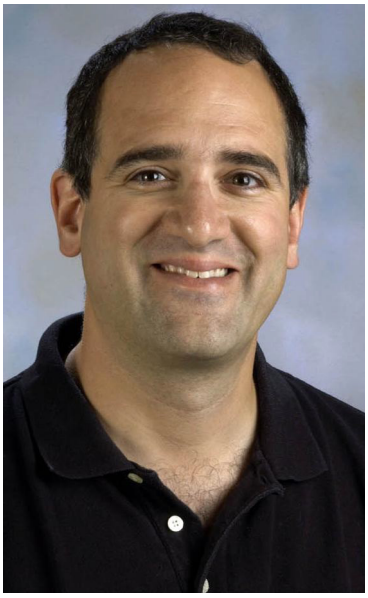
PROFESSOR PHILIP CAFARO



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(In dealing constructively with Cafaro's efforts we need to find it in our hearts to get past simplistic blunders such as, wow, his opening sentence "Henry Thoreau went to Walden Pond to take up Emerson's challenge." Perhaps we can do this by saying to ourselves "Obviously, somebody fed such crap to him, obviously he didn't invent that sort of thing all by himself" – placing the onus on an unknown Emersonian dolt who has led him astray.)

1633

February: The Cavalier poet Thomas Carew's masque entitled *COELUM BRITANICUM* was acted in the banqueting-

house at Whitehall. (Eventually at some point Thoreau would extrapolate from this the following words

of Mercury in response to the 5th antimasque of Gypsies, and would add to his extrapolation a title.)

PEOPLE OF WALDEN

WALDEN:

COMPLEMENTAL VERSES

THE PRETENSIONS OF POVERTY

"Thou dost presume too much, poor needy wretch,
To claim a station in the firmament,
Because thy humble cottage, or thy tub,
Nurses some lazy or pedantic virtue
In the cheap sunshine or by shady springs,
With roots and pot-herbs; where thy right hand,
Tearing those human passions from the mind
Upon whose stocks fair blooming virtues flourish,
Degradeth nature, and benumbeth sense,
And, Gorgon-like, turns active men to stone
We not require the dull society
Of your necessitated temperance,
Or that unnatural stupidity
That knows nor joy nor sorrow; nor your forc'd
Falsely exalted passive fortitude
Above the active. This low abject brood
That fix their seats in mediocrity,
Become your servile minds; but we advance
Such virtues only as admit excess,
Brave, bounteous acts, regal magnificence,
All-seeing prudence, magnanimity
That knows no bound, and that heroic virtue
For which antiquity hath left no name,
But patterns only, such as Hercules,
Achilles, Theseus. Back to thy loath'd cell;
And when thou seest the new enlightened sphere,
Study to know but what those worthies were."

T. CAREW

THOMAS CAREW

In the masque the god Mercury is responding to the pretensions of the personification of Poverty. The poem thus points toward the error of those who are impoverished, who might suppose that the mere fact of their poverty provides them with some sort of unearned moral and intellectual esteem. The point would be that merely being poor makes no-one worthy. It might well be easier to achieve poverty by being righteous than it would be to achieve righteousness by being poor. Thoreau would tip this selection into his WALDEN manuscript between Chapters 1 and 2, on a leaf which does not match any of the paper types he used in any of the eight drafts (thus rendering it difficult for us now to ascertain precisely when it was that he inserted this selection).

THOMAS WOODSON

Sue Petrovski has said something about Thoreau's tipping of this extract from a 17th-Century Cavalier court masque about poverty into the WALDEN manuscript between Chapters 1 and 2, that I think is insightful. Sue's insight is that at this point Thoreau is being at his very most profound and thoughtful, that rather than being a throwaway nonce insertion, a lone cabbage in the Thoreauvian pumpkin patch, this is one of the deepest points in his writing.

At this point in his writing, I consider, Thoreau is dealing with the problem of self-deception — the problem of negative affect exhibiting itself as if it were positive, the problem of something pretending to be helpful when its actual impulse is to destroy.

Thoreau is here dealing with people who suppose they are enamoured of their own poverty when actually they are embarrassed by it and thus despise themselves. Their defense is to profess to be oh, so proud that they are poor. Wretchedness become their proof of personal righteousness. This sort of mental trickiness is dangerous because we also have a habit of tying our own shoelaces together. While we suppose that we are doing ourselves a great favor in endlessly congratulating ourselves for our own poverty, actually we are up to something rather dangerous because there is always the chance that we will trip over our own toes while we are patting ourselves on our backs. Ressentiment is a contortion.

The vocabulary for describing this sort of situation did not exist at the time that Thoreau was writing. Sigmund Freud had not yet been born in what is now the Czech Republic (which itself did not yet exist), and Friedrich Nietzsche was not yet a teenager. Without the words having been created by Friedrich Engels, there was as yet no such thing as a recognizable "false consciousness."

Another example of this sort of self-deception is the way that the Emersonians now rise to the defense of Waldo's "Negrophobia." In his own era, among his own compatriots, Emerson was known as a Negrophobe. That was the word they used at the time. It was hard for him to get a haircut because he couldn't let a negro barber touch him. He didn't want negroes in his house even as servants, which is why he hired the Irish as maids and cooks and gardeners, and why he hired the white boy Henry as a handyman. His journal is painfully honest about this (you will notice that I am here praising Emerson for his exceptional honesty, not condemning him). He wants the negro to die out, or go the hell away or something. He is antislavery because he supposes that it is having a white master that allows such incompetent people to get enough to eat and stay alive. He is so painfully honest in his journal, that nowadays there are portions of his journal that the Emersonians simply cannot read. They cannot pay attention to such honesty. Their eyes glide right over certain of his passages. The false consciousness of today's Emersonian is that they themselves are not racists, and that therefore their hero Waldo could have been no racist. To acknowledge that Waldo was "antislavery for all the wrong reasons" back then would be to admit something about themselves right now that they simply cannot afford to admit. (This explains, also, our rather absolute dearth of black Emersonian scholars.)

Did you ever wonder why "Jim Crow" came after the civil war? Here the good white people had gone to all this trouble to free the black people, and a whole bunch of good white people had died the bloody death, and then after they had gone to all this trouble, **these disrespectful negroes were still around**. –We set them free, so why didn't they go the hell away and leave us the fuck alone???? They'd better step off the sidewalk into the street when a white man comes by, if they know what's good for them! Our nation's attitude was Emersonian.

I'll try to describe this in its most general form, so that we can see that it applies just as well to black people as to poor people, just as well to poor people as to black people, right here in between Chapter I and Chapter II of Walden, where Thoreau inserts this lone cabbage into his pumpkin patch — this Cavalier masque. Here goes. Compassionate helpfulness is a dangerous emotion, because so very often it derives its energy from a desire to do harm. What happens is that we see something that we do not like, something that we suppose ought not to be allowed to exist (such as, for one example, poverty, or for another example, people who aren't white and progressive like us), and so we immediately and naturally desire to destroy this thing that ought not to exist. Our negative impulses are so, so much more powerful, and so, so much more prevalent than our positive impulses! However, our minds instantly protect us by blocking this unacceptable desire to do harm. In fact we never become aware of our own affect as consisting of an impulse to do harm. We experience it falsely, as an

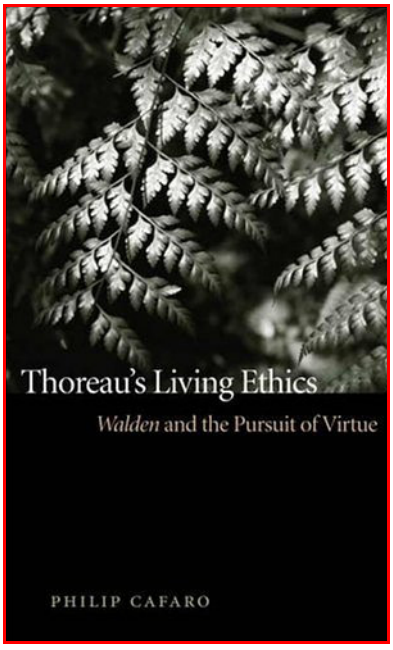
emotion of benevolent helpfulness. It appears as the opposite of what it really is deep down. By the time we become conscious of it, it is all prettied up and made presentable. In "false consciousness" our minds have always already replaced this negative impulse, this impulse to destroy, with a positive one, which we experience always and only as a benign desire to make ourselves helpful. Our negative energies get redirected from harmfulness into beneficence. In the case of a poverty problem or a race problem or whatever, our destructive loathing is channeled into a noticing that someone "needs our help." We set out to be of service to this person who disgusts us so, and in that manner we harmlessly dispose of our unacceptable impulse. What makes this utterly dangerous, of course, is that our mental trickiness is not always successful.
A good example of how our mental trickiness in this regard is not always successful is the great "War on Poverty" that was proclaimed by President Lyndon Baines Johnson. We don't like poverty? No, it's poor people that we don't like, and we want to do away with all the poor people! Therefore over time our government's program, called the "War on Poverty," became our defensive, preemptive war against the poor people. Instead of helping them rise from poverty, its goal became to punish them again and again relentlessly for being poor, by shoving them down again and again into poverty. And then along came our War on Drugs, and we began to sentence our teenage children to twenty years in the penitentiary for smoking a joint in a desperate effort to protect them from ruining their lives by graduating to hard drugs.

This is of the first importance and of the last importance because we so readily betray ourselves. We start out to "help" someone and before you know it, that person has been destroyed — because our "help" was tainted and we betrayed ourselves and somehow, "unintentionally," our true intent came through into the outcome. The drink that we held out with our good right hand turned out to have had a poison pill slipped into it by our left hand while we were feeling benevolent and weren't watching that left hand. "Oh, did I poison you — my goodness, and there I was only trying to be helpful!" When we try to act and it is unbeknownst from a false position, we tend to betray ourselves, and others. (The aftermath of Katrina comes to mind.)

PHILIP CAFARO ON THOMAS CAREW IN WALDEN[1]

PAGES 48-49: This ancient conception of virtue can be seen most

1. Philip Cafaro. THOREAU'S LIVING ETHICS: WALDEN AND THE PURSUIT OF VIRTUE. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2004



clearly in the "complemental verses" by the Cavalier poet Thomas Carew that end WALDEN's first chapter. As so often, Thoreau's words are slyly suggestive. The verses are hardly complimentary to those who refuse to recognize higher goals in life, but the ethic of aspiration they express may well complement our more conventional ethic of social obligation:

> Thou dost presume too much, poor needy wretch,
> To claim a station in the firmament,
> Because thy humble cottage, or thy tub,
> Nurses some lazy or pedantic virtue.

Carew contrasts "lazy or pedantic virtues" that are presumably easy to achieve and that allow us to live in "dull society" with others, with "fair blooming virtues," whose neglect "Degradeth nature, and benumbeth sense, / And, Gorgon-like, turns active men to stone." As examples, Carew rejects "necessitated temperance" and "forc'd falsely exalted passive fortitude" as virtues, because these qualities are life-denying; also, perhaps, because we may take them on through fear, insensibility, or laziness. Carew's adjectival qualifications suggest he might recognize a genuine temperance or fortitude, in the service of action and life. Certainly Thoreau would. Elsewhere, he reminds us that temperance can keep us from pursuing unnecessary and frivolous goals, while true fortitude is not mere passive acceptance of our lot, "forced" on us by circumstances, but is rather itself a force enabling us to act in adversity.

The conventional social virtues become degraded through an acceptance of "mediocrity," while rarer, more difficult-to-achieve virtues are ignored altogether. "But we advance," Carew says:

> Such virtues only as admit excess,
> Brave, bounteous acts, regal magnificence,
> All-seeing prudence, magnanimity
> That knows no bound, and that heroic virtue
> For which antiquity hath left no name,
> But patterns only, such as Hercules,
> Achilles, Theseus.

Already in his early essay "The Service," Thoreau had rejected any pseudo-Aristotelian account of virtue as a mean of effort or achievement: "their mean is no better than meanness, nor their medium than mediocrity." Here he quotes Carew to challenge the complacency that seeks to specify some point beyond which we need not strive: either because we are already sufficiently virtuous; or because we have no strict duty to do so; or because higher, difficult to achieve goals are unimportant. Magnificence (the bestowal of great gifts on others) and magnanimity (literally "great-souledness," the superior development of one's whole personality) are almost by definition impossible for most people to achieve. But that does not make them any less virtues for Carew or Thoreau. We may assume that the inhabitants of the one-room house by Walden Pond would interpret magnificence and magnanimity quite differently than the Cavalier poet, but this emphasizes all the more what these aristocrats of human aspiration do share: a demanding and open-ended conception of virtue.

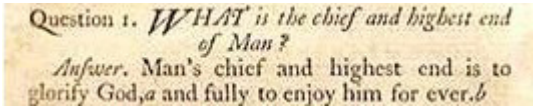
1648

The Parliament authorized the Westminster Assembly of Divines's THE SHORTER CATECHISM, prepared primarily for the instruction of children in the true faith (it would be authorized also by the Scottish parliament in 1649).

> THE SCARLET LETTER: Now Pearl knew well enough who made her, for Hester Prynne, the daughter of a pious home, very soon after her talk with the child about her Heavenly Father, had begun to inform her of those truths which the human spirit, at whatever stage of immaturity, imbibes with such eager interest. Pearl, therefore –so large were the attainments of her three years' lifetime– could have borne a fair examination in the New England Primer, or the first column of the Westminster Catechism, although unacquainted with the outward form of either of those celebrated works. But that perversity, which all children have more or less of, and of which little Pearl had a tenfold portion, now, at the most inopportune moment, took thorough possession of her, and closed her lips, or impelled her to speak words amiss. After putting her finger in her mouth, with many ungracious refusals to answer good Mr. Wilson's question, the child finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison-door.

