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AN EXPOSITION AND CRITICISM.

The University of Oklahoma, Ph.D., 1973
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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE POLITICAL THEORY OF HENRY DAVID THOREAU
AN EXPOSITION AND CRITICISM

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
CHARLES M. EVANS
1973
THE POLITICAL THEORY OF HENRY DAVID THOREAU

AN EXPOSITION AND CRITICISM

APPROVED BY

[Signatures]

Dissertation Committee
PREFACE

This study owes its beginning to the inspiration of Dr. Walter Harding, Distinguished Professor of American Literature of the State University of New York, whose comment about the lack of a systematic exposition and criticism of Henry David Thoreau from the perspective of academic political theory led to an investigation of the literature, beginning with Professor Harding's own works, widely acknowledged as the most authoritative of contemporary Thoreau scholarship. The number and variety of interpretations of Thoreau's political and social ideas were striking; some of them must represent misinterpretations. It became a fascinating intellectual game to discover from his own writings and the historical data available about his life what the political theory of Thoreau is to my mind. The physical proximity of my place of employment to the scenes of Thoreau's life as well as to the repositories of the relevant research materials added a practical dimension to my awakened interest.

It became apparent that Thoreau's writings, and so his theory, were best suited to a descriptive analytical method rather than other possible approaches available to modern social science. Therefore, this study is an essay and analysis in normative theory, consciously based upon a descriptive method. A more extended explanation of this decision is found in the first chapter and in the opening pages of Chap-
ter VIII. The bibliography will be found to include sources from English and American literature, psychology, religion, history, anthropology, and philosophy as well as from political science. The intent has been to suggest an interpretation of the political theory of Thoreau which can serve as a standard by which to consider the appropriateness of invoking his name in particular causes, and by which his influence in modern political affairs might be considered. Hence, the claims of the study are modest, as the words "exposition and criticism" in the title are meant to convey.

It is with sincere appreciation that I acknowledge the earnest and penetrating criticism offered by John Paul Duncan, David Ross Boyd Professor of Political Science, as chairman of my doctoral committee over the period of nearly three years in which this work was written—and rewritten. The ordeal has strengthened rather than strained my admiration for his scholarship and my affection for him as teacher and friend. His uncompromisingly high standards have been rendered humane by the remarkable patience he has displayed. Grateful appreciation is also due to the other distinguished members of the committee: John S. Ezell, David Ross Boyd Professor of History and Dean of the College of Arts and Science; Rufus G. Hall, Professor of Political Science and Assistant Dean of the College of Arts and Science; Joseph C. Pray, Professor of Political Science; and Walter F. Scheffer, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Advanced Program.
in Public Administration. Their stamina and high professionalism were tried and proven in reading so carefully through the considerable volume of this study, and their criticisms have been most valuable. It is needless to add that the errors of fact and judgment which remain are entirely my own.

Finally, the encouragement and consideration of my colleagues of the State University of New York must be acknowledged as invaluable in the completion of the work. And last, but only because the enormity of the debt has weighted it to the bottom, I record here the love, understanding and faith of my wife and daughters. Of my wife, one can only say, as in the words of the spiritual, nobody knows the trouble I have seen but she.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

As long as men have lived together under a codified system of positive law, there has been a central dilemma facing each ethically sensitive citizen: What are the rights of individual subjective conscience against the demands of the legal system? From this basic question arise many other concerns of serious students of political organization. Legitimacy, majority-minority rights, procedural due process, and the array of political problems that hinge on ethical questions with which the various mechancial techniques of governmental systems have attempted to cope—through reconciliation where possible and through accommodation in other cases—are corollaries to the fundamental issue of individual freedom within the social order. Modern life has presented the question singly and in a great number of its various combinations.

In an age of civil disobedience, both passive and of a more violent character, it is useful to establish a perspective. Racial strife, class differences, labor disharmony, inequity of the sexes, opposition to war both in genre and in particular, have been hallmarks of our political life since before the American Revolution. The history of the last few years has brought into sharper focus for a greater number of people the conflict inherent in political society of the individual who defines his personhood primarily in terms of moral autonomy against
his obligations, which are also of an ethical character, to the legal requirements of the political system. Under such circumstances, political obligations have often been accepted only on a tenuous and tentative basis as a commitment to obey, and only so long as there is no conflict with the demands of conscience. At times, some dissidents have held this as a reason for refusing obedience according to personal preference and convenience. However, the concern of this paper is not with individual caprice but with the deeply held convictions of conscience which are so strongly felt as to lead one to disobey the command of the state.

The civil rights movement of the 'fifties and 'sixties removed some of the onus against defiance of the law. The increasing demands of blacks for higher social and economic status, protests over the involvement of the United States in various foreign military engagements, principally in Southeast Asia, have led to urban riots, widespread draft resistance, and a few well-publicized refusals to pay taxes. At the same time the range of acceptable methods of securing redress of real or imagined grievances has been broadened to include confrontation politics, allowing people to place themselves between the law and the persons or institutions against which the law is called to operate, all in the name of some good higher than that which the law seems to embody. The number of dissenters and their motivations
seem to increase daily, and the modes of protest and defiance have become a remarkable tribute to the exhaustless capacity of human imagination. Both radicals and reactionaries have found themselves opposing the enforcement of particular laws.

This is a study of the thought of Henry David Thoreau, whose name has been an increasingly prominent one among the totems of a wide spectrum of present day social dissenters. His name is invoked toward an astonishing number of ends, some of which he could not have had any sympathy with. He has been presented as a proponent of opposition to law in general as well as to a host of particular laws. Civil disobedience has come to be considered as Thoreau’s contribution to the methodology of dissent. It is true that social critics of nearly every stripe can find in Thoreau an analogous position or at least a tendency toward one. He has been hailed (or damned) as a father of progressive education, a forerunner of the present enthusiasm for ecology, an inspiration for the "green-belt" variety of city planners, a kindred soul of nudists, a guiding light to Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., as a spokesman for pacifism, and as a crusading supporter of holy war. Chapter and verse can be cited by persons anxious to identify Thoreau with this cause or that. But to plump for Thoreau as a pillar of particular causes does not do justice to his exceedingly complex and sophisticated system of personal ethics as the ground of protest and the basis of methodology. His was a more
universal view than is usually accorded to him by those hoping to prove a particular point by using his name as an authority to buttress an argument.

To one who reads his works as a student of political theory, it is apparent that there is a lack of understanding of Thoreau's political views, and a misapprehension of what is generally known through his few explicitly political statements and his one celebrated act of civil disobedience. The result is that his name has become connected with political positions which, if not in actual conflict, are at logical variance with one another. So often has the appeal to Thoreau been made inappropriately, that present day perceptions of his thought, even by many competent scholars, are distorted. The polymorphism of "Thoreauvianism" arises from three basic causes. First, his explicitly political works are few and are ordinarily read in isolation from the main body of his writings. Secondly, he was one of the most ethereal of the Transcendentalists, and Transcendentalism was never a unified or consistent system of thought. Thirdly, Thoreau considered himself apolitical and was unconcerned to follow political problems back to their philosophical roots. The focus of his life and work was by deliberate intention subjective in the extreme. Political institutions were beyond his interest and artistic scope. He did not write with the purpose of setting forth a comprehensive and distinct political theory. The absence
of a completely developed political theory among Thoreau's works makes him appear ambiguous and often naive, particularly so when his works are cited to buttress political positions. His own perception of the situation was that he had no political positions, only unyielding moral principles.

Nonetheless, the popular mind has attributed to Henry David Thoreau a political significance, and legitimately so. The popular image of Thoreau as an anti-social hermit living alone in a hut and advocating anarchy and the dissolution of political and social conventions has led even scholars to continue the stereotype of Thoreau as a New World Rousseau advocating the life of a noble savage as a simplistic back-to-nature solution to the ethical problems of human social and political life. While he did not have a completely developed theory of politics, he not only had a considerably sophisticated approach to the ethical dimensions of political problems, but his philosophical positions inevitably led to political applications. As a result, he sometimes had surprisingly practical suggestions to offer a people groping with increasing mechanicalization, terrific sectional and racial tensions, aggressive foreign policy, and an industrialization which was significantly altering human relations and the physical habitat of the species. Henry Thoreau has a relevance to the history of modern political thought; he still speaks to the contemporary situation which the United
States, as well as all governments of industrialized nations, face. He still speaks to the individual struggling in modern times to abide by the dictates of his subjective moral convictions, to live up to the ethical imperatives imposed by membership in humanity, and at the same time to fulfill his obligations as a citizen under law.

It is the purpose of this study to construct from Thoreau's writings a systematized explication of his political theory and to subject the structure, artificial as it may be, to a critical analysis within the historical setting of his creative life. Since Thoreau did not devote himself to the task of writing his own political theory, this represents an interpretative attempt to suggest what the theory might have been like had he given the subject more extensive treatment. This is a study in normative theory, and is not presented as a work calling extensively upon the scientific methodology of more behavioral approaches to political thought. The "spirit" which plays such an important role in Transcendental thought is wholly a value construct permeating life at all levels, and does not lend itself to objective measurement. Especially Thoreau among the Transcendentalists was concerned with the ought to be. His explanations of phenomena and of behavior were weighted down with value judgements. It seems entirely appropriate that a normative approach be taken as the methodology of this study since it permits a holistic consideration of Thoreau's life and writings
as the basis of a political theory. It is also important to this purpose
to relate his thought to its intellectual precedents in Europe and
America, his intellectual affinities with Eastern religious and philo-
sophic thought, to certain of the classical European anarchists and the
nascent anarchism of the early Nineteenth Century in America, and
most importantly, to Transcendentalism. Thoreau's Transcendental-
list identification links him with the Romantic movement in England
and Germany, with idealism in the Platonic tradition, and made him
so receptive to the influence of Oriental mysticism. Although Thoreau
is often mentioned in connection with more modern reform conflicts
and popular movements such as those led by Gandhi and Martin Luther
King, it is not the primary purpose of this study to follow the intellec-
tual threads which lead backward to his thought; rather, it is to pro-
vide a clear explication of Thoreau's political thinking within the intel-
lectual framework of his period. Incidental references to develop-
ments in later years are unavoidable. But it has been left to others to
address themselves to Thoreau's contribution to these.

The interpretation of Thoreau's political theory presented and
defended here challenges the usual view of Thoreau as anti-authori-
tarian, egalitarian, and humanely libertarian. By developing so far as
is possible from the available sources a comprehensive view of his
political theory, this study attempts to offer a more balanced and
accurate understanding of his thought. The ambition of this paper will be fulfilled if it can provide a firm basis upon which later scholars will draw in making more appropriate analogies than is often the present case between more contemporary social issues and the works of Thoreau. No such basis has been established heretofore, and here-in lies the contribution of the study to political scholarship.

That Thoreau considered himself, and was, a writer of literature is one of the most important factors to keep in mind when approaching his work from a political point of view. His ambition and most deliberate aim was to create literature—art—using his own consciousness or subjective experiences for thematic material. He sought to achieve a mythological quality in his work, to fashion a statement of perceived truth through the use of symbols. His subject matter was intentionally limited by intense subjectivism and further narrowed by a meagre range of experience. Not only was he wholly subjective he was rigidly provincial, steadfastly refusing to take a wider perspective or to concede any validity to a viewpoint other than his own.

These facts create certain problems and impose conditions upon this study. Being a writer of literature, skilled in his craft, and familiar with the use of literary devices, two of his favorite methods of achieving literary effect, even in conversation, were exaggeration and paradox. Because he thought of his works as mythologic, he relished
the use of symbolic language. It is often so difficult as to be a matter of conjecture to distinguish between an emphatic conviction of Thoreau the thinker and an embellishment of Thoreau the writer. He admitted to a tendency to overstate his case for the sake of effect: "I trust that you realize what an exaggerator I am, —that I lay myself out to exaggerate whenever I have an opportunity...." Even his Journal, which might be taken as the most direct, spontaneous, and intimate source of enlightenment as to his thought must be read with great care. Much of it was written as tentative drafts of some literary effort rather than as the personal notes of an accurate observer reporting to his diary. What found its way into the early Journal was the carefully wrought final draft of day-book entries in what Perry Miller calls the Ur-journal, which no longer exists. Although the Journal, especially in the later volumes, contains long tedious lists of plants and measurements, much of what has been preserved is the repository of meticulously reworked and polished epigrams and miniature essays which Thoreau confidently expected to be published one day in some form or other. The Journal must be used cautiously for it is not a reliable informant of Thoreau's thought; it is a stylistic exercise book for the perfection of his literary virtuosity. One must rely heavily on intuitive reading of his works, a method of study which Thoreau would approve as appropriate for anyone interested in what he had to communicate. In his own reliance on intu-
ition rather than the scientific method, he consistently held that truth was independent of system and larger than could be contained in the vocabulary of science. Not only does the intuitive approach conform with Thoreau's own personality and method, it probably is the only way in which his vision of the world can be apprehended or communicated. Because Thoreau had so strong an anti-intellectual, anti-rational bias, sympathetic reading is required in any attempt to rationalize and systematize his thoughts.

A further complication is introduced by Thoreau's wholehearted acceptance of Ralph Waldo Emerson's dictum, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do." Thoreau subscribed to most of Emerson's points of view, although he insisted on rephrasing them less elegantly and usually with less clarity. This acceptance of a necessary ambiguity in reality was particularly strong. Both he and Emerson accepted a Pythagorian view of a balanced harmony of antagonistic elements which when combined with the dialectic processes of thought taught by Plato produced the dynamism in the world-view of the Concord Transcendentalists. Also, Thoreau certainly considered himself to be a "great soul." He was the full embodiment of that total assurance which Transcendentalism bequeathed to its adherents. Consequently, he was often hopelessly obscure in his
expression and had no hesitation about contradicting himself. It is
difficult, too, at times to determine which viewpoint on a matter was
most genuinely his own opinion. With distressing frequency one con­
cludes that on one day he saw things in one way, and the next day took
quite another view. And being human, his views modified with age.
For most of the assertions made in the course of this study, some
critic will be able to point to a passage undeniably written by Thoreau
which will be inconsistent with the interpretations made here. This is
distressing to one who prefers to see all the loose intellectual threads
tied neatly into finished knots. While recognizing the difficulty, it has
not been made an over-riding concern in this study because Thoreau's
behavior in the final years of his life drew his fragmented political
views into a whole pattern. The niceties of a consistent philosophical
system may have been lacking in his writings, but at the end of his life
the main tenets of his political thought were completely congruent with
the tenor of his life and consistent with the ethical posture which he
maintained from his youthful years after he developed an intellectual
independence of Emerson.

A political theory implies a system of general, if not universal
applicability; it suggests a regularity of human responses conditioning
the development of political life. In this sense, Thoreau cannot be said
to have offered a theory, but rather a philosophical view about politics.
However, the task of piecing together a political theory from his published writings and the content of his Journals is one which Thoreau might easily have undertaken himself had he been inclined to devote sufficient time and attention to the political aspects of his thinking. He left the philosophical rudiments from which a comprehensive political theory can be deduced; he made explicit statements concerning his view of the universe, of nature, of the nature of man, of society, of the state, of the source of morality and the nature of political obligation, and the method of finding value.

The first portion of this study is a mosaic constructed of bits and scraps lifted from his writings mixed with occasional pieces drawn from his biography and other secondary sources to complete the pattern whose design is a comprehensive political philosophy. Only three of his pieces are specifically political in intent: "Civil Disobedience," "Slavery in Massachusetts," and "A Plea for Captain John Brown." However, his two book-length works, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* and *Walden*, as well as his *Journal* and occasional essays such as "Life Without Principle" contain passages which have distinctly political significance. The *Journal* is written in a disconnected fashion, and there is little necessity to be cautious about quoting him out of context from that source since very often his observations were written apropos to nothing.
The last portion of the study will provide a critical analysis of the theory as presented in the first part. For purposes of illumination and contrast, there will be some discussion of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the German and English Idealists, continental anarchists, and early American reformers, abolitionists, and anarchists. The focus remains upon Thoreau and the introduction of other thinkers is intended only to serve as background to Thoreau's thought, to provide the means of setting Thoreau in bas-relief. Much the same thing may be said of the more modern personages and movements. The central figure remains Thoreau, the moderns being mentioned only to illustrate the rich potential of his influence.

Notes:


CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Every man's thought is conditioned by the circumstances of his life. This is particularly true of Henry David Thoreau. He was a plant of his native soil, a simile he used himself in remarking how easily men could be transplanted while he was tap-rooted. And like a tap-rooted plant, he was wholly subject to the environmental conditions enveloping him. His thinking was shaped by and all of his writings poured from his experiences within the narrow confines of New England in the early middle part of the Nineteenth Century. Any understanding of Thoreau's political thought must take into account the man himself, his family, friends and enemies, enthusiasms and aversions, his social and economic circumstances and the general historical setting in which he lived and wrote.

On July 12, 1817, Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau gave birth to her third child and second son in her mother's house on the Virginia Road at the edge of Concord, Massachusetts. She and her husband, John, were in financial straits. New England had not fully recovered from the depressing effects of the War of 1812, nor from the political disaffection which accompanied it. John had suffered a succession of business failures and had returned to Concord to farm his mother-in-law's
"widow's third" left to her by her second husband. The Thoreaus lived in half of Widow Minot's house with a family named Catherine occupying the other half. Times were difficult for the Thoreaus and their three young children. Cynthia Thoreau was grateful for the assistance of her family. About six weeks after the birth of Henry, Cynthia's brother, David, died. Possibly from gratitude as well as grief, Cynthia had the child christened David Henry Thoreau by the venerable Dr. Ezra Ripley of the Old First Parish Church.

David Henry Thoreau did not have a very auspicious beginning. His paternal ancestry was partly responsible. The Thoreaus were French Huguenot stock which had come to America from the Isle of Jersey. Henry's grandfather, Jean Thoreau, was a sailor who settled in Boston in 1773 and reared a family of five children. He managed to build a moderately successful business on Boston's Long Wharf, but it was not substantial enough to launch five children with inheritances. He sold the business in 1799 for twenty-five thousand dollars and moved to Concord, where he died two years later. Henry's father was only fourteen years old when he found it necessary to go to work as a clerk to support himself. He tried a variety of occupations before marrying Cynthia Dunbar in 1812. After Henry's birth he settled on pencil manufacture and struggled along with that until as a grown man Henry discovered a way to produce superior quality graphite which they sold
wholesale and became close to comfortable near the end of John's life. John Thoreau was not an ambitious or successful man and seems to have added very little to Henry's hereditary constitution, except some might say a tendency toward indolence. The negative effects of his father, on the other hand, have been the subject of comment by scholars who hypothesize that Thoreau's sexual orientation and defiant attitude toward constituted authority was in part the result of a weak father figure. In his later years Thoreau would engage in the fantasy that his paternal ancestry provided him with the blood of fierce Northmen, Vikings who worshipped Thor and who took his name. The Journal has such romantic daydreaming about a noble lineage scattered through it. In reality, however, the Thoreau name brought an inheritance of a congenital tendency toward tuberculosis and a tradition of humble living which bordered on poverty. Despite Henry's romantic notions of Thor worshipping ancestors, the religious heritage of the Thoreaus was a pale protestantism which had been diluted to his father's mildly Unitarian Congregationalism.

It was from his mother's side that Henry inherited his colorful blood. The talkative, vivacious, energetic, domineering and opinionated Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau had two strong blood lines behind her competing for dominance. The Jones and Dunbar families were both moderately prosperous and definitely were sufficiently well-connected to indicate that Cynthia married below her social position.
The Jones family were of the old Puritan stock with a long history of solid land ownership, of sea-faring and ministerial sons. At the time of the American Revolution the Jones family were of substantial means and considerable influence, but they were Tories. They suffered the fate of those loyal to the British crown, with some of the family dispersing to Canada or the United Kingdom and others resigning themselves to their reduced economic and social circumstances. Henry's great-uncle spent more than one night in the same Concord jail that he was later to occupy for trying to bring supplies to the British during the siege of Boston. His vessel was captured and he was incarcerated in Concord jail where Henry's grandmother carried cherries and other treats to her brother. This is the same grandmother in whose house Henry was born. She bore Cynthia by her first husband, the Reverend Asa Dunbar, a Tory clergyman.

The Dunbars were Scotsmen, independent and a bit eccentric. Although Asa Dunbar was a Congregationalist, there were a number of Quakers or other quietists in the family. They were substantial people of Tory sentiments, financially secure but with an hereditary tendency toward lethargy. For instance, Henry's favorite uncle, Charles Dunbar, had a habit of nodding off to sleep while shaving or at other odd moments. Charles provides an excellent example of Dunbar peculiarities. It is said he could perform such remarkable feats as running up one side and
down the other of a free-standing ladder, and could swallow his nose. There are stories that being toothless, he was able to swallow eating utensils and refuse to produce them unless the inn-keeper would remit the price of the meal. Charles revelled in his oddities, making his reputation for outstanding accomplishments such as making his voice heard to sailors on board passing ships by shouting from the shore. He played the role of bachelor uncle with no home of his own, but traveled from this relative to that, preferring to be a guest rather than a householder.

Henry fancied himself as favoring the Dunbars, and certainly succeeded in building his own reputation as a character. One wonders at times which of his own oddities were real and which were assumed. In any case, the Dunbars were independent minds and fit no conventional mold. To be different was a family tradition worthy to be continued. Henry accepted the tradition. It appealed to his imagination and suited his temperament.

It was also the religious heritage of his maternal ancestors that had the most profound influence on Henry's spiritual orientation. Although he rejected institutionalized religion, he displayed throughout his life a curious mixture of quietistic mysticism and militant moral arrogance pointing back to the not wholly compatible Quaker and Puritan religious legacies of the Dunbar and Joneses. The conflict between the philosophic assumptions of these two theological strains is apparent in
his alternate withdrawal from the affairs of the world and passionate
flares of political involvement and expression. It may account for his
personal tactics of non-payment of taxes and civil disobedience when
he undertook political action. Ultimately, the Puritan strain would
come to the fore, but only at the end of his life. For most of his years,
the themes of his writing were removed from secular affairs and had a
mystical, almost Oriental, detachment from the materialism of a com-
mmercial age.

Just as the maternal family characteristics seemed to have domi-
nated his genetic constitution, so was his mother the dominant environ-
mental force in his life. Cynthia Thoreau was a strong personality.
Her social and economic status had been damaged by her marriage con-
nection, but it did not dampen her ambition for her children. By all
accounts she overshadowed John and almost everyone who came under
her roof. There was no escaping the fact that they were poor. But
Cynthia was not one to be defeated by poverty or to have her horizons
limited by a circumstance which could be modified if not wholly removed.
Cynthia moved with John from the house shared with the Catherines
into her mother's home in 1818 and after a few months on to Chelmsford
where John tried to keep shop and paint signs to support them. In 1821
they moved again, this time to Boston where John tried his hand at
school keeping without much success. In 1823 they retreated again to
Concord, where as indicated earlier, John fell into pencil manufacture with occasional help from Charles Dunbar. There was no lack of pencil manufacturers in Concord, which was sort of a regional center for this activity, and predictably John Thoreau was not a spectacular financial success. To help make ends meet, Mrs. Thoreau took roomers and opened her table to board. It is difficult to see how she could have realized much profit as there were frequent and long-term visits by Aunts Louisa and Jane Thoreau and Aunt Maria Dunbar and Uncle Charles Dunbar. There were many other relatives who visited for longer or shorter periods; they were usually related to Cynthia and usually female. The paying guests were nearly always female. Miss Prudence Ward and her mother lived with the Thoreaus for years and there were other long-term guests such as R. W. Emerson's sister-in-law, Lucy Jackson Brown. The feminine population of the house was also augmented by the two Thoreau daughters, Helen and Sophia. The household was ordered to please the routine of the ladies and arranged according to feminine tastes. John Thoreau was not assertive at home since, in a very immediate sense, the house was Cynthia's business.

There was a great lack of privacy owing to the financial necessity of keeping boarders which bore particularly on the young Thoreau boys. The preponderance of female company in the Thoreau household combined with a dominant mother and submissive father figure drove the
brothers into an alliance for the protection of their masculinity. David was extraordinarily close to his brother John. It appears that John was David's only close friend or childhood companion. There is no record that David participated in games or other activities such as debate unless John were involved. Joseph Hosmer remembers:

When a boy he manifested peculiar traits of character. He perfectly hated street parades and shows, with their band accompaniment, that so generally excites the youthful mind. Nothing could induce him to engage in any game or sport,—he preferred to be an indifferent spectator.

He was a shy, retiring, and apparently unhappy child whose sober disposition earned him the nickname, "the Judge." David was seldom seen without John, with whom he was constantly being compared to his disadvantage. Recollections by people who knew both indicate the kinds of cruel comparisons which were made. Priscilla Rice wrote, "The opposite of John in every particular, he was thin, insignificant, poorly dressed, careless looking ... with straight shaggy hair and pale blue, wattery [sic] looking eyes." If that is how the girls saw him, the boys had an even worse opinion.

I knew Thoreau well when we were school-boys together. He was considered by most of us boys as rather stupid, and unsympathetic, though by no means a poor scholar. I suppose we thought him stupid because he did not join heartily in our plays. I cannot recollect that he ever played with us at all. He seemed to have no fun in him. We used to bother him a good deal calling him, "The fine scholar with the big nose." His quietness was more noticeable, no doubt, from the contrast between him and his brother, John, who was chock full of fun as an egg is of meat.
If John was gregarious, full of fun, and well liked by his peers and elders, he was also thoughtful and generous to David. It seems to have been typical of his character that he tried to draw his younger brother into the pastimes of boyhood, consenting to play the role of best friend as well as elder brother. They fished, swam, debated, explored, and studied Indian lore and botany together during the days and at night slept together in the house that was always packed to the rafters with family, friends, and often strangers. The special closeness of John must be given additional attention. At this point it suffices to stress the unusual attachment David had for John and how important it was for David to identify with his brother who was the strongest masculine influence in a family dominated numerically and psychologically by women.

Concord, Massachusetts, was nearly the perfect place for a youngster to grow up, especially a youngster with personality problems, an overcrowded home environment, and an ambitious mother reduced to economic circumstances which could be described generously as genteel poverty. Although Mrs. Thoreau took in boarders and son John wore his father's cut-down clothes while David wore John's outgrown things, the Thoreaus were not social outcasts. They lived next door, then across the street from the most prominent family of Concord, the Hoars, for a long period during the years in which the Thoreau children were growing
Concord had a proud democratic tradition, but it had the additional good fortune of geography. It was not a trade center as was Boston, nor was it a manufacturing center as was Sewell. It was a sleepy little inland village on the banks of the sluggish Concord river. The depressing effects of the War of 1812 had helped to make the economic class distinctions less clearly defined. There were no dominant sea-faring, commercial or manufacturing families as was the case in so many New England towns. The population was only around fifteen hundred persons and most of these people knew one another. Of the eight hundred or so male inhabitants, two-thirds were still minors, and most of the men were farmers. There were, naturally, a few men who were shopkeepers, clerks, blacksmiths and other service workers, along with a scattering of professional men and clergy. There were no rich people in Concord and very few poor if one excluded the Irish from consideration. The Irish were available for the back-breaking and unremunerative jobs which the thrifty Yankees and penurious corporations needed to have done cheaply. The Irish built the railroad, cleared the bogs, cleaned the pigpens, pulled the stumps and rocks from the fields and for their labors lived in floorless shanties without adequate heat or light or food or clothes. The Irish were the poor of Concord. They provided the villagers with objects of derision, condescension and scorn which might otherwise have fallen on such as the Thoreau family.
Cynthia and the ladies of the household were active in the affairs of the First Parish Church and interested in most of the reforms of the day. This was one way in which Cynthia preserved and improved the social standing of her family. The other tactic which she employed was centered on the education of her children.

Although Concord was extremely proud of its system of public education, by Cynthia's frugality and sacrifice the Thoreau boys attended the Concord Academy, a private school considered superior to the common schools. The common school had had some unfortunate episodes of violence inflicted upon students either by bullies or by harshly disciplinarian school masters. This may have played a part in the relatively poor Thoreau children being enrolled in the Academy. Probably the most significant factor was Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau's ambition and her Puritan respect for the value of a superior education. It is hard to see what might have been gained because the testimony of Thoreau and several of his classmates rated the master of Concord Academy as a remarkably poor teacher. Judge John S. Keyes recalled, "When six years old I began to attend the Academy then kept by Phineas Allen, the poorest teacher and worst school I ever knew anything about personally." By attending the Academy, the Thoreau children naturally knew well the children of the established families. The economic position of the Thoreaus did not markedly improve, but the social
distinctions among the older Concordians were not a persuasive influence among Academy scholars. The Thoreau children were accepted. John was especially well liked, popular with everyone for his quick wit, kindness and generosity. To make matters even more difficult for shy, ugly David, John was a better scholastic performer than David as well. Living under the shadow of his brother and pushed by his mother must have made life as a child difficult for David.

The family finances continued precarious. The eldest child, Helen, took a teaching position in order to help. She was unwell, however, already beginning to weaken under the strain of tubercular infection. As quickly as he finished his village education, John went immediately into a paying job. Cynthia continued to feed and house paying guests while all the family worked at pencil manufacture doing such chores as their age, sex, strength and time permitted. The time approached for David Henry to go to work, but strangely, family sentiment favored sending him to Harvard College where the Hoar sons and other young men of Concord Academy were going, not that David was particularly anxious to go all the way to Cambridge by himself, for the apron strings were still firmly tied. His eyes brimmed with tears when his mother suggested that with a proper education he could pack his bag and seek his fortune. He was comforted only when Helen assured him that he would always be with the family and should find his fortune at home. Perhaps David had in
mind his family situation as well as Phineas Allen when he remarked
that he was "fitted for college or rather made unfit" at Concord
Academy. At any rate, he worked hard but barely gained entrance on
the strength of his test performance.

Once at Harvard he was even less gregarious than in Concord,
possibly because John was not there to provide social lubrication. He
had other reasons for reticence. The family poverty marked him at
Harvard in a way it never touched him in Concord. Instead of the
required black, David wore to chapel his only coat which, unfortunately,
was green. Some writers have thought this to be an early example of
his perversity, but the fact was he was a poor boy on scholarship aid.
As a scholarship boy, he was allowed to take a leave from his classes
in order to teach and earn money. In his Sophomore year he availed
himself of this option, spending six weeks in Canton, Massachusetts,
teaching school and living with the Reverend Orestes Brownson. This
visit will be mentioned in a later connection, but his absence from
Harvard due to financial pressure was a further proof of his poverty,
drawing the attention of faculty and his peers to his humble status.
Furthermore, he was unwell. He was ill enough to take a leave of
absence in 1836. The scholarship aid which the Board of Overseers was
providing was cut because of lowered grades despite a letter from R. W.
Emerson on his behalf. 15
The times were turbulent for Harvard undergraduates, and Thoreau's class was particularly unruly. The irony of Thoreau's class being as disruptive as some contemporary collegians who sport sweat-shirts with Thoreau's name and picture printed on the front cannot escape attention. The class of 1837 led a large disturbance centering not on war, racism, slavery or free speech, but on bad living conditions, worse food, compulsory chapel and other grievances. There is no indication that David Henry took any part in the demonstrations although he must have had sympathy with at least some of their objections. A classmate recalled that,

he had no animal spirits for our sport or mischief. We cannot recollect what became of him during the Dunkin Rebellion. He must have slipped off into some "cool retreat or mossy cell." . . . Thoreau disappeared while our young absurdity held its orgies, stripping shutters from the lower windows of the buildings, dismantling recitation rooms, greeting tutors and professors with a frenzied and groundless indignation which we symbolized by kindling the spoils of sacked premises upon the steps.  

During the riots, the chances are that he was in the library or in some quiet corner reading. The library was a glorious discovery for Thoreau; it attracted and held his attention to the probable detriment of his required assignments. Although his class performance was adequate, it was undistinguished. His reading was not limited by any means to the required texts in a day when college curricula were highly prescribed. In later years he had few if any kind words to say about his experience
at college and minimized its value to him, but went to extraordinary lengths to secure library rights as an alumnus. The library was the one connection with Harvard College which he valued and continued to nurture. Despite his illness, lack of money, shyness, and bookishness, David Henry Thoreau managed to graduate on Tuesday, July 18, 1837 with the ability to read fluently Latin, Greek and French and to read Italian, Spanish and German passably well. He had done very well in mathematics as well as literature, so that in his later life he had no difficulty in surveying and no hesitancy in describing himself as a civil engineer. Among the sons of New England's commercial leaders and ministerial advocates of the work ethic, he had acquired a decided distaste for the commercial value system and materialism which had already become dominant in the region.

His part in the Harvard commencement exercise called upon him to comment on "The Commercial Spirit," and like many more contemporary college seniors, he damned it because it rests on base motives and "blind and unmanly love of wealth." It was his contention that when people lead "manly and independent lives" not considering riches as the end of existence, then "we shall hear no more of the commercial spirit." In this early address he had already adopted a viewpoint which remained fundamental with him throughout his short life. It was summarized in his observation that "this curious world which we inhabit is more wonderful than it is convenient."
Upon graduation the question of vocation presented itself. The country was in the midst of the financial panic of 1837 and jobs were not easily found. He was fortunate in finding a position as master in the Concord common school, but soon fell into a dispute with the school authorities and he resigned after two short weeks. The apparent reason for the dispute and resignation was Henry's distaste for corporal punishment. The authorities insisted upon it, whereupon Thoreau randomly chose an arbitrary number of students, gave them a stout paddling, and relinquished the care of the school to other hands. To most reasonable observers, including the unjustly punished pupils, Thoreau's behavior had every mark of a temper tantrum. He was now without a job and had very slim prospects of finding one, but the Journal which he had begun to keep makes no mention of the panic of 1837. He was living, sleeping and eating with the family, and although the Thoreaus had moved in with the aunts and were obviously financially pressed, Henry, as he was now pleased to call himself, was content to have his family assume responsibility for his physical needs. Apparently his behavior and actions were disturbing to his family and the subject of hostile comment by persons outside the family circle if one can judge by a letter he wrote to his sister Helen:

For a man to act himself, he must be perfectly free; otherwise, he is in danger of losing all sense of responsibility or of self-respect. Now when such a state of things exists, that the sacred opinions one advances in argument are apologized for by his
friends, before his face, lest his hearers receive a wrong impression of the man,—when such gross injustice is a frequent occurrence, where shall we look, and not look in vain for men, deeds, thoughts? As well apologize for the grape that is sour....

If Henry's family were forced to apologize for his unorthodoxies and extreme statements, that is not unusual today for families of twenty year old college boys. It infuriated him and he was in no mood to brook opposition. He was unable to see the contradiction between his protestations of independence and his complete psychological and economic dependence upon his mother and family. His general outlook was expressed pompously in a sophomoric letter to his former mentor, Orestes Brownson:

It hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive the full import of that word—Freedom—not a paltry Republican freedom, with a posse comitatus at his heels to administer it in doses as to a sick child—but a freedom proportionate to the dignity of his nature—a freedom that shall make him feel that he is a man among men, and responsible only to that Reason of which he is a particle....

Unrelated to his family situation, this interesting passage from his letter to the radical New England parson gives us a clue to his general dissatisfaction with the governmental institutions of the day and of his extreme individualism bordering on an anarchical position. When he came to voting age in 1838, he abstained from voting due to his strictly logical conclusions from the proposition that an individual is responsible for the morality of his own actions. Voting would be participation in, as
well as acquiescence of, a government which recognized slavery. The State of New York had outlawed slavery only eleven years earlier and there were large numbers of Northerners as well as Southerners who had no moral or political objection to slavery. The British Empire had outlawed slavery the same year Henry entered Harvard. He and his family had always been sympathetic to abolitionist causes. In his college days, he probably had been in sympathy with such anti-Jackson Whigs as John Quincy Adams, Caleb Cushing and Daniel Webster who spoke for New England against slavery in Congress. Most of Thoreau's townsfellows shared his objection to slavery. In 1837 the Whigs of Massachusetts adopted opposition to slavery as a party principle. Still, to Thoreau, voting represented an acceptance of the will of the majority in questions of morality. He was unwilling to agree.  

Probably Thoreau had been influenced on this point by the ideas of R. W. Emerson since the two had discovered one another fairly recently, although they had been acquainted for some time. Mr. Emerson's little book, *Nature*, had been devoured by the young collegian, and had deeply influenced him. Undoubtedly Thoreau made a point of seeking Emerson out and it is usually assumed that Emerson suggested to Thoreau that he keep a journal. Lucy Jackson Brown, Emerson's sister-in-law, was dining with the Thoreaus and is responsible for bringing the intellectual side of Henry to Emerson's attention. The intellectual simi-
larities between them impressed Emerson and Henry was soon a disciple. Although this is not the place to enter an extended discussion of Transcendentalism, the "new thought" to which Emerson had introduced him and for which Brownson had prepared him was a god-send. He was faced with the difficult personal situation of needing a job during a depression, not wanting to leave the warm safety of home or the protection of his older brother, yet aching to proclaim his independent personhood. Transcendentalism provided the perfect solution. He could remain vocationless if necessary, because a trade which required even limited participation in the prevailing commercialism and materialism would dull his capacity for spiritual perception of truth thereby retarding his quest for personal fulfillment. Transcendental egoism bolstered his need for personal identity. Better still, he could remain in Concord justifying himself with the Transcendental view of reality which rendered time and place of no consequence. He could rationalize that Concord was just as good a place to be—better, in fact, because he was able to realize his identity more easily in the familiar surroundings of his native village and in the security of his family home.

His resolve was not quite firm, however, and early in 1838 Henry made a trip to Maine where his mother had relatives to search for a teaching position. This did not prove successful and he briefly considered going to Virginia but gave it up as too venturesome. He undertook to convince his brother to strike out with him to Kentucky where
they might teach together or near one another. Again nothing came of it, so Henry continued to live at his mother's, write in his journal and walk in the woods.

Concord Academy had been ruined by Phineas Allen's political involvement with the anti-Masonic party and general dissatisfaction with the quality of academic preparation available through his tutelage. The Thoreau family had moved to larger quarters in the Parkman house. Through this combination of circumstances began one of the most important episodes in Henry's life and one which is still the subject of considerable controversy. John and Henry undertook a private school to succeed Allen's Concord Academy. Mrs. Thoreau boarded four of the young boys from out of town. Among these was an eleven year old boy named Edmund Sewall, whose grandmother and aunt, the Ward ladies, had lived with the Thoreau family for years. The school was successful and enrolled as many day students as could be accommodated. Amos Bronson Alcott had visited Concord the previous year and undoubtedly reinforced the Thoreaus' progressive ideas on education. Henry continued his policy against physical punishment. Every day was opened with a little lecture on morals and then proceeded to the formal lessons. At least once a week Henry conducted a field trip for the purpose of studying nature, which consisted of a tramp in the woods, a sailing trip, or a swim when there was pleasant weather. The school was successful enough in financial terms and satisfied the vocational needs of
the brothers. However, it led to severe emotional complications. Henry Thoreau became infatuated with Edmund Sewall. He wrote a poem entitled "Sympathy" extolling the beauty and virtue of "a gentle boy" whom he "might have loved had" he "loved him less." Although there are several interpretations of the poem, reliable tradition holds that the gentle boy was Edmund Sewall. Granting all possible allowance for Henry's Transcendental mode of expression and influence of Greek poetry of which he was fond, "Sympathy" clearly reads as a homoerotic poem. This interpretation has been bolstered by the psychological studies which have been made of Thoreau\(^2\) and accepted by most recent scholars,\(^3\) including virtually all of Thoreau's later biographers except Walter Harding. This attachment marked the first strong attraction toward a male other than John that Henry seems to have experienced to that point.

The situation became considerably more involved when Edmund's sister Ellen visited her relatives in the Thoreau household. Naturally she met and was entertained by the Thoreau brothers. John was enchanted and soon proposed marriage. Ellen accepted and they were engaged for a short while. After returning to her home in Scituate, Massachusetts, Ellen broke off the engagement at the urging of her clergyman father. Older scholarship advanced the proposition that Henry was also in love with Ellen but gallantly deferred to his elder
brother until after his suit was rejected and then declared himself to Ellen Sewall only to be rejected in his turn. It is true that Henry's journal does make an oblique reference to his hope of being restored when John was rejected by Ellen. It is also true that Henry made some kind of advance toward Ellen which was firmly declined. The correspondence has not been preserved, but a legend of unrequited love has persisted. My own speculation is that jealousy of John's heterosexual attraction to Ellen distracted him from Edmund. It is the view of this writer that Henry's real object of affection was John, although perhaps unconsciously so, and that his interest in Ellen was only a transference of his sexual urge toward his brother. The relationship between the brothers remained very cordial throughout the period when Ellen supposedly was an issue of rivalry between them. In fact, this was the exact period when John and Henry made a two week trip down the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, camping together and sharing one of the most intimate and delightful experiences either young man ever encountered.

This trip was immortalized in Thoreau's first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, written during his retreat at Walden Pond. Without mentioning John by name, it is a lyrical account of the voyage and the thoughts which attended the companionable retreat. Much of the chapter entitled "Wednesday" is devoted to Henry's thoughts on friendship. Henry's description of friendship is an ecstatic emotion.
almost erotic in intensity. The passages on friendship in "Wednesday" are too impassioned and too full of implication to be entirely Platonic whatever may or may not have been the actual events between the brothers.

For Thoreau, friendship is a mystical union of souls which allows no impediment to full communication.

Friendship is the unspeakable joy and blessing that results to two or more individuals who from constitution sympathize; and natures are liable to no mistakes, but will know each other through thick and thin. Between two by nature alike and fitted to sympathize there is no veil and there can be no obstacle. Who are the estranged? Two friends explaining.  

Moreover, friendship is basic to human motivation. It colors the relationship of one to all he encounters. "Friendship is the secret of the universe... and the idea of what is possible in this respect affects our behavior toward all new men and women, and a great many old ones." He specifically considered the relationship of the biological fact of sex to friendship:

The sexes are naturally most strongly attracted to one another by constant constitutional differences, and are most commonly the complement of each other.... The visit of man to man is wont to be an interruption, but the sexes naturally expect one another. Yet Friendship is no respecter of sex; and perhaps it is more rare between the sexes than between two of the same sex.

Friendship, the lofty sentiment, then is easier between members of the same sex, and does not exclude a sexual relation. In fact, in another place he implies that the dearest friend is one with whom there has been
a mutual sexual experience. "I lose my respect for the man who can
make the mystery of sex the subject of a coarse jest.... The man who
uses a vulgar jest describes his relation to his dearest friend." In
a passage which may combine Henry's taste for puns with an admiration
for the classical ages when manly love was not taboo, he points out that
friendship is not bound by the conventions of religious dogma nor contem-
porary social practice:

Friendship is not so kind as is imagined; it has not much human
blood in it, but consists with a certain disregard for men and
their erections, the Christian duties and humanities, while it
purifies the air like electricity. There may be the sternest
tragedy in the relation of two more than usually innocent and
ture to their highest instincts. We may call it an essentially
heathenish intercourse, free and irresponsible in its nature,
and practising all the virtues gratuitously. It is not the highest
sympathy merely, but a pure and lofty society, a fragmentary
and godlike intercourse of ancient date, still kept up at inter-
vals, which, remembering itself, does not hesitate to disregard
the humbler rights and duties of immunity.

Sexuality is, indeed, the danger to an emotional commitment as intense
as Thoreauvian Friendship. He warns, "reserve is the freedom and
abandonment of lovers.... It is one proof of a man's fitness for Friend-
ship that he is able to do without that which is cheap and passionate.

But if passion be a liability of friendship, it is only one frailty to which
humans are subject and possibly a less serious one than unfaithfulness.

"The lover learns at last that there is no person quite transparent and
trustworthy, but everyone has a devil in him that is capable of any crime
in the long run." Lest there be any doubt as to the identity of the friend
to whom Thoreau had reference or that his friend were an abstraction merely, he clearly identifies John as the individual he has in mind. "My Friend is not of some other race or family of men, but flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone. He is my real brother." 31

Some might object that a discussion of Thoreau's sexual orientation ought to have no place in a study of his political thought. However, his latent homosexuality (if it was merely latent) helps to clarify much which otherwise might seem contradictory. It helps to explain why family structure was not an important foundation point in his social theory, why his view of human nature was so particularistic, and offers a suggestion as to why his interpretation of history emphasized the role of the hero. It also provides a psychological explanation for the tension in his thought between his personal political passivity and his justification of political violence committed by a heroic archetype, John Brown. Henry Thoreau's political theory was an extension of his own perception of human personality in social contexts, and therefore the circumstance of his inversion is of major importance in understanding his political thought. It will be well to keep this discussion in mind when reading later chapters.

Throughout this period of personal turmoil, Thoreau continued to deepen his acquaintance with Ralph Waldo Emerson and the informal little circle of people who gathered around his Concord home. All of
these earnest young people had literary ambitions, but had more in common than an interest in literature. Under Emerson's guidance, they developed a certain psychological orientation and common viewpoint which, although there were wide variations among the beliefs of individuals in the group, came to be known as Transcendentalism. Admission to this small, talented group stimulated Henry's efforts to write well. He preferred poetry, but there was general agreement that Henry's poetry was wretched. He tried criticism and translations at which he was somewhat more successful. He had tried his hand at lecturing before the Concord Lyceum, presenting a set piece on "Society" in 1838. In 1840 he succeeded in becoming a published author when The Dial, the Transcendentalists' little magazine, accepted some of his material. Authorship was confirmed as his vocational preference, and he ceased to think of himself as other than a writer. To be a Transcendentalist and a writer pleased his imagination. It gave him moral support in his personal declaration of independence.

In 1839 David H. Thoreau first appeared in the tax books with an assessment of $1.50 for the city and county poll tax. In 1840 the tax rolls added $1.00 for the customary ministerial tax. This provided an excellent opportunity to establish his freedom from institutional religion. In the 1840 tax records, the "David H." was crossed out and "Henry D." was substituted. In addition to the name change, he insisted that the
ministerial tax be deleted from his assessment. His argument was that he would not pay a tax to support a clergyman whose preaching he never attended. The town fathers agreed to remove his ministerial tax but required that he issue a written statement declaring himself outside the church. "Henry D." agreed to issue not only that disclaimer but took the opportunity to state his position in the broadest possible terms:

"Know all men by these presents, that I, Henry Thoreau do not wish to be regarded as a member of any incorporated society which I have not joined." Transcendental independence made him feel "freer than any planet; no complaint reaches around the world. I can move away from public opinion, from government, from religion, from education, from society."

In the Thoreau household there must have been some friction arising from the new course Henry had charted for himself. John's health was not the best and Henry's vocational interest had drifted from education to literature. The brothers withdrew from their school keeping. There may have been strains between Henry and John as well as the more orthodox of the relatives. The opportunity presented itself for Henry to join the Emerson household as handyman and resident disciple. He left his mother's house for the Emerson home where he remained from 1841 until 1843. During this period he became a favorite of the Emerson children and began to look upon Lidian Emerson with some-
thing similar to the chivalric idealization which knights professed for unattainable ladies. From all indications there was strain in the Emerson household, also, due to Henry's brand of independence. There must have been disaffection between Thoreau and the other Transcendentalists who frequented Emerson's home. Yet his independence was not prideful. He cheerfully performed menial tasks for Emerson and others. He and a Negro caretaker put the Old Manse in order for Nathaniel Hawthorne and his bride when they moved to Concord in July of 1842. Margaret Fuller, the feminist and editor of The Dial, constantly resisted Emerson's attempts to rush acceptance of Henry's manuscripts. She found his poetry particularly atrocious, but consented to publish an occasional poem although with even less enthusiasm than she printed his critical essays and translations. Henry irritated almost every member of the conversational circle by his rejection of amenities which he considered artificial and by his continually antipodean comment. Many of the Transcendentalists were influenced by the social theories of Fourier and Owen. The little group provided the core of men and women—Charles A. Dana, Charles Lane, Bronson Alcott, Horace Greeley, George Ripley, Margaret Fuller, William H. Channing, and later Nathaniel Hawthorne—from which a remarkable number of American utopian experiments were to be established. Fruitlands, Brook Farm, Oneida, The North American Phalanx,
Eagleswood, were all tied in some way to this group of men with Transcendental connections. One of the unifying features was the religious ferment sweeping the New England area as the "new thought" of Unitarianism was transforming Congregationalism. Emerson had been a central figure in the theological disputes, his Divinity School address to the students and faculty of Harvard being a landmark in the struggle. The possibility of human perfectability was intriguing, and a branch of the Transcendentalists led by A. Bronson Alcott and his English friend, Charles Lane, were planning the community which they later established at Fruitlands near Harvard, Massachusetts. In 1841 George Ripley and Margaret Fuller of the Transcendental group were already participating in the Fourierist community at Brook Farm. Henry had no taste for any of these schemes. Not being content merely to refuse to join, it is characteristic that Henry saw fit to damn the whole enterprise:

As for these communities, I think I had rather keep bachelor's hall in hell alone than go to board in heaven. Do you think your virtue will be boarded with you? 35

Despite his extraordinary efforts at establishing his individuality, Henry Thoreau was absorbing the thought, style and manner of his host. It was obvious to everyone except, perhaps, to Henry himself. A college friend said:
I happened to meet Thoreau in Mr. Emerson's study at Concord. I think it was the first time we had come together after leaving college. I was quite startled by the transformation that had taken place in him. His short figure and general cast of countenance were, of course, unchanged; but in his manners, in the tones and inflection of his voice, in his modes of expression, even in the hesitations and pauses of his speech, he had become the counterpart of Mr. Emerson. Mr. Thoreau's college voice bore no resemblance to Mr. Emerson's, and was so familiar to my ear that I could easily have identified him by it in the dark. 36

This process of absorption was irritating to people who knew both men, and was to prevent Henry from being taken for anything but a pale imitation of Emerson among the Concord circle. Even Frank Sanborn who later idolized Thoreau wrote, "In his tones and gestures he seemed to me to imitate Emerson, so that it was annoying to listen to him.... He looks like Emerson, too—coarser, but with something of that serenity and sagacity which Emerson has," 37

Tragedy drew Thoreau and Emerson even closer through mutual sympathy. In January of 1842, John Thoreau, Henry's beloved brother, died of lockjaw. In the same month Emerson lost his first born son, six year old Waldo. Each man was stricken with his own loss yet full of sympathy for the other. Henry suffered sympathetic symptoms of lockjaw during his brother's fatal disease, suggesting both the intense identification with John and the possibility of a guilt reaction due to sublimated hostility toward the more favored son. Emerson's reaction to the loss of Waldo was the elegant and coolly intellectual essay on "Compensation" which so convincingly expresses Transcendental opti-
mism. Henry drew on the same source of strength, and in a letter to Emerson was able to articulate the view of death which he held consistently throughout his life.

How plain that death is only the phenomenon of the individual or class. Nature does not recognize it, she finds her own again under new forms without loss. Yet death is beautiful when seen to be a law, and not an accident—it is as common as life. And after all what portion of this so serene and living nature can be said to be alive? Do this year's grasses and foliage outnumber all the past.... When we look over the fields we are not saddened because the particular flowers or grasses will wither—for the law of their death is the law of new life.

Nonetheless, Henry became more solitary and withdrawn. John's death broke completely his vocational tie to education; it cast him alone and unprotected into the social world of Concord where John had always provided a buffer for him. It confirmed his conviction that his destiny lay in literature, that his contribution to mankind would be best made through the practice of the solitary craft of writing. John's death was taken for a sign: "Whatever I learn from any circumstances, that especially I needed to know. Events come out of God.... Hence they are always acceptable as experience, and we could not do without them." The fact that he was not breaking into print, had very little encouragement except from Emerson, and had no prospects for immediate literary success did not discourage him from resolving to serve mankind with such talent as he had.
I must confess I have felt mean enough when asked how I was to act on society, what errand I had to mankind. Undoubtedly I did not feel mean without a reason, and yet my loitering is not without defence. I would fain communicate the wealth of my life to man, would really give them what is most precious in my gift. I would secrete pearls with the shellfish and lay up honey with the bees for them. I will sift the sunbeams for the public good. I know no riches I would keep back. I have no private good unless it be my particular ability to serve the public. This is the only individual property. Each one may then be innocently rich. I inclose and foster the pearl till it is grown. I wish to communicate those parts of my life which I would gladly live again myself.... One would like to be making large dividends to society out of that deposited capital in us, but he does well for the most part if he proves a secure investment only, without adding to the stocks.

Emerson thought this resolve should be encouraged and in May, 1843, arranged for Thoreau to go to Staten Island as tutor to his brother William's children. Emerson thought to remove Thoreau from the inbred atmosphere of the Concord Transcendental circle—and from the Emerson house—to develop his talents without undue influence while putting him in close proximity to the publishers of New York City. Henry went to Staten Island, dutifully performed his tutorial assignment, and made the rounds of the publishers without much success. He was desperately homesick for Concord and despised New York City. As he wrote to Emerson: "I don't like the city better, the more I see it, but worse. I am ashamed of my eyes that behold it. It is a thousand times meaner than I could have imagined.... The pigs in the street are the most respectable part of the population." It was certainly not a wasted experience, however. He became acquainted with a large number of famous and influential figures of the age. The most valuable friendship
he made was with Horace Greeley, the editor of the *New York Tribune*, who became Thoreau's primary literary backer and performed many services as agent for him. In addition he met the elder James, father of William and Henry, and Lucretia Mott. He renewed acquaintance with William H. Channing, the socialist uncle of his friend Ellery Channing, and with Isaac Hecker, the associationist and seeker who became a Roman Catholic priest and founded the Paulist Fathers. Earlier Hecker had taught in Concord and roomed with the Thoreaus. Still Thoreau scored no great breakthrough in the publishing world and he hated living away from Concord. He managed to bear Staten Island until December, but then retreated to his mother's home in his native village.

When he returned to Concord from Staten Island he helped his father build a new house and shop on Texas Street. The manufacture of pencils in his father's shop provided his livelihood. His days of teaching and school keeping were over; he took the leisure he required to give his life a wide margin. He took greater interest in the Concord Lyceum, in the intellectual concerns of Emerson's circle, and in the reforms espoused by the ladies of the Thoreau household. He read the abolitionist literature available at home, especially *The Liberator*, and lent his moral support to the cause of abolitionism. On March 5, 1845, Wendell Phillips made a vitriolic address on abolitionism before the
Lyceum. Two curators resigned in protest over using the Lyceum as a platform for political agitation rather than for cultural and intellectual enlightenment. The portion of the Lyceum membership who approved of involving the organization in political controversy constituted a majority and elected Thoreau and Emerson to fill the vacancies. This precedent should comfort Thoreau's modern adherents who wish to make universities and learned societies the vehicle of political expression. To underscore his victory over the dissenting faction, Thoreau wrote a long letter in praise of Phillips' addresses before the Lyceum to the editor of The Liberator. In writing to The Liberator he was giving the back of his hand not only to those in the Lyceum who did not wish Phillips to deliver his polemics before them but also to The Liberator editorial staff and readership. Among abolitionists there were two loose factions, one led by William Lloyd Garrison which advocated militancy and group action, the other led by Nathaniel P. Rogers who had published the Herald of Freedom and advocated an individualistic approach based upon moral persuasion. Rogers was later forced from his editorship by Garrison. Thoreau was more sympathetic to Rogers and in 1844 had published an article in The Dial which was entitled "Herald of Freedom" and strongly supported Rogers' position. His letter to Garrison heavily emphasized the individualistic tenor of Phillips' speeches before the Lyceum. In a subtle fashion, Thoreau was becoming
a polemicist. At this time, both Garrison and Rogers were committed to non-violence. Phillips' position was less pacific than either faction.

While fishing with young Edward Hoar during this leisurely period Thoreau accidentally let a cooking fire get out of hand. It burned over a hundred acres of prime woodland. He never was a popular figure with his townsfellows, but the destruction of valuable property and his cavalier attitude toward the farmer's loss—illustrated by his later comment, "I felt that I had a deeper interest in the woods, knew them better and should feel their loss more," 43—stamped him irrevocably as an eccentric ne'er-do-well. They saw him as able-bodied but unwilling to do honest labor. Actually, he had resolved to devote his time to the development of his literary talent. It required much time, and practical considerations required that he practice a rigorous economy in order to live and have enough of his time free to receive inspiration and to write.

A college acquaintance, Charles Stearns Wheeler, earlier had built a hut to save money toward books and his forthcoming graduate study in Germany. Thoreau had spent six weeks in the hut with Wheeler, was impressed by the lack of expense, and by the simplicity of this kind of life. It captured his imagination. 44 His friend Ellery Channing had lived alone in a hut in the plains of Illinois for a period of time before moving to Concord in 1841 and it was he who suggested that Thoreau
retire to a similar shack. Earlier Henry had thought of buying a farm and went so far as to make a firm offer to a local farmer whose wife refused to allow him to conclude the deal with so undependable a character as David Henry Thoreau! He thought to build a shanty by Flint's Pond, but the owner was crass enough to be interested in rent from his land. As so often in the past, Ralph Waldo Emerson came to the rescue. Mr. Emerson had acquired several acres of woodland on the shores of Walden Pond which he offered to Henry without charge. Henry accepted his friend's kindness and with borrowed tools he began to build a one room shack with a cellar and lean-to. Much of the work was done with his own hands, although his collection of friends helped him to raise the roof. On Independence Day, 1844, Thoreau moved into his sparsely furnished cabin. The Walden experiment was indeed economical—particularly so since it was within sound of Emerson's dinner bell, and his doting mother and sisters delighted in bringing him baskets of edibles. To supplement this certain source of nourishment he planted a field of beans, for which he had a Pythagorian dislike, and purchased some staples such as flour and potatoes. Since he was a vegetarian, although not a strict one, the lack of meat was not an inconvenience. Walden was just outside if he wanted fish. His real business in the woods was his writing. He composed several essays, wrote his first book, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, and drafted a substantial portion of his
magnum opus, *Walden, or Life in the Woods*. Life was not so very
solitary at the pond. He continued to be part of Emerson's soirees
and to receive visitors. Ellery Channing even moved in for several
weeks. His withdrawal was to work, to live deliberately, and to
demonstrate to the associationists the superiority of an independent
life.

Aside from his literary achievements, the most significant thing
that occurred in the two years was his confrontation with the power of
the State in the person of Sam Staples, the local constable. It had
become something of a fad among Transcendentalists to refuse payment
of taxes as a method of protest against the acquiescent support Massa­
chusetts gave to the Federal Government. Washington was in disfavor
over the issue of slavery and the impending trouble with Mexico. The
disunionist sentiment had been strong in the 1812 war, and with the trouble
over Texas had revived among many New Englanders. Bronson Alcott
had refused to pay his tax as had certain others, as a symbolic protest
against the uses to which the Federal Government and Massachusetts put
the tax money. Non-payment of taxes was almost a Transcendental tra­
dition. Thoreau's long-standing disgust at the support the State of
Massachusetts gave to Negro slavery was given very specific focus when
President Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor to seize disputed lands
in Texas from Mexico and war was declared. Thoreau, as well as many
other New Englanders, saw the war with Mexico as a thinly disguised aggression against a weaker neighbor undertaken for the purpose of adding territories into which slavery might be expanded. Henry refused to pay taxes to support this war for the extension of slavery. For some years he had paid no poll tax, although he paid other taxes, because he felt it was the tax most directly beneficial to the Federal Government. He had not been troubled by the authorities about the small matter of the poll tax until one day in 1846. He was taking a shoe into Concord to be repaired when Staples stopped him to inquire about payment. Staples offered to pay the tax in Henry’s stead if he were without funds. Thoreau firmly refused the offer. Although he and Staples were on friendly terms, apparently Thoreau made Staples angry. Without any further legal proceedings Staples marched Henry to the Concord jail and locked him up. One of Thoreau’s aunts called later that evening and paid the poll tax but Sam Staples did not bother to release his prisoner until the next day. Thoreau was hopping mad, but it is not clear whether he was angry that the tax had been paid for him, that Staples had not released him upon receipt of the money, or because he had been jailed in the first place. If Thoreau had been of a nature to use the legal apparatus it is possible that he could have made a very unpleasant situation. Sam Staples could have been hard pressed to cite a statutory basis for summary imprisonment. But Thoreau held lawyers in contempt, and chose instead to cause
a disturbance which would continue long after he and Staples were forgotten. Furious, he returned to his green desk at Walden. His outrage was poured into a little essay now called "Civil Disobedience". Thoreau's remark that "I quietly declare war with the State" was prophetic, as the influence of his essay has spread subversion far beyond Concord and the United States. Although it will be discussed at length later, it is important to note here that the fundamental assumptions of "Civil Disobedience" have the individual as the morally responsible agent rather than a collectivity of men, and declare the infallibility of individual conscience on matters of moral principle. It does not insist upon a violent resistance to the morally objectionable demands of a political power, but it does justify any refusal to cooperate or to recognize the authority of government to act upon an individual when its demands contradict the requirements of conscience. "If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. Violence is not rejected out of hand, for he recognized the honored American doctrine of the right of revolution, which carries the corollary that violence at some point is justifiable:

All men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable.... In other words, 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 are subjected to military law, I think that it is not too soon for honest men to rebel and revolutionize. 48

His major point is that violence is committed against the individual who is required to act against his conscience or to support financially an action which is reprehensible to him. Individuals can accomplish as effective a revolution as can a conspiracy supported by an armed insurrection. "When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished. But even suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of bloodshed when the conscience is wounded?" 49

Thoreau spent no more time in jail, not because he paid his tax from that day forward, but because he permitted the tax to be paid by his friends or relatives in his behalf. This appears to be a sophistry, but Thoreau himself probably was honestly convinced that since only he could be responsible for his actions in an ultimate sense, he was not soiled by the fact that his tax was paid by another. The person who paid Henry's tax as well as his own bore a double guilt of complicity, but Henry bore none at all. He continued to live at Walden Pond after his experience in jail, but the cabin became less a home than headquarters. 50 He spent more time in the village than the previous year and late in the year took a trip to the Maine woods. Writing and walking in the woods continued as his
main activities. On at least one occasion he harbored a slave at the cabin and helped him to escape to Canada. This was an unusual event, for Thoreau was not associated with the Underground Railroad. He was quite willing to behave humanely and sympathetically toward a fugitive slave when the opportunity conveniently presented itself. Henry literally believed that charity begins at home; he never sought it abroad but waited for it to call upon him. So he continued until September, 1847, when suddenly "the axel of the world" creaked and he concluded that he had "other lives to lead". Less poetically phrased, Henry had completed A Week, was well into a solid draft of Walden, and could afford to live a less secluded life. He went back home to his mother and father. The house was crowded as ever. To a man of thirty who had had a taste of living alone it must have been unpleasant to give up a large measure of privacy and to be constantly called "my Henry" by his mother.

Fortunately, Emerson was able once again to come to Henry's rescue. Emerson was to go to England for a year of lecturing and suggested that Henry move to his house once more to look after the property and provide any necessary assistance as well as company to Lidian and the children. Henry jumped at the opportunity. The Emerson household was more peaceful and private than his mother's. Henry wrote, polished the draft of Walden, continued his walks taking a more scientific interest in the observation of natural phenomena. He began to correspond with and provide specimens for Louis Agassiz who had come to
the Harvard faculty. This was both an intellectual interest and method of making money since Agassiz paid for specimens he needed. Ellery Channing and Bronson Alcott continued to be his most intimate companions along with a collection of very plain people whom Thoreau knew and liked. His bachelorhood was well confirmed, if it had ever been in question, by his flat rejection of a marriage proposal from Miss Sophia Foord, a former tutoress of the Emerson children. His self-image as an author was secure enough to refer to his "career", for *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* was about to see publication. Henry wrote to Emerson. "She did really wish to—I hesitate to write—marry me.... I really had anticipated no such foe as this in my career." The year passed pleasantly. Thoreau published his book, wrote a great deal, presented his "Civil Disobedience" as a lecture before his townsfellows, and for the first time began to offer lectures outside of Concord. These ventures on the platform were not overwhelming successes, but Thoreau was happy to present his ideas and to earn a bit of money from his literary efforts. Most of his necessities had been supplied by the menial jobs he was able to pick up here and there. In a letter to Horace Greeley he boasted that his wants were few and day labor gave him enough to supply his wants. For this reason he was at greater leisure for literary pursuits than anyone of his acquaintance. It was evident that he was not able to support his bodily needs from the sale of his literary efforts as he would
have preferred. Since the demise of *The Dial* in 1844 he had not been
published with any frequency. Late in 1847 Theodore Parker and
James Elliot Cabot founded *The Massachusetts Quarterly Review* which
was planned as the successor to *The Dial* and Thoreau might have taken
hope that there would once again be a market for Transcendental litera-
ture.

Thoreau was becoming more convinced that an active position
against slavery was justified, even though many of the ardent abolition-
ists were victims of the moral pathology which he felt to be an occupa-
tional requirement for reformers. He began to take a kindlier view
toward some reform issues. When Washington Goode, a Negro seaman
convicted of killing another Negro in a fight over a prostitute, was sen-
tenced to death, a petition against capital punishment was circulated.
The Thoreau ladies, as could be predicted, were signers, but Henry
Thoreau's signature appears as something of a surprise. Washington
Goode was hung as scheduled on May 25, 1849. Soon thereafter Albert
Brisbane adopted the abolition of capital punishment as a cause, and held
meetings in Boston on "Social Sin and Capital Punishment" which Alcott
attended. Although Thoreau makes no mention of capital punishment
in his *Journal*, he certainly was aware of the issue and had been suf-
ficiently converted to reform techniques as actually to sign a petition.

His interest in public affairs increased. Although he took no
special note of the great social and political upheavals wracking Italy, France, Ireland, Austria and most of Europe, affairs close to home did catch his attention in a substantial way. He had begun to feel that he had a stake in the political questions which were becoming so acute in America. President Zachary Taylor, notorious in Concord for his role in the Mexican War, was opposed by majorities in both Houses of Congress, with New Englanders largely leading the opposition. Women had begun seriously to agitate for political recognition, holding their first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, with Henry's old acquaintance Lucretia Mott as speaker. Thoreau was not at all enthusiastic about the program put forth by the ladies. However, the aims, if not the methods, of the Congress of Labor organizations held in Philadelphia of that year, certainly had his support. He had seen the abuses of industrial capitalism first hand, and shared the opinions of Carlyle and Ruskin whose works were favorites of his. His own Journal and published writings contained a great many critical observations upon the factory and wage systems employed in the Northeast. He classed wage slavery in the same category as Negro servitude. "It is hard to have a Southern overseer; it is worse to have a Northern one...." The end of the Mexican War had come, confirming the annexation of California and resulting in the cession of a large area of the present Southwest to the United States. The discovery of gold in California struck Henry as an event almost as lamentable as
the prospect of slavery spreading into the new lands. Henry took note of the political activities of the rapidly organizing abolitionist force. The Free Soil Party had held a convention in Buffalo in August of 1848 and nominated Martin Van Buren for President. Thoreau did not approve of Van Buren since he was not a New Englander and therefore could not be a truly superior person, but he did approve of the principles of the Free Soil Party. He wrote his cousin that he felt "some what encouraged at the political prospects of the country, not because they have chosen such a leader, but because they are perhaps worthy of a better one. The N. E. delegation seems to have managed affairs in a bungling manner. If they had gone prepared they might have had their own man." Thoreau, almost unaware, was becoming a political man.

Emerson returned to Concord in 1849 and resumed his place in his home. Henry moved back to his family with whom he would remain. He worked in the family graphite business, saw "Civil Disobedience" published in a journal which Elizabeth Peabody was attempting to launch under the inauspicious title of Aesthetic Papers. The subscription list was so small that Miss Peabody was unable to issue another number, and "Civil Disobedience" lay buried in an obscure and unsuccessful periodical. A Week came from the presses in the spring but was an immediate commercial failure. He refused Bronson Alcott's invitation
to join a group of intellectuals which eventually became the famous Saturday Club and resulted in the establishment of the *Atlantic Monthly*. This was a very distinguished group of political and literary figures including Emerson, Garrison, Parker, Samuel O. Ward, Jones Very, William F., William H. and W. Ellery Channing, Lowell and a host of other New England notables. Although interested in many of the issues that would be discussed, Thoreau continued to prefer to do his thinking without the aid of any formal group. Thoreau always had his private affairs which took precedence to socializing over tea in drawing rooms.

He and the family were under the strain of Helen's serious illness. In June she succumbed to tuberculosis. Henry was saddened, but not crushed as he had been at the death of John. His father and he made additions to a house back on Main Street, to which they would move next summer. He accepted an invitation to lecture before the Salem Lyceum, of which his friend, Hawthorne, was secretary. For the most part, however, Thoreau was listless. He was depressed by the failure of his book, the death of his sister, and the political direction the nation was taking prior to the Compromise of 1850. In late 1849 he and Ellery Channing took a trip to Cape Cod which lifted his spirits.

In 1850, the Thoreau household moved again. Because of Henry's improvements in the preparation of plumbago, the graphite business
had completely replaced the manufacture of pencils and the family became more secure financially. The political situation was distressing to Thoreau. The Compromise of 1850 upset him since he felt slavery should be banished immediately everywhere. Instead, New Mexico and Utah were made territories without a clear restriction on slavery. Although California was admitted as a free State, it was the scene of a gold rush which appealed to the very worst element in mankind and the thought of such a State in an already sadly imperfect Union was unpleasant. The death of President Taylor brought Millard Fillmore to the Presidency. Fillmore had opposed the admission of Texas as a slave territory, but he favored the Compromise of 1850 and placed his signature on the Fugitive Slave Law. This made him anathema to Thoreau and the Concord Circle. His Secretary of State, Daniel Webster, had long since been branded an opportunist unworthy of his New England heritage. Thoreau was disgusted by these Northern politicians. One might have expected low moral vision of Jackson, Harrison, Tyler and Polk for, after all, they were Southerners. The betrayal of Webster and Fillmore was proof positive that American politics contained a corruption of such virulence that no Northerners—not even New Englanders—were able to withstand contamination.

A trip to Canada which he and Ellery Channing took together was a tonic for him. It provided him with a political perspective which was not available in Concord. He saw what oppression by Church and State
could be, what a military occupation meant to the liberties of citizens.

In ironic contrast to the perceptions of modern day conscientious
objectors who have fled to Canada because of the war in Southeast
Asia, Thoreau wrote his impressions in "A Yankee in Canada":

It was evident that, both on account of the feudal system and
the aristocratic government, a private man was not worth so
much in Canada as in the United States; and, if your wealth in
any measure consists in manliness, in originality and inde­
pendence, you had better stay here.... A New-Englander
would naturally be a bad citizen, probably a rebel, there,—
certainly if he were already a rebel at home.57

Thoreau may have been unhappy at home, but he clearly recognized
that at least for white men, the American government was vastly
preferable to the alternatives available nearby for comparison. It
certainly permitted abuses against the working classes, particularly
the immigrant Irish who were flooding the country and factories as
workers, it encouraged the despoliation of the landscape for profit, it
acknowledged the legality of human slavery, but it did not, like the
Canadian government keep its people "suffering between two fires,—
the soldiery and the priesthood."58

Thoreau now spent more time surveying, a trade which he had
begun to practice occasionally after his return from Staten Island. He
continued to haunt the woods and to write in his Journal, but his obser­
vations became more meticulously factual. His dissatisfaction with
the nation continued stronger than ever; his retreat to the solitude of
the woods and his Journal almost represented an attempt to find conso­
lation for his disappointment with the state of political affairs. He wrote to a friend:

If there is anything more glorious than a congress of men a-framing or amending a constitution going on, as I suspect there is, I desire to see it in the morning papers. I am greedy of the faintest rumor, though it were got by listening at the keyhole. I will dissipate myself in that direction.  

Yet he was not entirely satisfied with withdrawal as a solution to his dissatisfaction. His poverty, lack of success in publishing, despair of national policy, inability to receive ecstatic inspiration through nature as easily as when younger, combined to shake his Transcendental optimism.

I am sure my acquaintances mistake me. I am not the man they take me for. On a little nearer view they would find me out. They ask my advice on high matters, but they do not even know how poorly on't I am for hats and shoes. I have hardly a shift. Just as shabby as I am in my outward apparel, —aye, and more lamentably shabby, for nakedness is not so bad a condition after all, —am I in my inward apparel. If I could turn myself inside out, my rags and meanness would appear. I am something to him that made me, undoubtedly, but not much to any other that he has made. All I can say is that I live and breathe and have my thoughts.

Although he was trying to escape politics, and would much have preferred to achieve some success as a writer, politics continued to intrude into his meditations to the detriment, he thought, of his other activities which he considered of much greater personal importance.

"One wise sentence is worth the State of Massachusetts many times over," he wrote in a backhanded acknowledgement of his concern with his native state.
In July of 1850, Henry Thoreau was sent on a melancholy mission. Margaret Fuller had gone to Rome, become pregnant by the Marquis d'Ossoli and married him. As she was returning to America with her child and new husband, their ship was wrecked off Fire Island. The Ossoli family all were drowned. Emerson asked Thoreau to go to the scene of the wreck to recover any of Margaret's manuscripts or other personal effects which might have been salvaged. Margaret was the sister-in-law of his dear friend, Ellery Channing and Henry respected her as one of the brightest of the Transcendentalists even though she was unremittingly critical of his own literary efforts. He arrived too late to find anything of consequence which had belonged to Margaret Fuller Ossoli. The sights and descriptions of the wreck by survivors were so pathetic that even Thoreau's stoicism was sorely tried. Upon his return he continued the routine, broken by a visit to Newburyport where he stayed with the Reverend T. Wentworth Higginson, a Transcendentalist acquaintance. He was full of dissatisfaction which he could not escape even by his walks, dissatisfaction which arose from the troubled affairs swirling about the nation in 1850.

I feel a little alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit. I would fain forget all my morning's occupation, my obligations to society. But sometimes it happens that I cannot easily shake off the village....

Visiting with fire-breathing abolitionists like Higginson could hardly be
calculated to inspire serenity or complacency in one such as Thoreau.

The news of the day continued to be a source of fascinated vexation toward which he was drawn involuntarily.

It is a strange age of the world this, when empires, kingdoms and republics come a-begging to our doors and utter their complaints at our elbows. I cannot take up a newspaper but I find that some wretched government or other, hard pushed and on its last legs, is interceding with me, the reader, to vote for it, — more importunate than an Italian beggar. Why does it not keep its castle in silence, as I do? The poor President, what with preserving his popularity, and doing his duty, does not know what to do. If you do not read the newspapers, you may be impeached for treason. The newspapers are the ruling power. What Congress does is an afterclap.... If a man neglects to read the daily Times, government will go on its knees to him; this is the only treason in these days. 63

Throughout 1851, the first full year after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, Thoreau was increasingly aware of the conflict between the realities and the potentialities of American life. He saw that moral principles, such as abomination of slavery, were compromised by the acceptance of political freedoms offered to citizens in the United States. "What is the value of any political freedom, but as a means to moral freedom?" 64 This was a summation of his objection to governmental forms which provided the external appearances of freedom in political terms but permitted moral license rather than moral freedom. To Thoreau, moral freedom consisted in a recognition of necessity in the universal law. His Transcendental confidence in the ultimate triumph of right was strong enough that he followed this pene-
trating question with the optimistic remark that "it is our children's children who may perchance be essentially free." Thoreau felt strongly that the New World, and especially the United States, offered mankind a second chance. He literally meant what he said in the famous observation that in wildness is the preservation of the world. He wrote:

America is the she-wolf today, and the children of exhausted Europe exposed on her uninhabited and savage shores are the Romulus and Remus who, having derived new life and vigor from her breast, have founded a new Rome in the West.... I believe that Adam in paradise was not so favorably situated on the whole as is the back woodsman in America. You all know how the former turned out— or was turned out,— but there is some consolation at least in the fact that it yet remains to see how the Western Adam in the wilderness will turn out. 66

When a slave named Shadrach was arrested in Boston under the Fugitive Slave Law, a mob stormed the jail. They rescued him from the jurisdiction of the court which would certainly have returned him to his owner. Thoreau was quick to perceive the import of this action for a society ruled by law.

I think that recent events will be valuable as a criticism on the administration of justice in our midst, or rather as revealing what are the true sources of justice in any community. It is to some extent fatal to the courts when the people are compelled to go behind the courts. 67

Thoreau himself openly defied the Fugitive Slave Law when he aided Henry Williams, a fugitive from Virginia who had been referred to the Thoreau family by a Mr. Lovejoy of Cambridge and William Lloyd Garrison. Williams lodged at the Thoreau's home, and was
assisted in the collection of funds to forward him to Canada. Henry
Thoreau himself bought the ticket and saw Williams boarded on the
train for Canada. He considered the Fugitive Slave Law to be wholly
a Southern sin and one which clearly would justify a holy war if only
Northern men would honor their own principles. "I do not believe that
the North will soon come to blows with the South on this question. It
would too bright a page to be written in the history of the race at
present." Clearly Henry would have preferred disunion or even war
to the Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Law which accompanied it.

Thoreau was in an irascible mood throughout the year. It possibly
could have been a result of toothache, for he was forced to have his
teeth replaced with false ones. He complained of the inferior character
of the select men who had hired him to survey the town boundaries and
insisted upon accompanying him. He went to a party, detested the
crowd and noise, and was disgusted with friends who introduced him to
pretty women and expected him to be grateful. "I confess that I am lack-
ing a sense, perchance, in this respect, and I derive no pleasure from
talking with a young woman half an hour simply because she has regular
features. The society of young women is the most unprofitable I have
tried." He heard Mrs. Elizabeth Oakes Smith, a leading feminist, and
was decidedly unimpressed with her light-weight intellect and was irri-
tated by the inconsistency between her views on feminine equality and her behavior in expecting all the chivalries from men. "I fear that to the last, woman's lectures will demand mainly courtesy from man."

This was the peak year of the Irish immigration, and while Thoreau often pitied the conditions they were forced to live in, he thought much of their misery they brought upon themselves. Thoreau never held much respect for the Irish as a people. It was with some regret that he complained that the flood of Irish were "naturalizing themselves at a rapid rate, and threaten at least to displace the Yankees, as the latter have the Indians." Fortunately, the year was not totally a prosaic time for Thoreau. He still experienced periods of Transcendental ecstasy, and recorded in his Journal that Divinity followed him down into his cellar and spoke to him. Politics and the irritations of everyday life had not closed off the channels of inspiration, so Henry could count the year as a good one.

In 1852 both Henry Clay and Daniel Webster died, and although the old political figures were disappearing, the old order of politics continued. Franklin Pierce, the Democratic presidential nominee personally brought the taint of politics into Concord and Thoreau's personal circle. Pierce was a college chum of Nathaniel Hawthorne whom he had engaged to write a biography for use in the coming campaign. Undoubtedly Thoreau thought this was a low use of talent, for Pierce was not uncompromising in the issue of slavery, although he opposed it. When
elected president, the influence of Southerners was very strong in his administration, Jefferson Davis being a member of his cabinet. To Thoreau the writer who made proper use of his talent saw it as his function to "record truths which shall have the same relation and value to the next world, i.e. the world of thought and of the soul, that political news has to this."75 Despite his protestations to the contrary, Thoreau maintained a lively, almost partisan, interest in the issues of the day, though he preferred to see them as moral rather than political in nature. "I lose my respect for people who do not know what is good and true."76 So much for those who disagreed with his viewpoint.

The rapid development and spread of technology, the outward signs of civilization, were everywhere in evidence and did not escape Thoreau's comment. "Barbarous as we esteem the Chinese, they have already built their steamboat. Swiftly the arts spread in those days."

"It is a mistake to suppose that, in a country where railroads and steamboats, the printing-press and the church, and the usual evidences of what is called civilization exist, the condition of a very large body of the inhabitants cannot be as degraded as that of savages."77 We are told today that civilization is making rapid progress; the tendency is ever upward.... We read tomorrow in the newspapers that the French nation is on the verge of going to war with England to give employment to her army.... This Russian war is popular.... Does the threatened war
between France and England evince any more enlightenment than a war between two savage tribes...? Is it founded in better reason?"  

Thoreau's political interests were not all limited to grand national and international affairs. He gave considerable attention to the problems of local government and the improvement of life in Concord. Contrary to the popular modern view of Thoreau as completely against the idea of the state, he proposed tax support for the arts, institutes for continuing education, parks and libraries in addition to the system of public schools. While he was worrying about the culture of the community, the ladies of the charitable society were worried about him. They asked him through his mother if he would accept a gift of some decent cotton shirts. He cheerfully agreed, stipulating that they should be of unbleached cotton. Although the object of charity himself, he saw the meanness of the ladies' gift to him when compared to the genuine needs of the town's abject poor—such as the little children of the Irish.

