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Thoreau and Integrity

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by

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I thank my advisor, Roger Berkowitz, for constantly challenging me, and helping me truly think. I thank my family, for all of their love.

"It is never too late to give up our prejudices. No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof."

-Thoreau, *Walden*, page 7.

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Musical score attached to the end of the essay.

Introduction

Henry David Thoreau is a provocative figure. To this day, there is a divide on how to see him in the canon. Some reduce him to merely a conservationist, merely a nature lover.[1] Others deride him as a cold and annoying hypocrite, a disturbed faux-philosopher.[2] Yet there are also those who see him as a prodigiously gifted writer and political thinker, as someone who lived and advocated for beauty in life.[3]

I see Thoreau as one of the greatest persons in America's intellectual heritage, a transcendentalist founding father, and someone who could give American leaders and citizens today some sorely needed reminders about American values. But what I admire about Thoreau the most is his integrity. So many of us forget to think and act. We leave difficult decisions by the wayside in favor of comfort. We dream, but we refuse the choices to make our dreams a reality. Instead of taking the difficult but rewarding path, we are content to live our lives as average, quiet, subdued people.

Thoreau thought and Thoreau did. He profoundly and seriously assessed the issues of his time, and fought for solutions. In this essay, I argue that what Thoreau sees as wrong in the America of his day as well as what he idealizes boil down to the lack of and creation of integrity. This is because Thoreau advocates for an outlook on life that involves an embracing of God, freedom, reason, equality, vivacity, simplicity, frugality, plurality, and morality. These elements are indispensable to the integrity and thus health of individuals as well as society. For as Thoreau points out, although these elements may always be recovered

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[1] Jack Turner, "Introduction," in *A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau,* ed. Jack Turner (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 7.
[2] *Ibid.,* 1.
[3] *Ibid.,* 2-3.

and attained, when they are discarded, evil in the form of oppression, mindlessness, and rigid, robotic behavior tends to grip a nation toxically. Lastly, I will discuss why a musical composition of mine for choir which sets one of Thoreau's poems is significant to this essay.

Chapter 1: Integrity Defined

To argue that Thoreau is a thinker of integrity, I will first offer an understanding of what integrity is. The Oxford English Dictionary defines integrity in two main parts. First, there is, "The condition of having no part or element taken away or wanting; undivided or unbroken state; material wholeness, completeness, entirety."[4] Second, there is, "Soundness of moral principle; the character of uncorrupted virtue, especially in relation to truth and fair dealing; uprightness, honesty, and sincerity."[5] Etymologically, the word integrity comes from the Latin *integritās*, which is associated with not only wholeness, but also chastity and purity.[6]

What do the definitions and etymology of integrity show us? Integrity is a highly open-ended, abstract term that leads to perhaps an uncountable amount of interpretive outcomes across all sorts of cultures and societies. Wholeness and purity are umbrella-like, open-ended, abstract concepts themselves, as thinkers have tried to define these terms since thought began to be written down, and their meanings change shape continuously through history. Based on information about the world locally available, the wholeness and purity of an ancient Sumerian farmer would be much different than a dentist's living in the greater New York area today.

But there are several indisputable qualities we can pinpoint on the word integrity, which are useful for any discussion of integrity in relation to something else (in the case of this essay, Henry David Thoreau's ideas about society and living). First, integrity has two dimensions, or states of being. There is a state of wholeness, which may be objectively

[4] "integrity, n.". OED Online. December 2015. Oxford University Press.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*

physical or subjectively metaphysical. A rock may be intact or shattered. Or an idea may be judged cohesive or otherwise. Then, there is an important (subjectively metaphysical) sub-state of wholeness, which sticks out independently in integrity's definition due to its societal ramifications: The condition of being morally right, that is unblemished, uncorrupted. This condition makes integrity a highly desirable, uniquely positive trait because it signifies that someone has reached an elevated state of reason, rightness, and maturity. As law professor and thinker Stephen Carter notes, one does not simply become morally right. They do so after careful reflection and having experience in parrying evil.[7] A person of integrity has the confidence to be steadfast in their thoughtful, just and correct convictions, all the while being wary of the siren song of fanaticism, a moral failing.[8]