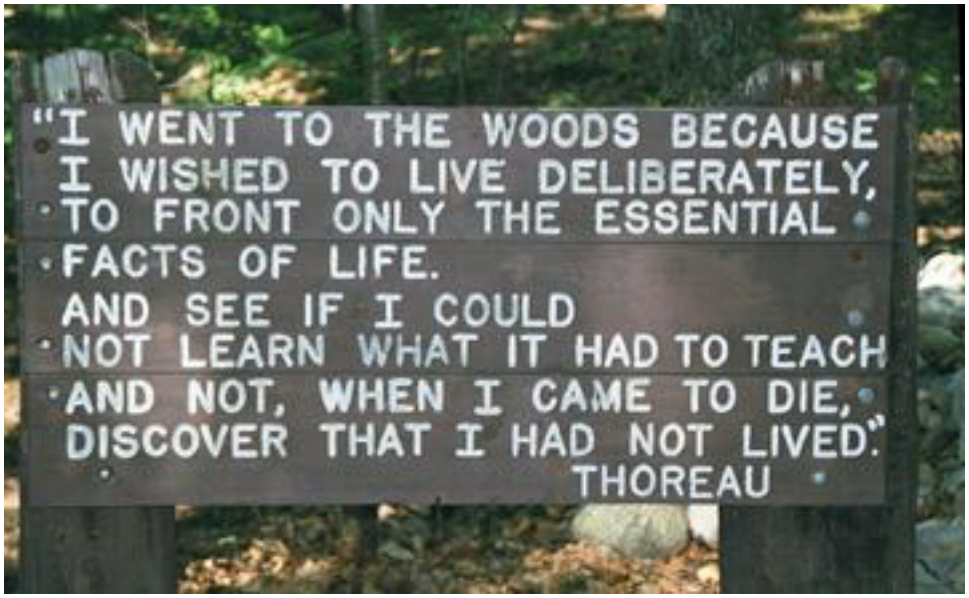
In this new catechism there were 107 questions and answers the first of which was the famed:

Q1. WHAT IS THE CHIEF END OF MAN? A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.[2]


Question 1. *WHAT is the chief and highest end of Man?*
Answer. Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God,*a* and fully to enjoy him for ever.*b*

2. With the restoration of monarchy in 1660 the official standing of this document would of course evaporate.

WALDEN: I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have *somewhat hastily* concluded that it is the chief end of man here to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."



PHILIP CAFARO ON CATECHISM IN WALDEN[3]

PAGES 25-28: This emphasis on personal choice is underscored by a third key term Thoreau uses to describe his ethical aspirations: pursuing his "chief end." Consider again a passage we have already discussed:

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life ... to live deep ... to know [life] by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next

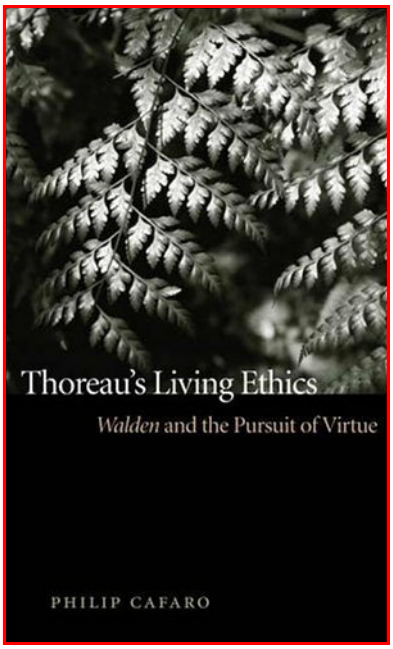
> excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have **somewhat hastily** concluded that it is the chief end of man here to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."

The phrase Thoreau emphasizes is nicely ambiguous. The full quotation actually goes some way toward specifying Thoreau's conception of the good life, which includes a rich experience, the pursuit of knowledge, artistic creation, and reverence. That conception is in many ways out of the ordinary, but Thoreau's conclusion sets these goals up as constituents of a "chief end" to which his readers must respond.

Thoreau's contemporary readers, predominately Protestants, would have immediately recognized the source of the quotation that concludes the passage as the catechism given in the New England Primer, widely used in the religious instruction of the young. "Q: What is the chief end of man? A: To glorify God and enjoy him forever." To refer to this catechism is to refer to a "chief end" that has been explicitly acknowledged by many of his readers, in language that they understand and accept to some degree. Thoreau cleverly piggybacks his own elevated conception of the good life onto another conception to which his neighbors at least pay lip service, letting his readers' religious convictions do some of the motivational work for him. In fact, he will challenge these convictions. But it is in such words as the catechism speaks that his readers acknowledge higher goals and some chief goal in life, and Thoreau begins here.

What might it mean that his readers have "**somewhat hastily** concluded" on a chief end? Perhaps that they have chosen wrongly and that there is a better one. But "to glorify and enjoy God"

3. Philip Cafaro. THOREAU'S LIVING ETHICS: WALDEN AND THE PURSUIT OF VIRTUE. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2004



might well express Thoreau's own vision of living well, based on his particular definitions of the terms in question. So the "hasty conclusion" might mean that the terms are correct, yet their common interpretation false. Then again, such suggestive words are essentially empty without a certain amount of interpretation, which each individual must provide for himself or herself. There could be many valid readings, but some degree of mental effort is necessary for any genuine one. Still another possible interpretation focuses on our actions: most of us conclude our efforts to live up to our chief end "somewhat hastily," failing to pursue the good life through mere laziness. Along these lines, the quotation might even refer to a widespread hypocrisy: we acknowledge a grand purpose to our lives, we gravely insist that our children memorize these words. Yet we often fail to even attempt to live up to them.

Thoreau certainly means to challenge his readers' interpretations of their "chief end." But irrespective of any particular interpretation, he wishes to warn them against a premature belief that they understand what such rich and consequent words mean and what their acceptance would entail. Perhaps Thoreau's most important contention is that **resting** in any particular interpretation of these words, or in any particular forms for living up to them, is mistaken. This point holds regardless of our definition of our chief end. "Happiness," "flourishing," or even "maximizing pleasure," all challenge us. Their pursuit demands a continual effort of translation and interpretation and will. To rest in doctrine – **this** is God, the Bible, or my particular sect, says so– is to abdicate my personal responsibility to know God. To rest in a particular understanding of what God demands from us –these particular forms of worship, these particular relationships to our neighbors– is to close off the possibility of a transformative religious experience or genuinely new testament that might call into question our current forms of life.

Taking the words of the catechism seriously –believing that we are making a statement that refers to God, the author of the universe, who demands that we glorify him– means accepting a task that is almost by definition beyond our abilities. We can know God's nature only very imperfectly and can only glorify him in words and deeds that fall laughably short of his own glory. Nevertheless we must make the effort, or forthrightly renounce this as our chief end. To fail to take our chief end seriously is to fail to take ourselves seriously.

The congregation repeats that its chief end is to **enjoy** God, yet Thoreau sees little joy in his neighbors' religion: "Our hymn-books resound with a melodious cursing of God and enduring him forever.... There is nowhere recorded a simple and irrepressible satisfaction with the gift of life, any memorable praise of God." The worshippers on the hard benches certainly don't look like they are enjoying God, life, or anything else. They no doubt hope to get closer to God in the great by and by and enjoy him then "forever." But if this world is God's creation, displaying an order and beauty that all may see, then perhaps we are somewhat hasty in dismissing it. Perhaps a proper reverence demands an appreciation for **this** creation — the only one, after

all, with which we have yet formed an acquaintance.

The catechism defines our chief end in religious terms, but religion easily enough becomes another discrete activity in our lives, performed in church on Sunday mornings. In contrast, WALDEN specifies reverence within various concrete areas of life: fishing, reading, cooking meals, heating a house. Thoreau describes his experiment in farming as a means toward reverent association with the earth, conceived as God's creation (and even more radically, conceived of as itself divine). He seeks to make farming a sacrament expressing joy in the world and our necessary work within it. Such examples undermine the convenient belief that we may worship God at select times and places and go our secular way in between times. Our chief end should not be so lightly dismissed. Thoreau's attempts at everyday sacramentality show both a will to reverence and a determination to focus his efforts toward his chief end. There is a strong connection between this reinterpretation of everyday activities and the reinterpretation of important ethical terms. both further our goal of living the best lives possible.

Thoreau offers these reinterpretations as a way of challenging his neighbors to take seriously their chief end, **however they may conceive of it**. Elsewhere in WALDEN, he speaks of the good life in more secular terms. Whether speaking in sacred or secular language, he insists that our highest goals and ideals must be part of our daily lives. If they do not infuse our lives, they do not really specify our chief end. We should then honestly discard them and discuss our real goals in life, low as these may be. Any putative chief end must be the conceivable point of all our actions. The simplicity of WALDEN's chapter headings illustrates Thoreau's determination to find beauty, joy, and value in the mundane. "Economy," "Reading," "House-Warming," "Visitors." These activities and aspects of our lives may in the end be elaborated in quite complicated ways. They may turn out to mean something more, or something different, than what we had originally envisioned. But they should be put to the worthiest possible use: a chief end that we may wholeheartedly endorse.

For finally, neither reason, nor tradition, nor society, can define our chief end. Each of us must choose, saying, through our actions, "this is good" or, at least, "this shall be." Whatever our chief end, we should take it seriously and make it our own and "earnestly life [live] from beginning to end."

1806

The Reverend William Paley, D.D.'s THE PRINCIPLES OF MORAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY (London: R. Faulder). (This may or may not be the edition that was in the personal library of Henry Thoreau, to which he would refer in "CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE".)

PALEY'S PRINCIPLES

PALEY'S PRINCIPLES

"RESISTANCE TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT": Paley, a common authority with many on moral questions, in his chapter on the "Duty of Submission to Civil Government," resolves all civil obligation into expediency; and he proceeds to say that "so long as the interest of the whole society requires it, that is, so long as the established government cannot be resisted or changed without public inconveniency, it is the will of God ... that the established government be obeyed, and no longer.... 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." Of this, he says, every man shall judge for himself. But Paley appears never to have contemplated those cases to which the rule of expediency does not apply, in which a people, as well as an individual, must do justice, cost what it may. If I have unjustly wrested a plank from a drowning man, I must restore it to him though I drown myself. This, according to Paley, would be inconvenient. But he that would save his life, in such a case, shall lose it. This people must cease to hold slaves, and to make war on Mexico, though it cost them their existence as a people.

PHILIP CAFARO ON WILLIAM PALEY IN "CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE"[4]

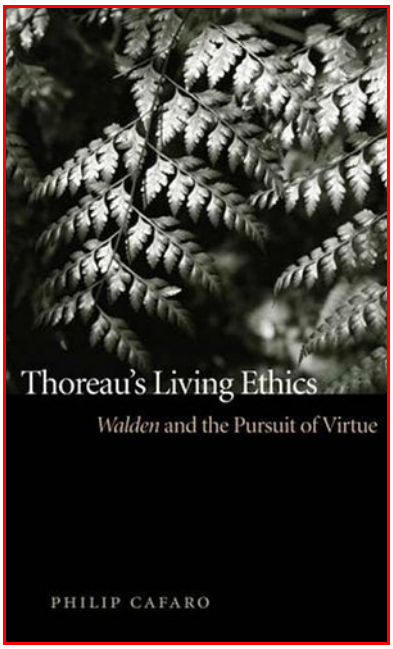
PAGE 68: Slavery and imperialism are such egregious injustices, Thoreau asserts in "Resistance," that we have an absolute, unavoidable duty to oppose our own government if it supports them. This is not a matter of expediency, but of justice. Arguing against theologian William Paley, a prominent advocate of submission to civil government, he writes:

> Paley appears never to have contemplated those cases to which the rule of expediency does not apply, in which a people, as well as an individual, must do justice cost what it may. If I have unjustly wrested a plank from a drowning man, I must restore it to him though I drown myself. This, according to Paley, would be

> inconvenient. But he that would save his life, in such a case, shall lose it. This people must cease to hold slaves, and to make war on Mexico, though it cost them their existence as a people.

In a sense, moral duty overrides expediency and all conflicting interests by its very definition. This is true whether or not duty ever calls for the absolute sacrifice of one's life, regardless of how often duty and expediency do, in fact, conflict, and regardless of whether Thoreau is right in this particular instance. Of course, we should not assert such duties lightly. However, "when a sixth of the population of a nation which has undertaken to be the refuge of liberty are slaves, and a whole country is unjustly overrun and conquered by a foreign army, and subjected to military law, I think that it is not too soon for honest men to rebel and revolutionize. What makes this **duty** the more urgent is the fact, that the country so overrun is not our own, but ours is the invading army." Because these injustices are being sustained or perpetrated by our government, in our name, we have a direct responsibility to oppose them.

4. Philip Cafaro. THOREAU'S LIVING ETHICS: WALDEN AND THE PURSUIT OF VIRTUE. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2004



The ſteps by which the argument proceeds are few and direct. "It is the will of God that "the happineſs of human life be promoted:"—this is the firſt ſtep, and the foundation not only of this, but of every moral concluſion. "Civil ſociety conduces to that end:"—this is the ſecond propoſition. "Civil ſocieties cannot "be upheld, unleſs, in each, the intereſt of the "whole ſociety be binding upon every part and "member of it:"—this is the third ſtep, and conducts us to the concluſion, namely, "that "ſo long as the intereſt of the whole ſociety "requires it, that is, ſo long as the eſtabliſhed "government cannot be reſiſted or changed "without public inconveniency, it is the will "of God (which *will* univerſally determines "our duty) that the eſtabliſhed government be "obeyed,"—and no longer.

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 expence of redreſſing it on the other.