They showed me little Johnny Riordan to-day, with one thickness of ragged cloth over his little shirt for all this cold weather, with shoes with large holes in the toes, into which the snow got, as he said, without an outer garment, to walk a mile to school every day.... This little mass of humanity, this tender gobbet for the fates, cast into a cold world with a torn lichen leaf wrapped about him, — Oh, I would rather hear that America's first-born were all slain than that his little fingers and toes should feel cold while I am warm.... Let the mature rich wear the rags and insufficient clothing; let the infant poor wear the purple and fine linen. I shudder when I think of the fate of innocency. Our charitable institutions are an insult to humanity.
Henry took the ladies' unbleached shirts, but he carried a new cloak to Johnny Riordan. His sense of charity might be acute, but he worried about relaxing his little disciplines of diet to include meat, at first so as not to inconvenience his family, but then out of laxity. He made no mention of prohibition which was enacted in Massachusetts that year although he was opposed to alcohol. Outside of the news of the suicide of an acquaintance, for which Thoreau oddly went out of his way to disclaim responsibility, the year passed uneventfully with the majority of his time being devoted to walking and writing.

From the beginning of 1853 to the end, Thoreau was concerned with the mortality of man. In January there was an explosion at the powder mills which killed several men. With almost clinical detachment Thoreau viewed the mangled and charred remains of human beings, but afterward the experience marked his thoughts and even brought him nightmares. Another excursion to the Maine woods was undertaken although Thoreau did not enjoy travelling. He found nature innocent and unambitious, a pleasant contrast to the electioneering going on. He was grateful that at least nature's "elections are not Presidential." His interest in nature and contact with Agassiz brought him an invitation to join the Society for the Advancement of Science, which somewhat embarrassed him.

Social concerns played an increasingly large role in his thinking. Thoreau and his family received a fugitive slave in their home, and
Henry ministered to the frightened man's physical and psychological needs with almost feminine tenderness. Again late in the year they harbored a free Negro woman who was attempting to buy her husband from his Virginia owner. Thoreau's indignation against the slaveholder was strong, but it was almost matched by his disgust with the Yankees of Concord who persisted in treating the Irish as slaves. One man had kept for himself the four dollar prize his hired Irishman won in competition at the fair. That struck him as being "as mean as a slaveholder." Thoreau worried about the Indians as well as Negroes and Irish. The discrimination against Governor Neptune of the Penobscot tribe at a Portland hotel aroused his ire and caused him to regret the eventful extinction of the American Indian. The United States Government was making huge land grants to railroads while Thoreau was cursing "that devilish Iron Horse" which was stripping the land of wood, defiling the springs, splitting the ears and "polluting the air." Objecting to the large scale destruction resulting from the railroads, Thoreau wished for a champion to "throw a victorious and avenging lance against this bloated pest." It is easy to understand why today's advocates of a technology compatible with ecology find a kindred soul in reading Thoreau. Yet for all his fury at the wrongs of the world, his dislike of reformers was greater. His mother was continually taking in reformers to board, none of them meeting Henry's approval.
There have been three ultra-reformers, lecturers on Slavery, Temperance, the Church, etc., in and about our house.... They addressed each other constantly by their Christian names, and rubbed you continually with the greasy cheeks of their kindness. They would not keep their distance, but cuddle up and lie spoon-fashion with you, no matter how hot the weather nor how narrow the bed.  91

His feelings about "good causes" was illustrated in his reply to Francis Underwood who was attempting to enlist contributors to a new anti-slavery magazine projected by John P. Jewitt, the Boston publisher who was growing rich from his publication the year before of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin. Henry's response to Underwood made it clear he expected financial reward and not merely the satisfaction of aiding a good cause.

If you will inform me in season at what rate per page (describing the page) you will pay for accepted articles, —returning the rejected within a reasonable time —and your terms are satisfactory ... you shall be at liberty to put my name in your list of contributors.  92

It is unusual that Thoreau took little notice in his Journal of Commodore Perry's opening of Japan since he was interested in the Orient. Similarly, he did not record his impressions about the wrenching of additional lands from Mexico through the Gadsden Purchase, or about the opening of hostilities between Russia and Turkey until later when it had involved France and England. It was a war fought for principles and should have appealed to Thoreau's imagination.

In February of 1854 a collection of anti-slavery Whigs and Free
Soilers met in Ripon, Wisconsin for the purpose of forging an alliance. They adopted the name Republican for their new party. Initially small, they provided the effective coalition which the anti-slavery forces had been lacking. Thoreau, however, had no use for the equivocal positions the young party was required to take in order to maintain the cohesion of their alliance.

It is not any such free-soil party as I have seen, but a free-man party, —i.e. a party of free men, —that is wanted. It is not any politicians, even the truest and soundest, but ... godly men, men not of policy but of probity. Politicians! ... They will vote for my man tomorrow if I will vote for theirs today.93

Early in the year Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois had introduced the Kansas-Nebraska bill which provided an opportunity for the settlers to determine the question of slavery. The effect of this popular sovereignty provision was to repeal the limitations on expansion of slavery in the West which had been imposed by the Missouri Compromise of 1820. In May, the Kansas-Nebraska bill was enacted. Hawthorne's friend, President Pierce not only signed the bill but appointed a pro-slavery governor for Kansas. The stage was set for armed conflict between opposing factions in Kansas.

Distasteful as the Kansas-Nebraska bill was, Thoreau's anger toward the government remained relatively contained until the Anthony Burns incident. In May, Burns was seized under the Fugitive Slave Act and was held pending a decision on the legal question of whether he was a citizen of Massachusetts entitled to protection of the State or was a
fugitive whose return was required under the Federal statute. The idea that a man's right to liberty could be subject to determination by a legal procedure was incomprehensible to Thoreau. His Journal contains scathing denunciations of lawyers, the concept of law as the will of the political sovereign, and of justice as defined in procedural terms. Commissioner Loring determined that Burns was a slave whom the State was required to return to his owner. The Mayor of Boston and the Governor of Massachusetts accepted the decision. Burns was returned on a Government ship. Like modern protestors, Thoreau was unprepared to accept a judicial or governmental determination which ran counter to his own view of the case. From furiously scribbled Journal notes Thoreau pieced together his incendiary essay, "Slavery in Massachusetts." He advocated immediate withdrawal of Massachusetts from the Union, but recognizing this to be improbable, he dissolved his allegiance to Massachusetts. He also asked that others follow his example and declare personal secession from Massachusetts until she should withdraw from the Union. "My thoughts are murder to the State ... my thoughts involuntarily go plotting against the State." Law and order was brushed aside as a false issue. "The law will never make men free; it is men who have got to make the law free. They are lovers of law and order who observe the law when the government breaks it." He travelled to Framingham to deliver his essay as a lecture. At this
meeting William Lloyd Garrison burned a copy of the United States Constitution with the full approval of Henry Thoreau and the assembled crowd. Events had pushed him almost against his will into league with the Abolitionist organizational leaders. "Why, who are the real opponents of slavery? The Slaveholders know, and I know. Are they the governors, the judges, the lawyers, the politicians? Or are they Garrison, Phillips, Parker and Co.?" He even became more charitable toward certain politicians, such as Senator Charles Sumner with whom he exchanged complimentary letters.

In August, Tickner and Fields published Walden, or Life in the Woods. His reputation as a writer and radical was spreading. Thomas Cholmondeley, an Englishman, visited Thoreau in Concord. He and Henry became good friends before he returned to England for volunteer military service in the Crimea. Cholmondeley later sent Thoreau a magnificent collection of books on Oriental philosophy and religion in recognition of Henry's profound interest in the thought of the East. Their correspondence gives us our best indication of his thinking concerning foreign affairs. Daniel Ricketson, a Quaker from New Bedford was also drawn to Thoreau's writings and arranged to have him lecture in that village. Ricketson became a fast admirer. Thus, Henry was acquiring a following of literary disciples. As his modest reputation grew, Thoreau was less hesitant to leave Concord. His Journal notes that his
travels for the year included Framingham, New Bedford, Philadelphia
where he visited the site of the Declaration of Independence only to be
impressed by the squirrels, and New York City where he visited
Barnum's Museum, the Crystal Palace, and actually allowed Greeley
to take him to the opera. It impressed him that Greeley was admited
to the opera without charge, given a tour of the building, and was
seemingly recognized by everyone.

Thoreau's health began to fail in 1855. Although he was able to
visit Cape Cod again and to do some walking in the late part of the
year, the spring and summer were periods of confinement. This
attack of tuberculosis was the first serious one since 1841; but Thoreau
never fully recovered his physical strength after this long illness. His
Journal contains long lists of trivial measurements and enumerations of
data interspersed with passages of moral outrage. The State of Maryland was "a moral fungus", "bound straight for the bottomless pit" for
establishing a State lottery. He was amused at Sam Staples' simile
in comparing listening to Wendell Phillips to picking up cow chips; and he continued to be critical of Fourierism. The gold mania in
Australia and California again drew Thoreau's ire. He objected
that gold was merely the symbol of value. Righteous men produced
value through honest independent labor; only greedy men sought gold in
the ground. He thought that a society which recognized the value of
found gold had perverted or at least misunderstood the nature of value. The thought that the tax assessors were especially prone to such a misunderstanding occurred to him. When Thoreau was brought before the tax assessors he had nothing to declare but a boat. He indicated that he produced very little of value, and managed to eat and wear that. "But what is the use in trying to live simply, raising what you eat, making what you wear, building what you inhabit, burning what you cut or dig, when those to whom you are allied insanely want and will have a thousand other things which neither you nor they can raise and nobody else, perchance, will pay for?" Due to his illness, political opinions, and acrimonious temperament, Thoreau was not on pleasant terms with very many people during this year. "For sympathy with my neighbors I might about as well live in China. They are to me barbarians."

He took little note in his Journal of the troubles in Kansas, although he was aware of the fighting between the slavery and anti-slavery factions. It seems strange that he was not inflamed by this direct conflict in Kansas which was prominently mentioned in the press. He did express his objections to the Ostend Manifesto which urged the United States to buy or take Cuba and his objection to the presidency of Franklin Pierce.

The Democrats dumped Frank Pierce, passed over Stephen Douglas, and nominated James Buchanan of Pennsylvania for their presi-
idential candidate in the campaign of 1856. The Whigs and Know-Nothings
nominated former President Fillmore. The new Republican party
offered its first presidential candidate, John C. Fremont. Thoreau
wrote to Cholmondeley, "They are on the eve of a Presidential election
... and all the good people are praying that of the three candidates
Fremont may be the man..." Millard Fillmore's candidacy elicited
ridicule: "A man who has been President becomes the Ex-President,
and can't travel or stay at home anywhere but men will persist in paying
respect to his ex-ship. It is cruel to remember his deeds so long." As for Buchanan, he was too unspeakable to desecrate the pages of
Thoreau's Journal. Fremont and the Republican party were too equivocal to suit Thoreau; he expected that their temporizing on the moral
issues would bring them defeat. He thought that the arguments "which
the Republican Party uses lacked penetration, and their foe steadily
advances ... to tear them apart." At this point Thoreau had aban-
doned what small amount of toleration he retained for the established
political process and had begun to hope for the cleansing purgative
effect of violence. He wrote, "But as for politics, what I most admire
now-a-days, is not the regular governments but the irregular primitive
ones, like the Vigilance committee in California and even the free state
men in Kansas. They are the most divine." He recognized that it was
only a matter of time; his only wish was that "the north had more spirit
and would settle the matter at once." The election fell to Buchanan
who achieved a plurality of nearly two million votes, proving how few Americans shared Thoreau's opinions.

Thoreau did a great deal of surveying in 1857 as the situation in Kansas grew worse and the election went badly for the anti-slavery men. Surveying provided him with a means of withdrawal from the political condition of the nation. Thoreau convinced himself that "only absorbing employment ... determines the future of individuals and states, drives Kansas out of your head.... The attitude of resistance is one of weakness, inasmuch as it only faces an enemy; it has its back to all that is truly attractive." One of the places where he sought "absorbing employment" was the Eagleswood community near Perth Amboy, New Jersey. He surveyed the property and delivered three lectures to the members of the community. The influential abolitionist, Theodore Weld had established a school there in company with the Grimke sisters of South Carolina, one of whom was his wife. Others involved with the experiment were Marcus Spring, the financier of the project, Elizabeth Peabody, James O. Birney, and Edward Palmer. Bronson Alcott and Horace Greeley were frequent visitors. The community life made no better impression on him than similar ones had done previously. While at Perth Amboy, Alcott and Thoreau visited Greeley at Chappaqua, heard Henry Ward Beecher preach, and visited Walt Whitman in Brooklyn. Thoreau was unimpressed with Beecher,
but was very interested by Whitman. They immediately disagreed, but Thoreau recognized Whitman as something of a kindred spirit.

While in Chappaqua, Greeley attempted to persuade Henry to become a resident in his home as tutor to the Greeley children, but Thoreau refused to return to teaching. So long as he could live without teaching he preferred to do so, and he managed to deliver paid lectures in Philadelphia and in Walpole, New Hampshire.

In 1857 the gold rush in California collapsed. Failure of banks and railroads became commonplace. In October there was a general suspension of specie payment by banks. Thoreau was not personally affected by the depression since he had no regular occupation and was used to a very simple style of life. He saw economic collapse as the natural concomitant to governmental policies so at variance with his view of universal laws, and for that reason was pleased to see evidence that the weaknesses of government were beginning to present themselves. He thought that "this general failure, both private and public, is rather occasion for rejoicing, as reminding us whom we have at the helm, — that justice is done." Thoreau had no sympathy for the misery caused by widespread unemployment for he felt that "if thousands are thrown out of employment, it suggested they were not well employed." Thoreau's personal funds were sufficient for him to travel to the Maine woods and again to Cape Cod.
A transforming experience occurred in March of 1857. Thoreau was introduced to John Brown by Frank Sanborn. Brown was just fresh from Kansas warfare and his Pottawatomie atrocities. His announced object was to elicit moral and financial support for his crusade, but part of his mission was to organize the secret conspiracy which led to his attack on Harper's Ferry. Thoreau was not taken into confidence about the impending raid on Virginia, but Henry immediately underwent an identification with Brown. Brown was boarded at Mrs. Thoreau's, met Ralph Waldo Emerson there, and was invited to stay the night. Thoreau was thunderstruck by the lecture Brown delivered in the Concord Town House. To Henry's mind Brown was the man of heroic moral vision who was following the principle—not policy—which would finally abolish slavery.

Thoreau travelled a good deal in 1858. He visited Webster's birthplace, New York City, Worchester, Cape Ann and Monadnock. Edward Hoar and Henry, the same two who set the Concord woods ablaze, went to the White Mountains and camped for several days without inflicting significant damage to the landscape. One of the high points of the year was the publication of his "Chesuncook" in the Atlantic Monthly. It did not end happily however, for the editor, James Russell Lowell, blue-pencilled a line in which Thoreau accorded to a pine tree a soul which could aspire to as high a heaven as man's. Henry had not been consulted
in the deletion, had not given permission, and he was livid. Lowell
and he came to no agreement and retained a hearty dislike for each
other ever after. Thoreau offered nothing further to the Atlantic
Monthly while Lowell was editor, but the final revenge was Lowell's.
After Henry's death, Lowell printed a scathing review which minimized
Thoreau's importance as a writer and retarded the growth of Thoreau's
reputation for years. Henry had other disputes as well. A neighbor's
cow kept trespassing in his garden, which so annoyed Henry that he
actually sought the advice of a lawyer concerning possible legal action.
However, it was as he suspected—the law was of no use to him in his
troubles. 115

The conflicts among the various factions in the United States were
growing more severe. The newspapers were full of the strains to which
the governmental system was being subjected. The Lincoln-Douglas
debates were in full swing from August until mid-October. Yet, to
Thoreau, it was only sound and fury.

The editors of newspapers, the popular clergy, politicians and
orators of the day and office-holders, though they may be
thought to be of very different politics and religion, are essen-
tially one and homogeneous, inasmuch as they are only the
various ingredients of the froth which ever floats on the sur-
face of society. 116

To an acquaintance he wrote, "As for the presidency, —.—. . . . I am so
politically benighted (or belightened?) that I do not know what Seward's
qualifications are. I know, however, that no one in whom I could feel
much interest would stand any chance of being elected." As was his custom when affairs of state did not suit him, Thoreau had relapsed into one of his periodic retreats.

In February, 1859, John Thoreau died leaving Henry the titular head of the household. The graphite business had begun to prosper in the early part of the decade and John left the family moderately comfortable. Acting as executor of his father's estate and managing the business left him little time to himself. His services as surveyor were also in demand as the owners of meadowlands adjacent to the Assabet, Concord and Sudbury rivers had engaged him to survey their lands and to write the history of the bridges and bridge abutments within the area of the survey. This was Henry's largest surveying assignment. When he submitted the results he followed his signature with the title, civil engineer.

By October, Thoreau had his own affairs and those of his father's estate in sufficiently good order to read a lecture before Theodore Parker's society in Boston. Early that month John Brown had been in Concord visiting Frank Sanborn. Henry's friends Higginson and Sanborn were playing a supporting role in the plot which Brown was hatching. From Concord, Brown went directly to carry out his project at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. He and twenty-one men attacked the United States arsenal. The plan was to move throughout the South liberating slaves, using the captured weapons to arm a growing army
of insurrectionists. The bloody scheme failed. A detachment of marines under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee captured the raiders. Brown and five of his men were captured, eleven including two of Brown's sons, were killed and the remainder escaped. They had killed five civilians and one marine.

Brown's adventure at Harper's Ferry, his subsequent trial and execution galvanized Thoreau's political impulses. The dramatic audacity of the raid under Brown's fanatic leadership suddenly clarified in Thoreau's mind the logical unity of his heretofore vague and fragmentary political thought. He proclaimed Brown a hero, saint and martyr. By the time the news of Brown's capture reached Concord, Thoreau's Journal was filled with a defense of Brown and condemnation of neighbors, editors, politicians,—anyone who denounced the violence in Virginia. Thoreau immediately began to describe Brown as a messianic hero whose example provided a new revelation. The Journal entries reached a crescendo of righteous indignation and emotional intensity. These were the notes from which "A Plea for Captain John Brown" was composed. "A Plea" is the most complete expression of his political thinking at the end of his life. The irrationalism, elitism, violence, and moral absolutism which had always been present in aspects of his writing are finally made explicit and brought to their logical conclusion. On October 31, he delivered his defense of Brown in Concord. On
November 1, he made the same speech in Boston and again on
November 3 in Worchester. Brown was executed on December 2.
Thoreau spoke at a memorial service which he arranged in defiance
of the Concord worthies to commemorate the life and death of his hero.
When Sanborn brought one of Brown's hunted raiders, Francis Jackson
Merriam, to Thoreau for help in escaping capture by the Federal
government, Thoreau borrowed a horse from Emerson and escorted
him to South Acton station where the train to Canada could take him to
safety. The man was brought to Thoreau incognito and not introduced
by his proper name, but Thoreau must have suspected something of the
true nature of his identity. Henry was in positive violation of the law
in helping Merriam to escape. It was a far cry from the passive non-
payment of taxes with which Thoreau began on his career of civil dis-
obedience. It is strange that Thoreau clearly saw that Merriam was
insane, but refused to consider the possibility that Brown was also
insane. To Thoreau, Brown was the embodiment of sanity. Walter
Harding's biography of Thoreau suggests that he would have been less
positive on the point or at least less enthusiastic in his praise of Brown
had he known the details of Brown's atrocities at Pottawatomie. Brown
and his band had killed and dismembered five men and boys in a most
brutal manner. Despite Harding's apology, Thoreau must have been
made aware of the facts of the case by Sanborn, Higginson, or the press,
if not by a person in a position to know. Certainly Thoreau knew of
the slaughter of five civilians at Harper's Ferry, and was willing to
shrug off the violence as inconsequential.

They who are continually shocked by slavery have some right
to be shocked by the violent death of the slaveholder, but no
others. Such will be more shocked by his life than by his
death. I shall not be forward to think him mistaken in his
method who quickest succeeds to liberate the slave. 118

In the Journal entry for October 21, he said, "I do not complain of any
tactics that are effective of good, whether one wields the quill or the
sword.... I will judge the tactics by the fruits." 119 The testimony of
Brown's friends and relations that he suffered from hereditary insanity,
the documented record of theft and murder failed to deter Thoreau in
his praise of "Old Brown". He accepted the violence wholeheartedly.

After the emotionally exhausting ordeal of Harper's Ferry and
its aftermath, Thoreau eased back into a less strenuous life. The
graphite business was his responsibility now, there were a few matters
pending relating to his father's estate, and he had a reacquaintance to
make with nature. In January of 1860 Charles Brace brought a copy of
Darwin's Origin of the Species to Concord. Thoreau was very impressed.
He ridiculed Agassiz's rejection of the theory, and praised it to Franklin
Sanborn and Thomas Cholmondeley. 120 It was too late, however, for
Darwin's ideas to have much influence on Thoreau. His "Plea for
Captain John Brown" was published as was "The Succession of Forest
Trees. His writing, walking and work took little account of political struggles going on. The Democrats had always embodied the worst in politics as far as Thoreau was concerned and so he took no notice of the split between the Douglas and Breckinridge factions of the party. The Republicans had earned his undying contempt for their frantic attempts to disassociate themselves from John Brown. The Seward-Lincoln battle was, therefore, irrelevant to him. He did, however, write a grateful, flattering letter to Senator Charles Sumner for his support of those who had refused to honor a Senate summons to testify on the John Brown case.

Ellery Channing and Henry had travelled to Monadnock for a week of camping in the summer and the latter continued his interest in nature throughout the year. In December Henry caught a cold while lying on his chest counting tree rings. It brought on his final decline. The Journal entries were drastically reduced in volume, conclusive evidence of his weakness. The secession of South Carolina in December of 1860 passed without a recorded remark. Probably Thoreau was glad to see South Carolina and those which joined her leave the Union, but his reaction, whatever it might have been, has not been preserved. On the day Lincoln was inaugurated Thoreau was "impatient with the state of the country, the State itself, and with statesmen generally." About the same time he roundly denounced the Republican party for duplicity and compromise while chiding Bronson Alcott for his favorable opinion.
of the new administration. 123

Thoreau was aware of the impending war and realized the full
implication of what a civil war would mean. He preferred not to think
about it and advised others to do the same: "As for my prospective
reader, I hope that he ignores Fort Sumter, and Old Abe, and all that,
for that is just the most fatal and indeed the only fatal, weapon you can
direct against evil ever; for as long as you know of it, you are particips
criminis." 124 Not long after Sumter fell and both the Union and Con-
federcy began to muster troops, Henry went to Minnesota hoping that
the climate would be therapeutic. He tried to follow his own advice.
As he wrote Sanborn, "I am not even so well informed as to the progress
of the war as you suppose. I have seen but one eastern paper... for
5 weeks. I have not taken much pains to get them..." 125

Thoreau returned in July from his Minnesota trip convinced that
recovery was a vain hope. He turned to the task of preparing as many
of his manuscripts for publication as he could. His Journal makes only
one reference to the war, and that, in October, took note that Concord
was not represented by a military company. He reported that the town
butcher was mentioned as a possible leader of a company since "There
isn't one in the company can cut up a crittur like him." 126 His health
steadily declined, and by winter of 1861 he was in bed most of the time.
By December he had stopped making Journal entries. On May 6, 1862,
Thoreau died attended by his mother and sister. He had maintained that
there had never been a quarrel between himself and God. To his intimate friend, Ellery Channing, he came closest to expressing a sense of regret by saying "it is better for some things to end" in reference to their long walks together. By all accounts his death was serene.

This discussion of Thoreau's biography has been extensive. It clearly demonstrates that the development of Thoreau's thought was directly molded by the times. The understanding of his political theory is impossible without considering the historical and philosophical perspectives from which he viewed events. A review of his life and personality aids materially in appreciating the political thought of this most subjective of individualists. It will, of course, be necessary and useful in the following chapters to refer to some of the incidents mentioned here for illustrations to document elements of his thought which are not explicit in his written works, but are deduced from events of his life.

Notes


10. Alfred Munroe, "Concord Authors Continued," Richmond County Gazette (Stapleton, New York), August 15, 1877.


18. All quotations in this paragraph are from W., VI, p. 9.


26. Ibid.


29. Ibid., pp. 292-293.

30. Ibid., p. 301.

31. Ibid., p. 302.
33. W., IV, p. 324.
36. David Greene Haskins, Ralph Waldo Emerson: His Maternal Ancestors (Boston: Capples, Upham, 1887), pp. 121-122.
40. Ibid., March 26, 1842, pp. 350-351.
42. Ibid., pp. 163-166. Letter dated March 12, 1845.
45. Ibid., p. 76.
47. Ibid., p. 371.
48. Ibid., pp. 360-361.
49. Ibid., p. 371.
51. **Correspondence.** Walter Harding and Carl Bode, eds., p. 191.

52. Ibid., p. 224. Letter dated May 19, 1848.


55. **Correspondence**, Walter Harding and Carl Bode, eds., p. 230. Letter to George Thatcher, August 24, 1848.

56. Ibid., p. 239-240. A. Bronson Alcott to Thoreau, February 20, 1849.


58. Ibid.


60. Journal, date uncertain, possibly August, 1850. W., VIII, p. 46.

61. Ibid., date uncertain, but before May 12, 1850. W., VIII, p. 4.


63. Ibid., November 17, 1850, pp. 101-102.

64. Ibid., February 16, 1851. W., VIII, p. 162.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., date uncertain, February, 1851, pp. 151; 152-153.

67. Ibid., April, 1851. W., VIII, p. 178.

68. Ibid., October 1, 1851, pp. 37-38.

69. Ibid., April, 1851, p. 174.
71. Ibid., November 14, 1851, pp. 115-116.
72. Ibid., December 31, 1851, p. 168.
73. Ibid., p. 166.
74. Ibid., undated entry for 1851. W., VIII, p. 143.
75. Ibid., January 21, 1852. W., IX, p. 212.
76. Ibid., January 30, 1851. W., IX, p. 250.
77. Quotations are from the *Journal*, W., IX, January 18, 1852, p. 205; February 11, 1852, p. 295; February 26, 1852, pp. 321-322.
81. Ibid., February 8, 1852. W., IX, p. 289.
83. Ibid., August 5, 1852, p. 280.
84. Ibid., January 21, 1853, p. 472.
85. Ibid., January 9, 1853, p. 461.
86. Ibid., March, 1853, W., XI, p. 4.
89. Ibid., September 22, 1853, pp. 427-428.


97. Correspondence, Walter Harding and Carl Bode, eds., pp. 348; 353.

98. Journal, November 21, 22, 1854. W., XIII, 73; 76.


100. Ibid., February 24, 1855, p. 211.


102. Ibid., October 18, 1855, pp. 500-501.

103. Ibid., November 30, 1855. XIV, pp. 36-37.

104. Ibid., November 5, 1855. W., XIV, pp. 7-8.


111. Journal, August 30, 1856. W., XV, p. 36.


113. Ibid.


116. Ibid., August 9, 1858, pp. 87-88.

117. Correspondence, Walter Harding and Carl Bode, eds., pp. 519-520. Letter to G. W. Curtis, August 18, 1858.


123. Alcott, Journals, p. 337.


125. Ibid., pp. 618-619. Letter to F. B. Sanborn, June 25, 1861.

CHAPTER III
INTTELLECTUAL AFFINITIES AND INFLUENCES

Just as Thoreau was a phenomenon of an historical epoch in Nineteenth Century America, he was shaped by the intellectual forces which were converging at that time to produce the New England renaissance. This rebirth was not merely an artistic flowering, although that was certainly one of the most prominent results, nor was it merely the awakening of the American social conscience, although penetrating social criticism was part and parcel of the movement. The area around Boston and Cambridge was the intellectual center of America, even if not quite so exclusively as many of the proud Yankees felt it to be. Still, during a period when America was very much a province in the cultural sense and most of our art, philosophy and politics were derivative, Massachusetts and particularly the area around Boston, was the place where the latest in European thought was first received. Massachusetts had the first opportunity to react to European ideas in an American environment and to set for the rest of the country the peculiarly American interpretation of world-wide intellectual currents. Of course, not all of American social thought and culture was derived, but along with Virginia and South Carolina, and to a much lesser extent Pennsylvania, what was original and native to America was largely the product of New England. Massachusetts was clearly the leader of the New England
states in matters of social concern, politics, intellectual trends and artistic tastes.

The time was right in the first half of the Nineteenth Century for New England to assert the tremendous intellectual power which had been building for generations and to lead America to a position of equality with the older cultures of Europe. By the turn of the century, the intellectual energy which had characterized Calvinism in New England during the previous two hundred years had nearly spent itself. The Puritan dogmas which drive people to achieve prosperity as an outward sign of inward grace, and the doctrine of election which had been used by the prosperous elite to exercise social and political control had reached their culmination by the time Thoreau was born. New England had produced an aristocracy whose social and political pre-eminence was firmly grounded in theological orthodoxy. Commercial and manufacturing families were amassing fortunes which made them the social and financial peers of the rich old sea-faring families. The solid farmers had been content to accept this state of affairs, for the accomplishments of the New England leadership were considerable. Boston and other Northeastern cities were becoming prosperous centers of trade. Those Yankees who had achieved material success could be assured by their pastors that they were indeed the elect of God. As New England became more firmly dominant in the economic leadership of the United States, the moral arrogance of the Calvinists became more assertive. Convinced
of a most depressing view of human nature, Calvinist theology had grasped at Locke, Hobbes and even Hume for philosophical support. Locke and the Scottish philosophers had demonstrated to their own satisfaction that man was born without innate ideas, that his knowledge was entirely derived from his association of impressions of experience which were relayed to him through his senses. Mankind was limited by heredity and environment to knowledge based solely upon experience. The appeal to natural law, with its confusion of fact and value, was deprived of its argumental validity which suited the purposes of the elitists of Calvinism. It gave a perfect justification to their political conservatism, aggressive laissez-faire economics, and similar social positions that led to class distinctions and an exploitive approach to labor.

The philosophic materialism which protected a system of values based upon material rewards contained real difficulties when grafted upon a supernatural religion replete with miracles and revelations from outside the experience of mortal men. Paradoxically, however, a theory of knowledge which is entirely built upon a collection of sense data, each new experience being interpreted in the light of previous experience, can find convenient justification in abstract rationalism. It leaves no room for intuitive or received knowledge, and no absolute standard for an external truth other than that which abstract reason
demonstrates to be true. At least in Locke, it leads to a supposition that if a sufficient number of individuals interpret objective data in the light of reason and arrive at the same conclusions, then the knowledge resulting from the collective interpretation is a working approximation of truth. Although a person cannot know anything other than the sense perceptions emanating from external stimuli, the reason provides a modus operandi by which individuals are able to act and by which groups of individuals can act.

In religious practice, this philosophy supports Congregationalism; in political practice it supports representative democracy and laissez-faire liberalism or defends the status quo depending upon whether one follows the philosophic radicalism of Bentham, Austin and Mills or adopts a more conservative interpretation holding the proof of long experience to be a justification for the existing political arrangements. It assumes a very finite limit to the potential perfection of human kind, since each man is a creature of his own experience. The existence of the state is justified by what perspective it allows the individual beyond his own limits and the protection it offers to his life and property under conditions as they exist due to the evil potential inherent in human nature. As a religious creed it was a coldly logical system which required reason operating upon God's one revelation to man, the Bible, to give rise to moral rules for the proper conduct of mankind.
Herein lay its fatal weakness, that it asked a materialistic philosophy to contain a supernatural religion devoted to an arbitrary capricious god and attempted to hold human motivation to a standard of rigid rationality with no accommodation for the emotional responses which are part of human nature. The whole Calvinist construct was of a piece, logically speaking, and when it failed, it collapsed all at once and nothing first as did the "One Hoss Shea" in Oliver Wendell Holmes' brilliant satire. Calvinism being what it was, and Massachusetts being Massachusetts, what affected religion affected everything else. When the Unitarian reaction to the Calvinist tradition succeeded in making a shambles of the old orthodoxy, it also left in pieces the social and political underpinnings of New England culture. It was the process of picking up the pieces of the old order which brought about the age of reform that swept through the Northeast during the period following the War of 1812 and the opening of the War Between the States. Even in the massive reaction to the old Calvinistic traditions, the newer systems of thought which rejected most vehemently the Puritan theology and sought to substitute a more comprehensive and adequate view of human nature did not abandon Christian traditions, but sought to base their faith upon ethical suppositions which were generous and humane. Despite the religious ferment, New England retained its peculiar regional character. All social questions, all political questions with the possible exceptions of those economic issues which touched the Yankee pocketbook too
closely, were considered in relation to a moral standard which was homogeneous in most essentials.

While not all New Englanders by any means accepted the new thought of Unitarianism, it became the profession of the most influential segment of the citizenry. Harvard had been subverted to Unitarianism so that the new generation of ministers from that source spread the new faith throughout New England and began to infiltrate the West, that is to say, the Ohio Valley. Families divided into trinitarian and unitarian camps; congregations split over the issue. In most cases, the Unitarians carried the day. As one orthodox churchman commented after the majority of his congregation voted to accept the newer theology, "We kept the faith. They kept the furniture."

Unitarianism rejected the old view of human nature that saw mankind as hopelessly depraved. Instead, a more optimistic view of the positive possibilities for improvement if not perfection in human affairs prevailed. Reform was possible, and therefore worth promoting. Under the newer thought, personal survival after death was not given much attention as a serious probability. Improvement of the here and now assumed a more critical importance. In other words, Unitarianism was not burdened with the idea that whatever is reflects the will of God, that evil or poverty or misery or oppressions were punishments of a vengeful deity. It became a vehicle for promoting social action, for
prison reform, abolition of slavery, improvement in labor conditions, betterment of the position of women and the protection of children. These were positive traits, welcome ideas which attracted persons of conscience, of sensitivity, of culture.

On the other hand, Unitarianism retained most of the philosophical weaknesses of Calvinism while discarding all of the theological dogmatism which gave the old system cohesion, verve, and moral energy. It clung tenaciously to the associationist or sensationalist psychology of Locke. It was even more coldly rational and logical than orthodox Calvinism since it managed to do without the miracles, without the mystery of a majestic God who was both vengeful and merciful, if Quixotic, and who operated directly in the affairs of men.

The young men who were attracted to the Unitarian ministry were aware of the positive aspects of the creed and made the most of the possibilities for social reform. The Whigs began to feel the pressure of the Unitarian pulpit in their alliance with the cotton interests and slave power, as did the unscrupulous New England rum runners and the factory owners who were ruthlessly exploiting the laboring classes, and the working women and children in particular. The slave-holding interests of the South and their Northern supporters began to feel the moral indignation of these Unitarians who were audacious enough to believe firmly in the dignity and worth of every individual without regard to his finan-
cial condition, class background, or race. The great Dr. William Ellery Channing was the best example of this type of Unitarian minister. The hard logic of Unitarianism clothed in the gentle language of Dr. Channing became a bedrock foundation for most of the reforming efforts in America prior to his death in 1842 and a profound influence on much that was accomplished afterward. His kinsman, William Henry Channing, carried the Unitarian spirit into the Christian Socialist movement in America. James Freeman Clarke and Thomas Wentworth Higginson were examples of the sort of social activist whose impact went far beyond the pews in front of a pulpit.

There were many others, however, for whom Unitarianism was not enough, who required a deeper spiritual or emotional satisfaction than that provided by the lean rationality of Unitarianism. Such men were attracted to the ministerial life not only for the opportunities afforded them by all that was valuable for human improvement of themselves, their fellow creatures and society, but also for the leisure it afforded to pursue an avocation for literature or for some other scholarly interest.

It was among this class of earnest men of philosophic and aesthetic bent that the limitations of Unitarianism provoked dissatisfaction. They needed a broader vision of human potential, a more satisfactory rationale for the moral behavior which they felt had to be introduced into the social
and political relations of the race. In short, they needed a faith, a view of life and reality which could account for the illimitable possibilities they felt for their own perfection and the perfectability of human institutions. They needed to find a creed which would express the sense of ultimate unity in the universe, of possible harmony to be made from the discordant clashes of political organizations and social groupings. For some of these seekers, a satisfying solution to all their questionings and longings would be found in a heresy developing in Unitarianism which ultimately became known as Transcendentalism.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was the leader and spokesman for the Transcendentalists, if such an amorphous and loose amalgamation as they were could be said to have a leader and spokesman. They had no creed, no set of dogmas, but only a shared way of looking at things, a feeling for the ideal after the fashion of Platonists, and a conviction that personally they were able to transcend the plane of the material, the illusion of multiplicity, and to make contact with the ultimate unity, The One of which the Platonists and the Oriental mystics spoke. Transcendentalism took many forms, and had ramifications in politics as well as in literature, philosophy and religion but it was Ralph Waldo Emerson who was the guiding spirit of Transcendentalism and who personified the movement as much as anyone. And it was Emerson who brought Henry David Thoreau from the immature sentimentalism of his adolescence into the mature world of idealism. Emerson was the guiding
light for the young Thoreau and it was Emersonian Transcendentalism which Thoreau absorbed undiluted in its purest, most ethereal form.

The ex-clergym an was perhaps the most articulate spokesman for the Transcendentalists, but he might have been writing about Thoreau, so closely did his behavior conform to the Transcendental viewpoint. Emerson was the spokesman, Thoreau was the example. "The Transcendalist," Emerson's attempt to describe the mood and purpose of the movement, could easily be taken as a sketch of Thoreau's mind.

He does not respect labor, or the products of labor, namely property, otherwise as a manifold symbol, illustrating with wonderful fidelity the details of the class of being; he does not respect government, except as far as it reiterates the law of his mind; nor the church, nor charities, nor arts, for themselves, but hears, at a vast distance, what they say, as if his consciousness would speak to him through a pantomimic scene. His thought—that is the Universe. His experience inclines him to behold the procession of facts you call the world, as flowing perpetually outward from an invisible, unsounded centre in himself, centre alike of himself and of them, and necessitating him to regard all things as having a subjective or relative existence, relative to that aforesaid Unknown Centre of him. 1

Thus, the first and most important intellectual affinity which Thoreau developed was with Transcendentalism as personified and articulated by Emerson. It was through Emerson that Thoreau's links with the intellectual world were forged. And, it is in the context of American Transcendentalism that Thoreau can best be related to the history of political thought.

From the perspective of more than a century, for the movement reached its peak in the decade between 1840 and 1850, Transcendentalism
was only a brief and incidental episode in the great century-long swell of idealism and humanistic sentiment in Europe and America which has come to be known as the Romantic Movement. The latter, of course, has been variously interpreted as a reaction to the excessive materialism of the French and Scottish philosophers, a corrective to the sterile rationalism of the Protestant theology, as an expression of the liberation of the individual spirit from centuries of class stratification, and as a natural intellectual consequence of the collapse of the old social and economic order in the rise of the machine age. Yet whatever the emphasis one prefers to give the Romantic Movement, whether it is seen as the emotional and intellectual preparation for the mid-century revolutions which swept Europe and America, or is interpreted as the reawakening of man's appreciation of the mystery of life in the face of advancing technology and science, there is common agreement that it had an effect which dramatically shaped the culture of Western society during the first three quarters of the Nineteenth Century and continues to have ramifications in the present day, particularly in the interpretation it placed upon nature.

In one way or another most of the specific reforms in modern society—racial equality, justice for women, an end to exploitation of labor, economic reform, expanding suffrage, national self-determination, criminal rehabilitation—were given impetus in the thinking of the Romantic era. Out of the idealism which it promoted came some of the
most important political and social movements of the recent past and present. The Christian Socialists, represented in America by William Henry Channing, the Fabians of England, a whole genre of Utopian speculations, philosophical anarchism in the mood of Count Tolstoy, Radical Republicanism, the various movements for national self-determination, especially that led by Gandhi in India, the branches of idealism which led off of Hegel's ideas of the state which must include some aspects of Marxian communism as well as German and Italian fascism, the kind of thinking which led to the Nuremberg War Crimes trials and to the more recent civil disobedience concerning civil rights and the Vietnam war, can all be seen in well-developed form in the Romantic Movement. It was world-wide, and it was pervasive. It had not come to full power quickly, but had grown over a period of centuries, and retains vestigial life in the present day. Thoreau was a child of the Romantic era, and dealt understandingly with the major problem of the Romantic view of nature, that is, the necessity to differentiate carefully and to maintain a perspective between fact and truth, the object and human reflection upon the object. 2

The Romantic Movement was stimulated by a rediscovery of Platonic idealism. Of course, "realism" or idealism had always been one of the major strains of thought in Western culture. The Greek mystery religions, Pythagoras, the Neo-Platonists, and Stoics had carried the concept to Rome where it was assimilated in the philo-
Sophie foundations of the Roman law and through that medium spread throughout the Roman world. The early Christian church adopted intact much of the otherworldliness of ancient idealism to support its trinitarian theology that included the mystery of a unitary godhead, and made use of the dualism implicit in idealism to justify its own radical separation between matter and spirit. Along with these ideas the church accepted the Platonic view that the state exists as an ideal form and its proper use in the world is to create the conditions of the good life. Gradually Platonic idealism became a keystone in the philosophic foundation of the Roman Catholic faith. Idealism in the Platonic vein was so deeply ingrained in the mental habits of Europe that by the time of the Reformation idealism remained a normal mental posture even in Protestant areas. Non-Catholic areas such as England and the German states, continued to express the sense of mystery and majesty of the non-material world in the poetry, epic folklore, philosophic speculations, and in their theories of political legitimacy. Natural law, in the sense of an inborn faculty in man which allow him through right reason to know the laws of nature willed by God, was a commonplace and well-accepted argument to which a successful appeal was possible against almost any adversary. The Platonic assumption of an ultimate unity of all things which Christianity had adopted provided the bridge between fact and value upon which the natural law theory depended. This in turn supported the organic theory of society upon which both secular and clerical rulers
depended for the validity of their claims to power.

Reformation literature and poetry continued to carry a thread of mysticism and idealism, but in philosophy newer thoughts were beginning to make their force felt. Science and the method of science dealt with the concrete and observable, and only material objects lent themselves to the demands of the scientific method. Materialism, supported by the emerging philosophy of science, began to make telling arguments against the older assumptions of the theologians. Francis Bacon, John Locke, David Hume, and others made materialism de rigueur for most religious and political philosophies in the Protestant countries. However, idealism was too deeply ingrained to be completely erased even though temporarily overwhelmed by the speculative buttressing of the Protestant Reformation. As Emerson said in "The Transcendentalist,"

This way of thinking, falling on Roman times, made Stoic philosophers; falling on despotic times, made patriot Catos and Brutuses; falling on superstitious times, made prophets and apostles; on popish times, made protestants and ascetic monks, preachers of Faith against preachers of Works; on prelatical times, made Puritans and Quakers; and falling on Unitarian and commercial times, makes the peculiar shades of Idealism which we know.

Emerson was correct about the spirit of the idealists, but over generalized about the technicalities of philosophical speculation upon which these various examples based their thoughts. Whether technically related in philosophic terms or sentimentally allied to the temper of idealism, much of European thought in the post-Reformation era
retained idealism as a mental habit in more than vestigial form. Even in the period of enlightenment during which the superstitious embellishments made by clerics were being discarded with a vehemence which tended to discredit idealism as a valid philosophical or psychological approach to reality, it survived.

Perhaps the most complete expression of Idealism applied to social and political thought outside of the Roman Catholic Church prior to the French Revolution was contained in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which in some respects are so similar to Thoreau's works that he has been called an American Rousseau. Some might raise serious questions as to whether Rousseau was an Idealist at all, but whatever the case of his own position, he profoundly influenced later thinkers who are indisputably called Idealists.

Neither man was particularly appealing in some of his personality quirks, and both seem to have been creatures of emotion more than intellect. Persons who wish to be unkind could say of either one what George Sabine wrote of Rousseau:

By inclination he was parasitic and during considerable periods he lived in a state of semi-dependence, but he could never accept dependence gracefully. Instead he built around himself a myth of pseudo-Stoicism and fictitious self-sufficiency, which expressed itself most definitely in suspicion of those who tried to befriend him.  

Rousseau's thought has at least two phases: the first is a relatively individualistic position following Lockeian assumptions, as in his  

cours sur l'Inégalité, in which he presented a detailed, if naive, description of man in the natural state unencumbered by the social and civic regulations that mark the present cultural stage of mankind; the second is a collectivistic position based upon a Greek feeling for the community as the milieu of citizenship without which mankind is not wholly man.  

Both Rousseau and Thoreau felt a sense of division and fragmentation in human life, and it was their aim to reestablish a sense of unity in the human psyche. While nature was a common refuge for both Thoreau attempted to achieve a pantheistic fusion of the individual man into the nature of which he is an unsevered piece, whereas Rousseau sought the complete socialization of man by insisting that it is in a community of other human beings whose wills are fused into a polity rather than in the matrix of nature that man becomes a whole personality. 

Both found reasons for holding views of extreme individualism, but ended their lives offering apologies for using men as means rather than ends. To this much they agreed: that in a state of nature man is an animal whose behavior is dictated by instinct, and as such is neither vicious nor moral; that mere likeness creates no bond between individuals, but such bonds are created by affinities of language, interest, well-being and cultural values; that if there is such a thing as a general human family it arises from the little families and communities of families which men instinctively form; and that obligation must be
volitional. There are similarities in their common preferences for small scale communities, distrust of the psychological effect of private property, and other details of form.

But a more fundamental similarity is related to the role of will played in each man's thought. What Patrick Riley wrote of Rousseau holds for Thoreau in the political principles which they tried to establish: "that will is not enough, that perfect polity alone is not enough, that will must be united to perfection, and that perfection must be the standard of what is willed."^10

It is on the crucial issue of will, however, that the two must be clearly divided into separate camps. Thoreau, as will be seen in the chapters on the nature of man and the nature of society, believed firmly that will is an individual capacity of which institutions, groups, or communities are incapable; Rousseau seems to accord the capacity of will to corporate bodies. ^11 As Riley points out, Thoreau had the better logical position.

For, strictly speaking, the idea of general will is an impossibility; the ideas of generality, and of will are mutually exclusive. Will, whatever its crudity as a psychological construct, is characteristically a concept of individuality, of particularity, and it is only metaphorically that one can speak of will as "general." ^12

But, one must also recognize that it is the role of the will, which is associated with the affective senses rather than with rational intellectual processes, that gives a certain similarity to many of the political
positions taken by the two. Their irrationalism was joined to a certain
anti-intellectualism and anti-historicism which followed as concomitants
to their view of the natural state of man whose motive force is instinct,
not reason. It is man's instinct, shared by all because of the biological
fact that they are men, which allows Rousseau to declare that there is
a General Will which arises from the parties to a social contract to
which all members instinctively agree even though the operation of the
artificial process called reason may delude some individuals into think-
ing that they are opposed to the General Will. It should be noted that
Rousseau begins with individuals capable of independent will and moves
to a unifying ideal which is absolute and understood only through feeling
and emotion. This is an element which strikes a more fundamental
agreement with Thoreau's final position than the more obvious super-
ficial agreement between the two in their preference for pastoral simpli-
city. For instance, the role of the hero in Thoreau has a correspond-
ence to the "great legislator" which Rousseau discussed in Le Contrat
Social.

However, the absoluteness of heroic will relates immediately to
transcendent values in Thoreau, while the great legislator of Rousseau,
being himself constrained by the values of the community, has limitations
which are not required by Thoreau's simpler egoism. The central place
of volition as the source of obligation is clearer in Thoreau because
individual will is less confined. Riley suggests that Rousseau lacks a
conception of a political morality of the common good as a source of political cohesion and that the great legislator, through persuasion and religious devices, remedies the defect of a common-good morality by bringing will into conformity with "reason" and getting individuals to will something like such a morality would require. Thoreau's hero, on the other hand, is the embodiment of moral action, whose example of the good is sufficient to compel men of good will, and who is prepared to confound by force those of ill will. The general temper of the two was similar in holding that no man can be made subject without his consent, they both asserted that there are values which compel consent.

Neither Thoreau nor Rousseau finally resolve the problem of political obligation which asks why one is duty bound to obey a social order that one does not choose for himself and that happens at times to violate his reason and conscience. One reason why they were unable to do so is because perhaps only a philosophy of reason can give a compelling answer, and neither has a philosophy of reason available to him. Thoreau may be somewhat more in a defensible position, however, in that he had a psychological basis for obligation that Rousseau seemingly lacked: One has a duty to himself to fulfill his own personality potential according to the inspiration of his conscience, and must act upon the obligation arising from internal necessity. On the other hand, if critics such as Riley and Sabine are correct in their assessment, Rousseau had
only the force of community with neither the psychology nor philosophy
to provide the ought.

The irrationalism which clearly is a part of the social and politi
cal thought of both men is inherent in their reliance upon will, and the
potential for totalitarian values in both stems at least partly from their
faith in the affective rather than the cognitive attributes of man. As a
practical matter, a well disciplined minority convinced of their own
inspiration who are men of action and who think with their blood provides
an adequate vehicle under either system of thought for political deomina-
tion in the name of the "general will" or the "hero." In the one case it
leads to the French Revolution and holocaust, in the other to Ossawatomie
and Harper's Ferry, or possibly to the cult of personality as with Hitler,
Stalin, or Mao. The affinity between Rousseau the social absolutist and
Thoreau the individualist absolutist is precisely this: La Volonté^  
General—toujours droite; heroic consciousness—always right!

Although Thoreau is often pictured as the individualist par excel-
elence and the prototype of the subjectivist anarchist, the final positions
which he adopted closely parallel Rousseau's thought in certain assump-
tions that are made. Rousseau began that type of metaphysical specu-
lation about the general will that was a prominent concern in the social
theories of the Nineteenth Century philosophical idealists and which was
profoundly important to the development of the political thought which
developed in the Romantic age, and particularly in the ideas which Thoreau took from Transcendentalism.

As Sabine has pointed out, Rousseau had a direct influence on Immanuel Kant by impressing him with the surpassing value of moral will as compared with scientific inquiry or mere intellectualizing.\(^{15}\) Ralph Waldo Emerson, the spokesman for American Transcendentalism and for Henry Thoreau during the early and middle periods of his life, credited Kant with the name of the form of Idealism which Transcendentalism followed both in its philosophical perspective and ethical structure.\(^{16}\) Transcendentalism was not, however, committed to any system of thought as Emerson was at pains to make clear, and was therefore free to appropriate only that part of any previous thought, including Kant's, as might suit their viewpoint. Thoreau's interests were less philosophical than Emerson's, but he appears to have followed the general outlines of Transcendental thought as interpreted by Emerson during the greater part of his adult life. However, just as Emerson was eclectic in the selection of ideas for Transcendentalism, so Thoreau picked and chose for the ideas which formed his personal view of the world.

The individualism inherent in the thought of such Protestant figures as John Knox and Martin Luther naturally appealed to Thoreau's temperament. Transcendentalism and Henry Thoreau were comfortable with a moral atomism which allowed men a conviction of truth requiring no
authority beyond faith in their individual revelation and mental pro-
cesses. However, theological individualism had encouraged a politi-
cal individualism in Europe following the Reformation that had loosened
the older ties of community and received values. Rousseau in one way
and Kant in another had attempted to reintroduce a standard upon which
both a moral code and a political system could be built. This involved
a compromise, or at least a paradoxical approach to the question of
individual autonomy which, as we shall see, also faced Thoreau in the
transition from his days as a Transcendentalist to the period of the
Brown essays.

Kant's system turned the moral trick of establishing a standard
of behavior and providing the means of universalizing an act of moral
will through what he called the Categorical Imperative. Essentially
a restatement of the Golden Rule, Kant asserted an intuitive basis for
each person to measure morality by the degree to which his action might
be extended to a universal principle. Kant's ethical position resting on
intuitive forms innate in man appealed strongly to the American Tran-
scendentalists because it retained a strong flavor of individualism in a
free moral will that is both objective and general, yet capable of foster-
ing a deep sense of human community.

From Kant the anti-Utilitarian bias in Thoreau's idealism can be
traced. Moreover, Thoreau shared the Protestant temper of Kant
which holds duty rather than happiness to be the proper personal objec-
tive of the moral individual. To associate duty with the seemingly
unambitious and undisciplined Thoreau may seem malapropos, but not
when the definition of duty is carefully drawn. If duty is a subjective
obligation taken upon oneself to obey the moral dictates of his con-
science guided by rational maxims and intuition, then duty begets justice
and justice begets contentment. Using such a definition, happiness be-
comes associated with pleasure and as such is seen as sensual, transi-
tory, superficial, and a false objective for either individuals or for
governments. A close reading of A Week or Walden, both usually seen
as care-free accounts of a man enjoying nature, show that in Thoreau's
view an individual who pursues happiness in this sense as his objective
becomes gross and sensual, unable to sense the subtle whisperings of
the Oversoul because the channels of consciousness have been glutted
and numbed by a concern for the material rather than the ideal. Furth-
more, when a government seeks to ensure the happiness of its citizens
rather than to establish justice (justice would require one to earn his
own contentment), it is an audacious government, tyrannical and despotic.

As Kant wrote and Thoreau would have agreed:

No one has a right to compel me to be happy in the particu-
lar way in which he may think of well-being of other men; but
everyone is entitled to seek his own happiness in the way that
seems to him best, if it does not infringe on the liberty of others
in striving after a similar end for themselves when their Liberty
is incapable of consisting with the Right of Liberty in all others
according to possible universal laws.... Such a Government
would be the greatest conceivable despotism.
If happiness is a subjective condition that has little to do with the popular definition of happiness, Thoreau was equally insistent that duty is a subjective condition as well. What is ordinarily called duty by the state and other institutions he saw as nothing more than conventions as unsubstantial as the popular idea of happiness. The Kantian Categorical Imperative extends subjective duty to objective behavior toward others. It is an individualism skirting solipsism by a hair, rescued at the brink by duty and justice.

Kant retained a philosophic separation between science and morals, with the Emersonian Transcendentalists trudging along behind. This separation implied that since science knows only appearances, there is another method of knowing reality and that there is a reality beyond appearances. Thoreau was clearly in this tradition, expecting to find the higher truth by irrational or non-rational ways, by light of genius, by intuition, and in the will. Kant and Thoreau placed nature in the middle of this mystery, believing that there is a potentiality in nature that works to realize itself, that there is a moral progress which in the moral sphere works itself out through the mutual antagonisms among men.

The moral absolutism which was latent in the Categorical Imperative and in the intuitive method which sharply distinguished between the phenomenal world subject to reason and science and the world of the spirit subject to individual moral will struck a responsive chord in Thoreau. He had always felt the difference between understanding and
knowledge, a feeling which led him to prefer to study birds and animals whole and living rather than by dissection or as products of the taxidermist's art. This much of what Rousseau and Kant contributed to Transcendentalism, Thoreau accepted, and acted upon in his political conviction.

Thoreau stopped short of the political conclusions Kant drew, at least partly because he was not convinced that a desire to protect liberty is the reason for the existence of authority under the sanction of law. They did agree, however, that the development of human powers as such is the end of progress and that justice is the moral imperative to which subjective duty leads. Kant declared, "If justice perishes it is of no value any longer that men live on the earth," and hoped by such a statement to bolster the case for legitimate governmental authority through law. Thoreau demurred that the state is not the infallible arbiter of justice, but in fact is quite often the opposite. The rule of law is artificial, and although order might be the result of authority through law, justice is not always the result. "The law will never make men free; it is men who have got to make the law free."

In embracing the hero worship of John Brown and glorying in the violent purgation of those who stand in the way of the new moral revelation, Thoreau in effect renounced the implications of the Categorical Imperative. In the Brown essays, Thoreau seems to suggest that opponents of the inspired hero may be considered as means at the dis-
posal of evil, and therefore exempted from the requirement to treat all men as ends. If fact, the hero himself might be considered a means employed by the Oversoul, a tool of history and a cipher in the design being woven by the emerging immanent Absolute. While Kant believed in an aristocracy of ability, he never held that there is a qualitative difference among men, which is the root of Thoreau's theory of the hero. Thoreau rejected Kantian reverence for the authority of the state, but accepted an even more onerous and insistent absolutism which failed at the last to preserve the protections of the Categorial Imperative.

Nevertheless, the philosophical influence of Kant upon Thoreau was greater than that of other German Idealists. Others of the Transcendentalist circle were taken with the speculations of Fichte who had emphasized the social interconnections arising from the consciousness inherent in every free individual will, that each man's freedom is limited by the freedom of others. The socialists and associationists among American Transcendentalists followed this train of German Idealist thought, leaving Thoreau to brood over a more extreme position of individualism. Thoreau's individualism is reminiscent of Hobbes, but softened somewhat by Kantian ethics:

Absolutely speaking, Do unto others as you would that they do unto you is by no means a golden rule, but the best of current silver. An honest man would have but little occasion for it.... Even here we have a sort of living to get, and must buffet it somewhat longer. There are various tough problems yet to
solve, and we must make shift to live, betwixt spirit and matter, such a human life as we can.22

The ideas of Fichte and Hegel which were so prominent in the thinking of Transcendentalists such as James Freeman Clarke and some of the later Ohio Hegelians, had little direct importance for Thoreau, although there are those who contend that he was directly influenced by Hegel through his Germanophile friends and teachers at Harvard.23 This may have been the case, but it is equally plausible that he caught the same intellectual outlook from his readings of Oriental sacred texts which have a similarly fluid view of reality. Or, as Emerson seemed to believe, Thoreau's appreciation of reality as process may have stemmed from the Stoic view that the universe is impregnated with the primal fire, the spirit of the gods, which unfolds itself as time progresses.24 As for the Hegelian method, Thoreau could well have felt some affinity for the paradoxical progression of truth as it unfolds through the dialectic and have instinctively seen it as a release from the analytic distortions of a static model.

"Germanism" however, did have a significant impact upon Thoreau's ways of thinking, and especially upon his view of religion. His six weeks with Orestes Brownson had been a period of intensive study of German and the works of many of the German poets and thinkers such as Herder and Lessing. From study, Thoreau accepted the general proposition which they advanced that the succession of world religions is a progres-
sive revelation of religious truth. He agreed with them that creeds and religious forms were not wholly true or false, but symbols of the feeling of things divine which is the essence of religion, and in this sense contain validity. Thoreau's own developing religion of nature seemed a sufficiently comprehensive reflection of the universal divinity to spare him the religious seeking that drove so many of his generation from one denomination to another. A large number of these earnest persons, such as Isaac Hecker and Orestes Brownson, ended their quest in the Church of Rome, while Thoreau found the universal unity reflected in nature to be truly catholic. His toleration for the religious meanderings of his friends was an example of his acceptance of the kind of evolutionary thinking current in the period and which was appearing or would soon appear in the philosophy of Hegel, the biological theory of Darwin, and the social theories of Herbert Spencer.

Thoreau did not, however, develop the same attitude toward political matters. What a man believed about religion was a personal matter affecting only himself, and no matter what his creed or ceremony, it was likely to contain a partial reflection of the divine mystery in which truth resides. Politics on the other hand, affected social behavior, required the application of moral principles, and these, Thoreau believed, were of broader implication for mankind in that it was possible for political actions to do violence to a man's individual conscience. For
Thoreau, the ethical intuitions of his moral will were absolute and did not partake of the evolutionary character of religion which was only an historical or temporal phenomenon as opposed to the reality of universal moral principles. These were out of time and out of the realm of material expediency. Therefore, on these principles no compromise, no alternative policies were possible for they were eternal fixed forms. Politics, like religious ceremonies, could be ignored except where eternal verities were involved. As Thoreau put it,

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

It is clear that Thoreau, whom Emerson regarded as the ultimate protestant, went beyond the position that Luther finally took. Martin Luther had conceded that while one must follow God in matters of the spirit, in matters of outward expression, that is in political matters, one must follow the requirements of the state. Thoreau refused to make that concession since he was convinced that matters of conscience could not be neatly separated into those which are of the interior spiritual life and those which are matters of outward expression. He believed that one follows the dictates of conscience not only in his interior spiritual
life which is in any case beyond the touch of others, but in all actions
for which he is accountable to his conscience. This extended to the
pressures for social conformity and to the legal demands of the state.
Although in "Civil Disobedience" he went out of his way to make the
point that he sought "even an excuse for conforming to the laws of the
land," he concluded the essay by asserting that government "can have
no pure right over my person and property but what I concede to it." for
the individual of conscience is a "higher and independent power" from
which the state derives its own authority.

The religious and literary bent to the intellectual interests of
the American Transcendentalists accounts for the fact that the major
sources of their thought came through literature or through the controver­sial writings of the liberal theologians. It was Germany that pro­duced the earliest flowering of both romantic literature and the higher
criticism. Tieck, Heine, Schelling, Lessing, Herder, Novalis,
Wakenroder, and Goethe were the principal writers with whom the
American Transcendentalists were concerned, but none of them were
especially great influences on Thoreau. Although he could read German
and was impressed by Goethe, it was through their impact upon the
Transcendentalists of his acquaintance, such as Margaret Fuller,
Fredrick Hedge, and James Freeman Clarke that Thoreau indirectly
felt their influence.
However, it appears that the conversations and opinions of the men and women of his acquaintance did not count for much with Thoreau when compared with his reading of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and especially Carlyle, whose writings conveyed the German spirit to the English speaking world. The German mood was partly indigenous and partly acquired by the English Idealists. Wordsworth and Coleridge were in the romantic vein with their German counterparts. As were so many of the Idealists, Coleridge was a corporatist. He incorporated much of Burke's sentimentality and reverence for the growth of human institutions with the same limiting effect upon the independence of the individual personality from the culture of which it is a part. The mystical mood of corporatism was compatible with Transcendental thought, particularly since it allowed for a sharp distinction between society and government, and between culture and the state. There was lacking, however, in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and most of the German Idealists of the generation preceding and nearly contemporary with Emerson and Thoreau, the defiant self-sufficiency that was a hallmark of Thoreau's individualism.

There was a shared mood among the German and English Idealists, and the American Transcendentalists, but two distinct threads of thought persisted: the individualistic and the social-organic. The social-organic strain carried on through to liberal idealism as with Thomas
Hill Green and certain of the Fabians which included Thoreau's first comprehensive biographer, Henry S. Salt. But the individualistic strain was also present, and it is worth noting that with the English Idealists individualism acquired a strong flavor of will, irrationalism, and heroism.

Among the English Idealists, it was Emerson's great friend Thomas Carlyle for whom Thoreau developed the greatest enthusiasm. In his laudatory essay on "Thomas Carlyle and His Works" written relatively early in the careers of both men, Thoreau made clear his admiration for the Edinburgh reviewer who spoke so forcefully for idealism in the romantic mood.

...Carlyle alone, since the death of Coleridge, has kept the promise of England. It is the best apology for all the bustle and the sin of commerce, that it has made us acquainted with the thoughts of this man.... New England owes him a debt which she will be slow to recognise.

Thoreau, who liked to fantasize about the ancient Scandanavian warriors and to link his own surname to the Viking god, Thor, responded to Carlyle's assertion of the creative role of the hero in the course of human affairs. For him, the genius and the hero were nearly synonymous terms, and he declared Carlyle "to have what is called genius." Although he recognized Carlyle's heroic representations as exaggerations to underscore the main point that individual moral will is a potent force to which reverence is due, exaggeration was a technique he understood and did not feel to diminish the essential truth. Thoreau agreed
that there are periodic appearances of the heroic type in humanity, individuals whose deeds and moral perceptions elevate them above the common crowd and whose examples provide a new standard for the measurement of human potential; such men are themselves exaggerations. "To a small man every greater is an exaggeration. He who cannot exaggerate is not qualified to utter truth." 32

Thoreau disputed those who suggested that Carlyle's works were German transpositions, or that an appreciation of a heroic example or of the Transcendental world-view is an exclusively German trait. He argued that "no writer is more thoroughly Saxon.... and if you would know where many of those obnoxious carlyleisms and Germanisms came from, read the best of Milton's prose, read those speeches of Cromwell which he has brought to light, or go and listen once more to your mother's tongue. So much for his German extraction." 33

Thoreau's Puritan heritage had obviously left him with a sympathy for and an intuitive understanding of the leaders of the Puritan Revolution whom he regarded as examples of the heroic type. It is worth noting that Carlyle was still a Calvinist in the Scottish tradition. Although both were at pains to disassociate themselves from the superstitions and abuses of organized religion and were witheringly critical of Christianity, their stern moral outlook was as stiff as any Puritan. And, the religious aura was part of the viewpoint of both men, Thoreau finding an object
in the worship of nature and Carlyle in a peevish reformism. Usually hostile toward reformers, Thoreau made an exception for Carlyle, remarking:

In him the universal plaint is most settled, unappeasable, and serious. Until a thousand named and nameless grievances are righted, there will be no repose for him in the lap of nature, or the seclusion of science and literature. 34

He applauded Carlyle's uncompromising insistence upon honesty and genuineness in individuals and in general social relations, which Thoreau took to be a mark of moral rectitude. As Emerson put it, Carlyle's "genius is his moral sense, his perception of the sole importance of truth and justice; but that is a truth of character, not of catechisms." 35

Carlyle was a translator and admirer of Goethe, but like Thoreau, he had little admiration for the sentimentality which often characterized Idealism in both its literary and philosophical guises. Their integrity required a recognition of quality differences in persons, relations, and occurrences that could not be blurred in a wave of sentimental good feeling. A stern recognition of quality differences among persons paradoxically served at once to strengthen their individualism and to deny egalitarianism. It was therefore possible for Thoreau to damn slavery as a crime against humanity while viewing the mass of men as morally inferior beings, just as it was for Carlyle to urge reforms in the oppressive capitalist-industrial system because it degrades workers
while praising Czar Nicholas for maintaining an iron hold on his autocratic throne during the revolutionary sweep of 1848.

With Carlyle, Thoreau accepted war and violence as hallmarks of the heroic type. Throughout his works Thoreau used the military metaphor in reference to the heroic life, which is to say, the good life. The most obvious example is "The Service", Thoreau's little sermonette on the necessity for valor and courage to sustain the integrity of one's moral character, in which he stated that "men have made war from a deeper instinct than peace." In a letter to his English friend, Thomas Cholmondeley, who was a volunteer for service in the Crimean War, he observed that perhaps "more true virtue is being practiced at Sevastopol than in many years of peace," for while it may be cause for some regret, "we seem to require a war, from time to time, to assure us that there is any manhood still left in man."  

The hero, however, was not necessarily a man of physical violence or a warrior, in Thoreau's opinion. One of his few criticisms of Carlyle centered on "the peacefully practical hero, whom Columbus may represent" whom Carlyle had slighted in discussing the heroic type. Lest there be any doubt about the social sympathies of Thoreau or of his conviction that heroism is compatible with humble worldly condition, he went on to point out that Carlyle overlooked "the Man of the Age, come to be called workingman," as a heroic type and that as yet no one had learned to speak to the condition of the workingman.
Carlyle seemed to have an almost Hegelian notion that might approximates right over the long period of history, and that the heroic will by military force brings into historical being a higher level of morality. Thoreau's heroism was the converse: right makes might, and the hero whose moral perceptions introduce a new moral vision in the world is invincible whether militarily victorious or not. As a matter of tactics, he seems to suggest in "A Plea for Captain John Brown" that martyrdom is more effective—mighty—than military success. The two were completely in agreement, however, in their spirit of affirmation and solid conviction that, as Carlyle put it in Heroes and Hero-Worship, the end of Man is an Action.

One wonders if Thoreau's admiration for Carlyle would have extended to other specific points as strongly as for heroism. Of course, Thoreau's own position on vegetarianism, capital punishment, free trade and nationalism were not shared by Carlyle. Carlyle's anti-democratic biases were more clearly stated than Thoreau's, but both had a powerful contempt for majoritarian voting and other mechanical trappings of democracy. Their preference was for the leadership of an upright man, a true leader who will guide the way to truth. They believed in a natural aristocracy, men of moral merit, who are the appropriate leaders of mankind and who lead the way to justice and righteousness rather than follow the opinions of the majority.
The same anti-majoritarian bias which led both Carlyle and Thoreau to reject the assumptions of democracy led them to be contemptuous of the press or other unlimited free exchange of ideas. Since ideas were not seen as having equal moral weight, they saw the proper function of the press as the medium for presenting good ideas, not as an impartial forum for bad as well as good.

Although both found something exhilarating in martial exercise, they found inexcusable the trained stupidity of soldiers who will march anywhere and shoot anything so ordered. As stated in "Civil Disobedience" Thoreau would have expected a soldier of conscience to refuse an order which violated his sense of right, but despite Carlyle's fine words one suspects he would expect a soldier to follow the hero wherever he is led. Where Thoreau relied upon the of moral example, Carlyle seemed to believe in the force of cannon. After John Brown, Thoreau was more understanding of this viewpoint, but still believed that the moral action is of greater importance than the question of its immediate success.

One fascinating question for which there is no clue of an answer in Thoreau's writing is how he felt about Carlyle's support of the Confederacy in the American War Between the States. In fact, Thoreau's own views about that conflict are unclear. According to Moncure Conway, Thoreau was in sympathy with the "Disunionists" in 1854 over the fugitive slave question, but Bronson Alcott's Journal indicates Thoreau
had considerable feeling for the Federal cause after the outbreak of hostilities.  

Nonetheless, a strong belief in individual will unites the two men in a bond that is greater than the many differences of opinion which may have existed on specific issues. Carlyle's illiberal leanings were for all the world to see; Thoreau's were not so clearly stated, and perhaps are not so obvious.

Without leading any causes, Carlyle represented reformism in the very best sense, a man whose influence could be expected to hasten the crisis of affairs in England. Toward the end of his essay on Carlyle, Thoreau accepted for his own the intellectual antecedents of Emerson and Carlyle by stating that the men whom they admired, when joined together, make an approximation of the ideal man.

Carlyle, and our countryman Emerson, whose place and influence must ere long obtain a more distinct recognition, are, to a certain extent, the complement of each other.... The one has more sympathy with the heroes, or practical reformers, the other with the observers or philosophers. Put their worthies together, and you will have a pretty fair representation of mankind....

Thus, it is again Ralph Waldo Emerson who must be re-emphasized as having had a decisive influence upon Thoreau. And here there is little question but that the philosophy of Germany was influential upon the Transcendental movement initiated by Emerson. There is no doubt that Byron, Shelly, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and other English romanticists left an imprint on Transcendentalism. The sacred literature of the Orient
was a favorite with the Transcendentalists, especially Emerson and Thoreau, and was highly valued for its mysticism. However, it was neo-Platonism which shaped the fundamental quality of Emerson's thought.

The modern view of Plato and Platonism stems from scholarship based upon the volumes of Jewett's translation which appeared in 1871, too late to be influential in Emerson's intellectual development. The translations of Thomas Taylor which were published in 1793 and 1804 presented the view of Plato with which Emerson was familiar. Taylor's translation presented an interpretation of Platonism which was colored by doctrines introduced in the final stages of Hellenistic speculation by the neo-Platonists, Plotinus and Proclus. John S. Harrison has presented a convincing analysis of Emerson's work as essentially neo-Platonic. His view of nature which is presented in his little book of the same name, and which so profoundly influenced Thoreau, is largely a restatement of the neo-Platonic conception.

But Thoreau was himself an adept Greek scholar, the best in Concord save Mrs. Ripley, and could take directly from the original Greek the ideas which Emerson received second hand. The Platonic and Pythagorian elements in Thoreau, then, were most probably the result of his own scholarship, although his basic agreement with the Emersonian way of viewing things could easily have prepared his mind to receive
large doses of Platonism. The same observation may be made of the
Oriental scriptures which were so well loved by Emerson and Thoreau.
Before leaving Harvard, Thoreau had read several of the Eastern sacred
books in French and German editions. He continued to study them, con­
tributing several of his translations to The Dial, the short-lived Trans­
cendental journal. After Thomas Cholmondeley presented him with a
set of Oriental scriptures which rivaled the holdings of any library in
America, Thoreau's interest in and knowledge of the Eastern sacred
texts was unmatched by any of the Transcendental circle. It was he who
transmitted Oriental mysticism to his Transcendental friends, even though
Emerson, being fourteen years the elder, had begun to read Oriental
literature earlier.

What Thoreau absorbed of Eastern mysticism and Platonic idealism,
he managed to acquire by his own reading and not by blind inheritance
from Emerson. It was because of a common bent of mind that Emerson
and Thoreau shared an enthusiasm for the Eastern scriptures and for the
Platonists. It was Thoreau, however, who was far the better read in
the Greek and Oriental writers and who was in a position to form his own
impressions directly from the written sources. The Hindu writings in
particular appealed to him for their allegorical approach to the universal
problems seemed expansive enough to hold a part of truth better than the
logical approach of Western writers. Thoreau felt that "the New Testa-
ment is remarkable for its pure morality; the best of the Hindu Scrip-
ture, for its pure intellectuality. The reader is nowhere raised into
and sustained in a higher, purer, or rarer region of thought than in the
Bhagvat-Geeta. Thoreau preferred the reflective spirit of the
Eastern sages to the repentive mood of Western moral thought. It was
the greater range of possibilities admitted by the mystical approach
which attracted Thoreau.

Behold the difference between the Oriental and the Occidental....
There is such a thing as caste, even in the West; but it is com-
paratively faint; it is conservatism here. It says, forsake not
your calling, outrage no institution, use no violence, rend no
bonds; the State is thy parent. Its virtue or manhood is wholly
filial. There is a struggle between the Oriental and Occidental
in every nation; some who would be forever contemplating the
sun, and some who are hastening toward the sunset.

Thoreau cast his lot with the Oriental sun gazers.

The early shaping of Thoreau's interests toward Greek and Roman
themes was a consequence of the type of education which Henry David
and his brother received at their mother's insistence. The classical
education which was the staple of all academies in New England, but
particularly the one run by Phineas Allen in Concord, had a predilection
for the antiquities of Western literatures. Greek and Latin were hardly
foreign languages to most young scholars who intended to prepare for col-
lege. The Greek influence on Thoreau is hardly surprising, nor is an
appreciation of the heroic in human nature after the Roman style.

Emerson insisted upon characterizing Thoreau as a Stoic, although
Thoreau might more accurately be paired with Diogenes the Cynic than with Marcus Aurelius. Thoreau personified the Socratic ideal of individual self-sufficiency which the Cynics had adopted as their philosophic base. Thoreau was at one with Diogenes in believing that everything except moral character is a matter of indifference. Individual cultivation of one's character took precedence over all the pieties and conventions of civilized life for Thoreau as for the Cynics. Thus, one of the occasional figures in Thoreau's writings is the hermit who lived in a hollow tree, rumored to have been an actual personage in Concord history, but who had assumed mythological status by Thoreau's time. This was used as a literary symbol of the withdrawal or passivism which Thoreau carried into practice in the Walden experiment. It is also perfectly consistent with the subjectivism and negativism of the Old Cynics.

Thoreau's social conscience, which was acute, did not lead him to active reform efforts until at the very end of his life. Up until the John Brown episode, Thoreau preferred to withdraw into himself practicing the dictum of Kant and Goethe to do that duty which lay nearest him. He demonstrated his preference for this approach in his continued support of Nathaniel P. Rogers against the more activist strain of abolitionism, in his refusal to vote, in his efforts toward achieving a sensible personal economy.
The Cynic characterization is also consistent with Thoreau's Carlylian admiration for the hero, whom he preferred to call the Genius. With the Cynics, Thoreau felt that most men regardless of social position are fools and that the good life is only for the wise man. The good life is an internal one, he thought, rich in the furniture of one's own mind, not an external life dependent upon material goods or physical pleasures. The wise man is he who achieves moral self-sufficiency; for his institutions and conventions are artificial for his virtue provides his standard of law. The wise man is at home in himself, in his virtue and wisdom against which the state and its law have no power. With the parable of the Artist of Kouroo, Thoreau makes the point that by following one's genius, even though it involves only the whittling of a walking stick, one does that duty which lies nearest and by the very process of fulfilling one's internal necessity, time and the material world become inconsequential.

A list of quotations could easily be taken from Walden alone to demonstrate the points being made. With the Cynic's distaste for social distinctions Thoreau says, "It is an interesting question how far men would retain their relative rank if they were divested of their clothes." On the political independence of the wise man he wrote: "A simple and independent mind does not toil at the bidding of any prince. Genius is not a retainer to any emperor...." The negative and ascetic element in Cynicism is present in Thoreau: "Chastity is the flowering of man;
and what are called Genius, Heroism, Holiness, and the like are but various fruits which succeed it.\textsuperscript{51} The following two quotations illustrate his belief in the subjective nature of the quest for realizing one's potential: "... if there were bestowed upon us the wealth of Croesus, our aims must still be the same, and our means essentially the same."\textsuperscript{52} And, "... if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unsuspected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness."\textsuperscript{53} As for the secondary place of reform to personal perfection, "I sometimes wonder that we can be so frivolous to attend to the gross but somewhat foreign form of servitude called Negro Slavery, there are so many keen and subtle masters that enslave both North and South. It is hard to have a Southern overseer; it is worse to have a Northern one; but worst of all when you are a slave-driver yourself."\textsuperscript{54} Pointing out the power of individual moral will, and the function of the wise man: "The virtues of a superior man are like the wind; the virtues of a common man are like the grass; the grass, when the wind passes
over it, bends. These examples could be extended almost without limit if one looked beyond *Walden*. Throughout his life, until John Brown brought him into flaming activity, Thoreau had more in common with the negative aspects of the Cynics than with the more positive, and therefore, socially constructive emphasis of Stoicism. Thoreau and the Cynics shared a primitivism, a wish for the return to nature that came close to nihilism, and a rejection of civic and social ties, and of all restrictions, except those which stem from the wise man's sense of duty.

There are also, of course, Stoic elements to be found in Thoreau, and Emerson was not wholly wrong in pointing to these more constructive aspects of his thinking and behavior. As Stoicism arose from the earlier Cynic thought, so Thoreau in his development moved from the passivism of his youth and middle years toward a participation in political affairs which implied a broader social concern. The self-sufficiency of the individual was also a Stoic ideal, and Stoicism also had occasion to see withdrawal as the part of wisdom. However, the dominant theme of Stoic teaching was the duty of man to perform as well as he is able in the station where fate has cast him and to be faithful to the integrity of his personhood. The oneness and perfection of nature reflecting a true moral order was a central contention of the Stoics which supposed a moral fitness between man and the rest of nature. The soul of man contains a spark of the divine fire which animates the world; this the
Stoics and Thoreau believed absolutely. Man partakes of an instinct which gives a sense of the right and convinces him of the value of social arrangements which further moral purposes. This "right reason" upon which natural law was constructed is one and the same with the "innate ideas" of the pre-Lockean philosophers, and the "sense of things divine" of the Protestant reformers, the "General Will" of Rousseau, and the transcendent "Categorical Imperative" of Kant.

These intimations of the divine in man, Thoreau thoroughly accepted.

What Thoreau did not accept in Stoicism were the political implications. Believing in a transcendant law to which the instincts of nature in man conform, Thoreau was unable to accept with passive resignation the customs and conventions which violate those instincts but which are enacted as law by political entities. Accepting one's fate and performing in his condition nobly did not imply for Thoreau that one must submit to any requirement of law or convention that is contrary to the dictates of the "Higher Laws". The displacement of human and transcendent law was such that Thoreau believed any congruence between them was merely coincidental, and what one must accept is the obligation of his moral vision rather than the duties of his political and social station.

Where Thoreau parted company with the Stoics is on the question of reason, which they took to be the principle by which man achieves a sense of unity between himself and the natural moral order; for Thoreau,
it was instinct which performs this function. The implications of this distinction kept Thoreau in an individualistic frame of reference that cut him off from the duty of social and political cooperation which the Stoics found in "right reason". As he said, "Go where he will, the wise man is proprietor of all things. Everything bears a similar inscription, if we could but read it, to that on the vase found in the stomach of a fish in old times, — 'To the most wise'." For Thoreau, the wise man is a man of right feeling, not right reason.

Individualism, whether in the Idealist tradition which we have been discussing or in other modes, has had a connection with irrationalism in Europe and America throughout the Nineteenth Century, particularly in certain literary and artistic circles. It flourished on a mood of dissatisfaction and maladjustment which is often characteristic of the artistic temperament, especially in industrialized societies where utility provides the universal standard of worth in both human and social terms. Thoreau was typical of the artist, his interest in natural history notwithstanding, who found life too complex and miraculous to be reduced to formulations of science and intellectual analysis. To him there are indescribable mysterious forces within nature, or perhaps behind nature, which remain opaque to intelligence and beyond the capacity of the scientific method to understand. Against cold rationalism the artistic temper often turns to other methods of understanding and standards for action.
The insight of genius, the inarticulate wisdom of instinct, and the creative assertion of will are the alternatives to reason that are available to those whose individualism requires that action be self-justifying, and whose concern is with creativity rather than analysis, the ideal rather than the apparent, the process rather than the product. Thus, individualism can be stretched to heroism, and heroism relies heavily upon the irrationalist perspective and requires an unconventional standard by which individual actions are judged.

