau writes: “The end of all punishment is the welfare of the state, — the good of community at large, — not the suffering of an individual.” By taking the *end of all punishment* as his ideal, Thoreau wants to understand the means to realize the ideal. He reasons the good of the individual is the good of society. In actual practice, lawgivers often lose site of the ideal, considering what is merely expedient. “It matters not to the lawgiver what a man deserves. . . .” In principle, the means should be just. There is a “higher tribunal” than the civic judge.<sup>107</sup> He does not discount the possibility of there being “some advantage” to severe punishment, however. He writes: “It would seem then, that the welfare of society calls for a certain degree of severity; but this degree must bear some proportion to the offence. If this distinction be lost sight of punishment becomes unjust as well as useless — we are not to act upon the principle, that crime is to be prevented at any rate, cost what it may; this is obviously erroneous.”<sup>108</sup> To Thoreau, accordingly, severe punishments do not always discourage crime and in their severity may be unjust. The *end of all punishment*, then, can never be attained through injustice.

Justice is best served through peaceful means as violence begets violence, and establishing the welfare of the individual or the state through its continuance is impossible. As long as injustice persists it must be resisted. In “Resistance to Civil Government,” Thoreau writes of certain instances in which “an individual, must do justice, cost what it may.” In college, he believed it was “erroneous” to assume that crime should be prevented “cost what it may” because in so doing an injustice may result. He is concerned with the preservation of justice above all in both cases, and elsewhere argues: “We do all stand in the front ranks of the battle every moment of our lives; where there is a brave man, there is the thickest of the fight, there the post of honor.”<sup>109</sup> To do justice is to battle with injustice, armed or otherwise, and in either case the hero willingly submits to its cause.

By examining the past, Thoreau found examples of virtuous action. His 1843 essay on “Sir Walter Raleigh” can serve as an example. Thoreau writes of Raleigh: “He was a proper knight, a born cavalier, and in the intervals of war betook himself still to the most vigorous arts of peace, though as if diverted from his proper aim.”<sup>110</sup> Knighthood is a recurring theme in Thoreau’s political essays, and still more, rather a peculiar theme for a supposed pacifist. Thoreau writes: “Men claim for the ideal an actual existence also — but do not often expand the actual to the ideal.”<sup>111</sup> Instead, they follow what is expedient. The hero expands the actual to the ideal; he lives for its principle. Although the ideal may never materialize in actuality, society may never be free from all punishments; the hero nevertheless recognizes the reality and the inherent goodness of the ideal and strives toward its fulfilment through intermediate goals resisting injustice.

Nature and history illustrate the heroic principle. In an 1851 journal entry Thoreau writes:

The story of Romulus & Remus being suckled by a wolf is not a

mere fable; the founders of every state which has risen to eminence have drawn their nourishment and vigor from a similar source. It is because the children of the empire were not suckled by wolves that they were conquered & displaced by the children of the northern forests who were.

America is the she wolf today and the children of exhausted Europe exposed on her uninhabited & savage shores are the Romulus & Remus who having derived new life & vigor from her breast have founded a new Rome in the West.

It is remarkable how few passages comparatively speaking there are in the best literature of the day which betray any intimacy with nature.<sup>112</sup>

Thoreau reworks the fable illustrating a *spiritual truth*. The hero above all must show courage. His vigor is derived from nature. Not that geography is a determinate factor in the growth and progress of a civilization, but individuals feasting at the wellspring of life, so to speak, derive sustenance for new life, a beginning. Movement and activity continually overturn static and sedentary habits. The primitive facilitates the lofty; the hero is their relationship. He writes: "Bravery and Cowardice are kindred correlatives with Knowledge and Ignorance Light and Darkness — Good and Evil."<sup>113</sup>

In Thoreau's estimation, truth is absolute insofar as it derives its meaning from the principle of change. Truth for him is a verb and consists of relationships. As he wanted to find a balanced approach to severe and mild punishments, so also he wanted a balanced life overall. His diet was almost exclusively vegetarian, but he sometimes ate flesh. He almost never drank alcohol, tea, or coffee, but he had been known, on occasion, to have drunk fermented cider. He says he is "naturally no hermit, but might possibly sit out the sturdiest frequenter of the bar-room," if his business called him thither. As a naturalist he never shot his specimens, yet as a boy he owned a fowling piece and enjoyed sport, although he says if he were to live in the wilderness he "should again be tempted to become a fisher and hunter in earnest." He compares the individual in youth to a voracious caterpillar and in adulthood to the transformed butterfly, whose diet is significantly less ravenous. While his habits were chaste and temperate, he found in himself "an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one." And, he wrote: "I reverence them both."<sup>114</sup>

Thoreau's habits are consistent with Western ascetic practice and the literature of the past. Socrates was temperate, yet, he too, reportedly, could "sit out" the sturdiest Athenian. Thoreau is not ascetically austere. He is sympathetic about human foibles and chooses for himself the path of moderation. Virtue must coexist and harmonize with and consist of the higher and lower laws of his nature. Equanimity cannot be sacrificed for one virtue over another without detriment to both. The *savage* quality that produced Sparta, Rome, and

America was active and vigorous. As Plato's *Republic* recommends gymnastics to cultivate vigor and music, the sensibilities, so too, Thoreau seeks to cultivate his lower and higher natures. He believes that "the brave warrior must have harmony if not melody at any sacrifice," and writes: "Ever since Jerico fell down before a blast of ram's horns, the martial and musical have gone hand in hand. — If the soldier marches to the sack of a town he must be preceded by drum and trumpet, which shall identify his cause with the accordant universe."<sup>115</sup>

Reform movements were well established in America by 1837, the year Thoreau graduated from college. Garrison's Abolition movement had gained national recognition along with Mann's educational reforms and Beecher's temperance movement. Robert Owen had founded New Harmony in Indiana in 1825 based on the socialistic teachings of Charles Fourier. The decade of the 1840's witnessed the growth of similar collective organizations. George Ripley organized his voluntary association, Brook Farm, in 1841 desiring an intellectual retreat that combined work and study; Adin Ballou organized his Hopedale community in 1842; while Bronson Alcott and Charles Lane moved their two families to Harvard, Massachusetts, in 1843 founding Fruitlands.

Thoreau began lecturing at the Concord Lyceum almost immediately. His essays soon appeared in periodicals and newspapers in Boston and New York. The earliest of his essays appeared more frequently in the *Dial*, a Transcendental periodical edited by Margaret Fuller, than any other. Fuller was, perhaps, the most prodigious intellect among the Transcendentalists. Her unmatched erudition of Goethe gained both the respect and admiration of Emerson and Thoreau. She and Thoreau had somewhat of a rocky relationship, however. Unabashed, she often criticized his work, especially his poetry, but never his literary merit. When reportedly asked if they were to be married, Thoreau replied: "No, in the first place Margaret Fuller is not fool enough to marry me; and second, I am not fool enough to marry her." Walter Harding who reports the rumored incident suggests that Emerson was "nearer the truth when he jokingly called Thoreau 'Margaret's enemy' and tried to assure her that Thoreau's 'perennial threatening attitude' was his 'natural relation' and not something he assumed in her presence alone."<sup>116</sup>

Emerson later wrote of Thoreau: "There was somewhat military in his nature not to be subdued, always manly and able, but rarely tender, as if he did not feel himself in except in opposition."<sup>117</sup> Such comments, while they do suggest an important side of Thoreau's character, should not be taken too literally. As Harding suggests, Emerson played up to this side of Thoreau, often "jokingly." Upon Thoreau's death, Emerson wrote: "The country knows not yet, or in the least part, how great a son it has lost."<sup>118</sup> Thoreau's friends remembered him fondly, believing his kind regard for his neighbors as well as for humanity superseded his brashness. Edward Waldo Emerson, son of Ralph Emerson, wrote:

I can remember Mr. Thoreau as early as I can remember anybody excepting my parents, my sisters, and my nurse. He had the run of

our house, and on two occasions was man of the house during my father's long absences. He was to us children the best kind of an older brother. He soon became the guide and companion of our early expeditions afield, and later, the advisor of our first camping trips. I watched with him one of the last days of his life, when I was about seventeen years old.

In writing his biography of Thoreau, Edward wished to show "that Thoreau, though brusque on occasions, was refined, courteous, kind and humane; that he had a religion and lived up to it."<sup>119</sup> He was responding to critics who had charged Thoreau with being a hermit, uninterested in society, a curmudgeon, or a fanatical crank. While sentimental, the work does offer a first-hand account of another side of Thoreau that deserves equal consideration.

In 1843, Thoreau published a review of J. A. Etzler's book, *The Paradise Within the Reach of All Men, Without Labour, by Powers of Nature and Machinery: An Address to All Intelligent Men*. The piece appeared in the *Democratic Review*. Etzler wrote:

Fellow men! I promise to show the means of creating a paradise within ten years, where everything desirable for human life may be had by every man in superabundance, without labor, and without pay; where the whole face of nature shall be changed into the most beautiful forms, and man may live in the most magnificent palaces, in all imaginable refinements of luxury, and in the most delightful gardens. . . . Mankind may thus live in and enjoy a new world, far superior to the present, and raise themselves far higher in the scale of being.<sup>120</sup>

Etzler explained that humanity could achieve all this using natural resources. He wanted to revolutionize agriculture, harness the power of wind, falling water, tides, and waves. He believed solar energy could be harnessed to produce steam using mirrors. The architecture in the new society would consist of buildings 200 feet high, or twenty stories.

Thoreau deduces certain benefits inherent in Etzler's plan. For example, the idea that mechanical systems could eliminate much of the need for animal power pleases him. He also accepts the notion of continued material progress and its inevitability. "Or, perchance, coming generations will not abide the dissolution of the globe, but, availing themselves of future inventions in aerial locomotion, and the navigation of space, the entire race may migrate from earth, to settle some vacant and more western planet. . . . Do we not see in the firmament the lights carried along the shore by night, as Columbus did? Let us not despair or mutiny."<sup>121</sup>

Thoreau did not fault Etzler's book or its vision but that it aimed to "secure the greatest degree of gross comfort merely." He writes:

Love is the wind, the tide, the waves, the sunshine. Its power is

incalculable; it is many horsepower. It never ceases, it never slacks; it can move the globe without a resting place; it can warm without fire; it can feed without meat; it can clothe without garments; it can shelter without roof; it can make a paradise within which will dispense with a paradise without. But though the wisest men in all ages have labored to publish this force, and every human heart is, sooner or later, more or less, made to feel it, yet how little is actually applied to social ends.<sup>122</sup>

Love was as important a principle for Thoreau as were justice and temperance. He did not disavow material progress, only so long as it did not conflict with virtue, or spiritual progress. These virtues are inherent to the individual and must, therefore, be cultivated individually. "Alas!" he says, "this is the crying sin of the age, this want of faith in the prevalence of a man. Nothing can be effected but by one man. He who wants help wants everything. True, this is the condition of our weakness, but it can never be the means of our recovery. We must first succeed alone, that we may enjoy our success together."<sup>123</sup>