But who ſhall judge of this? We anſwer, "Every man for himſelf." In contentions between the ſovereign and the ſubject, the parties acknowledge

1837

August 31, Thursday: At noon, at University Hall in Cambridge, 200 academics lined up in their pecking order and marched west, to the music of a band, into the 1st Parish Church that had been erected where Mrs. Anne Hutchinson had been examined before her exile for heresy. In this structure they intended to hear an address "Man Thinking" by the Reverend Waldo Emerson,[5] an honorary member of the ΦBK society who had been retained at the eleventh hour (after they had been turned down by the orator of their choice).

The records of that society assert that the Reverend Emerson's oration, of 1¼ hour, was "in the misty, dreamy, unintelligible style of Swedenborg, Coleridge, and Carlyle." The last paragraph of this address included a

5. Which would be retitled and printed in 1841 as "THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR".

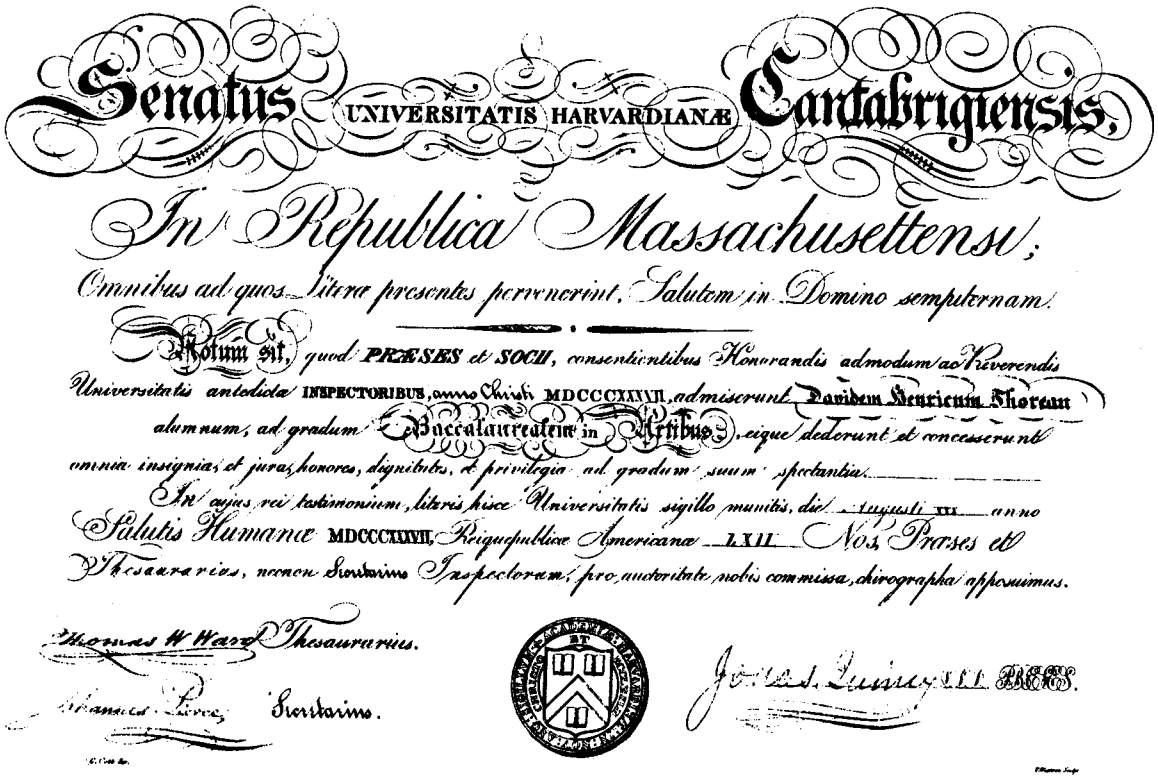
VIEW THIS ONLINE

quote from Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, here rendered in **boldface**:

> Another sign of our times, also marked by an analogous political movement, is, the new importance given to the single person. Every thing that tends to insulate the individual, — to surround him with barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel the world is his, and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state; — tends to true union as well as greatness. **"I learned," said the melancholy Pestalozzi, "that no man in God's wide earth is either willing or able to help any other man."** Help must come from the bosom alone. The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges. If there be one lesson more than another, which should pierce his ear, it is, The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all, it is for you to dare all. …this confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar. We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat. The scholar is decent, indolent, complaisant. See already the tragic consequence. The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself. There is no work for any but the decorous and the complaisant. Young men of the fairest promise, who begin life upon our shores, inflated by the mountain winds, shined upon by all the stars of God, find the earth below not in unison with these, — but are hindered from action by the disgust which the principles on which business is managed inspire, and turn drudges, or die of disgust, — some of them suicides. What is the remedy? They did not yet see, and thousands of young men as hopeful now crowding to the barriers for the career, do not yet see, that, if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him. Patience, — patience; — with the shades of all the good and great for company; and for solace, the perspective of your own infinite life; and for work, the study and the communication of principles, the making those instincts prevalent, the conversion of the world. Is it not the chief disgrace in the world, not to be an unit; — not to be reckoned one character; — not to yield that peculiar fruit which each man was created to bear, but to be reckoned in the gross, in the hundred, or the thousand, of the party, the section, to which we belong; and our opinion predicted geographically, as the north, or the south? Not so, brothers and friends, — please God, ours shall not be so. We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds. The study of letters shall be no longer a name for pity, for doubt, and for sensual indulgence. The dread of man and the love of man shall be a wall of defence and a wreath of joy around all. A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.

Richard Henry Dana, Jr., once Emerson's pupil, was there, back from his two years before the mast and graduating first in his Harvard College class and preparing to take up the study of law at Harvard's Dane Law School. James Russell Lowell was there and later stated that the day was "an event without any parallel in our

literary annals" (it is hard to imagine how what the lecturer had to offer might have been without any parallel in our literary annals, since basically he was merely channeling schoolmaster Noah Webster, Jr.'s bloviation of 1783, "America must be as independent in literature as she is in politics, as famous for arts as for arms"). Emerson's heresy lasted however an hour and a quarter, after which all dined in University Hall. Davidem Henricum Thoreau was not apparent either at this Cambridge bloviation, or at its festive table.



Senatus UNIVERSITATIS HARVARDIANÆ Cantabrigiensis,

In Republica Massachusettensi;

Omnibus ad quos Litera presentes pervenerint, Salutem in Domino sempiternam.

Notum sit, quod PRÆSES et SOCII, consentientibus Honorandis admodum ac Reverendis Universitatis antedictæ INSPECTORIBUS, anno Christi MDCCCXXXVII, admiserunt Davidem Henricum Thoreau alumnum, ad gradum Baccalaureatûs in Artibus, eique dederunt et concesserunt omnia insignia et jura, honores, dignitates, et privilegia ad gradum suum spectantia. In cujus rei testimonium, literis hisce Universitatis sigillo munitis, die tertio mensis Augusti anno Salutis Humanæ MDCCCXXXVII, Reipublicæ Americanæ LXII. Nos, Præses et Thesaurarius, necnon Scriptorius Inspectorem, pro auctoritate nobis commissa, chirographa apposuimus.

Thomas W. Ward Thesaurarius.

Scriptorius.

Thoreau had not really won much recognition in college, except for a couple of $25.^{00} scholarships, and except for the recognition a student obtains by being difficult. The administration summed up his attitude in this

manner, carefully pointing out that it had, despite his resistance, done everything that might be expected of it:

> *He had … imbibed some notions concerning emulation and college rank which had a natural tendency to diminish his zeal, if not his exertions. His instructors were impressed with the conviction that he was indifferent, even to a degree that was faulty…. I appreciate very fully the goodness of his heart and the strictness of his moral principle; and have done as much for him as, under the circumstances, was possible.*

But today we would say he was, for a Comp Lit undergrad student, well "trained:" by the time he left, he had read not only the Greek and Latin canon, but also widely in Italian, French, Spanish, and German literatures (Sanskrit, Chinese, and Arabic literatures were of course encountered in translation). Luckily, as he left higher education, he was able to retain his access to that omphalos of the universe, the Harvard library.[6] We can only be grateful that there was no Sierra Press in 1843, and that no publisher cut a contract with this writer fresh from college, to produce a series of glossy-illustration nature books or "miscellanies" to lay on the nation's coffee-tables for beaucoup bucks, and that for lack of a such a contract, this young writer had to go back to his home town and rusticate and take nature hikes. Dr. Edward Waldo Emerson's comment on this significant ceremonial day, late in his life, was:

> Highly interesting it is to find that Thoreau at twenty, in his "Part" at Commencement, pleaded for the life that, later, he carried out. An observer from the stars, he imagines, "of our planet and the restless animal for whose sake it was contrived, where he found one man to admire with him his fair dwelling-place, the ninety and nine would be scraping together a little of the gilded dust upon its surface.... Let men, true to their natures, cultivate the moral affections, lead manly and independent lives; ...The sea will not stagnate, the earth will be as green as ever, and the air as pure. This curious world ... sublime revelations of Nature."

Friend Stephen Wanton Gould wrote in his journal:

> *5th day 31st of 8th M 1837 / Took a Carryall & rode to Portsmouth with my wife & Mary Williams to attend the Monthly Meeting — Mary Hicks & Hannah Hale preached — To me both Meetings were hard uncomfortable seasons - We dined at Shadrach Chases & it being Rainy came home early.*

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

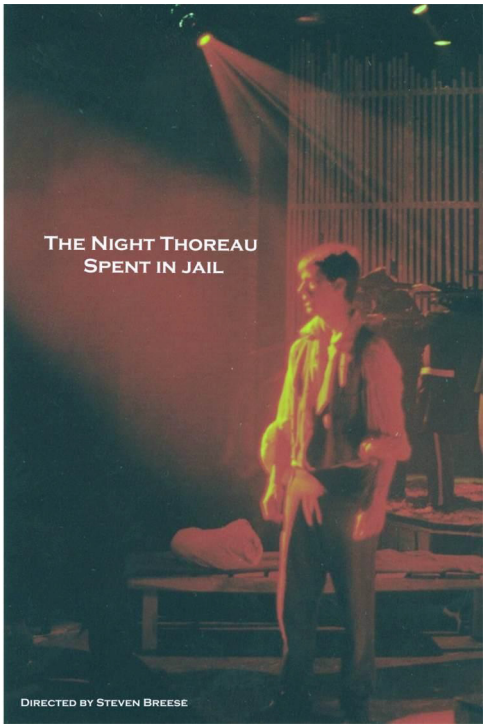
The Phi Beta Kappa address that the Reverend Emerson delivered at the Brattle Street Church in Cambridge on this occasion has been described by Philip Cafaro as "what remains America's most famous commencement speech." –Silly me, I thought America's most famous commencement address was this one that Kurt Vonnegut did not deliver at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1997:

> Ladies and gentlemen of the class of '97.
> Wear Sunscreen.

> If I could offer you only one tip for the future, sunscreen would be it. The long-term benefits of sunscreen have been proved by scientists, whereas the rest of my advice has no basis more reliable than my own meandering experience. I will dispense this advice now.
> Enjoy the power and beauty of your youth. Oh, never mind. You

6. There's an oft-repeated story that Thoreau refused to accept his Harvard diploma, which I showed you above. This is from Lawrence and Lee's play "The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail":

> HENRY: (embracing him) John!
> JOHN: Welcome home. How's your overstuffed brain?
> HENRY: I've forgotten everything already.
> JOHN: At least you've got a diploma!
> HENRY: No, I don't.
> JOHN: Why not?
> HENRY: They charge you a dollar. And I wouldn't pay it.
> JOHN: But think how Mama would love it — your diploma from Harvard, framed on the wall!
> HENRY: Let every sheep keep his own skin.



He did pay his $2.^{50} diploma fee, he did go to his commencement, he did receive his A.B. sheepskin. *Davidem Henricum Thoreaus* did say "Let every sheep keep but his own skin" (November 14, 1847) and "Harvard College was partly built by a lottery. My father tells me he bought a ticket in it" (January 27, 1855). When he made a speech at this commencement, as we have seen, what he told his classmates and superiors was "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." What happened, how this repudiation-of-diploma story got started, was that Harvard offered, for an extra $10.^{00} and no additional work, to magically transform A.B. degrees into A.M. degrees, that is, despite Thoreau's academic record, to make him a Master after the fact. Six members of the class of 1837 earned an advanced degree, and an additional 21 received the advanced degree through this painless learning, but Mr. Thoreau entirely ignored Harvard's meretricious fund-raising scheme (Cameron).

will not understand the power and beauty of your youth until they've faded. But trust me, in 20 years, you'll look back at photos of yourself and recall in a way you can't grasp now how much possibility lay before you and how fabulous you really looked. You are not as fat as you imagine.
Don't worry about the future. Or worry, but know that worrying is as effective as trying to solve an algebra equation by chewing bubble gum. The real troubles in your life are apt to be things that never crossed your worried mind, the kind that blindside you at 4 pm on some idle Tuesday. Do one thing every day that scares you.
Sing.
Don't be reckless with other people's hearts. Don't put up with people who are reckless with yours.
Floss.
Don't waste your time on jealousy. Sometimes you're ahead, sometimes you're behind. The race is long and, in the end, it's only with yourself. Remember compliments you receive. Forget the insults. If you succeed in doing this, tell me how. Keep your old love letters. Throw away your old bank statements.
Stretch.
Don't feel guilty if you don't know what you want to do with your life. The most interesting people I know didn't know at 22 what they wanted to do with their lives. Some of the most interesting 40-year-olds I know still don't. Get plenty of calcium. Be kind to your knees. You'll miss them when they're gone. Maybe you'll marry, maybe you won't. Maybe you'll have children, maybe you won't. Maybe you'll divorce at 40, maybe you'll dance the funky chicken on your 75th wedding anniversary. Whatever you do, don't congratulate yourself too much, or berate yourself either. Your choices are half chance. So are everybody else's.
Enjoy your body. Use it every way you can. Don't be afraid of it or of what other people think of it. It's the greatest instrument you'll ever own.
Dance, even if you have nowhere to do it but your living room.
Read the directions, even if you don't follow them.
Do not read beauty magazines. They will only make you feel ugly.
Get to know your parents. You never know when they'll be gone for good. Be nice to your siblings. They're your best link to your past and the people most likely to stick with you in the future.
Understand that friends come and go, but with a precious few you should hold on. Work hard to bridge the gaps in geography and lifestyle, because the older you get, the more you need the people who knew you when you were young.
Live in New York City once, but leave before it makes you hard. Live in Northern California once, but leave before it makes you soft.
Travel.
Accept certain inalienable truths. Prices will rise. Politicians will philander. You, too will get old. And when you do, you'll fantasize that when you were young, prices were reasonable, politicians were noble, and children respected their elders.
Respect your elders.