Like Nietzsche later in the Nineteenth Century, Thoreau was arguing for truth referred to a new standard, a transvaluation of values. Thoreau's writings are full of fulminations against the conventional pieties of pity, charity, and sympathy. The utilitarian and humanitarian values of the bourgeoisie were viewed as hypocrisy or philistinism. Much of Thoreau's writings, especially "The Service" and to a lesser extent the essays on John Brown are Nietzschean in their pessimistic contempt for comfort, and their resignation to the destruction of the natural aristocrat by commonplace minds which recognize the superiority of his moral will only after his disappearance. As did Nietzsche, Thoreau sought to affirm the irrational will morally as well as justify it intellectually. In place of herd-like equality they welcomed recognition of innate superiority; in place of majoritarian rule, the aristocracy of the morally virile and strongly principled; in place of hypocritical
humility and pity as the basis of moral action, the hard justice of nature and animalistic pagan pride. However, Nietzsche at bottom was nihilistic, with only a difference of emphasis saving him from the complete pessimism of Schopenhauer. Thoreau was more triumphantly affirmative—and his thought more politically potent—because his idealism, which was not shared by Nietzsche, included a teleology, an Absolute of which the values of the hero are a reflection.

Thoreau's vitalism was perhaps more comparable among somewhat later thinkers to the intuitionism of Henry Bergson than to Nietzsche. The limitations of science provided a constant theme for Thoreau even while collecting botanical specimens and making minute observations of natural phenomena after the best scientific method of the day. He saw utility rather than the attainment of truth as the product of science; Thoreau equated utility with temporal values and expedience, that are seldom if ever congruent with transcendent values that are spiritual in essence as well as material in appearance. Thoreau, like Bergson, believed that only intuition—the gleanings of a cultivated consciousness—can directly apprehend nature as it is, an indefinable, creative, living force. Thoreau assumed what Bergson later stated coherently: that the human mind originally is endowed with intuitive capacity, but that it atrophies by over dependence upon intelligence. Thoreau consistently strove to keep his intuitive channels open through ascetic abstinences.
and communion with nature, but apparently came to believe that in some persons the intuitive ability has completely atrophied or perhaps was deficient in their constitutions.

Thoreau's individualism was extreme, as was that of Carlyle, Nietzsche, and Bergson. Logically, anarchism is a further extension of individualism with some additional assumptions about man as a social animal. It is anarchism that claims Thoreau in the modern mind, and therefore, a discussion of anarchist thought as represented by selected anarchist thinkers is included in this discussion of his intellectual affinities although Thoreau himself is not presented as an anarchist in this study. 60

One of the notable features of much anarchism, particularly communistic anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, and the native American anarchism of Thoreau's time is its materialism and concern for immediate economic reform as the basis for social reform. Although he clearly recognized some economic injustices, Thoreau's mysticism led him to be much less concerned with the economic abuses of the state than with the effects of governmental coercion upon individual psychological and moral sensitivities. His acceptance of economic reaction such as boycott of newspapers, goods produced by slave labor and products of iniquitous governments, was justified on the ground that by such means an individual keeps his own moral integrity and places the whole weight
of his influence—words, goods, and deeds—on the side of justice.

For the same reason, he urged the resignation of persons holding government positions when duty conflicts with conscience, and the non-payment of taxes when the objects of expenditure violate conscience. In Thoreau's view, justice is central because it alone provides the environment in which an individual can achieve his own moral development. The fact that conditions in other lives might be ameliorated is only a secondary effect.

So far as Thoreau was concerned for other people, and there is evidence that he had a compassionate nature as well as a stern sense of justice, it was for the interior state of their souls more than for the physical deprivations of poverty. As will be shown later, Thoreau's special contribution was a re-examination and a redefinition of the meaning of wealth. He thought poverty to be a false issue as generally stated, particularly in the agricultural and village based life that he believed to be best for mankind. He felt that true poverty is a condition of the soul; it is found where individuals have no feeling of worth or control of their person. It is most often found in cities where people are crowded on top of one another and where they have little exposure to the refreshing, recreative influences of nature. The industrial wage system can create the conditions of poverty by crowding people together in cities, despoiling nature, and convincing people that they will starve
without the pittance paid for long hours of drudgery. The agricultural slave system of his time was capable of producing conditions for poverty of an even more desperate kind for it deprived the slave of selfhood and made the slave owner—and all those who observe without interfering—so morally calloused that all chance of achieving full human consciousness vanished.

Effective reform in Thoreau's view, at least prior to the John Brown incident, is a personal reform of the kind that one accomplishes in his chamber before dropping himself into the street in the morning. The tinkering with monetary systems and property systems advocated by many anarchists, and especially those who were active in America during Thoreau's lifetime, were off the point because they address symptoms rather than causes. For Thoreau, it was not money, property, capital accumulation, any form of government, or the state itself that was the central issue, but the moral quality of individuals who compose all institutions and who employ tools of trade, agriculture, and social service. Thoreau declared that "unlike no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government."61

Another reason why Thoreau may not be considered as conforming to an extreme anarchism is that he did not hold a firm belief in the perfectability of mankind. One of the fundamental assumptions of anarchism in most of its forms is that people are by nature good, if not every indi-
individual, at least the preponderant mass of men are sufficiently good to manage their affairs without government. The essentially good nature of man leading him to act upon enlightened self-interest to achieve both individual fulfillment and social duty is not a feature of Thoreau's final thought. While Thoreau did defend Brown's direct action, which was also admired by the French anarchist-communist Joseph Déjacque, the Brown essays do not read as anarchist papers. His perception of natural man was that he is capable of both good and evil and that only by diligent cultivation of consciousness does one identify the good through communion with the Oversoul. The good, therefore, is Thoreau's standard of behavior for all men; those of acute moral perception will perceive it is their duty, and those of less sensitive natures are no less bound by the duty for not perceiving the good. Such a view presupposes that the latter must be held to their duty through some system. It follows that systems and institutions, including government, being composed of men, ought to be controlled by only the best of men so as to insure that the standards of justice are the expected behaviors of all.

Thoreau does have some affinities with certain European anarchists, nonetheless. As Vernon Parrington noted, there is little in "Civil Disobedience" that is not to be found in William Godwin's Political Justice. "Civil Disobedience" was not Thoreau's final word on the subject of indi-
vidual relations with government, however. Godwin's sweet reason-
ableness is of the same tone as Thoreau's eagerness to seek "even an 
excuse for conforming to the laws of the land." At that time his 
optimism about the ultimately good intentions of the state and the inevi-
tability of moral progress led him to write:

I believe that the State will soon be able to take all my work of 
this sort [weighing the effects of government against transcendent 
justice] out of my hands, and then I shall be no better patriot 
than my fellow-countrymen.

There is a strain of utopianism in "Civil Disobedience" which seems to 
recognize Godwin's contention that political institutions mould the minds 
of citizens and that government "insinuates itself into our personal dis-
positions, and insensibly communicates its own spirit to our private 
transactions." But it also seems to reject Godwin's belief that govern-
ment, regardless of how reformed it may be, is incapable of affording 
solid benefit to mankind. The utopian hope of "Civil Disobedience" con-
cludes the essay in eloquent language:

Is a democracy, such as we know it, the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recognizing and organizing the rights of man? ... I please myself with imagining a State at last which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor; which even would not think it inconsistent with its own repose if a few were to live aloof from it, not meddling with it, nor embraced by it, who fulfilled all the duties of neighbors and fellow-men. A state which bore this kind of fruit, and suffered it to drop off as fast as it ripened, would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State, which also I have imagined, but not yet anywhere seen.
This relatively mild essay was followed by the more extreme "Slavery in Massachusetts" which urged personal secession from the state, boycott, strike, and unlimited violence: "... I need not say what match I would touch, what system endeavor to blow up; but as I love my life, I would side with the light, and let the dark earth roll from under me ...." Godwin's humanism and belief in a rational science of politics is not touched with the unreasoning violence of Thoreau's mood. Godwin was a believer in many reforms, but not revolution. He remained true to Thoreau's earlier belief, nearly abandoned by the time the above lines were written, that the truth is the legitimate instrument of reform, that wise men are free men. Thoreau's final embrace of John Brown, whose heroic leadership seems to have been a fore-shadowing of that "still more perfect and glorious State" which he imagined in "Civil Disobedience", is an example of the fanaticism which Godwin saw as the most intolerable tyranny of all. Godwin was as afraid of unreasoning dogmatism as of unlimited government. Both Godwin and Thoreau rejected majoritarian democratic assumptions and were agreed that the work of the world is accomplished by individuals. Further, both made telling arguments that governments as presently constituted are always conservative influences pitted against the newer values of a moving civilization. Thoreau, however, was at last found in the emotional, absolutist tradition of Jean Jacques Rousseau while Godwin
remained in the rational, liberal tradition of John Locke, and that made all the difference.

Max Stirner was roughly Thoreau's contemporary, and was even more extreme in his individualism than the Concord eccentric. Thoreau favored a great many cooperative ventures so long as they were voluntary and non-coercive. For Stirner, however, the spirit of cooperation has no purpose to serve except for the benefit of the ego. Stirner's concern was for the transitory age, and while Thoreau also sought to live on the crest of time in the very moment, his perspective was eternal rather than temporal. The absolute good is beyond and above the individual for Thoreau; while only the individual will can know the good, its existence surpasses the individual. Stirner's view of such mystic idealism is stuff and nonsense. As he wrote in *The Ego and His Own*:

> What! am I in the world to realize ideas? To do my part by my citizenship, say, towards the realization of the idea "State," or by marriage, as husband and father, to bring the idea of the family into existence? What does such a calling concern me! I live after a calling as little as the flower grows and gives fragrance after a calling. 71

In Stirner's view, the individual will is the good. This is not the same cloth as Transcendental individualism which always held to a divine immanence suffusing the whole of nature, including individual men. Transcendentalism, even Thoreau's version of it, never cut the individual adrift with no point of relation except his own will to power.
Thoreau tenaciously held to a Platonic Idealism finally culminating in his adulation of the heroic wise man, John Brown.

Although Stirner and Thoreau were not in metaphysical agreement, they expressed their ideas in strikingly similar ways. The following passage from *The Ego and His Own* states in bolder language ideas that can be found in *Walden* and *A Week*.

I am free from what I am rid of—owner of what I have in my power or what I control. My own I am at all times and under all circumstances, if I know how to have myself and do not throw myself away on others.... Because in society the most oppressive evils make themselves felt, therefore the oppressed especially, and consequently the members in the lower regions of society, think they find the fault in society, and make it their task to discover the right society. This is only the old phenomenon—that one looks for the fault first in everything but himself.  

While Thoreau could have written these very words, he still believed that man exists to bring to actuality the idea of the good and to achieve the full potentiality of self-hood, which is itself an ideal form. In the main, however, Stirner and Thoreau share similar tempers and agree on many essential points. The primary of the self is the touchstone of life for both men. They saw man as wholly responsible for himself endowed with the power to correct the conditions of his life by force of will.

The anarchism of Europe was given much of its literature by Russian noblemen, Count Michael Alexandrovich Bakunin, Prince Peter Kropotkin, and Count Leo Tolstoy. With the first two Thoreau had
relatively little in common, but somewhat more with the third.

Bakunin's life span, 1814-1876, made him almost an exact
contemporary of Henry Thoreau. However, he was opposed to the sort
of idealism to which Thoreau was committed. In his God and the State,
he condemned even the rule of upright men.

... that is, a tutelage officially and regularly established by
a minority of competent men, men of virtuous genius or
talent, who will watch and guide the conduct of this great,
incorrigible, and terrible child, the people.... Of all des-
potisms that of the doctrinaires or inspired religionists is
the worst. They are so jealous of the glory of their God
and the triumph of their idea that they have no heart left for
the liberty or the dignity, or even the suffering of living men,
of real men....

This presents the counter argument to Thoreau's Brown essays.
It makes a point which it is difficult for Thoreau's apologists to turn
aside.

Kropotkin, too, took a materialistic and collectivist approach to
political problems, his main concern being to prepare everyone to con-
tribute to and receive his just share from the production of material
goods. Outlined in several works but especially Fields, Factories and
Workshops published in 1898, Kropotkin's mutualism and communism
have little in common with the individualistic emphasis of Thoreau,
even when writing about the possibilities inherent in villages of noble
men, an enthusiasm Thoreau shared.

Count Leo Tolstoy, a longer lived contemporary (1828-1910), on
the other hand did offer a type of anarchist thought more similar to
Thoreau's position than the voluntarism and acceptance of violence which the works of Bakunin, Kropotkin and Thoreau shared. Being a mystic dedicated to the simple rural life immediately associates Tolstoy with Thoreau. Nearly alone among the Europeans he went beyond materialism in embracing the anarchical principle. There are important differences, however, which clearly separate the two men's points of view. Tolstoy's primitive Christian communism was exactly the sort of cooperative sentimentalism which Thoreau denounced saying he would rather keep bachelor's hall in hell than go to board in such a collectivist community.

Thoreau's denunciation of the Mexican War and general distrust of the military state was less inclusive than Tolstoy's complete renunciation of war, for he recognized a difference in the moral quality of some wars and some violence, arguing that it is the motivation rather than the consequences of violence that are significant. Thoreau had praised violence as having a purifying effect, referring to Brown's crusade as "the best news that America has ever heard ... [it has] quickened the feeble pulse of the North ... infused more and more generous blood into her veins ... many a man who was lately contemplating suicide has now something to live for." Thoreau even made oblique calls for armed insurrection in the case of the Fugitive Slave Law and in the case of John Brown.
There was more agreement between Thoreau and Tolstoy on the issue of non-payment of taxes for ends of which they did not approve than on the iniquity of war. Tolstoy's *What Must We Do Then?* and his *Ancien Regime* are even more inclusive in their denunciation of government as taxgathering than Thoreau's essays. Thoreau was not vehement against the state *per se*, so much as against the ends to which government was being used. The call to anarchy, so far as it may fairly be said to have been made by Thoreau, is only for the period of time when the state fails to establish justice in the land: "Let each inhabitant of the State dissolve his union with her, as long as she delays to do her duty." For Tolstoy, the state seems to have had no legitimate duty nor any helpful function to perform.

Tolstoy was very nearly anti-culture in his insistence that all art and science be placed wholly in the service of the mass of men. Thoreau's concept of art was decidedly Greek, and full of appreciation for the aesthetics which surpass common understanding and speak to the single soul. Art, science, labor, any worthwhile endeavor is its own reward to the creator, in Thoreau's view. The great gulf of communism with its assumptions about the primacy of the group separates Tolstoy from Thoreau and renders them incompatible with one another. Tolstoy the primitive Christian communist was interested first in happiness; Thoreau the Puritan individualist was interested first in justice.
Anarchism in Europe developed under far different circumstances than were to be found in America, particularly in New England. It is not surprising that the whole temper of anarchist thought in the America of Thoreau's time had little more than superficial similarities with the European variety. As Eunice Schuster makes clear, the monetary and credit gimmickery of Proudhon is closer to the American anarchists than other European varieties of anarchism.\textsuperscript{82}

Civil disobedience is in the revolutionary tradition of America. In itself, it is not inherently anarchist, for it is as consistent with the idea of the state as it is with the right of revolution.\textsuperscript{83} The history of revolutions in Europe was considerably different than in the United States where the Federal system was still a reality insulating individual citizens from the national government and from the governmental policies of other States. Individual disagreement with governmental policies had neither the significance nor the consequences that civil disobedience was likely to generate in a unitary European government. This explains a great deal of the difference in tenor between European anarchists who were forced to renounce the state as wholly corrupt, and the American individualists and anarchists who could find an accommodation with their government, at least for the expression of their ideas. Civil disobedience, therefore, in an American setting is not necessarily synonymous with anarchism, although it can be used as a tool of anarchism.
Anarchism in America did not become a factor of any great
importance until after Thoreau's death, and then as only a passing
phase of the larger movement for the rights of labor. Such expressions
of anarchism as appeared in the United States prior to the War Between
the States were relatively insignificant. Interestingly enough, as a
group American anarchists were New Englanders, and nearly all from
Thoreau's home state of Massachusetts. The names of Stephen Pearl
Andrews, William B. Greene, Ezra Heywood, Joshua K. Ingalls, John
Humphrey Noyes, Lysander Spooner, Benjamin Tucker and Josiah
Warren are obscure except to specialists, and have little significance
for contemporary American political thought. They do, however, pro-
vide a contrasting background which helps to place Henry David Thoreau
in perspective against those in America who were more truly anarchists.

The Abolition Movement provided a common point of departure for
many kinds of reformers until the issue had been removed by war. The
method of attacking slavery caused some divisions among those who
were otherwise united in their objection to the Constitutional and statutory
protections of the peculiar institution. They were agreed in their dis-
taste for the Federal government, but one group insisted that only moral
suasion and non-resistance was the legitimate course of opposition, while
another strongly believed in direct political action. Thoreau found him-
self in the first group during the greater part of his life. Increasingly
he became more aggressive in asserting his abolitionist feelings until
by the time he had embraced the direct action of John Brown's violence he was clearly in the activist camp. There seems never a time, however, when he approved of voting or other political action to resolve the difficulties created by slavery. He either ignored the political aspects of the problem by withdrawing into aesthetics or, as in his last days, was an advocate of direct action.

One of those who took a non-resistance stand was John Humphrey Noyes (1811-1886). He reached an anti-statist position by an extreme interpretation of Protestant individualism, which he expressed in his monthly publication, The Perfectionist, founded in 1834 and from which the Perfectionist movement took its name. As the name of his movement suggests, Noyes was persuaded that he had attained a state of sinlessness that made government unnecessary for the regulation of his behavior, and that such a condition is attainable by other Christians. His argument against the state was a simple one: he and other Christians of his persuasion were perfect in God’s sight and therefore, the law, government, and all earthly authority had no claim upon him or others who had achieved perfection. Because the law and government were manifestly imperfect, it is the duty of perfectionists to withdraw from participation in the government of the United States.

Following these principles he organized a society of Bible Communists at Putney, Vermont, where he taught among his other doctrines
free sexual love within the membership of the community. After being arrested on charges of adultery, he broke bail and in 1848 resettled his Bible Communists in Central New York as the Oneida Community. It was one of the few economically successful American utopian communities. Eventually Noyes emigrated to Canada in order to escape legal prosecution in the United States.

Noyes was not one of the passive non-resistants, at least verbally, for he aimed to be an agent of the overthrow of the United States government. The passive non-resistants he dismissed as ultraists who were unrealistic in their approach to combatting evil. Their reluctance to resist actively he considered to be sedition against the kingdom of God. Thoreau's sympathies in the early part of his career were clearly with the more passive non-resisters such as Nathaniel P. Rogers, although his later writings show an increasing willingness to accept more direct positions as demonstrated by his defense of Wendell Phillips' lyceum addresses. Furthermore, Thoreau's disenchantment with communities in general, and his rejection of the Christian myth made his outlook incompatible with that of Noyes. However, he agreed that non-resistance is a form of complicity with evil if one's own actions are compelled or coerced by the state.

The non-resistants were anarchists and pacifists whose premise was that governments are the instigators of war and all the manifold sins and wickednesses which befall mankind, but that the Biblical injunction
to resist not evil was the first law of conscience. As early as August 1815, a peace society was founded in New York with David Low Dodge as president, and in 1828 the American Peace Society was founded with a policy which specifically condemned only offensive war. In reaction to this moderate position, in 1838 the New England Non-Resistance League was established condemning all war, both offensive and retaliatory.

William Lloyd Garrison was a prominent member of the New England Non-Resistance League, and through his publication, *The Liberator*, laid many a verbal blow against the government. There are passages in Thoreau's journals which may reflect the non-resistance position that love is more powerful than force, but he did not remain long in that mood after the Fugitive Slave Law drove him to active resistance. The non-resistants turned inward on their experimental Hopedale Community and read *The Non-Resistant* which Henry C. Wright edited. The coming struggle between the Northern and Southern sections of the country caused the defection of nearly all the non-resistants. Only Adin Ballou among the Christian anarchists remained faithful to the Golden Rule and the Sermon on the Mount in the face of the irrepressible conflict.

The non-resistants led by William Lloyd Garrison repudiated the logical and moral base of their positions in advocating Northern aggres-
sion against the South and denying the right of secession, an inconsis-
tency that other anarchists were to recognize several years after the
end of the war. 86 This was a failing of Thoreau’s as well, though he
redeemed himself on the question of secession since he not only recog-
nized it, but advocated it as the correct course of action for Massachu-
setts. 87 Thoreau did try to dismiss government from his mind as the
non-resisters attempted to do, but found his walks were spoiled by a
remembrance of the state. 88 However, Thoreau could not bring his
individualism to comprehend the anti-heroic passivism of Ballou nor
the collectivist solutions of the group of anti-government persons led
by Garrison. In temper and approach Thoreau had much more affinity
with the Garrisonians in the last years of his life than with Ballou and
those few non-resistants who truly were anarchists. Neither Garrison
nor Thoreau can qualify as no-government men. Both wished to have
a government to do right against the forces of evil.

If Garrison and Thoreau were not no-government men, Josiah
Warren (1798-1874) was. In fact, Schuster credits Warren with being
the first American anarchist because of the fact that he developed a
fully rounded theory of anarchism including an economic justification
as well as a spiritual and moral foundation. 89 As early as 1827 he had
opened a "time store" which used labor as the only standard of value,
much on the order of Robert Owen's later Equitable Banks of Labor
Exchange in England. Although his major book length works, Practical
Details in *Equitable Commerce* and *True Civilization*, were published after Transcendentalism had passed its peak, Warren's thoughts and actions were known to the Concord Transcendentalists through their interest in all of the social theories and experiments which were so common in the first half of the Nineteenth Century.

Warren anticipated the currency reforms of Pierre Proudhon and the land theory of Henry George in his early version of mutualism. He and those who followed after his lead were not of the same mystical strain that Thoreau, Ballou and Noyes were. Their concerns were with material welfare, higher standards of production with a greater personal freedom from the impersonal forces of government and industry which the credit and capital system controlled. Warren's scheme of pooling the symbols of labor in "time banks" envisioned voluntary associations of laborers who would produce the essentials of civilization strengthened by banks of labor exchange that would extend the opportunity for individual entrepreneurship to all who wished it. The scheme was rather elaborately drawn, but relied too heavily upon a natural balance among men to counteract exploitation and rapacity of single individuals who wish to dominate.

Warren believed in the equal rights of all, and where natural balance of competing individual interests fails, voluntary associations would monitor and protect the equality of rights. He was one of those
who believed that a high degree of civilization and culture is necessary for a society based upon equal rights to exist. He was impressed with Robert Owen's theories and was a member of the community at New Harmony, Indiana, before founding his own colonies, Utopia and Modern Times, based upon his own ideas. From his weekly periodical, *The Peaceful Revolutionist*, he preached his ideas of equity and mutuality. Social defects were seen as the cause of crime and perversities, not evil will nor malevolent natural dispositions. He believed that a correct construction of civil order granting "sovereignty" to the individual would soon put an end to the manifestations of crime and anti-social behavior that plague men in communities and which in most cases are directly related to the struggle for bread, bread being defined in the broadest sense to include all the bodily necessities and comforts which are so widespread as to be taken for necessities. Furthermore, Warren was consistent in his logic: force is not a proper vehicle to overcome the state with all its imperfect social arrangements. Demonstration by example and persuasion were the appropriate means of bringing the millennium.

Stephen Pearl Andrews (1812-1886), the near contemporary of Thoreau and his fellow citizen of Massachusetts, was the populizer of Warren's ideas, putting them in systematic order and publishing them in his major work, *Science of Society*, which appeared in 1852. Andrews knew several of Thoreau's acquaintances, including Horace Greeley, so
their ideas probably came into contact, at least through an inter-
mediate party.

The economic theory Andrews espoused was virtually identical
with Josiah Warren's, but he differed on the question of political
action. Where Thoreau and Andrews had something in common was
their agreement with William Lloyd Garrison's methods of direct
action in the cause of abolition. Where Andrews attempted to get the
government to buy slaves and set them free, Thoreau would have noth-
ing to do with anything which might seem to suggest that a human being
is property for which any compensation is due or possible. But this
is a minor question in the greater issue of accepting without resistance
or actively attempting to alter the offending conditions.

Andrews shared Warren's inconsistency in saying crime and per-
versity are merely symptoms of poor social conditions while at the
same time proclaiming individual sovereignty which gives every man
complete control of his actions limited only by the onerous consequences
he brings upon himself. Of course if a man's crime is only a manifesta-
tion of a social defect there is little in the way of onerous consequences
to worry about. One suspects that Thoreau would have little sympathy
with Andrews' belief that corporations should take the place of political
government. The whole atmosphere surrounding business and the way
in which most men of trade arrange their values were repugnant to
Thoreau. The evils of the state did not surpass the evils of business and trade in Thoreau's view. The political legacy of Warren and Andrews was the Greenback scheme set forth first in its full reasoned argument by Edward Kellogg in his *Labor and Other Capital*. The concerns of Henry Thoreau were not those which were subject to solution by currency manipulations.

Tinkering with credit and currency was not Thoreau's idea of addressing social or political problems. His bias was against banks, not because of the rapacity they engender or the evil effect the credit system has upon the toiling masses, but because he disagreed with the common view of value. The economics of *Walden* are so contrary to the mutualists' idea of economic reform that one scarcely knows where to begin to describe the contrast. The value of labor for Thoreau was entirely personal with a spiritual dimension at least as great as the physical benefit that might be produced. He could no more have approved of a "time bank" where a worker places the symbols of his physical labor than of the conventional banks of his day. The real value of labor cannot be transferred to another individual by any mechanism; as his telling of the fable of the artist of Kouroo points out, labor is its own reward, but only to the laborer. Naturally he deplored the grinding poverty of the laboring masses and the mortgaged farmers, but the remedy lay in trans-valuing labor itself, not by sleight-of-hand tricks with the medium of exchange. There is as much moral and aesthetic poverty in a bank of
labor exchange as in any of the banks on Boston's State Street. While the ideal of individual sovereignty was wholly consistent with Thoreau's views, he was unable to reconcile the ideal of individual sovereignty with the reality of communal life, even based upon the most thoroughgoing voluntarism. The tendency of Warren and other like-minded persons to discount individual responsibility for their actions by blaming social conditions for aberrant or anti-social behavior was contrary to Thoreau's own rigorous individuality. The passage in his letter to Blake in which he refutes the argument of social guilt made by the father of William and Henry James is one which might have been written against all of these reformers who profess extreme individualism, yet pull back from some of the less pleasant implications of their argument. Thoreau was a libertarian in many ways, but was not so naive as to believe that human nature could suppress its aggressive tendencies by mutual agreement with only the pressures of competing interests checking the rise of dominant personalities. Thoreau was not one who accepted the equal ability or the equal moral capacity of all men. Too much of the old Calvinism from colonial times and the newer Calvinism of Thomas Carlyle was ingrained in Thoreau for him to be sanguine about any voluntary credit scheme taking the place of those heroes and upright men set above others by the favor of God. Where Warren was content to agitate for change by moral argument, Thoreau came to advocate direct action against the state and against individuals who offended
his vision of moral good.

Although Warren and Andrews came to solutions remarkably close to those of Proudhon and were responsible for circulating these ideas in America, there were a number of persons who were part of the intellectual background of Thoreau’s last years and just after his death, who were more directly affected by a European influence. The wave of immigrants known as the Forty-Eighters brought European ideas of anarchism to the United States where they augmented the native radicalism already present. 93 There were increasing numbers of Americans who were visiting and studying in Europe and considerable numbers of Europeans visiting America, including such persons as Michael Bakunin who was the guest of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1861. Among those European travellers with connections in the Transcendental circle were William B. Greene, Charles A. Dana, and Albert Brisbane. Dana and Brisbane were Fourierists, but were strongly influenced by Proudhon. In 1848 Dana wrote a brilliant series of newspaper articles from France giving an account of Proudhon and his ideas, which were collected and republished by William H. Channing in The Spirit of the Age.

But the purest and most systematic presentation of Proudhonian Mutualism was William B. Greene, a friend of Thomas W. Higgenson of the Transcendentalist circle. 94 A native of Haverhill, Massachusetts, and a graduate of West Point, Greene was only two years younger than
Thoreau but of a much different turn. A politician by inclination and reformer by avocation, Greene was a member of the 1853 Massachusetts Constitutional Convention where he was one of the leading advocates of women's rights along with Abbey Alcott and Wendell Phillips, his friends who were not members of the Convention. His written arguments are made in two books, *Mutual Banking and Socialistic,* *Communistic, Mutualistic,* and *Financial Fragments,* and are directly related to Proudhon's ideas in France and to the labor conditions in the American East. Whereas Josiah Warren was in reaction against the socialistic tendencies of Robert Owen, Greene was not one to hold an unbridled individualism. No passage could more clearly have described the differences between Warren and Greene or presented as clear a criticism of Thoreauvian individualism than the following:

> The subjective divinity of the human soul seems to have been overdone by the existing generation. Individualism is good in its place, as qualified and balanced by socialism, but the experience of the world shows clearly that individualism unbalanced by socialism, and socialism unbalanced by individualism lead always to disastrous social and political crises.... We are mutually dependent, morally, intellectually, and physically upon each other. What we possess, we owe partly to our own faculties, but mainly to the educational and material aid received by us from our parents, friends, neighbors, and other members of society.

Although most of the economic trappings of Greene's system would not have attracted Thoreau and the socialist suggestions would have repelled him, Thoreau and Greene agreed that the Federal Constitution was an
instrument of iniquity, intrinsically evil in requiring men under sanction of law to violate their consciences. Greene believed the Constitution should be destroyed by any available means and that every man has the right to thwart the government as he can.

Lysander Spooner, a lawyer from Athol and Worcester, Massachusetts, was an interesting individual, nearly as egoistic and eccentric as Henry David Thoreau. As an ardent abolitionist and a lawyer, he combined his emotions and his training to attack the legality of the American Constitution using natural law as his starting point. The Unconstitutionality of Slavery was written in 1845, and was influential in New England circles. Gerrit Smith, the acquaintance of both John Brown and Thoreau, based his political position on Spooner's book. Thoreau never believed in the subtle arguments of lawyers to solve a problem, but preferred the more direct approach of individual action to nullify the effect of an unjust law on one's person by ignoring or defying the law. Garrison and the non-resistants quarrelled with Spooner's interpretation because they considered the Constitution to be legal but a covenant with the devil and death. From Thoreau's impassioned comments about the Constitution in "Slavery in Massachusetts", it is a safe assumption that Thoreau was in agreement with Garrison. He wished a better government, a better Constitution, and an upright ruler. Spooner, Thoreau, and Stirner had similar views of the individual in society: "the good of the individual is the good of the many." Thoreau and Spooner
shared the view that justice is the only legitimate basis for any obligation, personal, political or social. Spooner would see justice enforced by individuals or individuals in voluntary associations with others; Thoreau resorted to vigilante justice of the John Brown variety only when government failed to establish justice in the land. The difference is fundamental. One wonders how well Thoreau's theory of the hero would fare under Spooner's criticism of one man's rule over another:

The only real 'sovereignty' . . . is that right of sovereignty which each and every human being has over his or her own person and property, so long as he or she obeys the one law of justice towards the person and property of every other human being. This is the only natural right of sovereignty, that was ever known among men. All other so-called rights of sovereignty are simply the usurpations of imposters, conspirators, robbers, tyrants and murderers....

Many a hero, including John Brown, has a good claim to at least one if not more of these titles. Apart from the fundamental disagreement over the role of the hero in establishing justice, Spooner and Thoreau share a wish for a return to a pre-industrial society where each man is master of his whole labor. Spooner's denunciations of organized business, trade, commerce, and corporations were as bitter as Thoreau's. Unfortunately Spooner falls into the same currency reform miasma that plagues other thinkers of the era, calling for a Mutual Insurance Company to replace government. Its major function would be to enforce contracts. Since Thoreau did not believe in a lawyer's methods of attacking a man, Spooner's legalistic approach to maintaining social and economic
balance would have had little appeal.

Benjamin Tucker was the most prominent name in American anarchy, and was the chief agent for the dissemination of its doctrines. However, Thoreau died when Tucker was only eight years old. Tucker, Ezra Heywood and others of the Massachusetts confraternity of radicals were forerunners of those who led anarchy to its zenith of activity in America during the last part of the Nineteenth Century and the first part of the Twentieth Century until the direct action of a presidential assassination and the Haymarket riot brought the whole movement into disrepute. After the deportation of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman and the collapse of the IWW the anarchist movement went into a deep decline in America. Not until the late 1950's and during the 1960's did American anarchy in the direct action mode become a prominent feature of political life. Until the civil rights demonstrations and the emergence of Martin Luther King as the spokesman for conscience over law, the flame of civil disobedience was in the keeping of Mohandas K. Gandhi.

The influence of Thoreau on Gandhi is the subject of an imposing bibliography, and has the testimony of Gandhi himself. The application of non-violent resistance to the Indian situation in South Africa and British India which became known to the world as satyagraha has been linked to Gandhi's reading of "Civil Disobedience" so frequently and exhaustively that no purpose is served by repeating it here. The
similarities have often been stressed, particularly the insistence upon
the simple life, the force of example when backed by total personal
commitment, a recognition of coercion as a debilitating influence on
the personality of both the coerced and the coercer, and an insistence
upon manual labor and a life not far removed from the soil. Certainly
Gandhi was responsible for his own approach to political problems and
while he might have received some inspiration from Thoreau's milder
essays, the Mahatma's program was a personal response to his particu-
lar experiences. Thoreau came to accept and justify physical violence
and war, which Gandhi found repugnant. Gandhi did indeed recognize
satyagraha as moral and emotional coercion and intended it to be so.
Thoreau had supported moral coercion mixed with social obstruction
in advocating resignation of public offices and non-payment of taxes,
but in supporting John Brown he went far beyond moral, emotional, and
intellectual coercion. He implied that holy war is acceptable and under
some conditions, desirable. The convoluted reasoning of Mohandas
Gandhi, a wily politician, made a number of retreats from complete
pacifism but he never condoned physical violence as a means of a valued
end. "Civil Disobedience" and satyagraha are kindred concepts, but the
essays on John Brown are not in the Gandhi spirit. It was the wide-
spread political movement led by Gandhi which gave civil disobedience
a respectable political position with power to be reckoned with. Betty
Schecter has traced the growth of non-violent resistance from Thoreau
through the Gandhian movements to Martin Luther King and the early civil rights movement in the southern United States. It is clear that many of the techniques of civil disobedience survived the Indian independence movement and were passed on to the American civil rights movement through such leaders as Martin Luther King. However, the question of internal motivation, which was uppermost in Thoreau's moral theory suffered some erosion. The issue was no longer actual slavery, but the political division of goods and services among the races. Rather than class conflict as in the case of many of the early American anarchists who proposed monetary gimmickery as solutions, the American civil rights movement was a conflict of racial groupings with conflicting social aspirations. Economic goals were only secondary concerns; equal dignity as human beings was the primary objective. King paid homage to Thoreau as inspiration for his campaign against segregation. The rhetoric bears some resemblance, but the psychological perspective was quite different. Thoreau's concern was for the individual person to be unfettered of all institutional restraints which tend to impede his maximum opportunity for the development of transcendental consciousness. King wished to liberate black people from social ostracism and economic discrimination for the benefit of their social status. The effect upon individual personality was by no means ignored, but it was not the central feature of King's moral appeal or
of his political strategy. Non-violence remained a relatively consistent theme throughout King's leadership of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The supremacy of conscience over legal prescriptions was a feature virtually unaltered in King's approach to reform.

And I submit that the individual who disobeys the law, whose conscience tells him it is unjust and who is willing to accept the penalty by staying in jail until that law is altered, is expressing at the moment the very highest respect for the law. ¹⁰³

Thoreau's position was more advanced. He agreed that the true lovers of law are they who obey the higher law when the government breaks it, ¹⁰⁴ but he also declared that rather than have the government perpetrate an unjust punishment upon himself or his loved ones he would touch the match to blow up earth and hell together. ¹⁰⁵

The non-violence of Gandhi and Martin Luther King was not as completely Thoreauvian as popular opinion would have it. Both Gandhi and King died by assassination while Thoreau died peacefully at home. This irony is compounded as recent history has brought a recession of non-violent tactics and a rapidly spreading reliance upon violence-for-the-sake-of-conscience. Urban riots, political assassinations, destruction and violence on college campuses, antics of the Weathermen and the Berrigan brothers provide ample evidence that those who believe that action prompted by conscience is self-justified are displacing the advocates of non-violent civil disobedience.
Paul F. Power's survey of civil disobedience in recent years illuminates the full range of viewpoints now current on the definition and import of civil disobedience, which is a term he credits to Thoreau on the first page of his article. It is an impressive list. It demonstrates the very frequent association of violence with civil disobedience. In modern America violence had become so frequent and accepted as a means of political expression that several presidential commissions have been appointed to examine civil disobedience and the violence it often fosters. The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (the Eisenhower Commission) presented a majority finding that civil disobedience is an unacceptable method of expressing dissent when joined with violence, although the minority report cited ethical criteria to support civil disobedience in certain contexts. The Kerner commission has taken a similar view of civil disobedience as potential anarchy.

It is the young for whom Thoreau has had the most visible attraction in the past few years, and it is in the citadels of the young, the colleges and universities, that civil disobedience has been a particularly favored device for political expression. The President's Commission on Campus Unrest issued its report in October of 1970. The first chapter of the Scranton Report as it is known, could easily have been written as a refutation to Thoreau's political essays. The historical evolution of the Berkeley riots as presented in the Scranton Report
remarkably parallel Thoreau's own progress from civil disobedience to radical violence. The grievances began with an intense concern for the plight of American Negroes. The legal apparatus which supported slavery in Thoreau's time seemed to support vestiges of anti-Negro discrimination. Like Thoreau, the young protestors felt a moral superiority to the law, and began to subject its precepts to active rejection. Breach of the law became an ingrained habit and the discipline of law eventually had no personal relevance to those with moral objections to any part of the legal structure. The movement fell to a small cadre of dedicated revolutionaries who justified havoc, destruction and violence by claims of conscience above the law. The activists introduced tactics which were aimed toward achieving their aims regardless of the freedom they were denying to others. The Berkeley student leaders and John Brown had much the same view of what is permissible in the name of good. The disruptions of the John Brown escapade heralding the coming war bear strong resemblance to the disruptions on American college campuses which the Scranton Commission notes. It recognized a new youth culture that defines itself through a passionate attachment to principle and an opposition to the larger society. At the center of this culture is a romantic celebration of human life, of the unencumbered individual, of the senses, and of nature. It rejects what it sees to be the "operational ideals of American society: materialism, competition, rationalism, technology, consumer-
This is a Thoreauvian list. The Report continues to note that the high idealism of the young "reveals in its tactical behavior a contrary tendency toward intolerance, disruption, criminality, destruction, and violence." The cause of this apparent contradiction the Commission found to be that,

this subculture took its bearings from the notion of the autonomous, self-determining individual whose goal was to live with "authenticity," or in harmony with his inner penchants and instincts. It also found its identity in a rejection of the work ethic, materialism, and conventional social norms and pieties. Indeed, it rejected all institutional disciplines externally imposed upon the individual, and this set it at odds with much in American society.

The subculture of today's disaffected youth had as its aim the liberation of human consciousness and the enhancement of the quality of experience. It rejected the deferred pleasures, materialism and self-denial of conventional values for a new emphasis upon the expressive, the creative and imaginative. It sought to free each individual for the opportunity to feel, experience, and express what was prompted by his unique human personality. As this new value system spread among the young, their 'perceptions of the world grew ever more distant from the perceptions of the existing culture: what most called 'justice' or 'peace' or 'accomplishment' the new culture envisioned as 'enslavement' or 'hysteria' or 'meaninglessness'. The flavor of Thoreau is strong. A return to the simple and primitive was central to the youth culture of that recent period, with garlands of
Just as Thoreau failed to achieve a coherent political program, the Scranton Commission noted that the youth culture did not develop a new political decalogue or rally around an old one. It also noted that "in this new youth culture's political discussion there are echoes ... of Thoreau, of Rousseau, of the evangelical fervor of the abolitionists, of Gandhi, and of native American populism." The strong parallel between the mood of the recent youth movement and Thoreau's sentiment rests in part upon a confidence in revelation or instinct rather than cognition, in sensation rather than analysis, the personal rather than the institutional, an emphasis upon the necessity of living life to the fullest extent as a natural animal unfettered by the artificialities of institutionalized order. How close the mood of the young came to that of Thoreau is suggested by the following passage:

Profoundly opposed to any kind of authority structure ... and urgently pressing for direct personal participation by each individual, members of this new youth culture have a difficult time making collective decisions. They reveal a distinct intolerance in their refusal to listen to those outside the new culture and in their willingness to force others to their own views. They even show an elitist streak in their premise that the rest of society must be brought to the policy positions which they believe are right.

Perhaps one of the most significant influences of Thoreau to be noted in the Scranton Report is the anti-utilitarian ethical structure which
characterizes many of the activists.

For many (not all) student activists and protesters, it is not really very important whether the protest tactics employed will actually contribute to the political end allegedly sought. What is important is that a protest be made—that the individual protester, for his own salvation, stand up, declare the purity of his own heart, and take his stand.\[^{115}\]

So influential has this point of view become in American life that three major presidential commissions chaired by Milton Eisenhower, Otto Kerner, and William Scranton, have been appointed and each in its turn has attempted to counter the effect of Thoreauvian civil disobedience and the use of violence. The government position was last stated, and most eloquently, by the Commission on Campus Unrest:

Too many Americans have begun to justify violence as a means of effecting change.... Too many have forgotten the values and sense of shared humanity that unite us.... Dissent is a healthy sign of freedom and a protection against stagnation. But the right to dissent is not the right to resort to violence.\[^{116}\]

The Report specifically condemns vigilantes of the John Brown variety who would bring destruction and death upon their opponents. It deplores the growing lack of tolerance, a growing insistence by the morally self-righteous that their own views must immediately govern, the tendency to deny the humanity and good will of those who urge patience, restraint and democratic procedure. The Commission flatly states "the fact that giving moral support to those who are planning violent action is morally despicable."\[^{117}\] This is in direct contradiction of Thoreau's John Brown essays. In short, the Commission on Campus Unrest
found it necessary to devote two entire chapters to opposing the basic political position stated by Thoreau in his political essays. More convincing evidence of the continuing influence of Henry David Thoreau need hardly be submitted.

The examples of Thoreauvian influence need not be limited to the young campus rebels. The antics of Jane Fonda, Joan Baez and her husband, and countless others of riper vintage show traces of the Thoreauvian spirit. The sight of American Indians attempting to occupy and reclaim Alcatraz might have delighted Thoreau had he lived to see it. The conspiracy of Philip Berrigan and the others of the Harrisburg Seven is in direct descent of John Brown. Undoubtedly Thoreau would have approved.

Some of the basic tenets of Thoreau's thought appear in less active forms. Charles Reich's book, The Greening of America, has echoes of Walden in his celebration of heightened consciousness to the natural and ethereal values which render materialistic gains less significant. The rejection of commercialism and the supporting political apparatus which Reich calls the Corporate State is a paraphrase of Thoreau's own condemnation of trade. The revolution that matters is the personal re-assertion of the supremacy of one's own personality and its spiritual potential. Thoreau's middle years were committed to the view that this was the only revolution necessary. Institutions are composed of
individuals; when individuals change their working and consumer lives, rediscover their self-hood which gives real meaning to their lives, they will cease to be blinded by the artificial goals of the state and its economic institutions. The Consciousness III of Reich differs in many details from *Walden*, but the spiritual message is basically the same. Reich stops short of the physical force and violent revolutionary apologies which marked Thoreau's later years and his political essays. Reich's book is a happy book, as is *Walden*, and is a welcome reminder that the good a man does lives after him as well as the evil.

This study has not intended to trace Thoreau's influence in the current generation; rather this section was intended to suggest the continuing importance for political affairs contained in the thought of Henry David Thoreau. It seems obvious that his influence has been powerful, and that several branches of his thought have been developed by persons who wish to use his name as authority for their own causes. So long as there are persons of sensitive conscience who oppose the state and its law, Thoreau's name will be invoked.

**Notes**


13. Ibid., p. 94.

14. The first four chapters of Le Contrat Social are devoted to an examination of theories of obligation and right, and his discussion of the general will in the same work confirms the assertion. A comparison of "Civil Disobedience" with the Brown essays demonstrates Thoreau's agreement with the proposition.


21. This is a general proposition of Kant's Principles of Political Right. See the discussion in Catlin, The Political Philosophers, pp. 413-414.

22. A Week, W., I, p. 74.

23. Such works as John Wesley Thomas' James Freeman Clarke: Apostle of German Culture in America (Boston: Luce, 1949); Loyd D. Easton's Hegel's First American Followers (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1966); and Edgeley W. Todd's "Philosophical Ideas at Harvard College, 1817-1837," New England Quarterly, XVI (March, 1943), pp. 63-90, imply that Thoreau was under considerable influence of German, and Hegelian, philosophy. However, a more extensive study of the German
influence on Thoreau is found in Henry A. Pochmann, "Henry David Thoreau," in *German Culture in America: Philosophical and Literary Influences: 1600-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1957), pp. 423-436, and concludes that Thoreau was little influenced. But it seems clear that he was conversant with at least the outlines of Hegel's thought through his teachers and friends.

24. See Emerson's biographical sketch of Thoreau, W., I.


27. Ibid., p. 387.

28. Ibid.


30. Ibid., pp. 320-321.

31. Ibid., p. 322.


33. Ibid., p. 324.

34. Ibid., p. 320.


44. Kenneth W. Cameron has produced a prodigious amount of scholarship detailing Thoreau's reading in college, his subsequent borrowings from the Harvard Library, and his reading from Emerson's personal library. See the entries under his name in the Bibliography.

45. A Week, W., I, p. 142.

46. Ibid., p. 147.

47. See Ethel Seybold, Thoreau: The Quest and the Classics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), for a full discussion of the classical influences on Thoreau's development.


49. Ibid., p. 24.

50. Ibid., p. 63.

51. Ibid., p. 243.

52. Ibid., p. 262.

53. Ibid., p. 356.

54. Ibid., p. 8.

55. Ibid., p. 191.

57. For an interesting statement of the relation of this attitude to the modern study of politics see Henry S. Kariel, "Expanding the Political Present," American Political Science Association Review, Vol. LXIII, #3 (September, 1969), pp. 768 ff.


64. Although Thoreau did not himself use the word, it is part of the Transcendental vocabulary and may properly be used in connection with his ideas.


67. Ibid., p. 383.


72. Ibid.


74. Thoreau and Tolstoy have been compared and contrasted by several scholars including Clarence A. Manning, "Thoreau and Tolstoy," *New England Quarterly*, No. 16 (June, 1943), pp. 234-243, Pyarelal Nair, *Thoreau, Tolstoy and Gandhiji* (Calcutta: A. K. Banerji, 1958). Striking parallels are to be found in Tolstoy's *Writings on Civil Disobedience and Non-Violence* (New York: Bergman, 1967).


77. "It is not an era of repose. We have used up all our inherited freedom. If we would save our lives, we must fight for them." "Slavery in Massachusetts," W., IV, p. 407.

78. "Who is it whose safety requires that Captain Brown be hung? Is it indispensable to any Northern man? Is there no resource but to cast this man also to the Minotaur? If you do not wish it, say so distinctly." — "A Plea for Captain John Brown," W., IV, p. 437.


80. This is stressed with particular strength in What Must We Do Then?, written twenty-three years after Thoreau's death in 1885.

81. A major theme of Ancien Regime is that education, art, and science must be made to relate more directly to the common people rather than be the exclusive preserve of an elite whose tastes are over-refined.


84. See Thoreau's essay, "Herald of Freedom," which was the name of the journal which Rogers edited in Concord, N.H., for the New Hampshire Anti-Slavery Society, W., IV, pp. 306-310.
85. "Wendell Phillips Before the Concord Lyceum," a letter to the editor dated March 12, 1845, W., IV, pp. 311-314. It is here that Thoreau approves of Phillips' prayer that God should dash Massachusetts "into a thousand pieces, till there shall not remain a fragment....," p. 312.


88. Ibid., p. 407.

89. Eunice Minnette Schuster, Native American Anarchism, p. 92. She also credits Warren with publishing the first anarchist paper in America, The Peaceful Revolutionist, and with founding the first anarchic utopian communities in America.

90. Josiah Warren, Practical Details in Equitable Commerce (New York, 1852); also see True Civilization (Boston, 1863). Reprinted (New York: Bert Franklin, 1967).

91. Walden, W., II, pp. 359-360. See also the Journal entry for July 1, 1840. "The true laborer is recompensed by his labor, not by his employer. Industry is its own wages. Let us not suffer our hands to lose one jot of their handiness by looking behind to a mean recompense, knowing that our true endeavor cannot be thwarted, nor we be cheated of our earnings unless by not earning them." W., VIII, p. 157.


105. For the most violent expression of this sentiment see the *Journal* entry for May 29, 1854. *W.*, XII, p. 315. The phrase is more temperate in "Slavery in Massachusetts."


110. Ibid.

111. Ibid., p. 8.

112. Ibid.

113. Ibid.

114. Ibid., p. 9.

115. Ibid.

116. Ibid., p. 2.

117. Ibid., p. 3.

CHAPTER IV
THE UNIVERSE AND NATURE

While a political theory strictly defined concerns itself with only a limited range of human experience, it rests upon a larger conception of ultimate reality. It is not necessary for a political theorist to build, or even to subscribe to a particular philosophic system; but consciously or unconsciously he will possess a cosmic view which can comprehend the whole context of man's life. Pushed far enough, a political theory will be found to make certain assumptions concerning existence in the largest sense. These assumptions will include the nature of the universe and the principle of causation. A normative theory of politics must also consider the source and character of the good; it must define the relationship between what men accept as what "is" but also believe the "ought" to be and so provide a standard by which political institutions and the social interactions that they effect can be measured in normative terms.

Although Emerson declared that Thoreau never attempted to define nature, and Thoreau himself seems to have believed that the universe is inconceivable to man's intelligence, there is a great deal of thought evident in Thoreau's writings as to the nature of ultimate reality, about the universe as a phenomenon, about God as a causative principle, about
the meaning of earthly nature, about the character of good and evil, and finally, about how man fits into the grand scheme. These are matters which were of most intimate concern to Thoreau, and which were given great attention in his thinking and writing.

In dealing with these issues, Thoreau did not fully adopt the Transcendentalist vocabulary which Emerson found convenient. Emerson's philosophic speculation lacked precision, but it did contain an element of consistency in the use of terms which makes it easier to follow his discussions from one essay to the next and from one time period to another. In his writings, however, Thoreau sought to convey moods and emotions rather than elegant demonstrations of philosophic prowess, and chose his language accordingly. One result is that ambiguity is a constant difficulty in interpreting Thoreau's philosophic positions from his poetically phrased writings. What Emerson meant by "Oversoul" was fairly consistent wherever and whenever he used the word. Thoreau, on the other hand, seldom used that particular term, preferring to use a variety of other words such as "universal law," "the universe," "spirit," and "nature" to express approximately the same idea as well as other concepts, including the generally accepted sense of the terms when the occasion suited him. He accepted the general outlines of Transcendental philosophy without the encumbering terminology, although he had certain reservations concerning Transcendental opti-
mism, particularly as related to the existence of evil, that had important implications for his view of the nature of mankind.

Thoreau was an uncompromising Idealist. He believed in the concrete actual world, but was convinced that this was merely the surface appearance and that reality lay deeper in an immaterial ideal. "I perceive that we inhabitants of New England live this mean life because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things. We think that that is which appears to be." Again, "The mind knows a distance and a space of which all those sums combined do not make a unit of measure, —the interval between that which appears and that which is." Reality therefore, lies beneath or beyond appearances. Thoreau made the point in a small story with a typically New England flavor:

There is a solid bottom everywhere. We read that the traveler asked the boy if the swamp before him had a hard bottom. The boy replied that it had. But presently the traveler's horse sank in up to the girths, and he observed to the boy, "I thought you said that this bog had a hard bottom." "So it has," answered the latter, "but you have not got half way to it yet."

For Thoreau the ultimate reality is an ineffable mystery wherein all things become one. It is the point where all lines converge, where creation makes union with the Creator. It is where motion and rest reach equilibrium, where all contradictions are resolved, where matter and spirit are united, the point at which multiplicity becomes unitary. It is beyond time in the sense of duration and beyond space defined as extension. It is simple absolute reality, surpassing human distinctions of
good and evil, and it is wholly ideal or spirit. In this mystery there is no relation in a quantitative sense, no condition, no beginning or end or aim. And, this reality can be known only in fleeting glimpses to mankind through flashes of inspiration or intuition which Thoreau prefers to call consciousness.

The eye may see for the hand, but not for the mind. We are still being born, and have as yet but a dim wisdom....

The anecdotes of modern astronomy affect me in the same way as do those faint revelations of the Real which are vouchsafed to man from time to time, or rather from eternity to eternity.... I am not without hope that we may, even here and now, obtain some accurate information concerning that OTHER WORLD which the instinct of mankind has so long predicted.  

To those persons of complete innocence, such as children, or those of moral genius whose consciousness permits a vision of reality, all other facts, appearances, or moral prejudices are dissolved. 'To the innocent there are neither cherubim nor angels. At rare intervals we rise above the necessity of virtue into an unchangeable morning light, in which we have only to live right on and breathe the ambrosial air.' The consciousness of reality is, for Thoreau, a mystical revelation.

If with closed ears and eyes I consult consciousness for a moment immediately are all walls and barriers dissipated, earth rolls from under me, and I float, by the impetus derived from the earth and the system, a subjective, heavily laden thought, in the midst of an unknown and infinite sea, or else heave and swell like a vast ocean of thought without rock or headland, where are all riddles solved, all straight lines making there their two ends to meet, eternity and space gambolling familiarly through my
depths. I am from the beginning, knowing no end, no aim. No sun illuminates me, for I dissolve all lesser lights in my own intenser and steadier lights. I am a restful kernel in the magazine of the universe.  

The perception of reality is a subjective experience, but for Thoreau it is nonetheless real for being incommunicable to others. In the intensity of this experience of reality, the perceiver merges with reality and becomes indistinguishable from reality itself, for he has achieved a unity with "the One."

Sometimes we see objects through a thin haze, in their eternal relations, and they stand like Palenque and the Pyramids, and we wonder who set them up, and for what purpose. If we see the reality in things, of what moment is the superficial and apparent longer? What are the earth and all its interests beside the deep surmise which pierces and scatters them? While I sit here listening to the waves which ripple and break on this shore, I am absolved from all obligations to the past....

Time is dissolved in reality, for only eternity is real. Time is only a measure for man to gauge superficialities and passing events by.

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars.

Ultimate reality is not nature, but the cause behind it. It is not to be apprehended through the accumulation of facts and the analytic methods of science.

We soon get through with Nature. She excites an expectation which she cannot satisfy. The merest child which has rambled into a copsewood dreams of a wilderness so wild and strange and inexhaustible as Nature can never show him.
To commune with the reality behind Nature, mankind cannot rely upon his cognitive powers, but upon his affective powers.

The highest we can attain to is not Knowledge, but Sympathy with Intelligence. I do not know that this higher knowledge amounts to anything more definite than a novel and grand surprise on a sudden revelation of the insufficiency of all that we called knowledge before,—a discovery that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy. It is the lighting up of the mist by the sun. Man cannot know in any higher sense than this, any more than he can look serenely and with impunity in the face of the sun....

Thoreau thus thought of reality as beyond human comprehension and irreducible either by language or logic to fit any intellectual container; all attempts to explain are doomed to fail. It is the insubstantial medium in which all apparent phenomena float. As he mystically put it, "Men are constantly dinging in my ears their fair theories and plausible solutions of the universe, but ever there is no help, and I return again to my shoreless, islandless ocean and fathom unceasingly for a bottom that will hold an anchor, that it may not drag." In this ultimate unity, all individuality ceases and morality dissolves into innocence. This unutterable mystery is, for Thoreau, what should be meant by God, although he does not himself consistently limit the use of the term.

Thoreau uses "God" to express at least two additional ideas. God can refer to the principle of causation as in the following passages:

"The great God is calm withal. How superfluous is any excitement in his creatures! He listens equally to the prayers of the believer and the
unbeliever. "[God] has no moral philosophy, no ethics. "\textsuperscript{14} "The human soul is a silent harp in God's quire, whose strings need only to be swept by the divine breath to chime in with the harmonies of creation."\textsuperscript{15} "Each natural object is an end to itself. A brave, undoubting life do they all live, and are content to be a part of the mystery which is God, and throw the responsibility on man of explaining them and himself too. "\textsuperscript{16}

He also used "God" to refer to a cultural phenomenon that men create to satisfy their social and psychological needs as in the following passages taken from "Sunday" of \textit{A Week on the Merrimack and Concord Rivers}: "There are various, nay, incredible faiths; why should we be alarmed at any of them? What man believes, God believes."\textsuperscript{17} "I am not sure but I should betake myself in extremities to the liberal divinities of Greece, rather than to my country's God. Jehovah, though with us he has acquired new attributes, is more absolute and unapproachable, but hardly more divine than Jove. He is not so much a gentleman, not so gracious and catholic, he does not exert so intimate and genial an influence on nature, as many of the gods of the Greeks."\textsuperscript{18} "It seems to me that the god that is commonly worshiped in civilized countries is not at all divine, though he bears a divine name, but is the overwhelming authority and respectability of mankind. Men reverence one another and not yet God.... Every people have gods to
suit their circumstances.\footnote{19}

For our purposes, it seems reasonable to assume that Thoreau conceived of the God of his personal worship to be the perfect idea behind creation, the absolute and ultimate reality. The perfect idea, whether named God or reality, is perfect spirit, perfect will. Necessity is its cardinal attribute; because it is, it must be, all apparent contradictions notwithstanding.

In order to account for the phenomenal world, Thoreau, as do most idealists, adopted a dualism which sharply divided the world of matter from the immaterial ideal. As he explained in his \textit{Journal}:

\begin{quote}
On one side of man is the actual, and on the other the ideal. The former is the province of the reason; it is even a divine light when directed upon it, but it cannot reach forward into the ideal without blindness. The moon was made to rule by night, but the sun to rule by day. Reason will be but a pale cloud, like the moon, when one ray of divine light comes to illumine the soul.\footnote{20}
\end{quote}

He saw the material universe, therefore, to be made up of a succession of objects, pieces of creation which are conditional, which function within time and space as earlier defined. It is only in a material sense that relations exist, where the principle of limitation operates.

Within the material sphere of creation, conditional relations arrange themselves in organizational patterns, such as in the law of gravity and other principles of physics. These non-normative relations, confusingly enough, are typically referred to as "laws" of the universe or "laws" of nature when Thoreau merely wished to denote the condi-
tional or relational aspects of matter. As an illustration, the com-
ments in his Journal concerning the patterns which eroded sand leave
under the operation of water and gravity indicate how he viewed the
conditional relations of matter:

I am too late, perhaps, to see the sand foliage in the Deep
Cut; should have been there day before yesterday; it is now too
wet and soft. Yet in some places it is perfect. I see some per-
fected leopards' paws. These things suggest that there is motion
in the earth as well as on the surface; it lives and grows. It is
warmed and influenced by the sun, just as my blood by thoughts.
I seem to see some of the life that is in the spring bud and blos-
som more intimately, nearer its fountainhead, the fancy sketches
and designs of the artist. It is more simple and primitive growth;
as if for ages sand and clay might have thus flowed into the ferns
of foliage, before plants were produced to clothe the earth. The
earth I tread on is not a dead, inert mass. It is a body, has a
spirit, is organic, and fluid to the influence of its spirit, and to
whatever particle of that spirit is in me. She is not dead, but
sleepeth. It is more cheering than the fertility and luxuriance
of vineyards, this fundamental fertility near to the principles of
growth. To be sure it is somewhat fecal and stercoral....
Nature has some bowels. And there again she is mother of
humanity. Concord is a worthier place to live in, the globe is
a worthier place, for these creations, this slumbering life that
may wake. Even the solid globe is permeated by the living law.
It is the most living of creatures. No doubt all creatures that
live on its surface are but paracites. 21

As in the above, Thoreau at times speaks of nature as the sum of the
phenomenal aspects of creation. At other times he speaks as if nature
might be the physical representation of the immaterial ideal.

Despite the lack of precision in his language, or some might pre-
fer to say due to confusion in his mind, Thoreau was strongly con-
vinced that the material world exists, and that in terms of human morality
it is neutral, or perhaps more accurately, innocent. As he said, "How innocent are Nature's purposes! How unambitious!"22 "How wholesome winter is, seen far or near; how good, above all more sentimental, warm-blooded, short-lived, soft-hearted, moral goodness, commonly so called.... Nature is goodness crystallized."23 He made the point rather sanguinely in Walden:

We are cheered when we observe the vulture feeding on the carrion which disgusts and disheartens us, and deriving health and strength from the repast.... I love to see that Nature is so rife with life that myriads can be afforded to be sacrificed and suffered to prey on one another; that tender organizations can be so serenely squashed out of existence like pulp,—tadpoles which herons gobble up, and tortoises and toads run over in the road; and that sometimes it has rained flesh and blood! With the liability to accident, we must see how little account is to be made of it. The impression made on a wise man is that of universal innocence.24

Nature is both ends and means. "Each natural object is an end to itself,"25 because it is part of the creation which "God has seen to be good, and let be."26 But nature is also a means for the instruction of man, for Thoreau believed that nature corresponds to the ideal world as a mirror image might. It is not the ideal world itself, but a reflection of it without the moral content that man seeks to attain in his own life. Thoreau believed that "man's destiny is but virtue, or manhood. It is wholly moral, to be learned by the life of the soul."27 The moral content may be reflected, but is not contained in nature. It is up to mankind to discover and absorb it through his own processes. "I am not con-
cerned to express that kind of truth which Nature has expressed. Who knows but I may suggest some things to her? Yet, "how indispensable to a correct study of Nature is a perception of her true meaning. The fact will one day flower out into a truth." Properly studied and understood, nature will be instructive to man in his moral pursuits.

I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright. It is not indifferent to us which way we walk. There is a right way; but we are very liable from heedlessness and stupidity to take the wrong one. We would fain take that walk, never yet taken by us through this actual world, which is perfectly symbolical of the path which we love to travel in the interior and ideal world; and sometimes, no doubt, we find it difficult to choose our direction, because it does not yet exist distinctly in our idea.

Thoreau's mysticism was obviously based upon emotional rather than intellectual processes. The idealism that he professed was not of the same order as the cerebral abstractions of Plato. His approach to the larger questions of existence were made with Dionysian abandon; he just followed his feelings believing that such a method leads most directly to revelations about the nature of reality. Ecstatic mysticism does not provide a very adequate foundation for a metaphysical justification of his ethics, and the political applications of his ethical system. In fact, his metaphysical positions do not logically lead to the moral absolutism which he adopted as the basis of his political theory. Moreover, the revelations of reality which are opened to one individual are incommunicable to another individual. Without benefit of shared experi-
ence or common perceptions, there is no apparent way in which humans can agree upon the nature of reality nor upon the value system that must be deduced if an absolute moral code can be applied to the behavior of man in his political or social relations. As Thoreau said, "perhaps the facts most astounding and most real are never communicated by man to man." Such a position may be compatible with philosophical anarchy, but can hardly be reconciled to the inflexible moral absolutism which was the foundation of his political thought in relation to the questions of abolition and in the forthright defense of John Brown. This inconsistency is a more serious objection to Thoreau's position than the criticisms which other philosophical systems, particularly those of a materialistic, pragmatic, or positivist bent, could bring to bear against him. Such criticisms extend to all idealistic philosophical systems, even those which are much more sophisticated and coherent than Thoreau's. Not to recognize the incongruence of one's metaphysical convictions with one's ethical and political persuasions is not easily excused.

As the ultimate ideal is externally beyond merely human ethical considerations in Thoreau's idea of reality, so does the physical universe stand temporally innocent. The "cosmic scare" which Thoreau experienced on Mt. Katahdin during one of his mountain camping trips perfectly illustrates his belief that there is an impartial and wholly oblivious power innate in the material universe. He became separated
from his climbing companions and climbed alone to the summit where he felt himself to be "more lone than you can imagine" amid the "raw materials" of the planet. In such a place man is forced to acknowledge the presence and power of material creation in the presence of which "some vital part" of man "seems to escape through the loose grating of his ribs as he ascends.... Vast, Titanic, inhuman Nature has got him at a disadvantage, caught him alone, and pilfers him of some of his divine faculty." In this confrontation with majestic creation Thoreau found physical nature to be "primeval, untamed, forever untamable," "vast and drear and inhuman," "savage and awful, though beautiful." Nature was "matter, vast, terrific." The untamed brute forces are terrifying to man, but are without direct significance to him except as he is another material object as a stone or a tree.

I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one,—that my body might,—but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries! Think of our life in nature,—daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it,—rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the solid earth! the actual world! the common sense! Contact! Contact! Who are we? Where are we? 33

As he wrote to Blake, "you must ascend a mountain to learn your relation to matter, and so to your body, for it is at home there, though you are not." 34 It is in this sense that the material world and the laws which operate upon matter are innocent, exist only to be ends in themselves,
and are content to be a part of God's mystery, throwing upon man in his spiritual and intellectual aspects the responsibility of explaining them.

Nature, when employed as a word meaning material creation, is naked, whole, inhumanly sincere, without an awareness of good or evil in moral terms. This is what Thoreau meant when he referred to Nature as "goodness crystalized." It is the goodness beyond mere sentimental moral goodness. Mankind may see moral reflections in nature, but it is he who introduces moral considerations into nature by finding parallels and corroborations in material nature of moral inspirations received through intuitions of reality beyond physical creation. "Nature puts no question and answers none which we mortals ask." The answers are found in a reality which transcends nature. In a material sense, nature is the medium for all that which occupies time and space, but is not itself comprehensive of ultimate reality. Nature is insufficient to contain all possibilities. The limitations of the material universe, in other words, are by no means the limitations of reality.

Man comes short, because he seeks perfection. He adorns no world, while he is seeking to adorn a better. His best actions have no reference to their actual scenery. For when our actions become of that worth that they might confer a grace on Nature, they pass out of her into a higher arena, where they are still mean and awkward. So that the world beholds only the rear of great deeds, and mistakes them often for inconsistencies, not knowing with what higher they consist.
When man approaches the ideal realm or when he introduces ethical considerations, especially those which are based upon sympathy and compassion, he moves out of nature. The limitations of material nature are not dogmatic. "They do not say to us even with a seer's assurance, that this or that law is immutable and so ever and only can the universe exist. But they are the indifferent occasion for all things ...." The world of material objects is the object of the senses to which science addresses itself. This is the world of facts, the data reported by the senses, but independent of the senses.

It must be noted that Thoreau is not wholly consistent in holding nature to be organic and infused with spirit yet completely objective and without moral content. Others have noted this inconsistency and have attempted to reconcile the contradiction by holding that Thoreau capitalized Nature when meaning the spirit infused reflection of reality, but left the initial letter in the lower case when referring to the objective material creation. The preceding quotations illustrate that whatever validity that theory might have, Thoreau made exceptions. The ambiguity about nature's "goodness" or moral neutrality cannot pass unnoticed. This confusion is related to Thoreau's uncertainty as to the existence and character of evil. If nature is good, then presumably in keeping with the symmetry of creation, there is an equally objective evil. However, if nature is morally neutral then Thoreau was on solid
ground in assigning such moral judgements as good and evil to man. Of course, he eventually came to the strong conviction that an absolute good does exist in the ideal realm of reality to which man's actions must conform in the actual events of his life. But the issue of a moral content in the material universe was not definitely settled by his belief in the absolute goodness of the ideal.

For Thoreau the world of matter is not static, but expanding toward the fulfillment of its potential according to the laws of its being, thus implying a teleological character even to the world of "science." The principle of conservation of matter was a constant fascination to him, for it links mankind with all of matter. Nature "finds her own again under new forms without loss." Yet, though the materials may remain constant, the processes of life, of becoming, are constant. "Earth is still in her swaddling clothes, and stretches forth baby fingers on every side. Fresh curls spring from the baldest brow." The idea of matter being alive, of always "becoming" was related to his feeling that life is always in process and that reality is found "on that eternal ridge between" the past and the future "which neither comes nor goes." Reality and nature are in motion. "There has not been a sudden reformation, or as it were, new creation of the world, but a steady progress according to existing laws." Nature "repeats herself annually" moving in cycles with all her phenomena "perfectly regular and
Thoreau noted the continuous unfolding of the creative urge in nature and was pleased that even the prosaic method of science had discovered that "stupendous changes in the earth's surface, such as are referred to the Deluge, for instance, are the result of causes still in operation, which have been at work for an incalculable period. 44

There is a movement in the material universe which can create an illusion of reality. But appearance, no matter how dynamic, is not reality.

This, our respectable daily life, in which the man of common sense, the Englishman of the world, stands so squarely, and on which our institutions are founded, is in fact the veriest illusion, and will vanish like the baseless fabric of a vision; but that faint glimmer of reality which sometimes illuminates the darkness of daylight for all men, reveals something more solid, ... the cornerstone of the world. 45

Reality is not the long-term purpose, or end of the teleological potential toward which nature is moving herself, although there is something true and sublime in the great span of time; reality culminates in the very moment. It is the process itself. In nature, amid the flowing continuation of the universe toward the fulfillment of its inherent potencies, reality exists only at the point where past and future divide, for all these times and places and occasions are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages. And we are enabled to apprehend at all that is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us. 46
The idea of cause and effect loses its imperative character in such a conception as Thoreau's, where space is merely a point of perspective and time has no compelling connection with what is past and is no more or with what is future and never may be. "We affirm that all things are possible, but only these things have been to our knowledge. I do not even infer the future from what I know of the past. I am hardly better acquainted with the past than with the future." At the same time, Thoreau did not deny the operation of physical and mechanical forces nor deny the highly systematic organization of the material universe. But such a view does circumscribe what may be called factual by which is meant the effect of a cause, and gives a tentative quality to all observed phenomena that makes the factual apparent rather than real. Science attempts to deal with the factual by a logic dependent upon empirical cause and effect relationships and fails because the factual is embedded in time past which bears no necessary connection with the present moment.

There is a glaring inconsistency in Thoreau's denial of cause and effect in his metaphysical position and his insistence upon inescapable necessity in ethics. It was consistently his belief that every behavioral decision with moral connotations trailed after it predictable consequences. The wrongdoer will come to no good end, and the evil deed will not escape the demands of justice. It was this conviction which comforted him during
the periods of non-involvement in public affairs that recurred throughout his life. It was also a part of his ethical argument against slavery, the Mexican War, the Fugitive Slave Law, and even wanton slaughter of muskrats. The disjunction of his metaphysics and ethics apparently did not occur to him, or if it did, it probably would merely have confirmed his confidence in the capacity of the idealist-dualist philosophy to resolve paradoxes. This is a frequent problem with dualist philosophies, that they permit a commingling of meaning and material in a sort of intellectual shell game. Thoreau, as others with his general viewpoint often have been, is subject to criticism on this ground.

In the sense in which we have been discussing the universe, nature has been presented as the physical aspect of creation including, whether logical or not, both organic and inorganic phenomena. "All parts of nature belong to one head, as the curls of a maiden's hair.\textsuperscript{48} As part of nature, all things are partakers in the organizing principle upon which the material universe is founded. The various manifestations of the principle of organization which are observable, Thoreau occasionally refers to as law, by which he means the thread which connects all the phenomena of nature, including time:

The hardest material obeys the same law with the most fluid. Trees are but rivers of sap and woody fibre flowing from the atmosphere and emptying into the earth by their trunks, as their roots flow upward to the surface. And in the heavens there are rivers of stars and milky ways. There are rivers of rock on the surface and rivers of ore in the bowels of the
earth. And thoughts flow and circulate, and seasons lapse as tributaries of the current year. 49

Thoreau regarded life as one expression of the organizing principle and for him it was difficult, if not impossible, to define life separately from the rule of regularity which operates throughout creation. Additionally, as life is progressive, so is creation dynamic under the prevalence of organization.

There is nothing inorganic. These folaceous heaps lie along the bank like the slag of a furnace, showing that nature is "in full blast" within. The earth is not a mere fragment of dead history, stratum upon stratum like the leaves of a book, to be studied by geologists and antiquaries chiefly, but living poetry like the leaves of a tree which precede flowers and fruit,—not a fossil earth, but a living earth; compared with whose great central life all animal and vegetable life is merely parasitic. 50

Nature, then, is teleological in that it has purpose, is constantly developing toward the fulfillment of its cycle of potential in a regular order from lowest organization to highest organization and back. As Thoreau expressed the idea, "the earth is pregnant with law." 51 "On the outside all the life of the earth is expressed in the animal or vegetable, but make a deep cut in it and you find it vital; you find in [the oozing and flowing of] the very sands an anticipation of the vegetable leaf.

... The stones have already learned the law." 52 All of matter, as all of life, is interconnected. The matter which once was alive has decomposed to its basic elements to make room for and nourish more life, and all matter potentially passes through all degrees of life from
the least organic to the most complex. In the material world, there is no death except for the individual, and that is merely a factual incident and therefore apparent rather than real.

How plain that death is only the phenomenon of the individual or class. Nature does not recognize it, she finds her own again under new forms without loss. Yet death is beautiful when seen to be a law, and not an accident—it is as common as life.... and after all what portion of this so serene and living nature can be said to be alive? 53

The introduction of purpose into nature further adds to the confusion Thoreau creates between the metaphysical and ethical aspects of his thought. The logical inconsistency here accounts in part for the later lack of consistency between the ethics of his early and middle years and the politics of his later life.

In addition, Thoreau believed that because all of nature is of a whole, animal, mineral and vegetable, the general may be inferred from the particular. The merest particle contains the whole in microcosm. The regularity of nature's organization, the cyclical operation of the vital forces at work within the universe, permits a generalization from the particular. But since the factual exists only in the present moment at a definite place, the relations of particular facts to general facts change with a difference in perspective from either point of time or spatial position. It is because of such complexities that any generalization from the particular fact to the relational principle is valid only when limited to a static unit of time and a fixed point of perspective. As he
said in *Walden*:

If we knew all the laws of Nature, we should need only one fact, or the description of one actual phenomenon to infer all the particular results at that point. Now we know only a few laws, and our result is vitiated, not, of course, by any confusion or irregularity in Nature, but by our ignorance of essential elements in the calculation. Our notions of law and harmony are commonly confined to those instances which we detect; but the harmony which results from a far greater number of seemingly conflicting but really concurring, laws, which we have not detected, is still more wonderful. The particular laws are as our points of view, as, to the traveller, a mountain outline varies with every step, and it has an infinite number of profiles, though absolutely but one form. 54

If this held true in ethics as well as metaphysics, then Thoreau presumably would have been more tolerant of persons who did not share his moral viewpoint. The metaphysics would seem to argue for a wider latitude in moral behavior, if not some form of ethical relativism; but Thoreau held to a moral absolutism which took his particular viewpoint as the only valid position. The lack of toleration in human affairs which his life displayed is hardly consistent with the equanimity with which he viewed the operations of a material universe that is supposedly morally neutral. To introduce as he does, purpose into the universe is to introduce an ethical content which he had been at pains to exclude. The logical inconsonance is important, for it explains in large measure the essential incompatibility of his metaphysical assumptions about a morally neutral nature and the ethical basis of his political arguments.

Yet, Thoreau believed that the "purpose" displayed in the operation
of organization in the material universe is not reason, intelligence, or any external benevolent power. It is rather a blind, impartial, neutral condition of being which progresses according to impulses beyond the comprehension of human reason. It is the motive force of life and all the kindred mysteries of the laws of physical nature, among which he included the instincts of living organisms, that operates with a remarkable degree of regularity in its various manifestations and with an underlying unity of effect throughout nature. It is this rule of purposeful regularity which Thoreau has in mind when he asks, "Who shall distinguish between the law by which a brook finds its river, the instinct [by which] a bird performs its migrations, and the knowledge by which a man steers his ship around the globe?" It is obviously a non-normative influence of sequential events to which matter responds under the weight of its own being.

This process is not the source of morality as it would be in a system that was mechanical or tied firmly to a monomorphic view of reality. Such a system might suggest that the stuff of nature responds of its own weight, that from response comes movement, from movement comes pattern, from pattern comes purpose, from purpose comes intelligence and from intelligence come ethical norms which create the basis of morality. Thoreau, being a committed dualist, would not have adopted such an argument. Values come not from the operations of the material
universe but from the ideal world which man apprehends through intuition and revelation.

I am often astonished to see how long, and with what manifold infringements of the natural laws, some men I meet in the highway maintain life. She [Nature] does not deny them quarter; they do not die without priest. All the while she rejoices, for if they are not one part of her they are another .... How many a poor man, striving to live a pure life, pines and dies after a life of sickness, and his successors doubt if Nature is not pitiless; while the confirmed and consistent sot, who is content with his rank life like mushrooms, a mass of corruption, still dozes comfortably under a hedge. He has made peace with himself; there is no strife. Nature is really very kind and liberal to all persons of vicious habits.  

To Thoreau as a simplistic dualist, intelligence is an attribute of the spirit and spirit is the mode of the ineffable mystery of reality that lies beyond the material universe. It does not come out of the life-growth or arise from the stuff of life. Spirit permeates the material universe, but is something other than matter. Spirit yields truth whereas matter yields knowledge. That is of fundamental importance to Thoreau's entire system of thought, for it convinces him that, "God did not make this world in jest; no, nor in indifference."  

For Thoreau the permeation of matter by spirit introduces an element of normative value in the factual and gives it a relation to reality beyond time and space, which frees it from utility, limitation, and the constraints of the organizational principles of mere matter. Spirit provides a sense of things divine, joins fact with value; it is the consciousness of spirit which distinguishes the sentient from grossest matter. Apprehension of the factual gives rise to knowledge, but apprehension of the spirit-
Wisdom does not inspect, but behold.... We do not learn by influence and deduction and the application of mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy. It is with science as with ethics,—we cannot know truth by contrivance and method. Thoreau believed that "the highest we can attain to is not Knowledge, but Sympathy with Intelligence," which is the same as wisdom. Wisdom brings a "sudden revelation of the insufficiency of all that we had called knowledge before; an indefinite sense of the grandeur and glory of the universe. It is the lighting up of the mist by the sun. But man cannot be said to know in any higher sense...." Thoreau's separation between the understanding and knowledge or wisdom and intelligence could not be more complete, with knowledge having to do only with factual data perceived by the senses and predicated upon a logic of limitation, that is, of cause and effect within a time sequence. In the material sense, nature is incomplete and unsatisfactory for she excites an expectation of revelation which is not empirically possible. Without an appreciation of the spiritual permeation of nature, purpose in nature has no use and reality is impaled upon the present moment without any essential meaning. In its material aspect, "the present is the instant work and near process of living, and will be found in the last analysis to be nothing more nor less than digestion." Ludwig Fuerbach was dead right as far as he went, for in a material sense Thoreau
believed that we are what we eat. Yet, with a belief in both the transcendence and in the immanence of spirit it is argued that "Nature is full of genius, full of the divinity; so that not a snowflake escapes its fashioning hand. Nothing is cheap and coarse...." 

It is obvious that Thoreau lacks consistency and logic in arguing for the immanence and simultaneous transcendence of spirit. The whole argument rests upon an intellectual sleight of hand, although Thoreau was doubtlessly unconscious of it, which pushes value into the natural realm then pulls it back into the supernatural as it suits his immediate forensic need. The logical lapse would probably not have disturbed him in the slightest, but it does make a glaring weakness in the systematic presentation of his views.

The duality in nature, spirit and matter, which Thoreau assumes to exist gives a sense of paradox or perhaps of partiality as when seeing reflections of a reflection. "All sights and sounds are seen and heard both in time and eternity," and either can be an illusion if it is apprehended as knowledge rather than with wisdom. "It is only when we forget all our learning that we begin to know.... You must be aware that no thing is what you have taken it to be." It is something more than what it appears: it is subject as well as object. Nature in her objective aspect Thoreau views as containing the material articles which are the topic of science and which linked together in a sequence of time and proxi-
mity of space yield knowledge. In her subjective aspect, however, Thoreau viewed nature as the medium through which spirit is manifested; it is the source of all value, the point of reference for all virtue, the mother of poetry, philosophy, mythology, and wisdom. In her objective aspect, nature is a closed system feeding on herself, conserving matter and energy, bound on all sides by the limitations of time and space, driven in blind perpetual motion, restricted by inexorable physical laws. Subjectively, nature is limitless, admits all possibilities, and is a direct channel of the absolute mind or spirit.