Second, integrity is a state of perfection, an ideal, a condition of harmony and health, how something *should* be. This is because true unity and purity, physically or metaphysically, means there can be nothing wrong with the whole, visibly or otherwise, known or unknown. The whole is simply correct, true to itself. A demon cannot have integrity, because while a demon might have consistent convictions, such convictions are not towards morality, but evil. However, as alluded to with the earlier example of the ancient Sumerian and modern New Yorker, perfection is also something in the eye of the beholder. What may be viewed as perfect to one person may be seen as incomplete to another -- "one man's trash is another man's treasure." There may only be one universal truth, but comprehending it is probably impossible to the human mind.[9] As humans, we nonetheless have a responsibility to get closer to that truth. Examining a variety of different viewpoints

[7] Stephen L. Carter, *Integrity* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996), 30-31.
[8] *Ibid.,* 39, 48.
[9] *Ibid.,* 60.

on integrity can only aid such a cause. This essay will concentrate on the viewpoint of Thoreau.

Lastly, it is important to note that a state of perfection may have seemingly imperfect elements. A degree of conflict may be necessary in a properly functioning whole. Therefore, integrity does not eschew conflict. Integrity also implies the concepts of direction and freedom, because if someone has integrity, they know what the correct path to take is, and are capable of doing so. As opposed to merely being honest about their beliefs, a person of integrity understands right from wrong, and how to act accordingly after careful reflection, even if manifestations of non-integrity stand in their way.[10] To live with integrity is to be morally upright, while being able to positively choose how one grows. To be as deeply aware of one's self as one's surroundings. To be able to judge what is best for oneself as well as the broader world justly.

[10] *Ibid.,* 7. It is important to note that Carter concedes understanding right from wrong, just like trying to uncover absolute truths, is uncertain, but not in every respect. As he notes on page 25, "...there are surely some views of sufficiently obnoxious morality that one cannot hold them and remain a person of integrity." In other words, no matter how subjective and non-evolved the concepts of right and wrong may still be, and no matter what the context, one can never frame an act such as murdering in cold blood, or holding human slaves as an act of integrity.

Chapter 2: Thoreau's Core of Integrity

In this chapter I spell out specifically how Thoreau's writings are not merely about the beauty of nature or self-absorbed ramblings, but about how individuals can become free and therefore obtain true integrity. This is because, in *Walden* as well as his *Journal,* Thoreau writes in great detail about how he attains his own individual freedom; Thoreau's progress to freedom shows that the steps to the attainment of freedom are identical to the criteria of what makes a person have integrity, that is whole, especially mentally and morally. I also argue that Thoreau believes finding individual integrity is always of the utmost importance in American society. This is because life becomes decayed, blurry, bland, and unhappy, as well as more susceptible to moral evil such as oppression, senseless destruction, and murder, when lack of individual integrity is widespread in society. Thoreau observes worrisome non-integrity in the America of his time.

Thoreau opens his masterpiece *Walden* aggressively in the first person. In the very first sentence, Thoreau writes, "When I wrote the following pages...I lived alone, in the woods...in a house which I had built myself."[11] In the first three pages of *Walden*, the word "I" occurs twenty-four times. Thoreau also remarks at *Walden*'s beginning, "In most books, the *I,* or first person, is omitted: in this it will be retained...We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking."[12] What does Thoreau's usage of the first person mean? *Walden* is not merely a portrait of Walden the geographical location, it is about how Thoreau *is* at Walden, how Thoreau's self is at Walden. How Thoreau, self-aware and not beholden to others, chooses to live his life the way he determines at Walden.

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[11] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden,* ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer, (Yale, 2006), 1.
[12] *Ibid.,* 2.

Thoreau's I-ness, his insistence upon personal honesty and transparency, reflects his extreme valuation for a life answerable to none but oneself. Thus, Thoreau shows us how to live with integrity, because autonomy is essential to a fulfilling, whole life. A person cannot be complete as a human being if they do not achieve their potential and are ignorant.