Thoreau emphasizes the need for conscientious awareness to his audiences. He does not limit his praise of heroes to ages gone by but seeks out the virtuous in the present. Garrison believed it was necessary to organize to defeat slavery. Thoreau was not so sure. He believed the individual voice, one crying out alone in the wilderness, was enough to usher in a new age, the defeat of chattel slavery. Such a one as this caught his attention. Nathaniel P. Rogers distrusted urbanity, sophistication, politics, clergymen, and organization. He left a lucrative law practice for the cause of emancipation and became the editor of a New Hampshire weekly, *Herald of Freedom*. Within Garrison's anti-slavery organization, he became the chief prophet of Come-Outerism, a movement that stressed the abandonment, or "coming out," of corrupt churches, an idea as old as the Reformation itself. Rogers detested the semantics of moral suasion: "Tell the truth. Let everybody tell it — & in their own way. And if they transcend propriety — *tell them so* & if they won't conform, let them go unconformed. That's my sort of moral suasion. Any thing short of it is *war*."<sup>124</sup>

In 1843 and 1844, Rogers was at odds with Garrison and came to favor disorganization. He had discovered defalcations within the treasuries and the budgets of the organization and suggested that anti-slavery lecturers should from then on support themselves as Buddhist mendicants with beggingbowls.<sup>125</sup> Thoreau defends Roger's plea for disorganization against political expediency in an article published in the *Dial* in April of 1844. He calls Rogers "wide awake" and praises him for raising the anti-slavery "war-whoop" in New Hampshire. He writes: "We do not know of another notable and public instance of such pure, youthful, and hearty indignation at all wrong. The Church itself must love it, if it have any heart, though he is said to have dealt rudely with its sanctity." Also, Rogers occupies an "honorable and manly position. . ." and "unlike most reformers, his feet are still where they should be, on the turf . . . he looks out from a serener natural life into the turbid arena of politics."<sup>126</sup>



Shortly after defending Rogers against attacks from Garrison, Thoreau came to the aid of Emerson in a long running free-speech debate that had gripped the town of Concord. Emerson planned to deliver an anniversary address on “Emancipation in the British West Indies.” The local clergy had refused to hold any meetings concerning slavery. Thoreau rang the courthouse bell to announce Emerson’s intentions to speak. Emerson told his townspeople: “I doubt not that sometimes, a despairing negro, when jumping over the ship’s sides to escape from the white devils who surrounded him, has believed there was no vindication of right; it is horrible to think of, but it seemed so.”<sup>127</sup> Emerson used the occasion to argue that in America, too, the end of institutionalized slavery must come to pass. Its citizenry may have been indifferent to slavery, but “those moments are past.” He feels America must follow Britain’s lead against slavery.

Because Thoreau was elected five times to the governing board of the Concord Lyceum, he was much involved with the question of free speech. When they invited Wendell Phillips to the Lyceum to address the audience in Concord, conservatives fought back. Thoreau defended his right to speak. In a letter to Garrison’s anti-slavery standard, the *Liberator*, Thoreau reported Phillips’ speech.

Glick, however, believes Thoreau’s championing of Phillips as well as Rogers is an indication of his further involvement with radical Abolitionism. It is true that by 1844-1845 Thoreau had become steadily involved with issues concerning emancipation. Since graduation, he had been weighing the arguments of the New England Non-resistance Society and those of Abolitionism in general. His immediate involvement with the Lyceum made this inevitable. Thoreau praised Rogers for his individualism, his bravery, and his conscientiousness, but not for his association with Abolitionism. In fact, it was Roger’s stance against organization that so moved him.

The same themes that characterize Thoreau’s earliest essays are extant in his 1845 report, “Wendell Phillips Before Concord Lyceum.” Thoreau continually questioned the integrity of institutions, particularly the Church and State, and as the slavery controversy escalated and the threat of war with Mexico materialized into a fact, his denunciations of these outstripped his earlier complaisant temperament. He continually found himself moored at the murky shores of conflict as the tide of anti-slavery sentiment rose and the clouds of war grew ominous, his eyes ever intent on the beacon of light. He praises Phillips for his virtue: his consistency, frankness, conscientiousness, and “soldierlike steadiness,” which give him “natural oratory” so that his “audience might detect a sort of moral principle and integrity. . . .” As virtue belongs to the individual, Thoreau reasons the precedence of the individual over the transitoriness of institutions. “It was the speaker’s aim to show what the State, and above all the church, had to do, and now, alas! Have done, with Texas and slavery, and how much, on the other hand, the individual should have to do with church and state.”<sup>128</sup> Thoreau lauds Phillips’ plucky integrity and expresses his wish that Phillips should be heard against the backdrop of timorous public opinion, which “cannot drive him.”

Thoreau writes: “He stands so distinctly, so firmly, and so effectively alone, and one honest man is so much more than a host. . . .”<sup>129</sup>

As the slavery controversy escalated, Thoreau found examples of heroism in his own time, a heroism that he felt was essential to the soundness of human affairs. Thoreau praised Rogers, Emerson, and now Phillips for their individual bravery fronting adversity. Concluding his report to the *Liberator*, Thoreau wrote of Phillips:

If you know of any champion in the ranks of his opponents who has the valor and courtesy even of paynim chivalry, if not the Christian graces and refinement of this knight, you will do us a service by directing him to these fields forthwith, where the lists are now open, and he shall be hospitably entertained. For as yet the Red-cross knight has shown us only the gallant device upon his shield, and his admirable command of his steed, prancing and curvetting in the empty lists; but we wait to see who, in the actual breaking of lances, will come tumbling upon the plain.<sup>130</sup>

Metaphorical as this passage is, Thoreau praises Phillips for his “paynim” courage, his heathenism or what Emerson might call “unhandselled savage nature.” By the “actual breaking of lances,” Thoreau does not mean to suggest an advocacy of passive resistance; no, this imagery is of medieval crusaders. It is also Homeric, somewhat suggestive of the Scamander Plain. Thoreau wrote in *Walden*: “No wonder that Alexander carried the Iliad with him on his expeditions in a precious casket.”<sup>131</sup> While these passages may not be read as an outright sanction of violent resistance, Thoreau’s violent imagery is undeniable.

After his defense of Rogers, Thoreau made what has been deemed his retreat from society. Thoreau took up occupancy at Walden Pond during the presidency of Polk, July 4, 1845. He later admitted that “it is difficult to begin without borrowing.”<sup>132</sup> As such, he had borrowed Alcott’s axe, Emerson’s wood lot, and the help of his neighbors for his house raising. Their assistance and their interest in his enterprise were essential. After the initial community involvement, Thoreau had to console himself with the bravery of minks and muskrats if his so-called community of one was to survive.

While at Walden, Thoreau lived a little more than a mile from his nearest neighbor. His retreat was not total nor entirely solitary. He still made frequent trips to town to visit friends and relatives, and much to the fancy of some critics, occasionally ate a cookie or two at his mother’s house. Walden served as his residency, a place of self-study, and above all as a writer’s retreat. He continued to publish essays and kept in touch with literary contacts such as Horace Greeley in New York. He also continued frequent excursions into the countryside and embarked on his first excursion to the Maine woods. Life at Walden was not without its incidences. Thoreau occasionally harbored fugitive slaves, and once held a meeting for the Concord Women’s Anti-slavery Society as he indirectly mentions in *Walden* having once housed twenty-five to thirty

people under his roof. On going to the woods, he conceded that “we all belong to the community.”<sup>133</sup> And yet, he would not have anyone adopt his “mode of living.” Moreover, three significant things happened while Thoreau was at Walden Pond. He began work on *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*; he wrote the preliminary passages of *Walden*; and he was arrested for non-payment of his poll tax and spent a night in the Concord jail.

*A Week* contains the rudiments of Thoreau’s social philosophy. It is a hard nut to crack; yet its tough outer flesh yields a rich transcendental inner core ripe with universal meaning. Link Johnson called it Thoreau’s “complex weave.” As with *Walden*, its meaning flowers forth ever anew with increasing force on each successive reading. Thoreau makes clear at the outset of the description of his river journey that Concord is “a port of entry and departure for the bodies as well as the souls of men; one shore at least exempted from all duties but such as an honest man will gladly discharge.”<sup>134</sup> He compares the Concord river to the Nile and Euphrates and remarks of their kindred age.

On one level, *A Week* is a memorial to Thoreau’s friendship with his brother John, who died of tuberculosis in 1842 shortly after the river journey. It is a story of life and death as well, or it is correlatively associated with the history of New England and the history of the world, its longings, musings, and remembrances. “The characteristics and pursuits of various ages and races of men are always existing in epitome in every neighborhood.”<sup>135</sup> Digressions within the story are no longer seen as digressions when the reader willingly leaves the ebb and flow of the river journey, recognizing the ideal realm as well, for the stream of consciousness.

*A Week* aims at what is universal in history: language, myth, virtue, beauty, goodness, poetry, art, music, and the integrity of the individual. As a contribution to the reaction of Transcendentalism to Unitarianism and organized religion overall, Thoreau argues that, because these things are universal to the human soul, it is through the individual that they are to be expressed. “What was the excitement of the Delphic priests,” he asks, “compared with the calm wisdom of Socrates?”<sup>136</sup>

In the Sunday chapter, Thoreau questions the integrity of the Church. He quotes various passages from the New Testament. “Seek first the kingdom of heaven.” “Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth.” “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.” “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Or, “What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” He goes on to remonstrate:

Think of repeating these things to a New England audience! thirdly, fourthly, fifteenthly, till there are three barrels of sermons! Who, without cant, can read them aloud? Who, without cant, can hear them, and not go out of the meeting-house? They never *were* read, they never *were* heard. Let but one of these sentences be rightly read

from any pulpit in the land, and there would not be left one stone of that meeting-house upon another.<sup>137</sup>

His pronounced criticism of hypocrisy was provocative. James Russell Lowell rebuked Thoreau in the *Massachusetts Quarterly Review*: “We were bid to a river-party, not to be preached at.”<sup>138</sup> Yet unlike some of his contemporaries, Thoreau, while although believing in the moral regenerative powers of language, produced no systematic moral philosophy as did the Academic Orthodoxy.<sup>139</sup> Where Garrison and Ballou referred to the Golden Rule as their guiding light, Thoreau wrote: “An honest man would have but little occasion for it. It is golden not to have any rule at all in such a case.”<sup>140</sup> His work does not digress into solipsism, however, nor is it overtly pantheistic. He looks rather for correspondences between what he finds in himself and what he observes in nature and tries to see if these do not somehow relate to what is universal in history as well as to the present condition of his society.

Virtue is not to be found in dead institutions of the past nor in the institutions of the present but, instead, within the individual. If institutions, only, and not individuals, represent virtue, then, as Thoreau believes, virtue is dead: “Even virtue is no longer virtue if it be stagnant. A man’s life should be constantly as fresh as this river. It should be the same channel, but new water every instant.”<sup>141</sup>

In the Monday chapter, rather than advocating egotism, Thoreau says “humility is still a very human virtue.” He then gives a succinct definition on the role of conscience in deciding moral questions:

I must conclude that Conscience, if that be the name of it, was not given us for no purpose, or for a hindrance. However flattering order and experience may look, it is but the repose of a lethargy, and we will choose rather to be awake, though it be stormy, and maintain ourselves on this earth and in this life, as we may, without signing our death-warrant. Let us see if we cannot stay here where He has put us, on his own conditions. Does not his law reach as far as his light? The expedients of nations clash with one another only the absolutely right is expedient for all.<sup>142</sup>

He elsewhere adds, rather abstractly: “The conscience really does not, and ought not to, monopolize the whole of our lives, any more than the heart or the head.”<sup>143</sup> Again, Thoreau never resolves anything into a single principle. It is always his intention to look at relationships. He strives to balance competing principles, to harmonize them, and to have the ideal reflect the actual, looking for a more real, less artificial sense of reality.