How nature is to be at once objective and subjective is one of the mysteries which Thoreau does not attempt to explain, but rather accepts. Whether nature is objective or subjective seems to rest upon the mood and attitude of the observer. Consciousness is the human faculty that permits an individual to achieve an intuitive apprehension of the subjective aspect of objective nature. Nature does of course act in the sense that its unfolding in accord with physical laws affects persons and phenomena within nature. Nature is also acted upon by the impermeating spirit, and by the morally conscious man. To those who would object that nature cannot be at once value-free or objective, and infused with value as the embodiment of spirit in a subjective mood, can only be said that Thoreau saw it as a mystery or a paradox. Objectors may prefer to see it as intellectual confusion or self-deception.
Yet, this is a fundamental point for Thoreau, and he builds upon it by asserting that there is a point of union between the objective and subjective aspects of nature, an opening from historic time to eternity, from space to infinity, from potential to perfection, from the contingency of cause and effect to ultimate indivisibility. The conjunction is in the present; the very now is the aperture in time, the interstice in cosmic space. Transcendent reality is displayed in the moving instant. He ascribed to the reality of the moment both the objective and subjective aspects of nature, affirming that "we dwell on that eternal ridge between" the past and future where time "neither comes nor goes," where all things are possible and the future has no relation to the past. As he said in the Journal, "in the prospect of the future, we are, by instinct, transcendentalists. We affirm that all things are possible, but only these things have been to our knowledge. I do not even infer the future from what I know of the past." He expresses this same feeling in the famous passage from Walden where he declares that "time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains." The same idea is found in A Week: "The mind knows a distance and a space of which all these sums combined do not make a unit of measure, —the interval between that which appears and that which is." Speaking of an encounter with subjective nature he
gives an account of the mystical passage of an objective fact into the transcendent realm of reality:

If you stand right fronting and face to face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a scimitar, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow, and you will happily conclude your mortal career. Be it life or death, we crave only reality. 69

This translation of a fact to a truth, or perception of the reality behind appearance is achieved by an openness to the present moment, what Thoreau calls consciousness. For the attentive individual consciousness is the instrumentality by which matter is transcended to the realm of the ideal and can only be described in the ecstatic language of a mystic. Though the passage was cited earlier, it bears repeating in this connection:

If with closed ears and eyes I consult consciousness for a moment immediately are all walls and barriers dissipated, earth rolls from under me, and I float, by the impetus derived from the earth and the system, a subjective, heavily laden thought, in the midst of an unknown and infinite sea, or else heave and swell like a vast ocean of thought, without a rock or headland, where all riddles are solved, all straight lines making their two ends to meet, eternity and space gamboling familiarly through my depths. I am from the beginning, knowing no end, no aim. No sun illuminates me, for I dissolve all lesser lights in my own intenser and steadier light. I am a restful kernel in the magazine of the universe. 70

The above is the sort of mystical experience which we know also is described throughout the religious literature of the East, and by the Christian mystics. Indeed, Thoreau summarizes the apprehension of the ideal reality in language reminiscent of Jesus and the later martyrs:
"Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations." 71

From the above it is obvious that Thoreau had difficulty in reducing to precise and consistent language his idea of the good. But it is equally clear that he conceived of a good beyond the existential facts and that the good has a universal applicability. Also, that this ultimate source of value encompasses more than particulars and individuals is implicit in his expressed thought and it serves as a standard against which normative problems can be gauged. The way in which man is able to apprehend the transcendent good will be a topic to be discussed later when considering the nature of man. At this point it is necessary simply to recognize the existence in Thoreau's thought of an idea of the good which is beyond the bounds of the material world, and which is not related directly to the material objects that are perceived by the physical senses. The good is perceived by individual consciousness as we have seen. Thoreau does not explain how this individual perception is enlarged to encompass the universal good. The difficulty, only noted here, will be treated more extensively in the section devoted to the nature of man. This lapse is one of the most serious weaknesses in the system of moral absolutism upon which he grounded his politics.
According to Thoreau, the good is not identical with God, not identical with beauty or compassion or any of the traits usually considered virtuous by human standards. It has no necessary relationship to human conventions of morality, nor indeed, any necessary relationship to any human consideration. The good is an ideal category which exists independently of the material universe as one of the attributes of ultimate reality. As indicated earlier, the channel to reality is through the present moment, and therefore, the good is subject to the perspective of the viewer from his position in time and space. While this will be interpreted by many as a kind of ethical relativism, in Thoreau's mind it merely accounted for the different opinions of the good among honest men and for the shifts in his own opinion concerning the normative value scale. To him it simply meant that there still exists an ultimate good against which historical events might be measured by a person of acute consciousness and toward which a conscientious person might direct the course of his own life in both the physical and spiritual sense. Why his beliefs did not engender a greater toleration for an opposing viewpoint cannot be explained except by noting Thoreau's overweening egoism. The good in the universe was not much of a problem for him because he was certain of his own perceptions and because the essential optimism of Transcendentalism assumed a certain cheerful intention in the workings of both the spiritual and physical aspects of creation.
The problem of evil, on the other hand, was a serious one to Thoreau, for he sometimes wrote and acted as if convinced of the reality of evil as a positive force. Many of the Transcendentalists were able to shrug off the problem of evil by explaining it simply as one of the examples of the principle of polarity, that is, that evil is the absence of good just as the absence of light is darkness and the absence of sound is silence. Emerson escaped the problem of evil by declaring it to be not a problem at all, for he dismissed it as simply non-existent. In "Compensation" Emerson wrote,

Under all this running sea of circumstance, whose waters ebb and flow with perfect balance, lies the aboriginal abyss of Being, Essence, or God, is not a relation or a part, but the whole. Being is the vast affirmative, excluding negation, self-balanced, and swallowing up all relations, parts and times within itself. Nature, truth, virtue are the influx from thence. Vice is the absence or departure of the same. Nothing, falsehood, may indeed stand as the great night or shade on which as a background the living universe paints itself forth, but no fact is begotten by it; it cannot work, for it is not.

This was unsatisfactory to Thoreau, although he did not articulate his ambiguous feelings until late in his life, when the John Brown incident had stirred his moral outrage to the point of explosion, and after the period when Emerson had been the primary influence on him, indeed, after the crest of Transcendentalism had passed in New England. In his early Journal Thoreau had been ambivalent about evil, attempting to reconcile Transcendental optimism with his own Puritan suspicions about the darker power. In 1839, he was filling his Journal pages with
such Emersonian declarations as, "Virtue is the very heart and lungs of vice: it cannot stand up but it lean on virtue,"\textsuperscript{73} and, "Bravery and cowardice are kindred correlatives with Knowledge and Ignorance, Light and Darkness, Good and Evil."\textsuperscript{74} But he had nagging doubts about the non-objective reality of evil. In nature he observed occasional peculiarities which suggested a not wholly innocent influence. During the soul-chilling experience on top of Mr. Ktaadn, Thoreau thought that he had come face to face with a primordial chaos in nature which was possibly "one true source of evil."\textsuperscript{75} Elsewhere he observed that "filth and impurity are as old as cleanliness and purity. To correspond to man completely, Nature is even perhaps unchaste herself."\textsuperscript{76} In the following six months Thoreau had further suspicions that "impurity" in nature was not merely a reflection of man's character, but an expression of one aspect of all material creation, natural phenomena as well as of mankind:

All things, both beautiful and ugly, agreeable and offensive, are expressed in flowers,—all kinds and degrees of beauty and all kinds of foulness. For what purpose has nature made a flower to fill the lowlands with the odor of carrion? Just so much beauty and virtue as there is in the world, and just so much ugliness and vice, you see in flowers.\textsuperscript{77} More pointedly, the Victorian equation of sex with impurity or vice which Thoreau shared was the basis for his sense of shock at finding a fungus which closely resembled a human phallus. Thoreau identified it as the \textit{Phallus impudicus}, and was led to comment: "In all respects
a most disgusting object, yet very suggestive.... Pray, what was
Nature thinking of when she made this? She almost puts herself on a
level with those who draw in privies. 78

The idea of two powers, one benevolent and the other malevolent,
operating in the neutral or innocent medium of the material universe
never quite surrendered to Transcendental doctrine in Thoreau, for the
Calvinist strain was dominant in his emotional temperament. The
supervenience of some apparently vengeful or malign occurrence roused
Thoreau’s latent conviction that evil has an independent existence.

Day before yesterday I looked at the mangled and blackened
bodies of men which had been blown up by powder, and felt
that the lives of men were not innocent, and that there was an
avenging power in nature. Today I hear this immortal melody
[the wind on telegraph wires], while the west wind is blowing
balmily on my cheek, and methinks a roseate sunset is prepar­
ing. Are there not two powers? 79

As he grew older, his conviction grew stronger that evil was some­
thing more than the absence of good. In his later correspondence
Thoreau often referred to evil as something positive, as he did in a
letter to Parker Pillsbury in which he speaks of weapons to be employed
against evil and "the deeds of darkness. 80 To Harrison Blake he
pointed out in a relatively early letter that, "It is a momentous fact
that a man may be good, or he may be bad. ....81 As his political and
ethical views crystallized around events such as the Mexican War, the
Fugitive Slave Law, and finally the John Brown episode, Thoreau came
at the end of his life to a position that evil is a part of the scheme of things and inseparable from the operation of the material universe. Aggression and violence are a part of nature. "Such is Nature, who gave one creature a taste or yearning for another's entrails as its favorite tidbit!" 82

The ambivalence with regard to the problem of evil was never completely resolved in Thoreau's mind, but the vehemence which he displayed against those things which he regarded as moral wrongs was so strong that it is unlikely that he considered evil as merely nothing or non-being. His tendency to withdraw and to ignore the various manifestations of evil was consistent with orthodox Transcendentalism, but the active phase of his social concern combined with the military metaphor he continually used when discussing the struggle between virtue and vice seem to indicate the prevalence of a conception of objective evil. The source of morality, then, exists in the good which is pre-existent in the ideal categories of the spiritual realm, but the problem of evil remained essentially unsolved in Thoreau's metaphysical thought, although his emotional tendency was toward a belief in something more ominous than the merely not-good. It is clear that in terms of the general outline of his metaphysical position the problem of evil was unresolved, perhaps unresolvable, and remained one of those mysteries which were not subject to adequate solution by human intelligence. Evil
apparently was considered as one of the proofs of irrationality in the universe, an aspect of universal will which does not deny the organizing principle immanent in creation, but which adds symmetry and provides evidence of the illimitable potentiality in the world of spirit. Unable to explain it satisfactorily, he accepted the possibility of evil and dealt with it pragmatically as an element in the life of man and let the problem of the origin of evil take care of itself.

One sees not but he had best let bad take care of itself, and have to do only with what is beyond suspicion. If you light on the least vestige of truth, and it is the weight of the whole body still which stamps the faintest trace, an eternity will not suffice to extol it, while no evil is so huge, but you grudge to bestow on it a moment of hate. 83

Of course, he seems to abandon this lofty position in the best of his polemics against the Fugitive Slave Law and slavery in general. In any case Thoreau had a disdain for metaphysical systems and was most concerned with the practical issues of morality which face men in their private and social lives. Therefore, the problem of evil as he saw it will be dealt with extensively in the section on the nature of man as a social and psychological phenomenon even though no satisfactory explanation of evil itself has been presented by Thoreau or by the present author on Thoreau's behalf.

One additional point should be made in connection with Thoreau's view of the universe. He believed that there is a law of conservation of matter demonstrable by science and which connects all of material
creation, so that inorganic dust one day may have been one's ancestor and one day may be his posterity. He believed the same thing to be true of the spiritual world. Spirit permeates physical creation, and has an analogous law of conservation. As he put it in the line which James Russell Lowell deleted from "Chesuncook" before printing it in the Atlantic, the pine trees which tower above a man's head may aspire to as high a heaven as the soul of man, there to tower over him still. The conservation of spirit gives an interesting twist to Thoreau that is unusual in Western political thought. He accepted the idea of transmigration as a consequence of the continuity of spirit. "It is unavoidable, the idea of transmigration; not merely a fancy of the pets, but an instinct of the race." 

The whole train of ideas which flow from the law of conservation of spirit as applied to mankind jars with our understanding of Thoreau as an individualist in political and social matters. However, the spirit which Thoreau had in mind here is not the individual soul, but the spark of Universal Intelligence that animates the individual soul but which is indivisible from the Over-soul of which he believed it to be a part. Speaking of a skeleton, he distinguished the spiritual or general from the particular factual or physical aspects of an individual and related it to the greater whole:

We discover that the only spirit which haunts [the skeleton] is a universal intelligence which has created it in harmony with
all nature. Science never saw a ghost, nor does it look for any, but sees everywhere the traces, and it is itself the agent, of a Universal Intelligence. 86

This is an example of what he had in mind when he observed that infinite change occurs only in particulars, not in generals. 87 He was speaking of the spiritual transcendence of absolute reality over the particular needs and wishes of individual members of the race when he remarked on "the so much grander significance of any fact ... when not referred to man and his needs but viewed absolutely! Sounds that are wafted from over the confines of time." 88 The conservation of spirit or truth as Thoreau might have preferred to say, is illustrated by the following passage from the Journal:

Thought greets thought over the widest gulfs of time with unerring freemasonry. I know, for instance, that Sadi entertained once identically the same thought that I do, and therefore I can find no essential difference between Sadi and myself. He is not Persian, he is not ancient, he is not strange to me. By the identity of his thoughts with mine he still survives. It makes no odds what atoms serve us. Sadi possessed no greater privacy or individuality than is thrown open to me. He had no more interior and essential and sacred self than can come naked into my thought at this moment. Truth and a true man is something essentially public, not private. If Sadi were to come back to claim a personal identity with the historical Sadi, he would find there were too many of us, he could not get a skin that would contain us all. The symbol of a personal identity preserved in this sense is a mummy from the catacombs—a whole skin, it may [be], but no life within it. By living the life of a man is made common property.... The difference between any man and that posterity amid whom he is famous is too insignificant to sanction that he should be set up again in any world as distinct from them. Methinks I can be as ultimate with the essence of an ancient worthy as, so to speak, he was with himself. 89
Thus, we have Thoreau the individualist making with unfeigned conviction such statements as, "Man has a million eyes, and the race knows infinitely more than the individual. Consent to be wise through your race." Here he was undoubtedly speaking of the spiritual residue of human experience which might easily be termed instinct. It is less clear what he may have meant in stating that, "It would be some advantage to philosophy if men were named merely in the gross, as they are known. It would only be necessary to know the genus, and perchance, the species and variety, to know the individual." He may have been relating the historical life of the race to the spiritual life of the individual, as he explicitly did in *A Week*:

We are grateful when we are reminded by interior evidence of the permanence of universal laws, for our faith is but faintly remembered, indeed, is not a remembered assurance, but a use and enjoyment of knowledge. It is when we do not have to believe, but come into actual contact with Truth, and are related to her in the most direct and intimate way.... all the events which make up the annals of the nations are but the shadows of our private experiences. Suddenly and silently the eras which we call history awake and glimmer in us, and there is room for Alexander and Hannibal to march and conquer. In short, the history which we read is only a fainter memory of events which have happened in our own experience. Tradition is a more interrupted and feeble memory.

In other thinkers such ideas have led to conservatism, but allied to Thoreau's view of history discussed above, his thought does not follow the traditionalists to a defense of the status quo. The theme of race memory in the hands of such writers as Houston Stewart...
Chamberlain, Alfred Rosenberg, and Ernst Driek has led to a doctrine of racial superiority. It is obvious that Henry Thoreau included all of mankind in the word "race", but even so, he did not escape all of the logical consequences of a theory of racial memory and, as will be apparent later, he held a thorough doctrine of elitism and hero worship. It is possible from certain of his observations on the Irish, Negroes, Canadians, and non-Yankees generally, to suggest that he was not above suspecting that there might be an ancestral basis to certain types of superiority. For Thoreau, however, the possibility of a racial memory and an elitism based upon this sort of intuition came from his metaphysical position on the conservation of spirit. It will be an important theme to recall when considering the function of the hero in Thoreau's distinctly political theory, and in the nature of man.

Two analogies certainly may be drawn with Thoreau's view of the conservation of spirit. In some respects it is similar to the Oriental theme of eternal recurrence. However, eternal recurrence implies the cyclical reappearance of static and completed designs, whereas Thoreau's idea is a more dynamic unfolding of spiritual creation related to universal forms. Reality was for Thoreau, as for Emerson, a spiral wherein all things are still possible rather than a closed circle. In a passage reminiscent of Hegel he wrote, "truth is ever returning into herself. I glimpse one feature to-day, another to-morrow; and the next
day they are blended."\textsuperscript{93}

It is to Hegelian cyclicism that the second analogy may be drawn. But, the analogy cannot be sustained in anything other than a similarity of process, for Hegel's application of the dialectic to the nation-state is antithetical to the view Thoreau took. Nation-states were for Thoreau close to non-realities, at least in the sense that Hegel would have used the term. Thoreau dismissed them casually: "The historian strives in vain to make them memorable."\textsuperscript{94} There are occasions when, as we shall see later, Thoreau speaks of institutions such as the state in a tone similar to Hegel, but for the most part Thoreau did not consider that there is sufficient spiritual content in social institutions for the principle of conservation of spirit to operate. In the life of the individual, and beyond that, in the race, spirit exists and accumulates through language and racial memory. The idea of conservation of spirit accounts for his preference for myth over history, and for poetry over prose. These forms are better suited to serve as vehicles for the transmission of truth through the passage of time and through the succession of rising and dying generations which inhabit this curious universe. As he observed in "Sunday" of \textit{A Week}.

It is interesting to observe with what singular unanimity the farthest sundered nations and generations consent to give completeness and roundness to an ancient fable, of which they indistinctly appreciate the beauty or the truth.... By such slow aggregation has mythology grown from the first. The very nursery tales of this generation were the nursery tales of primeval races. They migrate from East to
The spiritual content of races of men, of pine trees, of rocks, is preserved by as fixed a law of nature as the conservation of energy or of matter. In these laws of conservation, the identification of mankind with all other natural phenomena from which he is literally inseparable has a metaphysical basis. It is obvious that everything is interrelated in both a physical and a spiritual sense, and men instinctively feel this to be true. But, this should not be interpreted in such a way as to modify his basic dualistic view of the nature of the universe.

In summary, Thoreau had no qualms about the existence of objective reality. While the spirit of God pervades the universe and imparts a measure of divinity to it, the material universe is God's creation rooted in spirit, but is not wholly spirit, and is not God himself. The spirit which pervades the universe permeates the objects which occur in it. Therefore, Thoreau's feeling for divinity is better described as a variety of vitalism rather than pantheism. Thoreau seems to have had a kind of Aristotelian view of "soul"—or in Transcendental terms, Oversoul—which provides the entelechy of the universe and its phenomena. Thus as we have seen, Thoreau is both idealist and dualist. He was convinced of a universe which provides a universal reason, in the causative rather than the cognitive sense; yet he admitted an irrationalism in
the cognitive processes of man's intellectual perceptions because of his belief in the superiority of the affective perceptions of man's spiritual intuitions. The unsatisfactory confusion about the source of morality, sometimes external to nature and sometimes inherent in objective creation, is a glaring flaw in his metaphysics and a problem for the ethics of his politics. Additionally, his philosophical conclusions concerning the teleology of a universe whose manifestations in natural phenomena are morally neutral despite the objective reality of evil create difficulties for his later political thought.

In any case, Thoreau's view of the universe is complex, combining several ideas which may not be wholly compatible or logically consistent. But he was careful to make a reservation which preserved his view of reality from hopeless confusion: "Let us wander where we will, the universe is built round about us, and we are central still.... Yet the universe is a sphere whose center is wherever there is intelligence. The sun is not so central as a man."96 The real lies in the present moment and in the perspective of the individual.

Nature and human life are as various to our several experiences as our constitutions are various. Who shall say what prospect life offers to another? Could a greater miracle take place than if we should look through each other's eyes for an instant? We should live in all the ages of the world in an hour,—aye, in all the worlds of the ages.97

As is the case with many political theorists whose works are written with more explicit explanation of their views, it is the nature of man
which is the keystone of Thoreau's metaphysical system as well as the
basis of his political thought. Mankind and man in particular must exist
before any other considerations of the real or the apparent have meaning.

Notes

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Eulogy," in The Writings of Henry David
3. A Week, W., I, p. 413.
5. A Week, W., I, pp. 411-412.
6. Ibid., p. 394.
15. Ibid., August 10, 1838. W., VII, p. 53.
17. A Week, W., I, p. 67.
24. Walden, W., II, pp. 350-351.
31. Walden, W., II, p. 239.
32. The modern spelling of the highest point in Maine is Katahdin. Thoreau preferred to spell it phonetically from the Indian pronunciation. See his essay, "Ktaadn," W., III.
33. All quotations in this paragraph are from "Kataadn," W., III, pp. 67-79.
34. Letter to Harrison Blake, November 16, 1857. Correspondence, Bode and Harding, eds., p. 497.
35. Walden, W., II, p. 312.
37. Ibid., April 19, 1840, pp. 133-134.

39. Letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson, March 11, 1842. Correspondence, Bode and Harding, eds., p. 64.


44. Ibid., January 14, 1861. W., XX, p. 311.

45. Letter to Harrison Blake, March 27, 1848. Correspondence, Bode and Harding, eds., p. 215.


49. Ibid., p. 443.


52. Ibid.

53. Letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson, March 11, 1842. Correspondence, Bode and Harding, eds., p. 64.

54. Walden, W., II, p. 320.


58. W., V, p. 131.
64. **Ibid.**, October 4, 1859. W., XVIII, p. 371.
68. **A Week**, W., I, p. 413.
71. Walden, W., II, p. 190.
74. **Ibid.**, December, no date, 1839, p. 99.
77. **Ibid.**, June 26, 1852. W., X, pp. 149-150.


83. A Week, W., I, p. 328.

84. The quotation, which caused a breach between the two men that never healed reads, "It [the pine tree] is as immortal as I am, and perchance will go to as high a heaven, there to tower above me still."


86. Ibid., December 2, 1853. W., XII, p. 4.

87. Ibid., July 5, 1840. W., VII, p. 162.

88. Ibid., November 11, 1851. W., IX, p. 104.

89. Ibid., August 8, 1852. W., X, p. 290.

90. Ibid., September 11, 1850. W., VIII, p. 69.

91. Ibid., May 21, 1851. W., VIII, p. 209.

92. A Week, W., I, p. 310.


94. A Week, W., I, p. 353.

95. Ibid., W., I, p. 59.

96. Ibid., W., I, pp. 353-373.

In Thoreau's view, the major characteristics of man are (1) his dual nature as both a physical and spiritual being; (2) his existence as a part of the natural order of the material universe; (3) his discrete individuality; (4) the freedom of his will; and (5) his tendency to exaggerate the importance of the social artifices which his innate gregariousness cause him to develop. There are other characteristics of mankind that Thoreau recognized, among which are a class of spiritual attributes transcending the limitations imposed upon mankind by the necessities of his physical being. However, the physical nature of mankind, while not occupying primary place in Thoreau's thinking, is given first consideration in this chapter because Thoreau recognized it to be a prior condition of the spiritual side of man's nature. The elements of spirit, will, and affective intelligence in the Bergsonian sense that occur in humanity will follow second in the order of discussion. The synthesis of the two sides of man's nature in a complete picture of human potential will occupy the third area of discussion with particular attention being given to Thoreau's theory of the hero, in which the ideal fulfillment of human potential is achieved.

Thoreau suffered a certain doubleness of vision when considering
mankind, particularly in terms of man's material element, which resulted in part from the dualism of his metaphysics, but which was also a consequence of the fundamental inconsonance between the Transcendental view of the nature of man that he professed and the darker suspicions he harbored about his fellow creatures as legacies of his Puritan New England heritage and that were reinforced by the Victorian pruderies of his time. He vacillated between one extreme view and the other attempting to find a comfortable accommodation. In his doctrine of the hero, he finally made a compromise which satisfied the demands of his metaphysical dualism and his Puritan moral predilections, but left little more than an apology to the grand optimism of his early Transcendental thinking about the common man. As he grew older the emphasis of his thinking shifted to the darker side of the human personality as he became disillusioned with the specimens of humanity which he came in contact with and disheartened by the moral follies, if not sheer maliciousness, to which they seemed predisposed, especially when acting in concert for social or political ends. Such confusion as there may have been in his thinking was probably dismissed or at least rendered inconsequential with the refinement of his idea of the hero and the actual appearance of the heroic archetype in the person of John Brown.

As a dualist, Thoreau was bound to see two aspects of man, the physical and the spiritual. One of the difficulties which man must bear is
the constant tugging he feels from both sides of his nature because, as he put it in *A Week*, the spirit of man is imperfectly mingled with his body. ¹ He wrote several aphorisms to illustrate the point, such as, "On one side of man is the actual, and on the other the ideal,"² and "The eye may see for the hand, but not for the mind."³ Both sides of man were infinitely interesting to Thoreau, but it was ultimately the spiritual nature of man which commanded his first loyalty, and it was man's spiritual being which claimed priority in the grand scheme of his thinking. To stress the point is to risk drawing too sharp a dichotomy between the two sides of man's nature, for Thoreau thought of them less as separate states of being than as two phases in the single process of living. Although the poetic language makes the central point somewhat obtuse, Thoreau described his view of the life process which mingled the body and spirit albeit imperfectly:

This stream of events which we consent to call actual, and that other mightier stream which alone carries us with it,—what makes the difference? On the one our bodies float, and we have sympathy with it through them; on the other, our spirits. We are ever dying to one world and being born into another, and possibly no man knows whether he is at any time dead in the sense in which he affirms that phenomenon of another or not. ⁴

This was a fascinating mystery for Thoreau, and one which he felt deserved the closest observation and attention. He felt that the actual phenomena of human life deserves to be impartially studied. He found it inexplicable that mankind had progressed so far intellectually
and yet "the science of Human Nature has never been attempted, as the science of Nature has. The dry light has never shone on it. Neither physics nor metaphysics have touched it." One thing about man which is not to be denied, however, is that man is a part of nature, a material and physical being and as such has an importance by virtue of his place in the order of living creatures.

In his biography of Thoreau, Joseph Wood Krutch argues that Thoreau gradually moved from an originally Transcendental view of man to a more naturalistic view. Krutch says that:

The more his observations took in and the longer he brooded over the facts he had observed, the more obvious it became that man was a part of nature, not nature a part of man; that man reflected her, not she him; that her purposes and her standards might include some of his, but they included much more also, so that the merely human was swallowed up in the natural.

Thoreau was himself egocentric by disposition, and when dealing with moral, social and political issues, he took an anthropocentric viewpoint. But as concerns man's physical being he seems never to have entertained a serious doubt that man is not another thread in the patterned fabric of nature, wholly bound in the warp and woof of creation. From the very early Journal it is apparent that he saw man as part of the chain of matter which composes the organic earth: "We pass through all degrees of life from the least organic to the most complex. Sometimes we are mere pudding-stone and scoriae." From the middle Journal, ten
years after John's death, comes the statement, "I farm the dust of my ancestors.... I go forth to redeem the meadows they have become. I compel them to take refuge in turnips." And in the late Journal, just after his father had died, he wrote, "The matter which composed the body of our first human father still exists under another name."

Because he is at one with the organizing principle which nature manifests in the law of conservation of matter, man identifies himself with the earth or the material which makes the phenomena found in nature. With a kind of cheerful acceptance of this relationship with Mother Earth, Thoreau was able to observe that "the bones of children soon turn to dust again." In a very real and immediate sense, man is a part of nature and subject to the general laws that the various genera obey in coming into existence, flourishing for a season, dying to make room for the succeeding generation while providing a measure of nourishment for the replacement. In this sense, Thoreau saw mankind related to all animal life, vegetable life, and even the supposedly inanimate forms of earthly matter. Thoreau declared that he had yet to meet a "philosopher who could, in a quite conclusive, undoubtful way, show me the, and, if not the, then how [sic] any, difference between man and a fish. We are so much alike."  

It is clear therefore, that Thoreau regarded humanity with the same eye that he cast on the rest of nature. As one of nature's species,
mankind is the same wherever and whenever human beings occur, in the same way that cats are the same whether in ancient Egypt or in the Thoreau household. The constant element of humanity as one of the genera of nature is responsible for Thoreau's remark that it would be advantageous to philosophy for men to be named in the gross, for then the individual might be known if one had identified his genus, species, and variety.  

In view of the foregoing, mankind is subject to the same natural forces which control the lives of other orders of beings. So delicately attuned is humanity to the conditions of nature that the period of mankind's existence on the globe could be ended by only a bit colder winter, or a deeper snow, or a more violent wind for "it would be so easy to cut their threads any time with a little sharper blast from the north." Man lives tenaciously on the brink of annihilation, but has one advantage over his fellow creatures: he "is an animal who more than any other can adapt himself to all climates and circumstances." Being more adaptive, he has been able to assert dominion over the earth but obeys in his own turn the instincts which are part of his race, as when in his migrations he has usually followed a course from east to west, following the river patterns as he moved. In the span of time which man has been inhabiting the world, his essential diathesis has been constant even though the modes of his existence have been modified according to the state of civili-
zation that he has achieved. The humanity which appears is of uneven quality, but it does achieve an average which is healthy enough to ensure the continuation of mankind from age to age. Thoreau spoke of the "herd of men" who exist in the same way as cattle do; but despite the coarseness and numerous imperfections which are frequent among individuals, there is hope for the herd.

Though there are many crooked and crabbed specimens of humanity among them, run all to thorn and rind, and crowded out of shape by adverse circumstances, like the third chestnut in the bur, so that you wonder to see some heads wear a whole hat, yet fear not that the race will fail or waiver in them; like the crabs which grow in hedges, they furnish the stocks of sweet and thrifty fruits still. Thus is nature recruited from age to age, while the fair and palatable varieties die out, and have their period. This is that mankind. How cheap must be the material of which so many men are made.

How cheap, yet how dear, for Thoreau also had the profoundest conviction of the worth of individual personhood. Even though a man is a part of nature and is merely an incidental and passing appearance in the continuum of the race, for that individual all the life and reality that is exists only in his perceptions. For this reason, Thoreau saw each individual as a particle of the greater truth, and as such, a thing of intrinsic worth.

This point has been neglected by those who see Thoreau as a complete individualist. He did recognize man's relationship not only to the rest of creation, but also the rest of humanity. The recognition of the dependency of mankind upon the physical setting places Thoreau some-
what apart from the atomism of the Scottish individualists. As Thoreau's definition of man placed him in the context of the whole of creation, it also placed the individual in the context of the whole human race. As we shall see, there is a social aspect to mankind in Thoreau's writings that has been somewhat neglected.

Yet, since nature occupied so large a share of his attention, it is logical that man first be considered from a purely physical standpoint. In some ways, Walden and nearly all of his writing in the early and middle years seem to be addressed to the problem of how to provide the necessaries of life while preserving enough of the present moment to provide for the necessaries of the spirit. Still, his definition of what is necessary to life was fairly narrow as he pointed out:

By the words, necessary of life, I mean whatever, of all that man obtains by his own exertions, has been from the first, or from long use has become, so important to human life that few, if any, whether from savageness, or poverty, or philosophy, ever attempt to do without it. . . . The necessaries of life for man in this climate may, accurately enough, be distributed under the several heads of Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel: for not till we have secured these are we prepared to entertain the true problems of life with freedom and a prospect of success.

It is apparent that Thoreau recognized that physical needs must be met before man can develop beyond the savage search for sufficient means of survival. He did not disparage the body or decry its separate existence, except in rare instances which will be pointed out later, so much as relegate it to a secondary position in the value scale by which
he judged man's purpose. He spoke often of his respect and love of both aspects of man's divided nature, as when in *Walden* he wrote,

I find in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love the wild not less than the good. 18

This partly accounts for his avid interest in Indians and in cultural anthropology generally, for although mankind is essentially of the same nature in all times and in all places, he felt that more primitive people lived more completely in harmony with the rest of the natural order and had not suffered to the same degree the sense of separation from nature that is one of the consequences of advancing civilization. As he became more civilized man was no less nature's creature, but had acquired a painful self-awareness which fractured his identification with the wholeness—wholesomeness—of nature. This is true both of individual persons and of races of men. The tragic element in Thoreau's view of mankind is precisely this point, which he made in a poignant passage of "The Sphinx":

In a sense the babe takes its departure from Nature as the grown man his departure out of her, and so during its nonage is at one with her, and as a part of herself. It is indeed the very flower and blossom of Nature....

But alas, the fruit to be nurtured in these petals is fated to break the stem which holds it to universal consistency. It passes through Nature to manhood, and becomes unnatural, without being as yet quite supernatural.
Man in nature as seen by Thoreau was not the over-sentimental creature which Rousseau had envisioned, nor the hostile and aggressive brute at war against all his fellows whom Hobbes had described. Rather, Thoreau saw natural man as possessing both possibilities. Drawing upon the known history of the native American Indians, whom he took to represent man-in-nature, he saw mankind as gregarious and social, capable of tender emotions toward family and friends, of cooperation within the bounds of treaties or promises, but also capable of perfidy and ferocious cruelty toward human enemies. Thoreau assumed that natural man behaved as an animal behaves, obedient to instinct and above all also desirous of preserving his own existence. Whether primitive or more culturally developed, the urge toward self-preservation is so basic to man that it perforce makes him an egoistic, discrete individual.

He also felt that the less sophisticated stages of human development permitted man by the simplicity of primitive life to recognize himself as "a sojourner in nature."20 The psychological separation from nature which comes with advancing civilization leads to a kind of schizophrenic perception of one's body whether one is conscious of the dichotomy or not. He expressed this displacement when he wrote, "I must confess there is nothing so strange to me as my own body. I love any other piece of nature, almost, better."21 The urge to recover the lost union with nature leads some men into the woods as hunters, and although
Thoreau hoped that they would pass beyond that stage, he recognized it as an expression of "the most original part" of man.\(^{22}\) He believed strongly that man must achieve a reunion with the rest of the natural order and be "naturalized on the soil of earth,"\(^{23}\) and this meant not only tailoring one's life to the demands of his physical nature or even of harmonizing completely with the rest of the natural order, but actually achieving a sense of wholeness with the processes of life, and not merely to cooperate consciously with an abstracted or intellectualized mental image of what man's life ought to be. To be a man requires that he be what he is physically, and not what he thinks he ought to be intellectually. Pungently put, "A man thinks as well through his legs and arms as his brain. We exaggerate the importance and exclusiveness of the headquarters.... The Poet's words are, 'You would almost say the body thought!' I quite say it."\(^{24}\) Thoreau's metaphor of the body thinking expresses the objective of harmonizing the man with nature once more, which is one of the requisites for man to feel himself a whole person. The happy state of union with his earthly environment he insisted is a casualty of civilization, the garden of Eden lost because of the fruits of knowledge.

The sad recognition that man cannot go home again did not prevent Thoreau from feeling that a simple life can reduce the sense of separation. He took heart that man is not yet so degenerate because
of his sophistication that he could not live in a cave and cover his nakedness with skins, yet recognized that it "is better to accept the advantages, though so dearly bought, which the invention and industry of mankind offer." 25 It was not that Thoreau was glorifying the nobility of the savage, but was acknowledging that it is man's nature to expand along the lines of his animal characteristics, to seek the satisfaction of his appetites, and to make himself as comfortable as the manipulation of his environment will allow. This is a predictable consequence of his intelligence, and insofar as mankind pursue these ends, "the civilized man is a more experienced and wiser savage." 26

In addition, although man must be expected to fulfill his natural capabilities which must result in the improvements of civilization, the inescapable disadvantage of progress is a feeling of alienation from the environment of nature and a sense of separation from the rest of the natural order. The further man removes himself from the immediate contact with nature as the source of food and shelter, the more intense will be his disorientation and the more distorted will be the reality of his self-perception. Much of what Thoreau had to say was directed to mankind in his constant condition of discrete individuality, whether in civilized nations or in prehistoric tribes. "I wish," he wrote in his essay on "Walking," "to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely
civil, to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. 127

Obviously for Thoreau, society was not as essential a condition as some thinkers have held it to be for man to achieve the full potential of his humanity. This is not to say that he did not believe that man-in-nature does not have social relations and social needs which can only be satisfied through contact with other human beings. But quite clearly Thoreau wished to identify man as an individual first in naturalistic terms, to emphasize a human dependency upon nature more than upon such social or interpersonal relations as people have with one another.

Especially when thinking about man in elemental forms, Thoreau began by considering men-in-nature as entities unencumbered of all their social relations, but rather with their necessities dictated by the laws of their physical being. The concerns of man-in-nature are not the cares of man-in-society, and Thoreau insisted upon setting such secondary matters aside until one has addressed his nearer concerns. As he put it in "The Natural History of Massachusetts,"

We fancy that this din of religion, literature, and philosophy which is heard in pulpits, lyceums, and parlors vibrates through the universe, and is as catholic as the creaking of the earth's axel; but if a man sleep soundly, he will forget it all between sunset and dawn. 28

In other words, individual physical and spiritual needs are much more central concerns than the subordinate social cares which many men
mistakenly allow to occupy their first attention, concerns which have to do with a man's livelihood, his relation to the physical conditions of creation and the problems associated with getting a living from life which will satisfy the physical and physio-psychological needs he has as a healthy animal.

Yet as was apparent in Thoreau's list of the necessities of life, he had a limited definition of what was indispensible to the continuation of human life. There were certain things that a man cannot do without, a very small list indeed when compared to the objects for which most men spend their lives in pursuit. Still it is extremely important to note that although Thoreau had a short list of human necessities, it was in broad language that permits each man to define his own necessities, which might well differ from those of his neighbor, but which basically consist of the satisfaction of natural appetites and protection from the more hostile elements in the environment. Thoreau had no quarrel with those givens of the human condition; his concern was with the method by which they are obtained and the purposes for which they are sought.

The how and the why are the two fundamental questions raised by securing the needs of the body. These two related issues were the subject of certain phases of Thoreau's most intense critical thought. The means of securing a bodily living are at the heart of most political systems, at least from a post-Marxian perspective, for it is the
behavioral and economic consequences in a social setting that provide the stuff of politics. Even though Thoreau was vitally interested in the ways, he was even more concerned with the purpose for which a man provides himself with life's necessities. As important as the natural physical side of man is, Thoreau was always a dualist and Idealist. While body and intelligence are complementary parts of the whole natural man, the spiritual being of man is super-natural. To readers of the polemical tracts growing out of the Christian controversies, this is not an unfamiliar position. The means of the body are to serve the ends of the spirit. The hard political questions have always centered on the means, for those who like Thoreau view the spiritual development as essential recognize the indispensability of means appropriate to that end, while others who do not share the Idealist viewpoint consider physical rewards and satisfactions as the ultimate goal.

Thoreau believed that how one secures bodily needs is as crucial as the fact that they are met. The way a man acquires his necessities may hinder or divert him from achieving spiritual goals necessary to full personhood as opposed to full manhood. His complaint was so much energy and attention is usually devoted to bodily existence that most individuals are stunted in their spiritual growth so as never to achieve full personhood. "How few," he wrote near the end of his life, "ever get beyond feeding, clothing, sheltering, and warming themselves in
this world, and begin to treat themselves as human beings,—as intellectual and moral beings. 29 The intertwining of the proper provision of physical needs to achieve spiritual goals led Thoreau to set forth the maxim that "the whole duty of man may be expressed in one line,—make to yourself a perfect body." 30 As we shall see, this maxim was difficult for a Puritan such as he to follow, for he had serious doubts about the possibility of human perfection.

The old trick of slipping from the world of fact into the world of value which Idealists so often use is obvious here. In addition to this difficulty, Thoreau side-stepped the profound reality of the social political questions that are presented when men living together attempt to work out the production and distribution problems inherent in providing necessities of life. The conflict of values and ambitions which present themselves in the world of human practice cannot be solved by a sudden shift to the world of the ideal where values are not debatable. He assumed that the issues of feeding, clothing and warming oneself in the world are subject to simple individual solution, and that the institutionalization and socialization of the means—that is to say politics—have unnecessarily complicated the issues to the detriment of individual spiritual development. When spiritual goals, which in this sense are values as opposed to the facts of life, are not shared by all, there is no agreement on the appropriate means of achieving those goals. Thoreau
did not squarely face this issue, and it is one of the most important reasons why his political theory does not provide a satisfactory explanation of the relationship between society and individuals, or between political issues and ethical values. The result is that Thoreau has very little practical and positive suggestions as to how a political apparatus might be constructed and how it might operate. As we shall see, it forces him to rely upon a moral elite for political direction.

The physical conditions of man's life require that he have more than the clothing, food and shelter that Thoreau enumerated as the basic necessities. One of these psycho-physiological needs is sex. As an observer of Nature and one convinced that man is a part of the natural order, the sexual nature of man was inescapable to Thoreau. He was reticent on the subject, having admitted to Harrison Blake that his thoughts on the matter might merely "betray [his] peculiar defects." Sex in human relationships was a "beautiful mystery," one which must be "always treated with delicacy and reverence." This is only partly attributable to Victorian prudery, for he admitted that sex was the mainspring of life, the vehicle by which creation unfolds itself in much of the organic world, and an irreverence toward this generative force constituted to his mind the essence of irreligion and blasphemy. Any mocking of sex, even by nature herself, was shocking because it seems close to mocking the Creator. One of the lasting puzzles to
Thoreau was the fact that nature herself, grew phallus-like fungi and in so doing lowered herself to a level of "those who draw in privies." The false modesty which was characteristic of his time made him impatient. He found it remarkable that the phenomenon of sex, although universally encountered, was discussed so seldom, and then with indirection only. He would prefer to have sex "treated naturally and simply" rather than avoided from a sense of shame and hinted at.

The extent of his utter failure to appreciate the complexity of human sexuality is apparent in reading the little he wrote on the subject. In *A Week* he observed that "the sexes are naturally most strongly attracted to one another by constant constitutional differences, and are most commonly and surely the complement of each other," yet to Harrison Blake he confessed that he did not know why. "What the essential difference between man and woman is, that they should be thus attracted to one another, no one has satisfactorily answered."

The sex drive, while present in nature and therefore innocent if one takes Thoreau seriously, had to him a different quality in mankind because, presumably, mankind has a capacity for a deeper dimension to his drive to procreate. Therefore, he distinguished carefully between love and lust. "The one is good, the other bad. When the affectionate sympathize by their higher natures, there is love; but there is danger that they will sympathize by their lower natures, and then there is
lust." The wholly animal aspects of sex Thoreau condemned insisting that human sexuality be engaged only at the point where man transcends his animal characteristics. He had sex in mind when he wrote that "the spirit can for a time pervade and control every member and function of the body, and transmute what in form is the grossest sensuality into purity and devotion. The generative energy," he continues in order to make the point perfectly clear, "which, when we are loose, dissipates and makes unclean, when we are continent invigorates and inspires us." The animal instinct in the rest of creation is innocent, but in humans, the sex drive tends toward lust; although "Nature is hard to overcome, ... she must be overcome." The mainspring of life in the animal kingdom is a fact in human existence, but Thoreau did not wish to encourage it.

We are conscious of an animal in us, which awakens in proportion as our higher nature slumbers. It is reptile and sensual, and perhaps cannot be wholly expelled: like the worms which, even in life and health, occupy our bodies. Possibly we may withdraw from it, but never change its nature. I fear that it may enjoy a certain health of its own; that we may be well, yet not pure.

The hedonistic enjoyment of sex which Thoreau referred to as "lust" and "gross sensuality" was identified with the animal aspect of man, although he did not note sexual hedonism in any of the creatures he observed in nature. Still speaking of sex, but focusing on chastity as a positive virtue in mankind, he wrote, "he is blessed who is assured that the animal is dying out in him day by day." The fact that we are "creatures of appetite" is a "cause for shame on account of the inferior
and brutish nature" to which mankind is allied. Therefore, "to some extent, our very life is our disgrace.\(^43\)

It is a remarkable fact that Thoreau whose name has become synonymous with individualistic egoism did not give attention to human sexuality outside of the socially sanctioned and institutionalized proscriptions of marriage. It is a major distinguishing characteristic which separates him from other extreme individualists. Thoreau assumed that the control of sex is a legitimate function of political and social institutions extending not only to marriage but presumably to all other sexual relationships. Admitting social and political control over marriage introduces a host of practical considerations arising from the legal rights and obligations between husband and wife. The property rights of women in marriage, inheritance of property by widow and children and a host of other related issues stem from political sanction of marriage. In a time when the rights of women were practically non-existent, being excluded from voting privileges, unable in some states to hold property in their own name if married, subject to the physical control of a husband whom they had promised to obey, and subject to legal and social obstacles to employment and financial independence, the failure to address these problems is a flaw in Thoreau's political vision. These issues were being raised during his lifetime by women of his own circle, and others with whom he came in contact. One must assume that he did not take
seriously the condition of women in his time. The remarks he made about women in general, particularly about Elizabeth Oakes Smith the early feminist lecturer, indicate a lack of sympathy with equality of rights between the sexes.

The institution of marriage was entered too lightly to suit Thoreau. Most people marry for the wrong reasons, through a series of misunderstandings of one another or for the gratification of sexual desire. These mismatched unions or those entered for reasons of expediency were of course legal, but in Thoreau's opinion were not what he called "true marriages." As he explained it, "a true marriage will differ in no wise from illumination. In all perception of the truth there is a divine ecstasy, an inexpressible delirium of joy, as when a youth embraces his betrothed virgin. The ultimate delights of a true marriage are one with this." He believed that a true marriage is a rare occurrence, and found it "remarkable that so many are married," observing disapprovingly that "it would seem as if men yielded too easy an obedience to nature." A more intellectual and less passionate approach to mating would be more likely to result in a "true" marriage.

One may be drunk with love without being any nearer to finding his mate. There is more of good nature than of good sense at the bottom of most marriages.... If common sense had been consulted how many marriages would never have taken place. Even though a rare occurrence, a "true marriage" is the only occasion for a "pure" expression of sexual love, for, "if it is the result of a pure
love, there can be nothing sensual in marriage."

Even in a "true" marriage, Thoreau takes an extreme position on the purpose of sexual union. It is not merely for procreation as many anti-sensualists would argue, but for elevation of the quality of the human stock. It is possible to go so far as to say that his view of reproduction constitutes an argument for the practice of eugenics. In the light of his elitist tendencies as demonstrated by his celebration of the hero, it would not seem to be an untenably strained interpretation. Thoreau himself wrote, "the only excuse for reproduction is improvement. Nature abhors repetition." But one should hasten to add that Thoreau most probably would have insisted that only individual self-limitation, not external coercion, would be employable for such an end, for only self-imposed limitation can be effective in obtaining the desired ends. For Thoreau, it was not merely a matter of genes and chromosomes but of motivational intention and moral will which he included in the word, Love.

Some have asked if the stock of man could not be improved, — if they could not be bred as cattle. Let Love be purified, and the rest will follow.... Beasts merely propagate their kind; but the offspring of noble men and women will be superior to themselves....

Outside of a true marriage, which certainly is not an expectation every person can anticipate under Thoreau's definition, "a man's seed [is] the direct tax of his race," and "the seed becomes merely excre-
Those who have not allied themselves in a true marriage are expected to maintain a strict celibacy. The avoidance of sexual sensuality, which Thoreau recognized as a powerful force of the most insistent kind, prevents one from having his attention so completely absorbed in the satisfaction of this one appetite that he does not develop the more subtle aspects of his character which are more productive or creative in a moral, intellectual, or artistic sense. It is not the avoidance of sex that is Thoreau's objective so much as channeling these energies toward more lasting satisfactions than mere physical gratification offers. Following St. Paul, in his view, "chastity is something positive, not negative," and is a potent creative force for subjective development: "Chastity is the flowering of man; and what are called Genius, Heroism, Holiness, and the like, are but various fruits which succeed it." Although it strikes the reader as hilariously reminiscent of the mad general in Dr. Strangelove, Thoreau was completely straight-faced and serious in insisting that it is of utmost importance that "the vital, the divine, fluids" not be dissipated.

In looking at man as a part of nature and being immediately confronted with the inescapable fact that man is a sexual being, Thoreau attempted to minimize it to the greatest possible extent, to confine it to narrow limits, to sublimate the energy to other ends, and finally to hint that he regrets that mankind is burdened with such a need. It is
much easier for him to deal with the human body and all its functions by ignoring the sexual basis of man's physical existence.

From the foregoing discussion it is easy to understand why Thoreau assumed that a child would be born into a social unit along the lines of the traditional family structure. The earliest physical needs of a human are met by his parents or parent surrogates. Only when he reaches the age of self-sufficiency must a child face the necessity of providing for himself. It is at this point that a man has to face the all-important question, "What are life's necessaries as far as my life is concerned." The way in which the question is answered determines the quality of life for the individual.

Propagation of the race being assured through sex, provision of the minimal necessities of life must be made by man for himself and those immediately dependent upon him. At this point, dependency is not intended to extend beyond the family unit, although it might encompass close neighbors or friends. Clothing, shelter, and food are what must be provided, but not in such a way as to absorb all of an individual's attention and energy.

Clothing, in Thoreau's estimation, served only two purposes: to protect the body from the effects of hostile environmental elements and to cover nakedness. Judging by his accounts of "fluvial walks" one is not certain that the second of these is terribly important. In pleasant
weather, "clothing is to cover nakedness and protect the body from the sun." He found it "remarkable that, though it would be a great luxury to throw aside all clothing now except one thin robe to keep off the sun, yet throughout the whole community not one is found to do it." And, although all peoples agreed that clothes were one of the things which had to be provided, certainly so in all temperate or northern climates, Thoreau would not argue that clothing is an essential condition for man's survival. He might hedge to point out that when the weather is pleasant, clothes are non-essential. Nudity was an honorable condition under natural circumstances, as when young boys go swimming. He found it a singular fact that "men were forbidden to expose their bodies under the severest penalties," and lamented that so long as this were true, "as yet we have not man in nature." The protection which clothing affords on the other hand, is a natural and necessary reason for securing it. Thoreau's objection arose when clothes were used as a disguise or for pretense, or for reasons of false and exaggerated modesty. There they ceased to be natural and necessary.

Consequently, Thoreau took a casual view of clothing. It was not essential that acres of cotton be grown, ginned, loomed, cut and sewn, nor that hundreds of thousands of beaver and other fur-bearing animals be slaughtered for human decoration. The exploitation of factory girls working endless hours for a pittance was as inhumane to Thoreau as the degradation of Negroes to slavery for the production of cotton to feed the
Yankee and English mills. The point was that it was so unnecessary. It cost more than it came to. People could be clad, as were the farmers in Concord, in homespun and be as warm, but more innocently warm. Fine clothing for decoration or for symbols of rank and prestige were too costly of other men's labor to be justified. Such items are sought not to cover nakedness and offer protection from the climate, but to satisfy vanity, greed, and sloth.

The mills of New England were clogging rivers with their dams, flooding meadows, and ruining the habitat for wildlife and fish. Men have no right to impose upon the rest of creation, he thought, except to provide the actual necessities of life. Not only was it damaging to nature, but ultimately to mankind since he is part of nature, too.

These views, sympathetic as modern readers may find themselves, are simplistic. Even in Thoreau's day, the population was too large to be clothed by the hand crafting methods employed in farmers' kitchens. The labor saving virtues of technology were not adequately considered. The drudgery and toil of obtaining clothing is not limited to factories and cotton fields as Thoreau well knew, having heard that one Concord lady could make a shirt in one day if she put her mind to it; her price was five cents.

In addition, Thoreau did not seem to realize that his proposed solution deprives some farmers, hunters, millers and craftsmen of the means of their livelihood. It ignored the vested interests that had developed.
He seemed not to have considered the consequences of changing the system.

The matter of shelter poses basically the same questions as clothing. It is necessary to be protected from the ravages of weather and to have an opportunity for a requisite amount of privacy. Thoreau observed that "in the savage state every family owns a shelter as good as the best, and sufficient for its coarser and simpler wants."\(^5\)

Civilized man has made improvements for his comfort and safety, but has in the process, made it a burden for many persons to acquire even minimum housing. This observation is only in part a social criticism, for it also says something, at least to him, about the perverse nature of man. As he often remarked, "only the wise improve their advantages,"\(^6\)

and civilization with its improvements in comfort does not always—Thoreau might have said does not often—improve the advantages. The only advantage is shelter, privacy and safety, and if civilization is to improve the way in which housing is obtained, it must produce "better dwellings without making them more costly; and the cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run."\(^7\)

The peculiar blindness which affects most men, whether in a savage or civilized stage of development, is that they are unable to distinguish between the mere improvement in the objects which satisfy the necessities of life and improvements in the
advantages secured by having the physical needs met adequately. This constitutes a defect in the character of the vast majority of human beings regardless of their anthropological stage of development. Savage and civilized men alike strive for the objects rather than the advantages, assuming "that the houses will civilize the inhabitants at last." Civilization has failed to eradicate this perverse streak in human nature, and may have accentuated it.

Civilization has largely considered material improvements as not only the means of progress but the end of progress as well. By not making it clear to citizens that technological and social advances which contribute to comfort and leisure are opportunities for each man to pursue the spiritual and intellectual gifts, men become engrossed in the acquisition of things, allowing their individual spiritual potentialities to atrophy. In Thoreau's view, the purpose of civilization is to permit mankind to relegate the pursuit of material necessities to secondary status while devoting a larger proportion of his time and energies to the cultivation of his moral, or spiritual talents, whatever they may happen to be.

While civilization has been improving our houses, it has not equally improved the men who are to inhabit them.... and if the civilized man's pursuits are no worthier than the savage's, if he is employed the greater part of his life in obtaining gross necessaries and comforts merely, why should he have a better dwelling than the former? This reference to the "gross necessaries" implies the importance Thoreau attached to the more subtle necessities which a man must acquire.
to transcend the purely material aspects of his life. These non-material necessities are **sine qua non** for the spiritual development of the individual, they are not so easily categorized for they are as various as individuals and depend on the personality and circumstances of the person.

For many, the satisfaction of their non-material needs are found in art, literature, music, museums, religion, libraries and other social and cultural expressions. These, of course, are provided only within a social setting and the culture which conditions their forms also conditions the individual. While Thoreau was not Greek in his understanding of man as a social creature, he appreciated that some persons do require these refinements to satisfy very real needs. He himself sought the leisure available through simplified living in order to read and to practice the art of writing, to walk in the woods and to study the phenomena of nature. For other, whose "genius" required satisfactions such as theatre, art, travel, Thoreau assumed that their energies not expended in the search for food, clothing and shelter would be devoted to the cultivation of these interests.

It will be observed that the pursuits noted above are social and cultural, presupposing the existence of other persons with the capacity to reciprocate in their appreciation. Thoreau, however, wished to see the pursuit of cultural activities to result in the realization of spiritual
truths which are, in his view, subjective apprehensions and private, incommunucable intuitions. This spiritual nourishment is as essential to the ideal moral side of man as food is to his physical being.

The confusion of fact and value, physical and spiritual, is usual in Idealist thinking. Thoreau's difficulties are all the more apparent for his failure to attempt to reconcile the two except in the perceptions of the individual. The fact that individual needs are satisfied through social means seems to have made little impression on him. The positivists and those Idealists who follow more closely the Greek conception of man as a social animal would be among the first to point out the inadequacies of Thoreau's position.

Food is an undisputed necessity for continued physical existence. Thoreau believed that "the diet of any class or generation is the natural result of its employment and locality."\(^62\) Men eat what is available, and what will provide sustenance to the work required of them. He acknowledged that "there is not one kind of food for all men. You must and you will feed those faculties which you exercise. The laborer whose body is weary does not require the same food with the scholar whose brain is weary."\(^63\) Both herbivore and carnivore, Thoreau felt that as mankind became more humane and developed his latent potential for a truly human life—what he called spherical man—his diet would gradually cease to disclose a carnivorous taste.
Is it not a reproach that man is a carnivorous animal? True, he can and does live, in a great measure, by preying on other animals.... Whatever my own practice, I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals, as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other when they came in contact with the more civilized. 

The practical objection to animal food was not that it was unnatural for man or even unwholesome, though he thought it was "unclean", or more accurately put, disagreeable to the imagination, involving as it does unsightly remains and unpleasant odors, but that it was "insignificant and unnecessary, and cost more than it came to." By the same measure, he felt that "water is the only drink for a wise man," since it truly is the necessary drink, everything else being non-essential and gratifying to the senses rather than to the actual need. Although in extremis, the physical needs for nourishment can be met by eating flesh, Thoreau felt that once liberated from the habit of meat eating brought about by centuries of experience living close to starvation, mankind would find his natural preference would not include flesh. "The repugnance to animal food and the rest," he wrote, "is not the result of experience, but is an instinct."

Liberated from the constant search for food and presented with a choice, Thoreau assumed that experience would enlighten mankind and alter their behavior, in this case, make them prefer to be vegetarian. This is an example of how he believed that freedom from the urgent
demands of the physical man would bring about spiritual improvement. Thoreau of course made a value judgement about the relative moral value of eating animal flesh as opposed to vegetables. Since he held the intuitions of spiritual truth to be incommunicable, he must have assumed that all persons who came to be vegetarians were morally superior to those who had not yet received the spiritual message to leave meat alone. It is only a step further to make people conform to the behavior of those whose moral progression is most advanced. His tendency toward moral elitism is apparent here, but comes to full flower in his reaction to the slavery issue.

There is nothing in Thoreau to suggest that government or a social agency should take over the provision of the basic needs of mankind so as to free them for more elevating pursuits. In fact, there are several passages, noted elsewhere in another connection, which suggest that Thoreau was not even convinced that individual charity is a virtue. There is, in Thoreau's point of view, a spiritual dividend in providing one's needs for oneself. It is only when one is too absorbed, either by avarice or by degrading poverty or illness, in providing gross necessaries only that he offers an objection to working for one's own livelihood. The materialists can take no comfort in Thoreau's criticism of the economic oppression of individuals. Individuals, with rare exceptions of invalids and innocent children of poverty, oppress themselves.
Such a view ignores the myriad institutional and cultural effects which are beyond the control of individuals but which affect lives profoundly. For instance, his assessment of Canadians as ignorant and degraded tools of the priests and soldiery in "A Yankee in Canada" places the blame on the citizenry rather than on their cultural conditioning to accept the domination of the British Crown and the Catholic Church.

By contrast with the foregoing discussion of individual physical needs, there is a paradox in the nature of mankind in that although he is a discrete individual with private concerns of central importance for which there is no possible assistance from other persons, yet man has a craving for companionship and the kindred but deeper relation of friendship. Thoreau did recognize the social nature of man, but failed to give sufficient weight in his writings to the influence of society upon the moral development of the individual. His consideration of man as a social animal continued to focus upon the individual and his relationship to other individuals. The capacity of an individual for friendship he considered to be the basis of the social instinct.

Thoreau's idea of friendship was complicated, and not wholly clear; it was a deep human communication through sympathy, a non-verbal understanding and acceptance of another individual in an uncritical attitude.

You know about a person who deeply interests you more than you can be told. A look, a gesture, an act, which to everybody else
is insignificant tells you more about that one than words can.... If he wished to conceal something from you it would be apparent. It is as if a bird told you.... He says consciously nothing about it, yet as he is necessarily affected by it, its effect is visible to you. From this effect you infer the cause

* * * * * * * * *

You are the more sure because, in the case of love, effects follow their cause more inevitably than usual, this being a controlling power. Why, a friend tells all with a look, a tone, a gesture, a presence, a friendliness. 68

Friendship could include a sexual relationship, in fact, a true marriage is built only on the emotional foundation of friendship, but he considered it more likely between members of the same sex and on a Platonic plane. 69 The instinct toward this kind of human sympathy and affection on which civility is founded, 70 has caused men to live within speaking distance and to form towns and villages. 71 On the other hand, the tragic frustration to this instinct is the insularity of the individual will. "That which properly constitutes the life of every man is a profound secret," he wrote. "Yet this is what everyone would give most to know, but is himself most backward to impart." 72 He asked the question, "What sort of space is it that separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary?" 73 It is not a simple matter of physical proximity. His answer is found in "A Plea for Captain John Brown": "It is the difference of constitution, of intelligence, and faith... that are the true and impassable boundaries between individuals.... None but the like-minded can come plenipotentiary to our court." 74
Again the elitism and anti-democratic bias in his view of mankind is apparent. One man is not the equal of others, but only certain categories of persons who share his perceptions, moral stance, and intellectual interests, can be considered one's equal. It is not a class theory in the sense of economic or prestige strata, nor in the sense of a functional ordering of society. Rather, his is an elitism built upon the moral levels which individual persons have attained. Only among moral equals can there be free social intercourse. It also implies that those of the highest moral caste are the ones who by right should govern the behavior of others of lesser moral station. This is not to imply that Thoreau advocated social and political oppression; rather he felt that the standards for behavior, including the standards for legal codes, were those demonstrated in the lives of the most morally advanced.

Though men obey their instinct in living together, there is an inherent limitation in the constitution of the human personality which prevents the complete fulfillment of the objectives of the instinct, which is cooperation and friendship. It is sad but true that,

the only cooperation which is commonly possible is exceedingly partial and superficial; and what little cooperation there is, is as if it were not, being a harmony inaudible to men.... To cooperate in the highest as well in the lowest sense, means to get our living together."

Obviously he had in mind more than merely providing the basic necessities for survival, but to provide for the psychological needs a
man has as part of his nature. The nature of the individual ego being what it is, men have formed towns and villages, marriages and acquaintanceships, "but they have not associated, they have only assembled."\textsuperscript{76} The failure of humans to relate to one another well is, one suspects, the reason why Thoreau saw "the gregariousness of men [to be] their most contemptible and discouraging aspects,"\textsuperscript{77} rather than any misanthropic intention on his part. He understood the irony and paradox of man's existential position in regard to his fellow creatures, and felt as well the \textit{angst} of man caught between the yearning to be a part of nature and the knowledge of his apartness from the primordial whole. Transcendental optimism was the prescribed remedy for the melancholy inspired by man's condition, but Thoreau did not sound very convincing or convinced at this approach of putting man together again. For example, in the following quotation he protests overmuch and tries to gloss over the separation of man from his fellows and from the sense of belonging to his natural habitat:

\begin{quote}
Yet I experienced sometimes that the most sweet and tender, the most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural object, even for the poor misanthrope and most melancholy man. There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of nature and has his senses still.... Nothing can compel a simple and brave man to a vulgar sadness. While I enjoy the friendship of the seasons I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me.\textsuperscript{78}
\end{quote}

It does not require much skill at reading between the lines to understand that Thoreau was lamenting a deficiency in man's accommodation
to his fellows and to the wider nature of which he longed to feel a part.
The logical inference of this is that man's discrete ego, his individual personhood is something of a burden, for it makes him solely responsible for himself, his condition, development and destiny. It makes man majestically alone, lonely, self-reliant yet driven in a search for an absolute beyond himself upon which he can depend, and which will define for him the unchanging relationship between himself and the non-subjective. "It is for want of a man that there are so many men," he wrote, and it is because of the lack of wholeness in the fractionated nature of man that he followed this statement with the disillusioned observation, "It is individuals that populate the world." 79

In addition to the problem of friendship between adults, what we call now inter-personal relations, Thoreau and most of the Transcendentalists and romantics held a Wordsworthian view of childhood, feeling that the newly-born have still a sense of oneness, and only with age does self-awareness come and with it the separation from the rest of creation. "Man," he wrote, "is not at once born into society, —hardly into the world. The world that he is hides for a time the world that he inhabits." 80 Then, "after the year of youth is passed, the knowledge of ourselves is an alloy that spoils our satisfactions." 81

Paradoxically, it is self-awareness through growth which brings with it the irrevocable separation of man from the rest of creation where-
in he lives and sets him apart from his fellow human beings. It establishes and confirms the focal point of human personality—its individuality. It makes the Greek ideal of self-sufficiency not merely an attractive goal, but an imperative condition of survival for the human psyche. Thoreau's egoism, so similar in application with Emerson's cheerfully optimistic individualism, was founded on a more melancholy, if not morbid, idea of man's nature and his resultant psychological perspective.

This fundamental difference between Emerson's view and Thoreau's more existential position accounts for Thoreau's persistent insistence upon the necessity for courage, bravery, vigilance and soldierly forbearance found throughout his writings, but most especially in his essay on "The Service." There is no bosom but his own on which he can rely, and man must muster the strength from within himself to accept his fate, indeed, to search out and meet his fate whatever it may be.

Nothing must be postponed. Take time by the forelock. Now or never! You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment. Fools stand on their island opportunities and look toward another land. There is no other land; there is no other life but this.... Take any other course, and life will be a succession of regrets.... There is no world for the penitent and regretful. 82

Thoreau's view of human isolation therefore makes it of first importance for a person to know who he is, and what the essential conditions for his life may be. As he wrote to Blake, "Know your own bone; gnaw
at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw it still. Everything which diverts attention from this necessary central focus deprives a man of his best chance of making such coherence from his fractionated psyche as is possible under the circumstances where he finds himself. This is the main point behind Thoreau's prescription for a comfortable approach to the painful business of living, his insistence upon a rigid self-imposed discipline holding one to his own near concerns in spite of the distractions of the appetites of the conventions of other men. Self-discipline and self-reliance combined with a simple straightforward acceptance of the terms of one's own existence in relation to the nature of which he longs to be a part, for Thoreau, offers the only way by which a man can hope to recover the lost sense of wholeness.

But even in nature, man is afflicted with the awareness of his mortality and the foreknowledge of death. Therefore, it is not possible for man to be completely at rest in the bosom of nature. To Thoreau, as to the later existentialists, self-awareness reinforces the necessity for man to accept the sternest responsibility for control of his life, which one recalls, consists only in the present moment.

It is a very remarkable and significant fact that, though no man is quite well or healthy, yet everyone believes practically that health is the rule and disease the exception, and each invalid is wont to think himself in a minority, and to postpone somewhat of endeavor to another state of existence. But it may be some encouragement to men to know that in this respect they stand on the same platform, that disease is, in fact, the rule of our ter-
restrial life.... Disease is not the accident of the individual, nor even of the generation, but of life itself. In some form, and to some degree or other, it is one of the permanent conditions of life.... Life is a warfare, a struggle....

The conditions of the struggle and the site of the battle depend upon the individual, his constitution, and circumstances, but it is inevitable to the life of every man—whether he is fully aware of the fact or not. "I am astonished," he wrote in A Week, "at the pertinacity and endurance of our lives. The miracle is ... that we walk on in our particular paths so far, before we fall on death and fate, merely because we must walk in some path.... What risks we run! famine and fire and pestilence, and the thousand forms of a cruel fate,—and yet every man lives till he—dies." It is clear why Thoreau regarded the material comforts—everything beyond those things which are essential to the continuance of life—to be superfluous, and probably dangerous encumbrances to the struggle to live in the fullest sense of the word. Attention or energy spent in directions other than self-exploration and self-development depletes one's reserves for that struggle for what some would call the existential affirmative. Even the most prosaic life is the scene of dramatic effort.

Each man's necessary path, though as obscure and apparently uneventful as that of a beetle in the grass, is the way to the deepest joys he is susceptible of; though he converses only with moles and fungi and disgraces his relatives, it is no matter if he knows what is steel to his flint.

After recognizing the nature of man includes self-consciousness
and a separation from nature as well as from other human beings, Thoreau arrived at the most thoroughgoing individualism. Forthright acceptance of the full responsibility for one's being calls for discipline, courage, and confidence, in short the exercise of will. By sheer will man must face himself for what he is and strive to overcome the centrifugal forces which are pulling on him and separating him from nature and his fellow creatures as cream is separated from milk; only by force of will can he be himself, a man in nature, free to achieve his own personhood and to provide his own impetus toward the unfolding of his unique potentiality. Without the exercise of this self-directed force of will, men are at sea, mad with their awful freedom not recognizing its existence or recoiling from a too clear perception of its full implication, herding together seeking a solidarity which does not exist, "follow[ing] each other like sheep, not knowing why." The man who is fully aware of his nature will understand that "you must prevail of your own force, as a plant springs and grows by its own vitality." The individual which Thoreau postulated as the essential man is less the Hobbesian man-against-all than a stylized version of the Greek ideal of self-sufficient man without the social aspects that apologists for the polis ascribed to his nature.

Were it not for the definite dualism with a supernatural theism for an escape hatch, Thoreau's man would be close to that brave but
essentially hapless creature postulated by some modern writers as "existential man." In temperament, if not in philosophy, Thoreau's view of self-sufficient man was close to existential man as the following passage demonstrates:

If by trusting in God you lose any particle of your vigor, trust in him no longer. When you trust, do not lay aside your armor, but buckle it tighter. If by reliance on the gods I have disbanded one of my forces, then it was poor policy. I cannot afford to relax discipline because God is on my side, for He is on the side of discipline. And if the gods were only the heaven I fought under, I would not care if they stormed or were calm. I do not want a countenance, but a help. And there is more of God and divine help in a man's little finger than in idle prayer and trust. 89

Thoreau's self-sufficient man is one who strives not only to know himself, but to be himself, which is to exist in process or in the present passing moment,—what existentialists call the process of becoming—and to exist as an end in himself. As he put it in the early Journal, "man is as singular as God." 90 It is only an individual who can make his life, and it is impossible for him to make a life with materials other than those of his own experience. What he makes of those experiences depends upon how severely he disciplines his subjective sensitivity and how closely he relates them to the person he knows himself to be or wills himself to become.

This is why Thoreau so casually dismissed historical and social elements as not essentially determinative of the individual personality. Without denying that a man is caught in the flowing stream of the race
and of history, Thoreau was convinced that there is freedom from the constraints of historical circumstance and social convention for every person who will recognize his freedom and come to grips with it. But he must make the act of will in order to transcend the external conditions of life. "The weakest child," he wrote, "is exposed to the fates henceforth as barely as its parents. Parents and relations but entertain the youth; they cannot stand between him and his destiny. This is the one bare side of every man. There is no fence; it is clear before him to the bounds of space." 91 What a man makes of his open-ended life is within the scope of his will and is his inescapable responsibility whether that responsibility is accepted or not. As he wrote to Blake, "the principle, the only, thing a man makes, is his condition of fate. Though commonly he does not know it, nor put up a sign to this effect, 'My own destiny made and mended here'." 92

Thoreau's reverence for nature and his attempt to merge himself back into her lap sprang from a longing to repair the estrangement man felt, but it was not a retreat from individualism or an act of resignation of will. On the contrary, a man who recognizes himself as a man in nature and cooperates with the imperative dictates of his instinct is more in control of his life and personhood than one who consents to the conventions of social or institutional practice. The man in nature is a wild man in a special sense which Thoreau the philologist explained in
Trench says a wild man is a willed man. Well, then, a man of hope and of the future tense, for not only the obstinate is willed, but far more the constant and persevering. The obstinate man, properly speaking, is one who will not. The perseverance of the saints is positive willedness, not a mere passive willingness. The fates are wild, for they will: and the Almighty is wild above all, as fate is. 93

The courage to be, the bravery to exert his will, is the best definition of human virtue that Thoreau could offer. Allen Beecher Hovey has made a convincing analysis of Thoreau's correlation between virtue and bravery, by which he meant exercise of the will. 94 In making his point Hovey quotes the following passage from the essay on Sir Walter Raleigh:

The gods have given man no constant gift, but the power and liberty to act greatly. How many wait for health and warm weather to be heroic and noble! We are apt to think there is a kind of virtue which need not be heroic and brave, —but in fact virtue is the deed of the bravest; and only the hardy souls venture upon it, for it deals in which we have no experience, and alone does the rude pioneer work of the world. 95

The force of individual will which follows the instincts of his nature is irresistible, for he will be a true man whose concordance with the natural order will demolish the artifices and conventions upon which the less brave—less virtuous—men rely upon for such a life as they have. It is the prevalence of life over existence, for "how can any man be weak who dares to be at all?" What passes for life in the eyes of society "is so artificial and complex—bolstered up on many weak sup-
ports, and sure to topple down at last—that no man surely can ever be inspired to live it, and only 'old fogies' ever praise it. Even so, few do live anything other than this artificial existence. In a passage which could easily be mistaken for a quotation from Nietzsche's "Beyond Good and Evil," Thoreau wrote:

Virtue is the deed of the bravest. It is that art which demands the greatest confidence and fearlessness. Only some hardy soul ventures upon it. Virtue is a bravery so hardy that it deals in what it has no experience in. The virtuous soul possesses a fortitude and hardihood which not the grenadier nor pioneer can match.

The method of life is clearly demonstrated to one who perceives what the nature of his life is; it consists of laborious discipline and exertion of his will; in short, of labor to be self-sufficient, in both a bodily and psychological sense. The immediate and direct provision of one's own necessities of life makes his personality so much the more whole and in harmony with the conditions of life because it amounts to self-sufficiency. "For if I buy one necessary of life," he wrote, "I cheat myself to some extent, I deprive myself of the pleasure, the inexpressible joy, which is the unfailing reward of satisfying any want of our nature simply and truly." What he said about providing shelter could be extended to cover all of the physical necessities of human life:

There is some of the same fitness in a man's building his own house that there is in a bird's building its own nest. Who knows but if men constructed their dwellings with their own hands, and provided food for themselves and families simply and honestly enough, the poetic faculty would be universally
developed, as birds universally sing when they are so engaged? But alas! We do like cowbirds and cuckoos, which lay their eggs in nests which other birds have built.... Shall we forever resign the pleasure of construction to the carpenter? What does architecture amount to in the experience of the mass of men? I never in all my walks came across a man engaged in so simple and natural an occupation as building his house. We belong to the community.... where is this division of labor to end? and what object does it finally serve?

In providing himself with food, shelter and clothing, Thoreau asserted that a man was expressing his character, and in a sense, making those necessities extensions of his personality. "The pleasure, the warmth," he thought, "is not so much in having as in a true and simple manner getting these necessaries."100

The emphasis upon labor should not be interpreted as a simple reflection of the Puritan work ethic lingering on in Thoreau's mind, although that certainly cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. Thoreau's ideas about the necessity for work were more complex than merely a literal acceptance of the Biblical curse of Adam. He was convinced that individual effort — work — is necessary for psychological well-being as well as for physical sustinence, and more than that, is an instinct which has for its object the continuation of the race of man in both a physical and social sense. This is true work, "honest, peaceful industry, conserving the world, which all men respect.... toil that makes his bread taste sweet and keeps society sweet."101 This is a valuable and constructive instinct which assures the improvement and survival of mankind, and one
which Thoreau did not wish to disparage.

Nothing has got built without labor. Past generations have spent their blood and strength for us. They have cleared the land, built roads, etc., for us. In all fields men have laid down their lives for us. Men are as industrious as ants.¹⁰²

Understood rightly, work is the result of a certain divine energy in every man, but sparingly employed as yet, and is directed toward the cultivation of his own being, toward achieving his full human potential, which Thoreau more often termed his "aspirations." It is possible, indeed usual, for men to pervert their industrious instinct so that employment is wholly directed toward acquiring non-essential "goods" or gluttonous indulgence of the senses, and so man dissipates his energies in toil, drudgery and self-destruction rather than in true work which is beneficial and constructive.

The really efficient laborer will be found not to crowd his day with work, but will saunter to his task surrounded by a wide halo of ease and leisure. There will be a wide margin for relaxation to his day. He is only earnest to secure the kernels of time, and does not exaggerate the value of the husk.¹⁰³

To Thoreau, true work leads to a life of material simplicity but self-sufficient personhood whereas perverted work leads to gross comforts, dependence upon institutions, and an atrophied will. True work is virtuous for it requires bravery and self-reliance, but mere toil can be the result of moral cowardice and therefore constitutes depravity.

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that Thoreau developed a normative standard by which to judge the quality of a man's life in
relation to his nature without reference to any religious theological system. Of course he did believe in an external transcendent moral absolute which will come under later discussion, but at the present point it is important to note this distinguishing feature of Thoreau's dualism.

A particularly interesting consequence of this view, and one which has been largely overlooked in the literature dealing with his political thought, is that physical toil can to a limited extent improve the human condition, even though an individual has not recognized or has shirked the responsibility for his discrete personhood and his relations with the rest of creation. The following passage illustrates quite clearly both this idea and the elitism which is implicit in the statement:

The savage lives simply through ignorance and idleness or laziness, but the philosopher lives simply through wisdom. In the case of the savage, the accompaniment of simplicity is idleness with its attendant vices, but in the case of the philosopher, it is the highest employment and development. The fact for the savage, and for the mass of mankind, is that it is better to plant, weave, and build than to do nothing or worse; but the fact for the philosopher or a nation loving wisdom, is that it is most important to cultivate the highest faculties and spend as little time as possible in planting, weaving, building, etc. It depends upon the height of your standard, and no doubt through manual labor as a police men are educated up to a certain level. The simple style is bad for the savage because he does worse than to obtain the luxuries of life; it is good for the philosopher because he does better than to work for them. **The question is whether you can bear freedom.**

At present the vast majority of men, whether black or white require the discipline of labor which enslaves them for their good. If the Irishman did not shovel all day, he would get drunk and quarrel. But the philosopher does not require the same discipline...
Thoreau did not believe that all men are capable of bearing their burden of freedom and responsibility. He was an elitist, believing that those who exerted their will were superior beings, and that though men were of unequal talents or intelligence, the true test of superior manhood rests with the bravery one exhibits in accepting the freedom of will and in achieving the full potential of humanity.

The superior man is not necessarily the most accomplished person or the one who has accumulated much knowledge or much property, but the man who has learned to know himself and to follow his instinctive genius as it leads him to a fulfillment of his potential. "It is a pleasant fact that you will know no man long, however low in the social scale, however poor, miserable, intemperate, and worthless he may appear to be, a mere burden to society, but you will find at last that there is something which he understands and can do better than any other," \(^\text{105}\) and if that man also makes the same discovery about himself and follows where his instincts lead he can be a superior man because he is a man, not something less than he was created. But, most men are deficient in courage, or the wisdom to be themselves, preferring to resign their responsibilities to institutions and to relinquish their freedom to social conformity.

This want of courage is a fatal flaw in the nature of man, for it leads him to prefer an inferior quality of life. Thoreau was dismayed
that "when we consider what, to use the words of the catechism, is the chief end of man, and what are the true necessaries and means of life, it appears as if man had deliberately chosen the common mode of living because they preferred it to any other."\textsuperscript{106} Such a preference is stupidity—"always you have to contend with the stupidity of men.... The stupid you have always with you."\textsuperscript{107} The stupid may include some very knowledgable persons who have attained neither wisdom nor the virtue to which it leads. Stupidity and cowardice have the same practical result, for they prevent a man from achieving full personhood.

The want of wisdom, the lack of courage, and the other foibles which afflict mankind result in a clear division among the race, and establishes the foundation for an elitism. The elite are superior types, —genius, philosopher, poet, hero—and command domination by virtue of their force of will. Their superiority consists in their example and their contribution to the race is the force of their personality which "changes things and relations:"\textsuperscript{108} rather than any benevolence or charity toward their less favored fellows. Virtue is a personal thing, self-contained. Any influence it has is through example, for its concerns and obligations are individual and subjective. No man can reform any but himself, and to do for another what he must do for himself is not a kindness but perhaps a hindrance for it allows him to postpone the day when he becomes a self-sufficient human.
What is called charity is no charity, but the interference of a third person. Shall I interfere with fate? Shall I defraud man of the opportunities which God gave him, and so take away his life?  

This is the limit of human cooperation. Benevolence consists in being true to one's own genius, and providing an example through one's character and force of will. Thoreau was explicit: "There is but one obligation, and that is the obligation to obey the highest dictates. None can lay me under another which will supersede this."  

The effect of human insularity is not callous disregard for the genuine needs of a fellow human, but a recognition that as regards the central needs of human life there is no help. It is also true that there are men who are so benighted and depraved that they are beyond any assistance save that of an example of a full life:

Be sure that you give the poor the aid that they most need, though it be your example which leaves them far behind. If you give them money, spend yourself with it, and do not merely abandon it to them. We make curious mistakes sometimes. Often the poor man is not so cold and hungry as he is dirty and ragged and gross. It is partly his taste, and not merely his misfortune. If you give him money, he will perhaps buy more rags with it.