Don’t expect anyone else to support you. Maybe you have a trust fund. Maybe you’ll have a wealthy spouse. But you never know when either one might run out.
Don’t mess too much with your hair or by the time you’re 40 it will look 85. Be careful whose advice you buy, but be patient with those who supply it. Advice is a form of nostalgia. Dispensing it is a way of fishing the past from the disposal, wiping it off, painting over the ugly parts and recycling it for more than it’s worth.
But trust me on the sunscreen.

1839

July: Thoreau copied into his Commonplace Book a portion of "The Nonnes Preestes Tale" dealing with the figure of Chanticleer, possibly from the 1830 edition by Thomas Tyrwhitt, THE CANTERBURY TALES OF CHAUCER, WITH AN ESSAY ON HIS LANGUAGE AND VERSIFICATION ETC. First, in describing the condition and substance of the "poure widewe":

A yerd she had enclosed all about
With stickes, and a drie diche without,
In which she had a cok highte Chaunteclere,
In all the land of crowing n'as his pere.
His vois was merier than the mery orgon,
On masse daies that in the chirches gon
Wel sikerer was his crowing in his loge,
Than is a clok, or any abbey orloge.
By nature he knew eche ascentioun
Of the equinoctial in thilke toun;
For what degrees fiftene were ascended,
Than crew he, that it might not ben amended.
His combe was redder than the fin corall,
Embattelled, as it were a castel wall.
His bill was black, and as the jet it shone;
Like asure were his legges and his tone;
His nailes whiter than the lilie flour,
And like the burned gold was his colour.
This gentil cok had in his governance,
Seven hennes, for to don all his plesance,
Which were his susters and his paramoures,
And wonder like to him, as of coloures.
Of which the fairest hewed in the throte,
Was cleped faire damoselle Pertelote,
Curteis she was, discrete, and debonaire.
And compenable, and bare hirself so faire,
Sithen the day that she was sevennight old,
That trewelich she hath the herte in hold
OF Chaunteclere, loken in every lith:
He loved hire so, that wel was him therwith.
But swiche a joye it was to here hem sing,
Whan that the brighte Sonne gan to spring,
In swete accord: "My lefe is fare in lond."

Then in describing what happened after Chanticlere “flew down fro the beme”:

> This Chaunteclere stood high upon his toos
> Stretching his necke, and held his eyen cloos,
> And gan to crowen loude for the nones;
> And dan Russel the fox stert up at ones,
> And by the garget hente Cha[u]nteclere,
> And on his back toward the wood him bere.

And finally in regard to the ruckus that then ensued:

> The sely widewe, and hire doughtren two,
> Herden thise hennes crie and maken wo,
> And out at the dores sterten they anon,
> And saw the fox toward the wode is gon,
> And bare upon his back the cok away:
> They criden, out! “Harrow and wala wa!
> A ha the fox!” and him they ran,
> And eke with staves many another man;
> Ran Colle our dogge, and Talbot, and Gerlond.
> And Malkin, with her distaf in hire hond;
> Ran cow and calf, and eke the very hogges
> So fered were for berking of the dogges.
> And shouting of the men and women eke,
> They ronnen so, hem thought hir hertes broke.
> They yellenden as fendes don in Helle:
> The dokes crieden as men wold him quelle;
> The gees for fere flewen over the trees,
> Out of the hive came the swarm of bees, —

WALDEN: I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.

WALDEN: The present was my next experiment of this kind which I purpose to describe more at length; for convenience, putting the experience of two years into one. As I have said, I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

PHILIP CAFARO ON DEJECTION, DESPAIR, AND WALDEN'S EPIGRAPH[7]

Pages 17-18: The epigraph ["I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up."] suggests that Thoreau has made a choice here. Like Coleridge, he could have written an ode to dejection: faced west at sunset, rather than rising to greet the sun in the east. A journal entry, written while he was composing WALDEN, confesses: "Now if there are any who think that I am vain glorious –that I set myself up above others –and crow over their low estate –let me tell them that I could tell a pitiful story respecting myself as well as them –if my spirits held out to do it, I could encourage them with a sufficient list of failures –& could flow as humbly as

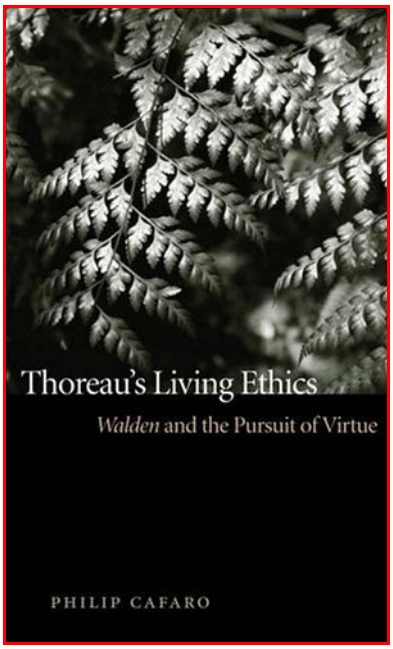
the very gutters themselves." Here, in the relative privacy of his journal, Thoreau lets himself moon a bit. He certainly knew these moods and the disappointments that led to them. In fact, he explored them, as essential human experiences having much to teach him.

But Thoreau knows that such dejected, twilight thoughts provide no impetus and no guidance for right living. "That man who does not believe that each day contains an earlier, more sacred, and auroral hour than he has yet profaned, has despaired of life, and is pursuing a descending and darkening way." Note the word "despair" here, from the Latin *de* (without) + *sperare* (hope). Such hopelessness leads to lethargy and laziness. Despair is an important term in WALDEN, often marking our "stuckness" in the quotidian and our failure to demand more from our lives and ourselves. "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation [acceptance, brute endurance] is confirmed desperation" [the final surrender, a fatalism that is truly fatal].

Rather than despair, we must build on a recognition of the essential goodness of life (*esse qua esse bonum est*, wrote Augustine, specifying **his** ethical starting point). "We should impart our courage, and not our despair," Thoreau writes, "our health and ease, and not our disease, and take care that this does not spread contagion." The epigraph's crowing cock puts a simple "yes" to life at the center of ethics. We can get from this simple "yes" to more complex affirmations, but never from a "no" to a "yes." And this first premise, or necessary practical postulate, cannot be proven. Affirmation or negation always remains the main choice facing each of us.

Consider a second key passage, one of the most often-cited in

7. Philip Cafaro. THOREAU'S LIVING ETHICS: WALDEN AND THE PURSUIT OF VIRTUE. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2004



WALDEN:

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life ... to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.

The passage develops into a stirring peroration to life and life's grand possibilities (experiencing deeply, knowing truth, sharing this knowledge with others). But Thoreau makes it clear that these possibilities can be explored only by those who live **deliberately**. The term encompasses both the ability to consider alternatives and the ability to act — to instantiate one alternative rather than another. The presence of *liber* and *liberate* suggests an essential connection between such deliberation and human freedom.

If choosing to speak a basic "yes" to life is one key antidote to despair, another is deliberation: thinking through particular options and actively choosing the best ones, rather than falling into the easiest ones. Deliberation is an act of optimism, signaling the belief that we can have choices; that we can distinguish better from worse choices; that we can act on that knowledge and improve our lives. "I know of no more encouraging fact," Thoreau writes, "than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor." Throughout WALDEN, he renews his call for "deliberate" action in constructing a house, choosing a career, reading a book, building a fireplace. Deliberation is the key to living well, affirming human freedom, and meeting life's challenges. Life is glorious, Thoreau insists, and so the stakes are high. For we may come to the end of our lives and find that we have not lived. We may waste our lives on inessential trivialities. We may fail to learn what life has to teach. Like the penitential brahmins described in Walden's third paragraph, we may lead lives that deny or deform our human nature. In all these ways we may, and often do, deny life.

1843

July 7: Henry Thoreau was being attacked by the family tendency to narcolepsy, so strongly present in his Uncle Charles Jones Dunbar that he described in WALDEN how once his uncle went to sleep while shaving himself with a straight razor, and had to have something to do of a Sunday such as rubbing the sprouts off stored

potatoes to keep from going to sleep:

WALDEN: Breed's hut was standing only a dozen years ago, though it had long been unoccupied. It was about the size of mine. It was set on fire by mischievous boys, one Election night, if I do not mistake. I lived on the edge of the village then, and had just lost myself over Davenant's Gondibert, that winter that I labored with a lethargy, -which, by the way, I never knew whether to regard as a family complaint, having an uncle who goes to sleep shaving himself, and is obliged to sprout potatoes in a cellar Sundays, in order to keep awake and keep the Sabbath, or as the consequence of my attempt to read Chalmers' collection of English poetry without skipping. It fairly overcame my Nervii. I had just sunk my head on this when the bells rung fire, and in hot haste the engines rolled that way, led by a straggling troop of men and boys, and I among the foremost, for I had leaped the brook. We thought it was far south over the woods, -we who had run to fires before,- barn, shop, or dwelling-house, or all together. "It's Baker's barn," cried one. "It is the Codman Place," affirmed another. And then fresh sparks went up above the wood, as if the roof fell in, and we all shouted "Concord to the rescue!" Wagons shot past with furious speed and crushing loads, bearing, perchance, among the rest, the agent of the Insurance Company, who was bound to go however far; and ever and anon the engine bell tinkled behind, more slow and sure, and rearmost of all, as it was afterward whispered, came they who set the fire and gave the alarm. Thus we kept on like true idealists, rejecting the evidence of our senses, until at a turn in the road we heard crackling and actually felt the heat of the fire from over the wall, and realized, alas! that we were there. The very nearness of the fire but cooled our ardor. At first we thought to throw a frog-pond on to it; but concluded to let it burn, it was so far gone and so worthless. So we stood round our engine, jostled one another, expressed our sentiments through speaking trumpets, or in lower tone referred to the great conflagrations which the world has witness, including Bascom's shop, and, between ourselves we thought that, were we there in season with our "tub", and a full frog-pond by, we could turn that threatened last and universal one into another flood. We finally retreated without doing any mischief, -returned to sleep and Gondibert. But as for Gondibert, I would except that passage in the preface about wit being the soul's powder, -"but most of mankind are strangers to wit, as Indians are to powder."

FIRE

PEOPLE OF WALDEN

INSURANCE

ALEXANDER CHALMERS

BASCOM & COLE

The demon which is said to haunt the Jones family, hovering over their eyelids with wings steeped in juice of poppies, has commenced another campaign against me. I am "clear Jones" in this respect at least.

Thoreau was "clear Jones" in one respect at least ...

According to Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, Uncle Charles Jones Dunbar had been in the practice of mimicking a currently popular ventriloquist, magician, and juggler named Potter. In corroboration of this he quoted a snippet from Thoreau's journal:

 Ever since I knew him he could swallow his nose. One of his tricks was to swallow the knives and forks and some of the plates at a tavern table, and offer to give them up if the landlord would charge nothing for his meal. He could do anything with cards, yet did not gamble. Uncle Charles should have been in Concord in 1843, when Daniel Webster was there. What a whetter-up of his memory that event would have been! …

 March 28, 1856: Uncle Charles buried at Haverhill. He was born in February, 1780, the winter of the Great Snow, and he died in the winter of another great snow, —a life bounded by great snows. …

DUNBAR FAMILY

HENRY'S RELATIVES

Consider WALDEN's "If they had not been overcome with drowsiness …":

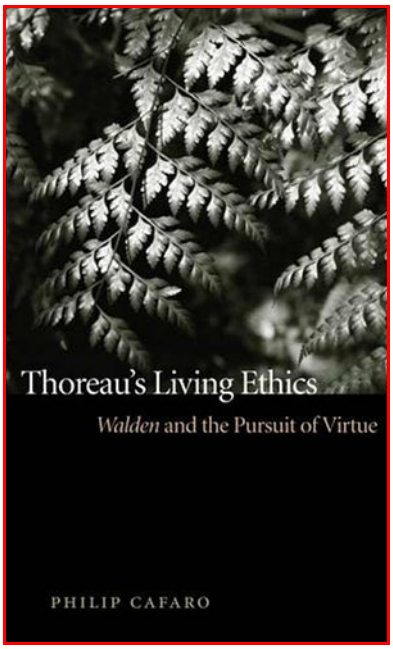
> Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me. Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep. Why is it that men give so poor an account of their day if they have not been slumbering? They are not such poor calculators. If they had not been overcome with drowsiness they would have performed something. The millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?

While Thoreau was living on Staten Island and putting up with the stodgy William Emersons in 1843 the "clear Jones" in him had become so drowsy, or narcoleptic, that in his efforts to counteract this he even tried making spare change by selling magazine subscriptions door to door.

PHILIP CAFARO ON AWAKENING IN WALDEN[8]

> PAGES 19-21: WALDEN anchors its ethical discussions in powerful, richly extended metaphors: morality as economy, morality as cultivation, morality as flourishing. Just as we must pay particular attention to first principles and initial arguments in works of academic philosophy, so here we must attend to these key orienting metaphors. One of the most important equates morality with awakening.