In writing deeply about self-awareness, Thoreau distinguishes himself as a serious thinker, as opposed to merely an admirer and describer of the natural world. To Thoreau, going to Walden is an experiment in finding one's self by stripping away numerous distractions from unnatural society. Thoreau confirms this in *Walden* when he writes, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."[13] Thoreau writes that he wants to seek greater deliberation over his life, because a life must be lived earnestly from beginning to end.[14] Since Thoreau seeks to distance himself from society in his experiment, we know Thoreau sees forces in society that inhibit true deliberation. As will be discussed later, some of these forces are conformism and mind-numbing consumerism, which draw their victims in with siren songs of comfort and stability.

Thoreau's trip to Walden is about putting his house, his mind, into order. Thoreau wishes for others to have a similar experience in their lives, to release themselves from the bewildering and labyrinthine spells of custom, as well as technology for technology's sake. As Thoreau warns in *Walden, "*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

[13] *Ibid.,* 97.
[14] *Ibid.,* 53.

which it was already but too easy to arrive at."[15] Thoreau reminds us that having more of something, even if that something is technology, is not necessarily a good thing. An invention, however seemingly impressive, may ultimately make us more rigid and thoughtless, take us away from ourselves while simultaneously keeping us self-absorbed. Integrity is the opposite of such characteristics, because integrity encourages empathetic and reflective thought. While integrity encourages us to be steadfast in our views, it also requires us to be constantly examining and changing our views, to make sure they are truly morally correct.

Thoreau cites the telegraph as an example of draining technology in *Walden,* "We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate."[16] Thoreau was not against technology, or even the telegraph per se. Thoreau admires the telegraph's power.[17] Rather, Thoreau warns against technology's misuse. He is against the telegraph if all it promotes is idle chatter, the dull, colorless, apathetic routines of a world without integrity. To Thoreau, modern living must not clutter the mind with detritus. Rather, Thoreau argues, one must live with a clear mind, with a deep capability to explore individuality and reflect.

However, due to his obsession with the I, some have called Thoreau a narcissist, as well as other negative labels such as cold-hearted, quack, antisocial, selfish, condescending, and mentally ill. Journalist Kathryn Schulz in her *New Yorker* article *Pond Scum* writes that, "The real Thoreau was, in the fullest sense of the word, self-obsessed: narcissistic, fanatical

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[15] *Ibid.,* 55.
[16] *Ibid.,* 55.
[17] Henry David Thoreau, *The Journal 1837-1861,* ed. Damion Searls, (New York: New York Review 2009), 81.

about self-control, adamant that he required nothing beyond himself to understand and thrive in the world. From that inward fixation flowed a social and political vision that is deeply unsettling."[18] Schulz also also calls Thoreau "chilly" and "arrogant."[19] Rather than see Thoreau as a bastion of integrity, Schulz regards him as a misanthropic, even dubious grump. To her, Thoreau has such profound flaws in his character that whatever he wrote on how to live must not be trusted, and is hypocritical.

Some of these insults flung at Thoreau come from misconception. For instance, Thoreau was not a recluse while residing at Walden, oblivious to everyone else around him. He lived in close proximity to Concord, and was friendly with other residents of the township, as well as his mentor, Ralph Waldo Emerson.[20] Occasionally one does find curious statements in Thoreau's writings such as, "If one may judge who rarely looks into the newspapers, nothing new does ever happen in foreign parts, a French Revolution not excepted." It is deeply wrong to denounce Europe's history in the first half of the 19th century as insignificant, considering European movements that shaped activity in the West including in the United States such as the the Industrial Revolution, and Romanticism. Certainly Thoreau reacted to these items in his writings. As mentioned earlier in regards to the telegraph, he both marvels at and expresses distrust at technology.[21] Thoreau responded to Romantic notions, and his output can be seen as a great contribution to or as a reaction

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[18] Kathryn Schulz, "Pond Scum: Henry David Thoreau's Moral Myopia," *New Yorker,* October 19th, 2015, accessed February 10th, 2015, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/10/19/pond-scum.
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] Denis Donoghue, "Introduction," in Thoreau, *Walden,* viii.
[21] In another remark about the soul-sucking power of machines, Thoreau writes in *Walden* on page 99, "We do not ride the railroad; it rides upon us." Yet he also praises the sailboat and its symbolism in his *Journal* on page 64, "The sailboat is an admirable invention, by which you compel the wind to transport you even against yourself."

against Romanticism.[22]

One must concede that Thoreau does display some elements of hypocrisy in his character. As will be discussed in the fourth chapter, Thoreau calls for more men to be like John Brown. Yet one could frame an argument that Thoreau was nothing like John Brown himself. Instead of directly helping slaves, Thoreau refurbished a hut in the woods.