He is a little less critical of Christianity in this chapter, comparing its advantages and disadvantages to those of Hinduism. Those who would like to label Thoreau as a radical will find some interesting views of his on what he himself labeled as conservative and liberal virtues. He calls Christ the “prince of Reformers and Radicals,” and writes: “Christianity . . . is humane,

practical, and, in a large sense, radical.” He cherishes both the scriptures of Christianity and those of Hinduism. “The New Testament is remarkable for its pure morality; the best of the Hindoo Scripture, for its pure intellectuality.” He praises Christianity for its practical teachings and its willingness to confront evil. In so doing, Thoreau then goes on clearly to illustrate, specifically, that in 1849 he did not reject the idea of forcible resistance. He writes of Hinduism:

It is not always sound sense in practice. The Brahman never proposes courageously to assault evil, but patiently to starve it out. His active faculties are paralyzed by the idea of caste, of impassable limits, of destiny, and the tyranny of time. Kreeshna’s argument, it must be allowed, is defective. No sufficient reason is given why Arjoon should fight. . . . The Brahman’s virtue consists not in doing right, but arbitrary things. . . . It is in fact a defense of the institution of caste.  
. . . <sup>144</sup>

While Thoreau’s lavish praise of the *Bhagavad Gita* is well known, clearly Krishna’s argument does not satisfy his understanding of the central necessity of fighting. “No sufficient reason is given why Arjoon should fight.” Krishna’s argument is defective because assaulting evil is sometimes necessary, which the Brahman never proposes to do. Thoreau writes: “There is such a thing as caste, even in the West; but it is comparatively faint. It is conservatism here. It says forsake not your calling, outrage no institution, use no violence, rend no bonds. The State is thy parent. Its virtue or manhood is wholly filial.” Nor does he accept the idea of passively waiting to “starve out” injustice and writes: “Thank God, no Hindoo tyranny prevailed at the framing of the world, but we are freemen of the universe, and not sentenced to any caste.”<sup>145</sup>

Thoreau toned down his use of military metaphors in *A Week* as Linck Johnson explains in “Context of Bravery,” but he did not dispense with military imagery altogether. He writes of a soldier without “casting any suspicion on his honor and real bravery in the field.” He still admires paynim courage and heathenish integrity. “Inside the civilized man stands the savage still in the place of honor.” And there are still references to battles: “Where a battle has been fought, you will find bones of men and beasts; where a battle is being fought, there are hearts beating.” He looks for the hero in his midst with disappointment: “But generally speaking, the land is now, at any rate, very barren of men, and we doubt if there are as many hundreds as we read of. It may be that we stood too near.”<sup>146</sup>

## V. Later Thoreauvian Themes

As often opportunity presents itself, Thoreau hoisted his banner. On January 26, 1848, Bronson Alcott wrote in his journal: “Heard Thoreau’s lecture before the Lyceum on the relation of the individual to the State — an admirable statement of the rights of the individual to self-government, and

an attentive audience.”<sup>147</sup> Thoreau followed the lead of Alcott and Charles Lane, when, in 1843, he stopped paying his poll tax in protest of slavery. One afternoon, near the end of his second summer at Walden, Thoreau, on his way to the cobbler’s shop, was arrested by Concord constable Sam Staples. Alcott’s journal refers to Thoreau’s 1848 lecture resulting from his arrest entitled “The Rights and Duties of the Individual in Relation to Government,” published a year later in Elizabeth Peabody’s *Aesthetic Papers* as “Resistance to Civil Government.”

Thoreau gave the lecture twice in early 1848 at the same time as Adin Ballou’s book on *Christian Non-Resistance* was reviewed by the *Christian Examiner*. Ballou advocated passive resistance against institutionalized, government sanctioned, chattel slavery. He recognized the nefarious injustice of his government, that it sanctioned slavery and war was enough to establish this fact in his own mind, being contrary to his avowed Christian ethic. The book, while recognized as an exemplary work by notable pacifists such as Leo Tolstoy, was ignored by Thoreau, who simply would not have accepted its fundamental arguments. Noting the government’s role in the egregious institution, Ballou wrote:

And yet, notwithstanding all this, I must be a member of the national organization, who are bound by this political creed and covenant. I must be a voter. I must vote for the President of the United States to be “commander in chief of our army and navy.” I must agree to have him put under oath, faithfully to execute this office. I must myself be ready to accept of *this, that* and the *other* office, prefaced by an obligation to support the entire Constitution, war, slavery and all, as ‘the SUPREME LAW of the land!’ And if IDOLATRY were a fundamental prescription of the compact, I must support *that* too!

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He echoed Garrison’s “Declaration of Sentiments” address, which declared similarly: “We shall submit to every ordinance of man, for the Lord’s sake; obey all the requirements of government, except such as we deem contrary to the commands of the gospel; and in no wise resist the operation of law, except by meekly submitting to the penalty of disobedience.”<sup>149</sup>

“Resistance to Civil Government” differs from Ballou’s book in tone, temperament, and suggested course of action. In the past, Thoreau had come to the aid of several speakers in Concord favoring the free discussion of slavery. Now he championed the freedom of self-expression. He always believed non-resistance should have an edge. When in the course of time a government ceases to represent the welfare of society, he believes it is the individual’s right, and sometimes their duty, to resist heroically, rather than cravenly submit to its injustice.

As Alcott aptly suggests, Thoreau’s essay is a treatise on self-government, but also germinating from the Transcendental concept of self-culture. The essay advances the third proposition of Emerson’s “American Scholar” address. Individuals not only should enrich themselves in the literature of the past and

in nature but also in affecting the progress of society. Thoreau takes this to its ideological conclusion.

I HEARTILY accept the motto, — “That government is best which governs least”; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe, — “That government is best which governs not at all”; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have.<sup>150</sup>

Simply a continuation of his earliest themes, he calls not for no government but for virtuous self-government. Thoreau says he cannot be “forced” by society to conform, only by those who “obey a higher law” than he. Giving a Transcendental metaphor, he writes: “I perceive that, when an acorn and a chestnut fall side by side, the one does not remain inert to make way for the other, but both obey their own laws, and spring and grow and flourish as best they can, till one, perchance, overshadows and destroys the other. If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man.”<sup>151</sup>

In reading the *Bhagavad Gita*, Thoreau recognized what he believed was a fundamental defect in Krishna’s argument. Because “no sufficient reason” is given for the necessity of why Arjuna should fight and because Brahmanic virtue “consists not in doing right, but arbitrary things,” Thoreau concludes that inactive virtue is not virtuous but, in fact, in this case, “a defense” of the caste system. Without discounting altogether the need for severe and mild punishments, he had earlier reasoned that the *end of all punishment* would be the good of society. Within his seemingly recondite social philosophy there is simplicity. Given the premise that the human mind is not *tabula rasa*, that human beings are not merely malleable, but are complex organic organisms, Thoreau reasons that social progress is facilitated by individual self-culture first, and institutions secondly. In an 1844 lecture, “Reform and Reformers,” he wrote:

There is no objection to action in societies or communities when it is the individual using the society as his instrument, rather than the society using the individual. . . . In every society there is or was at least one individual, its founder and leader, who did not belong to it, but who imparted to it whatever life and efficiency it had, and sad indeed is the condition of that society, and it is the condition of most, which is deprived of its head — and soul — for the members can still vote, — and as it were by force of galvanism, a spasmodic action be kept up in the body, and men call it life, and expect virtue and character from senseless nerves and muscles.<sup>152</sup>

He by no means objects to the ideals of the Non-resistance Society, but being a practical idealist, recognizes the necessity of definitive individual action and sacrifice, sometimes force. In “Resistance to Civil Government,” he almost immediately alludes to the Society, stating that there are “objections” against a “standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail. . .

.” This he particularly objects to as a standing army is often used by a few unscrupulous men wishing to further their own unjust enterprises. “Witness the present Mexican war,” he says. While he deliberately criticizes the war, we should note, Thoreau stopped paying his taxes before the eruption of conflict with Mexico in protest of slavery, not war.

Without casting suspicion on the majority, Thoreau is sure it is they who have kept the country free, who are the educators, and who have settled the West: “The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished. . . .”<sup>153</sup> He is optimistic, cherishing the integrity of the individuals who compose the citizenry: “But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but *at once* a better government.” Desiring to be a good citizen, Thoreau always paid the highway tax, and as for “supporting schools,” he says he is doing his part to educate his “fellow countrymen now.”<sup>154</sup>

Governments, particularly in a democracy, need the consent of the people in order to function. Refusal to pay taxes, if carried out by a majority, could have serious consequences for a government. Therein lies one aspect of a potentially dangerous campaign. Thoreau does not address the problems that would be associated with *civil disobedience* on an expanded scale, whereas Gandhi gives this considerable attention. Confined, instead, to the theme of his own individual resistance against the civil authorities, his essay avoids discussing it wholly in terms of a national collective movement. Although, he does entreat conscientious citizens and abolitionists alike to follow his example. “If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact,” he says, “the definition of a peaceable revolution,” and adds, “if any such is possible.”<sup>155</sup> He would much rather discuss his own individual experience and in his own characteristic style writes: “I know this well, that if one thousand, if one hundred, if ten men whom I could name, — if ten *honest* men only, — aye, if *one* HONEST \*\* man, in this State of Massachusetts, *ceasing to hold slaves*, were actually to withdraw from this copartnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefor, it would be the abolition of slavery in America.”<sup>156</sup> His intended hyperbolic response is meant literally, ideally, as Thoreau truly believes the power of virtue influences the good of society: “For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done for ever.” The truth of his statement can be observed in the subsequent effect of his essay in the twentieth century.

With the individual as the foundation of society, and as the essential necessary component for social progress, Thoreau also argues: *All are peaceably inclined*. He objects not so much to the fact that men go off to war, but that they go against their own will and conscience:

A common and natural result of an undue respect for law is, that you may see a file of soldiers, colonel, captain, corporal, privates, powder-monkeys and all, marching in admirable order over hill and



dale to the wars, against their wills, aye, against their common sense and consciences, which makes it very steep marching indeed, and produces a palpitation of the heart. They have no doubt that it is a damnable business in which they are concerned; they are all peaceably inclined.<sup>157</sup>

Individuals, as Thoreau trenchantly perceived in himself, have a tendency toward a higher and a lower nature. Unaware of their higher natures, individuals often have an “undue respect for law.” They resign their consciences to expediency. “Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience, then?” Fleeting thoughts pass through our consciousness and are often dismissed as flights of fancy. As Emerson wrote: “In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty.”<sup>158</sup> Citizens resign their consciences to legislators and, thus, serve the state “not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailers, constables, *posse comitatus*, &c.”<sup>159</sup> Thoreau complains that in “most cases there is no free exercise,” of what he terms, “the judgement” or “the moral sense.” The implementation of which is not predicated on an assumption of nonviolent resistance but on the “free exercise” of the moral faculty.