8. Philip Cafaro. THOREAU'S LIVING ETHICS: WALDEN AND THE PURSUIT OF VIRTUE. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2004



Two calls to wakefulness bracket the text of WALDEN: the epigraph's crowing of the cock and the text's final sentences: "There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star." In between, Thoreau returns to the theme often, asking us, for example, to awaken to the fact that we have choices in life, or describing his literary labors and itinerant naturalizing in terms of alert wakefulness. The metaphor's most extended use occurs midway through WALDEN's second chapter, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For."

"Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself," Thoreau begins, once again emphasizing our free choice of whether or not to engage life's opportunities. "I have been as sincere a worshipper of Aurora as the Greeks. I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did." The sacrament's power comes from its bodily immediacy — what could be more immediate than a plunge, first thing in the morning, into a clear, cold pond? — and its ability to thrust us into the state of excitement and awareness it celebrates. If you doubt that wakefulness is a matter of degree, such a plunge will instantly dispel these worries! The metaphor's power comes from how literally Thoreau takes it, here at the start of the discussion, and from the diverse ways it transcends that literal meaning, in what follows. The passage continues: "The morning, which is the most memorable season of the day, is the awakening hour. Then there is least somnolence in us; and for an hour, at least, some part of us awakes which slumbers all the rest of the day and night." Now Thoreau begins to speak metaphorically, yet the statement also seems literally true to experience. Waking from a full night's sleep, early, before the neighbors begin bustling about, we may feel a freshness within and without, a hopefulness and sense of possibility that even the best days, as they fill up with details, somehow obscure. Morning is a natural beginning; making the effort to wake with the world, at dawn, emphasizes this.

Then again, how we will experience our mornings remains to some extent open, no matter when we arise. We may all have to get up eventually, to some degree, but the spirit in which we do so can make all the difference. "Little is to be expected of that day, if it can be called a day, to which we are not awakened by our Genius, but by the mechanical nudgings of some servitor, are not awakened by our own newly acquired force and aspirations from within ... to a higher life than we fell asleep from." Hope is the key to true awakening: hope, anchored in feelings of excitement and in the belief that we can live better lives than we ever have before. "We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn."

Thoreau's admonition speaks directly to anyone who has ever unwillingly dragged himself or herself out of bed to the shrilling of an alarm clock. But I think that to fully appreciate "awakening" as a metaphor for personal renewal, you need to have watched a sunrise recently and felt the radiance on your face, the sense of promise warming your bones. We must anchor our

metaphors in personal experience. The more we do so, the truer they will prove themselves, if indeed they are true.

Just as the metaphor of "awakening" allows us to descend more fully into our experience, it points to its transcendence: to an ability to look beyond experience, hopefully. The passage continues: "To him whose elastic and vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun, the day is a perpetual morning. It matters not what the clocks say or the attitudes and labors of men. Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me. Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep." To call moral reform, the improvement of character, an effort to throw off sleep emphasizes yet again that this opportunity is widely available; in a sense, it is as easy as waking up. It isn't for lack of some esoteric knowledge that we fail to live better lives, but for lack of effort.

But Thoreau's "moral reform" is quite different from the common conception, in his day or ours. It is personal, not social; it does not ask for justice toward others, but that we be just **toward ourselves** and develop our highest faculties. "The millions are awake enough for physical labor," Thoreau continues, "but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life." If that is so, we have all of us – including the author of WALDEN– mostly been sleepwalking through life. "I have never yet met a man who was quite awake," Thoreau asserts. "How could I have looked him in the face?"

The power of the metaphor, I think, comes from its juxtaposition of the ease and the difficulty of waking up. If we could continue after our dip in the pond, piling sacrament upon sacrament, and be fully alive, truly grateful, completely aware, for just one day – what a day it would be! And, the metaphor suggests, we might simply wake up and **see** the right path to all this, as easily as we wake up and see the world waking up outside our window. For these are the great miracles, of course: the living, changing, lovely world; our ability to see and understand and appreciate it. The goal seems so near! To really think, really create, really live, means to be **present**, the way we are when we plunge into a pond and **WAKE UP**. Yet we continue to slumber.

Again, the power of the metaphor comes from its juxtaposition of incremental and heroic striving, and Thoreau's blurring of the line between them. It is as if, like some con man or "traveling patterer," he and his metaphor have signed us up to purchase something that we are not sure we want, despite its obvious goodness, despite lacking any clear reason to remain suspicious. "Who would not be early to rise, and rise earlier and earlier every successive day of his life, until he became unspeakably healthy, wealthy, and wise?" Yet we prefer endurance to excellence.

1852

April 6, Tuesday: When Henry Thoreau appeared to lecture as scheduled at Cochituate Hall in downtown Boston, a heavy snow was falling. He had come from the Boston Society of Natural History where he had checked out John Evelyn's *SYLVA*, OR A DISCOURSE OF FOREST-TREES, AND THE PROPAGATION OF TIMBER.... TO WHICH IS ANNEXED *POMONA*.... ALSO *KALENDARIUM HORTENSE*....

JOHN EVELYN'S SYLVA

(see the following screen)

This lecture date had been set up by the Reverend Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

Due to the snowstorm only 5 or 6 persons showed up, among whom was Doctor Walter Channing, the father of Ellery Channing of Concord. Bronson Alcott got the meeting moved to the Mechanics Apprentices Library next door, in hopes that some of the young men reading there could be persuaded to join the audience, but these young men proved to be hard to interest in a lecture on "Reality."

WALDEN: According to Evelyn, "the wise Solomon prescribed ordinances for the very distances of trees; and the Roman praetors have decided how often you may go into your neighbor's land to gather the acorns which fall on it without trespass, and what share belongs to that neighbor."

PEOPLE OF WALDEN

JOHN EVELYN
SOLON OF ATHENS

(This was a mistake. Thoreau should not have indicated the by-tradition-wise King Solomon of Judaea, for Evelyn had been referring in *SYLVA*, OR A DISCOURSE OF FOREST-TREES, to this by-tradition-wise originator of Athenian democracy.)

WALDEN: Though I gave them no manure, and did not hoe them all once, I hoed them unusually well as far as I went, and was paid for it in the end, "there being in truth," as Evelyn says, "no compost or lætation whatsoever comparable to this continual motion, repastination, and turning of the mould with the spade." "The earth," he adds elsewhere, "especially if fresh, has a certain magnetism in it, by which it attracts the salt, power, or virtue (call it either) which gives it life, and is the logic of all the labor and stir we keep about it, to sustain us; all dungings and other sordid temperings being but the vicars succedaneous to this improvement." Moreover, this being one of those "worn-out and exhausted lay fields which enjoy their sabbath," had perchance, as Sir Kenelm Digby thinks likely, attracted "vital spirits" from the air. I harvested twelve bushels of beans.

PEOPLE OF WALDEN

SIR KENELM DIGBY
JOHN EVELYN

TIMELINE OF WALDEN

One of my most amusing impressions of Thoreau relates to a time when, in the Quixotism of youthful admiration, I had persuaded him to give a lecture in Boston, at my risk. He wrote (April 3, 1852) in a tone of timidity which may surprise those who did not know him, "I certainly do not feel prepared to offer myself as a lecturer to the Boston public, and hardly know whether more to dread a small audience or a large one. Nevertheless I will repress this squeamishness, and propose no alteration in your arrangements." The scene of the lecture was to be a small hall in a court, now vanished, opening from Tremont street, opposite King's Chapel, the hall itself being leased by an association of young mechanics, who had a reading-room opening out of it. The appointed day ushered in a furious snow-storm before which the janitor of the building retreated in despair, leaving the court almost blockaded. When Thoreau and I ploughed through, we found a few young mechanics reading newspapers; and when the appointed hour came, there were assembled only Mr. Alcott, Dr. Walter Channing and at most three or four ticket-holders. No one wished to postpone the affair and Mr. Alcott suggested that the thing to be done was to adjourn to the reading-room, where, he doubted not, the young men would be grateful for the new gospel offered; for which he himself undertook to prepare their minds. I can see him now, going from one to another, or collecting them in little groups and expounding to them, with his lofty Socratic mien, the privileges they were to share. "This is his life; this is his book; he is to print it presently; I think we shall all be glad, shall we not, either to read his book or to hear it?" Some laid down their newspapers, more retained them; the lecture proved to be one of the most introspective chapters from "Walden." A few went to sleep, the rest rustled their papers; and the most vivid impression which I retain from the whole enterprise is the profound gratitude I felt to one auditor (Doctor Walter Channing), who forced upon me a five-dollar bill towards the expenses of the disastrous entertainment.[9]



April 6, Tuesday: Last night a snow storm & this morning we find the ground covered again 6 or 8 inches deep–& drifted pretty badly beside. The conductor in the cars which have been detained more than an hour–says it is a dry snow up country– Here it is very damp.

PHILIP CAFARO ON VIRTUE IN WALDEN[10]

PAGE 47: [I]n the chapter "The Bean-Field," Thoreau quotes seventeenth-century horticulturist John Evelyn's assertion that "the earth ... especially if fresh, has a certain magnetism in it, by which it attracts the salt, power, or virtue (call it either) which gives it life, and is the logic of all the labor and stir we keep about it, to sustain us." Clearly a field cannot act morally! For Evelyn, as for Thoreau, "virtue" implies power: that force through which a field or a man may flourish and bring forth the proper fruits. Thoreau quotes a similar archaic use of "virtue" by Cato the Elder.

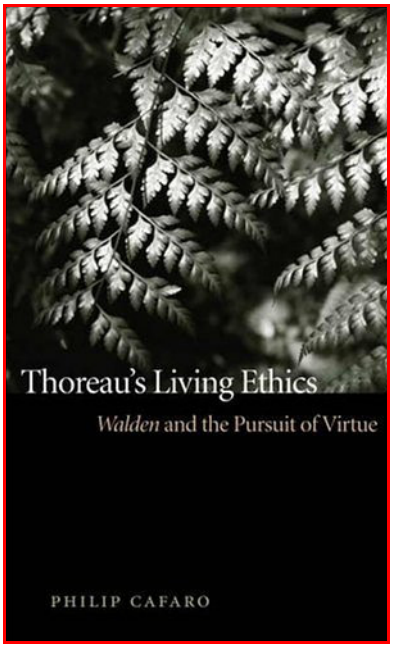
Virtue is thus essentially active for Thoreau; as he had written earlier, "even virtue is no longer such if it be stagnant." In

9. The Reverend Thomas Wentworth Higginson's "Glimpses of Authors" (Brains I, December 1, 1891, page 105)

the modern view, the virtues are valuable largely because they limit our self-assertion and keep us from doing what we should not do. The modest person will not brag about his achievements, the honest person will not lie for personal advantage, the just person will not take more than her fair share. The ancient view instead stresses that actively cultivating the virtues is key to our self-development and happiness. They allow us to do what we should do and become better people. Thoreau echoes this life-affirming view when he writes: "The constant inquiry which Nature puts is Are your virtuous? Then you can behold me. Beauty — fragrance — music — sweetness — & joy of all kinds are for the virtuous."

Thoreau, like the ancients, links his notion of virtue to personal flourishing. In WALDEN, he tries to show how the virtues of simplicity, integrity, and resolutions serve to focus and clarify our lives; how generosity and sympathy may improve our relations with our neighbors; how curiosity, imagination, and reverence help us appreciate the world around us. These connections between virtue and flourishing serve to specify genuine virtues and spell out their proper development and use.

10. Philip Cafaro. THOREAU'S LIVING ETHICS: WALDEN AND THE PURSUIT OF VIRTUE. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2004



1995

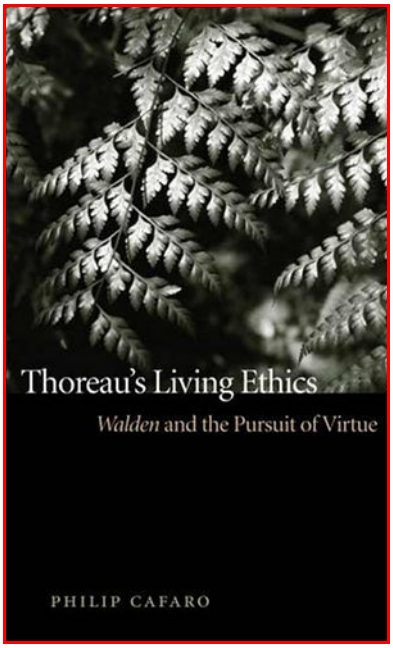
Philip Cafaro's monograph on virtue ethics began in this year with an article in Philosophy in the Contemporary World 2, pages 1-9, titled "Thoreauvian Patriotism as an Environmental Virtue." It would continue in 1997 with his PhD dissertation at Boston University, "Thoreau's Vision of a Good Life in Nature: Towards an Environmental Virtue Ethics." It would then continue in 1999 with an article "Thoreau and the Place of Economy" in Center: Architecture and Design in America II, pages 39-47, then there would be, in 2000 in The Concord Saunterer, pages 23-47, an article "Thoreau's Virtue Ethics in WALDEN," in 2001 in Environmental Ethics, pages 3-17, an article "Thoreau, Leopold and Carson: Toward an Environmental Virtue Ethics," and, in 2002 in The Concord Saunterer, pages 17-63, an article "Thoreau's Environmental Ethics in WALDEN."

2004

Footnote 48 in Philip Cafaro's chapter on Virtue in THOREAU'S LIVING ETHICS: WALDEN AND THE PURSUIT OF VIRTUE[11] offers a novel moralistic take on Thoreau's parable of the artist of Kouroo:

> In an influential essay titled "Moral Luck," Bernard Williams uses the example of Gauguin deserting his family to move to Tahiti, in order to question the claims of morality. [Williams, Bernard. MORAL LUCK: PHILOSOPHICAL PAPERS 1973-1980. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981] Williams suggests that Gauguin might not have had to fulfill his familial obligations, if these

11. Philip Cafaro. THOREAU'S LIVING ETHICS: WALDEN AND THE PURSUIT OF VIRTUE. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2004



> conflicted with his project to become a great painter; or at least, that we might be glad that he did not fulfill those obligations. The parable of the artist of Kouroo suggests that Thoreau yearned for the kind of freedom Gauguin took. But again, he could never have justified such an abdication of duty.