In his writings, Thoreau has instances where he exhibits less than exemplary behavior, all the while praising himself. For example, Thoreau is indifferent to the damaged corpses of washed up Irish immigrants from the 1849 shipwreck of the brig the St. John on Massachusetts' coast,

> "On the whole...it was not so impressive a scene [the shipwreck] as I might have expected. If I had found one body cast upon the beach in some lonely place, it would have affected me more. I sympathized rather with the winds and waves, as if to toss and mangle these poor human bodies was the order of the day. If this was the law of Nature, why waste any time in awe or pity?"[23]

Rather than express sorrow for the loss of life as well as respect for the indifferent force of nature, Thoreau separates the two, and chooses the latter, implying indifference towards human life. Then several years later in *Walden*, Thoreau writes, "I used to wonder at the halo of light around my shadow, and would fain fancy myself one of the elect."[24] It is narcissistic and ironic for Thoreau to casually compare himself to angels, since angels, at least in the conventional, Biblical sense, are God's guardians of human activity and life.

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[22] Perry Miller, "Thoreau in the Context of International Romanticism," in *New England Quarterly* 34 (2), 1961. New England Quarterly, Inc.: 147–59. doi:10.2307/362523. See also Donald Culross Peattie, 1938, "Is Thoreau a Modern?," in *North American Review* 245 (1), 1938. University of Northern Iowa: 159–69. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25114968.
[23] Schulz, "Pond Scum," *New Yorker.*
[24] Thoreau, *Walden*, 220.

But Thoreau would agree that self-admiration on its own is a negative characteristic. Thoreau recognizes he is not perfect. He himself humbly admits that he is not consistent in his message 100% of the time, but he also states that his wheat is worth finding in his chaff.[25]

As mentioned previously, Thoreau not only went to Walden, he wrote *Walden*. Thoreau is someone who has thought long and hard about who he is. By showing what he did at Walden, and writing in such detail about his own reasoning and impulses, Thoreau shows us who he is as a free man. He chose to live a certain way, as opposed to following conventions for the sake of following conventions. Thoreau's self-admiration is only a part of his self-reflection. Moreover, by writing about his self-reflecting, Thoreau shows us that he actually cares a great deal about human life. Thoreau teaches us how to be ourselves, see more nuances in the world around us, and thus have greater capacity for mental choice. This in addition to having the capability to moving our bodies where we would like to move, or simply saying what we would like to say, more rudimentary aspects of freedom.

Freedom to Thoreau is not being beholden to ideas just because they are taught to us. Freedom is a part of integrity, because cognitive porousness is essential to wholeness. One cannot be whole if one does not know how to at least think about what is moral and best for themselves as well as society. A humanity of uprightness requires a dialogue of active, positive ideas.

Thoreau acknowledges that attaining freedom is not an easy path, but a lifelong struggle. Thoreau himself admits as much when he writes in *Walden* how distractions abound in human lives, "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

[25] *Ibid.,* 52.

of."[26] Thoreau understands that we may be born into a mode of living, but that does not mean the greatest or even the rightest expression of who we are as a person is necessarily that mode of living. In fact, it most likely is not. It may be easy and comfortable to simply accept one's lot, and take cattle and tools just because they are there. But if someone becomes tied down to the farm, and is unable to explore other things which may excite them or develop latent talents, they will probably not lead a happy and fulfilling life.

Later on in Walden, Thoreau continues this point, writing, "I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue *his own* way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead."[27] Thoreau reminds us it is not enough to simply reject the plow. One must promote there being a plurality of individuals in society, and embark on their own journey of deliberation. Doing an activity simply because one's parents or neighbors do it is not only mindless, but morally apathetic. One cannot justify being a a thief just because their parents were thieves.