He particularly objects to a system based on exponential morality when citing William Paley’s *Evidences of Christianity* in “Resistance to Civil Government” and specifically its chapter on “The Duty of Submission to Civil Government.” Paley explains his doctrine as follows: “This principle being admitted, the justice of every particular case of resistance is reduced to a computation of the quantity of the danger and grievance on the one side and of the probability and expense of redressing it on the other.”<sup>160</sup> Thoreau rejects Paley’s argument in cases where the “rule of expediency does not apply, in which a people, as well as an individual, must do justice, cost what it may.” He gives an example of a case where he himself might have to suffer injury: “If I have unjustly wrested a plank from a drowning man, I must restore it to him though I drown myself.” Furthermore, doing justice, *cost what it may*, also contains an implicit sanction of forcible resistance. And given the evidence in *A Week*, Thoreau’s citation of Krishna’s “defective argument,” the inference is wholly tenable.

He does not formalize moral decision making, nor suggest that *his* is the only way. Holding slaves and the war with Mexico for the acquisition of new territory and the expansion of slavery are unjust enterprises as he so believed. Because of this injustice, Thoreau resists the government’s support of slavery and the war. In *Walden*, he wrote: “It is true, I might have resisted forcibly with more or less effect, might have run ‘amok’ against society; but I preferred that society should run ‘amok’ against me, it being the desperate party.”<sup>161</sup> As before mentioned, he believed “the strongest is always the least violent,” and as such, preferred peaceful to forcible resistance — a preference he would always try to maintain without, however, discounting the possible necessity of force in instances where justice must be done *cost what it may*.

By refusing to pay his taxes, Thoreau believed he was acting according to the higher law. Such refusal was not an anarchic deed but an imperatively heroic expression intended as an appeal to conscience necessary for the preservation of justice. His individual act was one of non-compliance and non-cooperation but intended to awaken legislators to their own unlawful participation in perpetuating slavery. In his lecture and subsequent essay on “Resistance to Civil Government,” Thoreau makes a similar appeal to conscience, an appeal to mass consciousness. While he recognized the virtues of the American people, he criticized them for not following their consciences: “Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience? — in which majorities decide only those questions to which the rule of expediency is applicable?”<sup>162</sup> The majority resigns their consciences, instead, even in such cases when the government’s despotic perpetration of injustice, in this case, slavery, is so great as to be almost universally recognized as inequitable, if not, unjust. In this particular case, Thoreau believed he himself constituted a majority of one.

“Resistance to Civil Government” follows Antigone’s maxim that there is a higher law than that of the State. Torn between her loyalties to the State and her religious convictions, Antigone disobeyed the king’s law and buried her brother. Similarly, Thoreau breaks the law by refusing to pay his poll tax. For his act of non-compliance and non-cooperation, he readily, willingly, and happily, even humbly, submitted to imprisonment. Fulfillment of the higher law entails living virtuously according to principle, and is essentially nonviolent.

Thoreau’s act of resistance to the civil law followed from his lifestyle overall, and, in this sense, was not simply a single act of disobedience but rooted in his notion of self-government. Virtue consists of living according to principle, not as an occasional endeavor. One of his reasons for going to Walden Pond was because he wanted to live simply, recognizing virtue as its own reward. A resister of civil government not only should be willing to go to prison but to suffer loss of property as well. In this case, the virtue of simplicity is evident:

I have contemplated the imprisonment of the offender, rather than the seizure of his goods, — though both will serve the same purpose, — because they who assert the purest right, and consequently are most dangerous to a corrupt State, commonly have not spent much time in accumulating property. . . . Absolutely speaking, the more money, the less virtue; for money comes between a man and his objects, and obtains them for him; and it was certainly no great virtue to obtain it.<sup>163</sup>

At times it may become necessary to resist injustice, and with simplicity, an individual may be properly actuated to perform his or, nonetheless, her duty, as Thoreau believes the higher law is the province of God and bears forth its fruit for civilization. Appealing to the wisdom of Confucius, Thoreau writes: “‘If a State is governed by the principles of reason, poverty and misery are subjects of shame; if a State is not governed by the principles of reason, riches and honors are the subjects of shame.’”<sup>164</sup>

“Resistance to Civil Government” is reactionary as it considers individual self-government before the State, and revolutionary because political expediency is subordinated to individual virtue. Thoreau, in fact, borrows from numerous traditions, uprooting and gathering his grub. His landscape reveals the mulched remains of Shakespeare, Milton, Sophocles, Jesus, and Confucius, whose fecund practical ethics enrich the central theme of the essay:

There will never be a really free and enlightened State, until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. . . . A State which bore this kind of fruit, and suffered it to drop off as fast as it ripened, would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State, which also I have imagined, but not yet anywhere seen.<sup>165</sup>

Here again, Thoreau takes for his ideal the *free and enlightened State*, which corresponds to the ideal expressed in his college essay that *the end of all punishment is the welfare of the state*. By taking the *free and enlightened State* as his ideal, Thoreau implies the individual should strive for self-government. He objects to Paley’s system of exponential morality because it does not consider virtue, but what is merely expedient, and does not take into account those instances in which justice must be done, *cost what it may*.

In his college essay, Thoreau did not discount altogether the possibility that “some advantage” may be derived from a policy of severe and mild punishments but that the degree of “severity” must “bear some proportion to the offence.” If this distinction is not kept in mind, punishment may be unjust. Similarly, “Resistance to Civil Government” does not discount the possibility of severity, in this case, the possibility of bloodshed: “But even suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded?”<sup>166</sup> He does not insist that resistance *must be* nonviolent. Instead, he indubitably states: “The only obligation which I have a right to assume, is to do at any time what I think right.”<sup>167</sup> Reemphasizing the point again later, he writes: “This, then, is my position at present. But one cannot be too much on his guard in such a case, lest his action be biased by obstinacy, or an undue regard for the opinions of men. Let him see that he does only what belongs to himself and to the hour.”<sup>168</sup> As he assumes, *all are peacefully inclined*, he writes: “I see that appeal is possible,” i.e., a peaceful appeal. “And, above all,” he writes, “there is this difference between resisting this and a purely brute or natural force, that I can resist this with some effect; but I cannot expect, like Orpheus, to change the nature of the rocks and trees and beasts.”<sup>169</sup> He does not assume that natural forces are necessarily benign.

“Resistance to Civil Government” does not discount earlier themes. Heroic themes are extant and anticipatory of John Brown: “A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and *men*, serve the State with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated by it as enemies.” His patriotism, or “Concord pride,” is still

visible. Speaking of the majority, those who do not reverence their conscience, he writes: “Why does it always crucify Christ, and excommunicate Copernicus and Luther, and pronounce Washington and Franklin rebels?” Thoreau believes “[a]ll men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to and to resist the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable.”<sup>170</sup> “Resistance to Civil Government” is Jeffersonian not by design but in its belief that certain “truths,” or ideals, are self-evident, an individual has the right to withdraw his consent from the government, and the people have a right to revolution:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation of such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Many European visitors to the United States during Thoreau’s lifetime commented on the American form of Government. William Howard Russell, commentator for the *Times* of London during the first year of the Civil War, wrote in his travel diary: “During my short sojourn in this country I have never yet met any person who could show me where the sovereignty of the Union resides.”<sup>171</sup> This type of confusion about the American system of government was not uncommon. American politics often erupted into confusion during the Antebellum period.

With the Mexican war and the subsequent annexation of Texas in 1845, the Union became irreconcilably split over the future expansion of slavery. In 1849, President Taylor signed a treaty with Mexico acquiring the territory that would later become the states of New Mexico, Utah, and California. Taylor’s handling of events precipitated the greatest crisis in the history of American government prior to the Civil War. Congressional sessions became violent; there were challenges to duels. In 1850, Stephen A. Douglas presented Henry Clay’s Omnibus Bill piecemeal to Congress. Its passage was signed into law by the new president, Milford Fillmore. The Compromise of 1850 gave the South legal access to the territories, making possible the future expansion of slavery.

The Transcendentalists were outraged by the politically expedient Compromise, viewing it as a moral sanctification of slavery. Thoreau scathingly denounced its iniquity because it upheld the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in forcing Northerners to return runaway slaves to the South: “The fact which the politician faces is merely, that there is less honor among thieves than was supposed, and not the fact that they are thieves.”<sup>172</sup> Of the new law, Emerson wrote: “Whilst the inconsistency of slavery with the principles on which the

world is built guarantees its downfall, I own that the patience it requires is almost too sublime for mortals, and seems to demand of us more than mere hoping"; elsewhere adding, "I will not obey it, by God."<sup>173</sup>

Their sentiments were not misplaced. William Ellery Channing, the famous Boston Unitarian minister, remarked in 1842, that the Constitution of the United States is explicit on at least one point: "It affirms that 'slaves are recognized as property by the Constitution of the United States *in those States in which slavery exists*.' Here we have the limit precisely defined within which the Constitution spreads its shield over slavery."<sup>174</sup> Some of the founders, James Madison, in particular as Channing points out, did not want to sanction slavery morally. Madison thought the Constitution should not recognize slaves exclusively as property: "The slave is no less evidently regarded by the law as a member of the society; not as a part of the irrational creation; as a moral person, not as a mere article of property."<sup>175</sup> Moreover, the Declaration of Independence solemnly declares: *All Men are created Equal; and are endowed by their Creator with the Inalienable Rights of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness*. Thoreau and Emerson recognized the inconsistency of the Compromise in recognizing what they believed was a rejection of the good intentions and principles upon which their country was founded. Their diatribes become increasingly heated from 1850 on, with the ensuing breakdown of civil government, and the almost inevitable outbreak of war. In an 1854 journal entry, Thoreau wrote: "Your Congress halls have an alehouse odor, — a place for stale jokes and vulgar wit. It compels me to think of my fellow-creatures as apes and baboons."<sup>176</sup>

Passage of the Fugitive Slave Law inclined many Transcendentalists toward definitive, if not forcible action. In 1849, Emerson's essay on "War" was published in the *Aesthetic Papers* along with "Resistance to Civil Government." Emerson took a position similar to Thoreau's. Although he begins by praising war, the essay soon turns to defending the principles of nonviolence. Emerson asks: "How is this new aspiration of the human mind to be made visible and real?"<sup>177</sup> While he does not speak directly to the question of resisting the civil government, or *civil disobedience*, he, like Thoreau, is concerned with actualizing the ideal of a higher or enlightened State. Where he is concerned with attaining a peaceful State by avoiding hostility and war, he adds: "A wise man will never impawn his future being and action, and decide beforehand what he shall do in a given extreme event. Nature and God will instruct him in that hour." Thoreau's essay is the reciprocal of Emerson's in the sense that each calls for a peaceful State, yet granting, as Thoreau does, the individual do *what belongs to himself and to the hour*.