Professor Cafaro has on pages 71-74 of this book explicated the parable of the artist of Kouroo simplistically by equating Thoreau himself as the "artist" of the parable, and equating the "world" he has made with the book WALDEN (Thoreau's book was divided into 18 chapters, Cafaro alleges, "probably" because the translation of the *BHAGAVAD-GITA* he read had been divided into 18 sections!):

> In his journal for 1845, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "I owed –my friend and I owed– a magnificent day to the *BHAGAVAT-GITA*. It was the first of books; it was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us." Thoreau valued the *BHAGAVAD-GITA* as highly as any other book, both for the sublimity of its cosmology and for its noble ethical ideals. It is probably not accidental that WALDEN, like the *GITA*, is divided into eighteen chapters, or that both works move from images of despair and uncertainty in their initial pages to statements of triumphant, life-affirming resolution in their final ones. This sacred Hindu scripture points us toward one possible resolution of the conflict between duty and virtue, for it sees adherence to duty as the highest virtue. ... As Hinduism's premier ethical scripture, the *GITA* suggests that each of us have our own "fields of duty" to which we are called. No matter how lowly they seem, they are ours, and we, like the greatest of heroes, may fulfill our sacred duty within them. Thoreau echoes this position in WALDEN: "However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names." The ancient scripture also suggests that different members of society may have very different duties, tied to particular stations in life, admonishing: "better to do one's own duty imperfectly than to do another man's well." Thoreau finds this moral particularism appealing. Toward the end of WALDEN, he provides a parable that evokes the *GITA* with special reference to his own artistic vocation:

PEOPLE OF WALDEN

WALDEN: There was an artist in the city of Kouroo who was disposed to strive after perfection. One day it came into his mind to make a staff. Having considered that in an imperfect work time is an ingredient, but into a perfect work time does not enter, he said to himself, It shall be perfect in all respects, though I should do nothing else in my life. He proceeded instantly to the forest for wood, being resolved that it should not be made of unsuitable material; and as he searched for and rejected stick after stick, his friends gradually deserted him, for they grew old in their works and died, but he grew not older by a moment. His singleness of purpose and resolution, and his elevated piety, endowed him, without his knowledge, with perennial youth. As he made no compromise with Time, Time kept out of his way, and only sighed at a distance because he could not overcome him. Before he had found a stock in all respects suitable the city of Kouroo was a hoary ruin, and he sat on one of its mounds to peel the stick. Before he had given it the proper shape the dynasty of the Candahars was at an end, and with the point of the stick he wrote the name of the last of that race in the sand, and then resumed his work. By the time he had smoothed and polished the staff Kalpa was no longer the pole-star; and ere he had put on the ferule and the head adorned with precious stones, Brahma had awoke and slumbered many times. But why do I stay to mention these things? When the finishing stroke was put to his work, it suddenly expanded before the eyes of the astonished artist into the fairest of all the creations of Brahma. He had made a new system in making a staff, a world with full and fair proportions; in which, though the old cities and dynasties had passed away, fairer and more glorious ones had taken their places. And now he saw by the heap of shavings still fresh at his feet, that, for him and his work, the former lapse of time had been an illusion, and that no more time had elapsed than is required for a single scintillation from the brain of Brahma to fall on and inflame the tinder of a mortal brain. The material was pure, and his art was pure; how could the result be other than wonderful?

ARTIST OF KOUROO

Clearly Thoreau is himself the artist of this parable, while the "world" he has made is WALDEN. ... We may better understand Thoreau's and the *GITA*'s different valuations of personal choice and moral certainty if we return to the parable of "the artist of Kouroo." Thoreau's own pursuit of excellence involved artistic creation and the solitude, focus, and self-absorption necessary to achieve it. He well knew the conflicts between the demands of art and everyday life and between personal and familial duties. The parable presents the artist's fantasy of perfection and importance: the work itself becomes a world; the creation of this ideal world balancing out any moral failures

in the real one. Such single-mindedness **is** faithfulness to duty, Thoreau wants to believe. Only thus are the greatest achievements possible. Such faithfulness to duty takes precedence over all conventional duties to friends and family. In the face of great artistic (even cosmic) achievements, any conventional moral failures are unimportant. Perhaps the passage is directed specifically at budding artistic geniuses. Perhaps all of us, like the artist of Kouroo, may choose new commitments and follow them through, whatever it takes — provided we fully dedicate ourselves to them.

"The difference between the almost right word & the right word is really a large matter — it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."
— Mark Twain, letter to George Bainton, October 15, 1888

H-Net Review: Thoreau's Living Ethics: Walden and the Pursuit of Virtue (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004)

H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online

Reviewed by: JeremyBendik-Keymer, Department of International Studies, American University of Sharjah.

Environmental Protection and Social Justice: Two Expressions Of The Same Idea

Schoolchildren

When Henry David Thoreau died, three hundred of Concord's four hundred schoolchildren followed the processional to his grave. This is because he had spent much time being one of the villagers it takes to raise a child, teaching children especially about the nature of the land around Concord. He knew where to swim, knew most of the wildlife by name — and he kept learning. For instance, his journals during his last years were filled with endless observations of forest succession. In more ways than one, Thoreau knew how and where to fish.

All reports of his death, too, emphasize his serenity and positive outlook through the course of his tuberculosis. His comments to friends and visitors were gracious, taking the shock of his deathly appearance from them. This must be another reason why so many children, once asked by the moribund Thoreau to come in from the street, did. They kept returning on their own accord. Even at the burial, Thoreau's memory expressed vitality to those present — a point made by Louisa May Alcott, who was at the grave. Here he was buried in the ground with life growing around him, and he had always taught that we are a part of nature.

Virtue Ethics

Philip Cafaro's THOREAU'S LIVING ETHICS is the first book-length study of Thoreau's ethics in the English-speaking world. It is

written from the perspective of a former forest ranger turned Colorado philosophy professor who has done a substantial amount to open up a new field: environmental virtue ethics. Cafaro's treatment of Thoreau is of a philosopher in the tradition of virtue ethics and places Thoreau's environmental philosophy at the center of its work. The study is thorough and clearly a labor of love. It is well worth having in a general collection and is a significant source for anyone working on or around Thoreau. Moreover, as this review will attempt to suggest, Cafaro's Thoreau may remind us of a broad picture for environmentalism that should not be forgotten.

The book begins with Thoreau's life, ends with his death, and moves topically through the middle – "virtue," "economy," "solitude and society," "nature," "politics," and "foundations." Cafaro's point throughout is to show how Thoreau's entire ethical outlook expressed a commitment to virtue in its many forms.

"Virtue ethics" has, since the late 1980s, quickly become an established field in English-speaking ethical theory. It has built a substantial publishing industry and professional niche. Most major research institutions in Anglo-American philosophy now have a scholar whose specialty could be construed as virtue ethics in some form. Virtue ethics is contested as a category – even by some who are categorized as within it– but it has become widely recognized in ethics textbooks and in conferences.[12] Cafaro adds to this tradition by providing both Thoreau, a canonical American philosopher, and environmentalism, an outlier to the virtue ethics tradition, to the mix.

In the way Cafaro reads both Thoreau and virtue ethics, Thoreau is a virtue ethicist because his primary philosophical concern throughout life was to realize human excellence.[13] Virtue ethics is an ethics of excellence – as opposed, say, to an ethics of duty or prudence. Notice, too, that we did not read "moral excellence," but "human excellence." Virtue ethics concerns excellence in all our ways of being excellent. Here again it departs from an ethics of duty or of prudence. When asked the basic ethical question, "how should one live?", virtue ethicists expect more than doing our duty or being prudent and more than being moral or far-sighted. They expect a full, amazing human life. Such an expectation is demanding. After all, virtue ethics is an ethics of **excellence**.

The question for a virtue ethicist under this interpretation is, "what is human excellence?" Moreover, since you have a different set of potential excellences than I do, the question is just as well, "what is my human excellence?" How should **I** live? Thoreau's greatest novelty is that he answers all these questions by conceptualizing human nature within a larger biological vitality that is best called "freedom."

Freedom and Romantic Vitalism

12. See Martha Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?", The Journal of Ethics, 3.3 (1999): pages 163-201. Nussbaum, more than almost any other philosopher outside of Alasdair McIntyre and Bernard Williams, brought the study of ancient virtues into the limelight in the 1980s, although neither Nussbaum nor Williams considered or still considers themselves a virtue ethicist. McIntyre, to my knowledge, does.

13. "Virtue" traces its legacy through the Latin *virtu* to the Greek *arete*, which means "an excellence."

At this point in the review, I wish as an interlocutor to bring out an assumption of Cafaro's work. In doing so, I am being constructively critical — for Cafaro does not center his book around freedom. Yet freedom hovers in the background of the entire study, and I believe focusing on this idea illuminates the root system of his study.

What links Thoreau's view of nature, his politics, economics, experimentalism, and practice of solitude is his view that we are –**because** natural– free. In Thoreau's mind, the Earth and every living being on, in, or above it cries out for a "specific" form of freedom.[14] Here is Cafaro illustrating this point:

> "The shad, the philosopher will tell you, do not **act** at all, since they do not have conscious purposes. Yet we may watch them migrating upstream or hold one gleaming in our hands, imagine the vast distances they have traveled, and marvel" (page 143).

The philosopher alluded to in this passage is a generic philosopher from the Western tradition, one who assumes that only deliberative beings can have freedom. Yet Thoreau, Cafaro has allowed us to see, does not think this way: fish can have a freedom that is their own –species-specific. When you block the shad from swimming upstream, this is as bad as slavery is for a human.

The fascinating point here is that freedom is shared across human and nonhuman lives. Excellence is in the realization of that freedom. Thoreau came out of a period in biology known as romantic vitalism that conceived of life as involving a primal force that runs in all species for their full and often creative realization.[15] According to this tradition, life is stunted when its vital powers are curbed or thwarted and what it is to truly live is to have those vital powers exercised to their fullest.[16] Which powers are vital ones is a matter for species and often for individuals. But without exercising them, a living being has not truly been freed into its ownmost possibilities. Hence excellence –the realization of a vital potential to a high extent– is a result of freeing and is freedom realized.[17]

Integrationism

One of the strengths of Cafaro's study is that it allows us to get an overview of Thoreau's work according to its central

14. The pun on "species" is deliberate.

15. On romantic vitalism, see for instance Robert J. Richards, THE ROMANTIC CONCEPTION OF LIFE: SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE AGE OF GOETHE (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). The idea of all living beings having a "push" inside them to realize their essence is deeply lodged in the Western philosophical tradition, through the early modern *conatus* of Spinoza back through his Stoic ancestors and their *oikeiosis* even to the way Greeks heard the word "nature" — *physis*, which Heidegger aptly interprets as a "coming forth."

16. For a recent addition to this tradition, see David Oates's PARADISE WILD: REIMAGINING AMERICAN NATURE (Eugene: University of Oregon Press, 2003), which I reviewed previously for H-NILAS. See http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=278051070865869.

17. What is slightly misleading about this vitalism is that it does not allow us to easily place the importance meaning has for human life — and specifically the meaning bound up with rich human relationships. Not thirty years after Thoreau wrote, Freud was pointing out that the need to be loved and to love shapes human reality to a massive extent. Love, then, is a vital power and realizing rich relationships is its primary expression. But it is so through its mysterious connection to meaning. It is not that vitalism cannot in some very abstract way give a place for love or meaning — it is that vitalism seems too easily applied to the kind of solitary experience Thoreau explored. Vitalism does not clarify the importance of loving relationships or meaning in them, and so falls far short of a rich picture of the human.

ethical preoccupations. For example and accordingly, Cafaro's grasp of Thoreau's universe allows us to locate the way vitalist freedom integrates humanity with nature. This integration further allows us to weave together Cafaro's display of Thoreau's multi-sided approach to excellence.

"Integrationism" is a form of environmentally minded ethics that conceives of human flourishing as inseparable from environmental ethics. Rachel Carson or Aldo Leopold are two of the most important integrationists, and the tradition is sorely needed after a last quarter century that saw many environmentalisms conceive of humanity as necessarily opposed to nature.[18] Though Thoreau emphasized we should not be narrowly phil-**anthropic** but rather phil-**biotic**, Thoreau articulated a vision of flourishing that joined our sense of humanity's realization with ecological awareness and respect for the wider universe of life (page 141).

Thoreau's is an integrationism of striking possibilities — combining the ecological sense of a Carson with the sensibility of a Shelley and the republicanism of a Rousseau.[19]

As I've said, the canopy that allows Thoreau's integrationism is his conception of freedom. Through that conception, we can organize the expressions of Thoreau's political heroism: Thoreau's civil disobedience: his refusal to support an unjust war; his major influence on the most innovative and greatest political minds of the twentieth century, including Gandhi and King; his trenchant opposition to slavery; his support for armed intervention on behalf of slaves because of their extreme daily suffering and dehumanization; his critique of the dehumanizing effects of placing material consumption above self-realization. And together with these facts, we can organize the expressions of Thoreau's ecological thoughtfulness: his attempt to experience nature as nature is and not as we control it; his love for other forms of life and hatred of needless killing; his awe at the autonomy of nature to fix its own problems and to out-resource the heights of human ingenuity; his sense that solitude in nature brings out our vitality by our being rejoined with a source of freedom.