The Social Statics of Herbert Spencer did not state the point any clearer than the passage above. The main argument of Spencer's brand of liberalism was not, of course the major point which Thoreau wished to make. The effect, however, is very similar. The welfare state, in the opinion of both men, is based upon a set of faulty assumptions about the character of humanity. In a physical sense for Spencer and in a
spiritual sense for Thoreau, both men regarded strength as an attribute necessary to justify survival.

The superior man does have an influence beyond the life he leads, however, and plays a role in the improvement of the race. In this Thoreau was interestingly close to a theory of inevitable progress in the history of mankind similar to that of the German Idealists. But, it is just as clearly a "great man" theory of history resulting from his view of the nature of man as it appears in its perfect development, the superior man. In A Week, he wrote:

We will not be confined by historical, even geological periods which would allow us to doubt of a progress in human affairs. If we rise above this wisdom for the day, we shall expect that this morning of the race, in which it has been supplied with the simplest necessaries, with corn and wine, and honey, and oil, and fire, and articulate speech, and agricultural and other arts, reared up by degrees from the condition of ants to men, will be succeeded by a day of equally progressive splendor; that, in the lapse of the divine periods, other divine agents and godlike men will assist to elevate the race as much above its present condition. 112

Although the physical nature of man had Thoreau's profoundest respect and was held to be worthy of development to its fullest capacity, as an Idealist he gave priority to the spiritual aspect of man. The body is a part of nature and as such is subject to the laws of its organization, including the morbidities that precede the inevitable death and return to the elements of which all creation is made. On the other hand according to Thoreau, the spiritual nature of man exists thanks to the soul which
is allied to every human body. The soul is an immortal spark of the
divine fire, a particle of the creative spirit from which all nature
springs. The soul of man has an identity with the Creator as the body
of man has an identity with the created. Because it is man's soul
which will survive, it is the soul rather than the physical life which is
the nearer concern of man and commands the greater attention. It also
explains Thoreau's extreme subjectivism which has a necessary and
logical link to individualistic egoism in political, social, and religious
thought. Thoreau explained his view in *Walden*, recognizing in the final
sentence of the following passage, that the subjective, almost independ­
ent, spiritual aspect of man's binary nature forces an individuality
which is asocial.

I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak,
of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain double­ness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from
another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of
the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were,
is not a part of me, but a spectator, sharing no experience but
taking note of it; and that is no more I than it is you. When the
play, it may be the tragedy, of life is over, the spectator goes
his way. It was a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination
only, so far as he was concerned. This doubleness may easily
make us poor neighbors and friends sometimes.\footnote{113}

Here it is worth noting in passing that Thoreau seriously con­
sidered the Oriental idea of transmigration of the soul a distinct possi­
bility, a suggestive intimation of human instinct.\footnote{114} The important
point in the present discussion, however, is that the spiritual element
in man survives and transcends the physical limitations of the bodily
life, in Thoreau's view. The soul, being a permanent particle of the
Oversoul and therefore a participant in the creative will behind nature,
provides the connecting link between the real and the phenomenal in man­
kind as well as the means for the human subjectivity to define the relation­
ship between the apparent and the actual in everything which it perceives.
The soul has its own particular attributes and senses, as does the body,
but the spiritual faculties give an infinite extension to man's personality.
It is the integration of these two sets of abilities that makes a whole man.
The physical man has abilities based upon the objective character of his
natural environment such as rational intelligence, the accumulation of
factual knowledge and the power to manipulate his environment for added
comfort and well-being, which Thoreau collectively classed as talent.
The capabilities of the soul, on the other hand, are grounded in the
omnipotence of the Oversoul, and are not limited by the objective laws
of natural experience, but are intuitions of the will transcending the
restraints of cause and effect logic, instinctive sensors of the imperative
reality beyond the conditional appearance, and these subjective creative
powers Thoreau called genius. "The perfect man," he wrote, meaning
perfect in the sense of completed or whole, "has both genius and talent.
The one is his head, the other his foot; by one he is, by the other he
lives."
In the previous discussion, it has been noted that the physical man has a source of normative behavior which constitutes his duty, or a set of conventions which society has determined to name morality. This kind of moral duty based upon the physical demands of his nature and the conditions of his natural environment does not apply to the genius. The genius is above morality, for it is creative rather than reactive, infinite rather than conditional, based upon instinctive apprehension of the ideal rather than an intellectual process operating upon the observed facts of natural phenomena. "Duty belongs to the understanding, but genius is not dutiful, the highest talent is dutiful. Goodness results from the wisest use of talent." What comes to a man through the instinct of his genius rather than through the rational processes of his intelligence, is closer to ultimate truth for it has as its source an empathy with the creative will. "The unconsciousness of man is the consciousness of God, the end of the world."117

The use of the word "unconscious" in the preceding quotation is misleading, for it is used in a particular sense to distinguish instinctive wisdom from rational intelligence. In explaining Thoreau's theory, consciousness is the best word to describe the method by which one develops and extends the spiritual capacity to apprehend intuitive wisdom. Consciousness is to genius what reason is to intelligence. Acute awareness and receptivity to the least intimations of the spirit, is both the
method and the object of a successful life. The path to manly virtue, as opposed to mere morality, requires not only courage, but consciousness as well. "To be awake is to be alive,"\textsuperscript{118} or to be directed by one's genius.

None but the hero achieves a state of constant consciousness, but when he does achieve the necessary pitch of sensitivity he receives "inspiration, the divine gossip which comes to the attentive mind,"\textsuperscript{119} by which his genius is instructed.

If one listens to the faintest but constant suggestions of his genius, which are certainly true, he sees not to what extremes, or even insanity it may lead him; and yet that way, as he grows more resolute and faithful, his road lies. The faintest assured objection which one healthy man feels will at length prevail over the arguments and customs of mankind. No man ever followed his genius till it misled him.\textsuperscript{120}

It must be obvious that Thoreau's idea of genius is an individual property, and though each man has his genius, it is not a uniform gift. It ranges "from that which is next to sleep and death, to that which is forever awake and immortal. We must not confound man with man. We cannot conceive of a greater difference than between the life of one man and that of another."\textsuperscript{121} With each man following his genius, it is clear that uniform social behavior is not to be expected, nor can a man following his genius allow socially imposed constraints to interfere with his internal pursuits. The genius defines the direction a man ought to take, and the force of his will enables him to transform the ought into
the is. The will, however, can only actualize what is truly consistent with a man's genius, that is, what is a true intimation of the soul. It is easy to be misled, and close fidelity to one's consciousness is imperative. As Thoreau put it:

We must sail by a sort of dead reckoning on this course of life, not speak any vessel nor spy any headland, but, in spite of all phenomena, come steadily into port at last. In general, we must have a catholic and universal wisdom, wiser than any particular, and be prudent enough to defer to it always. We are literally wiser than we know. Men do not fail for want of knowledge, but for want of prudence to give wisdom the preference.122

Once man has given "wisdom the preference" he has provided for himself the necessary course of action. "What a man knows, that he does,"123 is a motive factor behind human behavior. A man whose wisdom, genius, and will are in harmony with the underlying reality of the soul will act upon principle, will rise above the circumstances of his physical life and will prevail against all opposing phenomena in the material world.

Action from principle, the perception and performance of right, changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary, and does not consist wholly with anything which was.... ay, it divides the individual, separating the diabolical in him from the divine.124

Of course, Thoreau was making an assumption which many thinkers would claim is not borne out by experience. To know right is not necessarily to do right. Nor does such a view adequately explain how men of good will arrive at different, often conflicting, convictions about right
behavior. The perception of the right being a function of a man's consciousness informing his genius, which Thoreau said can never mislead him, sets the stage for social conflicts among fanatics. This is, some might say, good theory because it describes why the affairs of the world present such moral tangles and the peace is continually disturbed. It does not, however, fit Thoreau's belief in a universal moral absolute which a man of genius comprehends through his consciousness. War among heroes is still a possibility. This contradiction in Thoreau's ideas leaves the door open, not only to holy war, but to a holy war fought on both sides by men convinced of the absolute morality of their position.

Thoreau did recognize the non-rational character of consciousness when understood as the subjective development of the instinctual whisperings of the soul and the final arbiter of virtue and standard for action. The emotional receptivity of consciousness upon which the genius and hero depend, gives rise to wisdom (as opposed to mere intellectual understanding) and the perception of eternal absolute principles that are the source of obligation. Thoreau would have expanded the Greek maxim to read "Wisdom is virtue and virtue is power."

The truly wise, truly superior man, the hero, when compared with the common man in temperament, intellectual method and behavior, will be judged by lesser characters to be insane—which he is in the sense of being wholly irrational by the standards of logic and factual
science. Thoreau wrote the following passage in 1850 before Harper's Ferry and therefore was speaking in general terms rather than in justification of John Brown:

Nothing memorable was ever accomplished in a prosaic mood of mind. The heroes and discoverers have found true more than was previously believed, only when they were expecting and dreaming of something more than their contemporaries dreamed of,—when they were in a frame of mind prepared in some measure for the truth.

Referred to the world's standard, the hero, the discoverer is insane, its greatest men are all insane. At first the world does not respect its greatest men. Some rude and simple nations go to the other extreme and reverence all kinds of insanity.

It should be clear by this point that despite the emphasis placed upon the role of the will and upon the heroic type as the motive agent in human progress, the will does not function independently of the genius, or put in more universal terms, the soul is free within the freedom of the Oversoul. The hero or willed man reflects "absolute goodness" which "will leaven the whole lump" of mankind, but the absolute is the Oversoul, not the heroic soul which is only a particle of the Oversoul.

In a letter to Isaiah T. Williams, Thoreau stated his view of the freedom of the will in terms that would satisfy an Augustinian theologian as well as an Hegelian conservative:

Tis true, as you say, 'Man's ends are shaped for him,' but who ever dared to confess the extent of his free agency? Though I am weak, I am strong, too. If God shapes my ends—he shapes me also—and his means are always equal to his ends. His work does not lack this completeness, that the creature consents. I
am my destiny. Was I ever in that straight that it was not sweet to do right? And then for this free agency I would not be free of God certainly—I would only have freedom to defer to him. 127

All men do not have the same capacity to receive the instinctive flashes of wisdom, either from native deficiency or from failure to cultivate the consciousness. Like utopians from Plato to Skinner, Thoreau saw social divisions of men tied to their abilities and to the social functions they perform, although he added the moral dimension as well. This is certainly an implication of an elitism incompatible with democratic values as understood in the West. The anti-liberal implications are obvious, and perhaps explain Thoreau's appeal to certain elements in the American New Left who wish a right moral structure along with a closely ordered political system.

In A Week the orders of men, defined according to their spiritual abilities, are the Genius—which is a synonym for the heroic type—the Artist, and the Artisan:

The Man of Genius may at the same time be, indeed is com- monly, an Artist, but the two are not to be confounded. The Man of Genius, referred to mankind, is an originator, an inspired or demonic man, who produces a perfect work in obedience to laws yet unexplored. The Artist is he who detects and applies the law from observation of the works of Genius, whether of man or nature. The Artisan is he who merely applies the rules which others have detected. There has been no man of pure Genius, as there has been none wholly destitute of Genius. 128

A hero, or Man of Genius, is one whose perceptions and life harmonize with both the spiritual and material aspects of his nature,
"for whom this world seemed expressly prepared, as if creation had at last succeeded." Again it is necessary to emphasize that Genius and affective will are universal and absolute, and prevail because of their consonance with the Oversoul. Thoreau clarified the point in his Journal:

Men commonly talk as if genius were something proper to an individual. I esteem it but a common privilege, and if one does not enjoy it now, he may congratulate his neighbor that he does. There is no place for man-worship. We understand very well a man's relation, not to his genius, but to the genius.

Because there is absolutely a standard for truth, a universal definition of virtue, and a uniform source of obligation, Thoreau arrived at a position similar to that which Rousseau held:

Any man knows when he is justified, and all the wits in the world cannot enlighten him on that point. The murderer always knows that he is justly punished.

This notion is necessary to buttress Thoreau's contention that the example of an action from principle, by force of will must convict all who apprehend the truth thus demonstrated and will assure the prevalence of the principle.

There is an unresolved contradiction apparent at this point that must be noted for the sake of a complete exposition of his theory of human nature. Again the unresolved question of evil becomes an issue. If the force of superior will and example were sufficient to convince all observers, to "change things and relations" there would be a perpetual move-
ment toward human perfection as the universal laws unfold and are demonstrated in the examples of superior men of the heroic type. Thoreau recognized that this is not an inevitable process, at least not an inevitably peaceful process, and that on occasion the right must prevail through coercion. Just as labor is necessarily imposed upon the weak or lazy for the sake of discipline, coercion is necessarily imposed upon those who will not acquiesce in the application of a universal principle. As labor is justified to impose the necessary discipline on the weak nature so violence is justified to impose discipline on the spiritually recalcitrant. This is not wholly consistent with the theory unless opposition to a demonstrated true principle is accounted for by evil as a positive factor. Opposition is not merely a stagnation of spirit, but a perversion of the force of will. Thoreau did not clearly articulate such an explanation, although he frequently referred to the existence of "two powers," man beginning as "old men in crime," or a devil in everyone "that is capable of any crime in the long run." The capacity of man for evil is tacitly assumed in such statements as, "Men have made war from a deeper instinct than peace," and, "I have a deep sympathy with war, it so apes the gait and bearing of the soul."

Thoreau recognized the strain of violence inherent in mankind. It may be applied toward good or bad ends. Rather than deny its existence or label its origin as evil, he accepted it as one of the givens of
the human constitution, and exalted it when employed in the struggle
to install the higher principles proclaimed by the hero.

War is the sympathy of concussion.... The Soldier is the
practical idealist; he has no sympathy with matter, he
revels in the annihilation of it. So do we all at times.
When a freshet destroys the works of man, or a fire con­
sumes them, or a Lisbon earthquake shakes them down,
our sympathy with persons is swallowed up in a wider
sympathy with the universe. A crash is apt to grate agree­
able on our ears.\(^{136}\)

The implication of violence is clear in the following quotation which
also adequately summarizes Thoreau's position on the force of will
and the role of the elite:

Sometimes a particular body of men do unconsciously assert
that their will is fate, that the right is decided by their fiat
without appeal, and when this is the case they can never be
mistaken; as when one man is quite silenced by the thrilling
eloquence of another, and submits to be neglected as to his
fate, because such is not the willful vote of the assembly, but
their instinctive decision.\(^{137}\)

While speaking to the nature of man, the passage just quoted
also says a good deal about the nature of society as seen by Thoreau.

It shows a sympathy with Plato's Republic, with the General Will state
of Rousseau, with the social preferences of Idealists from Augustine to
Hegel. Thoreau's view of the superior man is the foundation for his
view of the nature of society.

The philosopher's conception of things will, above all be truer
than other men's, and his philosophy will subordinate all the
circumstances of life. To live like a philosopher is to live, not
foolishly, like other men, but wisely and according to universal
laws.\(^{138}\)
The following chapter will discuss how man manages to live among men, both foolishly in the common manner, and wisely according to universal laws. It must never be forgotten, however, that it is man who lives in society and who determines its nature. Thoreau's idea of the nature of man precludes the possibility that society determines in any important respect the nature of man. It is man who makes society, not society that makes man.

Notes

1. A Week, W., I, p. 395.


3. A Week, W., I, p. 411.


5. Ibid., June 15, 1840. W., VII, p. 140.


10. Ibid., January 14, 1853. W., X, p. 466.


13. Ibid., February 6, 1854. W., XII, pp. 102-103. Also see Walden, W., II, p. 280.


18. Ibid., p. 232.


34. Letter to Blake, September, 1852. W., VI, p. 205.

37. A Week, W., I, p. 287.
39. Ibid., p. 206.
41. Ibid., p. 244.
42. Ibid., p. 242.
43. All quotations in this paragraph are from Walden, W., II, p. 243.
45. Letter to Harrison Blake, September, 1852. W., VI, p. 199.
46. Ibid., pp. 199-200.
47. Ibid., p. 205.
48. W., VI, p. 208.
49. Ibid., pp. 208-209.
52. Walden, W., II, p. 243.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., June 12, 1852. W., X, p. 92.
57. Walden, W., II, p. 33.
58. *Walden*, W., I, p. 34.


73. *A Week*, W., I, p. 287.


75. *Walden*, W., II, p. 79.


79. *Journal*, May 1, 1851. *W.*, VIII, p. 188.
86. *Journal*, November 18, 1857. *W.*, XVI, p. 188.
90. *Ibid.*, May 1, 1851. *W.*, VIII, p. 188.
95. Quoted by Hovey, p. 40.


105. Ibid., June 4, 1850. W., VIII, p. 27.


110. Ibid., September 2, 1841, p. 279.


114. "It is unavoidable. The idea of transmigration is not merely a fancy of the pets, but an instinct of the race."—*Journal*, June 23, 1851. W., VIII, p. 271.


116. Ibid.

117. Ibid.


120. *Walden*, W., II, p. 239.


127. *Correspondence*, Bode and Harding, eds. Letter dated March 14, 1842, p. 66.


133. *A Week*, W., I, p. 301.


137. Ibid., December 12, 1841. W., VII, p. 298.

CHAPTER VI

"THE NATURE OF SOCIETY"

With this chapter begins the examination of Henry Thoreau's ideas concerning "man and his affairs, —Church and State and school, trade and commerce and agriculture, —Politics, —for that is the word for them all...." Thoreau's definition of politics was obviously very inclusive; however, there are important distinctions which he made between those affairs of man that are undertaken voluntarily with willing and constructive motivation and those affairs which have been institutionalized to command compliance whether the individual be willing or not.

Although Thoreau was not concerned to use precise terminology in his rhetoric and used "society," "institutions," "nation," and "state" without reference to any definitional scheme which social scientists today would find appropriate and necessary, a careful reading of his work discloses that in his own mind he distinguished between social institutions and society itself. One is artificial and has no necessary relationship to the physical or psychological needs arising from the fundamental nature of man; the other is natural and arises from the physical or psychological needs of mankind and his gregarious instincts. The atomistic, subjective nature of man does not negate the need for society in its vari-
ous forms. Almost any social form, however, may be transformed—Thoreau might have said perverted—into an institution. The criticisms that he made of social arrangements are directed almost exclusively, therefore, toward institutions which no longer, if they ever did, directly provide necessities of life to individuals, but which maintain themselves through the employment of coercion, sometimes coercion of the greatest subtlety. Very seldom did Thoreau criticize social forms based upon voluntary association regardless of how unnecessary or supercilious he thought some of them to be; these were worthy of sarcasm perhaps, but not of the devastating denunciation which he directed toward collective enterprises of a compulsory character. In his view, voluntary associations provide a method of achieving an individual's intellectual and cultural aspirations among other things. Since participation in some of the affairs of an institution may be voluntary also, a more fundamental distinction must be drawn between the two social forms.

Thoreau made individual motivation the distinguishing mark. That is, social forms and institutions are not mutually exclusive categories, but rarely does one bear all of the characteristics of the other. Institutions form because of the defects in human character: aggression, indolence, avariciousness, pride, love of the superfluous, suspicion. Voluntary associations, on the other hand, are formed from more generous motives, for self-cultivation and support of mutual affections. Human
nature contains both possibilities.

Thoreau was not disparaging of society as such, quite the contrary, he acknowledged society as a beneficent and necessary part of life the benefits of which should be nurtured and conserved. Even in contemporary society, "on every hand we observe a truly wise practice, in education, in words, and in the arts of life, the embodied wisdom"\(^2\) of past ages which is deserving of retention. It is not society but a certain human deficiency which causes the tergiversation that was the subject of Thoreau's blistering criticism. The deficiency he felt to be a lack of spiritual influence, a rigidity of habit, "the all but universal woodenness of both head and heart, the want of vitality in man, which is the effect of our vice; and hence are begotten fear, superstition, bigotry, persecution, and slavery of all kinds,"\(^3\) to which one would add institutions of society.

In primitive societies (Thoreau had an avid interest in cultural anthropology, particularly as concerned American Indians), he thought the collective activities of a people were less highly organized and therefore, less formidable as cultural structures. Nonetheless, there is nothing in Thoreau to suggest that man in a primitive condition was necessarily noble or savage. He was subject to the same foibles as more technologically advanced peoples, and was motivated by the same range of human emotions that operate on modern man. The difference
is that there was a larger proportion of human activity left uninstitutionalized in more primitive cultures, and consequently more of a man's life was left for self-directed and voluntary activism. It was possible for a man to have a wider range of opportunity to exercise his voluntary will unopposed by rigid institutions. It was not the lost "golden age" of some or the "unspoiled child of nature" of others that Thoreau regretted as having passed, but the wildness that the earlier simple life permitted. Many are familiar with his aphorism, "In wildness is the preservation of the world," but too few have understood that Thoreau the philologist equated wildness with willedness. The simpler the social arrangements, the fewer the restrictions of the exercise of the individual will. As indicated above, Thoreau had no illusions, however, about the nobleness of the savage as yet uncorrupted by civilization. Nor did he dismiss out of hand civilization and its benefits as the root of all human folly. The problem lay with human motivation, not with the social arrangements per se, for the latter are the means, rather than the end so far as a successful life is concerned.

For Thoreau, the motivation rather than technological capacity is the hallmark of civilization. The distinction is suggested in the following Journal entry written after finding an Indian artifact which had been decorated with a sculpted handle:
It is a great step to find a pestle whose handle is ornamented with a bird's head knob.... I have, then, evidence in stone that men lived here who had fancies to be pleased, and in whom the first steps toward a complete culture were taken.... But here an Indian has patiently sat and fashioned a stone into the likeness of a bird, and added some pure beauty to that pure utility, and so far begun to leave behind him war, and even hunting, and to redeem himself from the savage state. In this he was leaving off to be savage. Enough of this would have saved him from extermination.5

It matters more the reason a thing is done than what the actual action may be. This is not to say that he believed that the quality of life does not differ with advances in culture, for he was convinced that it matters a great deal. The primitive man has advantages but also suffers serious deficiencies in the comforts, and sometimes in the essentials of life. The civilized man merely exchanges some disadvantages for other disadvantages.

Like Compte, Turgot and Condorcet, Thoreau believed that civilisation passes through stages, and like Hegel, Marx and others, he believed to a certain degree that history entails an element of progress. He was not, however, convinced that the advances of civilization inevitably bring advantages or that the progress of history necessarily adds to the well-being of all. For example, Thoreau saw that the nomadic life of hunting precedes the farming phase of human cultural development must give way to the pressures of accumulating knowledge and technological skill, and that there are necessary adjustments which the individual must make to accommodate himself to the qualitative difference in the hunter stage and
the farmer stage. Neither is a perfect condition for mankind: "The era in which men cultivate the apple and the garden, is essentially different from that of the hunter and the forest life, and neither can displace the other without loss."

Yet with rather inconsistent logic, considering his personalistic approach to social matters, Thoreau saw history as a social chronicle. Although he had severe criticism to offer concerning the methods used and events selected for historical preservation, he felt that observable laws were revealed in history as in other collections of data based upon unprejudiced observation of social behavior. In fact, his observations on cultural anthropology, motivational psychology, sociology and politics at times seem almost to suggest the possibility of a predictive behavioral science. In any number of places statements may be found in his writings such as,

Generally speaking, the political news, whether domestic or foreign, might be written today as for the next ten years with sufficient accuracy.... Most events recorded in history are more remarkable than important, like eclipses of the sun and moon, by which all are attracted, but whose effects no one takes the trouble to calculate.

And again, "As in geology, so in social institutions, we may discover the causes of all past change in the present invariable order of society.... We know not yet what we have done, still less what we are capable of doing." A more specific hint that Thoreau suspected that a predictive social science is possible is found in Walden:
What I have observed of the pond is no less true in ethics. It is the law of average. Such a rule of the two diameters not only guides us toward the sun in the system and the heart in man, but draw lines through the length and breadth of the aggregate of a man's particular daily behaviors and waves of life into his coves and inlets, and where they intersect will be the height or depth of his character. Perhaps we need only to know how his shores trend and his adjacent country or circumstances, to infer his depth and concealed bottom.  

The suggestion of a predictive behavioral science coming from a staunch individualist who has been interpreted as an anarchist raises some fundamental questions of logic and consistency. As we have seen, Thoreau argued for a normative system based upon the needs of man as imposed by nature; at the same time individual moral standards are obtained. The disharmony of the consequence of his dualism has been noted before. But a predictive social science raises two possibilities, with which Thoreau's theory does not adequately deal. To logical positivists, and one assumes even in Thoreau's normative scheme for physical man in nature, how men do act serves as a definition of their nature and therefore how they should act. Such a position supports a governmental system based upon majoritarian principles and a legal code flexible enough to accommodate new determinations of how men in society should behave. Of course, Thoreau was anti-majoritarian and one committed to an ethic based upon moral absolutes. The other difficulty is that a predictive social science assumes that mankind can be directed toward certain desired behaviors through manipulation of the environment, par-
particularly manipulation of the institutional framework. As demonstrated in the immediately preceding quotation, Thoreau had assumed the fixed character of human nature, with certain persons of acute moral sensitivity providing the standard of behavior for others. The possible role of institutions in the moral elevation of individuals was not acknowledged elsewhere in Thoreau's thought.

Convinced that observation of human behavior is a valid base from which to draw conclusions about the history of the race, the origins of institutions, and about social arrangements in general, Thoreau's belief in an inevitable human progress in terms of technology and ability to control the rest of nature of which man is a part is seen to be somewhat inconsistent with the rest of the body of his thinking. Aggregated human intelligence, combined with the spiritual energy of will, predetermine the unfolding of man's potential which includes dominion over the physical world. Yet the way toward spiritual progress as well as physical well-being Thoreau thought would be found in simplicity. He believed that it is "the simplest necessaries.... corn and wine, and honey, and oil, and fire, and articulate speech, and agricultural and other arts," which will assure "a progress in human affairs" that will "elevate the race" in "progressive splendor." "But," he immediately observed, "we do not know much about it."¹¹

Thoreau also had a strong belief in the value of empirical observa-
tion of society, and based his social criticism as well as his political theory on such a foundation. Yet, it is equally true that he began with a priori assumptions, which were previously discussed, proceeding to observe only within his pre-determined framework. And his observations did not follow the dictates of the scientific method:

There is no such thing as pure objective observation. Your observation,... to be significant, must be subjective. The sum of what the writer of whatever class has to report is simply some human experience, whether he be poet or philosopher or man of science.  

The limits of his own observations in fact were quite clear to him, and he would not have suggested that his social theory was grounded unshakably upon facts nor would he have accorded greater validity to the claims of conventional science, for "many an object is not seen, though it falls within the range of our visual ray, because it does not come within the range of our intellectual ray, i.e., we are not looking for it."

As to the problem of the substance of social relation, in Thoreau's view there are two types of social components, differentiated by motivation and by mode of operation, both dependent upon the gregarious nature of man. One springs from gregariousness sublime, or the principle of friendship; the other from gregariousness perverted, or the principle of conformity. From one develops the social arrangements which embellish and enrich human life; from the other comes the crushingly oppressive institutions which constrain and inhibit the fullness of life of which
every individual is capable.

Friendship, for Thoreau, was the natural attraction which man feels for his own kind, and which, when developed to its fullest, leads to the most intimate bonding of personalities as described in the preceding chapter. In the larger arena, it is the social feeling which leads men by "an instinct of their nature" to pitch their cabins and plant their crops within speaking distance of one another, to form towns, villages, and private alliances of many types. These simple aggregations are voluntary and instinctive, pliant and responsive to individual whims or tastes. They are not rigid forms, but amorphous, bending to the demands and needs of the individuals of whom they are composed. Such a cordial feeling for one's fellows is a rudimentary manifestation of the same emotion of which friendship is merely a more developed instance. As noted earlier, Thoreau took the position that friendship is the foundation of civility, and that it governs the constructive cooperation between and among men.

I am ready to believe that as private and intimate a relation may exist by which three are embraced, as between two. Indeed, we cannot have too many friends; the virtue which we appreciate we to some extend appropriate, so that thus we are made at last more fit for every relation of life. A base Friendship is of a narrowing and exclusive tendency, but a noble one is not exclusive; its very superfluity and dispersed love is the humanity which sweetens society, and sympathizes with foreign nations; for though its foundations are private, it is in effect, a public affair and a public advantage.
Friendship draws people together, but it does not cement them into fixed roles or patterns of behavior, except that it rests on an expectation of constructive behavior from each member of the voluntary association or withdrawal. This is not the motivation which builds social institutions: "There is on the earth no institution which Friendship has established...." He further commented, "However, our fates at least are social.... Men naturally seek this alliance, and their actions faintly foretell it. We are inclined to lay the chief stress on likeness and not on difference...."

Unlike Hobbes, Thoreau believed that there is more to join mankind together than to make them enemies. The effective relations which are a part of every human community are conservative of the "truly wise practice ... in education, in religion, and the morals of society." It is "this society, if it were a person to be met face to face [which] would not only be tolerated but courted, with its so impressive experience and admirable acquaintance with things." And the key to this society worthy to be courted, in his view is the innocent sympathy with one's fellow beings and the instinctive spontaneity with which it wells up in an individual. When it does not exist, a person withdraws from his neighbors and by damming his emotional reservoirs reasserts his total independence. When the spontaneous attraction for mutual support between or among individuals is present, it results in a social bond of "unspeakable joy and blessing."耐

Here Thoreau displays the same confusion that plagued Rousseau
although Henry never accorded society the dominant role that Jean-Jacques gave it. Nonetheless, one cannot argue both for the insurmountable discreteness of the individual ego, and for a fond sympathy for one's fellow creatures that springs from spontaneous instinct and culminates in associations in which the egos are blended. Thoreau simply did not deal with these critical issues with any understanding of the implications which are entailed with either of these conflicting positions.

Thoreau attempted (unsuccessfully) to resolve the dilemma by suggesting that if the motivation for a social bonding between a man and his fellows is lacking in the innocence of a spontaneous attraction for mutual emotional and spiritual benefit, then the milk of human kindness is spoiled. It is society of this stripe that Thoreau most often observed among men, and which has been mistaken for beneficent society. It is not based upon friendship, the innate capacity of man to love his neighbor. As he wrote in the Journal:

What men call social virtues, good fellowship, is commonly but the virtue of pigs in a litter, which lie close together to keep each other warm. It brings men together in crowds and mobs in bars and elsewhere, but it does not deserve the name of virtue.

The intent of the individual will is what makes the difference between constructive, volitional associations and inhibitive social institutions. A free man is only he who has a free will, whose social relations are voluntary, and is motivated by an egocentric yet sympathetic
feeling of friendship for those persons with whom he shares social ties. To underscore the idea that the motive makes the man and the man makes society, Thoreau declared that "when we want culture more than potatoes, and illumination more than sugar-plums, then the great resources of a world are taxed and drawn out, and the result, or staple production is, not slaves, nor operatives, but men..." The instinctive emotion which is expressed in Friendship is, for Thoreau, the foundation for legitimate expressions of the social drive of man. Using this criterion, society is obviously a distinct phenomenon from social institutions such as the state:

Never forgetting that the individual human will is the fundamental unit in all social constructs, it is possible to identify social groupings and to consider them as social units. The primary social unit for Thoreau is the family. Recalling his views on sex and the "true" marriage, it is clear that Thoreau viewed the attraction between a man and woman in the married relation to be complementary spiritually as well as physically. The truly married are Thoreauvian friends whose "natures are liable to no mistakes, but will know each other through thick and thin." Their sexual attraction is but a part of the larger union of their wills. Theirs is a voluntary relationship ne plus ultra. It goes without saying that not all marriages meet this definition, but in the class of relationships under discussion here, the family as the primary social unit begins
with a true marriage. One infers that Thoreau would prefer to have all remain unmated except those who have entered into marriage as Thoreauvian Friends.

At first thought, children born into a family unit would not seem to be voluntary members of the family. On a closer reading of Thoreau, it is apparent that he saw them as voluntary members in the sense that their instinctive awareness of their physical dependence upon their parents constitutes an affirmation of will. But children are individuals as well, and past the age of self-sufficiency, they are wholly responsible for their own lives and culture. Because children are members of the biological family, the animal instincts of filial and sibling affection and loyalty, serve to bind the children to membership in the social family until such time as they are mature enough to assume control of and assert the independence of their will.

A critic would observe that adults are also dependent in some respects, for example, for defense, larger commerce, public health protection, and similar socially provided benefits of community. It might be asked why a recognition of his dependency upon the larger social organization by an adult does not represent an affirmation of will similar to that of childhood.

The function of the family is to provide protection for the young until they are self-sufficient, and to serve as initiators of the young
to the culture. This educative function begins with the most elementary foundations of the particular culture to which the child is born, by directing the instincts toward sanctioned uses. The customs of the ages are passed on to the rising generation through the family. It is important to recall here how few true marriages Thoreau observed, and how few he inferred there to be. The only excuse for reproduction, he believed, was for improvement, and the only improvement to be expected was from the off-spring of true marriages. Therefore, the transmission of culture and improvement of the race was a legitimate function of a small and narrowly defined elite. In addition to confining this function to an elite and thereby improving the quality of humankind, the imposition of such restrictions on parenthood would result in a drastic limitation on population. As he recognized, many of the problems of society would disappear or be reduced to manageable terms if there were a much smaller number of people.

Childbearing is not for everyone, and it follows that inferior specimens of humanity are produced by persons who mate from less elevated motives than those who are truly married. The culture transmitted by these parents is of a lesser quality as their offspring are of the unimproved variety. The differences in motivation for cohabitation and reproduction account for the preponderance of lesser men and the wooden rigidity of mass culture. Thoreau's elitism is obvious in this discussion
of the family, and a foundation is present here for some of the ideas he had about the varying quality of individuals, various families of men, the nationalities and races of men.

The educative function of the family extends to all aspects of human development, but it is a self-evident proposition that parents cannot give better than they have. There are persons who have children without having sufficient strength of character and strength of culture to support themselves adequately much less transmit sound cultural values through their example to a new generation. Those persons do a disservice to the race to reproduce themselves and thereby pass on to their children an unimproved culture and character. It is to provide for the failures of inferior parents that certain classes of institutions must be erected. As an example, Thoreau cited the mother who insisted that her child attend church. "The fact is, this woman has not character and religion enough to exert a controlling influence over her children by her example, and knows of no such police as the Church and the minister."25

Still, Thoreau was not so naive as to assume that children can be directed by force of example only, even if they are so fortunate as to be born of a true marriage. Children deserve corporal punishment from parents, despite his own reluctance to use it as a school teacher. He urged that parents take necessary measures to control unacceptable behavior during their period of physical dependency. In the Journal he
explicitly sanctioned physical restraint and punishment by parents. As previously noted, this apparent inconsistency with his usual voluntarism can be explained because of an instinctive recognition on the part of children of their necessary dependency upon their parents for physical and psychological support.

Although hereditary factors are of prime importance to the quality of the child's personality, Thoreau also recognized the profound influence of environment and even of climate. He was particularly adamant about the adverse effects of raising children in such a situation that they are exposed to large concentrations of people. During his residency on Staten Island he wrote about the effects of New York City on youngsters in a letter to his mother:

Seeing so many people from day to day one comes to have less respect for flesh and bones, and thinks they must be more loosely woven of less firm fiber, than the few he had known. It must be a very bad influence on children to see so many human beings at once—mere herds of men.

More specifically, Thoreau believed that child-rearing and effective family life is not possible in cities. He might even be interpreted in such a way as to suggest that families be barred from cities during the period in which children are begotten and reared. For example, the following excerpt from the Journal comes close to such a suggestion:

What right have parents to beget, to bring up, and attempt to educate children in a city? I thought of infanticide among Orientals with complacency... The birds have more care for their young,—where they place their nests... A true
culture is more possible to the savage than to the boy of average intellect, born of average parents, in a great city. I believe that they perish miserably. How can they be kept clean, physically or morally? It is folly to attempt to educate children within a city; the first step must be to remove them out of it.  

This passage certainly is at variance with voluntarism as ordinarily understood. It cannot be explained away on the same basis as was the reliance of children upon their parents. It suggests that there is a social as well as individual good to be achieved by educating children outside of urban environments and that collective action to assure that end might be justified.

In any case, the education of a child in Thoreau's view is not to be entered lightly, nor to be considered complete merely if one succeeds in teaching the three Rs and prepares him to earn a wage. A child should be given an opportunity to relive the life of the race in reduced time scale; that is, he should be given an "introduction to the forest, and the most original part of himself. He goes thither at first as a hunter and fisher, until at last, if he has the seeds of a better life within him ... [he] leaves the gun and the fish-pole behind."  

The family rearing children has an obligation to show a child his place in nature, and to give him an opportunity in his own early history to taste the early history of the species. He urged this as a required part of the family life curriculum:
... when some of my friends have asked me anxiously about their boys, whether they should let them hunt, I have answered, yes,—remembering that it was one of the best parts of my education,—make them hunters, though sportsmen only at first, if possible, mighty hunters at last, so that they shall not find game large enough for this or any vegetable wilderness,—hunters as well as fishers of men. 30

The family has also the responsibility of placing an individual in the context of mankind and the culture which his particular branch of mankind has developed. Beyond that, it is the responsibility of the individual to work out his own identity and destiny. Thoreau was convinced, however, that the stage of dependence upon the family must be a long one for human beings, not only for reasons of physical maturation, but so that the cultural maturity man requires may be achieved.

I am struck by the fact that the more slowly trees grow at first, the sounder they are at the core, and I think that the same is true of human beings. We do not wish to see children precocious, making great strides in their early years like sprouts, producing a soft and perishable timber, but better if they expand slowly at first, as if contending with difficulties, and so are solidified and perfected. 31

It is curious that Thoreau did not extend the idea of protection and culture initiation beyond children. Adults also are embedded in institutions to which they did not voluntarily attach themselves, but which offer them protection, provide a cultural milieu for the expression and expansion of their personalities. The transmission of culture, as was obvious even to Thoreau, is not the exclusive prerogative of the family nor does the process of cultural assimilation cease when a child becomes
an adult and leaves the tutelage of his parents. As we shall see later, he rejected other institutions such as college and church as providing similar services to older individuals. The only kind word Thoreau seems to have had for Harvard was related to its excellent library, which, of course, Thoreau saw as providing the opportunity for the individual to teach himself rather than itself asserting a more positive influence in his social maturation. One supposes that Thoreau viewed the authors of the books he read to be single individuals speaking to him from isolation.

One of the most basic cultural elements acquired in the family and one which has a profound effect upon behavior in Thoreau's view, is language. He had in mind the living language which serves the immediate use of the individual and makes it possible for him to know what was known before. With language, "knowledge now becomes communicable and grows by communication," making it possible to "learn what others knew about the same thing." With language, man's perceptions are changed, and become more acute, giving him the building blocks of knowledge. "With the knowledge of the name comes a distincter knowledge of the thing." Yet, Thoreau was a realist, and as such held to a theory of language which placed it in a pivotal position for his theory of human behavior, for "living speech" reflects "all the true growth and experience" of the speaker. The language available shapes the ability of a mind to
think, and determines the structure of the thought. "Talk about learning our letters and being literate!" he wrote. "Why, the roots of letters are things. Natural objects and phenomena are the original symbols or types which express our thoughts and feelings...."35

However, language, while it is constructive, is not determinative; a truth gives rise to a word, not the reverse: "A more intimate knowledge, a deeper experience, will surely originate a word."36 At the present moment, the point being stressed is Thoreau's view of the family as a culture bearer, and the growth of language and other cultural phenomena as an organic process. Language learned at an early age is based on individual experience and augmented by the accumulated knowledge of the family—it is living, vital, and immediate. It is in the family that one learns "that the first requisite and rule is that expression shall be vital and natural, as much as the voice of a brute or an interjection: first of all, mother tongue; and last of all artificial or father tongue."37

If language is the reflection of perceived truth, and stands as a surrogate for objects, then the language learned at home sets the intellectual foundation on which all succeeding knowledge is built; it influences the direction of a man's intellectual and emotional development. Until reaching a certain level of maturity and sophistication—and some never achieve it—"men are more obedient at first to words or ideas. They mind names more than things."38 It matters what names one begins with.
An illustration from the *Journal*:

There are certain current expressions and blasphemous modes of viewing things, as when we say "he is doing a good business," more profane than cursing and swearing. There is sin and death in such words. Let not the children hear them. 39

The important points to be stressed are the importance of the family structure as a culture bearer, the organic nature of the family and of the values passed through it to a new generation, and the crucial role of motivation.

Besides the family, which is in many ways more of a biological than social unit, the next most intimate social relationship in Thoreau's scheme is between friends. As has been pointed out earlier, friends in Thoreau's view are complementary souls whose attraction is of the most profound depth. One would prefer to use the word love rather than friendship for this relationship, but that would erroneously carry a sexual connotation which Thoreau did not mean to convey. Friends may be of the same or opposite sex, and although a truly married couple must be friends, to be friends people need not have a sexual relationship. It is a voluntary sharing of experience for the mutual support and benefit of the friends, and not merely shared kindesses.

Most contemplate only what would be the accidental and trifling advantages of Friendship, so that the Friend can assist in the time of need, by his substance, or his influence, or his counsel; but he who foresees such advantages in this relation proves himself blind to its real advantage, or indeed wholly inexperienced in the relation itself. Such services are particular and menial, compared with the perpetual and all-embracing service which it
is. Even the utmost goodwill and harmony and practical kindness are not sufficient for Friendship, for Friends do not live in harmony merely, ... but in melody. We do not wish for Friends to feed and clothe our bodies,—neighbors are kind enough for that,—but to do the like office for our spirits.  

Friends need not be in close proximity, nor in frequent contact, but they must provide a continuing support for one another unquestioningly. Friendship is nearly an impossible relationship to establish, even harder to sustain. For Thoreau, however, it is the most sublime of social contacts, for it is a joining of wills, not merely a concert of wills. It is more than merely a sentimental attachment: it is a commitment by one to his better self and the better self of another, or a conjoining of aspirations to be. It is a stern discipline imposed upon oneself to give the best of oneself and to expect the best in return without compromise. It has profound implications for Thoreau's theory of the hero, and offers one link between the virtuous hero and those of good will but lesser moral sensitivity.

Friendship is not so kind as is imagined; it has not much human blood in it, but consists with a certain disregard for men and their erections, the Christian duties and humanities, while it purifies the air like electricity. There may be the sternest tragedy in the relation of two more than usually innocent and true to their highest instincts. We may call it an essentially heathenish intercourse, free and irresponsible in its nature, and practicing all the virtues gratuitously. It is not the highest sympathy merely, but a pure and lofty society, a fragmentary and godlike intercourse of ancient date, still kept up at intervals, which, remembering itself, does not hesitate to disregard the humbler rights and duties of humanity.
If one takes Thoreau literally, or even seriously, friendship may not qualify as a social relation at all, for he seems to imply that between friends there is a union of ages, and a fusion of identity. In the usual and accepted sense, a social relationship assumes independent identities between two or more individuals. If that is stretching his intention too far, then it must be assumed that the functioning of friendship is a deep psychological penetration of one will into another, a mutual recognition of truth, a shared perspective, and an apprehension of wisdom beyond knowledge. The incongruousness of this idea with his egoism has been noted earlier, but if that be the case, then there is no external objective to friendship which is analogous to less exclusive social relationships. The effects of friendship operate only between the friends with no consequences to persons not parties to the relation. By any standard, friendship is exclusive. Thoreau's elitist predilections lead him to suspect that the mass of men are not capable of friendship, but are limited to less elevated and intense encounters that are polluted by base motives. For most men, friendship amounts to no more than mere neighborliness.

Neighborliness is the next category of voluntary relationships, which he distinguished from friendship, and the first which is wholly a social phenomenon. The emotional intensity is much diluted in the neighborly relation. In distinguishing friendship from neighborliness Thoreau wrote:
What is commonly honored with the name of Friendship is no very profound or powerful instinct. If one abates a little the price of his wood, or gives a neighbor his vote at town-meeting, or a barrel of apples, or lends him his wagon frequently, it is esteemed a rare instance of Friendship. These helpful services are valuable, and certainly not to be dismissed lightly. Goodwill and practical kindness, and such commonly accepted social virtues as friendly persons accord one another, have their honored place in Thoreau's scheme. But he made the distinction between this kind of human cooperation toward desirable ends which he thought of as neighborliness, and the union of wills which he called Friendship by a subtle difference in motive and objectives.

Friendship is inter-directed as Riesman might say, since there is a fusion of will between the parties, and any service of the one rebound to his own benefit because there is no difference between the egos of the friends. Neighbors have a different perspective, for their favors and affections extend beyond the limits of their own egos. Friends are self-reliant regardless of services rendered between the parties, whereas between neighbors there is an element of charity and of "doing good" for one another. When a person regards the "humbler rights and duties of humanity," conducts his relations with others from a perspective of common obligations among men and treats another "like a Christian, or as he can afford,—then Friendship ceases to be Friendship, and becomes charity; that principle which established the almshouse is now
beginning with its charity at home, and establishing an almshouse and pauper relation there.⁴³

Neighbors are persons who happen to find themselves in geographic proximity, who are not at enmity, and who are willing to tolerate one another, to make allowances for each other, and who are willing to cooperate in doing favors or giving mutual aid. Nearly everyone has the capacity to act as a neighbor, for nearly everyone has the rudimentary sentiment of attachment for members of the species whom they know. It is still a requisite that such aid and support be voluntary when given. Thoreau recognized that even in neighborly cooperation there is the possibility of subtle coercion. That is, some people perform kindnesses because they feel the pressure of conformity to the prevailing value system rather than a spontaneous reaction of the will. Such a coercion is subtle, but nonetheless effective: "I see that to some men their relation to mankind is all-important. It is fatal in their eyes to outrage the opinions and customs of their fellow-men.⁴⁴"

The moral distinction is all important to Thoreau, for it defines the legitimacy of the social relation. Neighbors who act from spontaneous good will without expecting the applause of mankind or a returned beneficence legitimize the social relation, but those whose motivation is reaction to pressure of convention or hope of reward exhibit institutionalized behavior rather than social behavior. Their motive is external and does not arise from an unfettered act of will.
There is but one obligation, and that is the obligation to obey the highest dictate.... If any man assist me in the way of the world, let him derive satisfaction from the deed itself.... Kindness repaid is thereby annulled. I would let his deed lie as fair and generous as it was intended. The truly beneficient never lapses into a creditor; his great kindness is still extended to me and is never done. Of those noble deeds which have me for their object I am only the most fortunate spectator, and would rather be the abettor of their nobleness than stay their tide with the obstructions of impatient gratitude. As true as action and reaction are equal, that nobleness which was as wide as the universe will rebound not on him the individual, but on the world. If any have been kind to me, what more do they want? I cannot make them richer than they are. If they have not been kind, they cannot take from me the privilege which they have not improved.

Without the proper motivation, neighborliness is merely an institutional reflection. With the proper motive, neighbors improve each other by their near presence and provide the foundation for a beneficial society in which an individual comfortably can exist.

A collection of neighbors in the same geographical area constitutes a village. Clearly Thoreau assumed that true neighborliness is not possible in a large aggregation of people, as in a city. In small numbers where intimacy is possible, and the milk of human kindness is not strained by the sheer weight of numbers, neighbors can act in concert for mutual ends. Thoreau was enthralled by the possibilities for concerted action and voluntary mutual improvement inherent in the village. For human beings in a village to act collectively is not an anathema to Thoreau, quite the contrary. It is the objective of the collective activity and the motive which determined for him whether it is an acceptable exercise of
human sociability, or the prescriptive demand of an institution.

The village offers man the opportunity to combine to provide collectively for wants that each man cannot provide privately. It can enrich the lives of its inhabitants, significantly improve their culture, and play an educative role for persons of all ages and conditions. "It is time that villages were universities, and their elder inhabitants the fellows of universities, with leisure—if they are, indeed so well off—to pursue liberal studies the rest of their lives." Thoreau believed that the village could and should provide such tools of education as libraries, learned speakers on a short term and residential basis, believing that though they would not be of equal use immediately, they would eventually raise the quality of life for all.

The village should be a patron of the arts, and play a role in the elevation as well as the transmission of culture. "In this country, the village should in some respects take the place of the nobleman of Europe. It should be the patron of the fine arts. It is rich enough." Obviously such ideas assume the collection of taxes, the administration of procedures to select and maintain the cultural and educational offerings, and the organized structure necessary to accomplish the objectives. It may be objected that since this is the case, this function of the village is not appropriate for inclusion in the class of social arrangements under discussion here, for it smells of institutionalization rather
than of voluntary association. The reason it is included here is that Thoreau believed, rather inconsistently with the way he viewed other kinds of human groupings, that it was possible for the village to function as an associational rather than an institutional unit, and to behave as an organism rather than as a rigid structure. Like Rousseau, Gandhi and Tolstoy, he believed that the village can perform all these functions, but does not because "it wants only the magnanimity and refinement." In other words, there is a lack of proper motivation, a lack of spirit, and of concerted wills. The village does not provide these amenities because "it is unaspiring and ignorant of its own wants." Given the aspiration, the force of will, men through their villages might introduce "refining and civilizing influences" and put themselves "on a level as to opportunities at once with London and Arcadia, and secure ... a culture at once superior to both."

The practical limitation to securing voluntary agreement to such uses are obvious, but once effected, Thoreau seems to imply that the results of a liberal education would liberate the prejudices of men from the bonds of ignorance, and the acceptance and support of the endeavor would be nearly unanimous. It is this possibility of "noble villages of men" that Thoreau envisioned rather than the actuality most often encountered that gives the village its place in this discussion. It illustrates so well the distinction between associations and institutions, and
that the same phenomenon can be one or the other depending upon the motivation and the objectives it holds.

At this point it should be emphasized that Thoreau did not believe associations or institutions, either one, have wills of their own apart from the individuals who comprise them. The force of will and ultimate motivation remains an individual personal factor which, while providing the propulsion for collective groups of both associational and institutional types, does not adhere in the groups themselves. The way in which Thoreau spoke of villages in the preceding paragraph made the point in doubt, and it is necessary to correct any erroneous impression which may have been left on this point.

That intellectual tradition which includes Plato, many medieval corporatists, Rousseau, Burke, Hegel, and others who see a corporate will existing in at least some institutions, would object to Thoreau's simplistic view of man's institutions. Many institutions outlive generations of men, and some, like the Roman Catholic Church, survive millennia shaping the lives of men more extensively than men affect them. Thoreau was willing to admit many mysteries to his view of reality, but while he could suggest that there is an animating principle in stones and inert matter, he did not extend the capacity of will beyond individual human beings.

Villages then, are merely an aggregation of neighbors, with geo-
graphic proximity being one essential feature. There is an almost
infinite variety of associations based upon the same elements as the
village functions mentioned above. Neighbors and friends can combine
for almost any purpose which they share, and Thoreau considered it
a useful and natural expression of man's social nature.

The important point for Thoreau about associations is not, therefore, the part of will because, as we have seen, he did not believe such
exists in associations or institutions, but the essential features of voluntary associations are their spontaneous character and dependence upon
the free action of individual wills. That is, coercion from any quarter
vitiates the voluntary nature of the association and converts it into a
restrictive, inhibitive social institution. Freedom of the will to assent
or to abstain in collective endeavors, whether they involve two persons
or all other persons in the world was the touchstone by which Thoreau
distinguished voluntary associations from institutions as the two forms
of human society. One is natural and wholesome, the other is spoiled.
"There is no odor so bad as that which arises from goodness tainted.
It is human, it is divine, carrion."52 The motive behind voluntary
association is good, while that behind institutions is contaminated, and
is in some stage of decay.

Somewhat paradoxically as we have seen Thoreau still recognized
the importance of environmental factors in the development of an indi-
vidual and the effect it has upon his psychological and emotional orientation. As a child is shaped to some degree by the family into which he is born by partaking vicariously of certain aspects of their previous history and sharing their circumstances, so is an individual affected in important ways by the culture in which he lives. Previously it has been remarked that Thoreau held language to be an important aspect to man's intellectual development, for it provides the symbols he uses not only in communication, but in his very thought processes. A shared language, a shared intellectual tradition, and a shared cultural milieu have a tendency to develop a loyalty in an individual toward those who have so much in common with him.

This feeling is akin to the familial loyalty which a child has for his parents, siblings, and eventually, for more distant relatives. It creates in an individual an affinity for his culture mates. Although the product of environmental conditioning, the result is a mind-set which shapes the personality as definitely as if heredity or instinct had dictated it. It is clear from reading Thoreau that he considered himself to have a community of interest with Yankees, with inhabitants of New England and the nation, with Anglo-Saxons, with North Europeans—particularly Scandinavians—with English speaking peoples, with Protestants, and with the Caucasian race. Each of these loyalties stems from the cultural circumstances in which he was born, and each individual has a
similar set of loyalties according to the condition of his life.

These associations, though less immediate and further removed from individual volition, are nonetheless expressions of man's social nature which do not necessarily have the characteristics of institutions. In the class of associations under discussion here should be included the correspondence one feels for his co-linguists, residents of his native region and national homeland, his co-religionists, and others whose cultural similarity is strongly perceived. These emotional ties can assume institutional form, as in militant nationalism or evangelism, but in their innocent forms are little more than instances of ethnocentrism, which is merely an extension of egoism.

Thoreau expressed this feeling of group solidarity very well, though perhaps not quite consciously at least in his own case, in his piece, "A Yankee in Canada," which is full of lauditory references to Yankees with their revolutionary culture when compared to the colonial culture of the British subjects. There he also pointed to the differences in religion between Catholic Canada and Protestant New England, and imputes that this cultural difference has a direct relationship to nearly all aspects of the lives of the two peoples. From these differences in culture, Thoreau made broad generalizations about the peoples which demonstrate that he considered such cultural groupings to be supra-individual associations to which people belong because of their cultural perspective and mental training, but which lack the rigid and formalized
characteristics of a social institution, although they may be supported by institutionalized functions of the culture such as the school system or denominational religion.

The omnipresence of soldiers in Canada provided Thoreau with an example of how the social and institutional aspects of a culture are mutually reinforcing.

The inhabitants evidently rely on [the soldiers] in a great measure for music and entertainment... It is impossible to give the soldier a good education without making him a deserter... We saw one schoolhouse... but it appeared like a place where the process, not of enlightenment, but of obfuscating the mind was going on, and the pupils received only so much light as could penetrate the shadow of the Catholic Church.53

The religion of the Canadians, combined presumably with the French language and other cultural traits of the inhabitants of the region Thoreau was visiting, supports the Roman Catholic Church, which in turn supports the educational system, which supports the soldiery, and the military establishment under the direction of the government supports those cultural traits which permit the institutions to exist. The result is, in Thoreau's words, that:

The... inhabitants of Montmorenci County—appeared very inferior, intellectually and even physically, to that of New England. In some respects they were incredibly filthy... They are very far from revolution, have no quarrel with Church or State, but their vice and their virtue is content... The English government has been remarkably liberal to its Catholic subjects in Canada, permitting them to wear their own fetters, both political and religious...54
Thoreau’s lack of consistency with the individualism which is the foundation of his view of the nature of man, is apparent in his recognition of these cultural influences upon individual personality. From his discussions on language, villages, religion and ethnic associations, it is clear that he believed that men have a tendency to absorb into the structure of their personalities the substance of their culture and to reflect it in behavioral terms. He tangled in his own logic by admitting that associations built upon cultural affinities are coincidental rather than consciously chosen by an act of will, yet, they are affirmed if not elected by act of will. The logical conclusion of such a position is that a man’s culture is literally part of his ego because the culture into which he is born and in which he lives is partly assimilated by his personality and shapes in large measure the perceptions received by his mind. This is not at all supportive of Thoreau’s individualism which is built upon an unrestricted will, the wild or willed man which we have noted earlier.

Further, the binding tie of ethnocentrism is not the exclusive property of any one social association or grouping, but he thought exists to some degree among all peoples. Some, however, feel the effects more intensely than others. "An Englishman," for example, "habitually regards himself merely as a constituent part of the English nation; he is a member of the royal regiment of Englishmen, and is proud of...
his company...." The American, on the other hand, "cares, com-
paratively, little about such things, and is advantageously nearer to
the primitive and the ultimate condition of man in these respects." What he meant by the comparison between the English and the Ameri-
cans in this regard is that the culture of the latter, their history, is
of such a character that their various cultural practices are still
amorphous in large part and support comparatively few social institu-
tions. It does not mean that the American has fewer associational ties
of a social character, but that his ties are closer to the volitional prin-
ciple because they have as yet not congealed so firmly into institutional
patterns and forms. Cultural bias among ethnocentric groups is ines-
capable, and while perhaps best demonstrated in political histories, is
also present in racial, religious, and linguistic traditions.

In holding this view, Thoreau was strangely conservative. It has
been noted previously that he urged men to be wise through the wisdom
of their race. He may seriously have believed in a racial memory.
Cultural memory is more accurate, for in a hundred ways the perceptions
and experiences of all of his predecessors culminate in the life of each
person as he takes his place in the succeeding generations of the race.
Language, for instance, binds a man to the wisdom of his predecessors:

    A word is wiser than any man, than any series of words. In its
    present received sense it may be false, but in its inner sense by
descent and analogy it approves itself. Language is the most
    perfect work of art in the world. The chisel of a thousand years
    retouches it."
There is much wisdom in social tradition, in fact he believed social cohesion depends in large measure upon a shared tradition. The common value system, which Thoreau often called "morality" as distinguished from truth, is based upon cultural traditions and, therefore, is inherently conservative. Thoreau saw the utility in it, and while he did not hold morality to be superior to transcendent values, he did not lightly dismiss it. As he wrote in A Week:

"Immemorial custom is transcendent law," says Menu. That is, it was the custom of the gods before men used it. The fault of our New England custom is that it is memorial. What is morality but immemorial custom? Conscience is the chief of conservatives. 58

This viewpoint, so strongly reminiscent of Edmund Burke's idea of social organism, is inconsistent with Thoreau's strongly stated objection to the dead hand of institutional prescription. Most persons would argue that culture is transmitted exclusively through institutions, even though Thoreau might have offered a quibble about whether some cultural phenomena such as the family and language are institutions according to his definition. The values of society do, as he admits, have a claim upon an individual. Intuition and individual moral will in his view are superior to social values, but he did not deal with the crucial issue of how an individual balances the claims of conscience against the claims of society. This peculiarly conservative aspect of his social views are at odds with the radical implications of his politics.
Thoreau's conservativism was not static, however, and he believed
in an evolutionary process in the development of social value. "A man
is wise with the wisdom of his time only, and ignorant with its igno-
rance," he wrote in his Journal. "Observe how the greatest minds yield
in some degree to the superstitions of their age." For Thoreau, an
example of transcendental truth supercedes the truths of social con-
vention and acts as a solvent for all the relationships which are
cemented by traditional values. Transcendent truth is a function of
the intuitive consciousness of the individual will.

On the other hand, the hero is one who is able to break out of such
social conservatism and declare new values which approximate truth
more closely than existing values. The hero is able to be so singular an
individual that he transcends even the cultural forms which have im-
mersed him from the first breath he drew. The heroic type, in other
words, is superior to all associations of men, voluntary, cultural, and
institutional. The hero has regained full exercise of his will; but, most
men are incapable of making the quantum leap out of the societal asso-
ciations in which they are enmeshed. Because these cultural affinities
are nearer to the ego than are more artificial structures such as social
institutions, it is much more difficult to disengage from cultural associa-
tions than from voluntary associations or from institutional associations.

Thoreau did not leave any more satisfactory an explanation of how the
hero achieves his feat than the declaration that it happens and reference
to examples of persons whom Thoreau considered to have been such.

The distinction among voluntary associations, cultural affinities,
and institutional forms has been made earlier. We have seen that the
relations of man with man, whether they be based upon cultural affini­
ties or upon voluntary associations, Thoreau recognized as healthy and
necessary. The volitional character of the relationships of which insti­
tutions are incapable, and the individual motivation behind associations
of all types was for Thoreau the determining feature as to their accepta­
bility as non-destructive of individual integrity. As he phrased it, "as
for society, why should we not meet, not always as dyspeptics, but
sometimes as eupeptics?"

When the proper perspective and motiva­
tion is achieved, a man should not be aware of effects of his associations
any more than he is of the other functionings of his nature such as breath­
ing or digestion. Cultural and voluntary associations provide for any
number of necessities of human life and "are vital functions of human
society, it is true, but should [be] unconsciously performed, like the
vital functions of the natural body." Otherwise they become institutions.

When functioning properly, the various social forms which are
based upon acts of positive will and arise from motives consistent with the
personhood of the individual, are beneficial and enobling to mankind
singly and collectively. Stripped of all embellishments and semantic
qualifications, Thoreau's idea of society at the level here discussed is not so far from the Kantian imperative category in which all acts are capable of universalization, but unlike Kant, Thoreau did not consider the state to be the universalizer.

The preceding discussion has been primarily focused upon cultural affinities and voluntary associations. Institutions, on the other hand, do not share with these the Kantian ethical perspective, the natural biological or cultural basis of the family and linguistic associations, nor the instinctive emotional foundation of relationships built on Thoreauvian Friendship. Institutions form a separate class of social forms that are artificial as opposed to natural and instinctual. However, in typical fashion, Thoreau did not use terms consistently and can be found to have used other words, such as "society" in ways that refer to the forms which in the typology used in this discussion would be called institutions.

Institutions are distinguished from less prescriptive social forms by the absence of affirmative will. They are of several types. Some are vestigial remnants of once constructive volitional social forms which became encrusted with custom to the point that they are only rigid fossils, no longer drawing life from the wills of individuals but sustained by inertia. Most fall into this category, since at some point in time they were established by act of will to fill a human need; they became institutions after they ceased to be supported by volition and
began to stand only on useless custom and sterile tradition.

Some institutions—most institutions, indeed—have had a divine origin. But most that we see prevailing in society nothing but the form, the shell, is left; the life is extinct, and there is nothing divine in them.  

These are deadwood of a culture, the sort of thing which Hegel and Marx would have dropped from history by the inexorable march of events. Thoreau was less sanguine about them dropping obligingly out of history as progress spirals on its upward way. He believed the institutionalized forms of society to have been adopted by the majority as protection in the form of custom from the painful process of living and making choices of will. In a passage remarkable for its similarity to the opening statements of John Maynard Keynes' *A General Theory*, Thoreau wrote:

I love man-kind, but I hate the institutions of the dead unkind. Men execute nothing so faithfully as the wills of the dead, to the last codicil and letter. They rule this world, and the living are but their executors.

Such blind conservatism substitutes acquiescence to custom for the consciousness which is required of one exercising an act of will. It permits one to be mannerly rather than manly.

I have always found that what are called the best of manners are the worst, for they are simply the shell without the meat. They cover no life at all. They are the universal slaveholders, who treat men as things. Nobody holds you more cheap than the man of manners. They are marks by the help of which the wearers ignore you and remain concealed themselves. Are they such great characters that they feel obliged to make the journey of life incognito?
Reliance on institutions of this class protects individuals from making the painful choices which their freedom of will impose upon them; it is a substitute for freedom which many seek rather than the social contribution which the institution professes to make. "How rarely I meet with a man who can be free, even in thought!" Thoreau remarked in the Journal. "We live according to rule. Some men are bedridded; all, world-ridden." Even if one is able to "empty clean out of his thoughts all institutions of men and start again," it is often impossible for him to accept the responsibility for making independently the choices which institutions would make for him through custom and usage. Such persons "would fain abide by the institutions of their fathers. Their argument is they have not long to live, and for that little space let them not be disturbed in their slumbers; blessed are the peacemakers; let this cup pass from me, etc."  

Assuming that there are persons who understand the operation of institutions upon adherents, certain among these persons find a satisfaction in bolstering the institutions of society and assuming positions of leadership. A selfish drive for power and position is the motive for many, but for others there is a misplaced concern for their fellowmen much like that of Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor of Seville who wished to relieve men of the awful responsibility of freedom.

How much of the life of certain men goes to sustain, to make respected, the institutions of society. They are the ones who
pay the heaviest tax. Here are certain valuable institutions which can only be sustained by a wonderful strain which appears all to come upon certain Spartans who volunteer. Certain men are always to be found—especially the children of our present institutions—who are born with an instinct to perceive them. 68

Thoreau viewed this as the most contemptible of human motives, the "goodness tainted" and "human carrion" which has been mentioned earlier. It is one aspect of that human virtue, charity, which is so very delicate and liable to spoilage. Nothing in the human constitution is so prone to corruption as that emotion of humanity, which in its rare and exalted form, Thoreau called Friendship.

The allusion to the Grand Inquisitor is apropos, for of all institutions, Thoreau was perhaps most critical of the Catholic Church in particular and organized Christianity in general. The motives of the clergy were assumed to be similar to that of the old priest of Seville who took upon himself the burden of responsibility for all men, asking in return the power to direct the conscience of the faithful. "The sort of morality which the priests inculcate is a very subtle policy," Thoreau wrote in A Week, "far finer than the politicians', and the world is very successfully ruled by them as the policemen." 69

Yet, his wrath was not based upon denominations, for the spirit of bigotry and blasphemous arrogance infects all institutionalized religion, making spiritual slaves of adherents. Thoreau saw little difference between an African caught and made a slave in the South and a New
England youth ensnared by the Unitarian Church as a minister. "In course of time they will abolish the one form of servitude, and, not long after, the other," he hoped.  

For Thoreau the religious feeling was truly sacred, and it is profaned by outward expression or by institutionalized doctrine. "I have no sympathy with the bigotry and ignorance which make transient and partial and puerile distinctions between one man's faith or form of faith and another's," he wrote. "I pray to be delivered from narrowness, partiality, exaggeration, bigotry."  

If he took the larger view, his patience with those who professed a sectarian viewpoint was not so expansive as to tolerate them.

The religion I love is very laic. The clergy are as diseased, and as much possessed with a devil, as the reformers. They make their topic as offensive as the politician, for our religion is as unpublic and incommunicable as our poetical vein, and to be approached with as much love and tenderness.  

It should be clear to anyone who has read Thoreau seriously that it was not the religious emotion, which he regarded as instinctual, but the institutionalization of the religious feeling that he found so objectionable. The religious motive, but never the religious institution, is healthy and beneficial both to an individual and to society at large. "The bigoted and sectarian forget that without religion or devotion of some kind nothing great was ever accomplished."  

Of all facets of a man's life, his spiritual relationship to the divinity
in whom he believes was to Thoreau one of the most private and unshare-
able. He objected to the idea of a group setting down a creed which
represents a consensus, or which limits the direct communion between
an individual and his divinity. The idea of an institutionalized church
built upon a stated doctrine he felt to be antithetical to the religious
impulse. Such an abomination had its rise, he thought, in the abdica-
tion of individual inspiration to the judgement of a committee. Since
religious sects have no closer relation to individual conscience than a
group or institutional declaration, there is no good reason for preferr-
ing one religion over another. "Apparently," he wrote, "in ancient
times several parties were nearly equally matched. They appointed a
committee and made a compromise, agreeing to vote or believe so and
so, and they still helplessly abide by that." Clergy and others who
choose to bind their consciences in such a way abdicate a fundamental
responsibility of their humanity. In such persons there is "no perfectly
independent human nucleus; their spirits are caught in "a very fine cob-
web in the lower stratum of the air, which stronger wings do not even
discover." Such spiritually maimed persons do "not know that a man's
creed can never be written, that there are no particular expressions of
belief that deserve to be prominent."  

Among the objections Thoreau raised about the church, and other
institutions such as the Lowell Institute, is that they attempt to control
the intellectual, and sometimes the physical, liberty of all with whom they come in contact, through the heavy hand of custom where no other weapon is available, and through the power of the purse or other types of coercion where possible. By their very nature, such institutions as presume to make declarations of truth in religion or behavior which lie against an individual conscience, are constrictive and limiting.

They are conservative and illiberal in casting the presumption of moral authority in their favor against an individual conscience. This charge applies equally to the church, educational systems, political organizations, and like institutions that prescribe a behavioral norm. Their illiberality is constitutional and inherent, so that they do not permit a rebuttal or differing points of view. The fact that Thoreau himself was guilty of precisely this kind of moral arrogance apparently did not occur to him.

Institutions merely ignore and obscure counter arguments without permitting a confrontation of opinions.

Freedom of speech! It hath not entered into your hearts to conceive what those words mean. It is not leave given me by your sect to say this or that; it is when leave is given to your sect to withdraw. The church, the state, the school, the magazine, think they are liberal and free! It is the freedom of a prison-yard. I ask only that one fourth part of my honest thoughts be spoken aloud. What is it you tolerate, you church to-day? Not truth, but a lifelong hypocrisy. Let us have institutions framed not out of our rottenness, but out of our soundness.... I would like to suggest what a pack of fools and cowards we mankind are. They want me to agree not to breathe too hard in the neighborhood of these institutions, their weak and flabby sides
would fall out, for my own inspiration would exhaust the air about them. The church! It is eminently the timid institution, and the heads and pillars of it are constitutionally and by principle the greatest cowards in the community.  

Institutions of this class have the majority of men ensnared, and by temperament or by blindness, they continue to behave as though following the established forms prescribed by institutions constitutes life. Men have mistaken institutions for the individual processes of the life of the will, and so have not begun to live at all. They are entombed in dead institutions.

They live on the surface; they are interested in the transient and fleeting; they are like driftwood on the flood. They ask forever and only the news, the froth and the scum of the eternal sea. They use policy; they make up for want of matter with manner. They have many letters to write. Wealth and the approbation of men is to them success. The enterprises of society are something final and sufficing for them. The world advises them, and they listen to its advice. They live wholly an evanescent life, creatures of circumstances.... They have no knowledge of truth, but by an exceedingly dim and transient instinct, which stereotypes the church and some other institutions.

The differences among institutions, therefore, are gauged as much by the motivation of those associated with them, as inherent in the dissimilarities of their avowed purposes. It is less useful to classify institutions by social function in discussing Thoreau than to discuss the aspirations or motives of those who support them. The leadership of institutions rests upon a different sort of psychological stance than is common among the membership. Thoreau saw an elitism operating in
the mundane institutional life of men as well as in the more elevated aspects of human consciousness. The leadership of institutions he regarded as cliques whose members are an elite group, although not of the same moral quality of spirit that distinguishes the heroic type of his elite.

It is surprising to what extent the world is ruled by cliques. They who constitute, or at least lead, New England or New York society, in the eyes of the world, are but a clique, a few "men of the age" and of the town, who work best in the harness provided for them. The institutions of almost all kinds are thus of a sectarian or party character. Newspapers, magazines, colleges, and all forms of government and religion express the superficial activity of a few, the mass either conforming or not attending. 79

Despite the superficial differences among members of the ruling cliques, they have much the same internal motivations:

The editors of newspapers, the popular clergy, politicians and orators of the day and office-holders, though they may be thought to be of very different politics and religion, are essentially one and homogeneous, inasmuch as they are only the various ingredients of the froth which ever floats on the surface of society. 80

These opinion makers and manipulators of the masses are motivated by a wish to influence others. Their motives are not inner-directed, to use Riesman's word again; they do not mind their own affairs, but make the affairs of others their business. It is not by weight of their personal example that they seek to effect their objectives, but by using the force of institutions or organizations coerce their fellows by skilled use of custom, tailored information, and manipulation of public opinion.
The effect of the institutions of opinion ruled by these cliques will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

There is another class of activities institutionalized to a greater or lesser extent, and which have for their motive factor pecuniary gain. As was observed in the preceding chapter, Thoreau was too much of a Puritan with a strong commitment to the work ethic to dismiss lightly the benefits, personal and social, of work. As he wrote, "all enterprises must be self-supporting, must pay for themselves. The great art of life is how to turn the surplus life of the soul into life for the body,—that so the life be not a failure." To support oneself is a very necessary function of human life, and Thoreau was convinced that in order to achieve full human status, self-sufficiency must be achieved. This did not necessarily mean merely that one is not a burden to another, but that one provide for himself directly through his own efforts. "To be supported by the charity of friends or a government pension is to go into the almshouse. To inherit property is not to be born,—is to be still-born rather." Personal self-sufficiency is a requirement, in Thoreau's mind, for personal health as well as social health. Providing for one's own needs, and the needs of his family, even the needs of one's friends and neighbors in want is indicative of a strong character and provides the labor which keeps society sweet. But as indicated earlier it is not part of Thoreau's idea of the good life that people be forced to drudge for
a living, rather than they find some employment which is fitting to their character, which gives a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction as well as a place to sleep, an adequate diet, and a decent cover for nakedness; instead of toil, such an employment would be amusement.

I think that men generally are mistaken with regard to amusements. Every one who deserves to be regarded as higher than the brute may be supposed to have an earnest purpose, to accomplish which is the object of his existence, and this is at once his work and his supremest pleasure; and for diversion and relaxation, for suggestion and education and strength, there is offered the never-failing amusement of getting a living,—never-failing, I mean, when temperately indulged in. . . . Farming and building and manufacturing and sailing are the greatest and wholesomest amusements that were ever invented (for God invented them), only I think they indulge to excess generally, and so what was meant for joy becomes the sweat of the brow. 83

These are obviously social activities, but motivation, again, is the determining factor. The behavior may be identical, but the difference in motivation between any two acts will make the distinction of quality between them. Drudgery in a private life is the result of greed, or a slavish obedience to custom, or possibly the result of ignorance or lack of independence or courage. In this regard, private drudgery is a private tragedy and a private offense against oneself. The economic arrangements of society are liable to a more malicious use, with wider implications than mere private greed, conservatism, or cowardice.

When greed is organized it has a multiplier effect whereby persons who do not necessarily share the motivation of the organizers and per-
petuators of the institutions are forced to participate in order to earn their daily bread. It forces a man to earn his keep rather than earn his life. As Thoreau put it, "The true laborer is recompensed by his labor, not by his employer. Industry is its own wages. " The motive of the laborer, he believed, "should not be to get his living, to get a good job, but to perform well a certain work." It is precisely this which business or trade prevents a man from doing, because it is necessary to show a tangible profit, and because the goods of the earth are cornered by economic institutions. "Wealth, no less than knowledge, is power" and it is the power of wealth which allows it to be coercive. It may be a very overt or very subtle coercion that economic institutions exert, but it is nonetheless forceful on "the mass of men who are discontented ... because they are doing their duty ... and thus have forged their own golden or silver fetters." But, Thoreau was quick to observe that it is not a simple matter of choice because there are many pressures exerted by social and economic factors which only "strong and valiant natures" can overcome in order to "mind their own affairs whether in heaven or hell, and perchance build more magnificently and spend more lavishly than the richest, without ever impoverishing themselves." These stronger natures will be able to resist all pressures and to live free within themselves without reference to the conventions of society or the demands of economic institutions. The mass of men, however, are confused, not knowing "whether they are well employed or not."
They are victims in a very real sense, for they are not only deprived of economic independence, they have had their perceptions clouded by the manipulators of the system in whose interest their energy is extracted.

"What!" exclaim a million Irishmen starting up from all the shanties in the land, "is not this railroad which we have built a good thing?" Yes, I answer, comparatively good, that is, you might have done worse; but I wish, as you are brothers of mine, that you could have spent your time better than digging in the dirt.  

The economic leadership in what we now call the capitalist world was exploitative he thought, but his criticism gradually grew deeper than merely regretting the poorly rewarded physical toil extracted by the economic organization imposed by the entrepreneur class. As Leo Stoller has shown, Thoreau was more concerned with the shrivelling effect such a system has on the persons involved.

He believed that the distortions of value and of reality which economic institutions create by their operation are imposed upon the perceptions of the citizenry, and they are unaware for the most part of their delusion. The exploited are deprived of their spiritual consciousness as well as their physical vitality; the exploiters may fare even worse. Not only is the manipulator forced to bear the responsibility of his own misplaced values, he has the weight of the exploitation of others on his conscience. Business, or trade, in which both workers and entrepreneurs are bound together no matter what the commodity or
method of transaction, is a negation of life for all who are engaged in it. The moral ground is removed from those who must find buyers to remove themselves from debt, and that is a situation always present in business whether one be owner, manager, or worker.

It is very evident what mean and sneaking lives many of you live, ... always on the limits, trying to get into business and trying to get out of debt, a very ancient slough, called by the Latins aes alienum, another's brass, for some of their coins were made of brass; still living, and dying, and buried by this other's brass; always promising to pay, promising to pay, tomorrow, and dying today, insolvent; seeking to curry favor, to get custom, by how many modes, only not state-prison offenses; lying, flattering, voting, contracting yourselves into a nutshell of civility, or dilating into an atmosphere of thin and vaporous generosity, that you may persuade your neighbor to let you make his shoes, or his hat or his coat, or his carriage, or import his groceries for him; making yourself sick, that you may lay up something against a sick day....

Business, this doing for others what one should do for oneself only for the money, which is but a value substitute, attaches a man to an institution which gives him the means of subsistence. "Absolutely speaking," Thoreau said with business in mind, "the more money, the less virtue; for money comes between a man and his objects, and obtains them for him,... It puts to rest many questions which he would otherwise be taxed to answer." Thoreau was critical of the artificial value attributed to money. As he said, "men will tell you sometimes that 'money's hard.' That shows it was
Money was instituted for a valuable purpose, i.e., a medium of exchange for those things which did not easily lend themselves to barter and for which a man's labor was not an appropriate or possible exchange. He wholly approved of his Canadian woodchopper's analysis of the use of money: so he would not have to sell a piece of his cow every time he had need of a spool of thread or other small convenience. He deplored the misplaced value accorded to money which, after all, originally was only a symbol of value.

Yet, though money can buy no fine fruit whatever, and we are never made truly rich by the possession of it, the value of things generally is commonly estimated by the amount of money they will fetch. A thing is not valuable—e.g. a fine situation for a house—until it is convertible into so much money, that is, can cease to be what it is and become something else which you prefer. So you will see that all prosaic people who possess only the commonest sense, who believe strictly in this kind of wealth, are speculators in fancy stocks and continually cheat themselves, but poets and all discerning people, who have an object in life and know what they want, speculate in real values. The mean and low values of anything depend on its convertibility into something else—i.e. have nothing to do with its intrinsic value.

Money supports institutions as it is itself supported by institutions, and further, it encourages luxury on the part of those who can command more than they earn and can use merely by the accidental possession of money. In Thoreau's view, it is the luxury which money permits that brings degeneration in men, makes families run out, enervates and destroys nations. Such a view is perfectly consistent with his firm belief, with its Marxian implications, that businesses and banks inevi-
tably fail, that they carry the seeds of their own destruction, and that supportive institutions such as the state exert their power and influence to sustain them.

The acquisition of more money than one can immediately dispose of for personal necessities gives rise to the capitalist class and the gaggle of hangers-on that attach themselves to the wealthy. These persons, Thoreau considered not merely parasitic, but malignant.

What an army of non-producers society produces,—ladies generally (old and young) and gentlemen of leisure, so called! Many think themselves well employed as charitable dispensers of wealth which somebody else earned, and these who produce nothing, being of the most luxurious habits, are precisely they who want the most, and complain loudest when they do not get what they want. They who are literally paupers maintained at the public expense are the most importunate and insatiable beggars. They cling like the glutton to a living man and suck his vitals up. To every locomotive man there are three or four deadheads clinging to him, as if they conferred a great favor on society by living upon it.... How can you expect such blood-suckers to be happy?

Although Thoreau did not have a developed theory of revolution to correct the obvious ills which result from such an economic arrangement, he did see the cyclicism of classical economics to be a corrective application of a natural law requiring every individual and every enterprise to be self-supporting, if not wholly self-sufficient. Speaking of the panic of 1857, which was the worst since the down-cycle of 1837, he wrote to his friend Blake:
They make a great ado nowadays about hard times; but I think that the community generally, ministers and all, take a wrong view of the matter.... This general failure, both private and public, is rather occasion for rejoicing, as reminding us whom we have at the helm,—that justice is always done. If our merchants did not most of them fail, and the banks too, my faith in the old laws of the world would be staggered. The statement that ninety-six in a hundred doing such business surely break down is perhaps the sweetest fact that statistics have revealed.... If thousands are thrown out of employment, it suggests that they were not well employed. Why don't they take the hint? It is not enough to be industrious; so are the ants. 100

The problem, so far as Thoreau was concerned, was simply one of complexity and motivation. Even commerce has its virtues if properly motivated. Under certain conditions there is an enterprise and bravery in commerce, with men facing their risks, not clasping their hands and praying, but going about their business with confidence and courage. The example which Thoreau used for this kind of steady and cheerful valor, were the men who "inhabit the snow-plow for their winter quarters; who have not merely the three-o'clock-in-the-morning courage, which Bonaparte thought was the rarest." 101 Thoreau did not find that same kind of motivation prevalent in more highly organized activities, or in the provision of less individualized goods and services than snow-plowing, which is a solitary activity. Anything more complex escapes the control of an individual and ensnares him in the tangled web that trade weaves.