With the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, Concord citizens, members of Abolitionism and non-members alike, became embroiled in controversy over the contentious, earth-shattering law. In early 1851, citizens of Concord assisted Shadrach, a Virginian slave, to freedom. In April, Thomas Sims was captured and returned to his Georgian owner. Thoreau, too, got involved. In October, he helped Henry Williams elude slave-catchers by placing him aboard a train

bound for Canada. The arrest, trial, and return to slavery of one Anthony Burns prompted Thoreau's most scathing denunciation of slavery to date.

On May 24, 1854, Burns was arrested. The next day Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act. And a day later, a Boston crowd mobbed the courthouse in a failed rescue attempt of Burns. Richardson explains that "it had taken a battalion of U.S. artillery, four platoons of marines, the sheriff's posse, twenty-two companies of state militia, and forty thousand dollars to return Anthony Burns to slavery." (178) The exorbitant cost of returning a single individual to bondage outraged Northern-moderates and compelled many to shift their opinion in favor of abolitionism. Among the Transcendentalists, Parker and Alcott had earlier joined the vigilance committee, helping to patrol the streets of Boston at night to protect blacks from indiscriminate arrest as fugitives.<sup>179</sup>

Thoreau delivered "Slavery in Massachusetts" at an annual Fourth of July gathering of the Massachusetts Anti-slavery Society, the same gathering at which Garrison burned a copy of the United States Constitution. The new law had indeed riled its opponents. Thoreau's speech was delivered in front of a large audience and later reached thousands of readers in the pages of the *New York Tribune* and the *Liberator*. It was not, of course, the first time that one of his essays appeared in an anti-slavery publication.

Believing his country had lost its sense of reason, Thoreau's tone and temperament are markedly different in this essay. He says his "thoughts are murder to the State." Before the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, there were hopes that the South, especially one of the Border States, might adopt some policy of gradual emancipation.<sup>180</sup> Delaware and Maryland adopted a policy of voluntary manumissions, for example, with some success at decreasing their slave population. Advances in the Border States could have insured a three-fourths majority in Congress needed to pass a constitutional amendment, possibly with gradual emancipation as an aim. The political climate of the 1850's marked a steep decline in the prospect of gradual emancipation. And with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, slavery was opened to further westward expansion, rendering mute the Missouri Compromise, which had provided strict limits seeking to contain its spread. As individual self-government is higher than the State, and as the ideal State will come to recognize it as such, Thoreau contends that "the State has fatally interfered with" his "lawful business." "It has not only interrupted me in my passage through Court street on errands of trade," he says, "but it has interrupted me and every man on his onward and upward path. . . ." <sup>181</sup>

The new law restricted, as Thoreau believed, his own personal freedom, not only his ability to resist peacefully and effectively the government but his sense of the progressiveness of the ideal in the near future as well. As for "patriotism," every citizen of Massachusetts that is capable of such a sentiment, must feel, similarly, that they have suffered "a vast and indefinite loss" with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law. Thoreau adds: "For my part, my old and worthiest pursuits have lost I cannot say how much of their attraction, and I feel that

my investment in life here is worth many per cent less since Massachusetts last deliberately sent back an innocent man, Anthony Burns, to slavery.”<sup>182</sup> Very significant, this point; Thoreau is admitting that his preference for peaceful resistance is losing its practical appeal. Inactive virtue is not virtuous. “Show me a free State, and a court truly of justice, and I will fight for them, if need be; but show me Massachusetts, and I refuse her my allegiance, and express contempt for her courts.” Later, he concludes: “If we would save our lives, we must fight for them.”<sup>183</sup>

That same year, *Walden* was published. An inexorable book on self-reliance and self-cultivation, it deals with Thoreau’s spiritual journey, vision quest, if you will, while at Walden Pond, a practical expression of lofty idealism. He recognizes an innate tendency towards a higher, spiritual, or ideal existence as well as towards a lower, primitive, or material one with “reverence” to both. Military metaphors are distant, yet evident, and not altogether eliminated: “But sometimes it was a really noble and inspiring strain that reached these woods, and the trumpet that sings of fame, and I felt as if I could spit a Mexican with a good relish, — for why should we always stand for trifles?” There are references and allusions to the War for Independence — the Concord Battle ground, for example. Thoreau admires Oliver Cromwell, in one instance, writing: “almost the last significant scrap of news from that quarter was the revolution of 1649. . . .” In a parody on war, he writes of having witnessed “the struggle, the ferocity and carnage, of a human battle” before his door. He is speaking of ants, of course, but says: “I have no doubt it was a principle they fought for as much . . . as those of Bunker Hill.” And where courageous heroics are concerned, he writes: “As for the pyramids, there is nothing to wonder at in them so much as the fact that so many men could be found degraded enough to spend their lives constructing a tomb for some ambitious booby, whom it would have been wiser and manlier to have drowned in the Nile, and then given his body to the dogs.”<sup>184</sup> Humorous, these can be, but they are also a reflection of an indelible side of Thoreau, which cannot be erased or ignored.

“Slavery in Massachusetts” implicitly alludes to the use of forcible resistance. Asking for definitive action — reminiscent of his Phillips essay with its “Red-cross knight” — Thoreau argues that Massachusetts willingly puts the militia in the service of slave-owners, “but not a soldier is offered to save a citizen of Massachusetts from being kidnaped!”<sup>185</sup> In opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law, he vigorously implies the intensity of his feelings and the readiness with which he will later defend John Brown: “Whoever has discerned truth, has received his commission from a higher source than the chiefest justice in the world, who can discern only law. He finds himself constituted judge of judge.”<sup>186</sup>

Thoreau adds that it is “strange that it should be necessary to state such simple truths!” If he was to sacrifice the “‘truths’ of his ‘reason’” by defending John Brown, as Wendell Glick believes, Thoreau was not himself aware of a vast discrepancy between his earlier and later writings, nor were his Concord friends. While his acknowledged dismay over the lost appeal of his “old and worthiest

pursuits” is evident, he refers to previous pursuits not to principles or a sense of mistaken idealism. By appealing to his conscience, his sense that an individual should do *what belongs to himself and to the hour*, Thoreau acknowledges the injustice of the Fugitive Slave Law:

Much has been said about American slavery, but I think that we do not even yet realize what slavery is. If I were seriously to propose to Congress to make mankind into sausages, I have no doubt that most of the members would smile at my proposition, and if any believed me to be in earnest, they would think that I proposed something much worse than Congress had ever done. But if any of them will tell me that to make a man into a sausage would be much worse, — would be any worse, than to make him into a slave, — than it was to enact the Fugitive Slave Law, I will accuse him of foolishness, of intellectual incapacity, of making a distinction without a difference. The one is just as sensible a proposition as the other.<sup>187</sup>

Such an appeal to conscience relies on the Reason, holding that certain *spiritual truths* are self-evident and directly comprehended by the Understanding and are apparent to common sense. Removed from the political expediency of his day, such an appeal, for us, is more easily understood. Discrimination is often enough to provoke our own outrage. The actual support of forcible violence against a state militia barracks, however, is a delicate matter, and therein lies a possible explanation as to why so many have wished to downplay this particular aspect of Thoreau’s life, wishing, instead, to label him as a pacifist or an inconsistent one at best. Vincent Buranelli’s concerns in “The Case Against Thoreau” are not altogether misplaced and deserve their rightful recognition in Thoreau study. The New England Transcendentalists were aware of the ethical implications of the new subjectivism. Richardson wrote: “the great — and to a large extent still unrecognized — achievement of the transcendentalist as a group, and Parker and Ripley, Fuller and Peabody, Emerson and Thoreau in particular, was in working out the ethical implications of transcendentalism and making them widely accessible and, above all, liveable.”<sup>188</sup> If posterity is allowed to bear witness to Thoreau, we may find he has inspired virtue more than folly.

Henry Salt, who first introduced the young Oxford Law student, M. K. Gandhi, to Thoreau’s political essays believed “A Plea for Captain John Brown” was among the “very best” of these essays.<sup>189</sup> “A Plea” is entirely consistent with the epistemology of Thoreau’s earlier political works — his college essay on “Severe and Mild Punishments, the ”Service,” “Resistance to Civil Government,” and “Slavery in Massachusetts.” The individual, as his or her ken is limited to the present, should act on *what belongs to himself and to the hour*. Thoreau, then, consistently pursues the Transcendental principle that follows, according to Emerson, the maxim that *a wise man will never impawn his future being and action, and decide beforehand what he shall do in a given extreme event*. In such cases, Emerson suggests that “Nature and God will instruct” the individual in morally appraising an *extreme event*. “A Plea” is not only consistent with this



existential aspect of Transcendentalism, but is also wholly consistent with the Jeffersonian idea that when a government becomes destructive of natural rights, the people have a right to revolution.

Thoreau met Brown in 1857 on two occasions, once at the Thoreau household, and a day later at Emerson's. They discussed the subsequent eruption of violence in Kansas that arose after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Thoreau was moved by Brown's "Puritanism," his ascetic lifestyle and religious devotion; he was a hero of old, a man of action and sacrifice. Two years later the news of Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry reached Concord, and Thoreau was the first to publically acknowledge the greatness of his deed, its historical importance and its future bearing and import. On November 1, 1859, Thoreau was invited to read his "Plea" for Brown before Theodore Parker's congregation in Boston. The essay reached its largest audience when it was reprinted in James Redpath's *Echoes of Harper's Ferry*.

Bronson Alcott, always with a ready observation, wrote in his journal concerning Thoreau's defense of Brown:

Thoreau has good right to speak fully his mind concerning Brown, and has been the first to speak and celebrate the hero's courage and magnanimity. It is these which he discerns and praises. The men have much in common: the sturdy manliness, straight-forwardness and independence. It is well they met, and that Thoreau saw what he sets forth as no one else can. Both are sons of Anak, and dwellers in Nature — Brown taking more to the human side and driving straight at institutions whilst Thoreau contents himself with railing at them and letting them otherwise alone. He is the proper panegyrist of the virtues he owns himself so largely, and so comprehends in another.<sup>190</sup>

Alcott trenchantly perceived the pith of "A Plea," its bardic quality, as a hymn to heroic virtue — courage and magnanimity. Brown, in Thoreau's estimate, was a man of action and sacrifice in the highest esteem of the Greek meaning of the words. He was individually endowed with courage, a Carlylean hero, a self-reliant man of principle and idealism, who recognized within the redoubtable institution of slavery its perfidious tyranny and injustice, who felt a common humanity with the men and women subjected to bondage under the tutelage of an unrelenting slave-power, and as he was beckoned to action, led the raid on Harper's Ferry with the help of a select band of men, among whom his own sons also served and died. Brown marched to the beat of that martial drum, to the music that inspires heroic action and sacrifice and which is persistent throughout much of Thoreau's writing, from the "Service," where he first describes its sound, to *A Week* and "Resistance to Civil Government" and to *Walden*, though heard at a distance, and to "A Plea," where it resounds forcefully Brown's resplendent cause. These, Thoreau's sentiments, are consistent with his principle of self-government and express his kindred sympathy with Brown, the man and his "cause." The essay, above all else, is an appeal to the audiences' collective sensibilities, asking them to recognize the humanity of Brown's "cause," invoking a sense of pathos for

the man and his decided action. Thoreau qualifies his assumption of Brown's magnanimity, by quoting Brown:

I pity the poor in bondage that have none to help them; that is why I am here; not to gratify any personal animosity, revenge, or vindictive spirit. It is my sympathy with the oppressed and the wronged, that are as good as you, and as precious in the sight of God. I want you to understand that I respect the rights of the poorest and weakest of colored people, oppressed by the slave power, just as much as I do those of the most wealthy and powerful.<sup>191</sup>

Thoreau praises Brown for his "Spartan habits," his temperate Puritanism. Brown's grandfather was "an officer in the Revolution," while his father was "a contractor who furnished beef to the army" during the War of 1812. Young John Brown accompanied his father on several trips to the encampments, where he developed an "abhorrence" of military life. Thoreau explains: "He then resolved that he would never have anything to do with any war, unless it were a war for liberty."<sup>192</sup> Similar to the sentiments expressed in "Resistance to Civil Government," he supposes Brown is peacefully inclined and would not go off to war against his own will and conscience. When Brown resolved on force, however, Thoreau defends his decision based on his faith in the higher law, writing: "He was like the best of those who stood at Concord Bridge once, on Lexington Common, and on Bunker Hill, only he was firmer and higher-principled than any that I have chanced to hear of as there." He adds: "They could bravely face their country's foes, but he had the courage to face his country herself, when she was in the wrong."<sup>193</sup> An important distinction, Thoreau praises his individual effort. As a so-called majority of one, Brown does not stand for an upheaval; he is not legion; he does not constitute an extreme material threat to the government, an overthrow of its power, whereas regimes are legion. Buranelli's argument overlooks this meaningful aspect of Thoreau's political thinking in relation to self-government. *All are peaceably inclined*, as is Thoreau's conviction, yet on rare instances, in cases where tyranny is almost universally recognized as such in its vast scope and perpetration of injustice then the individual has the right to resist it accordingly. Harkening back to "Resistance to Civil Government," Brown can be categorized as one of the very few who serve the State *as heroes, patriots, and martyrs* with their consciences. Thoreau says: "It was no abolition lecturer that converted him," and calls him "a Transcendentalist above all," recognizing that he "did not go to the college called Harvard, good old alma mater as she is," but went, instead, "to the great university of the West"; he was a man of practical experience and idealism.

"Resistance to Civil Government" represents an appeal to mass consciousness and conscience; this is also true of "A Plea." Thoreau refers to the word *resistance* several times throughout the essay, writing: "Others, craven-hearted, said disparagingly," of Brown, "that 'he threw his life away' because he resisted the government." Many do not recognize the raid for its magnanimity; instead, they believe it was a misguided, untimely, or insane effort. But "[t]hey at most

only criticize the tactics.” Thoreau argues: “They are so anxious because of a dim consciousness of the fact, which they do not distinctly face, that at least a million of the free inhabitants of the United States would have rejoiced if it had succeeded.”<sup>194</sup> In proportion to the total population, Thoreau reasons that some, feeling sympathy for the nation’s 4,000,000 slaves, would agree in principle with Brown’s “cause.” Yet, they are unable to voice their assent and the newspapers make matters worse as they distort the truth. “Even the *Liberator*,” Garrison’s Abolitionist journal, “called it ‘a misguided, wild, and apparently insane effort.’”<sup>195</sup> Thoreau again voices his dissent against expediency, writing: “As for the herd of newspapers and magazines, I do not chance to know an editor in the country who will deliberately print anything which he knows will ultimately and permanently reduce the number of his subscribers. They do not believe that it would be expedient. How then can they print truth?” As society refers to ancient heroism but is unappreciative of it when it is in their “midst,” Thoreau refers “a city of magnificent distances” as representative of the “impassable boundaries between individuals and between states.”<sup>196</sup> Thoreau’s appeal is ethically directed at consensus, an appeal to the audiences’ collective reason and conscience.

In *A Week*, Thoreau compared conservatism in the West to the Hindu caste system. *It says forsake not your calling, outrage no institution, use no violence, rend no bonds.* In “A Plea,” he compares the New Englander to a Hindu idolater. Brown, on the other hand, “was an exception, for he did not set up even a political graven image between him and his God.”<sup>197</sup> His appeal was direct, and, so to, his action. Thoreau writes: “He did not recognize unjust human laws, but resisted them as he was bid,” referring to his action as “resistance to tyranny.”<sup>198</sup> As Brown’s action was resistance to tyranny, and not resistance to civil government, i.e., a polite or non-violent government, Thoreau sanctions the use of force in this particular case. It was Brown’s “peculiar doctrine that a man has a perfect right to interfere by force with the slaveholder, in order to rescue the slave,” Thoreau adds, “I agree with him.” (199) As he assumed in “Resistance to Civil Government” that *all are peacefully inclined*, he stated: “I see that appeal is possible,” i.e., a peaceful appeal. Yet he was careful to recognize an important distinction, at least implicitly, between a civil and a tyrannical government when he wrote: “And, above all, there is this difference between resisting this and a purely brute or natural force, that I can resist this with some effect; but I cannot expect, like Orpheus, to change the nature of the rocks and trees and beasts.” “A Plea” seizes this assumption. “When a government puts forth its strength on the side of injustice, as ours to maintain slavery and kill the liberators of the slave, it reveals itself a merely brute force, or worse, a demoniacal force.”<sup>200</sup> Referring to Christ, Thoreau writes: “The same indignation that is said to have cleared the temple once will clear it again.”<sup>201</sup>

Earlier, Thoreau had asserted *what is once well done is done for ever*. Brown’s “cause,” being virtuous, the eternal laws of justice are in its favor. Thoreau writes of Brown’s success in Missouri: “When the time came, few men were found willing to lay down their lives in defense of what they knew to be

wrong; they did not like that this should be their last act in this world.”<sup>202</sup> At Harper’s Ferry, too, Thoreau believes Brown’s deed, while a material failure, will stand resolutely as a single humane act of kindness in the “cause” of liberty and justice, and as testimony to those millions who suffered in bondage for three centuries within America’s peculiar institution of chattel slavery. Thoreau concludes “A Plea,” writing:

I am here to plead his cause with you. I plead not for his life, but for his character — his immortal life; and so it becomes your cause wholly, and is not his in the least. Some eighteen hundred years ago Christ was crucified; this morning, perchance, Captain Brown was hung. These are the two ends of a chain which is not without its links. He is not Old Brown any longer; he is an angel of light.<sup>203</sup>

He carefully points out that it is Brown’s “cause” he is concerned with, while invoking a sense of pathos with the essay’s title words. However, he was not altogether comfortable with the advocacy of force outside of the Brown episode, which he believed was a rare incidence of righteous action: “At any rate, I do not think it is quite sane for one to spend his whole life in talking or writing about this matter, unless he is continuously inspired, and I have not done so.”<sup>204</sup> This is not to let Thoreau off the hook too easily, so to speak, but to recognize that he reserved the right of judgment, as always, for himself. As for a wholesale welcoming of the Civil War, Thoreau faced the prospect with ambivalence. In the last paragraph of “A Plea,” Thoreau writes:

I foresee the time when the painter will paint that scene, no longer going to Rome for a subject; the poet will sing it; the historian record it; and, with the Landing of the Pilgrims and the Declaration of Independence, it will be the ornament of some future national gallery, when at least the present form of slavery shall be no more here. We shall then be at liberty to weep for Captain Brown. Then, and not till then, we will take our revenge.

He later maintained in a letter to Parker Pillsbury that he did not welcome the Civil War: “As for my prospective reader, I hope that he *ignores* Fort Sumpter, & Old Abe, & all that, for that is just the most fatal and indeed the only fatal, weapon you can direct against evil ever; for as long as you *know* of it, you are *particeps criminis*.”<sup>205</sup> Thoreau’s attitude remained essentially non-violent. Rather than war, Thoreau favored disunion.

## VI. Conclusion

Wendell Glick’s study on Henry David Thoreau, while an important contribution to Thoreau study in its day, needed to be reconsidered under the light of recent scholarship. Native influences, indeed, played an important role in the development of Thoreau’s social philosophy. Unitarianism was particularly well suited for the new subjectivism that was received via Immanuel Kant

and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. William Ellery Channing's illustration of the subjective faculty of the mind as "our own soul" anticipated the readiness with which New England Transcendentalism was to embrace Kantian idealism. New England Unitarianism was particularly well adapted for Kant's idealism, in that, Transcendentalism, which began as a reform movement within the church, was already struggling with subjective idealism.

French Eclecticism, too, was well adapted to Transcendentalism as it helped to justify the Transcendentalists sense and importance of history. Victor Cousin's belief that history follows a pattern according to four prehistoric archetypal ideas: sensationism, idealism, skepticism, and mysticism ran parallel to what the Transcendentalists wanted to accomplish, especially Brownson, Parker, Emerson, and Thoreau, who were attempting to give expression to the universality of art, philosophy, and literature. This is born out well in works of Emerson and Thoreau as they give metaphorical expression to universal forms in their writing.

Kant's subjective idealism and the importance of archetypes in Cousin's Eclecticism, both as modified aspects of Transcendentalism, are alone enough to distinguish the so-called twin movements of Transcendentalism and Garrison's Abolitionism, which was dominated by Evangelical Protestantism and had its roots in Scottish Realism and Lockean sensualism.

Unitarianism and Transcendentalism are clearly distinct from Evangelism, tending to avoid a fundamentalist interpretation of scripture, revivalism, and Evangelical notions of perfectionism. Garrison, on the other hand, was drawn to them and asserted the value of such practices and notions. Where he rejected portions of scripture, Garrison interpreted the Moral Law according to the Gospels of Christ as the intended governing principle of his Abolitionist movement. His "Declaration of Sentiments" address along with his association with Adin Ballou distinguishes him as one devoted to pacifism. Garrison's eventual support of Brown's raid marked a dramatic shift in his position.

Thoreau never joined either movement. As his writings indicate, he was never a pacifist. Rather, he in fact participated in a Lyceum debate whereby he championed the use of forceful resistance. His early essay the "Service" specifically favors "the hearty good will and activity of war" to the "the insincerity and sloth of peace." At first sight, these themes seem to be naturally opposed to his desire for an "enlightened State." However, Thoreau recognized in himself a tendency toward a "higher" or "spiritual" existence and another towards a "lower" or "primitive" existence and he "reverenced them both." His "somewhat military" nature, as Emerson described it, gave expression to Thoreau's "heathenish integrity." In this, we recognize his heroic ideal of character, a reverence for individuals who are drawn to action and sacrifice out of principle in times of civility or in times of crisis. However, Thoreau never accepted unqualified force and distinguishes between civil and tyrannical governments as well as individual and mass resistance. His defenses of John Brown is carefully qualified as an act of justice. Brown essentially acted alone against a government driven to expedient tyranny, as Thoreau believed, and his raid was symbolic of an historical process

that was at odds with the inconsistency of government sanctioned chattel slavery to the civilized ideals that America believed it embodied.