If you take a moment to study these two lists, what becomes clear is that all of these political and ecological aspects of Thoreau's work are expressions of respect for freedom. They are species of phyla of the same kingdom.[20]

Environmental Protection and Social Justice Are Expressions of the Same Idea

The most helpful parts of Cafaro's study are his explorations

18. In fairness to these environmentalisms —so called "anti-humanist" environmentalisms— they are responding to a Western philosophical and religious inheritance that has placed humans over or apart from nature for millennia and so have given us reason to think that humanity is opposed to nature. See, for instance, a book that I reviewed for H-NILAS, Giorgio Agamben's THE OPEN: MAN AND ANIMAL (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), which explores how the Western philosophical tradition has considered man and animals ontologically separate. See http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=160141080786893.

19. Cafaro might enjoy spending more time with Rousseau, who anticipated many of Thoreau's core assumptions. On how Rousseau displays an integrationist freedom preceding Romantic vitalism, see his down-to-earth analogy between the desire of colonized humans to be free from oppression and his description of how a wild horse chafes and struggles at the bit to regain its natural state: "As an untamed steed bristles his mane, paws the earth with his hoof, and breaks away impetuously at the very approach of the bit ... barbarous man does not bend his head for the yoke ... and he prefers the most turbulent **freedom** to tranquil subjection. Therefore it is not by the degradation of enslaved peoples that man's **natural** dispositions for or against servitude must be judged." [emphases added] (from THE DISCOURSE ON THE ORIGIN OF INEQUALITY AMONG HUMANS, Volume 3 of the COLLECTED WRITINGS OF ROUSSEAU, eds. Masters and Kelly, Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 1992, page 57).

20. According to this Romantic taxonomy, the kingdom of necessity would be the realm of nature that is not teleological.

of Thoreau's refusal to participate in either slavery or imperial wars and Thoreau's environmental ethics. Cafaro's study allows us to see these two areas of normative concern as continuous. Moreover, Thoreau's point of departure for this continuity is different from that taken in either social ecology or ecofeminism — the only fields of environmental ethics to state such a continuity at all.[21] Thus, from the standpoint of both social justice and environmental ethics, Cafaro's Thoreau discloses an exciting possibility for ethical direction: environmental protection and social justice are parts of the same project — to respect freedom, and to do so out of humanity. Imagine, then, that environmental justice is not "light" anthropocentrism and wilderness protection isn't anti-humanism.[22] Imagine instead that environmental justice is a way to respect living creatures, just as environmental protection is. Imagine further that in making sure people have conditions in which to live a healthy human life free of toxicity and radiation, you are doing essentially the same thing as when you protect wilderness from needless oil drilling, real estate development, or of grazing land for fast-food beef, or as when you protect animals from the yoke of a pen so small that their limbs wither. Not only are all these cases "needless havoc" as Carson wrote, but all destroy or hinder the freedom of life coming forth into its own.[23] This is Thoreau's insight, and it is one that emerges across Cafaro's study. To avoid the analogy between social justice and environmental protection is to live a less than fully human life. It is to live "freedom-blind".[24]

A Parting Suggestion: Human Excellence and What Is Common

Virtue is excellence, and both Cafaro and Thoreau think excellence tends to set us apart from the common. In closing, I would urge that Cafaro reconsider this. It is worth attending closely to the phenomenology of virtue as a species-specific – for example, human- excellence, which is how Thoreau conceives of virtue (though he shares the following mistake).

When someone does something excellently human, that concept – "the human"- is basic to the judgment. The human is what we share. It is not what separates us. When, for example, Martin Luther King Jr. did the excellently human thing of sacrificing his life for the end of violent and oppressive racism, he did not set himself apart from us, but reminded us of what it is to be humane. Analogously, when Rachel Carson did the excellently human thing of taking on the entire American chemical industry at the height of its economic and lobbying hegemony while she was dying of breast cancer, she did not set herself apart from us, but let us remember that the Earth is our home and home is worth fighting for. Virtues are home-comings to humanity.

The entire phenomenology of aloofness that haunts both Cafaro's

21. Deep ecology, on some formulations, seems to join anti-imperialism and abolitionism with environmental protection, but it does so by positing a staunch anti-humanism. What is fascinating about Cafaro's Thoreau is that being respectful of nature and being just with humans are parts of being humane.

22. Environmental justice is a species of social justice. I focus on it because some environmentalists see it as too human-centered to be authentically environmentalist.

23. Rachel Carson, SILENT SPRING (New York: Mariner Books, 1962/2002), page 85.

24. As when Wittgenstein says that some people are "aspect-blind" — unable to discern the way what makes sense to us can have different aspects — for example, freedom for humans and freedom for nonhumans.

and Thoreau's experience of virtue should be reconsidered. To respect life is to do what is minimally humane. Here we have obligation — a condition on any fully excellent life. To strive to one's utmost to realize both one's life and the spirit of respect for life, human or nonhuman, is superogatory, but it is not uncommon. Rather, when we witness it, it is what is most common. To understand this irony is the key to the virtues of humanity.

THOREAU ON SCIENCE AND SYSTEM[25]

ABSTRACT: Though best known as a literary figure, Henry Thoreau showed a lasting interest in science. He read widely in the scientific literature of his day and published one the first scholarly discussions on forest succession. In fact, some historians rate Thoreau as one of the founders of the modern science of ecology. At the same time, Thoreau often lamented science's tendency to kill poetry. Scientific writings coupled with his own careful observations often revealed life to him, but in other ways rendered nature lifeless. Modern-day Thoreauvians are also aware that science has largely become a tool for control and increased consumption, rather than for the appreciation and protection of wild nature. This paper explores some of Thoreau's reflections on science and "system," and presents his view of the proper role of science in our lives. As will become clear, Thoreau's worries are occasioned by his own scientific endeavors. His responses to science's insufficiencies are reformist, suggesting ways to improve and supplement science rather than discard it.

> Why do precisely these objects which we behold make a world? Why has man just these species of animals for his neighbors; as if nothing but a mouse could have filled this crevice? — WALDEN[26]

Introduction

Henry Thoreau, like Goethe before him, showed a lasting interest in science.[27] He belonged to the Boston Natural History Society from 1850 onwards, and read widely in the current scientific literature. Beyond this, Thoreau was intensely interested in the scientific puzzles suggested by his own rambles around Concord, Massachusetts. In the years following WALDEN's publication he observed more systematically and tested his hypotheses more rigorously, and published one of the first scholarly discussions on forest succession. Some historians rate Thoreau as one of the founders of the modern science of ecology.[28]

At the same time Thoreau often lamented science's tendency to

25. http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Envi/EnviCafa.htm

26. Henry Thoreau, WALDEN (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), 225.

27. Parallels between the two romantic naturalists are extensive. Like Thoreau, Goethe was suspicious of "systems"; noted the falsification inherent in all abstractions; objected to the woodenness and stasis of the Linnaean system; harbored moral worries about dissection (while continuing to practice it); and complemented analysis with a search for synthesis: for wholes, analogies, and relations. At the same time, both men shared an optimism concerning scientific progress; searched for general truths while appreciating nature's variety; and did not let a keen understanding of the limits of knowledge interfere with their lifelong efforts to better understand nature. See Johann von Goethe, *Goethe's Botanical Writings* (Woodbridge, CN: Ox Bow Press, 1989), 21-26; 81-85; 116-118; 149-157; 172-174; 242-245.

28. Important accounts of Thoreau as scientist and naturalist are Reginald Cook, *Passage to* WALDEN 2nd ed. (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966); James McIntosh, *Thoreau as Romantic Naturalist: His Shifting Stance toward Nature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); John Hildebidle, *Thoreau: A Naturalist's Liberty* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1983); Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 57-111; and Laura Walls, *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995). See also Raymond Adams, "Thoreau's Science," *Scientific Monthly* 60 (1945), 379-82; Philip and Kathryn Whitford, "Thoreau: Pioneer Ecologist and Conservationist," *Scientific Monthly* 66 (1951), 291-296; Charles Metzger, "Thoreau on Science," *Annals of Science* 12 (1956), 206-11.

kill poetry. The scientific writings of others and his own careful observations often revealed life to him, but at other times rendered nature lifeless.[29] Modern-day Thoreauvians are also aware of science's role in the imperialistic conquest of nature. We love the wild, yet science has largely become a tool for control, commodification and increased consumption, rather than for the appreciation and protection of nature.[30] The proper role of science in human society and in our own lives is thus an important issue.

This paper explores some of Thoreau's reflections on science and "system." As will become clear, Thoreau's worries are occasioned by his own scientific endeavors. His responses to science's insufficiencies are reformist, suggesting ways to improve and supplement science rather than discard it.

The Perils and Possibilities of "System"

Thoreau's science grew naturally and necessarily out of his attentiveness to nature. Describing his early botanical studies, he later wrote:

> My first botany [book], as I remember, was Bigelow's "Plants of Boston and Vicinity," which I began to use about twenty years ago, looking chiefly for the popular names and the short references to the localities of plants.... I also learned the names of many, but without using any system, and forgot them soon. I was not inclined to pluck flowers; preferred to leave them where they were, liked them best there... But from year to year we look at Nature with new eyes. About half a dozen years ago I found myself again attending to plants with more method, looking out the name of each one and remembering it... I remember gazing with interest at the swamps about those days and wondering if I could ever attain to such familiarity with plants that I should know the species of every twig and leaf in them, that I should be acquainted with every plant... I little thought that in a year or two I should have attained to that knowledge without all that [much] labor.[31]

The passage tells us much about Thoreau's ambiguous attitude towards science. His initial impulse, common to many amateur naturalists, is to learn the plants around him. Of course he will look and note differences himself, yet there are patterns in nature, aspects of which the scientific manuals capture. They help us to sharpen our ability to find distinctions in nature

29. Thoreau, "Natural History of Massachusetts," in Thoreau, *The Natural History Essays* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1980), 28-29; Thoreau, *Journal I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 3-4; *Journal IV* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 46; *Journal X* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), 293-295 (March 5, 1858); *Journal XIII* (Boston), 154-156 (February 18, 1860); *Journal XIV* (Boston), 117-120 (October 13, 1860). All subsequent references to Thoreau's journal are to the 1906 edition.

30. Our own time sees these trends accelerating, with large-scale industrial agriculture and forest management, and biotechnology firms creating new organisms and tampering with old ones. It should be noted, however, that a minority of scientists, particularly biologists, are working to reverse these trends. In particular, the growing discipline of conservation biology seeks to develop the knowledge necessary to conserve biological diversity; to teach students to love and appreciate it; and to make the case for its protection to governments, industry and the general public. See Michael Soule, "What is conservation biology?," *Bioscience* 35 (1985): 727-734; and Richard Primack, *Essentials of Conservation Biology* (Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates, 1993), 5-7, 17-20, 507-510.

31. *Journal IX*, 156-7 (December 4, 1856).

ourselves and to see nature's own order. So, to the books.
At the same time the passage shows a chafing at "system." At first Thoreau looks "without system." But without system he can't keep distinctions or knowledge in his head. So looks more "methodically": observing carefully, taking detailed notes, rechecking his observations.[32] Back to the books, then, whose detailed distinctions he will note and often correct through his own observations. Yet, Thoreau tells us as the passage continues:

> Still I never studied botany, and do not to-day systematically, the most natural system is still so artificial. I wanted to know my neighbors, if possible, — to get a little nearer to them. I soon found myself observing when plants first blossomed and leafed, and I followed it up early and late, far and near, several years in succession, running to different sides of the town and into the neighboring towns, often between twenty and thirty miles in a day. I often visited a particular plant four or five miles distant, half a dozen times within a fortnight, that I might know exactly when it opened, beside attending to a great many others in different directions.[33]

Thoreau does not study botany "systematically," he says, and offers as excuses that "the most natural system is still so artificial" and that what he really wants to do is "know his neighbors." He is making two important points here.
First, that we can pursue a basic knowledge of organisms up to the point where we may distinguish and appreciate them, note their main characteristics and seasonal changes — and that may be our goal. As Thoreau says elsewhere: "Botany cannot go farther than tell me the names of the shrubs which grow [in the surrounding swamps and forests]"[34] As he learns, the swamps he once saw as an undifferentiated green mass become individualized and he can meet new neighbors. The point now is to go out and do so — not to sit in a lab in Cambridge receiving plants from all over the world, as a systematic botanist might do, but to know his actual neighbors. Not to delve deeper into the structure of plants, but to enjoy them in their proper place. Not to dissect their flowers, but to go to see when they flower, allowing them to show themselves at their best.
There is an ambiguity in the word "to know." It can mean personal acquaintance with something or someone. Or it can mean possessing a correct picture of the structure and true information of the history of a physical thing. This more rigorous knowledge can be pursued ever more deeply — causal chains wind, structure explored leads to the discovery of micro-structure. In the process, our general knowledge of nature improves. Yet the field biologist or amateur naturalist also engage in a basic meeting of things in their careful observations of the natural world, and accumulate much particular knowledge. Against philosophy's tendency to equate

32. See for example Thoreau, *Faith in a Seed* (Washington: Island Press, 1993), 54.
33. *Journal IX*, 157-158.
34. "Walking," in Thoreau, *Essays*, 115.

real knowledge with general scientific knowledge, Thoreau asserts: (1) the existence and value of particular knowledge; and (2) the existence and value of acquaintance, irrespective of knowledge.