No trade is simple, but artificial and complex. It postpones life and substitutes death. It goes against the grain. If the first generation does not die of it, the third or fourth does. In face of all statistics, I will never believe that it is the descendants of tradesmen who keep the state alive, but of
simple yeomen or laborers. This, indeed, statistics say of the city reinforced by the country. The oldest, wisest politician grows not more human so, but is merely a gray wharf rat at last. He makes a habit of disregarding the moral right and wrong for the legal or political, commits a slow suicide, and thinks to recover by retiring on to a farm at last. This simplicity it is, and the vigor it imparts, that enables the simple vagabond, though he does get drunk and is sent to the house of correction so often, to hold up his head among men. 102

The complexity of affairs as well as the attendant complexity of the moral options imposed by the business of buying and selling has a corrosive effect upon the sensitivities of those engaged in the practice. Thoreau generalized from his own experience: "I have tried trade.... But I have since learned that trade curses everything it handles; and though you trade in messages from heaven, the whole curse of trade attaches to the business."103 The trouble with trade and business is that it is based on a system which expects a man to make or to get for others rather than being self-sufficient and expecting the same of others. The division of labor, itself a complicator of life, upon which "successful" trade or business is predicated is antithetical to Thoreau's ideal of the independent man satisfying his own needs in a material sense and in so doing massaging his spirit. Divided labor may provide the use of a thing, but it lacks the ability to provide the "goods" which men speak of when referring to objects for their use.

That on which commerce seizes is always the very coarsest part of a fruit,—the mere husk and rind, in fact,—for her hands are very clumsy. This is what fills the holds of ships, is exported and imported, pays duties, and is finally sold at
the shops.

It is a grand fact that you cannot make the finer fruits or parts of fruits matters of commerce. . . . You can't buy the finer part of any fruit—i.e., the highest use and enjoyment of it. You cannot buy the pleasure which it yields to him who truly plucks it; you can't buy a good appetite even. 104

The operation of economic institutions thus supports all manner of hypocrisy merely because it provides men with wealth or prestige without any necessary relation to the abilities or worth of the individual. It prevents men from having pure and truthful relationships.

Consider the cloak that our employment or station is; how we use and tolerate pretension; how the judge is clothed with dignity which does not belong to him, and the criminal, perchance, with shame or impudence which no more belong to him. It does not matter so much, then, what is the fashion of the cloak with which we cloak these cloaks. Change the coat; put the judge in the criminal-box, and the criminal on the bench, and you might think that you had changed the men. 105

The delusions are not only self-delusions, which to Thoreau is the more serious offense, but permit one to appear to others to be someone other than who he has a right to claim to be by virtue of his own character.

There is a difficulty here which Thoreau created for himself. A materialist could make this critique without blushing. Marx and Engles would have certainly agreed that in a capitalist exploitative society, the external trappings of station and material goods of life determine one's character. For an Idealist, as Thoreau certainly was, to lay such stress upon the influence of material possessions in determining character is somewhat of an oddity. Yet, Thoreau's concern with the relationship
of economics to a life of conscience and serenity is a central theme of his writings. There are some who interpret the whole of *Walden* as a treatise on personal economics. It is obvious that the separation between the ideal world and the actual world was not so distinct in Thoreau's mind as he believed it to be.

As institutions, economic arrangements operate in an impersonal manner. Of course, they possess no spirit of their own in Thoreau's view, and therefore are ill-equipped to deal with human concerns on a spiritual level. They become exploitive through the sheer momentum of their operation. For instance, Thoreau pointed to the factory system which was at its most Dickensonian during his lifetime, although almost any organized economic activity which was organized beyond the master-apprentice relationship could suffer from the same criticism:

I cannot believe that our factory system is the best mode by which men may get clothing. The condition of the operatives is becoming every day more like that of the English, and it cannot be wondered at, since, as far as I have heard or observed, the principal object is, not that mankind may be well and honestly clad, but, unquestionably, that the corporations may be enriched.\textsuperscript{106}

The very weight of economic institutions prevent one from being completely at liberty to adopt a counter life style because "we belong to the community"\textsuperscript{107} and are committed regardless of contrary intentions unless one is blessed with the superior will of the heroic type. The division of labor has led to the monopolization of certain of the resources and necessities by institutions which are incapable of respond-
ing to human needs except at the most superficial physical level. It amazed Thoreau that so few were thoughtful enough to wonder "where is this division of labor to end? and what object does it finally serve?

As for himself, Thoreau wrote:

I believe in the infinite joy and satisfaction of helping myself and others to the extent of my ability. But what is the use in trying to live simply, raising what you eat, making what you wear, building what you inhabit, burning what you cut or dig, when those to whom you are allied insanely want and will have a thousand other things which neither you nor they can raise and nobody else, per chance, will pay for? The fellowman to whom you are yoked is a steer that is ever bolting right the other way.

One of the least beneficial effects of the operation of the economic arrangements with which Thoreau was acquainted, was the accumulation of large amounts of property. Thoreau must not be interpreted in such a way as to make him seem against private property, for he certainly held strong views about personal property at any rate.

However, he appears to have been confused about the nature of property. In some places he wrote as if a use-value theory had been adopted, yet in other places he wrote as if a labor-value theory were in accord with his views. Probably the truth is he had given the nature of property very little thought and therefore considered the question of property in relation to specific situations that appeared to him. If the justice of the case seemed to suggest that the work of a man's hands belong to him, he said so; if the part of justice lay in giving a thing to
him who could best use it, he said that, too.

Thoreau wrote that he sympathized with "all savages and gypsies insofar as they merely assert the original right of man to the productions of Nature and a place in her.... The highest law gives a thing to him who can use it." This remark was intended to refer to the goods of nature, those things provided to mankind to meet his necessities in the same way that the beasts and fowl are provided materials for their shelter and nourishment.

This sort of use, however, cannot properly be called property according to Thoreau's definition, although he recognized that the law allows individuals exclusive control over the resources of the land and water. It was so contrary to logic and a moral view as to be patently invalid for one man to think "that he has a right to burn his thirty cords in a year because he can give a certain sum of money in exchange for them, but that another has no right to pick up the fagots which else nobody would burn." Speaking of the fire in the woods which he and a friend had accidentally set, he wrote: "I felt that I had a deeper interest in the woods, knew them better and should feel their loss more, than any or all of" the owners. He parodied the labor-value theory, as in his comment about sand being sold in Cape Cod, "a good instance of the fact that a man confers a value on the most worthless thing by mixing himself with it."
He did seem to hold at times, however, a view of property which was a close variant of the labor theory of value. He viewed personal property as an extension of one's personality, because it is of use to one as a tool for the will. Given the logic of this position, property is limited to those items for which a person has an immediate and direct use. And these necessary items, a man must secure for himself if they are to be his in this ultimate sense, for if they are obtained in other ways the man has no claim to self-sufficiency. In order for a thing to belong to one, it must be earned through the exercise of one's will, and its cost "is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run."\(^{114}\) A man's life is the only thing of worth that he has, and what he exchanges his life for gains value solely from that investment. "The pleasure," he wrote in his \textit{Journal}, "is not so much in having as in a true and simple manner getting these necessaries.\(^{115}\)

By either the use-value or labor-value theory, and Thoreau made both arguments, in his opinion property ought to be limited to the direct and affective kind which one acquires and which is part of one's character. The relation of this kind of personal property to institutionalized property is analogous to his view of how the voluntary associations one makes, or the cultural affinities one assimilates into his personality, differ from institutionalized social forms. This viewpoint meant, of
course, that Thoreau rejected property as a value surrogate in commercial transactions. The scramble for mineral rights in California illustrated his rejection of ownership in land or other tangible assets that do not directly support the process of living.

The gold of California is a touchstone which has betrayed the rottenness, the baseness, of mankind. Satan, from one of his elevations showed mankind the kingdom of California, and they entered into a compact with him at once.

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God gave the righteous man a certificate entitling him to food and raiment, but the unrighteous man found a facsimile of the same in God's coffers, and appropriated it, and obtained food and raiment like the former.

There are some things which God may afford to smile at; man cannot. 116

It is obvious that mere work is therefore not enough to confer value in the Thoreauvian view, for goldminers work hard for their gold. It is the motive again which drives a gold speculator that deprives him of the value of his work. He enters the search for gold in the same spirit as one who enters a lottery, expecting luck to bring him gains beyond his deserts.

The recent rush to California and the attitude of the world, even of its philosophers and prophets, in relation to it appears to me to reflect the greatest disgrace on mankind. That so many are ready to get their living by the lottery of gold-digging without contributing any value to society, and that the great majority who stay at home justify them in this by both precept and example.... I know of no more startling development of the morality of trade and all the modes of getting a living than the rush to California affords. Of what significance the philosophy, or poetry, or religion of a world that will rush to the lottery of California gold-digging on the receipt of the first news, to live by luck, to get the means of commanding labor of others less lucky, i.e. of slaveholding, without contributing any value to
society? And that is called enterprise, and the devil is only a little more enterprising.... It makes God to be a moneyed gentleman who scatters a handful of pennies in order to see mankind scramble for them. Going to California. It is only three thousand miles nearer to hell. I will resign my life sooner than live by luck.... What a comment, what a satire, on our institutions. 117

The usual ideas of property and value are so distorted, to Thoreau's way of thinking, that almost anything one engages in to live will be contaminated by the system, and no property save what one wrests from the natural state itself for one's own use is likely to be morally pure. This was a central concern with Thoreau and one which he recognized as one of the thorniest of society's problems.

In such a snarl and contamination do we live that it is almost impossible to keep one's skirts clean. Our sugar and cotton are stolen from the slave, and if we jump out of the fire, it is wont to be into the frying pan at least. It will not do to be thoughtless with regard to any of our valuables or property. 118

The only way out of such a dilemma, was the complete revaluation of values, or more fundamentally, a rejuvenation of human motives. Property for Thoreau's purposes, should not be considered as things or accumulations in excess of need, but only as the means by which needs are satisfied.

In capsule, his criticism of property was essentially this: that it has been perverted from the immediate human use it serves. Instead it has been made into an institution supported by law, custom, and a defective moral vision. To Thoreau property in excess of actual use
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is an encumbrance. The earning is the process by which property
becomes an extension of one's personality. One infers that if Thoreau
could have altered existing economic arrangements, he would not
have permitted the inheritance of property. It is in the interest of
sons not to have the father's accumulations to fall on his shoulders
according to Thoreau's view. It makes a moral cripple of a man to
have the care of what he did not earn and cannot use to advantage.

I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have
inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools
for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. Better if
they had been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf,
that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they
were called to labor in. Who made them serfs of the soil? ... How
many a poor immortal soul have I met well-nigh crushed
and smothered under its load, creeping down the road of life,
pushing before it a barn seventy-five feet by forty, its augean
stables never cleansed, and one hundred acres of land tillage,
mowing, pasture, and wood-lot! The portionless, who struggle
with no such unnecessary inherited encumbrances, find it a
labor enough to subdue and cultivate a few cubic feet of flesh.119

As must be clear from his previous several complaints, Thoreau
was a firm believer in much public ownership of the world's surface.
Perhaps a clearer statement of his position would be that he believed
in non-ownership of this "curious world which we inhabit."120 It
amused him, although the humor was somewhat bitter, "to see from my
window here how busily man has divided and staked off his domain. God
must smile at his puny fences running hither and thither everywhere
over the land."121 He was amazed that New Hampshire courts could
have such a question before it as to whom the top of Mt. Washington belonged. "I think that the top of Mt. Washington should not be private property; it should be left unappropriated for modesty and reverence's sake, or if only to suggest that earth has higher uses than we put her to."

It was his opinion that natural objects of rare beauty should belong to the public, and that both banks of every river should be unappropriated by individuals or corporations just as the river channel is open to unrestricted navigation. There are passages which lead one to believe that Thoreau might favor complete abolition of property in land.

By avarice and selfishness, and a grovelling habit, from which none of us is free, of regarding the soil as property, or the means of acquiring property chiefly, the landscape is deformed, husbandry is degraded with us, and the farmer leads the meanest of lives. He knows Nature but as a robber.

On the other hand, there is reason to believe that he thought land might become property if there were the proper motivation on the part of the owner; that is, if he had such affection for it that it became part of his personality. Such an interest in a particular spot would not satisfy a legal definition, for Thoreau undoubtedly would not have insisted upon the exclusive use which marks the usual property rights. It is more likely that he would be content to have such a property be regarded as part of his character, to be admired or despised by others according to their will, as they admire or despise the accent of his speech. An example of his ideas on property as an extension of personality and
ownership by affection is found in *Walden* where he blasts an old farmer named Flint who refused him permission to build a hut on his pond before Ralph Waldo Emerson offered his wood lot by Walden Pond for Thoreau's use:

_Flint's Pond!_ Such is the poverty of our nomenclature. What right had the unclean and stupid farmer, whose farm abutted on this sky water, whose shores he has ruthlessly laid bare, to give his name to it? Some skin-flint, who loved better the reflecting surface of a dollar, or a bright cent, in which he could see his own brazen face; who regarded even the wild ducks which settled in it as trespassers; his fingers grown into crooked and horny talons from the long habit of grasping harpy-like;—so it is not named for me. I go not there to see him nor to hear of him; who never saw it, who never bathed in it, nor thanked God that He had made it. Rather let it be named from the fishes that swim in it, the wild fowl or quadrupeds which frequent it,... not from him who could show no title to it but the deed which a like-minded neighbor or legislature gave him. 125

However, even where one has a love for his property, the exclusiveness of the property rights embodied in the law and minds of early Nineteenth Century Americans ran contrary to Thoreau's ideas of the proper control an individual might have over land merely because of legal ownership. One of the most passionate passages in Thoreau's *Journal*, except for the diatribes concerning the Fugitive Slave Law and the John Brown incident, concerned some farmer who sent an Irish hand to clear the walls of his farm. The Irishman cut down two or three of the very rare celtis trees which were not to be found elsewhere in Concord. Thoreau's reaction was, "The Lord deliver us from these vandalic proprietors.... If some are prosecuted for abusing children,
others deserve to be prosecuted for maltreating the face of nature committed to their care. Property, especially property in land, was not absolute for Thoreau. It is not usual for an individualist to limit severely the rights of individuals in their disposition of property. However, it was Thoreau's firm opinion that "it concerns us all whether these proprietors choose to cut down all the woods this winter or not." Speaking of the fact that men were allowed to cross another man's farm only by the designated road or path without special permission, Thoreau complained that a traveller "merely has the privilege of crossing ... by a particular narrow and maybe unpleasant path. The individual retains all other rights, —as to trees and fruit, and wash of the road, etc. On the other hand, these should belong to mankind inalienably."

Unfortunately for the practicality of his position, Thoreau did not indicate how a proper regard for the land is to be recognized by others as a valid property claim. His definition of legitimacy in property is hopelessly vague, and cannot be regarded as a principle which can be put to practice. More serious to the internal logic of his social criticism is his apparent unawareness that his discussion of private property, business and trade clearly presents examples of how institutions affect the lives of all and how they continue without any control being available to affected individuals.
Ownership of more than one requires to satisfy his immediate bodily necessities and innocent social or cultural needs, creates a psychological climate which is destructive of the moral will. It operates on an individual level, and the same principle infects society with a similar corruption. An illustration of the principle in individual terms involved Thoreau's personal pique at having to call at a man's home in order to collect money due him for some odd job:

The creditor is servant to his debtor, especially if he is about paying his due. I am amused to see what airs men take upon themselves when they have money to pay me. No matter how long they have deferred it, they imagine that they are my benefactors or patrons, and send me word graciously that if I will come to their houses they will pay me when it is their business to come to me. 129

A dramatic comment on the same principle operating in society was offered by Thoreau in relating an anecdote concerning the excess of the rich:

Mrs. Mowatt, the actress, describes a fancy ball in Paris given by an American millionaire, at which "one lady ... wore so many diamonds (said to be valued at two hundred thousand dollars) that she was escorted in her carriage by gendarmes, for fear of robbery." This illustrates the close connection between luxury and robbery, but commonly the gendarmes are further off.

The connection between the institutions of society and the property system are clearly indicated in the passage just quoted and in the foregoing discussion. Through property, institutions have caused men to "become tools of their tools. The man who independently plucked the
fruits when he was hungry is become a farmer."\(^{131}\)

While Thoreau cannot be read to be a strong supporter of the private property system as it developed in his time, yet he held a strong view of possession of personal tools and implements by virtue of the fact that they have been appropriated into the personality of the individual. All the rest is superfluous, and he implied, necrotic.

It may be guessed that I reduce almost the whole advantage of holding this superfluous property as a fund in store against the future, so far as the individual is concerned, mainly to the defraying of funeral expenses. But perhaps a man is not required to bury himself.\(^{132}\)

So little did Thoreau regard the claims of value made for property, he seriously suggested that there might be a periodic destruction of personal property and each one would begin again to furnish himself with such implements as he finds necessary for his life. "The customs of some savage nations, might ... be profitably imitated by us," he wrote in *Walden*, "for they at least go through the semblance of casting their slough annually; they have the idea of the thing, whether they have the reality or not. Would it not be well if we were to celebrate such a 'busk' ... as [was] the custom of the Muccliffe Indians?"\(^{133}\) It was not so much the property that Thoreau wished to be rid of as the weight of conservatism which accompanies the accumulation of unused items, and in the same stroke deal a blow at those institutions which support and are supported by the system of private property.

Thoreau added to his condemnation of the prevailing system of
trade, commerce, production and property, the charge that they play a central role in the development of those most despicable of all human institutions, cities. Besides the crowding and uncleanness of cities, he objected to them because the majority of the inhabitants are engaged in and committed to the value structure of business. The aggregations of men in cities by their avarice and greed spoil the accidental benefits of culture which occur there.

Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, New Orleans, and the rest, are the names of wharves projecting into the sea (surrounded by the shops and dwellings of the merchants), good places to take in and to discharge a cargo.... The more barrels, the more Boston. The museums and scientific societies and libraries are accidental. They gather around the sands to save carting. The wharf rats, and custom-house officers, and broken-down poets seeking a fortune amid the barrels; their better or worse lyceums, and preachings, and doctorings; these, too are accidental, and the malls of commons are always small potatoes. 134

Given the mode of operation of business and the conditions of the cities in which most trade and commerce have their major locus, a human life does not seem to be possible in Thoreau's way of thinking. They are caught in a sort of Plato's cave in which they see only the shadow of things possible with no hope of attaining them, and worse, no appreciation of what they are missing by their pre-occupation with succeeding in the world of institutions.

Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too
clumsy and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has no time to be anything but a machine. ¹³⁵

In addition to the previous social complaints, he believed that other institutions, some of which represent property, operate in much the same way upon the individual moral consciousness, and in their collective effect have a corruptive influence on mankind in general. Among such institutions, Thoreau counted the railroad as one of the most destructive of the individual and the social order generally. It was not the technological advance in itself which disturbed Thoreau, although he deplored the despoliation of the landscape, the woodlands, air, and water supplies caused by the operation of the trains. It was rather the encouragement and support which they lend to the further division of labor upon which the property system is founded, and to other institutions which combine to degrade mankind.

What he said about railroads, could of course, be extended to nearly all modern means of transport and communication. They all bring the further encroachment of organizations, institutions, and so-called amenities of civilization to the countryside where the primitive life with its attendant virtues still remains possible.

But now, by means of railroads, and steamboats and telegraphs, the country is denaturalized, the old pious, stable, and unenvied gains of the farmer are liable to all the suspicion which only the merchants formerly excited. All milk-farms and fruit-farms
etc., are so many markets with their customs in the country.

Consider the deformities to which the farmer is liable,—the rustic, the clown (a colono?) the villain, etc.\textsuperscript{136}

Along with hundreds of simple occupations, even the age old employment of herding has been pre-empted by the rapid transportation provided by the rails.\textsuperscript{137} Again, it was not merely the technological unemployment that bothered Thoreau, but that something was being drained out of man slowly as one by one his historic vocations which tied him to nature—farming, herding, hand craftsmanship—ceased to occupy his time and attention. To him, it was literally dehumanizing for man to lose his close identification with and relationship to nature.

"It is easy to foresee," he wrote with mixed admiration and disapproval, "that one extensive well-conducted and orderly institution like a railroad will keep time and order for a whole country."\textsuperscript{138} The point is, of course, that Thoreau felt strongly that a man ought to keep his own time and order without the interference of an institution decreeing what time and order shall be.

I do not see clearly that these successive losses are ever quite made up to us. This is one of the taxes which we pay for having a railroad. Almost all our improvements, so called, tend to convert the country into the town.

This suggests what origin and foundation many of our laws and institutions have....\textsuperscript{139}

He recognized that once such an improvement has become established as part of the institutional system, there is no realistic expecta-
tion that it will disappear. Once people see the world passing them by on the rails, they are no longer able to live the same kind of life as formerly, for a qualitative change has taken place. People "become impatient if they live more than a mile from a railroad ... there are few who have character or bravery enough to live off the road." Thoreau realized that once a man is "aware what is going on in the world [he will] wish to take some part in it."140 When they are drawn from the simple living of their own lives into the complexities of the world of commerce and gain, mankind has in effect blinded his moral eye.

Such is the universal law, which no man can ever outwit, and with regard to the railroad even we may say it is as broad as it is long. To make a railroad round the world available to all mankind is equivalent to grading the whole surface of the planet. Men have an indistinct notion that if they keep up this activity of joint stocks and spades long enough all will at length ride somewhere, in next to no time, and for nothing; but ... when the smoke is blown away and the vapor condensed, it will be perceived that a few are riding, but the rest are run over, — and it will be called, and will be, "A melancholy accident." No doubt they can ride at last who shall have earned their fare, that is, if they survive so long, but they will probably have lost their elasticity and desire to travel by that time.141

Technology such as the railroad therefore, deprives men of a sense of value of the readily available means of need-satisfaction. With technology, man seeks to satisfy his needs less directly, more artificially, with less investment of himself. By the use of these unnecessary aids, men are further removed from the total immersion in life which Thoreau
used as a standard by which to measure all value. In the same breath with a condemnation of the despoliation caused by the "devilish Iron Horse," he remarked that the villagers of Concord were anxious to tap the waters of Walden Pond "to wash their dishes and be their scullion." There is an inestimable loss in such progress, for while convenience may be served, Thoreau was convinced that the process of acquiring water from the shoreside and the association with the natural beauty of the pond helped man to define himself and to more fully understand himself as part of nature. Not by turning a tap is a man made more humane; mankind will not "earn their Walden by the turning of a cock or drawing of a plug." So much for all institutions of property and technology.

Even more objectionable, if possible, than institutions of private property and technology, which often combine in a single corporation, are the institutions which seek to mold opinions. Earlier when discussing the cliques which Thoreau believed to be in charge of the institutions of opinion, his disgust for the church, press, and educational system was noted. Although he said that the church was more presumptuous in pretending to speak for the Almighty, the press in America he felt to be a more influential institution than the church. Where the church occasionally raised a feeble voice on the side of the right, Thoreau believed the influence of the press to be wholly negative. "I believe," he wrote in the privacy of his journal, "that in this country the press exerts a greater
and a more pernicious influence than the Church. We are not a religious people, but we are a nation of politicians. We do not much care for, we do not read, the Bible, but we do care for and we do read the newspapers. The difficulty with the press is that it is captured by the necessity to be cautious in presenting the news. Journalistic balance and objectivity on controversial issues, Thoreau considered to be mere expediency. He thought that the press could not claim honesty unless it unequivocally assumed advocacy of what Thoreau would consider the morally correct position. As with reproduction, the only excuse for a press is for improvement. The institution of the free press, Thoreau felt, was captured by the institution of the free market, and that the economic necessity of showing a profit through a large subscription list and through paid advertising subverted the motive from seeking and telling truth to merely making money.

And as for the herd of newspapers, I do not chance to know one in the country that will deliberately print anything that will ultimately and permanently reduce the number of its subscribers. They do not believe it would be expedient. If we do not say pleasant things, they argue, nobody will attend to us. And so they are like some auctioneers, who sing an obscene song in order to draw a crowd around them.

Although the modern electronic news media have made a qualitative change in the nature of public news dissemination and commentary, it is interesting to speculate how Thoreau would have reacted to the modern role of television and radio. One imagines that his contempt for the
moral quality of the media presentations would be little different from his feelings about the press. The reliance of media upon commercial advertising is even heavier and less escapable by the public than newspapers. Despite occasional disagreements between the media and political figures, the mutual dependence of politics and media is obvious in the staged press conferences of politicians, the armies of reporters assigned to cover political activities, and the massive use of electronic media as campaign tools.

By having a monetary motive, the press, and by extension, other institutions of opinion which must rely upon public patronage and financial support, is in league with that class of institutions which are dominant economically and politically. Therefore, the press, commercial enterprises, and in his day, slavery, were mutually reinforcing with one another and with the state. The newspapers and institutions of opinion he considered particularly pernicious because they are capable of controlling minds whereas the other organizations with which they are in cooperation only operate to influence the economic and physical conditions of mankind. Other institutions of opinion, such as the church, may have an element of moral commitment which is capable of forcing them to take an unpopular position under extreme circumstances. The press on the other hand, he felt to be wholly prostituted to the ethic of the marketplace. On the issue of slavery, for example, Thoreau grudgingly admitted that
the church occasionally was known to make a timid declaration of prin-
ciple whereas the press is content to cling to "objectivity." Thoreau
advised the abolitionists to make as vigorous an assault on the press
as they had done upon the church in the drive against slavery. It was
his opinion that the morally sensitive spot in the church might be
touched, but that there was relatively little political influence avail-
able to it.

The press was vastly more influential, but a tougher nut to crack
because, in place of a love of truth or love of man, newspapers have a
commitment to the love of money. While Thoreau thought that under
prodding of the abolitionists, "the church has decidedly improved .
within a year or two," he found that "the press is, almost without
exception, corrupt."145

Yet, Thoreau saw the press as the key institution to force change
in other institutions. He felt that their relationship to government was
so intimate that, "if you do not read the newspapers, you may be
impeached for treason. The newspapers are the ruling power. What
Congress does is an afterclap."146 His belief that the press was one
of the keys to restructuring the institutions of society, although remot-
ivation of them was his ultimate objective, led to his advocacy of a boy-
cott of newspapers in an effort to force them to print for the sake of
their commitment to a moral viewpoint rather than to win popularity
and a large margin of profit. "The free men of New England," he wrote,
"have only to refrain from purchasing and reading these sheets, have only to withhold their cents, to kill a score of them at once." The only editors who were spared his wrath were those with whom he agreed and he seems to have agreed only with Nathaniel P. Rogers. Even his friend, Horace Greeley, stood condemned.

Thoreau also counted the educational institutions as among the institutions of opinion. He had had the advantage of a college education as well as experience in teaching in the village school and the one which he and John had operated for a short while. His ideas of the character of knowledge led him to have grave reservations about the scientific method and the cognitive approaches which are usual in the organized transmission of knowledge. He was convinced that the unitary character of knowledge was shattered by the cognitive approach and the employment of the scientific method.

The eye which can appreciate the naked and absolute beauty of a scientific truth is far more rare than that which is attracted by a moral one. Few detect the morality in the former, or the science in the latter.... They prefer the partial statement because it fits and measures them and their commodities best.

Thoreau did not admit a distinction between knowledge of truth and absolute morality. It was impossible for him to tolerate objectivity in science just as he could not tolerate an objective point of view in journalism. His belief in the unitary character of truth led him to adopt a view which is remarkably like that advanced by some of the activists in the
learned professions in the present time. In A Week he wrote, "mathematics should be mixed not only with physics but with ethics, that is mixed mathematics." It is for this reason that he believed that the real education of a person was possible only through the spiritual openness which he characterized as friendship, or what might be a clearer phrase, loving reverence.

He believed that a man's education was synonymous with his spiritual development and that it was so subjective a matter as to entail a loss of integrity to entrust it to another's keeping. The attitude with which one approaches facts is the crucial element in the educative process and is something which cannot be taught; the facts which are to be mastered are of secondary importance. It is the former he had in mind in remarking, "we talk much about education, and yet none will assume the office of an educator. I never gave any one the whole advantage of myself. I never afforded him the culture of my love." For this reason, he did not see that the educational institutions which had been established by the Church and the government were performing the function which he saw to be the essential one, i.e., imparting the openness by which intuitive knowledge, which he usually called wisdom, is absorbed.

His hostility to institutions of education, plus his belief in an intuitive and affective theory of knowledge rather than a cognitive one, makes him seem anti-intellectual. In some respects he certainly was.
I have heard that there is a Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. It is said that knowledge is power and the like. Methinks there is equal need for a Society for the Diffusion of Useful Ignorance, for what is most of our boasted so-called knowledge but a conceit that we know something, which robs us of the advantages of our actual ignorance.

For a man's ignorance sometimes is not only useful, but beautiful, while his knowledge is oftentimes worse than useless, beside being ugly. In reference to important things, whose knowledge amounts to more than a consciousness of his ignorance? Yet what more refreshing and inspiring knowledge than this?  

The pretensions of academic institutions are antithetical to this very sense of wonder. "When facts are seen superficially, they are seen as they lie in relation to certain institutions, perchance," he wrote, and that was precisely his criticism. He believed that an event in the education of a person would come to him through a sense of translation, "when the truth respecting his things shall naturally exhale from a man like the odor of the muskrat from the coat of the trapper. At first blush a man is not capable of reporting truth; he must be drenched and saturated with it first." Institutionalized education does not drench and saturate; rather, it fractionates and distorts, it confines the intellect rather than liberates it. "What does education often do?" he asked, then answered, "It makes a straight-cut ditch of a free, meandering brook." He was speaking of institutionalized education rather than the kind which takes place by the very process of living.

Educational institutions, therefore, whether government supported
or church-related, instruct "only in that innocent and ineffectual way in which the Catholic priests teach the aborigines, by which the pupil is never educated to the degree of consciousness..." Being a part of the established social system, the schools are supportive of the status quo and of the value system upon which the established social institutions are predicated. In both public and private schools "one is educated to believe, and would rejoice if the rising generation should find no occasion to doubt; that the State and Church are on the side of morality, that the voice of the people is the voice of God." In many respects, what passes for education is little more than a conspiracy for the perpetuation of the existing social system.

It was colleges which drew his strongest wrath, since they draw the finest distinctions between the various fields of knowledge, and practice the most extreme division of intellectual labor. The colleges therefore, have removed themselves furthest from the realities of the world.

Scholars have for the most part a diseased way of looking at the world. They mean by it a few cities and unfortunate assemblies of men and women, who might all be concealed in the grass of the praries. They describe this world as old or new, healthy or diseased, according to the state of their libraries,—a little dust more or less on their shelves. When I go abroad from under this shingle or slate roof, I find several things which they have not considered. Their conclusions seem imperfect.

Not only are their conclusions imperfect, Thoreau was of the opinion that most of what they know and teach is trivial. The modern cries of irrelevance in collegiate studies are found throughout Thoreau's
writings. It was his firm opinion that scholarship and learning are
given a deference and respect that they do not deserve. "Can there be
any greater reproach than idle learning?" he asked. "Learn to split
wood, at least.157 Idle learning is a barren accomplishment, or
worse, a spiritually deadening exercise.

When I think of the thorough drilling to which young men are
subjected in the English universities, acquiring a minute
knowledge of Latin prosody and of Greek particles and accents,
so that they can not only turn a passage of Homer into English
prose or verse, but readily a passage of Shakespeare into
Latin hexameters or elegiacs,—that this and the like of this
is to be liberally educated,—I am reminded how different was
the education of the actual Homer and Shakespeare. The
worthies of the world and liberally educated have always, in
this sense got along with little Latin and less Greek.158

So much for the liberal arts. Thoreau believed that if students
were taught useful practical skills rather than merely diverted with
pedantry, they would be more humane and liberated. What happens is
that the educational system supports the status quo by teaching the
common sense values and perpetuating a hierarchy based upon division
of labor and subordination of individuals to the welfare of the institution.

It was not Thoreau's idea that such a function in itself is objectionable.

What is called common sense is excellent in its department,
and as invaluable as the virtue of conformity in the army and
navy,—for there must be subordination,—but uncommon
sense, that sense which is common only to the wisest, is as
much more excellent as it is more rare. Some aspire to
excellence in the subordinate department, and may God speed
them. What Fuller says of masters of colleges is universally
applicable, that "a little alloy of dullness in a master of a col-
lege makes him fitter to manage secular affairs!"159
What is objectionable is that it smothers uncommon sense. The overseers and faculty of a college "require a man who will train well under them. Consequently they have not in their employ any but small men,—trainers." Like all institutions, educational institutions, and especially colleges are lifeless, conservative, and without the ability to make vital contributions to a man's internal process of living. They do not sharpen consciousness, but make the dullness more uniform among the unfortunates who attend them. In Walden, there is a long passage which states clearly his position on colleges, and in the last paragraph summarizes Thoreau's view of all social institutions. Although it is lengthy, it is quoted here because of its neat synopsis of his basic conception of social institutions and what is wrong with them.

At Cambridge College the mere rent of a student's room, which is only a little larger than my own, is thirty dollars each year, though the corporation had the advantage of building thirty-two side by side and under one roof, and the occupant suffers the inconvenience of many and noisy neighbors, and perhaps a residence in the fourth story. I cannot but think that if we had more true wisdom in these respects, not only less education would be needed, because, forsooth, more would already have been acquired, but the pecuniary expense of getting an education would in a great measure vanish. Those conveniences which the student requires at Cambridge or elsewhere cost him or somebody else ten times as great a sacrifice of life as they would with proper management on both sides. Those things for which the most money is demanded are never the things which the student wants most. Tuition, for instance, is an important item in the term bill, while for the far more valuable education which he gets by associating with the most cultivated of his contemporaries no charge is made. The mode of founding a college is, commonly, to get up a subscription of dollars and cents, and then, following blindly the principles of a division of labor to its extreme—a
principle which should never be followed but with circumspec-
tion—to call in a contractor who makes this a subject of specu-
lation, and he employes Irishmen or other operatives actually
to lay the foundations, while the students that are to be are
said to be fitting themselves for it; and for these oversights
successive generations have to pay. I think that it would be
better than this, for the students, or those who desire to be
benefited by it, even to lay the foundation themselves. The
student who secures his coveted leisure and retirement by
systematically shirking any labor necessary to man obtains but
an ignoble and unprofitable leisure, defrauding himself of the
experience which alone can make leisure fruitful. "But," says
one, "you do not mean that the students should go to work with
their hands instead of their heads?" I do not mean that exactly,
but I mean something which he might think a good deal like
that; I mean that they should not play life, or study it merely,
while the community supports them at this expensive game,
but earnestly live it from beginning to end. How could youths
better learn to live than by at once trying the experiment of
living? Methinks this would exercise their minds as much as
mathematics. If I wished a boy to know something about the
arts and sciences, for instance, I would not pursue the common
course, which is merely to send him into the neighborhood of
some professor, where anything is professed and practised but
the art of life;—to survey the world through a telescope or a
microscope, and never with his natural eye; to study chemistry,
and not learn how his bread is made, or mechanics, and not
learn how it is earned; to discover new satellites to Neptune,
and not detect the motes in his eyes, or to what vagabond he is
a satellite himself; or to be devoured by the monsters that
swarm all around him, while contemplating the monsters in a
drop of vinegar. Which would have advanced the most at the
end of a month—the boy who had made his own jackknife from
the ore which he had dug and smelted, reading as much as would
be necessary for this—or the boy who had attended the lectures
on metallurgy at the Institute in the meanwhile, and had received
a Rodgers penknife from his father? Which would be most likely
to cut his fingers? ... To my astonishment I was informed on
leaving college that I had studied navigation!—why, if I had taken
one turn down the harbor I should have known more about it.
Even the poor student studies and is taught only political economy,
while that economy of living which is synonymous with philosophy
is not even sincerely professed in our colleges. The consequence
is, that while he is reading Adam Smith, Ricardo, and Say, he
runs his father in debt irretrievably.
As with our colleges, so with a hundred "modern improvements"; there is an illusion about them; there is not always a positive advance. The devil goes on exacting compound interest to the last for his early share and numerous succeeding investments in them. Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end, an end which it was already but too easy to arrive at.

Institutions distract our attention from serious things. They debase our motives, dull our consciousness, pollute the purity of our intentions, and deceive our perceptions. It is clear that his famous observation, "In wildness is the preservation of the world," is a double entendre at the very least.

In closing, it is clear that Thoreau did not, as many have assumed, ignore society. However, it is true that he had a rather partial understanding of society as it relates to the individual. In attempting to relate his individualistic view of man to his social views, one is conscious of a number of inconsistencies. For example, Thoreau made the assumption that society originates in the instincts of mankind, but the psychology that undergirds his view of man does not make adequate provision for allowing an individual to perceive himself in a social context. The distinction which he drew between the beneficial cooperation among men in voluntary associations and the destructive, perverted institutionalized social forms is at best poorly described. The reliance upon "good" individual motivation in determining the character of a social form fails for want of a means of objectively determining the subjective motivation.
of others. The influence of institutions upon the development of the individual ego was recognized, but Thoreau failed to follow the implications of this back to his view of the nature of man.

It is also curious that Thoreau wrote of inert material objects as if they are part of a larger organism, and even as if they participate in the universal will, yet refused to accord the same characteristics to social institutions. His ideas of social evolution clashed with the individual moral intuitionism which he placed in a superior position to socially defined values. One is left unsatisfied after reading Thoreau, if one had hoped to find a reasoned integration of the rights of the individual and the rights of society. In place of reason, one is left with intuitionism and right motivation. In place of a definition of rights and obligations by which an individual functions among his fellow beings, one finds only the supposed supremacy of the individual will.

Even if one wishes to confirm his understanding of Thoreau as a complete individualist, one is confounded by his ambiguity toward cooperative ventures, such as exemplified by the village. His recognition of the feelings of ethnocentrism which natural cultural affinities raise in individuals could with only minor extension be built into something very like a theory of the comprehensive state in the manner of the Greeks, Rousseau, Burke, Hegel, and modern Marxist-Leninists. Instead, the reader finds himself left frustrated with neither a well constructed individualist-anarchist theory, nor a humanistic social theory built on
liberal values, nor an encompassing social theory that leads toward an adequate foundation for the role of the state. From this rather bewildering confusion, we must now proceed to consider Thoreau's view of the state.

Notes


7. Ibid., p. 134.

8. Ibid., pp. 132-133.


15. Ibid., p. 294.


22. W., IV, p. 480.


24. W., VI, pp. 208-209.

25. *Journal*, November 16, 1851. W., IX, p. 120.


27. *Correspondence*, Bode and Harding, eds., letter dated October 1, 1843, p. 142.


52. *Walden*, W., II, p. 82.
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.
60. *Journal*, November 11, 1851. W., IX, p. 103.


69. *A Week*, W., I, p. 75.


83. Ibid., October 29, 1857. W., XVI, p. 145.
84. Ibid., July 1, 1840. W., VII, p. 157.
87. Walden, W., II, p. 17.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid., pp. 59-60.
97. Walden, W., II, p. 165.


114. *Walden*, W., II, p. 34.


127. Ibid., January 22, 1852. W., IX, p. 216.
128. Ibid., July 17, 1858. W., XVII, p. 55.
129. Ibid., January 25, 1858. W., XVI, pp. 258-259.
130. Ibid., September 15, 1854. W., XIII, p. 43.
132. Walden, W., II, p. 34.
133. Ibid., p. 75.
137. Walden, W., II, p. 135.
139. Ibid., August 22, 1860. W., XX, p. 57.
140. Ibid., September 28, 1851. W., IX, p. 32.
141. Walden, W., II, p. 59.
146. Ibid., November 17, 1850, p. 102.
151. *Ibid.*, February (date uncertain, possibly 9th), 1851., p. 150.
CHAPTER VII

THE STATE

Because Thoreau has been presented as an Idealist, it is all the more striking that he was so coldly practical in his perceptions of political associations such as the state. Although his use of language was not according to the precise definitions of political science and he occasionally used the words state, government, people, and race almost as if they were interchangeable terms, a careful reading should convince one that Thoreau had a clear notion of the distinction between the state as an idea and the government as an operation or process.

As with the concept of society, Thoreau considered the state to be a manifestation of man's natural affinity for those other human beings with whom he shares a system of language, values and beliefs. It is a cultural phenomenon which arises at a certain stage of the development of civilization as a result of the conditions of man's nature, a consequence of his gregariousness, good will, and striving for justice in human relationships. The state, Thoreau felt, is a psychological predisposition and a shared idea more than a system of behavior control or a well-defined geographical boundary. He speaks of peoples and occasionally of races or of nations when he wishes to refer to this ideal entity, usually associating the idea with definite psychological and
physical benefits derived from the association. It has some racial and geographical implications, but the state is not primarily based upon either of these factors. It seems to have been Thoreau's assumption that the state is one of the natural associations which exist in human relations much like the family, in response to an inborn instinct toward "a right state of things,"^2 which in its most positive form Thoreau considered "Friendship."

Government, on the other hand, Thoreau saw as the human institution which had been developed to implement the operation of the state. Whereas the state rests upon positive impulses for mutual aid, government rests in the hands of individual men whose motives may be and usually are, defective. Any government is a separate thing from the state no matter what the form of government might be. He accepted the Aristotelian classification of governments, and although he displayed a preference for republicanism throughout his writing, especially in his accounts of his Canadian adventures, he agreed with Plato that the best government is by the best men. "So some, it seems to me, elect their rulers for their crookedness. But I think that a straight stick makes the best cane, and an upright man the best ruler."^3 His sympathies were definitely not monarchical, but he clearly had a preference for a moral elitism bordering on a theocracy somewhat like the Puritan Protectorate in England to which he frequently referred and always in a
favorable context.

Still, he was very much of a positivist in recognizing the government as an organized system of enforced behavior patterns resting upon coercive power with the implicit threat of violence.

We preserve the so-called peace of our community by deeds of petty violence every day. Look at the policeman's billy and handcuffs! Look at the jail! Look at the gallows! Look at the chaplain of the regiment.  

Thoreau's interest in cultural anthropology led him to collect a great deal of information regarding peoples in earlier stages of cultural development. He was particularly interested in American Indians and went out of his way to interview those few remaining representatives of the vanishing aboriginal population in his area who were knowledgeable about the old ways. His admiration for the Indians' immediate contact with nature and easy familiarity with the rest of creation was considerable. Thoreau believed that the Indians' intimacy with Wildness invigorated their lives to such an extent that they were able to function with the most rudimentary kinds of institutions. The state, Thoreau implies, was not a phenomenon in Indian cultural life prior to the coming of the white man. This is not to say there was no government, or system of social control, but it was not of the highly institutionalized character that marks the more advanced societies. He was aware of the qualitative change in human relations when the nomadic life of the hunter is superseded by the agricultural phase of cultural development.
In *A Week* he wrote, "Gardening is civil and social, but it wants the
vigor and freedom of the forest..." In some passages Thoreau
seemed to suggest that there is a progression in history which makes
the agricultural phase with its attendant civility and sociability inevi-
tably displace the hunter stage. It was lamentable from his point of
view, but civilization comes on apace for all peoples bringing with it
the institutions of civilization, among which the state and its govern-
ment are prominent.

For the Indian there is no safety but in the plow. If he
would not be pushed into the Pacific, he must seize hold of a
plow-tail and let go his bow and arrow, his fish-spear and
rifle. This is the only Christianity that will save him.

His fate says sternly to him, "forsake the hunter's life
and enter into the agricultural, the second, state of man. Rest
yourselves a little deeper in the soil, if you would continue to
be the occupants of the country." But I confess I have no little
sympathy with the Indians and hunter men. They seem to me
a distinct and equally respectable people, born to wander and
to hunt, and not to be inoculated with the twilight civilization
of the white man.

In Thoreau's opinion, the hunter stage is too primitive to have
created a structure for institutionalizing violence power for the control
of behavior. In other words, the state is not a phenomenon of the
hunter stage. He cited an example in his journal illustrating the dif-
ference between a primitive people's method of dealing with a breech
of expected behavior and modern governments.

In Vimont's Jesuit Relations for 1642, he describes the
customs of the Iroquois. As in the case of the Hurons, every-
thing is done by presents. The murderer and robber are restrained by the very defect of justice, and because the community (his relations or tribe) whips itself for his fault. They must appease the injured with costly presents. They make that he shall involve his friends in ruin along with himself, and if he would injure anyone, shall injure them too. By making it impossible for him to do any injury without doing a greater injury than he wishes, they restrain him.

This obviously is a discipline which was self-imposed through cultural conditioning, not the ritualized and institutionalized vengeance by which a state and its government metes out retribution. The fact that the coercive power in more developed cultures has been institutionalized is a significant historical event in Thoreau's view.

It is commonly said that history is a history of war, but it is at the same time a history of development. Savage nations—any of our Indian tribes, for instance—would have enough stirring incidents in their annals, wars and murders enough, surely, to make anecdotes without end, such a chronicle of startling and monstrous events as fill the daily papers and suit the appetite of barrooms; but the annals of such a tribe do not furnish the materials for history.

In this connection one might question what Thoreau considered the material of history to be. It is suggested here that the development of moral consciousness in the world was what he believed to be historically significant. It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that Thoreau viewed the state as important historically because it comes into being through the demonstration and recognition of a higher order of values than had been observed previously. This interpretation places Thoreau in the tradition of the German Idealists, but is not intended to imply that
Thoreau was by any stretch of the imagination a "statist" in the German sense. It does establish the state in his view as a vehicle of cultural values and as such, it has the potential for effecting spiritual and moral improvements. In fact, it is the argument presented here that Thoreau did indeed view this as the proper function of the state. The objectification of superior values through enforcement of the moral law is the transcendental reason for the state and the legitimate role of government. That is, in the opinion of the writer, the heart of Thoreau's theory of the state.

The transcendence of ethical values over monetary expediency creates the bond of obligation between individuals and the state in this interpretation of his views. The government must serve to objectify transcendental values or the bonds of obligation dissolve and the government no longer corresponds to the ideal form of the state. The governmental organization, as indicated, does not seem to have been a matter of vital concern to Thoreau, despite his ethnocentric preference for republicanism. The function and results of government were of more importance to his opinion of government than the means by which the ideal objectives are reached.

Thoreau objected to the view that governmental systems should attempt to balance competing values and interests through the arrangement of institutionalized compromise. He believed that the practical
result of such an operation is that expediency triumphs over principle. This process was what he meant by the word politics when he used it in a pejorative sense.

Few modern political scientists accept this critical assessment of the proper role of politics. Not only the legal positivists who, without stating value preferences rely upon the institutionalized compromise of competing interests to preserve a political equilibrium, but those who are committed to the normative assumptions of traditional American democratic theory as presented by Jefferson, Jackson and Calhoun find virtue in what Thoreau characterized as weakness. The modern establishment view of politics is not markedly different from that of the establishment of Thoreau's time. The same moral fervor Thoreau directed against the establishment view of politics in his day strikes a responsive chord among contemporary critics of American governmental policy. The New Left, for example, was as little tolerant of the United States' policy in Indochina as Thoreau was concerning the Mexican War. An analogous motive is apparent among those internal critics of the American scholarly societies who denounce the "objectivity" of their disciplinary methodologies and the political neutrality of their academic organizations. A largeness of moral vision seemingly results in a political myopia that obscures the rights of others to act in behalf of their competing interests. Those who unreasoningly refuse to consider
another viewpoint, who insist upon the existence of only one moral course of action and who wish to leave nothing to their opponents, feel drawn to Thoreau. His moral absolutism, justification of violent means to accomplish supposedly moral political ends, and his arguments for the leadership of a moral elite are supportive to those who base their revolutionary impulses on a similarly inflexible moral position.

However, Thoreau was not so simple-minded as he might appear in his condemnation of interest-compromise politics. He regarded politics of this sort as one of the less attractive consequences of civilization. He recognized that persons who live communally inevitably have conflicts, and that peaceable relations require a method of dealing with incompatible interests. His complaint against the methods of civilized politics carried with it no alternative procedural methods; the unquestioned moral rule of the upright man was his preferred solution.

Civilization, as Thoreau believed the word was commonly used, is the process by which a man is conditioned to subsume himself and his individual will under the collective needs of society by accepting ritual and convention as replacements for personal instincts and conviction. Civilization, obviously, he did not see as having the potential for human improvement that is inherent in the idea of the state as the initiator and enforcer of superior values. As he observed of Indians, 'We talk of civilizing the Indian but that is not the name for his improve-
Civilization only gives men a patina of manners without necessarily improving their character. It was Thoreau's suspicion that, "in civilization, as in a southern latitude, a man degenerates at length, and yields to the incursion of more northern tribes...." The following passage illustrates the difference between the civilization of manners and the improvement of character which Thoreau felt to be of much greater significance and which ought to be the aim of the state.

What an evidence it is, after all, of civilization, or a capacity for improvement, that savages like our Indians, who in their protracted wars stealthily slay men, women and children without mercy, with delight, who delight to burn, torture, and devour one another, proving themselves more inhuman in these respects even than beasts—what a wonderful evidence it is, I say, of their capacity for improvement that even they can enter into the most formal compact or treaty of peace, burying the hatchet, etc., etc., and treating each other with as much consideration as the most enlightened states. You would say that they had a genius for diplomacy as well as for war. Consider the Iroquois, torturing his captive, roasting him before a slow fire, biting off the fingers of him alive, and finally eating the heart of him dead, betraying not the slightest evidence of humanity; and now behold him in the council-chamber where he meets the representatives of the hostile nation to treat of peace, conducting with such perfect dignity and decorum, betraying such a sense of justness. These savages are equal to us civilized men in their treaties, and, I fear, not essentially worse in their wars.

Civilization permits the ambiance in behavior by which persons can commit unspeakable atrocities upon one another, then by behaving according to set ceremony can set aside all that is past and brush away such differences as there may have been between them as if those differences had been totally unimportant. To Thoreau, such ceremonial
mannered convention is not the thing upon which mankind can rely to actualize transcendental principles. The principles of right are not subject to the niceties of convention and manners as civilization would have it, but are verities which may not be opposed or compromised. In behalf of truth, the individual is the first line of defense, and every man is under an obligation to live in accord with such transcendent principles as manifest themselves to him. The second line of defense is the state. He believed that the state, through its government should enforce the rules of right as perceived by those individuals of most acute moral sensitivity. The question of central importance is, as Thoreau put it, whether you can bear freedom. The state and its government best serve mankind when acting as a police, or a discipline, to make men morally free when they lack the personal acuity to perceive the transcendent principles. The nation which confuses this issue diffuses its impact and undermines its raison d'être.

The nation itself, with all its so-called internal improvements, which, by the way are all external and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment (like the German Confederacy) cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, as the millions of households in the land; and the only cure for it, as for them, is in a rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose. It lives too fast. Men think it is essential that the Nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour, without a doubt, whether they do or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain.
From this it is clearly to be understood that a state does not exist for itself, but to assist mankind in achieving the full development of human potential. This is the idea or reason of the state, and the task of government. The power of government is to be used for bringing the right into being or it is not a legitimate use of power, in Thoreau's opinion. Legitimate or not, he had no doubt about the basis of government being power. It was the raw, untempered power of government that served as the basis of criticism in his political essays.

If he was without illusion about coercive power lying at the heart of government, he was somewhat more metaphorical about the origin of the state. He found the mythologies of ancient peoples instructive as allegories of history and psychology, and was well informed about the founding myths of Greece, Rome, and Israel. While the marvels attributed to Lycurgus, Solon, Moses, Romulus and Remus were not to be taken literally, he seriously referred to "the heaven-born Numa, or Lycurgus, or Solon," and believed that the legends centering on these persons carried an essential truth about the founding of a state. Such heroic individuals were symbols for the establishment of a predominating value system among the people. They stood as examples of a better way to live. They embodied a vision of truth that was compelling by its own weight; they were personifications of a principle that was an imperative for the citizens of the state. Without articulating it explicitly,
Thoreau recognized the close relationship between the myths of religion and the myths of the state in the early history of peoples.

Thus believing to a degree in the optimism of his Transcendalist friends, he felt an inclination toward consonance with universal principles of the good in all ages and nations, even though control of affairs usually falls to the hands of those who believe in policy and expediency over principles of truth and justice. It was his intuitive feeling that just as human beings are born in total innocence, human culture began in unity with abstract values; and that despite the grave defects which appear in every political apparatus as the culture develops, the course of history continually tends toward a right state of things, and that unity of fact and value might possibly be restored to the political life of the people. This conviction defined, at least for Thoreau, the objective toward which men of culture and civilization ought to strive. "In the last stage of civilization," he wrote, "Poetry, Religion, and Philosophy will be one; and this truth is glimpsed in the first." The state can assist in creating this reunion by harmonizing the behavior of men with the dictates of the transcendental world of value.

The moral structure of a state is struck in harmony with the unfettered universe, and is consonant with all of nature; that is, with what is real and independent of man. Thoreau refers to this independence of man as the Wild. It is the core of everything significant, and
the touchstone of reality. It gives vitality to the state.

... what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the World.... The story of Romulus and Remus being suckled by a wolf is not a meaningless fable. The founders of every state which has risen to eminence have drawn their nourishment and vigor from a similar wild source. 17

Wildness is the sustaining force behind a state; when artificial manners take the place of true relations between men and the rationalization of syllogistic logic displaces the intuitive apprehension of reality then the state has become senile, the government has become a hindrance, and the citizenry have become stunted in the development of their human potential. The state which lacks "a high and earnest purpose in its inhabitants"18 has lost its vitality and can only degenerate. Vitality of purpose "alone draws out 'the great resources' of Nature;" the want of vitality "at last taxes her [Nature] beyond her resources; for man naturally dies out of her."19 It is the function of the state to create in men a desire for "culture more than potatoes, and illumination more than sugar-plums." When this is done successfully, "then the result, or staple production is, not slaves, nor operatives, but men,—those rare fruits called heroes, saints, poets, philosophers, and redeemers."20

A state founded and sustained by congruity with the laws of nature—the Wild—makes men whose lives are free from moral hindrances. "How near to good," he wrote, "is what is wild."21

Thoreau believed that a state should conform to nature in all par-
ticulars. Not only ought the moral principles upon which a state rests to be consistent with the transcendent principles of nature, the geographical configuration of a state ought to conform to the demands of nature.

A state should be a complete epitome of the earth, a natural principality, and by the gradations of its surface and soil conduct the traveller to its principal marts. Nature is stronger than law, and the sure but slow influence of wind and water will balk the efforts of restricting legislatures. Man cannot set up bounds with safety but where the revolutions of nature will confirm and strengthen, not obliterate them.22

Thoreau believed that the state is a naturally occurring phenomenon whose existence ought to be so perfectly ordered in the larger scheme of things as to be unobtrusive in the daily life of men. The simile he used was the digestive system; as long as it functions properly it goes largely unnoticed, but in dysfunction commands a great deal of attention. Like digestive disturbance in individuals, dyspepsia in states "expresses itself, you can imagine by what sort of eloquence."23 The contributions of a state to the well-being of the individual are significant, and perhaps crucial, for the state helps to relate him to others and others to him in a structured system of values and behaviors. "No matter how valuable [the action of a government] may be to protect your property, even to keep soul and body together, if it do not keep you and humanity together."24 The position Thoreau took was that, when the values championed and the behaviors expected by the government are
no longer consistent with transcendent law, then the bonds which relate men together and create the mutual obligations among them are dissolved leaving the state a mere shell of form without the moral content that gives it vitality. It literally ceases to be. When the state is perverted from its conformity with prepotent law, those citizens who have a personal apprehension of universal principles sense the inconsonance and are pained by the discord. "Who can be serene in a country where both the rulers and the ruled are without principle?," he wrote in his condemnation of "Slavery in Massachusetts." The natural allegiance of those conscious of the disparity between policy and principle is to the principle. Their "thoughts are murder to the State and involuntarily go plotting against her." Even the slightest departure from universal principles, from the stark, unyielding demands of nature which he called wildness, brings the degeneration of the state.

I believe that water is the only drink for a wise man; wine is not so noble a liquor; and think of dashing the hopes of a morning with a cup of warm coffee, or of an evening with a dish of tea! Ah, how low I fall when I am tempted by them! Even music may be intoxicating. Such apparently slight causes destroyed Greece and Rome, and will destroy England and America.

As indicated above, Thoreau was convinced that only when the state conforms to nature completely is it truly a state. "You must patiently study the method of nature, and take advice of the under steward, in the establishment of all communities, both insect and human," he declared to his Journal. When the state no longer con-
forms to the laws of the universe, "It has no life. It is only a constant decaying and a death, offensive to all healthy nostrils."^29

It also should be obvious that Thoreau did not consider the state to be an inherent evil, but quite the opposite. The state can serve the same sort of useful functions as the village on a grander scale. The village usually touches the individual more intimately and directly, while the state is concerned with larger issues that affect individuals in no less important ways. Ideally the state is the power that demands justice among its members, that promotes truthfulness and confidence between them, and fosters the principles of friendship in the Thoreauvian sense which impels men to answer to the ideals embodied in the state. In such a state the lives of individuals are divine and miraculous.^30 All the conveniences which flow from the state, and which it falls to the government to administer, such as the post office, the monetary system, regulation of international trade, and encouragement of the arts and sciences he saw as valuable services that justify compliance with the requirements imposed to support them. Quite clearly Thoreau stated that the purpose of the state is to establish justice in the land and to make life more valuable.\(^31\) Insofar as the state provides services which augment the development of human impulses or removes hindrances to the development of individual consciousness, the state aids in the process of self-realization. The simultaneous unfolding of nature in
man and in the state creates an identity of interest between them, tying
them together in the weave of social values that creates a polity. The
government that serves the purposes of such a state is attractive to the
citizen whose consciousness is unfolding in harmony with the principles
of the state and of the universe. A citizen alert to transcendent prin­
ciples acquiesces to and participates in the activities of a government
serving a true state through a voluntary association with it.

As interpreted here, Thoreau's theory of the state contains two
elements. First, the state is natural; that is, it is an ideal entity con­
forming to the transcendent laws of nature which includes the natural
need of man to be served by an association such as the state. Second,
there is a contractual obligation in which the morally conscious citizen
owes allegiance to the government, which is the representative of the
state in the phenomenal world, so long as it maintains the parallelism
between political law and transcendent law. The moral law upon which
the ideal state is based is the guarantor of the contract. When govern­
ments transgress the limitations of the law of nature, then the political
obligation between a citizen and his government is dissolved, but the
moral consciousness of the good citizen and the ideals of the good state
remain identical. The good citizen merely continues observing the
natural moral law, and lets the errant government go on its way to
nothingness. Thoreau did not mean that such a government ceases to
exist, but that it ceases to be of positive significance. It becomes a
negative. Such a government ceases to be the interpreter of "the ever-
lasting laws which rightfully bind man," and becomes only "a counter-
feiting law-factory." 32 There can be no binding obligation upon a good
citizen to accept the prescriptions of a counterfeiting law factory.

Under such circumstances, obviously no contract exists.

Are laws to be enforced simply because they were made? or
declared by any number of men to be good, if they are not
good? Is there any necessity for a man's being a tool to per-
form a deed of which his better nature disapproves? ... Are
judges to interpret the law according to the letter, and not
the spirit? What right have you to enter into a compact with
yourself that you will do thus or so, against the light within
you? Is it for you to make up your mind, —to form any
resolution whatever, —and not accept the convictions that
are forced upon you, and which ever pass your understand-
ing? 33

Thoreau's tacit assumption of a contract between an individual and
the community suffers all of the logical disadvantages of the post-
Hobbesian writers who make use of the theory. Probably he absorbed
his impressions about the contractual nature of governmental relations
from the theories of John Locke which had become widespread through
apologists for the American federal system. However, he seems also
to have assumed in the fashion of the ancient Stoics that society itself
is a natural condition rather than an artificial one, and he was too much
in the Calvinist tradition to grant a unity between social and govern-
mental forms. Thoreau created a major difficulty for himself in seem-
ing to maintain that society is an instinctual human reaction while at the same time making an argument for voluntary consent in all associations, social and political, that implies a contract.

This difficulty is most awkward in relation to Thoreau's advocacy of civil disobedience and then of active resistance to government. He left no satisfactory explanation of how the contract operates and under what circumstances an individual is justified in withdrawing from the contract and how that might be accomplished. Simple renunciation enforced by personal violence is the only answer offered by his life or writings. The Calvinist doctrine that resistance must come through the inferior magistrates was clearly inadequate to his individualistic theory although he seems to have retained a bit of the flavor of resistance through "natural leaders" in his embrace of John Brown's insurrection.

He appears to have held a belief, somewhat similar to but less complex than the pyramidal contract theories of Althusius and Pufendorf, that an individual has a separate contract with each of the associations to which he has accorded voluntary consent. However, he apparently had no comprehension of how the multitude of human associations fit together to create a society nor of how intimately related the institutions of government are to the underlying social structure. Had he been aware of these complex inter-relationships, he would have been forced to give greater consideration to the rights and needs of others who are also
members with him in the interlocking network of social contracts. Even if he had been fully aware of the implications of his position, he seems to have left himself no adequate method of untangling the confusion of obligations voluntarily assumed which arises when one of the inter-dependent contracts is renounced.

The majoritarian principle by which Locke sought to solve the difficulty was explicitly rejected by Thoreau. The Calvinist solution of depending upon the inferior magistrates to indicate when resistance was justified was not open to Thoreau because the objects of his moral indignation, the Mexican War, the Fugitive Slave Law, and slavery itself, were part of the law the magistrates were pledged to uphold. They were even a part of many social institutions, such as the church, the press, and the general mores of the American people, so that Thoreau could not rely upon the conscience of the "natural leaders." The only open solution was the one he adopted, a freedom of individual will to decide when the contract is void and how it is to be resisted. Any "natural leader" such as the Calvinists had suggested to head the resistance to the state, would have to be a free standing soul unallied to existing institutions with a stake in the status quo. It was in this light that Thoreau saw John Brown, and himself. Critics, of course, will quickly point out that such unrestrained individualism can lead to chaos, preserves no necessary ties to other social or political institu-
tions, and completely disregards the rights of others within the social structure. It can lead to tyranny and totalitarianism of a sort that would certainly brook no opposition.

The advocates of the New Left politics who are disenchanted with the liberal institutions of present American government because of supposed moral transgressions naturally feel an attraction to Thoreau's viewpoint. The blind alley noted in the above criticism may or may not be apparent to those who hold Thoreau as an example of how moral political action should be taken; but, it would do them well to consider that Thoreau made no provision for opposition to what he held to be right.

Thoreau was sufficiently in the tradition of Platonic Idealism to consider that the reality of a phenomenon depends upon its identity with transcendent forms. But, he was also enough of a Puritan to believe in the existence of evil. Just because an errant government is evil, and therefore not real in the Platonic sense, did not mean for Thoreau that it was not actual. Despite his acceptance of the state and of government in the abstract, he did not consider most governments to have positive moral significance. Therefore, he felt them to be little related to the world of transcendent value in which the man of moral consciousness considers the important events of his life to occur. In relation to such an individual, if he can be assumed for a moment to
exist, "the political state can hardly be said to have any existence whatever," and its activities are for the most part "unreal, incredible, and insignificant." 34

In his own version of the withering away of government, Thoreau believed that when a government ceases to be congruent with the ideal state, it loses its powers of cohesion and begins a process of deterioration while another form emerges to carry on the moral functions of the state. As he put it, a government departing from transcendent law loses "its power and respectability as surely as water runs out of a leaky vessel and is held by one that can contain it." 35 The moral content of the state must be contained by some form, and when one government fails, some moral form spontaneously emerges from the conscience of such men as are attuned to the eternal principles of right. The Underground Railroad and the vigilantism of John Brown are examples of how new moral forms emerge to compensate for the moral failures of a government.

He was convinced that no "nation can ever deliberately commit the least act of injustice without having to pay the penalty for it. A government which deliberately enacts injustice, and persists in it!—it will become the laughing-stock of the world," he wrote. 36 Such a government is "an audacious government, and is taking a step towards its own dissolution." 37 No longer the champion of right, it becomes
antithetical to the course and direction of universal processes. Those citizens with the most acute moral sensitivities will be first to detect a deterioration in the moral quality of governmental actions, and will be the avant-garde defendants of the principles of recht. Thoreau spoke for this moral elite when he wrote, "The only government that I recognize—and it matters not how few are at the head of it, or how small its army—is that power that establishes justice in the land, never that which establishes injustice." In passing, it should be noted that he did not define what he meant by justice or by injustice.

It is apparent as indicated before, that Thoreau was uncommitted to any specific governmental form but was more concerned with the rectitude of governmental functioning regardless of its organization. It is a clear implication that Thoreau was not a majoritarian democrat, nor was he committed to a utilitarian theory of government as merely a stabilizing agent in human affairs or a means of providing an order and system of expectations. The real problem is that if it is not the tool of righteousness, government and its legalisms are artificial and illegitimate. It then falls to righteous men to fill the ethical void. "The law will never make men free; it is men who have got to make the law free," he wrote, and continued, "they are the lovers of law and order who observe the law when the government breaks it." The absolutism and elitism of his position are obvious, but he made it explicit in the para-
graph following the quotation just preceding: "Whoever can discern truth has received his commission from a higher source than the chiefest justice in the world who can discern only law. He finds himself constituted judge of the judge."^40 This ethical acumen is not an attribute shared by the general population, but a particular instinct which only a few have cultivated to full moral consciousness. For this reason, Thoreau is critical of any system of government where the majority vote directs governmental policy without appeal.

The amount of it [majoritarian democracy] is, if the majority vote the devil to be God, the minority will live and behave accordingly, and obey the successful candidate, trusting that, some time or other, by some speaker's casting-vote, perhaps, they may reinstate God.... This is expediency, or choosing that course which offers the slightest obstacles to the feet, that is, a down-hill one. But there is no such thing as accomplishing a righteous reform by the use of "expediency"...

Will mankind never learn that policy is not morality,—that it never secures any moral right, but considers merely what is expedient? chooses the available candidate,—who is invariably the devil,—and what right have his constituents to be surprised, because the devil does not behave like an angel of light? What is wanted is men, not of policy, but of probity,—who recognize a higher law than the Constitution, or the decision of the majority. The fate of the country does not depend on how you vote at the polls,—the worst man is as strong as the best at that game; it does not depend on what kind of paper you drop into the ballot-box once a year, but on what kind of man you drop from your chamber into the street every morning. ^41

Yet, the truism that a government is no better than its citizens was not the point that Thoreau was making. He did not consider that the rectitude of the government could ever rest on so frail a foundation
as the moral consciousness of ordinary mortals who constitute the majority of any polity. He was making a plea for the leadership of "men of probity." It has been noted previously that Thoreau considered that the government as a contract becomes null and void when it establishes injustice, for he denied that any person possesses the ability to confer legitimacy or transcendental reality to a principle which is antithetical to the law of nature. No agreement can be made between individuals, nor any contract struck with a government which will make the trivial significant or the untrue true. What a government exists to facilitate, and what a man can agree to is the bringing to actuality in the phenomenal world the préexistant principles of the ideal world. This point of view places a positive obligation upon government to "establish justice in the land." Since he has denied the individual the right to cooperate with any governmental activity inconsistent with justice, Thoreau has granted an awesome power to any government which might be in harmony with ideal forms. His point of view is clearly seen in his question, "What is the value of any political freedom but as a means to moral freedom?"42

Freedom it is readily recognized, is not seen by Thoreau as a capricious liberty to indulge the whims of undisciplined will, but as a consonance with the transcendent realities of the ideal world. Freedom is to be unfettered of the blindness, ignorance, and error which stands
between mankind and nature. An Idealist, Thoreau insisted that political freedom must be subordinated to moral freedom which he defined as consonance with the transcendent law. The function of the true state is to remain in harmony with the transcendent law, and to assist the citizenry to align their wills with the Oversoul.

The government which positively enforces the moral law through the civil law provides a legitimate service, and draws vitality from the spirit which pervades it. The government which permits its citizens through ignorance, perversity, or any other motivation to contradict the will of the Oversoul has failed to perform its obligation. Any government which structures its legal system in such a way as to require of its citizens behavior that is out of phase with the values unfolding from the universal process ceases to have any legitimate claim to authority. This was one of the difficulties with government, for none met Thoreau's criteria, nor did he seem to expect to encounter one.

At this point, a contradiction in Thoreau's thinking seems apparent. Following the line of reasoning outlined in the preceding paragraphs, it is not difficult to see how an absolutist theory of the state can be achieved. Indeed, it is one of the purposes of this study to demonstrate this element in Thoreau's thinking. However, it does not seem to wed well with the individualism which is undeniably a major tenet of his total view of man
and man's relations to institutions. A reconciliation of the two points of view may be offered by interpreting Thoreau's position in such a way as to achieve consistency through his view of the relative distance between the state and the individual. At least in Thoreau's experience, the state contributes proportionately less to self-realization than the more immediate associations such as the family and the village because the state is further removed from the daily life of the individual. The state presented itself to Thoreau only occasionally, as at the annual tax collection or at a militia muster. However, he did not view the family, village, and other such more immediate associations to be intermediary between the individual and the state as did Althusius and others. The individual has a direct relationship to the state even though the state may be more remote from the daily concerns of his life.

He recognized this distance between state and individual as a particular characteristic of the American republic, not duplicated by all states or governments. The visits to Canada had impressed upon him the relative remoteness of the state to his everyday existence, and he heartily approved of this feature of American federal republicanism as it existed in his lifetime.

That certainly is the best government where the inhabitants are least often reminded of the government. (Where a man cannot be a poet even without danger of being made poet-laureate! Where he cannot be healthily neglected, and grow up a man, and not an Englishman merely!) Where it is the most natural thing
in the world for a government that does not understand you to let you alone. . . . It is a government, that English one, —and most other European ones, —that cannot afford to be forgotten, as you would naturally forget them, that cannot let you alone, having learned to walk. It appears to me that a true Englishman can only speculate within bounds; he has to pay his respects to so many things that before he knows it he has paid all he is worth. The principal respect in which our government is more tolerable is in the fact that there is so much less of a government with us. In the States it is only once in a dog's age that a man need remember his government, but here [in Canada] he is reminded of it every day. Government parades itself before you. It is in no sense the servant but the master. 43

It was one of those ethnocentric conceits to which most political theorists are prone, that a similar relationship ought to exist between all states and their citizens as he described for the United States. His "Yankee in Canada" makes very clear his objections to government making itself obvious to the citizenry any more than absolutely necessary to perform its legitimate functions.

An Englishman, methinks, not to speak of other nations, habitually regards himself merely as a constituent part of the English nation; he holds a recognized place as such; he is a member of the royal regiment of English. And he is proud of his nation. But an American cares very little about such, and greater freedom and independence are possible to him. He is nearer to the primitive condition of man. Government lets him alone and he lets government alone. 44

By its remoteness the sort of state which Thoreau preferred has fewer opportunities to be of direct influence in the development of individual personality, or upon the conditions of daily life. Much of what concerns
government and governmental officials deals with what Thoreau con-
sidered trivial issues which could be decided either way without having
a significant impact upon the lives of citizens who live in the intimate
setting of their families and neighbors. As he wrote, "what is called
politics is comparatively something so superficial and inhuman, that
practically I have never fairly recognized that it concerns me at all." 45
There is a large amount of governmental activity which may be very
important to the continuation of the nation and to the proper ordering
of the functions of a state which Thoreau considered legitimate, but
which has very little practical significance or direct influence upon
individual lives. Therefore, much activity of a government is inconse-
quential, and even though it might lack agreement with transcendent
principles in these minor particulars, it does not disturb the relations
a morally conscious individual maintains with the people he encounters
in daily life or his own striving for moral consciousness. It is only
when the state, or its representative government, touches an individual
in such a way as to hinder him in his relations with his neighbors or to
require behavior which violates his perceptions of transcendent laws,
that it creates a difficulty for the citizen on the moral qui vive. But
when that difficulty presents itself, it assumes crisis proportions.

It is obvious that the state encompasses a larger multiplicity of
individuals than the more immediate associations such as the village.
In Thoreau's view, each person living under the authority of the state is under a transcendental obligation to search for self-realization and to be true to his own nature. He was aware of the great variety permitted in nature and was intolerant of anything other than natural law imposing behavioral conformity upon individuals.

I rejoice ... that men themselves have some wild oats to sow before they become submissive members of society. Undoubtedly, all men are not equally fit subjects for civilization; and because the majority, like dogs and sheep, are tame by inherited disposition, this is no reason why others should have their natures broken that they may be reduced to the same level. Men are in the main alike, but they were made several in order that they might be various. If a low use is to be served, one man will do nearly or quite as well as another; if a high one, individual excellence is to be regarded. 46

It follows that the range of governmental activity must be very narrow if it succeeds in avoiding a violation of the subjective integrity of every personality within its jurisdiction. When it acts in accord with the principles of the good and true, the state will not risk such violations because its actions will be in conformity with the intuitive apprehensions of genius, and will embody the principles of right toward which all lesser consciousnesses ought to be striving. When the state, or more precisely, the government transgresses the limits of its legitimate concerns and interferes with the process of individual self-realization it has lost the moral force of its authority. The modifying points in Thoreau's theory of the state which temper the authoritarian absolutism inherent in it are the remoteness of the state from the individual citizen and the narrow
range of activity which he considered legitimate for the state. It provides Thoreau with an escape hatch and a peg upon which he can hang his justification of civil disobedience.

The difficulty is not with the state, but with government, if one sees the state as the idea and the government as the operation. Government can, and almost invariably does pervert the state. When the government of the state is directed toward ends which are contrary to the higher laws apprehended by the most fully conscious, or when it erects obstacles to the development of subjective consciousness the individual who acts in accord with his own internal moral imperatives must withdraw his participation in the government. If the perversion of the idea of the state by its government impinges upon the integrity of subjective personhood, civil disobedience is the appropriate response of the individual. Should the operative state persist in the perverse course and attempt through coercion and force to impose complicity in immorality, positive resistance even to the point of violence is the only response consistent with the integrity of the morally sensitive individual. Even by itself, one individual example of the real, transcendent value is an irresistible force.

You can pass your hand under the largest mob, a nation in revolution even, and, however solid a bulk they may make, like a hail cloud in the atmosphere, you may not meet so much as a cobweb of support. They may not rest, even by a point, on eternal foundations. But an individual standing on truth you cannot pass your hand under, for his foundations reach to the centre of the universe.
It is the force of example which leads Thoreau to accept the consequences of civil disobedience; punishment accentuates the example provided by the civil resister and visibly demonstrates the incongruity of the statute law with the higher law. Even "A Plea for Captain John Brown" argues that Brown's principles be accepted rather than that Brown's life be spared. However, it is questionable that agreement could be gained among scholars and activists whether John Brown's raid or Thoreau's defense of Brown is properly classified as civil disobedience. Under Power's definition of responsible disobedience, Thoreau's non-payment of taxes would not be included, much less Brown's raid and Thoreau's implied incitement to free him from prison. Thoreau's refusal to pay the poll tax, assistance to fugitive slaves, and open support of Brown's murderous insurrection were actions taken without regard to exhausting available legal remedies, had no firm commitment to non-violence, took no obvious concern for the rights of others, and did not insist that the legal consequences of disobedience be borne.

In view of Thoreau's strong moral tendencies toward political absolutism tempered by an individualism that was nonetheless absolutist in moral terms, one suspects from reading his comments about the Biblical prophets and about the Cromwellian Protectorate that the form of government of which he would have been most approving might have been a theocratic form in which an unyielding moral autocrat enforces
the moral law by an example of moral rectitude in his own person and through an unhesitating use of all the means available to the govern-
ment.

This is not a perfect parallel, because Thoreau possessed much broader moral vision than is embodied in any of the particularistic religions. He was much too catholic in his tastes to give a higher cre-
dence to one religious system than to another. He considered them all to be mythic attempts to communicate intimations of the creative and sustaining spirit pervading the universe rather than literal explanations of the processes at work creating both nature and values.

I do not prefer one religion or philosophy to another. I have no sympathy with the bigotry and ignorance which make transient and partial and puerile distinctions between one man's faith or form of faith and another's, —as Christian and heathen. I pray to be delivered from narrowness, partiality, exaggeration, bigotry. To the philosopher all sects, all nations, are alike. I like Brahma, Hari, Buddha, the Great Spirit, as well as God. 90

It was the principle of good men using the state for good purposes that Thoreau admired rather than the historical realities of the patriarchs or the Puritan government of Cromwell. One suspects that he would have been highly discontent under the rule of any theocracy. He was convinced that a person of truly superior moral vision would have little to do with mundane affairs of government. As he made the point in A Week:
But will government never be so well administered, inquired one, that we private men shall hear nothing of it? "The king answered: At all events, I require a prudent and able man, who is capable of managing the state affairs of my kingdom. The ex-minister said: The criterion, O Sire! of a wise and competent man is that he will not meddle with such like matters." Alas that the ex-minister should have been so nearly right.51

He believed, however, that men of moral genius do appear in political settings to correct errors and to provide a standard of right by which all men and their institutions should measure their conduct. These persons, of whom John Brown was an example, he considered to have a divine commission to right wrongs and to provide an active demonstration of transcendent principles applied to the affairs of men. He replied to critics of Brown's actions at Harper's Ferry:

They talk as if it were impossible that a man could be "divinely appointed" in these days to do any work whatever; as if vows and religion were out of date as connected with any man's daily work; as if the agent to abolish slavery could only be somebody appointed by the President or by some political party.52

Thoreau recognized that all forms of government are susceptible to debasement in one degree or another, and that the usual conditions which they impose upon life under their rule are not those calculated to bring out the best in human potential. "Men are degraded," he believed, "when considered as the members of a political organization. As a nation the people never utter one great and healthy word. From this side all nations present only the symptoms of disease."53 Government of the state is ordinarily in the hands of those whose apprehensions
of the good and true are dim or defective. "I see," he declared, "that
the authorities—the Governor, Mayor, Commissioner, Marshal, etc.—
are either weak or unprincipled men, —i.e., well disposed but not equal
to the occasion, —or else of dull moral perceptions, with the unprinci­
pled and servile in their pay." These men are of a type, and regard­
less of governmental form, Thoreau believed that they monopolize the
machinery of government for purposes that are not in the interests of
mankind. As he wrote in his *Journal*:

> It is surprising to what extent the world is ruled by cliques....
The institutions of almost all kinds are thus of a sectarian or
party character. Newspapers, magazines, colleges, and all
forms of government and religion express the superficial
activity of a few, the mass either conforming or not attend­
ing. 55

Although governments are all subject to faults, and to domination
by cliques, Thoreau seems to have felt that some governmental forms
may be more prone to corruption than others. Monarchies and heredi­
tary aristocracies he felt to be particularly reprehensible. In part, he
believed this to be true because of the age of the governments they repre­
sent, that the vitality had been drained as they became further removed
from the invigorating forests and wildnesses of the original conquerors
who were their ancestors. Luxury, comfort, a willingness to listen to
the flattery of others rather than to search for inner truth are all traps
into which a system based upon heredity falls easily and inevitably. The
willingness of hereditary rulers to monopolize property which they can­
not personally use, and consequently deprive others of its use is contrary to Thoreau's use theory of property which he stated in his Journal. "The highest law gives a thing to him who can use it." The example of wrongful royal prerogative that struck him most forceably occurred on his trip to Canada when he was unable to get the best view of the Falls at Montmorenci because the Prince of Wales had fenced it off for part of his estate holdings. His remarks on the subject were full of understated sarcasm:

It appeared to me to be in bad taste for an individual, though he were the father of Queen Victoria, to obtrude himself with his land titles, or at least his fences, on so remarkable a natural phenomenon, which should, in every sense, belong to mankind.

The major point of his objection was to the idea of one arbitrary individual will having command over matters which touch the natural prerogatives of others. The measure of a man's authority over others, Thoreau believed, was his moral superiority and nothing else. Kings and noblemen do not ordinarily base their authority on personal moral superiority, at least in such a way that Thoreau would concede its validity. He was contemptuous that "kings love to say 'shall' and 'will". Thoreau was willing to acknowledge such contributions as the aristocratic system makes to the quality of life and to the level of culture, but also recognized its drawbacks, such as the necessary existence of a peasantry. He was pleased with the trend he perceived in history
that rendered monarchy obsolete as a common governmental form, and
with the new rise in republicanism and other more participatory forms.