Thoreau understood the implications of the new subjectivism, the Transcendentalist's conscience theory, and acted from the base of Transcendental principles. In "Slavery in Massachusetts," Thoreau describes his opposition to the ominous Fugitive Slave Law referring to the tyranny of it, and not without an historical basis for his position. His allegorical comparison of slaves to processed meat, sausages, was an appeal to conscience and intended to enlighten his listeners to the grave injustices of slavery, an appeal to Reason, in practice, became an appeal to common sense. He did not, as Glick claims, sacrifice the "truths" of his "reason" in defending Brown. Thoreau believed an individual should do only *what belongs to himself and to the hour*. He never rejected the possible necessity of force. His discernment of Krishna's "argument" in *A Week*, published the same year as "Resistance to Civil Government," illustrates well his acceptance of force. Because "No sufficient reason is given for why Arjuna should fight," Thoreau believes the argument is defective. Instead of encouraging Arjuna to fight the battle, or the Hindu to "courageously assault evil," Thoreau believes Krishna's argument encourages passivity.

In part, Kantian Idealism constitutes Transcendentalist principles. Kant's subjectivism explains the basis from which New England Transcendentalism arose as an individualistic and experiential philosophy. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* illustrates, transcendental idealism consists of both an intuitive and an intellectual process. As an experiential philosophy, Transcendentalism sought to synthesize the formative processes that made experience meaningful, yet limited in terms of its subjective nature. Through the Reason, the Transcendentalists believed they could directly apprehend reality in its Platonic form. The Understanding, on the other hand, had to refer to the faculties of the senses and formed a ratiocinative and categorical process.

While Kantian idealism constitutes Transcendentalist principles, in part, the Transcendentalists themselves, not so much borrowed, but drew from varied cultures and sources to give expression to their own ideas. They did not seek to systematize philosophy into an eclectic system as Cousin did. Rather, French Eclecticism intrigued their own belief in the universality of archetypal ideas that are expressed symbolically in art, philosophy, and religion in all nations throughout time. Emerson's *Nature* and Thoreau's *Walden* give expression to their form without constituting an eclectic philosophy, for example. Ethically, the Transcendentalists accepted a Kantian Imperative that the individual should will only those principles that can be willed for all humanity. As Thoreau was desirous of being "a good neighbor," he limited his protest against the civil government to the non-payment of his poll tax. In the case of his defense of Brown, he asks his audience to sympathize with Brown's "cause," to see things from Brown's standpoint. Unitarianism, too, was in agreement with the Transcendentalist notion of consciousness and conscience as a means to perceive the higher law. Nature, as it gives expression to language and thought, together

with the literature of the past gave utterance to the Transcendental ethos. As Transcendentalism was an experiential philosophy, the individual (obvious as this may be) constitutes Transcendentalist principles, hence the importance of self-culture.

Thoreau's social philosophy was indeed consistent. His lectures, essays, and books were always personal accounts of what he believed through practice. His college essays express themes that are carried through into adulthood. "Severe and Mild Punishments" contemplates the ideal State and his notion of justice. He follows similar logic in "Resistance to Civil Government." "The Commercial Spirit of Modern Times" emphasizes spiritual over utilitarian values and is anticipatory of his residency at Walden Pond.

Thoreau remained an active reformer throughout his life, believing in the precedence of the individual of the transitoriness of institutions and the importance of spiritual values over utilitarian ones. He did not advocate the overthrow of government but asked for "at once a better government." Slavery, however, was clearly one institution he would rather do without. As an active member of the Lyceum, Thoreau championed the freedom of speech and came to the aid of Rogers, Emerson, and Phillips. "Resistance to Civil Government" was his own conscientious expression of discontent with the institution of slavery. By the 1850's, the government's support of slavery and the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law convinced Thoreau of its tyranny. When Brown led his raid on Harper's Ferry, Thoreau championed the raid as "resistance to tyranny." While he was never quite comfortable with discussing forcible resistance, Thoreau's defense of Brown was not at odds with his Transcendentalist principles: his heroic ideal and his sense of active virtue. While Thoreau operated from the base of Transcendentalist principles, it is remarkable how consistent his essays are by design.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings by Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Joseph Wood Krutch (New York: Bantam Books, 1986) 342.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The American as Reformer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950) 33.

<sup>3</sup>James Goodwin, "Thoreau and John Brown: Transcendental Politics," *ESQ* 25 (1979): 156.

<sup>4</sup>Fritz Oehlschlaeger, "Another Look at the Text and Title of Thoreau's 'Civil Disobedience,'" *ESQ* 36 (1990): 240.

<sup>5</sup>Mohandas K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 19 (New Delhi: New Delhi Publications, 1958) 466.

<sup>6</sup>Gandhi 61: 401.

<sup>7</sup>Henry David Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," *Reform Papers*, ed. Wendell Glick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973) 133.

<sup>8</sup>Walter Harding and Michael Meyer, *The New Thoreau Handbook* (New York: New York University Press, 1980) 136.

<sup>9</sup>Mohandas K. Gandhi, *My Religion* (Ahmedabad: Jivanji Dahyabhai Desai Navajivan Press, 1955) 62.

<sup>10</sup>Vincent Buranelli, "The Case Against Thoreau," *Ethics* 67 (1957): 266.

<sup>11</sup>Buranelli 262 & 264.

<sup>12</sup>Myron Simon, "Thoreau and Anarchism," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 23 (1984): 368.

<sup>13</sup>Simon 362.

<sup>14</sup>Simon 369.

<sup>15</sup>Mark Van Doren, *Henry David Thoreau: A Critical Study* (New York: Russel & Russel, 1961) 44.

<sup>16</sup>Goodwin 164.

<sup>17</sup>Wendell Glick, "Thoreau and Radical Abolitionism: A Study of the Native Background of Thoreau's Social Philosophy," diss. Northwestern U, 1950, 222.

<sup>18</sup>Glick 215 & 188.

<sup>19</sup>Harding and Meyer 121.

<sup>20</sup>Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 64.

<sup>21</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoreau," *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Four Volumes in One* (New York: Tudor Publishing, 1941) 381.

<sup>22</sup>James Duban, "Conscience and Consciousness: The Liberal Christian Context of Thoreau's Political Ethics," *New England Quarterly* 60 (1987): 211.

<sup>23</sup>Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom* (New York: Modern Library, 1984) 416. The price of cotton, land, and slaves increased during the 1850's. Exorbitant profits were made in speculation, especially in the southwest. Also see Kenneth M. Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), esp. the chapter on "Profit and Loss" 383-418. Stamp writes: "In short, on both large and small estates, none but the most hopelessly inefficient masters failed to profit from the ownership of slaves." (Stamp, 414).

<sup>24</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957) see editor's introduction 49.

<sup>25</sup>Edmund S. Morgan, "The American Revolution Considered as an Intellectual Movement," *Paths of American Thought*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Morton White (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963) 18.



- <sup>26</sup>Adin Ballou, *Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1975) 33.
- <sup>27</sup>Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeepers Millennium* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).
- <sup>28</sup>Charles Dickens, *American Notes* (New York: Modern Library, 1996) 37.
- <sup>29</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988) 453.
- <sup>30</sup>John L. Thomas, *The Liberator* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963) 59.
- <sup>31</sup>Thomas 231.
- <sup>32</sup>Thomas 233.
- <sup>33</sup>William Lloyd Garrison, "Declaration of Sentiments," *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison* (Boston, 1852) 74.
- <sup>34</sup>Adin Ballou, *Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments* (Boston, 1839) 11.
- <sup>35</sup>Ballou, *Autobiography* 389.
- <sup>36</sup>Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod* (1988; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 37.
- <sup>37</sup>Glick 228.
- <sup>38</sup>Glick 164.
- <sup>39</sup>Harold Clarke Goddard, *Studies in New England Transcendentalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908) 21.
- <sup>40</sup>Theodore Parker, "A Discourse of the Transient and Permanent in Christianity," *Views of Religion* (Boston, 1890) 309.
- <sup>41</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, "An Address," *Nature Addresses and Lectures*, ed. Edward W. Emerson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903) 128.
- <sup>42</sup>Emerson, "An Address," *Nature Addresses and Lectures* 144.
- <sup>43</sup>Perry Miller, ed., *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950) 21.
- <sup>44</sup>William Ellery Channing, "Likeness to God," in *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* 23, 24, & 25.
- <sup>45</sup>Edward H. Madden, *Civil Disobedience and the Moral Law in Nineteenth-Century American Philosophy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968) 5.
- <sup>46</sup>Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 30. Richardson discusses Scottish realism and Emerson's reaction to Stewart's system, pages 29-33.
- <sup>47</sup>Emerson, "Transcendentalist," *Nature Addresses and Lectures* 339.

- <sup>48</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Heart of Emerson's Journals*, ed. Bliss Perry (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937) 262.
- <sup>49</sup>Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* (London, 1836) 151.
- <sup>50</sup>Coleridge 149.
- <sup>51</sup>Coleridge 214.
- <sup>52</sup>Robert Sattelmeyer, *Thoreau's Reading: A Study in Intellectual History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
- <sup>53</sup>Henry David Thoreau *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (Orleans, MA: Parnassus Imprints, 1987) 452 & 477.
- <sup>54</sup>Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 381.
- <sup>55</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. William H. Gilman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969) 408.
- <sup>56</sup>Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. 1, ed. John C. Broderick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) 277.
- <sup>57</sup>Thoreau *Journal* 1: 289 & 298.
- <sup>58</sup>Thoreau, *Walden* 142.
- <sup>59</sup>Thoreau, *Walden* 343.
- <sup>60</sup>William Ellery Channing, "Self-Culture," *The Works of William Ellery Channing* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1957) 17 & 18.
- <sup>61</sup>Sherman Paul, *Shores of America: Thoreau's Inward Exploration* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972) 5.
- <sup>62</sup>See Arthur Christy, *The Orient in American Transcendentalism: A Study of Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).
- <sup>63</sup>Thoreau, *Journal* (Broderick) 3: 306.
- <sup>64</sup>Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1945) 706.
- <sup>65</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* 91.
- <sup>66</sup>Emerson, "The American Scholar," *Nature Addresses and Lectures* 115.
- <sup>67</sup>Emerson, "Nature," *Nature Addresses and Lectures* 10, 25, 75, & 40.
- <sup>68</sup>Thoreau *Journal* (Broderick) 4: 29-30.
- <sup>69</sup>Thoreau, *Walden* 313.
- <sup>70</sup>Thoreau, *Walden* 172.

<sup>71</sup>Henry David Thoreau, *The Maine Woods* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 71.

<sup>72</sup>Channing, "Spiritual Freedom," *Works* 173.

<sup>73</sup>Channing, "Spiritual Freedom," *Works* 174.

<sup>74</sup>Duban 212.

<sup>75</sup>Thoreau, "Paradise (to be) Regained," *Reform Papers* 38.

<sup>76</sup>See Linck C. Johnson, *Thoreau's Complex Weave: The Writing of a Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986).

<sup>77</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* 67, 69, & 364.

<sup>78</sup>Victor Cousin, *Introduction to the History of Philosophy* (Boston, 1832) 1.

<sup>79</sup>Richardson makes a similar point. See Richardson, *Emerson* 114.

<sup>80</sup>Cousin 185.

<sup>81</sup>Cousin 35.

<sup>82</sup>Cousin 72 & 73.