Thoreau's second point, in his chafing at system, is that the botanists' natural system is not accurate. A "natural" botanical classification, in the technical sense of Thoreau's time and ours, is one which represents the actual structure or relations of groups of plants. It is opposed to an "artificial" system, which is put together for ease of identification or some other human purpose, and is hence arbitrary from the point of view of the organisms themselves. The Linnaean natural system of Thoreau's time related organisms solely in terms of similarities of structure, which are often best analyzed through dissection in a lab. But in placing an animal on the dissecting table or pressing a plant specimen, we take it out of nature's system, Thoreau believes. A plant makes sense in a certain habitat, flowering at its natural time. To systematize in this accepted way is to take the organism out of the natural order. It is these connections and histories that Thoreau is interested in, and he has an intuition that these relations make things what they are. Rather than "systematizing" in this way, Thoreau "attends" to his neighbors. He takes detailed notes on plant phenology, for example.[35] He describes the behavior of the birds and small mammals surrounding him.[36] These are regularities *in situ* and thus more to his liking.[37] These observations will help him glimpse a natural order in the fields and forests of Concord which the science of his day devalued in its search for general law and system. Thoreau wants to know why this particular wood lot, a pine forest ten years ago, is coming up to oaks today. But insofar as this involves particular and unique causes, and insofar as it looks for order in ecological succession, this would not have been considered a scientific question in Thoreau's day. Against this Thoreau asserts: (1) the importance of particular, historical explanation as contributing to scientific knowledge; and (2) the importance *to him* of knowing *his* place.[38]

Thoreau's historical and ecological studies, in turn, allowed him to read Darwin's *Origin of Species* with understanding and sympathy.[39] The *Origin*, of course, helped redefine biology's natural classification system, so that a species' evolutionary history (itself partly a product of its ecological relations) defines its place within the system. The modern Linnaean system incorporates the unique history of organic evolution, thus affirming Thoreau's criticism of its predecessor.[40]

35. *Journal IX*, 50-56 (September 1-2, 1856).
36. *Journal XIII*, 98-116 (January 22-30, 1860); WALDEN, 211-212; 225-228.
37. "I deal with the truths that recommend themselves to me, — please me, — not those merely which some system has voted to accept" Thoreau writes. (*Journal II*, 403; August 19, 1851)
38. In an interesting, complex passage, Thoreau criticizes science and aspects of nature itself which are simple and lawlike, stating his preference for complexity, proximity and novelty: "I am somewhat oppressed and saddened by the sameness and apparent poverty of the heavens.... I pine for a new world in the heavens as well as on the earth, and though it is some consolation to hear of the wilderness of stars and systems invisible to the naked eye, yet the sky does not make that impression of variety and wildness that even the forest does, as it ought." (*Journal IV*, 469; January 21, 1853)
39. See Walls, 189-199; 275, notes 21 and 24; Thoreau, J*ournal XIII*, 77-78 (January 4, 1860); *Journal XIV*, 146-147 (October 18, 1860).

"A Friend Among the Fishes"

But while Thoreau strives for an holistic and "neighborly" science, he also collects specimens: pressing plants and occasionally dissecting animals. In 1858 for example, five years after the publication of WALDEN, Thoreau discovers a fish he has never seen before in Walden Pond, shaped like a bream but with markings like a perch. He collects several dozens of the little fish and makes a minute description in his journal:

> They are one and one sixth inches long by two fifths of an inch wide ... dorsal fin-rays 9-10 (Girard says 9-11), caudal 17, anal 3-11, pectoral 11, ventral 1-5. They have about seven transverse dark bars, a vertical dark mark under eye, and a dark spot on edge of operculum.... They are exceedingly pretty seen floating dead on their sides in a bowl of water, with all their fins spread out.[41]

"Are they not a new species?" he wonders excitedly, and presents them at the next meeting of the Boston Natural History Society. Opinion is divided at the meeting, but subsequently the specimens are identified as the previously described *Pomotis obesus*.

Still, Thoreau has known the thrill of discovery, filled in a detail of the natural history of Massachusetts and seen new beauty in nature. All of this is a function of careful observation – and skill in field collecting and dissection. The passage reminds us of the aesthetic enjoyment we find in studying natural forms abstracted from context, such as flowers in a vase. It also reminds us of the role that such "abstraction" necessarily plays in furthering knowledge. Analysis and synthesis complement each other, furthering scientific progress. We cannot map out food webs, for example, without censusing the plants present in an area and determining what the animals are eating – sometimes killing them in the process.

Thoreau's journal for the next week is filled with pleasure over his discovery. Significantly, as he considers its meaning, he imaginatively places the fish back in the pond:

> I cannot but see still in my mind's eye those little striped breams poised in Walden's glaucous water. They balance all the rest of the world in my estimation at present, for this is the bream that I have just found.... But in my account of this bream I cannot go a hair's breath beyond the mere statement that it exists, – the miracle of its existence, my contemporary and

40. "No science does more than arrange what knowledge we have of any class of objects," Thoreau objects in one journal entry (*Journal X*, 294; March 5, 1858); but modern biology moves beyond this to describe and explain biological processes, species interactions, and the unique history of organic evolution on earth. Modern biology thus reaffirms the importance of the particular and the unique to science. Biological species are the creation of "chance and necessity": the laws which we believe constrain organic evolution tell us how evolution works, but do not show us deterministically that trilobites or hyenas had to come when they did. At the same time, our most sophisticated understandings of biological adaptations (such as the mechanisms and patterns of seed dispersal) and ecological regularities (such as the tendencies of bog communities to develop in certain ways) are of limited predictive power in explaining how seeds will disperse or particular plant communities will develop. While molecular and cell biology uncover structural and functional similarities across wide areas of organic life, evolutionary biology and ecology remind us of the diversity and complexity of life and the ineliminable importance of history.

41. *Journal XI*, 346-9 (November 26 and 27, 1858).

> neighbor, yet so different from me! I can only poise my thought there by its side and try to think like a bream for a moment. I can only think of precious jewels, of music, poetry, beauty, and the mystery of life.... I want you to perceive the mystery of the bream.... I have a friend among the fishes, at least a new acquaintance. Its character will interest me, I trust, not its clothes and anatomy.[42]

Thoreau's pleasure, as he realizes, is a function of the novelty of what he has uncovered. Walden Pond has surprised him with something new, after all these years. Yet nature is filled with such wonders; familiarity breeds indifference. The value of the scientific enterprise lies partly in renewing our excitement about nature. But if this is so, then aspects of science which detract from this excitement are suspect. And unfortunately, explanation itself can do so.

A scientific curiosity motivated Thoreau's interest in the bream and his presentation of an account to the natural history society. Yet considering what science would make of such a discovery, he is unhappy:

> A new species of fish signifies hardly more than a new name. See what is contributed in the scientific reports. One counts the fin-rays, another measures the intestines, a third daguerreotypes a scale, etc. etc.; otherwise there's nothing to be said.... A dead specimen of an animal, if it is only well preserved in alcohol, is just as good for science as a living one preserved in its native element.[43]

One may read this as an unyielding indictment of analytic science. Yet given Thoreau's own use of analysis and the obvious need for analysis in science, I prefer to take it as pointing up (1) the need for a more complete science and (2) the need to supplement science with other forms of knowing and being with nature.

(1) Picking apart nature — literally and in thought — is crucial to individual understanding and scientific progress: "the intellect is a cleaver; it discerns and rifts its way into the secret of things."[44] Those, like Thoreau, who are committed to knowing nature cannot jettison analysis — despite its inherent violence.[45] Still, the zoology of Thoreau's day slighted ethology.[46] Anatomy and physiology are important — and sometimes beautiful, on Thoreau's own account — but so is "character" if by character we mean behavior and an organism's relation to its environment. Its behavior links the fish to the rest of the pond community (community ecology was another undeveloped field in

42. Ibid., 358-9 (November 30, 1858).
43. Ibid., 359-60.
44. WALDEN, 98.
45. Thoreau never completely accepts this, however, writing a year after the publication of WALDEN: "The inhumanity of science concerns me, as when I am tempted to kill a rare snake that I may ascertain its species. I feel that this is not the means of acquiring true knowledge." (*Journal VI*, 311; May 28, 1854). Of course, post-modern critics of science with no interest in knowing nature can easily write off scientific killing, analysis and science itself as simply forms of imperialism; see for example Val Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism," *Hypatia* 6 (1991): 3-27.
46. In his words, it "left the *anima* out of animals." *Journal XIII*, 154 (Feb. 18, 1860).

the science of the day).
Truly, to understand the fish we must put them back into Walden Pond (and observe them). The holism advocated by Thoreau has clearly been incorporated into modern science, which seeks to explain the workings of evolution and the evolutionary histories of particular species. For ecology and ethology a dead specimen is *not* as good as a live one "preserved in its native element."

(2) But even a complete science should be supplemented. First, by personal acquaintance with our own neighbors. Second, by "friendship." Or, if that seems too strong a word for any possible relationship to something as cold-blooded as a fish, then by "appreciation." Third, by poetry and celebration. Fourth — and this is implicit in what has already been said — by protection.
I say that science should be completed in this manner, but what is the force of this ethical judgment? Half comes from the goodness of the bream itself: its integrity, its beauty, its complexity, its ancient and unique natural history.[47] Half comes from the goodness of a full, rich human life, which includes both knowledge and personal connection to nature: its superiority to lives of mere knowledge or of ignorance.[48]
Science must put the fish back in the pond, in order to understand its role in the larger systems of which it is a part. It remains perfectly still for a moment, poised in the water — then rushes off and out of sight, into the system of the pond and down the stream of evolutionary history. Before it does, Thoreau poises his thought next to it. And holds it there. At that moment "the bream, appreciated, floats in the pond as the center of the system."[49] From there, the knowing subject may write a poem which fixes the bream in the center of its own symbolic system. Or, she may fit the fish into our evolving system of objective, scientific knowledge. Or, she may continue to watch, appreciatively.
The jaundiced eye may see here a degeneration into willful obscurantism. A scientific account, after all, does go beyond the statement that the bream exists, telling us what it is and how it got here. Granted that science's account is necessarily incomplete, it seeks to dispel "mystery" and "miracle,"" replacing ignorance with knowledge. A naturalist who disparages anatomy and advocates "thinking like a bream" might be suspected

47. Strong arguments for the intrinsic value of wild nature are Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Holmes Rolston, III, *Environmental Ethics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Keekok Lee, "The Source and Locus of Intrinsic Value," *Environmental Ethics* 18 (1996): 297-309. Influential works denying such intrinsic value are John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1980) and Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). See also *The Monist* 75/2 (April, 1992), a special issue titled "The Intrinsic Value of Nature."
48. For the past twenty years, the discipline of environmental ethics has focused on the issue of the putative rights, intrinsic value, or moral considerability of non-human nature, and on the development of a non-anthropocentric ethics. In recent years there has been increased interest in developing an environmental virtue ethics, which incorporates a respect for nature, conceives "human interests" broadly, and argues that environmental protection is in our enlightened self-interest. See Bill Shaw, "A Virtue Ethics Approach to Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 19 (1997): 53-67; Stephen Kellert, *The Value of Life: Biological Diversity and Human Society* (Island Press: Washington, 1996); John O'Neill, *Ecology, Policy and Politics: Human Well-Being and the Natural World* (London: Routledge, 1993); Geoffrey Frasz, "Environmental Virtue Ethics: A New Direction for Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 15 (1993): 259-74; Thomas Hill, Jr., "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments," *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983): 211-24.
49. *Journal XI*, 359 (November 30, 1858).

of deliberately misdirecting us, blocking the sometimes pedestrian but reliable road to knowledge in favor of a fruitless attempt to achieve the impossible – "perceiving mystery."

Yet Thoreau has himself written a scientific account of the bream and reads the accounts of others. So his reservations about what his own account achieves cannot be read as denying science or scientific truth. Rather, they assert the relative unimportance of any account –scientific, poetic or some combination of the two –compared to the bream itself. The existence of this "other" is more important than any account we can give of it.[50]

This is Thoreau's bedrock position and he judges the giving of accounts accordingly. Scientific accounts should be as accurate as possible. "To know is to know good," and accurate knowledge brings us closer to the things themselves.[51] At the same time, any account which does not point to the goodness of that of which it speaks – through rhyme, exclamation points or a frank avowal of love – is suspect.

"I wish to speak a word for Nature," Thoreau begins one of his final essays.[52] The impulse to speak *for* nature comes from the realization that nature itself speaks (a recurring conceit in WALDEN). I may tell the story of the evolution of the bream, or the story of its life in Walden Pond, because nature writes or has written them. At a deeper level, I may be moved to speech or to silence, simply by the existence of the fish or the pond.

> It is no dream of mine,
> To ornament a line,

no matter how many afternoons I have dreamed away in my boat or how many poems I have written along its shores.[53] It is the source of life. It is life itself. May I write an account which accurately, lovingly and respectfully tells its story. May my account lead the reader to the pond itself in appreciation and help to preserve it. May my story allow its story to continue in its own way, harmonizing with and completing it, in concord.

50. Similarly Thoreau's relationship to nature is more important to him than his attempt to know nature, as the following journal passage suggests: "The secretary of the Association for the Advancement of Science requests me, as he probably has thousands of others, by a printed circular letter from Washington the other day, to fill the blank against certain questions, among which the most important one was what branch of science I was specially interested in.... How absurd that, though I probably stand as near to nature as any of them, and am by constitution as good an observer as most, yet a true account of my relation to nature should excite their ridicule only! If it had been the secretary of an association of which Plato or Aristotle was president, I should not have hesitated to describe my studies at once and particularly." (*Journal V*, 4-5; March 5, 1853). Note how Thoreau reframes the issue of his scientific studies in terms of a relationship to nature.

Reginald Cook, author of an excellent study of Thoreau as naturalist, states flatly that "Thoreau did not [primarily] aim at being a scientist.... He aimed at being a human being who realized as completely as possible ... the correspondence of nature and himself." (Cook, *Passage*, 204)

51. Thoreau, "Natural History," 5.

52. Thoreau, "Walking," 93.

53. Thoreau, WALDEN, 193.

"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

– Remark by character "Garin Stevens" in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST

Prepared: August 13, 2013

PHILIP CAFARO

ARRGH AUTOMATED RESEARCH REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE

This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, upon someone's request we have pulled it out of the hat of a pirate that has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (depicted above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of data modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture. This is data mining. To respond to such a request for information, we merely push a button.

Commonly, the first output of the program has obvious deficiencies and so we need to go back into the data modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and do a recompile of the chronology — but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary "writerly" process which you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

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