History used to be the history of successive kings or
their reigns,—the Williams, Henrys, Johns, Richards, etc.,
etc., all of them great in somebody's estimation. But we
have altered that considerably. Hereafter it is to be to a
greater extent the history of peoples. You do not hear some
King Louis or Edward or Leopold referred to now by sensible
men with much respect. 60

The historical supercedence of republicanism in the New World
was encouraging to Thoreau. In part he believed it was a consequence
of the process of truth revealing itself. For instance, he viewed the
difference between himself and a young English soldier stationed at the
citadel of Quebec as being that he "was born in modern times." 61
Another factor he believed to be influential in the demise of moribund
monarchies in Europe was the opening of the New World, with its
opportunities for people to re-establish a direct relationship to nature,
or the Wild, as he preferred to call the natural condition.

In new countries men are scattered broadcast; they do
not wait for roads to place their houses on, but roads seek out
the houses, and each man is a prince in his principality and
depends on himself. Perchance when the virgin soil is
exhausted, a reaction takes place, and men concentrate in vil-
lages again, become social and commercial, and leave the
steady and moderate few to work the country's mines. 62

He recognized that it is necessary to preserve the immediacy of the
relationship between the Wild and the individual if man's institutions
are to retain any vitality. Although the point has previously been made,
it is difficult to over-emphasize the very real connection in Thoreau's mind between the Wild and the fitness of institutions such as the state and its political agents to their tasks of enhancing the development of the good life among citizens.

A town is saved, not more by the righteous men in it than by the woods and swamps that surround it. A township where one primitive forest waves above while another primitive forest rots below,—such a town is fitted to raise not only corn and potatoes, but poets and philosophers for the coming ages....

The civilized nations—Greece, Rome, England—have been sustained by the primitive forests which anciently rotted where they stand. They survive as long as the soil is not exhausted. Alas for human culture! little is to be expected of a nation, when the vegetable mould is exhausted, and it is compelled to make manure of the bones of its fathers. 63

Here is another of the paradoxes which abound in Transcendental thought and yet in which Thoreau took particular delight. Although the movement of history pushes obsolete institutions aside to make room for newer ones which more fully reflect the unfolding principles of truth which define right relations, the passage of time encumbers even the newer institutions with traditions that gradually cease to reflect true relations. This is particularly true of government, because its traditions and conventions are expressed in terms of law and are enforced by organized violence or the threat of violence. Just as individuals must live in the present moment to be perfectly attuned to the Oversoul, the institutions which represent men must ride the crest of time's wave if
they are to remain consonant with the ideal world. Governments are particularly ill-suited to keep pace with the dynamic progress of moral revelation because they solidify their traditions in laws, and in sub-systems such as particular economic forms, in monuments to their achievements and schemes for their perpetuation. They have a stake in the past, not in the present or the future. The result is "not truth, but a lifelong hypocrisy. Let us have institutions framed not out of our rottenness," he asked, "but out of our soundness." A government is, by its nature, vested with static values which it is committed to preserve. The etymology of the word state indicates its conservative nature. Thoreau saw himself as the ultimate radical, in the sense of believing that life must be original, reaching to the center or ultimate source and affected by vital principle.

The view he had of history as an unfolding revelation of transcendent principles was joined to his conception of the role of the hero in the founding of a state or in leading a revolution. The principles, in Thoreau's mind, are superior to the person of the hero. It is an important distinction because it rescues his theory from falling into the superman syndrome which often springs from a position similar to that taken by Thoreau. The hero is important, even crucial, in Thoreau's theory of the state, but history prepares the way and creates the climate for the hero to act as a catalyst for change. As a Transcendentalist, he
was acutely aware of the inter-relationship of things.

Revolutions are never sudden. Not one man, nor many men, in a few years or generations, suffice to regulate events and dispose mankind for the revolutionary movement. The hero is but the crowning stone of the pyramid,—the keystone of the arch. Who was Romulus or Remus, Hengist or Horsa, that we should attribute to them Rome or England? They are famous or infamous because the progress of events has chosen to make them its stepping-stones. But we would know where the avalanche commenced, or the hollow in the rock whence springs the Amazon. The most important is apt to be some silent and unobtrusive fact in history. 65

Thoreau's own preference for republican democracy was well known to his friends. Emerson said of him, "No truer American existed than Thoreau. His preference of his country and condition was genuine, and his aversion from English or European manners and tastes reached almost contempt." But he did not consider the American form of government remotely to approach the ideal. It was merely less objectionable than other available examples. The American government had the virtue of being closer to the virgin wilderness because of its recent discovery and inhabitation by a population whose culture had reached the level of development to require a state and government. It was less obtrusive in the daily lives of its citizens and was less prescriptive than most other governments of the early and mid-Nineteenth Century. It did have severe limitations and defects in Thoreau's estimation.

The principal objection he had to the United States was a criticism
which may be extended to all republican forms and to all democracies. Republics do not represent the whole range of human experience, nor even the best part of the population. A system that relies upon any majoritarian scheme excludes the most advanced moral principles for the sake of mere opinion and conventional wisdom. It is never in a position to enforce justice because it perforce must deal in compromise and expediency in order to build the necessary coalition to achieve and maintain power. Dependency upon common opinion or the vox populi would always, in Thoreau's opinion, result in the coarsest perception of the good.

The mass never comes up to the standard of its best member, but on the contrary degrades itself to a level with the lowest. As the reformers say, it is a leveling down, not up. Hence the mass is only another name for the mob. The inhabitants of the earth assembled in one place would constitute the greatest mob. The mob is spoken of as an insane and blinded animal; magistrates say it must be humored; they apprehend it may incline this way or that, as villagers dread an inundation, not knowing whose land may be flooded, nor how many bridges carried away.67

Nothing exceptional can be expected from the mass of mankind. Principles are not founded on the results of plebiscites. To Thoreau's mind it is a fatal flaw in the democratic form of government which makes it among the least likely of all governments to fulfill the functions of a true state. It is predicated upon the perceptions and preferences, not of the best or finest, but the most common or most frequently occurring opinion. In choosing leadership Thoreau was espe-
cially unenthusiastic about the quality of democratic selection processes. "I feel that the public demand an average man, —average thoughts and manners, —not originality, nor even absolute excellence," he wrote. 68

Thoreau also observed that governments, regardless of what their Aristotelian classification might be, support and maintain sub-systems with which they interact in a mutually supportive way. Like all institutions, these sub-systems are subject to inertia; and they are particularly prone to torpor because they are heavily reliant upon the practices and traditions of the entrenched government and are therefore conservative by their natures. They are often impediments to the "good" life that Thoreau believed it is government's function to enhance. "In my short experiences of human life," he wrote in A Week, "the outward obstacles, if there were any such, have not been living men, but dead institutions." 69

Unlike the early liberals, Thoreau did not regard institutions and their histories as irrelevant to nor mutually independent from government. This is, of course, somewhat inconsistent with his view of the relative independence of individuals from the institutions of their culture. The laissez-faire attitude of the nascent liberalism of his time was imperfectly assimilated by Thoreau, and unfortunately for his theory, that portion which he embraced was not wholly compatible with his other views.

This emphasizes the conflict between the two views of nature he
seems to have held: on the one hand an inherently harmonious nature full of mystery but ultimately governed by beneficient principles, and on the other hand a nature, still full of mystery, but devoid of ethical content, operating under laws that have no relation to justice, reason, or human welfare. The same ambiance characterizes his view of government and the sub-systems which exist within it. He was unclear as to whether the voluntary associations of benefit to humans were sufficient to sustain a system of government that is harmonious with the moral dictates of the Oversoul, or whether the dark side of man's nature requires the firm control of a moral hero to keep the mass of humanity within the bounds of goodness.

Part of Thoreau's ambiguity toward intermediate institutions, or government sub-systems, may have come from the influence of German Idealism upon him, which J. S. Mill thought added a recognition of institutions as independent realities of historical importance, and to the mechanistic views of the early liberals, clashing with the individualism which he had inherited from his Calvinistic background and which was the predominating intellectual assumption of his social and political thinking. This tension and dissonance recurs through Thoreau's social writings. For instance, between his theory of continual progress in human affairs and his espousal of violent revolutionary tactics, this tension is obvious. His curious sympathy with voluntary associations
and cultural affinities such as language and the village contrasts with the antipathy he felt toward institutions of society and of government.

Why Thoreau should recognize the importance of institutions as sub-systems of government is of less interest than why he did not appreciate their influence upon individuals. Modern political science is accustomed to considering these sub-systems as an integral part of government. Indeed, economic determinists and some Marxian thinkers have suggested that the economic system is the government. This notion, at least as applied to property, was part of the Anglo-American intellectual tradition from the time of James Harrington if not earlier. In his observations of nature Thoreau took careful notes of actual behavior and actual facts; human behavior and institutional behavior were apparently less well observed.

After the legal structure, which will be discussed later, perhaps the most pervasive of the governmentally related institutions is the economic system. Thoreau recognized the close connection between wealth and political power in any form of government, from the simplest organization to the most complex.

Wealth, no less than knowledge, is power. Among the Bedouins the richest man is the sheik, among savages he who has most iron and wampum is chief, and in England and America he is the merchant prince. 71

Recalling the earlier discussion of economics, business, and commerce, Thoreau's most devastating criticism of government, particu-
larly in America, centered on the materialistic emphasis which government fosters in its citizens by an over concern for the economic consequences of its decisions to the near exclusion of other less tangible or less immediate values. An illustration of the tendency of government to consider all values in economic terms comes from his observations about common juniper:

The mass of men are very easily imposed on.... Whatever a great many grown-up boys are seriously engaged in is considered great and good, and, as such, is sure of the recognition of the churchman and statesman. What, for instance, are the blue juniper berries in the pasture, which the cowboy remembers so far as they are beautiful merely, to church and state? Mere trifles which deserve and get no protection. As an object of beauty, though significant to all who really live in the country, they do not receive the protection of any community. Anybody may grub up all that exist. But as an article of commerce they command the attention of the civilized world. ... Go to the English Government, which, of course, is representative of the people, and ask, What is the use of juniper berries? The answer is, To flavor gin with. This is the gross abuse of juniper berries, with which an enlightened Government—if ever there shall be one—will have nothing to do. 72

He was not so naive as to believe that a nation has no need to foster and encourage an adequate system of production. In fact, he believed that getting a living should be facilitated by a good government, but that the means of economic support ought not to obscure the ends of life. The reason for encouraging an adequate economy is to free individuals from the necessity of spending all their energies on sustaining life so that they can devote a greater share of their lives to
improving the quality of their existence. Thoreau believed that "if the civilized man's pursuits are no worthier than the savage's, if he is employed the greater part of his life in obtaining gross necessaries and comforts merely," he does not deserve any higher standard of living than the savage. The economic system can be used, however, to elevate both the physical and spiritual condition of mankind provided it is properly managed.

The fact for the savage, and for the mass of mankind, is that it is better to plant, weave, and build than to do nothing or worse; but the fact for the philosopher, or a nation loving wisdom, is that it is more important to cultivate the highest faculties and spend as little time as possible in planting, weaving, building, etc. It depends upon the height of your standard, and no doubt through manual labor as a police men are educated up to a certain level. 73

Thoreau believed in securing the necessities of life as nearly as possible by the exercise of such talents as an individual possesses, because that direct effort to support himself honestly and by the means most natural to him contributes most to his development. The same principle he believed applies to nations, and that gluttony and sloth bring ruin as surely to nations as to individuals.

The abdomen under the wings of the butterfly still represents the larva. This is the tidbit which tempts his insectivorous fate. The gross feeder is a man in the larva state; and there are whole nations without fancy or imagination, whose vast abdomens betray them. 74

In the right sort of government Thoreau believed that the economy would function naturally in a smooth operation of the law of supply and
demand, which he believed to be the driving factor behind the political economy. It has been noted earlier that his partial assimilation of the laissez-faire thinking that was becoming important in the intellectual circles of his day led to logical inconsistencies in other parts of his thought. A simple-minded conception of classic liberal economics such as lay behind his belief in the law of supply and demand leads directly to domination of governmental policy by materialistic values which he found so objectionable. The point must not be overdrawn, however. He did not consider a rising gross national product to be the measure of a nation's success.

The nation itself, with all its so-called improvements, which, by the way are all external and superficial, is ... an unwieldy and overgrown establishment ... cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, as the millions of households in the land; and the only cure for it, as for them, is in a rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose. It lives too fast.

Simplicity, self-sufficiency, and production for direct use is as necessary to a government of high purpose as it is for an individual of high purpose.

Without considering the idea in relation to his feelings about the laws of supply and demand being the proper basis of economics, Thoreau did not seem to believe private property to be compatible with a national economy of simplicity and self-sufficiency.
By avarice and selfishness, and a grovelling habit, from which none of us is free, the landscape is deformed, husbandry is degraded with us, and the farmer leads the meanest of lives. He knows Nature but as a robber. 

Agriculture is not free from avarice and grovelling habit due in large measure to the system of private ownership in land which naturally appeals to the baser motives of man. It encourages covetousness, greed, and pride. Ownership of land denies "the original right of man to the productions of Nature and a place in her." As far as the earth is concerned, Thoreau seemed to regard all men as equal inheritors; in Transcendental ethics, "the highest law gives a thing to him who can use it." His preference for agriculture over other forms of business undertaken for material profit beyond the limits of necessity, was based on the fact that it was at least a direct relation to Nature, and she might yet teach one who is familiar with her ways something about the true values in life which he might never learn in any other mode of employment.

Like the classical Greek theorists, Plato and even Aristotle, trade and commerce were regarded by Thoreau as the lowest kind of activity. Far from adding to the wealth of a nation, he believed that trade is so far removed from the act of production that it relies solely on a base motive for unearned profit.

No trade is simple, but artificial and complex. It postpones life and substitutes death. It goes against the grain. If the first generation does not die of it, the third or fourth does. In the face of all statistics, I will never believe that it is the descendants of tradesmen who keep the state alive, but of
simple yeomen or laborers... This simplicity it is, and the
g vigor it imparts, that enables the simple vagabond... to hold
up his head among men. 80

Thoreau was appalled that there are those who style themselves states-
men and philosophers who are so blind as to think that progress and
civilization depend on precisely this kind of inter-change and activity, --
'the activity of flies about a molasses-hogshead.' 81 Trade, commerce,
property in land, corporations and the factory system were all anathema
to Thoreau's conscience. Therefore, he objected to the sanction of the
state being extended to them. The factory system was nearly as degrad-
ing to laborers as the plantation system of private land ownership was
degrading to the slaves who supported it.

I cannot believe that our factory system is the best mode
by which men may get clothing. The condition of the operatives
is becoming every day more like that of the English, and it
cannot be wondered at, since, as far as I have heard or observed,
the principal object is, not that mankind may be well and honestly
clad, but, unquestionably, that the corporation may be enriched. 82

The adverse effects of trade, commerce, and the factory system are not
only on those persons whose lives are directly subordinated to them.
He recognized the waste, the pollution, the unnecessary depletion of
natural resources which result from an economy operated by the profit
motive, or geared to produce above the level of necessity. He objected
to the lowering of the quality of everyone's lives by the economic gains
of the system; but he was surprised that most persons are unaware, or
at least apathetic, about their own interests being damaged. The utili-
From the principle of each man knowing where his long-term interests lay seemed refuted by human behavior. In *A Week* Thoreau gave this example:

At length it would seem that the interests, not of the fishes only, but of the men of Wayland, of Sudbury, of Concord, demand the levelling of that dam. Innumerable acres of meadow are waiting to be made dry.... The farmers stand with sythes whet, waiting the subsiding of the waters... but sometimes their eyes do not rest... on the quaking meadow ground during the haying season at all. So many sources of wealth inaccessible. They rate the loss thereby incurred in the single town of Wayland alone as equal to the expense of keeping a hundred yoke of oxen the year round. One year... not long ago... the water gave no signs of falling.... But speedy emissaries revealed the unnatural secret, in the new float-board, wholly a food in width, added to their already too high privileges by the dam proprietors. 83

Thoreau offered no solution to the problems presented by trade and commerce except one of simplicity in living which would render much of this kind of activity unnecessary. What effect this might have on the operation of supply and demand he does not suggest; the question seems not to have occurred to him. In the passage quoted just above he seems to suggest that some regulation of manufacturing, at least, is desirable. The government, however, does not seem to be the regulatory agency he had in mind but rather the men of the neighboring villages. To suggest that unorganized men could act to regulate manufacturing is incredible. Some sort of organization would be necessary, and how it would differ in any essential respect from a government agency is not readily apparent.
Thoreau believed that under the economic system of his day the interests of the majority of men, at least those whose interests are represented by government, are measured in immediate economic gain. The state which allows such exploitation at the expense of the quality of life and the long range fate of mankind can hardly be said to make life more valuable, as Thoreau said a government should do. Thoreau would have made it a government function to protect natural resources and the landscape from the exploitation which seems to accompany commercial development for profit. But as pointed out above, he did not make it clear how it was to be accomplished, at least in an organized way. He would also have preserved much of the natural landscape from private ownership, feeling that the contribution made to the quality of human life by natural beauty outweighs the economic gain which might be realized by commercial development or individual ownership. A long passage in the late Journal summarized his view of the government's function in protecting nature against despoliation by economic development or private ownership.

What are the natural features which made a township handsome? A river, with its waterfalls and meadows, a lake, a hill, a cliff or individual rocks, a forest, and ancient trees standing singly. Such things are beautiful; they have a high use which dollars and cents never represent. If the inhabitants of a town were wise, they would seek to preserve these things, though at a considerable expense; for such things educate far more than any hired teachers or preachers, or any at present recognized system of school education. I do not think him fit to be the founder of a state or even of a town who does not fore-
see the use of these things, but legislates chiefly for oxen, as it were....

It would worth the while if in each town there were a committee appointed to see that the beauty of the town received no detriment. If we have the largest boulder in the county, then it should not belong to an individual, nor be made into doorsteps.

Not only the channel but one or both banks of every river should be a public highway. The only use of a river is not to float on it.

Think of a mountain-top in the township—even to the minds of the Indians a sacred place—only accessible through private grounds! a temple as it were, which you cannot enter except by trespassing and at the risk of letting out or letting in somebody's cattle! in fact the temple itself in this case private property and standing in a man's cow-yard, — for such is commonly the case.  

The land and its resources, especially trees, have a civilizing effect upon the inhabitants. Of two villages, one with trees and natural beauty and the other treeless with its resources wasted, Thoreau was certain that "in the latter will be found the most desperate and hardest drinkers," in his opinion, there is much merit in having land represented in the legislature, and he doubtless would have objected to the Supreme Court rulings of the Nineteen Sixties requiring that the principle of one man, one vote be observed in both chambers of the State legislatures as well as the House of Representatives of the Federal government. Speaking of the ancient elm trees which were disappearing from New England he wrote:
They might claim to send a representative to the General Court to look after their interests, if a fit one could be found, a native American one in a true and worthy sense, with catholic principles.  

Two days later he wrote that the elms "better deserved to be represented at the General Court than the manikins beneath,—than the bar-rooms and victualling cellar and groceries they overshadow." He felt that "they are worth many a political borough. They constitute a borough. The poor human representative of his party sent out from beneath their shade will not suggest a tithe of the dignity, the true nobleness and comprehensiveness of view, the sturdiness and independence, and the serene beneficence that they do." The necessity for preserving and protecting the esthetic quality of the natural setting is one of the obligations which government must accept in Thoreau's view.

Thank God, men cannot as yet fly, and lay waste the sky as well as the earth! We are safe on that side for the present. It is for the very reason that some do not care for those things that we need to continue to protect all from the vandalism of a few.

Still, it is not clear how Thoreau would have government accomplish the protection of the environment. It is possible that rather than suggesting that this is a government function he meant literally that groups of men and committees should undertake the responsibility. If so, the distinction between such vigilante groups and governmental agencies is not made clearly in his writings. Not only protective reaction, but positive efforts at reforestation, provision of parks, recrea-
tional areas and natural preserves were seen as essential governmental functions. It enhances the quality of life and has a beneficial psychological effect on the citizenry. All improvements and advances of whatever kind depend at last upon the preservation of wilderness and the natural features of the landscape.

Each town should have a park, or rather a primitive forest, of five hundred or a thousand acres, where a stick should never be cut for fuel, a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation. We hear of cow-commons and ministerial lots, but we want men-commons and lay lots inalienable forever. Let us keep the New World new, preserve all the advantages of living in the country. There is meadow and pasture and wood-lot for the town's poor. Why not a forest and huckle-berry field for the town's rich? ... A town is an institution which deserves to be remembered. We boast of our system of education, but why stop at schoolmasters and schoolhouses? We are all schoolmasters, and our schoolhouse is the universe. To attend chiefly to the desk or schoolhouse while we neglect the scenery in which it is placed is absurd. If we do not look out we shall find our fine schoolhouse standing in a cowyard at last.90

The major danger from which natural resources and beauty must be protected is from the greed of man for economic gain. Greedy farmers who fence land and despoil unnecessarily, railroads which strip forests for fuel, mills and factories that dam waterways and flood lowlands, hunters who wantonly slaughter wildlife for sport or pelts, villagers who permit a town to become shabby, barren and squalid because of unwillingness to bear the civic cost are all examples of the human flaw which government ought to counter with careful preservation of existing natural resources and replacement of resources for the future. Govern-
ment, unfortunately, is responsive to the economic demands of the farmers, railroads, mills, factories, corporations, and taxpayers whose shortsightedness prevents them from seeing that in wildness is the preservation of the world. Other mighty civilizations have fallen due to the same errors. As an example, Thoreau noted that, "They say that the Pasha, by some improvements in cutting down trees has banished rain from Egypt altogether for some years past." Greed is nearly an irreversible human tendency; almost no man can escape it and nearly every government yields to the demands with disastrous results.

Besides despoiling the earth, the economic system of the early industrial age in America and Western Europe was, in Thoreau's opinion, a corrupting influence on individuals. It fostered a materialism which made men blind to the more subtle rewards of a well cultivated interior life. Even those whose native capacities were not sufficiently great to respond deeply to transcendental values, were deprived by the economic and political system from achieving self-sufficiency, a prerequisite for full realization of personhood inherent in every person. Those at the bottom of the economic scale, the slaves of the South and the wage earners in the industrial North in America, and the peasants and workers of Europe were struggling so against starvation and extreme privation that there was no time or energy for expanding their consciousness; their souls shrivelled. Those at the top of the capitalist system or
among the privileged classes in the Western world Thoreau felt to be as flawed by the system as those at the bottom. Their spiritual development was arrested by gross materialism. Their initiative made flacid by a lack of exercise of the moral will toward their own self-support, their contact with the reality of nature and transcendent value was contravened by smothering luxury. It was this class of persons living on the support of others, by inheritance, by the gain on invested capital, or by the unearned produce of nature such as enrich owners of gold mines and oil wells, whom Thoreau regarded as the most unhappy and most useless of citizens.

What an army of non-producers society produces, — ladies generally (old and young) and gentlemen of leisure, so-called! Many think themselves well employed as charitable dispensers of wealth which somebody else has earned, and those who produce nothing, being of the most luxurious habits, are precisely they who want the most, and complain loudest when they do not get what they want. They who are literally paupers maintained at the public expense are the most importunate and insatiable beggars. They cling like the glutton to a living man and suck his vitals up. To every locomotive man there are three or four deadheads clinging to him, as if they conferred a great favor on society by living upon it. . . . How can you expect such bloodsuckers to be happy. 92

The state depends for its survival upon the yeoman class of self-sufficient workers; they provide both the material and spiritual support which gives any government its viability. He found the governmental system of the United States, and of those other Western governments with which he was familiar, to be supporting economic systems that
raised grave obstacles to the moral development of their citizens rather than removing moral hindrances. It was against this system of values that he countered the economics of Walden.

The same logic which deplores the unearned profit of capital finds welfarism to be non-productive and detrimental to the development of a healthy body politic. Thoreau objected to the state supporting the able indigent because, as he said, "all enterprises must be self-supporting, must pay for themselves. The great art of life is how to turn the surplus of life of the soul into life for the body,—that so the life be not a failure." The principle of self-sufficiency applies equally to all. Both the wealthy and the poor who do no productive work fail to meet one of the prior requisites to achieving full personhood. The economic structure of his time led him to see very dim prospects for many to be self-sufficient.

As is said of the merchants, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the life of men is a failure, and bankruptcy may be surely prophesied. . . . To be supported by the charity of friends or a government pension is to go into the almshouse. To inherit property is not to be born,—is to be still-born rather. And the other, as I said, provided you continue to breathe, is to go into the almshouse.

Governmental interference in the moral struggle for self-sufficiency is too remote from individual compassion to be psychologically beneficial to the helper or the helped. The motivation is more important than the act in Thoreau's view.
True help, for the most part, implies a greatness in him who is to be helped as well as in the helper. It takes a god to be helped even... But men so cobble and botch their request, that you must stoop as low as they to give them aid. Their meanness would drag down your deed to be a compromise with conscience, and not leave it to be done on the high table land of the benevolent soul. They would have you... serve them and not God. 95

Welfare activities not only have the effect of interfering between a person and his fate by defrauding him of the opportunity for self-improvement through force of his own will, but also are of no positive moral consequence because they are not the product of individual motivation but merely the mechanical act of an impersonal institution. The poor and beggars who are the recipients of welfare services welcome it as an answer to their plea for someone to "Get between me and my god." 96

The dispensation of charity is an equally precarious moral venture for the helper. It will fail without the proper mind-set. Institutions are artificial creations of social man and are therefore incapable of generating a genuine human motive. Institutional acts of charity are doomed to come to nothing or worse. "This almshouse charity is like putting new wine into old bottles," he wrote. 97 The moral point is finely stated in Walden.

Be sure that you give the poor the aid they most need, though it be your example which leaves them far behind. If you give money, spend yourself with it, and do not merely abandon it to them. We make curious mistakes sometimes. Often the poor man is not so cold and hungry as he is dirty and ragged and gross. It is partly his taste, and not merely his misfortune. If you give him money, he will perhaps buy more rags with it. 98
This view is consistent with the Puritan outlook which still had strong vestiges in New England and was supportive of the social Darwinism which developed later as an apology for the consequences of the industrial system, but is a much more subtle ethical point than either of the other arguments contained. Welfarism supports the materialistic value system which Thoreau found so objectionable in the government and economic system of the United States. Thoreau refused to deviate from the strictest accountability for individual moral actions, which he believed had unavoidable consequences for the individual. He refused to allow society or the state anything but the passive role of observer in the moral decisions men make. The consequences of those decisions are justice. His views were succinctly stated in a letter to Harrison Blake recounting a visit with the father of William and Henry James.

I met Mr. James the other night at Emerson's, at an Alcottian conversation.... He (James) utters quasi philanthropic dogmas in a metaphysic dress; but they are for all practical purposes very crude. He charges society with all the crime committed, and praises the criminal for committing it. But I think that all the remedies he suggests out of his head—for he goes no farther, hearty as he is—would leave us about where we are now. For, of course, it is not by a gift of turkeys on Thanksgiving Day that he proposes to convert the criminal, but by a true sympathy with each one, —with him, among the rest, who lyingly tells the world from the gallows that he has never been treated kindly by a single mortal since he was born. But it is not so easy a thing to sympathize with another, though you may have the best disposition to do it.... We are now, alas! exercising what charity we actually have, and new laws would not give us any more. But perchance, we might make some improvements in the house of correction.
Thoreau's objection to governmental activities or reforms such as welfarism or social rehabilitation of miscreants was that such activities were merely "mending the times when we should be building the eternity."¹⁰⁰ Such tinkering is like "a hundred 'modern improvements'; there is an illusion about them; there is not always a positive advance."¹⁰¹ Our social and economic "inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end. . . ."¹⁰²

In the previous discussion Thoreau's criticism of the industrial production system, the liberal attempts at socially corrective measures such as welfare and prison reforms, and of the functioning of government in general has indicated his dissatisfaction with existing political and social arrangements as well as his unhappiness with attempts at reform. It must be apparent to all who seriously read Thoreau that his thought is essentially a negative condemnation rather than a positive criticism with constructive suggestions. He offered no means whereby the abuses of unrestrained capitalism might be corrected by governmental action or even by revolutionary tactics. He extended no plan for the improvement of the environment or for easing the plight of the working classes. The problems of poverty, hunger and crime have no proposed solutions in Thoreau's writings. When considering such issues he seems to have withdrawn into his Cynic guise. Those who have suggested
that Thoreau is essentially nihilistic have some basis for their opinion.

Government, at least the form that Thoreau was familiar with efficiently and adequately represent vested economic interests. It supports a monetary system, an internal and foreign trade, a postal system, a transportation network, maintains a legal system for the protection of life and property, and keeps an armed force to ensure that those external and internal activities deemed essential to the economic well-being of the state are protected. All of these can be of incidental benefit to the general population as well. However, government is little representative of the aesthetic, psychological, moral and spiritual interests of its citizens. It is almost entirely concerned with outward behaviors, ignoring the subtleties of the human psyche, which differ in each person according to his circumstances and turn of mind. Whole areas of human needs are unrepresented by the most representative governments. Thoreau would prefer to have the interior life of man, the aesthetic and spiritual side of his nature, as free from governmental interference as possible, but he objected to that excessive materialism which makes the subjective qualities difficult to develop, and which may prevent a satisfactory moral consciousness to develop.

At this point, Thoreau found the benefits of government to be overbalanced by its liabilities. "We talk of representative government," he protested, "but what a monster of a government is that where the noblest faculties of the mind, and the whole heart, are not represented!"
The deficiency is not to be remedied by simply tinkering with the mechanics of government, with electoral processes or economic reforms. The solution is more fundamental. When fronted with the observation that, "the time will come when there shall be no difference between rich and poor, between high and low, when property will be held in common, even wives and children," Thoreau responded, "But forever I ask of such, What then?" The purposes of life which government exists to facilitate are not so trivial as property systems and economic questions. This is a fact of which most governmental leaders are oblivious, and so they mistakenly talk about reforms of one kind or another in the monetary system, or the constitutional relationship between the States and central government in the Federal system, or some superficial palliative. Thoreau had no patience with the attempts of government to achieve its proper effect through such gadgetry. The important reforms, he believed, "can be undertaken any morning before unbarring our doors. We need not call any convention." Most of Thoreau's objections to the state centered on its persistent mistaking of trivia for critical activities. For example, he was devastatingly critical of most public architecture, even important public improvements, because they are undertaken more to satisfy vanity than to elevate the quality of life. He complained that, "nations are possessed with an insane ambition to perpetuate the memory of themselves by the
amount of hammered stone they leave, "when they ought to invest at least equal pains "to smooth and polish their manners."

He believed the priorities of government are reversed. "Is not the builder of more consequence than the material"? he asked. "One sensible act will be more memorable than a monument as high as the moon. I love better to see stones in place."

The energy and expense would be better invested in abstract thought, in contemplation of the eternal principles and an attempt to articulate them for the instruction of mankind.

We have heard enough nonsense about the Pyramids. If Congress should vote to rear such structures on the praries to-day, I should not think it worth the while, nor be interested in the enterprise. It was the foolish undertaking of some tyrant. "But," says my neighbor, "When they were built, all men believed in them." Nonsense! nonsense! I believe that they were built essentially in the same spirit in which the public works of Egypt, of England, and America are built to-day,—the Mahmoudi Canal, the Tabular Bridge, Thames Tunnel, and the Washington Monument.

The unnecessary labor entailed in public works of monumental size bear heavily upon the workers who are called upon to invest their labor in these rather than more rewarding enterprises. It also caused the brutal exploitation of animals as well as the waste of material and human resources. Thoreau believed that no nation which lived simply in regard to essentials, "that is, no nation of philosophers" would stoop to the exploitation of animal labor. "Granted," he wrote, "that some public works would not have been constructed without this aid, and let man share the glory of such with the ox and horse; does it follow that
he could not have accomplished works yet more worthy of himself in that case?" One supposes he would level the same criticism of governmental projects which he deemed unworthy even when wholly constructed with machine technology, but his concern for those who would be called upon to spend a part of their lives, whether human or animal, was greater than his regret over wasted material. The tragedy of government in all its activities, is that it misses its mark so widely because it responds not to principles but to politics. The people in control of government are not "on errands of humanity... it is the mismanagement of wood and iron and stone and gold which concerns them." The whole point of Walden was to describe an attempt to solve some of the problems of life practically, to develop a personal economics to counter the prevailing economic system supported by the governmental and social structure of his time.

From a positive standpoint, one surmises that Thoreau would want a system of household industries in which each person or each family would support themselves to the extent of their necessities, much like what Gandhi tried to foster in India, although for a different reason. His passion for simplicity would make trade very much less than the massive exchange of goods that characterizes the economy of industrial societies. The Thoreau family business of pencil manufacture, and later of graphite manufacture, was a model of simple production and
distribution. Since Thoreau assisted in the business, and assumed full responsibility during and after his father's final illness, it would seem that he had no over-riding objection to a production and distribution system at least as complex as that. His primary concern was that men gain their living by exercising their unique talents; pencil making was good and honorable, but he considered himself a poet rather than pencilmaker. The benefit of getting one's living directly from honest toil he considered to be as much spiritual as economic. A living, not luxury, was the aim of the economic system of which Thoreau would have approved. Not money, but satisfaction of supporting oneself in a humane experience of life, is the reward of a just economic system. "It is not enough to tell me that you worked hard to get your gold," he believed, for "so does the devil work hard." It is the exercise and development of the unique talents of each man in supporting himself that makes an economic system worth the protection of government. His notions about monetary supply were naive.

Men will tell you sometimes that "money's hard." That shows it was not made to eat, I say. Only think of a man in this new world, in his log cabin, in the midst of a corn and potato patch, with a sheep-fold on one side, talking about money being hard.

As was pointed out in the previous chapter, Thoreau held a value theory that was a curious blend of use-value and labor-value, and viewed money as a constant medium of exchange which responds to an automatic supply and demand market operation. His idea of use-value justified
the preservation of nature in her original form rather than economic "development" of those resources; there are many among the race—many more than might suspect it of themselves—who can make the best use of nature in the wild state. Both his use-value and labor-value views require, therefore, an economics of simplicity since a man who labors to meet his needs can do so within rather modest limits, and by his own labors is unable to do much more than meet his needs plus those of his family.

That Thoreau's economics are based upon simplicity and directness are well known; his biographers and commentators have all presented this as the fundamental point in Thoreau's economic and political thought. It should not be assumed, however, as some do, that his desire for simplicity was based on his own simpleness. For instance, when accumulated capital is invested in such a way as to give some individuals or institutions control over the lives of others, Thoreau believed it to be an intolerable imposition on those who are exploited and thereby deprived of the chance to develop this aspect of their personhood. The governmental system that supports an exploitative economic system is without principle. It breeds citizens without principle. In such a country, just men conspire, their thoughts are murder to the state and involuntarily go plotting against her. 115

He makes an important point about the relationship between patri-
otism and a feeling for the native soil. The feeling for one's country is intensified with familiarity; the scenery becomes part of one's personality. The place helps to define the person. For this reason, Thoreau was reluctant to travel far from home. It would have made Concord less to him, and would have introduced an element of ambiguity into his otherwise solid identity. As he confided to his *Journal*,

I am afraid to travel much or to famous places, lest it might completely dissipate the mind. Then I am sure that what we observe at home, if we observe anything, is of more importance than what we observe abroad. The far-fetched is of the least value. What we observe in travelling are to some extent the accidents of the body, but [what] we observe when sitting at home are, in the same proportion, phenomena of the mind itself.\textsuperscript{116}

Even more pointedly and poignantly he later wrote:

When it was proposed to me to go abroad, rub off some rust, and better my condition in a worldly sense, I fear lest my life will lose some of its homliness. If these fields and streams and woods, the phenomena of nature here, and the simple occupations of the inhabitants should cease to interest and inspire me, no culture or wealth could atone for the loss. I fear the dissipation that travelling, going into society, even the best, the enjoyment of intellectual luxuries, imply. If Paris is much in your mind, if it is more and more to you, Concord is less and less, and yet it would be a wretched bargain to accept the proudest Paris in exchange for my native village. At best, Paris only be a school in which to learn to live here, a steppingstone to Concord, a school in which to fit for this university. I wish so to live ever as to derive my satisfactions and inspirations from the commonest events ... and I may dream of no heaven but that which lies about me.... In this sense I am not ambitious. I do not wish my native soil to become exhausted and run out through neglect.\textsuperscript{117}

The sentiment expressed here is not different in kind from patriotism.
It arises from love for the familiar landmarks of one's life, and is an extension of one's personality. It is his feeling of rootedness. Modern society with its high degree of mobility evidences a lack of this identification of personality and place. Thoreau recognized the psychological basis for patriotism for one's homeland, which is a far different emotional response than loyalty to the government that happens to rule. Thoreau was able to appreciate the emotion which links a man to the land of his fathers, to the trees and mountains outside his window, and to the soil which contains the bones of his ancestors and one day will receive his own. The feeling for one's patria is instinctive and legitimate. It is to this sentiment that a flag appeals by standing as an emblem of one's native land. "Men do believe in symbols yet and can understand some," he wrote of flags. Yet, it has little to do with the government which happens to be in power in a given period of time. Patriotism is instinctive and legitimate only so long as it reflects an internal psychological attitude towards oneself and the section of earth which he has absorbed into his personality. Patriotism is properly an attitude about oneself, and has very little to do with a government or a nation.

Every man is the lord of a realm beside which the earthly empire of the Czar is but a petty state.... Yet some can be patriotic who have no self-respect, and sacrifice the greater to the less. They love the soil which makes their graves, but have no sympathy with the spirit which may still animate their clay. Patriotism is a maggot in their heads.
For the purposes of a political theory, the legal system is perhaps the most important of the supportive institutions that exist in symbiotic relationship to government. In a sense all other social and economic institutions are dependent upon the law like fruits on a vine. The kind of vine it is obviously has a great influence upon the kind of fruit it bears. Thoreau had a well developed criticism of positive law from which a rather complete legal theory might be constructed.

At the outset one must read Thoreau with caution, for the word law is used in different senses which he did not always distinguish, and this can lead to ambiguity in interpreting the meaning of some of his writings. In one usage, law means a regularity, an orderly progression or the unfolding of the potentiality inherent in things. Usually he had this meaning in mind when writing of nature or of non-social relations. In this sense law is the motive toward self-realization, the pull exerted by the immanence of Being, the transcendental quality of which every animate object in nature partakes. This striving for the ideal or harmony of things with their essential (perfect) nature is law in the highest sense. It is synonymous with reality and has both objective and ideal identity.

Law is also used by Thoreau to denote the artificially imposed restraints applied for the maintenance of social cohesion. In the strictest sense he meant legality. However, Thoreau saw legality as merely a variety of convention carrying no greater moral weight than etiquette or grammar, but which carry the additional sanction of organized coer-
The conventional character of government was remarked in "Civil Disobedience": "This American Government,—what is it but a tradition, though a recent one, endeavoring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity...."\(^\text{120}\) The fact that the nation, state, or village chooses to back a certain convention with force does not change its moral quality. Law does not assume rectitude simply because it is articulated by a political unit. The essential character of legal enactments remains conventional. It does not depend upon legislative pronouncement or sovereign declaration for its moral obligation upon citizens, but upon its relation to categorical justice. The temper of Thoreau's thought related the validity of positive law to justice rather than "goodness" or "mercy." He was strongly influenced by the Puritan emphasis upon Old Testament concepts of stern justice, feeling that sentimentality or philanthropy compromises the impartial operation of cause and effect in questions of morality. "Our least deed," he wrote, "like the young of the land crab, wends its way to the sea of cause and effect as soon as born, and makes a drop there to eternity."\(^\text{121}\) Universal ethical principles, Thoreau believed, operate as inexorably as universal physical laws. In some places he seems to suggest a unity between moral principles and physical laws.

The most distinct and beautiful statement of any truth must take at last the mathematical form. We might so simplify the rules of moral philosophy, as well as arithmetic, that one formula would express them both. All the moral laws
are readily translated into natural philosophy, for often we have only to restore the primitive meaning of the words by which they are expressed, or to attend to their literal instead of their metaphorical sense. They are already supernatural philosophy. The whole body of what is now called moral or ethical truth existed in the golden age as abstract science. Or, if we prefer, we may say that the laws of Nature are the purest morality.\textsuperscript{122}

Thoreau's natural law bias is obvious. In his view natural law is operative upon humans at two levels. Man must respond to the law of his genus and also to the law of his individuality. Apprehension and application of these laws is what consciousness is all about in the Thoreauvian sense. Consciousness provides man with a moral sensor; it is the source of moral knowledge and provides the basis of personal and political obligation. "There is but one obligation, and that is the obligation to obey the highest dictate. None can lay me under another which will supercede this.... I never shall have dissolved my prior obligation to God."\textsuperscript{123} He illustrated the point further by recounting a story about Mirabeau who took to highway robbery in order to place himself in opposition to the law and to demonstrate his capacity to reason without obeying when obedience appears contrary to reason:

A saner man would have found opportunities enough to put himself in formal opposition to the most sacred laws of society, and so test his resolution, in the natural course of events, without violating the laws of his own nature. It is not for a man to put himself in such an attitude to society, but to maintain himself in whatever attitude he finds himself through obedience to the laws of his being, which will never be one of opposition to a just government.\textsuperscript{124}
The operation of natural law in the universe and in the natural world is independent of the will of man. He cannot halt the progression of the seasons by act of will nor change the requirements of human beings for sexual generation and sustenance by food and warmth. The operation of these laws upon his kind define the being of mankind; they are the laws of his genus. Political law cannot long stand in opposition to the nature of the genus man. It can successfully enforce minor regulations about the marriage relation, methods of producing and distributing food and other goods, but cannot countermand the basic drives which require satisfaction. The gross weight of numbers will eventually force laws to operate within the range of human nature in the aggregate. All men recognize these laws of their genus, whether they are reflected in the legal system or not. As Thoreau put it, "Man recognizes laws little enforced, and he condescends to obey them. In the moment that he feels his superiority to them as compulsatory, he, as it were, courteously re-enacts them but to obey them." This also illustrates well another of Thoreau's premises: in the individual man, as opposed to the genus of man, the primacy of personality is fundamental to his nature. Consciousness is a function of the individual, it is an attribute not possessed actually or potentially by any genus, species, grouping or association. These may share sympathy or a common instinct, but only individuals have the capacity for intuition. Intuition is the facility by which a man
develops consciousness and an understanding of the moral elements in the categorical forms, such as justice.

As was noted earlier, Thoreau held the position that the positive law has as its potential end the embodiment of categorical justice, and the recognition of one's obligations to transcendent ethical forms is the basis of obligation. The relation between the physical and the moral laws of nature, and the superior ability of some individuals to apprehend the relation have been noted. This gives two levels of quality to positive law: first, for those of superior moral acuity, the law should be the physical reflection of what he recognizes as the dictate of nature and which he enacts by his acquiescence; second, the law should be a system of mandates for the guidance of those of lesser consciousness.

He articulated this view in a letter to a friend:

The laws of earth are for the feet, or inferior man; the laws of heaven are for the head, or superior man; the latter are the former sublimed and expanded, even as radii from the earth's centre go on diverging into space. Happy is the man who observes the heavenly and the terrestrial in just proportion; whose every faculty, from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head, obeys the law of its level; who neither stoops nor goes on tiptoe, but lives a balanced life, acceptable to nature and to God.

It must be pointed out that Thoreau was speaking of how law ought to be in a just state. In such a situation, the congruence of the actual and ideal would pose no conflict between man and law. Even those who might transgress would have no reason to complain, for there would be
a faint recognition that justice was being done. Thoreau had a notion similar to the General Will of Rousseau, and closely reminiscent of Kant and Hegel, that "any man knows when he is justified, and all the wits in the world cannot enlighten him on that point. The murderer always knows that he is justly punished.... Is it for you to... not accept the convictions that are forced upon you and which ever pass your understanding?" In recognizing the obligation imposed by the right kind of positive law, an individual in effect re-enacts the law for himself by recognizing it as binding under the law of his nature.

The primacy of personality defined in an individualistic manner is the basis of the principle of voluntarism which is so prominent in Thoreau's thinking. The voluntary principle plays the same role for Thoreau that is termed "will" in some philosophic systems. Although a man cannot negate it, he can control the degree to which the law of his genus operates on the law of his specific nature. He can regulate the indulgence which he allows his need for food and warmth. He can direct or contain his sexual urge. He is capable of reducing the laws of his genus to the very essence of their demands. In fact, a properly cultivated consciousness in such an individual makes it incumbent upon him to curb the satisfaction of the appetites natural to his kind precisely at those junctures where they begin to impinge upon the nature of his own peculiar individuality. In following his subjective nature, man may
safely trust his consciousness—provided that he takes the trouble to
develop it by cultivation and nurture. Every obligation, political and
otherwise, is rooted in the consciousness of man. Consciousness relies
upon intuition rather than the right reason of older natural law tradition.

Thoreau argues further that when a convention, whether social or
of a legal character, is in harmony with a man's generic nature and with
the intimations of his consciousness, he scarcely realizes his conform-
ity. If a convention contradicts neither one nor the other, it can be
regarded with neutrality, and one loses nothing by conformity, but
might gain something. Conventions which give a disproportionate con-
venience or advantage to the group over the individual disturbed
Thoreau's Greek sense of proportion. Often conventions are in direct
opposition to natural law and to individual intuition, and so are repug-
nant.

Social conventions can be disregarded with impunity when it seems
more agreeable to do so. In Thoreau's view, social convention is ordi-
narily for the convenience of the generality, and the individual is usually
better served by ignoring it in most cases. Thoreau advised men to
consider themselves at liberty in such conventional matters: "The man
who takes the liberty to live is superior to all the laws, by virtue of his
relation to the lawmaker." Indeed, he seemed at times to include
government itself in the category of mere social convention: "This
American Government, —what is it but a tradition . . . endeavoring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity...."129

The category of convention which assumes legality owing to the sanction of force presents the same range of possible effects upon the individual, but obviously requires a different tactic. The best positive laws are in harmony with the highest law of nature and serve both the general and individual ends of man. To them attaches an absolute obligation confirmed by the dictates of consciousness. These are laws as Thoreau believed all positive law ought to be. There are other laws which are neutral; one obeys because it does no violence to consciousness to obey and would attract force against person or property if disregarded. There is no reason not to comply.130 But Thoreau disliked the number of regulations which government had made in this category, for each one deprived that much discretion from individual exercise. He believed that the fewer laws the better, particularly if they bear no relation to categorical justice, as morally neutral regulations do not. While resenting the impingement on discretion, obedience in trivial matters was nothing Thoreau quarreled with seriously. Under the best conditions, neutral matters would not be incorporated in the law. These matters are "comparatively something so superficial and inhuman," that practically speaking they are of no concern to a private man."131 Most laws are the sound and fury of cackling law-makers "who do not so much as lay an honest egg, but wear their breasts bare upon an egg
Their great game is the game of straws, or rather that
universal aboriginal game of the platter, at which the Indians cried
hub-bub". The real objection that Thoreau raises to superficial
and inconsequential legal requirements was stated in his remarks
upon the English government of Canada: An Englishman "has to pay
his respects to so many things that before he knows it he has paid all
he is worth." As far as governmental regulation is concerned,

In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judg­
ment of the moral sense, but [the mass of men] put them­selves on a level with wood and earth and stone; and wooden
men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose
as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or
a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth as horses
and dogs. Yet such as these men are esteemed good citizens.

It is useful for a citizen to arrange his life so that he has the least
possible stake in the law, that is, so that as much of the law as possible
is inconsequential to him. Recognizing that the bulk of the law concerns
itself with protecting what it defines as "goods," most people enmesh
themselves in whole categories of legal regulations by which the state
achieves control over their lives through a tacit threat to withdraw pro­
tection from their enjoyment of the "goods" of life. Thoreau said of
such persons, "the long and the short of the matter is, that they cannot
spare the protection of the existing government, and they dread the con­
sequences to their property and families of disobedience to it." Because of the love of things and property, men allow laws regulating
morally neutral matters, such as the regulation of property affairs, to assume a position of coercive influence over morally significant issues. The only way around this characteristic threat of government in all its legal proclamations which of themselves might be ethically neutral, is to avoid entrapment by the economic system.

For my own part, I should not like to think that I ever rely on the protection of the State. But, if I deny the authority of the State when it presents its tax-bill, it will soon take and waste all my property, and so harass me and my children without end. This makes it impossible for a man to live honestly, and at the same time comfortably, in outward respects. It will not be worth the while to accumulate property; that would be sure to go again. You must hire or squat somewhere, and raise but a small crop, and eat that soon. You must live within yourself, and depend upon yourself always tucked up and ready for a start, and not have many affairs.¹³⁶

Thoreau also believed that law as a governmental institution is inherently conservative of existing economic relationships, and he found this to be a major reason for the infrequent coincidence of transcendent and human law. The revelations of justice which are intuitively apprehended are unlikely to square with the economic interests protected by law. In the same way, the legal system is conservative of the existing social relationships between men. Thoreau found this aspect of law particularly objectionable. It obscures the individual character of a man by classifying him according to conventional relations which may be unrelated to his nature or situation. The law becomes an artificial standard by which to judge a man rather than allowing his character to
establish its own reputation.

Consider . . . how rarely men treat each other for what in their true and naked characters they are; how we use and tolerate pretension; how the judge is clothed with dignity which does not belong to him, and the criminal, perchance, with shame or impudence which no more belong to him.

The most obvious example in Thoreau's time was slavery. The idea of slavery was repugnant to him because it was the extreme application of a tendency inherent in law itself to define relations between men on bases other than the character of the individual. The law holding men in slavery is different only in degree from the law which subjects men to military conscription, or which taxes his labor under threat of imprisonment. The physical burden of the law is no greater than the moral burden of law, for it often puts men and their labor to uses which are repugnant to their moral consciousness. The very idea of justice is incompatible with such effects of law. Statutes having such ill effects are not just, and therefore are not valid law in Thoreau's view. Yet law does have these effects, sometimes in gross and obvious form, at other times subtly coercing a man to accept treatment as if he were an inanimate object without the capacity for moral judgement. It is the coercion against moral judgement that makes law a chain around mankind's ankle rather than the liberating embodiment of justice. Slavery "exists wherever men are bought and sold, wherever a man allows himself to be made a mere thing or a tool, and surrenders his inalien-
able rights of reason and conscience. With fine irony he pointed out that the men most devoted to human law are those most enslaved. Thoreau declared he had "never met with, or heard of, a judge who was not a slave of this kind, and so the finest and most unfailing weapon of injustice." It was this point about the morally regressive effect of the legal system that Thoreau was making in his aphorisms: "Obey the law which reveals, and not the law revealed." "He who lives according to the highest law is in one sense lawless." "The man for whom law exists—the man of forms, the conservative—is a time man."

An error is made in assuming that law achieves its legitimacy or obligation from any political prescriptions. Thoreau did not see law as the establishment of a common system of expectations, a standard for the definition of property and social relations, the articulated will of the people, or the balancing of competing interests according to a utilitarian set of values. He recognized that there are political systems which base jurisprudential theory on such grounds, but he denied any but two forces of compulsion to have real substance. The first, and over-riding source of obedience arises from the moral conviction of an individual conscience to behave according to transcendent standards of justice. "It is not desirable," he wrote, "to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right
to assume is to do at anytime what I think is right." The second—which is might rather than right—is the force and violence with which a government gives effect to its law. In this Thoreau would have agreed with the positivism of Austin and with the observation of Chairman Mao that political power flows from the barrel of a gun. However, this is the obligation of force and compulsion rather than of voluntary submission and is not morally binding. The forms and procedures by which governments attempt to confer legitimacy on law are superfluous. Law has obligatory force for an individual because he is convinced of its rectitude or because he is forced to conform by threat of violence against his person, property, or psyche. To mistake form for substance is the common failing of politicians, lawyers, judges, and most citizens.

Thoreau's metaphor holds for all governments and legal systems:

Justice is sweet and musical to hear; but injustice is harsh and discordant. The judge still sits grinding at his organ, but it yields no music, and we hear only the sound of the handle. He believes that all the music resides in the handle, and the crowd toss him their coppers just the same as before.  

The actual form of law enacted by most governments is itself an empty vessel. It considers only exteriors, things and objects, foolishly treating men as if they "were mere flesh and blood and bones, to be locked up."  

Thus the State never intentionally confronts a man's sense, intellectual or moral, but only his body, his senses. It is not armed with superior wit or honesty, but with superior physical strength.
Strength without spirit is liable to gross moral error. It preserves
the peace of the community by deeds of violence every day as wit­nessed by the constabulary, the penal system, the standing army, the
whole criminal code, for relatively petty protections while ignoring
some gross injustices.\textsuperscript{147} It has the limitations that attend a partial
apprehension of reality without recognition of the moral categories
which alone makes it worthwhile to abide by law. "When a government
puts forth its strength on the side of injustice, ... what a merely brute,
or worse than brute, force it is seen to be! A demoniacal force!"\textsuperscript{148}
When the effect of law contradicts the demands of justice (which he left
undefined), the government will not long survive the defect. It sets up
counter-forces that eventually dissolve the government and negate the
offending laws. Echoing idealists from Kant to Hegel to Green, Thoreau
wrote:

\begin{quote}
Any man knows when he is justified, and all the wits in
the world cannot enlighten him on that point. The murderer
always knows that he is justly punished; but when a govern­ment takes the life of a man without the consent of his con­science, it is an audacious government, and is taking a step­toward its dissolution.\textsuperscript{149}
\end{quote}

Thoreau's major moral objection to positive law, and the fatal flaw
in the positive law theory is "that while the law holds fast the thief and
murderer, it lets itself go loose."\textsuperscript{150} That is, the law does not bind
itself by the requirements of justice, and is therefore capricious and
limited only by the amount of force it can bring to bear in enforcing its
proclamations. Not only must it rely upon force to undergird its rules, it has no guide for policy development except the demands of expediency. There is no moral ground for policy development concerning law or its application in the absence of justice as a standard. The lack of a definition of justice weakens Thoreau's criticism.

In previous sections it has been pointed out that apprehension of moral categories such as justice is a capacity of individuals, never of corporations or organizations. This partially accounts for Thoreau's lack of interest in mechanics or forms of government. Regardless of forms and technicalities of legislation, Thoreau never deviated from his contention that "a straight stick makes the best cane, and an upright man the best ruler." An upright man, whether ruler or citizen, acts justly and if law is not in agreement it will bring itself to oppose him with force. It is not necessary to oppose unjust law. It will soon enough oppose the upright man, "it being the desperate party." The foregoing observations have been directed toward domestic law. The law among nations has the same basis as positive law declared by a sovereign. Thoreau views the violence that government visits upon its citizens in the name of law as no different in quality from that violence which nations bring to bear against one another, assuming in both cases that justice is not the standard of positive law.
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That is very true which Raleigh says about the equal necessity of war and law,—that "the necessity of war, which among human actions is most lawless, hath some kind of affinity and near resemblance with the necessity of law," for both rest equally on force as their basis, and war is the only resource of law, either on a smaller or larger scale,—its authority is asserted. In war, in some sense, lies the very genius of law. It is law creative and active; it is the first principle of the law. What is human warfare but just this,—an effort to make the laws of God and nature take sides with one party. Men make an arbitrary code, and, because it is not right, they try to make it prevail by might. The moral law does not want any champion. Its asserters do not go to war. It was never infringed with impunity. It is inconsistent to decry war and maintain war, for if there were no need of war there would be no need of law.\textsuperscript{153}

Thoreau goes so far as to suggest that war is a natural outgrowth of law, where law is given authority over the behavior of all subjects without a superior appeal to individual conscience. The law deprives men of their humanity in requiring blind obedience, and deprives the world of peace by responding to the gains of expediency rather than principles of justice.

A common and natural result of an undue respect for law is, that you may see a file of soldiers, colonel, captain, corporal, privates, powder-monkeys, and all, marching in admirable order over hill and dale to the wars, against their wills, aye, against their common sense and consciences, which makes it very steep marching indeed.... Now, what are they? Men at all? ... behold a marine, such a man as an American government can make with its black arts,—a mere shadow and reminiscence of humanity....\textsuperscript{154}

The motivation for most international war has nothing to do with matters of principle, but of competing interests in markets or prestige.

Thoreau's comments about the way in which Britain governed Canada
illustrates that in the absence of principle, a government must rely upon force of army and ignorance to maintain its law. It must resort to conscription and mercenaries. If, on the other hand, Britain acted from a sense of justice and upon moral principles all men of good will "could put their hands and heads and hearts and all together" to achieve cooperation and harmony that "would be the very end and success for which government now exists in vain." The interest of justice is never inconsistent with the interests of individuals of good will, and if nations were to define their interests in the same terms, a basis for true international law would exist, reducing the incidence of all the evils which lead to war.

This does not imply that Thoreau was a pacifist. Quite the contrary. The fact that all nations are not guided by justice does not constitute a valid argument for any single nation to forsake justice as its standard. A just nation standing amid rapacious and ambitious neighbors will find war unavoidable. As he wrote about the position of the North ten years before the outbreak of the War Between the States,

But I would have done with comparing ourselves with our ancestors, for on the whole I believe that even they, if somewhat braver and less corrupt than we, were not men of so much principle and generosity as to go to war in behalf of another race in their midst. I do not believe that the North will soon come to blows with the South on this question. It would be too bright a page to be written in the history of the race at present.
Further, he wrote to his English friend, Cholmondeley, approvingly of the Crimean War, "I have no sympathy with the idleness that would contrast this fighting with the teachings of the pulpit, for perchance more true virtue is being practiced at Sevastopol than in many years of peace." 157

Obviously the uses of violence play a complicated role in Thoreau's theory of law. At this point, it is unnecessary to say more than violence is at the root of positive law in both domestic and international applications. Further, violence is performed by individuals, not by government or by units of government, for it is always a man who pulls the trigger or slams a jail door.

The last point leads to Thoreau's ultimate criticism of the legal apparatus, and to his views on disobedience, resistance, and revolution. The American legal apparatus he found to be defective in all points. The legislature he believed was wrong in its commitment to the majoritarian principle, both in their election and in the enactment of legislation. Thoreau's anti-democratic bias was in fact, most strongly stated in his arguments against the majoritarian principle. Public opinion is not the most sensitive instrument for apprehending the demands of justice. It lends itself to compromising principles of right for passing advantages, appealing to the baser motives of mankind and attracting the least principled men to political careers. His essay on "Slavery in Massachusetts"
presents strong arguments against the majoritarian procedures in choosing government candidates and in passing legislation. Such procedures foster policy based upon expedient compromise, leaving aside moral probity as irrelevant to the solution of political problems. Majority rule assumes that one man's opinion is as good as another's. Thoreau believed that the quality of opinion is more important than the number of persons who hold it, and that persons fortunate enough to live in the country entertained a higher quality of opinion than those who are confined to the city. He was very much in the tradition of the Jeffersonian agrarians, and would have had strong reservations about recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions which require equal weighting of votes. Being closer to nature, being less crowded and able to consider men as individuals rather than en masse, the rural dweller has a less distorted apprehension of moral values.

I am more and more convinced that, with reference to any public question, it is more important to know what the country thinks of it than what the city thinks. The city does not think much. On any moral question, I would rather have the opinion of Boxboro than of Boston and New York put together.... When, in some obscure country town, the farmers come together to a special town meeting, to express their opinion on some subject which is vexing the land, that, I think, is the true Congress, and the most respectable one that is ever assembled in the United States.

It is evident that there are ... two parties ... becoming more and more distinct, the party of the city, and the party of the country. I know that the country is mean enough, but I am glad to believe that there is a slight difference in her favor.
His political essays object to a constitutional framework for government, because it places an artificial limit to the application of moral principles. Constitutions by their nature are forms without substance. The intuition by which transcendental forms reveal themselves are irreducible to written limitations as in the American example or limits of tradition as in the British example. The highest law is limitless, constantly unfolding itself to individual consciences. The whole point is encapsulated in one of the most widely quoted of Thoreau's pronouncements: "... any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one already." Thoreau's advice was to "obey that eternal and only just Constitution which [God], and not any Jefferson or Adams, has written in your being." Richard Drinnon's phrase, "Politics of the Upright Man" might be employed better to describe the moral absolutism against which he measured the U.S. legislative system and found it wanting.

Much the same sort of criticism is laid to the executive function. His contempt for the President of the United States was such that he wrote that he regretted ever having heard of "Old Abe" at the time when Lincoln was pursuing a course of war one might have assumed to coincide with Thoreau's moral vision. He criticized the governor of Massachusetts for failure to execute the moral law rather than the legal requirements in the case of the Fugitive Slave Law. "I had thought..."
that it was his business, as a Governor, to see that the laws of the State were executed; while, as a man, he took care that he did not, by so doing break the laws of humanity....

Thoreau saves his most contemptuous scorn for the judiciary and the lawyers who operate its mechanics. Of all the professions, the judiciary and lawyers are most blind to moral issues. Their training and habit of mind leads them to have more concern for precedent than for principle; they are committed to form and procedure rather than to justice and ethical vitality. The interpretation of law, in Thoreau's opinion requires something more than reading the statutes and researching the precedents. He believed that it requires one who interprets the law to do so by no standard other than justice. This is a requirement lawyers are unable to meet because of the nature of their profession.

"The lawyer's truth is not Truth, but a consistency of consistent expediency. Truth is always in harmony with herself, and is not concerned chiefly to reveal the justice that may consist with wrong-doing," he wrote. The mechanics of law—evidence, procedure, jury trial—Thoreau thought was a ruse and a humbug, of no benefit but to lawyers. It operates in such a way as to force the interpretation of law by irrelevant standards.

The judges and lawyers, —simply as such, I mean,—and all men of expediency, try [cases at law] by a very low and incompetent standard. They consider, not whether [a law] is right, but whether it is what they call constitutional.
Is virtue constitutional, or vice? Is equity constitutional, or iniquity? In important moral and vital questions, like this, it is just as impertinent to ask whether a law is constitutional or not, as to ask whether it is profitable or not. They persist in being the servants of the worst of men, and not the servants of humanity.\textsuperscript{166}

Thoreau would have preferred that the law be so perfectly drawn as to preclude the need for a judicial function. The Old Testament prophets are the closest model of proper judicial function that come quickly to mind in reading Thoreau's denunciation of the human judiciary. One has the suspicion, on the other hand, that Thoreau would have welcomed a judicial activist who was willing to interpret the laws according to his preferences. A court of the kind some feel the Warren Court to have been might have been spared castigation. The good judge in Thoreau's view, "is not he who merely pronounces the verdict of the law, but he, whoever he may be, who, from a love of truth, and unprejudiced by any custom or enactment of men, utters a true opinion..."\textsuperscript{167}

In a sense, the good judge is free of the law as written, and is bound by truth. "Whoever can discern the truth has received his commission from a higher source than the chiefest justice in the world who can discern only law."\textsuperscript{168} To some this might seem to beg Pilate's question,\textsuperscript{169} but Thoreau was a confident individualist of Puritan instincts who would not have been uncomfortable in accepting responsibility for answering the question in general and in particular instances.

Transcendental optimism combined with a pragmatic sense of
cause and effect, led Thoreau to hope for a future time when law
would be based on justice, and government would have no employment
but to establish justice and make life more valuable. He foresaw a
time when dealing with disputes through lawyers will be as obsolete
as duelling or direct combat. The law was not so great an improve­
ment over private enforcement of each against all as some had sup­
posed, for at least in a privately settled dispute one of the parties
could expect to gain. The law often operates to the advantage of none
but the lawyers as in the story Thoreau recorded in his Journal about
"two millers who owned mills on the same stream [who] went to law
about a dam, and at the end of the lawsuit one lawyer owned one mill
and the other the other." The natural tendency toward a right state
of affairs in which Transcendentalists, including Thoreau, believed would
not allow such eccentric effects to continue forever. Balance and har­
mony, even in the relations between man, will ultimately overcome the
injustices contained in the positive law. The government which does not
embody justice in its laws brings about its own dissolution. An example
of this historical law is the Fugitive Slave Law. Justice will not be
denied in Transcendental doctrine; those persons who perceive justice
will cast the weight of their influence behind its fulfillment. Speaking of
the Fugitive Slave Law, Thoreau noted the indominable force of justice
which yields neither to the dictates of law nor to the demands of the mob:
Recent events [the capture and return of a slave who had sought refuge in Massachusetts] will be valuable as a criticism on the administration of justice in our midst, or rather, as showing what are the true resources of justice in any community. It has come to this, that the friends of liberty, the friends of the slave, have shuddered when they have understood that his fate was to be left to the legal tribunals of the country to be decided. Free men have no faith that justice will be awarded in such a case. The judge may decide this way or that; it is a kind of accident, at best. It is evident that he is not a competent authority in so important a case. It is no time, then, to be judging according to its precedents, but to establish a precedent for the future. In their vote you would get something of value, at least, however small, but in the other case, only the trammeled judgement of an individual, of no significance, be it which way it might.

This should not be read as a testament of faith in democratic processes, for Thoreau was never willing to trust the resolution of a moral question to a vote of the people any more than to accept the moral validity of a legislative or judicial pronouncement. Thoreau was indicating merely that among the people there is a number, however small, of individuals who perceive where justice lies and their expression is of value to the cause of truth. The judge, being a captive of the institutional law is unlikely to go beyond the technicalities and precedents of a case to the essential question of truth. This number of persons who perceive justice are the lovers of law, and it is they "who observe the law when the government breaks it." The fact that men have become bad citizens in order to observe good law is an inconsistency that will eventually bring the government to collapse. In the same essay he
remarked that when men are forced to go behind the law to enact justice
it is fatal to the courts. It is also fatal to government.

Suppose that there is a private company in Massachusetts that
out of its own purse and magnanimity saves all the fugitive
slaves that run to us, and protects our colored fellow-citizens,
and leaves the other work to the government, so-called. Is not
that government fast losing its occupation and becoming con-
temptible to mankind? If private men are obliged to perform
the offices of government, to protect the weak and dispense
justice, then the government becomes only a hired man, or
clerk, to perform menial or indifferent services. Of course,
that is but the shadow of a government, whose existence
necessitates a Vigilance Committee. 174

If historical tendencies will ultimately bring down an unjust
government, there still remains a problem for those persons in the
here and now who are victims of injustice. Nor is historical inevitabi-
licity a solution for the person of moral acuity whose conscience is being
forced under pressure of law. The solutions to the problems of the
victim and of the threatened conscience lie in Thoreau views on dis-
obedience, resistance, and revolution.

The situation of the victim or the threatened conscience are indi-
vidual problems, calling for individual solutions. He devoted little
attention to the plight of the victim, feeling that one who is subject to
physical force is also under a strain of moral conscience as well.
When the conscience is convinced that punishment is warranted by the
demands of justice, an individual cannot be considered a victim unless
he has settled the matter with himself. If a man has cleared his con-
science, then the law has no valid claim against him even though he goes unpunished. The instinct of self-preservation is a moral impulse which is only compromised by the individual accepting the consequences of miscreancy as in the ethics of Rousseau and Kant. The conscience and its relation to justice as a moral category determined whether one is victimized by law. If one consents to be a victim, it is a moral defect; one has an obligation to keep his conscience clear, which one cannot do if he allows himself to be victimized without resisting. He believed this to be true of resistance to governments and their laws as well as resistance of individuals or other groups of persons. After pointing out how he and others who shared his opinions about supporting slavery through taxation were being victimized he plainly stated, "If we would save our lives, we must fight for them." One who acquiesces to being victimized has compromised his conscience, and is no longer on the side of justice. Thoreau did not feel it necessary to waste words on men unwilling to assert their manhood.

The question of the threatened conscience involves more subtle distinctions since it is not always obvious how one is connected directly with injustice that blackens his own character. In its clearest presentation, for instance the requirement of the Fugitive Slave Law that no citizen may impede the apprehension and return of a fugitive slave, it is easy to see the relation between the act and the decision of conscience.
Should the political authority proclaim a decree which would force a man to perform by commission or omission an act of violence against his subjective integrity, to violate in full knowledge the precepts of the higher law, a man is fully discharged of all obligations; he is fully justified in disregarding the statute and in working toward the destruction of its perpetrators. The individual is under the compulsion of his own consciousness of transcendent principles to employ any means, including violence, to halt the application of the statute and to arrest the capacity of the political agency to employ coercion in its enforcement.

It appears that Thoreau urged no greater counter-force against the government than is necessary to assert one's conscientious personality. The good man will live a good life, not seeking to oppose government as did Mirabeau the highwayman, but merely living his life according to his light without regard to the law. If a man encounters difficulty with the law under such circumstances, then the fault is with the law, and the initiative rests with the law, it being, as he said, the desperate party. He cautions, however, that one must be certain of his moral ground and that the issue touches his conscience directly. He insisted that "one cannot be too much on his guard in such a case, lest his action be biased by obstinacy or an undue regard for the opinion of man. Let him see that he does only what belongs to himself and to the hour."
It is easy to be misled by paying too much attention to injustices that do not directly touch one's own conscience. "It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous, wrong," he observed. For example, he questioned that the ostensible reason for the rebellion of the American colonies was a moral issue of critical magnitude. He compared it to a fight between red and black ants in *Walden*, and in "Civil Disobedience" wrote of the American Revolution:

> If one were to tell me that this was a bad government because it taxed certain foreign commodities brought to its ports, it is most probable that I should not make an ado about it, for I can do without them. All machines have their friction; and possibly this does enough good to counterbalance the evil. At any rate, it is a great evil to make a stir about it. 178

The subtle connection between a man and an evil that touches him has less to do with the existence of the injustice than with the support one lends to the continuation of the injustice. The existence of evil is taken for granted; a man's duty is not to ferret it out wherever it manifests itself and do battle, but to "wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support." 179 But in ignoring oppression and evil, a man has an obligation to be certain that he interferes with no other person's self-sufficiency. The moral imperative exists between individuals, not between an individual and an abstract evil. "If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man's
shoulders. I must get off him first, that he may pursue his contemplations too. 180 The practical effect of accepting allegiance to an oppressive government is to participate in oppression oneself. Payment of taxation, service as a soldier or office holder, entertainment of feelings of patriotism toward such a government makes one a participant in a moral sense. "Those who, while they disapprove of the character and measures of a government, yield to it their allegiance and support are undoubtedly its most conscientious supporters, and so frequently the most serious obstacles of reform." 181 In the logical argument, Thoreau's emphasis is on the word, conscientious. If the requirements demanded of a citizen have the effect of making him the agent of injustice to another, Thoreau would require the citizen to withdraw from the polity and disobey the civil government. The civil disobedient becomes "a counter-friction" by refusing to lend himself to the wrong, and by placing the moral weight of his influence against the operation of the wrongful law.

Once confronted by the law on an issue of conscience, an individual has no choice but to obey the higher obligation. In some instances, perhaps the majority of such cases, civil disobedience does not have serious consequences because the state does not find it worth the while to force compliance or apply punishment. The law is always enforced by men, and neighbors are prone to forgive eccentricities which they deem essen-
tially harmless. By Thoreau's account, he had paid no poll tax for several years before the local constable, Sam Staples, confronted him with a demand for payment, and being refused, led him off to jail. Thoreau shifts the moral burden of proof in such instances to the enforcer, "my civil neighbor, the tax-gatherer... for it is, after all, with men and not with parchment that I quarrel..." The force of example, person to person, Thoreau believed, brings a moral crisis in the conscience of the state's representative.

How shall he ever know well what he is and does as an officer of the government, or as a man, until he is obliged to consider whether he shall treat me, his neighbor, for whom he has respect, as a neighbor and well-disposed man, or as a maniac and disturber of the peace, and see if he can get over this obstruction to his neighborliness without a ruder and more impetuous thought or speech corresponding with his action.

The force of superior moral example Thoreau believed to be sufficient to convince other right-thinking persons, and that the obligation of conscience would prevent those persons from cooperating with the government in the enforcement of unjust laws. This conviction would lead men to resign offices of enforcement, would bring taxpayers to withhold their monetary support of injustice, and all citizens to withhold the psychological attachment upon which patriotism relies. Thoreau did not consider such civil disobedience to be merely a passive refusal to cooperate, but an affirmative act of moral will that amounts to spiritual resistance. Thoreau expected that the perception of right would lead
to action from principle and the performance of right in the face of wrong is essentially revolutionary. He recognized that the state could not tolerate any deliberate and practical denial of its authority and still maintain its existence as a government. When confronted by a choice between enforcing an unjust law and acknowledging justice, Thoreau stated that it is the obligation of the constable to resign, the judge to resign, the soldier to walk away from his weapon, the taxpayer and taxgatherer to drop their hands and let the coins fall. "When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished." 186

This technique amounts to the equivalent of a general strike of the righteous. Thoreau, ever distrustful of the moral perceptions of the great majority of men, did not expect that all office holders and all citizens would be able or even willing to perceive the moral imperative or to accept the obligation dictated by justice. He expected the government and its loyal supporters to fight back, and he expected that such persons would be supported by the majority. A general strike of the minority,—even one heroic individual—would however, add a drag to the operation of the state, and if the civil disobedience were complete and supported by a considerable minority, it has the power to bring the government to an absolute halt. "A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority... but it is irresistible when it clogs by its
whole weight." 187

The mechanics of reform within the governmental system Thoreau considered inadequate for immediate rectification of its defects. Yet, justice should not be delayed.

As for adopting the ways which the State has provided for remedying the evil, I know not of such ways. They take too much time, and a man's life will be gone. I have other affairs to attend to. I came into this world, not chiefly to make this a good place to live in, but to live in it, be it good or bad. A man has not everything to do, but something; and because he cannot do everything, it is not necessary that he should do something wrong. 188

He was critical even of referenda, not only because the majority is not a reliable indicator of right, but because voting does not wholly involve the conscience of the protestant. It is not an action for right, but only an expression of sentiment made in privacy without the commitment on one's total influence. Voting one's conviction without subsequent action has no moral significance because "the character of the voters is not staked." 189 Thoreau preached action, direct action, rather than giving a proxy to political representatives or by manipulating the mechanics of institutions.

Even voting for the right is doing nothing for it. It is only expressing to men feebly your desire that it should prevail. A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance, nor wish it to prevail through the power of the majority. There is but little virtue in the action of masses of men. 190

The implication of violence is obvious, but during the period when "Civil Disobedience," "Slavery in Massachusetts," and "Life Without
Principle" were written, Thoreau did not emphasize the violent aspect of civil disobedience and resistance. He was concerned more with violence against conscience than violence against the perpetrators of the oppression, although he was well aware that violence is a natural consequence of opposing the government.

But even suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death.\(^{191}\)

Compared to his position after the John Brown incident, there is an air of sweet reasonableness about both "Slavery in Massachusetts" and "Civil Disobedience." Speaking of his refusal to pay taxes, he pointed out that he paid the highway tax because he wished to be a good neighbor, and that he wished to make such advantageous use of the state as he could. He averred that he sought every excuse possible to conform to the laws of the land, and explained his action as an effort to convince people to abandon error and to follow a good example. He thought of it as a method of reasoning with his neighbors to correct the defects in their government.

Again, I sometimes say to myself, When many millions of men, without heat, without ill will, without personal feeling of any kind, demand of you a few shillings only, ... why expose yourself to this overwhelming brute force? ... But just in proportion as I regard this as not wholly a brute force, but partly a human force, and consider that I have relations to those millions as to so many millions of men, and not of mere brute or inanimate things, I see that appeal is possible, first and instantaneously, from them to the Maker of them, and, secondly, from them to themselves.\(^{192}\)
It will also be clear to one who reads Thoreau from a political standpoint that although an idealist, he was also a masterful propagandist who knew how to turn a phrase for maximum political effect. He ran through a checklist of standard revolutionary responses; passive resistance, non-payment of taxes, mass resignation of offices, repudiation of majoritarian rule, the general strike by extension of the principle of non-payment of taxes and resignation of offices, and violence, although he was somewhat vague on the last technique.

For reasons not explained by Thoreau's biographers, John Brown's adventures in Kansas and Virginia galvanized Thoreau from an eccentric malcontent with a formless program of civil disobedience into a flaming revolutionary unconcerned with means, fixed on ends, and totally committed to violence. The tone of the Journal changes completely after Brown and his views take on a sharp focus that had been previously lacking. The public essays on John Brown became celebrations of holy war and of purification through violence. He had always felt a sympathy with war, romanticized about the soldier as the practical idealist, and emphasized the role of the hero in history and moral mythology. In the person of John Brown these disorganized musings suddenly were drawn together as Thoreau took the last step in his development toward moral and political absolutism.

It must be apparent that Thoreau's civil disobedience and justifi-
cations of resistance to the law occurred on at least two separate levels. The first was the passive resistance which he practiced in refusing to pay his poll tax and which he justified in "Civil Disobedience" and "Slavery in Massachusetts." The other was the active attack upon the positive law which he undertook in harboring at least one fugitive slave, assisting Brown's accomplice, Francis Jackson Merriam, to escape capture, and which he justified in principle in "A Plea for Captain John Brown" and "The Last Days of John Brown."

In passive resistance, Thoreau was consistent with the Transcendental ethics which he had maintained throughout the controversy among the abolitionist factions, holding with Nathaniel P. Rogers that individual rectitude and personal example were the proper approach rather than the organized assault upon slavery as a legal institution urged by William Lloyd Garrison and his associates. In passive resistance such as non-payment of taxes, the moral burden of proof is placed upon the government that chooses to use force against the individual. The coercion is perpetrated by the government and it must bear the moral consequences. Such a position begs the question of a citizen's obligation toward the political community, and it fails to recognize that in forcing a government to defend its laws, the resistor has in effect taken the offensive. Still, the overt use of force is left to the government if it chooses to accept the option.
In performing an illegal act, as opposed to passive resistance—the resistor has taken the initiative and in doing violence to the law assumes himself the burden of moral proof. The difference in ethical perspective is considerable, and it is not consistent with Thoreau's earlier views. It presumes a moral infallibility which is not itself inconsistent with Thoreau's egoism. However, it requires that the resistor be placed in the position of employing coercion in the name of an absolute good, which in religious terms is God. Critics of this position have pointed out the "blasphemy" of presuming to speak for God rather than seeking to please Him, admitting the possibility of one's own error. Acting for God is capable only of subjective validation. Subjective self-validation by the resistor himself offers no external method of validation, and without a means of ascertaining the rectitude of the disobedient action in terms of the affected community, the moral significance of the action for the legal system is lost. It is difficult to distinguish self-certified disobedience from nihilism, for there is no apparent moral barrier to random violence and terror such as some hold John Brown to have been guilty. More recent examples could be drawn from the activities of the Weathermen, from Arab actions against Israelis, or the dispute between Northern Irish Catholics and their government. The fact that Thoreau failed to define justice, and held a belief in the incommunicability of moral intuitions reinforce this potentially nihilistic application of his argument.
In choosing to use government's own tool of force and violence, Thoreau deprived himself of the moral ground upon which he criticized government most severely. Coercion against the defenders of the law is obvious in the use of violence to resist legal requirements. As noted earlier in passing, it is equally true that passive resistance exerts a form of force. Thoreau was quick to recognize the indirectly coercive tactics of government implicit in the threat of punishment and the even less obvious manipulations of public opinion and of the economic system. He apparently did not recognize, or chose not to see, the coercive effect of passive resistance.

In the turbulence of violence, it appears that Thoreau expected that the man of genius whose consciousness most closely approximates the absolute moral principle sets the standard by which lesser consciousnesses must measure themselves. The man of genius provides an inspiration in the consciousness of others from which arises an obligation toward the principle illustrated by the example. The sheer force of a moral principle embodied in the action of a righteous man is irresistible to a cultivated conscience. It is a mistake to attribute to Thoreau a genteel pacifism. He was never committed to peaceful persuasion until a majority becomes convinced. The basis of law and the government is power; Thoreau held that the same power that can be used to support injustice and oppression should become the weapon of justice
and moral liberation. The force of example is irresistible only if it leads to action from principle. Exposed to a demonstration of truth individuals of good will are compelled to recognize its validity, and a tide of revealed truth will swell to sweep away mere legalities. But there are persons of dull moral perceptions who will not recognize it, and their influence is of no weight. Their personalities are devoid of moral content. The John Brown incident made Thoreau finally take a stand on the existence of evil. There are persons who may recognize the good and true but who refuse to accept its obligation. These persons are evil. They are the objects against which violence is directed as a means of purification.

The hero naturally encounters the full fury of the coercive power of the state. The application of legal sanctions provides an opportunity for the moral principle to be highly visible and for its superiority to civil law to be all the more obvious. The most effective demonstration is martyrdom of the hero. There is an immediacy to the triumph of good over evil. The good will be, and its becoming commands the assistance of all who recognize it. The right must prevail, by violence if necessary. By the close of his life Thoreau had arrived at an absolutism as compelling as that of any idealist who ever equated the dicta of the state with the good.