<sup>83</sup>Cousin 126.

<sup>84</sup>Cousin 171.

<sup>85</sup>Sattelmeyer 20.

<sup>86</sup>Henry David Thoreau, "Barbarities of Civilized States," *Early Essays and Miscellanies*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) 110.

<sup>87</sup>Thoreau, *Walden* 205. The italics are mine.

<sup>88</sup>Cousin 131.

<sup>89</sup>Thoreau *Walden* 153.

<sup>90</sup>Emerson's reading was far broader than I have indicated. While a complete list of his reading is outside the scope of my subject, I suggest Richardson's book for those interested, and especially those who would like to understand the importance for Emerson to refute Hume. Richardson also argues convincingly that it was Cousin who first helped Emerson to appreciate Eastern philosophy and religion. The same is probably true of Thoreau.

<sup>91</sup>Orestes A. Brownson, *New Views of Christianity, Society, and the Church* (Boston: James Munroe, 1836) 13.

<sup>92</sup>Thoreau, "The Commercial Spirit of Modern Times," *Early Essays and Miscellanies* 117.

<sup>93</sup>Glick 215.

- <sup>94</sup>Thoreau, "Paradise (to be) Regained," *Reform Papers* 41.
- <sup>95</sup>Kenneth Walter Cameron, *Thoreau and His Harvard Classmates* (Hartford: Transcendental Books, 1965) 6, 107.
- <sup>96</sup>Thoreau, "Class Book Autobiography," *Early Essays and Miscellanies* 114.
- <sup>97</sup>Cameron, *Thoreau and His Harvard Classmates* 85.
- <sup>98</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* 14.
- <sup>99</sup>Thoreau, "Walking," *The Natural History Essays*, ed. Robert Sattelmeyer (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1980) 111.
- <sup>100</sup>Kenneth Walter Cameron, *The Massachusetts Lyceum During the American Renaissance* (Hartford: Transcendental Books, 1969) 101-90.
- <sup>101</sup>Glick 164.
- <sup>102</sup>Thoreau, *Journal* (Broderick) 1: 163.
- <sup>103</sup>Linck C. Johnson, "Contexts of Bravery: Thoreau's Revisions of 'The Service' for a Week," *Studies in American Renaissance*, ed. Joel Meyerson (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983) 293.
- <sup>104</sup>Cameron, *The Massachusetts Lyceum During the American Renaissance*.
- <sup>105</sup>Thoreau, "The Service," *Reform Papers* 17.
- <sup>106</sup>Thoreau, *Journal* (Broderick) 1: 146.
- <sup>107</sup>Duban writes: "Thoreau suggests that his apparently radical outlook is actually consistent with long-established religious values; 'absolute right' he elsewhere mused, is 'synonymous with the law of God.'" Duban 212.
- <sup>108</sup>Thoreau, "The Comparative Moral Policy of Severe and Mild Punishments," *Early Essays and Miscellanies* 21, 23.
- <sup>109</sup>Thoreau, *Journal* (Broderick) 1: 87.
- <sup>110</sup>Thoreau, "Sir Walter Raleigh," *Early Essays and Miscellanies* 181.
- <sup>111</sup>Thoreau, *Journal* (Broderick) 1: 23.
- <sup>112</sup>Thoreau, *Journal* (Broderick) 3: 185-186.
- <sup>113</sup>Thoreau, *Journal* (Broderick) 1: 93.
- <sup>114</sup>Thoreau, *Walden*, "Visitors" 208; "Higher Laws" 263, 260.
- <sup>115</sup>Thoreau, *Journal* (Broderick) 1: 95.
- <sup>116</sup>Harding, *Days of Henry Thoreau* 69.
- <sup>117</sup>Emerson, "Thoreau," *Works* 383.
- <sup>118</sup>Emerson "Thoreau," *Works* 403.

- <sup>119</sup>Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau as Remembered by a Young Friend* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917) v, viii.
- <sup>120</sup>Thoreau, "Paradise (to be) Regained," *Reform Papers* 19, 20. For additional background information on Thoreau's political essays see *Thoreau: People, Principles, and Politics*, ed. Milton Meltzer (New York: Wang and Hill, 1974).
- <sup>121</sup>Thoreau, "Paradise (to be) Regained," *Reform Papers* 35.
- <sup>122</sup>Thoreau, "Paradise (to be) Regained," *Reform Papers* 47.
- <sup>123</sup>Thoreau, "Paradise (to be) Regained," *Reform Papers* 42.
- <sup>124</sup>Thomas 320.
- <sup>125</sup>Thomas 320.
- <sup>126</sup>Thoreau, "Herald of Freedom," *Reform Papers* 49-52.
- <sup>127</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Emancipation in the British West Indies," *Miscellanies* (Boston, 1885) 174-175.
- <sup>128</sup>Thoreau, "Wendell Phillips Before Concord Lyceum," *Reform Papers* 59.
- <sup>129</sup>Thoreau, "Wendell Phillips," *Reform Papers* 60.
- <sup>130</sup>Thoreau, "Wendell Phillips," *Reform Papers* 62.
- <sup>131</sup>Thoreau, *Walden* 181.
- <sup>132</sup>Thoreau, *Walden* 135.
- <sup>133</sup>Thoreau, *Walden* 139.
- <sup>134</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* 11.
- <sup>135</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* 21.
- <sup>136</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* 154.
- <sup>137</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* 85.
- <sup>138</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* ii. Introduction by Thomas Blanding.
- <sup>139</sup>I refer here to James H. Fairchild, *Moral Science*; Asa Mahan, *Science of Moral Philosophy*; and Francis Wayland, *Elements of Moral Science*. Madden discusses each of these works in relation to Transcendentalism.
- <sup>140</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* 85.
- <sup>141</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* 159.
- <sup>142</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* 161.
- <sup>143</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* 86.
- <sup>144</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* 170-171.
- <sup>145</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* 172, 181.

- <sup>146</sup>Thoreau, *A Week* 392, 432, 190, 319.
- <sup>147</sup>Amos Bronson Alcott, *The Journals of Bronson Alcott*, ed. Ordell Shepard (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1938) 201.
- <sup>148</sup>Adin Ballou, *Christian Non-Resistance: In All Its Important Bearings* (Philadelphia, 1846) 223.
- <sup>149</sup>Garrison, "Declaration of Sentiments," *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison* 75.
- <sup>150</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 63.
- <sup>151</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 81.
- <sup>152</sup>Thoreau, "Reform and Reformers," *Reform Papers* 186-187.
- <sup>153</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 64.
- <sup>154</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 84.
- <sup>155</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 76.
- <sup>156</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 75.
- <sup>157</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 65.
- <sup>158</sup>Emerson, "Self-Reliance," *Works* 31.
- <sup>159</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 66.
- <sup>160</sup>William Paley, *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (London, 804)  
<sup>155</sup>. Thoreau cites this passage in "Resistance to Civil Government," 68.
- <sup>161</sup>Thoreau, *Walden* 232.
- <sup>162</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 65.
- <sup>163</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 77.
- <sup>164</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 78.
- <sup>165</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 90.
- <sup>166</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 77.
- <sup>167</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 65.
- <sup>168</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 84.
- <sup>169</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 85. Also see Sherman Paul's note in *Shores of America: Thoreau's Inward Exploration*: "The transcendental conception of necessity was first stated by Thoreau in *The Service*. It was the central idea of an organic conduct of life — that whether or not one subscribes to Spirit, one must go with the current of life, not against it. Here the wisdom of Lao-tzu would have supported Thoreau." 228.
- <sup>170</sup>Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Reform Papers* 66, 73, 67.

- <sup>171</sup>William Howard Russell, *My Diary North and South*, ed. Eugene H. Berwanger (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988) 212.
- <sup>172</sup>Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," *Reform Papers* 92.
- <sup>173</sup>Emerson, "Fugitive Slave Law," *Miscellanies* 226; *The Heart of Emerson's Journals* 256.
- <sup>174</sup>Channing, *The Works of William Ellery Channing* 862.
- <sup>175</sup>James Madison, *The Federalist*, ed. Jacob E. Cooke (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961) 367.
- <sup>176</sup>Henry David Thoreau, *Journals*, ed. Bradford Torrey (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949) 7: 129.
- <sup>177</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, "War," *Miscellanies* 196.
- <sup>178</sup>Richardson 315.
- <sup>179</sup>Barry Kritzberg, "Thoreau, Slavery, and Resistance to Civil Government," *Massachusetts Review* 30 (1989): 543. Kritzberg also writes of Thoreau's reaction to the Fugitive Slave Law: "The collaboration of his native state in perpetuating this wrong convinced Thoreau that something more vital than the rights of black men was now at stake. His own freedom — of which he was more than usually jealous — was threatened as well. A philosophic individualism, such as he practiced, was only possible in a state where moral principles had some claim over political expediency." 548.
- <sup>180</sup>William W. Freehling, *The Reintegration of American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 182-194.
- <sup>181</sup>Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," *Reform Papers* 107.
- <sup>182</sup>Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," *Reform Papers* 106.
- <sup>183</sup>Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," *Reform Papers* 108.
- <sup>184</sup>Thoreau, *Walden* 223, 175, 276, 148.
- <sup>185</sup>Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," *Reform Papers* 94.
- <sup>186</sup>Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," *Reform Papers* 98 & 96. It is true, however, that on February 27, 1856, Thoreau disputes the sensibility of America's and England's engaging in war. Again, he will denounce war in cases contrary to his moral judgment. Thoreau, *Journal* (Torrey) 8: 180.
- <sup>187</sup>Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," *Reform Papers* 96-7.
- <sup>188</sup>Richardson 73.
- <sup>189</sup>Henry S. Salt, *The Life of Henry David Thoreau* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1890) 271.
- <sup>190</sup>Alcott 321.

<sup>191</sup>Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," *Reform Papers* 138. Also see John Brown, *The Life and Letters of Captain John Brown*, ed. Richard Webb (London, 1861). The publication of Brown's letters helped to shift Northern public opinion in his favor. Union troops reportedly marched to songs in his memory.

<sup>192</sup>Thoreau, "A Plea," *Reform Papers* 112.

<sup>193</sup>Thoreau, "A Plea," *Reform Papers* 113.

<sup>194</sup>Thoreau, "A Plea," *Reform Papers* 118.

<sup>195</sup>Thoreau, "A Plea," *Reform Papers* 122.

<sup>196</sup>Thoreau, "A Plea," *Reform Papers* 121 & 122.

<sup>197</sup>Thoreau, "A Plea," *Reform Papers* 120.

<sup>198</sup>Thoreau, "A Plea," *Reform Papers* 125 & 130.

<sup>199</sup>Thoreau, "A Plea," *Reform Papers* 132.

<sup>200</sup>Thoreau, "A Plea," *Reform Papers* 129.

<sup>201</sup>Thoreau, "A Plea," *Reform Papers* 133.

<sup>202</sup>Thoreau, "A Plea," *Reform Papers* 117.

<sup>203</sup>Thoreau, "A Plea," *Reform Papers* 137.

<sup>204</sup>Thoreau, "A Plea," *Reform Papers* 133.

<sup>205</sup>Henry David Thoreau, *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Walter Harding (New York: New York University Press, 1958) 611.

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