Thoreau's early individualism was consistent with Kant's cate-
gorical imperative and its logical corollary that each man must be con-
sidered as an end in himself rather than as a means. During the early
years when A Week was written he considered evil as merely a negative
integer, hardly having a real existence. The emphasis was on the
positive values as having significance. In the green years he wrote:

One sees not but he had best let bad take care of itself, and
have to do only with what is above suspicion. If you light on
the least vestige of truth, and it is the weight of the whole
body still which stamps the faintest trace, on eternity will
not suffice to extol it, while no evil is so huge, but you
grudge to bestow on it a moment of hate. Truth never turns
to rebuke falsehood; her own straight-forwardness is the
severest correction. 194

Even as late as the essay on "Civil Disobedience" he was of the
opinion that "it is not a man's duty . . . to devote himself to the e radica-
tion of any, even the most enormous, wrong," but merely "to wash
his hands of it." 195 He was willing to bear with some injustice as part
of the necessary friction of the governmental machine. Thoreau dis-
claimed any responsibility for the successful working of society and
required only that one not contribute to social wrong. 196 This was
relatively passive, not requiring anything more than subjective with-
drawal and physical non-participation. He was unwilling to contemplate
governmental injustice because he was unwilling to accept the reality of
injustice. "If a man is thought-free, fancy-free, imagination-free, that
which is not never for a long time appearing to be to him, unwise rulers
or reformers cannot fatally interrupt him." 197
However, by the time the essay on "Slavery in Massachusetts" was written, he had moved from the passive mood toward a willingness to confront spiritual evil with physical force but still retained the Kantian respect for the inviolability of individual personhood. His objection to slavery rested on this very point, comparing involuntary servitude to grinding mankind into sausages. He closed "Slavery in Massachusetts" with a paraphrase of the categorical imperative:

So behave that the odor of your actions may enhance the general sweetness of the atmosphere, that when we behold or scent a flower, we may not be reminded how inconsistent your deeds are with it....

Further, he was still unconvinced of the objective existence of evil. "Slavery and servility have produced no sweet-scented flower annually... for they have no real life," he wrote, but are "merely a decaying and a death, offensive to all healthy nostrils. We do not complain that they live, but that they do not get buried." Even the metaphors of violence which he uses in the essay are not directed against individual men, but against the system. He alluded to "what match I would touch, what system endeavor to blow up." Even the familiar quotation, "my thoughts are murder to the State, and involuntarily go plotting against her" threatens no person but an institution. The tone of writing definitely is more menacing than in "Civil Disobedience," yet he had not abandoned the notion that justice as the end requires just means, and that each man is an end in himself.
It was after the attack on Harper's Ferry that Thoreau's ethical foundation took a radical shift. Why this particular event caused so profound an effect upon him has not been explained incontestably. Whereas he formerly had considered the individual human subjective consciousness the inviolable touchstone of moral theory, the logic of his defense of John Brown rested upon the necessity of all persons to conform to a single vision of truth. The central moral concern for Thoreau throughout his life prior to Harper's Ferry had been to insist upon the congruence of means and ends. The end was a self-sufficient man who had accepted the responsibility to "know thyself" and to select only the means that would harmonize with the end. The point of Walden, or "Life Without Principle," and of the morally reflective passages of the Journal had been that only the pure means lead to pure ends. As mankind always lives on the crest of time's wave, the morality of the moment—the process—was in effect an end of itself. No moral end, no moral life, was possible except the method be pure. After Harper's Ferry and the revelations about the Ossawatomie atrocities Thoreau reversed his position to defend Brown. The Journal plainly states:

I do not complain of any tactics that are effective of the good, whether one wields the quill or the sword, but I shall not think him mistaken who quickest succeeds to liberate the slave. I will judge of the tactics by the fruits.
After it had become known that Brown had committed gruesome murders and mutilations in Kansas as well as treason, insurrection, and murder at the U.S. Arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Thoreau insisted that if the motive be good, the means by which good is effected are irrelevant. Of Brown's actions, he wrote:

The same indignation that cleared the temple once will clear it again. The question is not about the weapon, but the spirit in which you use it. No man has appeared in America as yet who loved his fellow-man so well and treated him so tenderly....

Though you may not approve of his methods or his principles, cease to call names, to cry mad dog. The method is nothing; the spirit is all in all. It is the deed, the devotion, the soul of the man.

John Brown became *ipissima verba* for the hero in Thoreau's hierarchy of moral types, who revealed a new level of truth to lesser consciousnesses. "Though he were of late the vilest murderer, who has settled the matter with himself," Thoreau insisted that the heroic character of Brown rendered previous morality obsolete, making those who observe the old forms "criminal in comparison." After Brown's revelation Thoreau abandoned his Kantian concern for every individual. Of the victims of Black Jack and Ossowatomie, Brown said, "They had a perfect right to be hung," and Thoreau, who had signed a petition against capital punishment, wrote that it was "the simple truth." Earlier Thoreau had insisted that no one has to eradicate any evil unless he were interfered with personally or if he were contributing to the evil. After the advent of the hero, he maintained that a superior
man would not wait until he was personally interfered with or thwarted in some harmless business before he gives his life to the defeat of evil.\(^{208}\) Whereas he formerly had urged merely disengagement of individuals of conscience from Massachusetts for the mistake of not withdrawing from the Union with slave holding states, and written that it was only the good qualities of the slave holders that made them formidable, Thoreau withdrew their rights of individual integrity and inviolability.

It was [Hero Brown's] peculiar doctrine that a man has a perfect right to interfere by force with the slaveholder, in order to rescue the slave. I agree with him. They who are continually shocked by slavery have some right to be shocked by the violent death of the slaveholder, but no others. Such will be more shocked by his life than by his death. I shall not think him mistaken in his method who quickest succeeds to liberate the slave. I speak for the slave when I say that I prefer the philanthropy of Captain Brown to that which neither shoots me nor liberates me.\(^{209}\)

As Thoreauvian ethics substituted the moral absolutism of the hero superman for the individualism which the Transcendentalists attributed to Kant, violence assumed a variable quality. Thus, violence employed for a good end by the righteous hero is a good means; where employed as a tool by men of evil motivation it is morally reprehensible. If the end is pure, so are the means. He removed evil men from the protection and consideration afforded to individuals by virtue of their common humanity. The point was that such men were no longer human because they lacked the \textit{virtue} of humanity. Men who are the agents of
evil are not entitled to consideration as men for they have forfeited the integrity of their subjectivity, leaving moral men free to regard them as objects merely.

This view of ethics is a mark of Thoreau's mature theory. There had been a latent strain, becoming more evident as he wrote on political issues, which questioned the essential humanity of those whose behavior was contrary to what he considered the evident demands of right. Five years before writing "A Plea for Captain John Brown" in which he praised the virtue of murder and violent destruction of slaveholders and their defenders, Thoreau had pronounced anathema on the military personnel who enforced the Federal Fugitive Slave Law against Anthony Burns. He excluded them from the protections which in the Kantian system all men claim as members of the common race, for "in a high moral sense they were not men at all." He regarded them merely as bodies, —objects employed for evil purposes—and not men of moral sentience. In 1854 he had not been forced to a full examination of the implications of such a shift in perspective. Ironically one of the objections Thoreau raised in the Burns case was that Edward G. Loring, a representative of the U.S. government, was seriously considering whether Burns was a man or a slave. Originally, Thoreau's objection to slavery had been that it treated men as means, not ends. Yet, Thoreau had no hesitation on his own authority to excommunicate men
from the race. The anti-democratic biases that he had always dis- played in his ethical thought became confirmed as a theory of moral heroics. He took the Puritan doctrine of the elect one further step by giving the moral heroes the ability to distinguish the elect, and the authority to mete out retributive justice. By granting to Brown the privilege he denied to Edward G. Loring, he confirmed the principle of moral absolutism which allows a man to be regarded as object rather than subject.

The political implications of this shift in moral emphasis are striking. The proper concern of politics in Thoreau's view no longer is to facilitate the self-actualization of every individual, but to bring to reality the moral perceptions of the elite, those who are already self-sufficient. Therefore, the chief end becomes an historical event, the establishment of the new revelation of justice. The language of "Slavery in Massachusetts" demonstrates Thoreau's belief that the existing government must be superseded and gives a feeling for the moral repulsion he feels for the status quo. It was not until John Brown that he abandoned his argument for secession of the individual from government and its supporting institutions. The historical event super- seded the individual life in Thoreau's view of political priorities. With the appearance of the hero and his new moral vision, history becomes ripe and human institutions come into bas relief through illumination by
the Hero's spiritual revelations. Speaking of the Harper's Ferry attempt, Thoreau emphasized the historical event as the important moral focus:

I regard this event as a touchstone designed to bring out, with glaring distinctness, the character of this government. We needed to be thus assisted to see it by the light of history. It needed to see itself.... It is the head of the Plug-Uglies. It is more manifest than ever that tyranny rules. I see this government to be effectually allied with France and Austria in oppressing mankind.211

The anti-historicism which is a common feature of Transcendentalism, and which Thoreau shared in the early period was obviously not a feature of Thoreau's final position. An acceptance of historical mission, or a moral teleology in political affairs was a departure from classical Transcendentalism, but placed him in the more logically congenial company of the Continental Idealists such as Hegel, Fichte, and Rousseau. His views on violence and holy war were more consistent with historical teleology than with the earlier anti-historical subjectivism he had subscribed to under the influence of Emerson and the Transcendentalist movement. He was no less an idealist than before, but his ethical perspective had far surpassed the Kantian individualism of his earlier thought. This is not inconsistent, paradoxically, with the defiant egoism which Thoreau never abandoned. He and the Heroic type were still the fixed points for moral sextant sightings; the application of moral principles shifted from the interior of an individual consciousness to
external situations. It was a new insistence upon total control of matter by the spirit. The battle ground shifted from within a single person responsible to himself to the whole array of external and visible forces of evil which the hero must engage in physical combat.

Talk of failure and throwing his life away! [Brown] is not dead yet in any sense, and if he were dead he would still live. Were the battles of Black Jack and Ossawatomie and many encounters of less note useless and a failure? I think that it was he more than any other who made Kansas as free as she is, who taught the slave holder that it was not safe for him to carry his slaves thither. None of the political parties have ever accomplished anything of the sort. It was he who taught Missouri that it was not profitable to hold slaves in that neighborhood. . . . To face singly in his work of righteousness the whole power of this unrighteous government, and successfully too! Who has gained the most ground within five years, —Brown or the Slave Power? 212

Brown's "peculiar doctrine"213 which allowed any means, including butchery, to accomplish an end, was a doctrine with a distinctly political application. Throughout Thoreau's writings on Brown he refers to Cromwellian parallels. Thoreau was not unaware or disapproving of the English dictator, and one suspects he would not have objected to a similar political role for John Brown.

Concerning techniques of revolution, Thoreau earlier had suggested methods which would probably attract violence upon the protestor, but which did not involve the infliction of harm on others. He recommended boycott as an economic pressure against newspapers, for instance. 214 He urged non-payment of taxes to support unworthy governmental activities;215 and, he urged mass resignations of governmental
agents which amounts to a general strike. 216 The violence against
the protestants would clog the jails, enervate the military, police,
and judicial system, drag down the economy, and bring the machine
of government to a stop. Thoreau's embrace of Brown did not aban-
don the earlier techniques, but added violence to the arsenal of the
moral protestant. Bellicosity was no longer denied to the upright man
of careful conscience. Holy war was the revelation which Brown the
Hero brought to Thoreau's list of moral weapons. Before Brown,
Thoreau thought it the duty of a moral man to resist injustices of
government; after Brown, Thoreau insisted that the moral man must
establish justice in the land. In effect, that meant seizing the govern-
ment, since law is the vehicle of justice. Of Brown's adventures,
Thoreau admiringly remarked that:

For once the Sharp's rifle and the revolver were employed
in a righteous cause. The tools were in the hands of one who
could use them. I know that the mass of my neighbors think
that the only righteous use that can be made of them is to fight
duels with them when we are insulted by other nations, or hunt
Indians, or shoot fugitive slaves with them. 217

In this last phase, Thoreau seems more the statist than an anar-
chist. Those who see Thoreau as an anarchist have some reason for
being misled in view of some of his statements such as in the opening
paragraph of "Civil Disobedience": "That government is best which
governs not at all." But even in that essay Thoreau defined govern-
ment as "only the mode by which the people have chosen to execute
their will. \textsuperscript{218} Two paragraphs following he asserted that "unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but \textit{at once} a better government."\textsuperscript{219}

Once he had escaped the necessity of including all persons in his definition of humanity, and had asserted that the will of the hero is a transcendent category which all attentive consciences recognize and affirm in their own wills, Thoreau was very much willing that there be a government by which people (in his special definition) execute their will. If John Brown had been successful in establishing a government, Thoreau would probably have been wholly supportive. He had no delusions of Brown's intentions in that regard: "It was the fact that the tyrant must give place to him, or he to the tyrant, that distinguished him from all other reformers that I know."\textsuperscript{220} This would have been the fulfillment of Thoreau's utopian prophesy that government would govern not at all "when men are prepared for it."\textsuperscript{221}

As for tactics of the revolution, Thoreau recognized with Lenin the necessity for a highly disciplined elite to serve as the vanguard. The description of Brown's party in "Civil Disobedience" compared them to Cromwell's army, but a comparison to the disciplined cadre dedicated to uncompromising principle demanded by Lenin is at least equally apt. There is no mawkish sentimentality or fuzzy liberalism which tolerates any kind of accommodation or compromise in Thoreau's admiring
description. The Thoreauvian ideal is no liberal utopia, but a totalitarian regime of "ideas and principles.... Not yielding to a whim or transient impulse...."\textsuperscript{222} The absolute obligation which Thoreau insists is due the will of the Hero is of the same water as the absolute obligation due the will of the state in other ideal systems such as that of Hegel. The Hero who embodies the ideal will of the people and of the transcendent form is the upright man who makes the best ruler.\textsuperscript{223} The Hero does not destroy the state; he makes it the agency of the Higher Law. The upright ruler is bound only by the Higher Law, which is apprehended by his acute intuition, and enforced by act of will and force of violence upon those who do not share the moral vision. The simple statement of Thoreau's theory unencumbered by the non-essential points can be stated baldly: The will of the Hero is law.

As interpreted above, Thoreau's final view of the state and his political conclusions as suggested by the essays on John Brown represent a departure from many of the views he had previously expressed. Although the elitism characteristic of his Calvinistic background had always been present in his thinking, hero worship of a fanatic madman represented a radical shift in his political position. The Brown essays are clearly not the culmination of a smooth progression of logically inter-related ideas concerning the nature of the universe, of man and of society. Many of his ideas on these topics had never been capable of
completely logical integration, but in the main they had tended to sup­port a concept of a loosely organized political commonwealth with mini­mal domestic functions, an isolationist or at least non-expansionist foreign policy, and protection of individual human rights in the French Revolutionary tradition, particularly rights of individual opinion and conscience.

Prior to the cataclysmic effect of the Brown episode, the politi­cal view sketched above had been supported by his assumption of an orderly universe in which an ultimately beneficent purpose served as the bedrock of reality. This kind of universe requires little by way of human artifice to keep the proper relations among the elements of creation. Since he viewed mankind as a part of physical creation yet endowed with a direct contact with the non-material spirit from which all value has its genesis, it follows that men will act in accord with what they know to be right and that they will deal justly with one another as beings of moral sentience. Thoreau viewed society as a natural phenomenon arising from the instinctive recognition among men of their need for association and cooperation to achieve individual pur­poses. Throughout this series of ideas runs the familiar thread of natural law assumptions tempered by a distrust of reason and rather strong hints of utilitarian premises about the nature of human society. The latter remained despite the particular pains Thoreau took to reject
utilitarian values defined in majoritarian terms or as an ethic of convenience and expediency.

Throughout his writings, and with greater frequency as he grew older, one can find passages that in their irrationality and moral passion forewarn of a totalitarian potential in his thought. It remained a subdued element, however, until it burst forth full blown in the Brown essays. Because they are among his last published works, one must accept them as the statement of his final position, and although it is not the view of Thoreau most widely held, it is on his final position that his political thought must be evaluated.

Notes


7. Ibid., January 6, 1854. W., XII, pp. 50-51.

9. A Week, W., I, p. 56.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.

18. W., IV, p. 480.

20. Quotations in this and the preceding sentence are from W., IV, p. 480.
26. Ibid.
29. Ibid., June 17, 1854. W., XII, p. 365.


33. Ibid., pp. 437-438.

34. A Week, W., I, pp. 133-134. This is an example of Thoreau's imprecision in the use of language. The word "state" is interpreted here as meaning government.


38. Ibid., p. 430.


40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., pp. 402-403.

42. W., IV, p. 477.


44. Ibid., August 18, 1851. W., VIII, p. 399.

45. W., IV, p. 480.


47. Journal, May 4, 1852, W., X, p. 16.

48. Paul Power, "On Civil Disobedience in Recent American Democratic Thought," American Political Science Association Review, Vol. LXIV, #1 (March, 1970), p. 37. Power contends that "responsible" civil disobedience must meet the following criteria: (1) The act must be openly performed with no attempt at secrecy; (2) it must be deliberately performed, not accidental; (3) it must be clearly unlawful under existing statutes or court ruling; (4) the
action must be voluntary, not induced by others; (5) the conduct must arise from "conscience" based upon moral or religious convictions; (6) the objective sought is a concrete, public reform; (7) legal remedies must be exhausted before disobedience is undertaken; (8) disobedience must use non-violent means; (9) throughout the act of disobedience, the rights of others must be considered; (10) a proximate relation must exist between the rule under attack and the reasons for dissent; (11) the disobedient must submit to the legal consequences of his act.

49. "A Plea for Captain John Brown," W., IV, p. 437. Thoreau implied that an uprising ought to be attempted to free Brown: "Who is it whose safety requires that Captain Brown be hung? . . . if you do not wish it, say so distinctly.


55. Ibid., August 9, 1858. W., XVII, p. 86.

56. Ibid., November 9, 1855. W., XIV, p. 19.


59. Ibid., September 27, 1851, p. 26.

60. Ibid., January 21, 1852, p. 213.

61. Ibid., April 6, 1852, p. 339.

62. Ibid., January 27, 1852, p. 238.

63. W., V, p. 229.

64. Journal, November 16, 1858. W., XVII, p. 325.

66. Quoted in W., I, p. xxi.


68. Journal, December 6, 1854. W., VII, p. 79.

69. A Week, W., I, p. 134.


72. Ibid., November 28, 1860. W., XX, p. 278.

73. Ibid., September 1, 1853. W., XI, pp. 410-411.

74. Walden, W., II, p. 238.


76. Walden, W., II, p. 102.

77. Ibid., p. 183.


79. Ibid.


81. W., IV, p. 479.

82. Walden, W., II, p. 29.

83. W., I, pp. 36-37.

84. Journal, January 3, 1861. W., XX, pp. 304-305.

85. Ibid., October 18, 1858. W., XVII, p. 221.

86. Ibid., January 22, 1856. W., XIV, p. 131.


108. *Ibid.*, p. 152. This Journal entry is very instructive as to Thoreau's view of the moral quality of nations.
111. Ibid.
117. Ibid., March 11, 1856. W., XIV, pp. 204-205.
118. Ibid., February 5, 1852. W., IX, p. 279.
120. W., IV, p. 356.
122. A Week, W., I, pp. 386-387.
125. Ibid., November 1, 1851. W., IX, p. 86.
130. "Civil Disobedience," W., IV, pp. 360-361; 382-383. The essay makes the point that compliance with positive law is expected in matters that are not vital to conscience.

131. W., IV, p. 480.


133. Journal, August 21, 1851. W., VIII, p. 413.


135. Ibid., p. 373.

136. Ibid.


139. Ibid.

140. Ibid., undated, 1851. W., VII, p. 171.

141. Ibid.

142. Ibid., p. 173.


146. Ibid., p. 376.


150. A Week, W., I, p. 135.

152. Walden, W., II, p. 190.


157. Correspondence, Bode and Harding, eds., p. 371.


162. Letter to Parker Pillsbury, April 10, 1861. Correspondence, Bode and Harding, eds., p. 611.


166. "Slavery in Massachusetts," W., IV, pp. 401-402. See also Journal, June 17, 1854. W., XII, pp. 362-363 for a less temperate statement of the same opinion.


168. Ibid.


173. Ibid., p. 396.


177. Ibid., p. 365.

178. Ibid., pp. 360-361.

179. Ibid., p. 365.

180. Ibid.

181. Ibid., p. 366.

182. Ibid., p. 375.

183. Ibid., p. 369.

184. Ibid., pp. 369-370.

185. Ibid., p. 367.

186. Ibid., p. 371.

187. Ibid.

188. Ibid., p. 368.

189. Ibid., p. 363.

190. Ibid.


192. Ibid., pp. 381-382.

194. A Week, W., I, p. 328.


196. Ibid., p. 376.

197. Ibid., p. 383.


199. Ibid., p. 408.

200. Ibid.

201. Ibid., p. 401. Emphasis supplied.


204. Some contend that Thoreau did not know about Brown's Kansas career. See Gillman Ostrander, "Emerson, Thoreau, and John Brown," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXIV (1953), p. 719. Also see Walter Harding, The Days of Henry David Thoreau, p. 418. In view of Thoreau's relations with James Redpath, Frank Sanborn, and his visits with Brown himself, it seems unlikely that he had no inkling of the butcheries prior to writing the Brown essays.


206. Ibid., October 19, 1859. W., XVIII, p. 408.


208. Ibid., p. 424.

209. Ibid., p. 433.


219. Ibid., p. 357.


CHAPTER VIII
CRITICAL EVALUATION

In attempting an assessment of Thoreau as a political theorist one must make an acknowledgement that his writings would not satisfy most modern definitions of what a political theory should be. Oddly, aside from some contemporary writers such as Henry S. Kariel and Christian Bay, whose inclusion of their articulated value preferences in their work leaves them open to charges of being idealogues rather than scholars, Karl W. Deutsch in his presidential address to the American Political Science Association in 1970 offered a definition of political theory which perhaps comes closest in admitting Thoreau's work to the field as is likely to be found in the literature of establishment political science. Deutsch's reminder that the etymology of our word "theory" denotes passionate contemplation such as experienced by spectators at classical Greek tragedies whose awareness of human nature was heightened and whose emotions were purified, places Thoreau's work unmistakably in the tradition of theory. The nine point definition of political theory offered by Deutsch begins and ends with an assumption that "wisdom," understood not as the specific answers to specific questions but as an awareness of what classes of answers are worth seeking, is both the beginning and the end of political theory. Certainly Thoreau shared this viewpoint.
If Thoreau were to fail Deutsch's nine point test of a political theory, it would probably have been in his failure to understand for himself and to articulate to others the values and goals that were embedded in the writings and actions from which we have constructed the beginnings of a theory in his behalf. The conflict between human values and the human needs that was a constant liability in Transcendental idealism, gave a certain impracticality to Thoreau's ideas of solving social and political problems that renders him unintelligible, if not laughable, in the eyes of some contemporary scholars who have become prominent in the field of political theory. Even Deutsch, tolerant as he is of wide latitude in admitting various theoretical methodologies, joins such writers as David Easton and Robert A. Dahl in asserting that for the future, "political science deals inescapably with the collective self-control of human beings—their joint power over their own fate." Thoreau, of course, was too subjectivistic and individualistic in his approach to political action to be included as part of "the future" of political science according to the present leaders of the profession. But he is a legitimate part of the past, just as are Plato, Machiavelli, Locke, Hobbes, Jefferson and Calhoun. As part of the past, Thoreau fulfilled an obligation of political theory which Deutsch recognizes as vitally important but too often neglected by modern political science professionals: that of critical reflection and reexamination of the
assumptions of the prevailing political ideology and culture which the vast majority of us may unknowingly share and take for granted. 4

Having introduced Thoreau into the closely guarded circle of political theorists using no less a figure than a recent past president of the American Political Science Association to legitimize the claim, it becomes important to explain that in this study Thoreau's work has been considered using a descriptive method of political inquiry rather than with the types of analysis made fashionable by the work of distinguished scholars in the discipline who prefer to use quantification where possible, to hold conclusions to the tests of verification and predictability, to employ a vocabulary of quite technical social science terms, and to insist upon a rigorous separation of the normative from the empirical and the objective. This study also reflects some of the dissatisfactions with behavioral approaches noted by David Easton in his presidential address to the American Political Science Association in 1969. 5 The reasons for this conscious decision are dictated by the method of Thoreau himself, whose intellectual processes were not those of modern political scientists who unexceptionally employ the scientific method. The mystical turn of his mind, his literary form of expression, and his preference for intuition over reason, affective wisdom over cognitive knowledge, demand that his work be analyzed after a sympathetic (albeit critical) reading, and from a historical perspective. The
Freudian studies of his personality have been cited, as have other studies using the techniques of contemporary social science method. While such studies have undisputed value, this study has chosen to analyze Thoreau's works by the methods of an older tradition, one which Thoreau would have understood, and one which is, it is believed, better equipped to understand him.

It is a mistake to see Thoreau as a system maker, a careful philosopher, or as a political strategist; still, all of these elements enter his work and cannot be ignored if for no other reason than the fact that the political impact of his ideas has been and continues to be considerable. He was an artist and a mystic, frank to admit both labels, and sensed no disgrace in opening his mind to things which seemed to him impossible to confine within the neat order of syllogistic logic. He certainly did not reject an empirical approach as is amply demonstrated by the long lists of concrete facts observed of both natural and cultural phenomena. However, when he wrote from the particular occurrence to its general significance in nature or in human affairs, he preferred to do so in what he felt were mythic terms, feeling that myth is better able to carry the ambiguities apparent in life than any methodological theory that relies wholly upon literal historical data. It was unnecessary from Thoreau's point of view as an artist and man of letters that his writings contain no inconsistencies between the
phenomenal world of the senses and the ideal world wherein he felt reality is to be found.

Admittedly, therefore, this study measures Thoreau against standards which he never applied against himself. Yet, consistency between assumption and conclusion is a primary measure of a political theory. Furthermore, it is perhaps unfair to read the record of more than a quarter century of serious thinking and be critical of the inconsistencies, contradictions, and discrepancies that appear. A thinker who never changes his view, gains a fresh perspective, or questions his positions lacks mental vitality and never matures intellectually.

Nonetheless, having recognized the limitations of the enterprise, it seems fair to consider Thoreau's ideas and his life with an eye for the flawed logic, the unnecessary conclusion, and the inconsistent application of principle. As is clear from the preceding sections of the study, there are logical gaps and disharmonies in the internal structure of Thoreau's political thought. There are also interesting contrasts between his political views and those of thinkers whose philosophical assumptions were similar to his own. In this concluding chapter, Thoreau's political thought will be considered first on its own merit as a free standing structure criticized from the impressions the author has developed in a careful reading of Thoreau's work. Less extensive than the first section, the remainder of the study in a limited and
selective way will criticize Thoreau's work in relation to particular forms of Idealism, especially as the problem of authority is treated, next in relation to a form of anarchism, and finally, in relation to some of the manifestations of more recent history which seem to bear some traces of Thoreauvian influences.

As must have become apparent to the reader, conscience and consciousness have been used throughout this study in particular ways which conform, in the conviction of this writer, to the operational definitions Thoreau himself employed. Conscience has been used to indicate an inbuilt moral sensor, a psychological "organ" which all normal human beings have. It is closely related to the philosophical notions of innate ideas and right reason. Consciousness, on the other hand, has been used to describe a state of awareness which permits one to achieve intuitive insight. Thoreau seems to have regarded consciousness as a capacity for openness that must be nurtured and developed as any other talent. Furthermore, he seems to have viewed it as a random gift which appears in different quality levels among people who possess it. Such a notion is closely related to intuitive and irrational—perhaps super-rational is a better term—philosophies. Since conscience is one of the basic elements of rational philosophies upon which liberal democratic theory has drawn so heavily, whereas irrational or intuitive systems have lent support to authoritarian theories ranging from the
divine right of kings to facist dictatorships, there are inherent ambiguities in Thoreau's fundamental assumptions which offer potential development in either liberal democratic or authoritarian directions.

The operative ideals of liberal democratic theory as A.D. Lindsay calls them, have, especially after the influence of J.S. Mill, and after Thoreau's time, the influence of T.H. Green, emphasized a belief in free associations, in the instrumental and secondary nature of the state, the inherent superiority of voluntary cooperation over coerced conformity, in toleration, diversity, equality before the law, free assembly and the free selection of political leadership. At some point in his career, Thoreau can be found to support these operative ideals, although not consistently. In terms of implementation of liberal democracy's ideals, he cannot so easily be cited in support. A substantial portion of liberal democratic theory concerns itself with the mechanics of government, adjusting social inter-relationships, and inventing devices to assist in balancing liberty and equality against the needs of an organized society. The emphasis has been on form and mechanics rather than upon the techniques to be employed in making optimum use of the devices. Thoreau, however, had no patience at all with the forms of liberal democracy. His denunciations of the American federal system, majoritarian balloting, parliamentary compromise and judicial adherence to precedent and constitutional stipula-
tion have all been noted. He was, however, more sensitive to the use of technique than some liberal democratic thinkers have been in that he had a shrewd sense of the uses of propaganda as amply demonstrated both in his denunciation of the press and in his essays on slavery and John Brown. Furthermore, he instinctively recognized how one might manipulate the devices of liberal democracy to achieve the most favorable chances for the adoption of his political goals. For instance, he wished to have land represented as well as people, perhaps partly from a residual Jeffersonian influence, but largely because he saw that the conservative moral values he believed in would more readily be expressed in a political sense by rural populations than by urban dwellers. Again, in his appeal to the people to nullify by direct action the rulings of the courts in the Anthony Burns case and in the John Brown case, he indicates an understanding of how governmental devices might be arranged and employed for the maximum advantage of his own political position. Nevertheless, despite an early sympathy with some of the operational ideals of liberal democracy and a sophisticated understanding of technique, he was basically unsympathetic to the methods of liberal democracy. Toward the end of his life, it may be doubted that he was sympathetic to the ends of liberal democratic theory.

Thoreau's moving descriptions of the harmony of creation, his belief in the development of things according to what he believed to be
the laws of their being, would seemingly lend itself to an argument for
the rationality of man, even if it had to be forced into the old natural
law formula of right reason. Many of the New England Transcendental-
alists recognized within Transcendentalism this philosophical strain
and their acceptance of it led some, like Isaac Hecker and Orestes
Brownson, to affiliate with the Roman Catholic Church. Thoreau,
however, did not choose to follow the traditional right reason formu-
lations. Through no logical necessity, Thoreau believed intuition
(consciousness) rather than right reason (conscience) to be the method
by which truth, political and otherwise, becomes evident to man. To
some the contrast between right reason and the capacity of a cultivated
conscience to receive intimations of truth might seem a distinction with-
out a difference. However, it is clear that Thoreau did not regard
intuition as an equal gift to all men as the natural lawyers had believed
of right reason. For Thoreau, intuition was of a different order than
right reason, like flashes of lightning across a darkened sky compared
with the spreading light of sunrise. Intuition, subjective will, and
irrationalism in the nature of man does not smoothly graft onto a more
placid orderly view of the universe and of nature for which Thoreau is
popularly known.

Neither does Thoreau seem to share much with those forms of
conservatism that depend heavily upon a rational progression built upon
historical evolution. His anti-historical bias has been noted both in the context of Emersonian Transcendentalism and as an element in his own mature thought. Using Edmund Burke as a spokesman for non-authoritarian conservatism, the mainstream of such thought has treated society as a social organism governed by laws of growth which lie beyond the ability of individual will to alter.\(^8\) Thoreau, as we have seen, separated the concept of society from the state, which further removes him from much conservative thought. This distinction is implicit in his doctrine of disobedience as it was in Gandhi's thought.\(^9\) In addition, Thoreau believed in the puissance of the individual will, a feature lacking in Burke and some other conservatives.

No convenient label can be assigned to Thoreau. It is evident that he was not a liberal democrat nor a conservative in the tradition of Burke. His idealism was not one that seemed to harmonize with either the secular theories of politics based upon right reason nor with the idealism on which the Roman Catholic Church sought to institutionalize a theocracy. The faults in Thoreau's political thought are his own rather than those of any system which he espoused.

For Thoreau, consequential political matters were aspects of larger moral issues. It was as if he took for granted that correctly made moral decisions, assuming that the moral issues are identified and are subject to a definitive answer, necessarily bring about the
appropriate political arrangements. It is this moral intensity which
gives a certain utopian flavor to Thoreau. As George Kateb has put
it in defining utopia, it is the search for "the real life, the natural life,
the perfect life, the *sensually* flawless life"\(^{10}\) in which Thoreau was
engaged. To the extent that his political writings pursued those moral
objectives, he was utopian and subject to all the logical and practical
flaws which are inherent in utopian speculation.

Although the very foundation of Thoreau's political thought was
his moral vision inferred from nature and received by inspiration, he
failed to make a graceful introduction of morality into the natural
environment, the setting of human life, which he declared to be morally
neutral.\(^{11}\) He made man at once a part of nature and yet distinguished
from the rest of creation by his duty to consciousness, or in more
modern terminology, his will-to-being. As others have noted, the
capacity for consciousness is not so very different from the older con­
ception of innate ideas, but as was seen earlier, Thoreau rejected both
the innate ideas argument and the sensationalism of Berkeley. One of
the most damaging, and unanswerable criticisms of Thoreau is that he
not only failed to make use of earlier thought to buttress his idea of
consciousness, he failed to offer any other argument for the claims of
consciousness than his own assured declaration.

Furthermore, he created considerable complications for his theory
of moral consciousness and its political application by making the quality of consciousness the moral measure of individual persons. By his assertion that the limits of man's knowledge is bound by his experience augmented by the flashes of insight afforded by an uneven intuition, Thoreau is caught in a rather unsatisfactory position of insisting that all a man knows is himself, and at the same time giving some persons—the heroic types—the ability to judge the quality of another man's consciousness without having the benefit of shared experience. In addition, he could not logically expect persons of varying moral quality uniformly and unanimously to recognize and accept reflexively a moral political act. Of course, Thoreau tacitly acknowledged the insufficiency of his earlier assumption in the espousal of John Brown's direct coercion. The earlier assumptions of individual moral consciousness might have been adequate to justify civil disobedience as a political reaction, but it failed in supporting a political movement. It illustrates one of the difficulties of an irrationalist epistemology that postulates the existence of an absolute truth. He might have been on more tenable ground to have continued to insist that each man is an absolute end unto himself as he seemed to have done in his early and middle years under the influence of Emersonian Transcendentalism, than to have asserted as he did after the advent of John Brown the existence of absolute values beyond individual subjective experience.
As most commentators agree, a thorough and unrelenting individualism was the hallmark of his early writings. It was the universality of his individualism that led to his opposition to capital punishment, slavery, and the Mexican War. "Slavery in Massachusetts" is a clearly individualistic argument relying upon the ability of everyman to perceive the absolute good when it is demonstrated. It is ironic that slavery was the issue which thrust John Brown into Thoreau's attention, for Brown's exploits brought out clearly the latent heroism of his thought. For himself and for others of the heroic type, he continued to insist upon the primacy of subjective will, but the theory no longer was one of responsible individualism, but of aggressive, moralistic egoism which he espoused and consciously articulated in "A Plea for Captain John Brown." His final egoism was more compatible with irrationalism than the universal individualism which he had earlier maintained. The difficulty is that he never clearly abandoned his allegiance to some of the earlier assumptions of Transcendentalism that favored individualism. For instance, in his eulogy for Brown he called him "a Transcendentalist above all," and quoted approvingly his justification of his violent actions on behalf of slaves who "are as good as you, and as precious in the sight of God."12 The claims of the eulogy jar badly with the heroic egoism Thoreau proclaimed as a basis for the right of the morally superior man to coerce and kill those persons who do not obey his revelations of absolute truth.
Thoreau's confusion of Transcendental individualism and heroic egoism seems likely to have been responsible for the ambiguity to be found in his view of morality in nature. When morality is seen as a function of individual consciousness, the universe and nature may more conveniently be considered morally neutral, but when an absolute transcendent value is considered to permeate the universe and to be pressing irresistibly toward the fulfillment of its teleological mission in the historical world, then the moral neutrality of nature is a very difficult argument to make. If nature were innocent, and man is a part of nature, then mankind in his individual life and in his social and political arrangements would be equally innocent. But, Thoreau did not continue to see virtue as effortlessly attained and in his mature years, especially after his emancipation from Emerson, he appears to have abandoned the idea of a morally neutral creation. He began to recognize both good and evil potentialities in nature, with man perceiving those qualities that appeal to his character. The shift in his thoughts concerning nature as possessing moral potentialities rather than merely a bland medium, implied a shift in his attitude toward the nature of evil and its role in the affairs of mankind.

Thoreau never dealt adequately with the problem of evil. As has been noted, at times he held that evil is unreal; then, that evil is actual but can be dealt with only by ignoring it and inwardly living a pure life;
and finally, that evil is a real force which must be met and opposed.

Even when accepting the Transcendental view that evil is not real but merely not-Good, one senses Thoreau's dissatisfaction with such a complacent attitude. His moral absolutism led him in the political essays tacitly to repudiate the Transcendental view of evil as stated in Emerson's "Compensation." Still, the endorsement of Brown's violent tactics is not wholly explained either in moral or philosophical terms, but merely on grounds of emotion and political reality. To be blunt, it seems only justified as an irrational reaction of expediency. George Kateb has neatly expressed the logical limits of Thoreau's moral absolutism:

Now the prohibitions of moral absolutism need not conclude in a doctrine of non-resistance to evil: they may only conclude in a doctrine of nonviolent and perfectly scrupulous resistance to evil, in a doctrine of passive and moral resistance to evil, in a doctrine that assumed the possibility of innocent political action. 13

These limits Thoreau clearly surpassed in the endorsement of violence, coercion, and destruction as practiced by John Brown. The innocence of political action and resistance to government was compromised. 14

He believed that objective evil is recognizable to individual consciousness, but where it comes from or why it exists was not explained. In view of the fact that no theory can be said ever to have accomplished a satisfactory answer to the where and why of evil, this is not a devastating criticism of Thoreau. Still, one would expect a greater amount
of attention to be given to an issue about which he felt so strongly, and which was the catalytic issue for the complete reversal of his position on acceptable political tactics.

The closest he came to defining sin prior to "Slavery in Massachusetts" was in terms of neglecting one's consciousness or failing to obey its dictates. With that essay he recognized evil as having an objective existence with power to contaminate all who are not actively engaged in resisting it. Evil became something that could not be ignored, nor regarded passively. It was neither a negative void nor a matter of relative perspective; evil was seen as absolute in the same sense that good is absolute. The result was a very simplistic approach to the human issues with which politics attempts to deal. Differing points of view necessarily involved one right and one wrong answer for Thoreau, and the motives were judged to be right or wrong as well as the answer. It is not a value system well suited to the preservation of peace or a balance of interests; nor does it allow for much pluralism in society. It does not show Thoreau to be the ultimate liberal as he sometimes has been presented.

Closely related to his ambiguous ideas about evil was his attitude toward the human body and its appetites. With some consistency, Thoreau seems to have held that the body is part of nature and as such is good, or at least morally neutral. Original sin seems never to have
been part of his belief about mankind. Yet, his attitude toward bodily appetites is pejorative. Thoreau briefly considered that it could be a condition peculiar to himself that caused the indulgence of bodily appetites to result in diminished consciousness, but in his monumental egoism he universalized it so that the good man is an ascetic one. This is not a conclusion demanded by his prior assumptions.

That the good man is an ascetic one had important implications for the economic system that Thoreau was willing to accept. Complexity in trade arrangements, a highly productive industrial system, and a consumer oriented economy were unnecessary, in fact, incompatible with Thoreau's view of a well functioning government. Even his insistence upon self-sufficiency and his aversion to the division of labor required in a technologically based economy, do not necessarily explain the hostility he had toward business and mechanical inventions **per se**. Thoreau went out of his way to reject effortless production of material goods and the leisured life which technology can make possible in his review of Etzler's science fiction fantasy, yet, he placed a high personal and social value on leisure. Against the promises of socialism, to Thoreau it seemed necessary that one provide for himself through the labor of his hands as if that infused the product with the spirit of the worker, and that the bodily needs must be met only at the minimum level. The argument of many liberals, applied scientists, and utopian
writers that the kind of reflective life he favored might be enhanced by being freed of toil seems to have been rejected, if it ever occurred to Thoreau. An economy of abundance, as predicated by the Fabians who were the first major political movement to have adopted Thoreau as a theoretical resource, in which all citizens are freed of hunger, cold, and fear of disease might have eliminated many of the specific complaints he made against capitalism in the period of the industrial revolution and against the government of the United States during his lifetime. One can understand why he would object to the communal living arrangements and the cooperative economic ventures that attracted many of his contemporaries; however, nothing in his writing offers a solid logical reason why automated industrialism would have been incompatible with his political and economic conceptions. The argument he employed against the pollution inherent in industrialism is a potent one, but it is a separate issue from his objection to effortless production of consumer goods as a method of supplying the necessities of life. For some reason that he fails to explain, Thoreau felt that a complex production system had an inhibiting spiritual effect on individuals. It may have been that he considered such mechanical assistance to produce "unearned" goods in the same category with inherited wealth. It seems less clear that is the case than is his belief that the complicated organizations required to support an automated technological production system cannot contain
the "spirit" required of proper motivation.

This narrowness in economic matters is one result of the peculiar difficulty Thoreau made for himself by limiting consciousness to individual persons. His argument, one recalls, is that a corporation, a group, or any other social association is incapable of consciousness. A corporation is incapable of achieving proper motivation to mix spirit with material to supply the bodily wants of conscious man, but an individual can provide for his own needs; a legislative body is incapable of action from principle because of this deficiency, but an individual is not so limited. Legions of political scientists and social theorists, including Plato with whose idealism Thoreau otherwise had so much in common, would take exception to his argument. No certain defense can be made in his behalf, for he did not make clear why a corporation or a legislative body is incapable of consciousness and of the action from principle which can arise only from consciousness. The attitude he adopted toward John Brown's vigilantes in fact betrays some ambiguities on this score. While giving great emphasis to Brown's role as the heroic leader, he recognized the "Cromwellian band" as an association acting from principle. In the essay on "The Last Days of John Brown" he indirectly attributed the capacity for consciousness to Brown's band by advising in one of his attempts to play on words, "Look not to legislatures and churches for your guidance, nor to any soulless
incorporated bodies, but to inspirted or inspired ones. Unless Thoreau considered Brown's group an association of separately inspirted individuals acting in concert, it would seem a contradiction in one of his basic premises. The practicalities of political govern­ance require that even a heroic leader supported by an association of inspired leaders have some kind of organization. In recognizing this reality, Thoreau finally abandoned the philosophical anarchism that had paralyzed him while others were calling for concerted action in the cause of abolitionism or New England separatism. The recognition came with such force that in the same essay, he embraced the principle of organization for righteous political action to the exclusion of indi­vidual liberty, previously one of his highest values: "It is not every man who can be a free man, even." The morally elite, in order to sustain a government based upon principle, would have to arrange them­selves in an administrative pattern capable of enforcing the dictates of the hero. It must be "incorporated," to use Thoreau's word, precisely because it had to deal with men for their own good, who are not capable of being free men.

This introduces a most serious criticism of Thoreau's theory. Starting with a series of assumptions about the inviolability of the indi­vidual, Thoreau sketched a utopian vision of government, not un-Marx­ian in tone, which would end in the golden age. The final paragraph of
"Civil Disobedience" contains a synopsis of his theory of the state prior to the essays on the Fugitive Slave Law and the John Brown episode:

The authority of government, even such as I am willing to submit to,—for I will cheerfully obey those who know and can do better than I, and in many things even those who neither know nor can do so well—is still an impure one: to be strictly just, it must have the sanction and consent of the governed. It can have no pure right over my person and property but what I concede to it. The progress from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a limited monarchy to a democracy, is a progress toward a true respect for the individual. Even the Chinese philosopher was wise enough to regard the individual as the basis of the empire. Is a democracy, such as we know it, the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recognizing and organizing the rights of man? There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor; which even would not think it inconsistent with its own repose if a few were to live aloof from it, not meddling with it, nor embraced by it, who fulfilled all the duties of neighbors and fellow-men. A State which bore this kind of fruit, and suffered it to drop off as fast as it ripened, would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State, which also I have imagined, but not yet anywhere seen.  

Yet, after Brown's massacres—and contrary to some apologists for Thoreau, he did know about the Kansas atrocities—he abandoned the Transcendentalist conception of Kantian individualistic ethics, and justified violence against individuals of the sort he condemned the State for exercising.

A more subtle yet as fundamental reversal in his position has to
do with his abandonment of the subjective perspective which had resulted in a political passiveness during his early years. In "Civil Disobedience" and "Slavery in Massachusetts" the political tactics he urged were passive: he envisioned the withdrawal of an individual from contamination by offending governmental activities. True, pressure against government results from withholding from it such goods and services as it deems essential to its existence, but the individual motivation which Thoreau advocated is one of subjective inculpability. He imputed no obligation to right a wrong, but there is an obligation that requires one not to lend his influence in any fashion to it. The mode of protest was passive and non-violent; in fact, it might be said that Thoreauvian tactics were non-activist. It is unlikely, for example, that Thoreau would have initiated a bus boycott because he personally was asked to ride on the rearward seats. He probably would have walked to his destination content that his money had not gone to the profit of such a company and pleased by the opportunity to enjoy the exercise and scenery. To have organized others in a boycott of the bus and the merchants whom it served as did Martin Luther King, Jr., would have been out of character for Thoreau prior to John Brown's raid. The flamboyance of a poor people's march or of a Fondaesque assault against institutional injustice is not in harmony with the quietistic introspection conveyed in "Civil Disobedience" and "Slavery in
Massachusetts. However, after Harper's Ferry, Thoreau dropped his subjective perspective and his passive tactics. He became a missionary apostle justifying the violent direct action Brown took, and praised it all the more because it was action taken on behalf of others—that Brown was not personally injured by the injustice.

The force of example in Thoreau's theory ought to have been superior in effect to the force of arms. Yet, he praised Brown's resort to violence as a revelation of a new morality in which overt action supplants subjective passive reaction. This new vision was not sustained as political realities became apparent in the Brown case. When a passion for holy war failed to materialize in the North, Thoreau retreated to a different tactic by seeking to make a martyr of Brown. When a blatant appeal to arms met with rejection or apathy in the North, he used Brown's death as a propaganda device to simplify the ethical and political issues, and to martial maximum sympathy for the anti-slavery position. This was no inadvertence on the part of a fuzzy naturalist-philosopher, but a shrewdly calculated tactical maneuver, and one which is included in Deutsch's list of functions of a political theory as "strategic simplification." "A Plea for Captain John Brown" contains a repudiation of the obligation to unjust human laws, and a call to action outside of the channels provided by government, but it also cleverly turns Brown from a marauder to a martyr. It is a jour-
nalistic tour de force, but it was not accomplished without weakening
his call to direct action and disregard for the law. Since Harper's
Ferry, Thoreau's Journal had fumed with sentiments that would be con­
sistent with Chairman Mao's axiom that political power flows from the
barrel of a gun. He praised the vigilante committees, especially
Brown's group, for their role in establishing and defending the higher
law against the enactments of the government. One would expect that
Thoreau would have suggested continuing guerrilla attacks against an
unjust government, but again he stopped short of where the logic of his
position might have led him.

By making a martyr of Brown he moved the moral perspective
from the objective back to the subjective. The force of example was
brought back from the political field to the range of individual moral
consciousness. By the time he wrote "The Last Days of John Brown,"
he had made the response to Brown's raid the measure of moral capacity
in individuals. Whereas earlier he had made consciousness a potential
inherent in all persons, albeit in varying degrees and quality, after
Brown's death he determined that some persons are completely without
the capacity for moral consciousness. Those who failed to respond to
Brown's pronouncements on justice Thoreau determined to be "not will­
fully but constitutionally blind." 21

The retreat from the full force of his argument on behalf of Brown
accomplished two things. First, it allowed a graceful declination of physical violence as a necessity for the morally sensitive individual by returning to a subjective moral perspective; and secondly, it retained a sufficient justification for imposing the political will of the Abolitionist forces upon the entire population if by chance the movement should have gained sufficient momentum to succeed.

The neat trick by which he solved the political dilemma that presented itself after Brown's failure was not so successful in salvaging much of the individualism that had been the bulwark of all his previous thinking. He was committed to the idea that consciousness is infallible and inclines toward a truth which is absolute. Thoreau had always recognized a variety of life styles as being consistent with individual consciousness. One would expect that the apprehension of a single truth would require a uniformity of behavior, which Thoreau deplored. Only at the end of his days when considering the issue of John Brown's insurrection against the state did the logic of his own position become inescapable for Thoreau and led him to insist upon uniform behavioral response to the dictates of an absolute higher law. Excluding some persons from the capacity for consciousness and therefore rendering them unfit for freedom does not adequately explain varieties of behavior among persons who are morally conscious. He failed to reconcile the demands of an absolute value system with the individualism that required
wide margins in life. Whether gigantomachy would be possible between equally conscious but incompatible heroes remains an unsolved question. The depth of disagreement between Thoreau and Walt Whitman, for instance, could have led to major conflicts if either man were in a position of political power, yet neither seems to have questioned the moral acuity of the other.

Thoreau's lack of sympathy for democracy and the accompanying disdain he had for the masses was the fundamental point of contention between Thoreau and Whitman. It was this anti-democratic bias as much as any individualistic egoism that made Thoreau unfriendly to the communal experiments of his friends. His concern always was not for quantity but for quality in human affairs. Even so, he had a peculiar blind spot where women were concerned and took every opportunity to disparage the intellectual powers of women. The moral rigor he insisted upon had no place for frivolity or sentimentality, which he considered to be character flaws shared by all women. In view of the fact that Thoreau knew several of his era's most outstanding women, such as Margaret Fuller, the Grimke sisters, Elizabeth Peabody, and the early feminists Elizabeth Oakes Smith and Lucretia Mott, his low opinion of the capacity of women for intellectual brilliance and the finer points of spirituality is all the harder to understand. It takes little stretch of the imagination to believe he thought women unfit for political leadership, and perhaps
unfit for any significant participation in public affairs. Similarly, Thoreau's slighting view of immigrants, particularly the Irish, might be interpreted as containing at least a touch of cultural chauvinism if not racism. His views on slavery and the inherent dignity of Negroes as human beings seem somewhat more generous than his views of females and Irishmen. It is not impossible to understand why some of Thoreau's contemporaries and later commentators have interpreted him as a misanthrope. This view is not wholly accurate, yet one senses that Thoreau had little more appreciation for mankind than he had for muskrats. His sympathetic comments about the exploitation of the horse and ox as work animals have much the same ring as his comments about the abuses of wage capitalism and slavery. And, in fact, it is a minor curiosity why Thoreau denied the capacity for consciousness in sentient creatures other than men.

An inadequate consideration of international relations is a major gap in any political theory that can be surmised from Thoreau's writings. The complicated relationship among the States and regions of the United States during his day bore some markings of international relations, but were not sufficiently intricate to qualify as relations between sovereignties. In fact, one might question that Thoreau had any comprehension of what is meant by national sovereignty. His only real contact with a foreign country was with Canada, then a part of the British
Empire and not a nation in its own right until five years after Thoreau's death. His notions about how governments behave toward each other were simplistic, and he took a very cynical view of national interests. Yet, from the very favorable comparisons he made of the United States with other countries, he seems not to have considered any political unity on a world scale. To his credit, one can say he had an appreciation for the cultural differences among peoples and understood their right to national existence, as demonstrated by his vehement opposition to the Mexican War. When he had something to say about foreign countries it was usually derogatory, except in his correspondence with Thomas Cholmondeley, an English subject, when courtesy moderated his expressions. His disdain for organization prevented him from developing any sense of a community of nations. Nations as such he always considered artificial; he had much better feelings about linguistic, cultural, and racial connections among people. Political boundaries were less real for Thoreau than the affinities among people on which most viable nations are based. This remoteness of interest on his part undoubtedly accounts for the lack of comment to be found in his writings about international politics.

Even considering the importance Thoreau conceded to lingual, historical, cultural, and racial bonds, most contemporary behavioral scientists of both liberal and conservative persuasion would judge his
idea of social cohesion to be faulty. Voluntary associationism as he described it was a logical extension of his extreme individualism, but as a cohesive force it was very weak. Associationism was not even given the glue of utilitarianism, but was forced to rest completely upon subjective voluntarism which he insisted upon as the binding force of obligation, provided that it arose from the inspired motivation of the subjective consciousness. Weak as it is, it provided at least a logical thread to hold his ideas together so long as he insisted upon man as an end in himself and never a means. After the metamorphosis wrought by the John Brown incident, however, he abandoned that position and the tenuous social cohesion based upon voluntary associationism dissolved. After the guidance of his consciousness persuaded him that no man could be allowed to stand before the accomplishment of the "Good," Thoreau was forced to rely upon the force of the moral elite to rule for the benefit of those who do not know the good for themselves. After earlier railing against the state for coercion in matters of public policy and public conscience, Thoreau attempted to justify force to the point of death and destruction of those who resist the moral apprehensions of a moral genius such as he believed John Brown to be, a man of principled action. He was willing to abandon voluntarism when a possibility presented itself, as with Brown's band, to enlist the force of association, even the state, behind his conception of the truth. In moments of moral
crisis, social cohesion is found not to rest upon voluntarism in his later theory. If people are so perverse as to be blind to Thoreau's vision, they must be forced to conform outwardly or be put to the extreme limit of coercion. It is a most ironic volte-face.

Perhaps the best analysis of Thoreau as a political theorist and a political actor might be made using Henry S. Kariel's notion of politics as art as the frame of reference. In this light Thoreau's essays and his defense of Brown might be seen as "structured drama, as political projects which create meaning," in which new truths of political consequence emerge to challenge customs and institutions that no longer meet changing human needs. Kariel argues for the right of all artists, and by extension, political actors, to do what Thoreau took it upon himself to do: to "approach convention, law, discipline, authority, or myth in a playful spirit, as forever subject to revision." By treating the truly basic questions of style and form as hypothetical, as useful to the extent that they intensify and extend experience, the artist as political actor realizes the power to create the plans, designs and concepts for the expansion of reality. Perhaps Thoreau is the perfect example of Kariel's point that

only when we succeed in suspending our causal analyses and explanatory theories can we perceive the unconditional, innovative, and self-determined aspect of human conduct. Only when we decline to judge and draw conclusions can we discern the expressive element of politics, the display of capacities not ordinarily displayed....
Using this as a point of departure from the analysis of Thoreau from the perspective of the author's reading of his work, it is natural to recall that Thoreau was in the Idealist tradition having received that philosophical perspective as a legacy from Emersonian Transcendentalism which, as was shown in the first three chapters, was itself based upon Neo-Platonism and Kantian influences. It is primarily the question of political authority which concerns us here, and it is significant for Thoreau's final position that Idealism has contained a potential for authoritarianism and elitism at least since Plato. As Sabine points out, the idea that virtue is knowledge, an idealist notion which Thoreau shared, supposes an elite in that both virtue and knowledge are demonstrably the possession of the few rather than the many. There are unmistakable echoes of the human classes described in Plato's Republic in Thoreau's description of the Genius or Hero, the Artist, and the Artisan; yet, Plato's immersion in the civic life of the state made his experience and his perspective much different than Thoreau's, whose Puritan New England background tended so strongly toward individualism. Platonic Idealism as expressed in The Republic, The Statesman or The Laws could not have supported the individualism of Thoreau's early writings, nor the drastic conclusions of the post-Brown essays which were profoundly anti-civic. Plato's enlightened despotism was intended to bring into being the objective good regardless of the capricious pref-
erences of the masses who were less wise and therefore less virtuous than the leaders, and Thoreau saw Brown in the same light. However, Plato's despotism was enlightened, depending upon rational, logical investigation to identify the objective good, whereas Thoreau's theory was based on intuition and non-rational processes to identify the good. The subjectivism of Thoreau's theory of the hero leads directly toward the excesses of fanatics such as John Brown and bends the authoritarianism of Plato's philosopher-kings into the arbitrariness of madmen.

Thoreau's holistic approach required that man be society writ large rather than the converse as Plato had held. Whereas Plato's Republic was based upon a careful division of social labor and social values, Thoreau's insistence upon the wholeness and self-sufficiency of the conscious man led him to discount the division of labor Plato found beneficial because of both the social and economic consequences to the individual, regardless of the consequences to the polity. Therefore, the Platonic doctrines that society is a mutual satisfaction of needs by persons whose capacities supplement each other and that government ought to be an art depending upon exact knowledge obtained in a rational mode are contradicted by Thoreau's theory, whether taken in his early Transcendental years or after the John Brown catharsis. Thoreau is liable to the criticism of artists which Plato makes in The Republic: that their effects are achieved without knowing how or why. Thoreau
himself sides with those who believe that worthy statesmen are those who govern by "divine madness," a position that Plato found hopeless for the sustained improvement of political life. Although both men shared a preference for the rule of the wise man, despite differences in their definition of wisdom, Plato recognized in *The Laws* the practical necessity of the rule of law granting that law is but a variety of convention. Thoreau never became willing to make the concession to what he termed expediency to grant the rule of law the primary role in the actual governance of a state. The thought of both men lead to what Karl Popper termed "closed societies." 27

The idealism of Jean-Jacques Rousseau has been discussed previously and the affinities between his thought and that of Thoreau noted. According to some recent scholars, notably Patrick Riley and J.N. Shklar, 28 Rousseau's understanding of individual and general will is both a psychological attribute and a moral faculty, but with a greater emphasis upon the psychological rather than the moral dimension. If this interpretation is a valid one then the distance between Thoreau and Rousseau is even greater than suggested in the earlier chapter. Psychological comfort was not possible for Thoreau except when his individual moral sense was satisfied, an attitude with which Rousseau would find little sympathy. 29 Thoreau's search for natural man within a social context was the antithesis of Rousseau's belief that the best social insti-
Institutions "are those best able to denature man, to take away his absolute existence and to give him a relative one, and to carry the moi into the common unity." Paradoxically, both Rousseau and Thoreau arrived at an authoritarian position despite a sincere belief in the conventional nature of political obligation and rightful political authority based upon consent and voluntary association. Rousseau's political idealism however, ran counter to Thoreau's reliance on the compelling moral conception of the hero, "since no man has natural authority over his fellow men, and since might in no sense makes right, convention remains as the basis of all legitimate authority among men." From Rousseau's perspective, which shared much of Thoreau's irrationalism and intuitionism, the political coercion imposed by a Thoreauvian hero such as John Brown would be repugnant and capricious, and inferior to the conventional practice of the community. The conclusion of idealism in the thought of both men results in the same practical result: "If it is good to know how to deal with men as they are, it is much better to make them what there is need that they should be." Instead of the hero, however, Rousseau followed the main body of idealist thought in placing reliance on the perfectly socialized state to elevate men above the status of stupid and limited animals to their proper station as moral and intelligent beings. While disagreeing on means, both men sought similar ends for man utilizing similar modes of knowing. The same anti-rational or anti-
intellectual bias is displayed by both writers in their belief that "morality is corrupted in proportion as minds are enlightened." Thoreau, however, predicated his view of political authority on what Michael Oakeshott calls the "idiom of individuality," rather than the collectivist notion which is characteristic of most of idealism and certainly that type represented by Rousseau. But again, one must acknowledge the convergence of the results of both types of idealism in the shared conviction that obligation arises and authority is established when individual will is united with perfection, and that perfection must be the standard of what is willed. Although the solutions were different, the problem was the same for both: how can a morally conscious person in society obey only his own free will from which all obligation arises, and how can he act upon his will, assuming it is consistent with a larger morality, in the face of established customs supported by private interest, selfishness and undeserved inequality of status?

In the history of idealism, both authoritarian and liberal political conclusions have been drawn. Plato, Rousseau and Hegel might be said to represent the authoritarian side of idealism. An earlier chapter has described the similarities and dissimilarities between this line of thought and Thoreau's work. The foregoing criticism of Thoreau from the perspective of Plato and Rousseau may be considered representative of the type. The more liberal aspect of idealism has been developed by
others, of whom Kant and Thomas Hill Green may be considered repre-
sentative.

One feature of liberal idealism is its humane concern for mini-
mizing the application of the coercive force that supports political
authority. Kant's theoretical projection of perpetual peace, for instance,
presupposes that the validation of political authority by force is an
admission of failure of the individual and social imperatives based upon
moral duty. Violence for him was not a positive factor either in moral
or political terms. Thoreau, as we have seen, seemed to value war
and violence "to prove there is any manhood left in man." Without the
strong foundation of rationalism that supported Kant, Thoreau was left
in a position of relying on the will of the hero and individual intuition
of the good as the moral basis for authority. Lacking a psychological
mechanism for the universalization of the good and a uniform standard
for political authority, such as that provided by Kant's categorical
imperative and practical reason. Thoreau's theory had no alternative
but violence and coercion to validate the claim of authority by the hero.36
Implicit in Thoreau's position on the acceptability of violence to estab-
lish the absolute moral vision of the heroic leader, is a compromise as
to the unlimited and equal sanctity of human life not different in kind from
the sacrifice of human life on behalf of revolutionary goals articulated by
Trotsky in *The Defense of Terrorism,* 37 and practiced by such Maxists
as Lenin and Stalin when in positions of political power.

The same inadequacy in Thoreau's theory of the psychological bases of authority accounts for his rejection of constitutionalism, which forms the bulwark of the political forms postulated by liberal idealism as represented by Kant and Green. Constitutionalism rests finally upon the acceptance of the rule of law. Even granted that law is but a social convention, Kant and Green provide for a rational, known, and uniform standard of behavior that may be improved (or worsened) by regularized processes based on reason, intelligence, and good will that minimize the necessity of men applying force against their neighbors and of the state coercing its citizens. Having discarded reason in favor of intuition, heroic will rather than collective action based upon mutual good will becomes the standard for law in Thoreau's theory, leaving law and constitutionalism morally vacant except as articulated by the heroic leader or the individual egoistic consciousness, and therefore with no moral basis for political authority. In moral terms, Thoreau's theory would deprive the state of an appeal to force to assert its authority, where it differs from the dictates of the hero or the intimations of his own consciousness, or even to defend itself, but arms the heroic leader with the moral sanction to use force against the persons who uphold and enforce the offending commands of the state. It arms even the dissenting individual for battle with the state as is made
clear in the Brown essays. The moral absolutism of Thoreau, based as it is upon irrational subjectivism, lacks the potential universality of the idealist ethics of Kant and Green, and is not adequate to support a political state in internal or external peace except under the most repressive sort of coercion.\textsuperscript{38} In addition to the psychological inadequacy of Thoreau's theory from the point of view of liberal idealism, Thoreau's position on the ethical question of means and ends lacks the humane measure for judging the appropriateness of the means to the end provided by the liberal idealist theory relying on the categorical imperative.\textsuperscript{39}

The implications of Thoreau's theory for freedom of those who do not share his moral vision, however, are not so far removed from liberal idealism as might be inferred in the application of governmental techniques for asserting its authority. Thoreau shares with Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Green, especially as expressed in Green's idea of "positive freedom," the notion that freedom consists in doing what is worth doing and what is morally correct. Where Thoreau is seen to be inconsistent when considered from this perspective, is in his continued belief in the primacy of the individual will. It is the same question that occupies theologians arguing between predestination and free will: how can one be free if freedom consists only in doing what one must do?\textsuperscript{40} Liberal idealism has no claim to solving this dilemma of the ages, but
it is in a more tenable position for practical reaction in political settings than Thoreau because the flexibility of reason is greater than intuition, thereby improving the possibility of devising solutions, imperfect as they may be, to specific political problems by employing intelligence rather than emotion.

Liberal idealism, particularly as expressed by Green, emphasized the social community as defining individual personality through the role played in and contribution made to society. It recognized the mutual dependence between the structure of personality and the cultural structure of the society of which the individual is a part. Although Thoreau at times appeared to concede the importance of culture, especially language, religion, and governmental form, as in "A Yankee in Canada," he never accorded to society the determinative role in the development of the personality. For him, the personality was a given, and the responsibility for its proper development lay with the individual person through the exercise of his will. Therefore, Green's liberal idealism which concerned itself with the material as well as the moral aspects of social and political arrangements, recognizing that poverty and social degradation have a negative moral effect upon citizens that loosens the ethical ties of obligation to governmental authority, offers a wider view of human personality in society. From this perspective, Thoreau's subjective individualism is inadequate to support either reform
of government or full realization of individual potential since it lacked a theoretical link between the two. Nevertheless, Thoreau seems to have had an instinctive awareness of one of Green's major points: that freedom is a social as well as an individual condition referring to the quality of life in the larger culture, and that the quality of life compatible with freedom is not realized where coercion is used beyond the needs of the individual or of society in its legal, political, and economic structure. But Thoreau did not act on this premise, if indeed the writings where he appears to recognize the point reflected a full understanding, but continued to hold the unfettered individual will to be the ultimate freedom. Furthermore, in denying the equal capacity for consciousness, Thoreau made men unequal in a moral sense, and Green rested his case for political justice on the necessity that members of society meet and be treated as moral equals, free to think and act for themselves, guided by rational principles for which they bear full moral responsibility. The consequences of Thoreau's political thought put him outside the liberal idealism of Kant and Green who insisted that a community be a "kingdom of ends" in which everyone is accorded recognition as an end to himself and never merely a means or an obstacle to the realization of an imperative, and therefore expendable.

As the discussion of anarchism in the section dealing with some intellectual affinities with Thoreauvian thought pointed out, Thoreau had
less in common with anarchists in Europe and America than is popularly believed. For the purposes of this study it is convenient to make two large classifications of anarchist thought. One may be designated as materialistic in that its concern is with the distribution of material goods and the way in which government operates to control the lives of persons by the manipulation of the goods, through direct methods based upon the monopoly of violence power or by more indirect methods involving customs and institutions that control the availability of goods and services to all on a relatively equal basis. Such diverse anarchists as Proudhon, Bakunin, Godwin, Kropotkin, Goldman, and the native American anarchists such as Warren and Greene fall into this category. On the other hand, there is an anarchism which is based on spiritual rather than material objectives in which category persons such as Adin Ballou and Leo Tolstoy might be placed.

The materialistic anarchist criticism of Thoreau explicit and implied was made in Chapter III. It is so obviously and straightforwardly in philosophic and practical conflict with the view of Thoreau's theory presented here that a further discussion at this point would be tedious and unproductive. However, the moral and philosophical similarities between Thoreau and Tolstoy are such that the points of divergence between them raise interesting ethical and political issues. It must be noted at the outset, however, that Tolstoy's acceptance of reason as
the force that "illuminates our life and impels us to modify our actions, is not an illusion [whose] authority can never be denied" immediately sets his intellectual method and hence his ethical perception somewhat at odds with Thoreau's intuitive method. Where Tolstoy insisted upon the necessity "to obey reason in the pursuit of good," Thoreau insisted upon obedience to intuitive consciousness in pursuit of the good. From the perspective of Tolstoy, whose reliance upon reason provided a common standard by which men might judge their actions and those of others, Thoreau's subjectivism coupled with heroism contained all the potential for capricious and arbitrary imposition of authority which he found objectionable in the state. Furthermore, Thoreau's final position denying not only that all men have a faculty for reason but even denying that all men have a capacity for consciousness, would prevent the obtaining of Tolstoy's political goal of abolishing authoritarian control over individuals, and moreover would also render impossible the social cohesiveness which is so important to his theory, dependent as it is upon an assumed desire for social identification and bonding among persons in communities.

Thoreau's objection to physical coercion for political ends was inconstant in that he objected only to coercion and violence toward ends with which he did not agree. Tolstoy's aversion to violence was uniform and abiding (although it is alleged that he beat his wife). The problem
of tactics, therefore, is one that presents widely differing solutions to each man. If Thoreau had retained the subjectivist perspective of his earlier years, with consistent logic he could not have been an apologist for the Brown atrocities nor urged popular uprisings to free governmental prisoners which carried an implicit assumption of violence. Had he not abandoned the uncompromising non-violence which Tolstoy retained, he would have been caught in the persisting dilemma of utopians and anarchists of how to establish the new order without violence.\(^{47}\)

Tolstoy's moral absolutism, in political terms, was more consistent than Thoreau's because he accepted as the basis for it an objective, if not empirical, standard, that of the Sermon on the Mount, to be understood by the application of the innate capacity for reason in mankind.\(^{48}\) From this perspective Thoreau's moral absolutism is absolute only for the individual struck by an intuitive flash of "the right," not for a society or a community, and in a political setting has the operational effect of pitting a fanatic against the group or fanatic against fanatic. In neither case is civilization, the polity, nor the individuals subject to the will (or violence) of the fanatic benefited. Such an approach as Thoreau attempted to justify founders in the Tolstoian view, on the shoals of the very evil it intends to vanquish. In fairness to Thoreau it must be noted that in the last days of his life
he wrote as if evil could only be eradicated by ignoring it and making no response to it whatever save a blameless personal life; but the fact remains that during the period when he wrote on matters political and advocated tactical responses to specific situations, his position was open to most of the ethical objections Tolstoy offered against the state and the political responses to it which were in the active mode.

In more modern times, Mohandas Gandhi has been identified with both anarchism and Thoreau. Despite the fact that there is a coercive element in Gandhi's satyagraha that is analogous to the moral coercion advocated by Thoreau in "Civil Disobedience" and "Slavery in Massachusetts," that included boycotts, non-payment of taxes, and non-compliance with legal prescriptions, Gandhi never sanctioned the application of violence by one human against another to gain political ends. The moral distinction between the coercion of satyagraha and the two essays mentioned above on the one hand and the type of violent coercion which Thoreau justified in the Brown essays is apparent, but has been labored at length elsewhere.

One element of Thoreau's thought which Gandhian technique and theory must reject is the immediate appeal to moral absolutes. Gandhian satyagraha first attempts to find common areas of agreement, to accommodate the interests or concerns of opposing parties, to compromise, or to use his phrase, "experiment with truth." When acceptable accom-
modation fails, only then do the non-violent but coercive elements of satyagraha become active. Even in Thoreau's moderate "Civil Disobedience" the possibility of compromise with an offending or opposing moral point of view is not admitted. Gandhi's satyagraha is philosophically compatible with a liberal democratic state; it is doubtful that Thoreau's moral heroism could admit a toleration sufficient to support the pluralistic values which liberal democratic governments exist to shelter.

One result of Thoreau's combination of moral absolutism and atomistic individualism is that it cannot sustain broad social movements such as that which Gandhi's "experiments with truth" mounted in South Africa and in India. Thoreau's thought was capable only of episodic reaction to specific situations, as exemplified by the occasions for his political essays, which might well be of minor significance to the total political pattern, depending upon the particular sensitivities and crotchets of the morally conscious individual. It was not an adequate theory for such social changes as satyagraha achieved, nor was it sufficiently comprehensive of the moral complexities inherent in a political system with pluralistic values to provide the theoretic foundation for the reform of an existing government nor the establishment of a new governmental form. 51

Whether anarchist or not, Gandhi and the political method he spon-
sored, have added a major impetus to the modern attitude toward civil disobedience. The American civil rights movement, particularly in the person of Martin Luther King, Jr., has claimed both Gandhi and Thoreau as important influences. 52 The personal influence of King upon the American civil rights movement had more elements of agreement with the Christian ethics of Tolstoy and the tactics of Gandhi than with Thoreau's acceptance of violent means for desired political ends. 53 A more militant view of the possible limits of civil disobedience has existed within the Christian ranks from which King represented himself with echoes as far back as *Vindicae Contra Tyrannos* and John Knox, using what Paul Power calls the Petrine injunction (Obey God rather than man—Acts 5:29) to deny the authority of the state and to permit disobedience to the extent of violence claiming the sanction of divine law without reference to human institutions. 54 Since King's death this view has had an increasing application among dissenters ranging from such diverse Christian leaders as the Reverend Jesse Jackson of the civil rights movement, the Berrigan brothers and the Reverend William Sloane Coffin, Jr., of the peace in Viet Nam movement, and some clergy on both Protestant and Catholic sides of the civil disturbance in Northern Ireland.

Thoreau's own moral certainty, although not precisely in the Christian tradition, lacks the humility required of non-violent disobedi-
ence to state authority as exemplified by Gandhi and King. As Leslie Dunbar objects, the claim that God justifies one's conscientious disobedience "borders on blasphemy.... It is not God rather than man that we obey, but God rather than man that we seek to please, and therein lies a tremendous difference." 55 The possibility that the Devil rather than God is the source of inspiration for violent disobedience must not be discounted in the context of Christian theology, and as has been pointedly remarked, "the perplexing implications of this option for actor and authorities were found at least as recently as John Brown of Harper's Ferry." 56 In "Civil Disobedience" Thoreau considered the possibility of acting from an arrogant and wrong-headed crotchet in disobeying the law by non-payment of taxes; in the Brown essays there is no such hesitation about the moral validity of armed insurrection and murder.

There is some recent comment that suggests that violence is justified when avenues of peaceful political change have been proven ineffective, 57 but in Thoreau's theory, the middle ground of working for peaceful change through the established political process is disparaged, i.e., his rejection of voting and his utter contempt for the judicial process.

Thoreau's system of thought, being wholly subjective in its reliance upon individual consciousness for a definition of the good in both personal and social terms, is subject to criticism from those who would reject such states of mind as "unreal" in political import and
therefore incompetent as an organizing principle for a political theory or of a system of law. As it pertains to jurisprudence, at least, the criticism has been outlined by J. P. Duncan, drawing largely on the ideas of Elijah Jordan. The objections basically are five: first, because of their discrete and largely uncommunicable character states of mind cannot be extended to organization nor reduced to system sufficiently to support law or political order, for they represent pure subjectivity and, as such, while they possess a qualitative substance, they lack the circumstantiality and indifference of reference which realize a thing as an effective property agent expressing legislative influence. Second, states of emotion and individual affective climates are unstable, or at least not static conditions, and moods are insufficient foundation for any system of government, excluding absolute despotism, and then is effective only for the single personality of the dictator. Third, subjective perceptions, even of moral implication, tend to remain within the mind and to have no power to initiate or sustain social effects of certain quality; if a moral perception, even of evil, "is real, [it] is not a state of mind; or if it is only a state of mind, it is not real, and so is practically unimportant." Fourth, the subjective moral perception is insufficient for a general theory of law or politics because it is inherently divisive and reductionist, capable of expressing only "blind intentless action." The subjecti-
vist perceives each object of interest to him as an independent good, standing alone "substantiated by its own quality with no reference to anything beyond itself." Fifth, a subjective identification of an interest, even if it be seen in terms of a moral "good" cannot support a general system of politics or law because it inevitably expresses an advantage for the individual who feels the interest, that disregards the interests or advantages sought by others and therefore breeds conflict rather than conciliation.

These are serious objections that apply to all political systems that rely on individual consciousness as the root of obligation and source of morality, and bear particular weight against Thoreau. While he cannot be defended against all five of these points, it can be remarked that he seems to have had an instinctive awareness of the limits of consciousness. It will be recalled that he held the experiences of consciousness to be incommunicable, of varying quality both among men and within his own mind, and of unpredictable occurrence. For much of his life, he did not attempt to extend his subjective perceptions of the good into the social or political arena, preferring to tend to his "nearer concerns" and to support the passivist branches in the controversies of the day, as in the case of N. P. Rogers. The recognition of this element in Thoreau has contributed to his reputation as a philosophical anarchist; indeed, the issues under discussion here are precisely
what created the paralysis of individualism within the ranks of the philosophical anarchists and seems to have touched Thoreau prior to 1850.

As to the second criticism, one can only observe that Thoreau believed in a kind of unfolding of reality which might account in part for the varying perceptions in one's consciousness. It does not, however, answer the charge that such an instability creates a nearly insurmountable difficulty for the construction of a general political theory on such a basis.

The third of Duncan's points proved to be the crucible for Thoreau. He had never been certain of the nature of evil nor the appropriate response to it because it was unclear to him whether "goodness" was a subjective reaction to the "innocence" of nature or an abiding quality in the universe outside the confines of his mind, and whether evil was merely "not good" as Emerson would have it, or an objective reality locked in constant opposition to the principle of good. However, as he moved through the moral crises of the slavery issue, he came to see good and evil as objective realities, and in sensing the similar psychological climate he shared with John Brown, sought to break the chains of subjectivity by justifying the "principled action" which Brown practiced in the objective world of politics. The objective reality of the slaughtered victims of the Kansas atrocities and the Harper's Ferry adventure can hardly be denied. Yet, the Brown essays cannot over-
come the objection of the third point: that it is inadequate to support a system of law. And, the Brown case demonstrates the force of the fourth point against Thoreau: his defense of Brown never rose above a glorification of blind action.

Finally, the fifth point can be accepted. Thoreau's final position was that the advantage belonging to the "good man" outweighs all other considerations to the contrary. The good must be brought to be, and the heroic consciousness of the upright ruler was the vehicle. The position smacks of despotism and tyranny, but there it is, expressed openly and without deceit for all to read in the political essays.

Severe as the criticism is, it should not be taken as a denial that Thoreau had nothing to offer political theory. No theory of politics has yet been found against which serious objections cannot be raised. It has not been the purpose of this study to defend Thoreau against all comers. Rather, a description of what he thought, a critique of the political aspects of his thinking, and a suggestion of his significance to the field of political theory has been attempted.

If for no other contribution than the reasoned praise of tactical civil disobedience, Thoreau is important to the theoretical study of politics. Civil disobedience has become a fact of political life in the United States, and efforts are being made to incorporate the concept into modern democratic theory, although the precise definition of
what constitutes civil disobedience has yet to be agreed upon. Insofar as American civil disobedience can be traced to Thoreau, the recent manifestations of disobedience, both civil and "uncivil," carry threads of Thoreauvian thought to the present day. From the Nuremberg trials to the civil rights movement, to the Viet Nam peace movement, to the American Indian Movement's occupation of Alcatraz and Wounded Knee, the significance of Thoreau for American political theory and practice is undeniable. An assessment, however, is not likely to have weight until greater historical perspective is gained and the present potentials in the application of civil disobedience in the modern political context have been developed. Until such time as a final and conclusive statement comprehending the significance of civil disobedience can be written, Henry David Thoreau will have relevance for the analysis of contemporary political issues as well as a place in the history of political theory.

Notes


2. For an interesting rebuttal to this kind of exclusiveness in contemporary scholarship in political theory see Sheldon S. Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," American Political Science Review, LXIII (December, 1969), pp. 1062-1082.

4. Ibid., p. 23.


7. Alfred M. Bingham, *The Techniques of Democracy* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1942). Bingham observes (p. 14) that only in comparatively recent times has the use of technique been seen as important to the operations of the mechanics of democracy.


11. Joseph Wood Krutch suggests that there was less conflict than confusion in Thoreau's thinking on this topic. He suggests that Thoreau never perceived the difference between saying that nature confirms man's moral notions and saying that what nature teaches is morality regardless of our customs. Thoreau's vacillation between making man the center of any conceivable universe and a tendency to make man merely one more natural occurrence has been noted with clarity in Krutch's *Henry David Thoreau* (New York: William Sloan, 1948), pp. 175-176.


14. This is a major distinction between Thoreau and Christian pacifists such as Adin Ballou and Leo Tolstoy, and between political activists such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.


17. Ibid., p. 445.


19. See letter to Thoreau from James Redpath, a confidant and assistant of Brown's in the Harper's Ferry adventure, dated February 6, 1860, in Correspondence, Bode and Harding, eds., p. 574. Also see F. B. Sanborn, Recollections of Seventy Years, Vol. I, p. 103, which states that Brown had told Thoreau in detail of his Kansas adventures, particularly about the Battle of Black Jack.


23. Ibid., p. 772.

24. Ibid., p. 773.

25. Floyd Stovall, American Idealism (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943), pp. 73-78.


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46. Ibid.


49. Gandhi's debt to Thoreau has been cited in Chapter III of this study. The anarchist label is one which is given by G. N. Dhawan, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (Bombay: The Popular Book Depot, 1946). Bondurant, however, disputes the contention that he was an anarchist, although his theory of satyagraha is offered as a corrective to the programmatic deficiencies of anarchism. See Joan V. Bondurant, *The Conquest of Violence*, pp. 172-188.


54. For a recent statement of this view see John C. Bennett, "The Place of Civil Disobedience," *Christianity and Crisis*, 27 (December, 1967), pp. 299-302.


60. Ibid., p. 280, quoting Jordan.

61. Ibid., quoting Jordan.

62. Ibid., quoting Jordan.


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