However, Thoreau also believes the path towards the freedom he envisions is always open to anyone at any stage in their life. For he also exclaims in *Walden*, "It is never too late to give up our prejudices."[28] Thoreau wants to emphasize that time does not inhibit integrity and personhood, only mental barriers do. At the end *Walden* he also analogizes waking up to freedom to a beautiful insect waking up inside a tree after many years of dormancy.[29] Despite how long someone may be trapped in the anti-individualist cage, their wellspring of

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[26] *Ibid.*, 3.
[27] *Ibid.,* 75.
[28] *Ibid.,* 7.
[29] *Ibid.,* 362.

individuality and integrity still sleeps inside them, waiting to blossom.

Thoreau does not condemn his fellow Americans as mindlessly materialistic with *Walden*. Rather, he extends his hand to lift his fellow Americans into a life of greater purpose and choice. It may be very difficult to discard the sickle or the axe, to go against the deep-rooted traditions of one's own family, township, and all one knows. But anyone can still do it. The majority of people can dispose of the wool over their eyes, and thus be enlightened with greater integrity. All a person has to do is reflect seriously on one's own thoughts, impulses, and desires, as well as be attuned to the beauty of all aspects of the outside world, large and small. Happiness, tranquility, and direction are symptoms of this attainment of integrity, just as unhappiness and emptiness indicate the opposite.

Thoreau gets at the lack of happiness and fulfillment in the people around him, this societal crisis, when he famously proclaims that, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."[30] That the people around him go on with the humdrum patterns of their lives, worried such patterns are the wrong way to go about life, but unsure of how to change. The United States, at least relative to other countries in the mid-19th Century, was (and still is currently) a bountiful, politically liberal and spacious place. And relative to other parts of the United States, Concord, Massachusetts was (and still is) a a very prosperous and peaceful place. But Thoreau does not see life in Concord and elsewhere in America as spontaneous, vivid, colorful, happy, or harmonious, obvious aspects of societal health and prosperity. Instead, he sees the vast majority of American life as tragically dull, predictable, routine, sad, and lethargic, because so many refuse to explore themselves and be attuned to the world.

Thoreau understands that the average citizen of Concord does not need to be loud in

[30] *Ibid.,* 7.

his aforementioned desperation, because they have a good amount of what we now term basic human rights fulfilled. They are quiet in their desperation because, despite all of the material and political blessings, they do not feel that their lives are meaningful, or natural. But Thoreau is no nihilist, because he believes there is a solution to this desperation. I remind the reader that being clay does not mean that one is incapable of going towards greater integrity. To Thoreau, there is meaning in life if one takes the time to be sensitive to their surroundings, natural and inorganic, and not bury such things under vague notions of duty.

As Thoreau writes in *Civil Disobedience*, those who, without thinking or making any moral judgments, march in lockstep with an institution like the government, just for the sake of order, are merely "wooden," or "clay,"[31] not human. This is because, to Thoreau, if you don't think, you don't know who you are. If you are not free, then what are you but a mass of organic material, vulnerable to other forces? You are only a vessel being used, rather than an autonomous body.

Thoreau elaborates on this point of view when In *Walden*, he remarks how, "Kings and queens who wear a suit but once...cannot know the comfort of wearing a suit that fits. They are no better than wooden horses to hang the clean clothes on."[32] To Thoreau, while some people may attain the status of royalty, (metaphorically in reference to the citizenry of America) that does not necessarily make them sentient, free people. They are still clay, albeit gilded. Someone may attain enormous purchasing power but only amass detritus, and not know the meaning of their belongings, or why they even want them. They may buy a suit, but not know why that suit may be good for them. They do not buy the suit because they are

[31] Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," in *Portable Thoreau*, 77-78.
[32] Thoreau, *Walden*, 21.

free, they buy it out of consumerist routine. The suit dresses up a mannequin instead of a person.

To Thoreau, being clay in practice is also having an obsession with all kinds of data (such as monetary, scientific, and some forms of entertainment literature) as opposed to knowledge, or provocative, open-ended thought. In *Walden,* Thoreau writes how,

> "A man, any man, will go considerably out of his way to pick up a silver dollar; but here are golden words [the Classics], which the wisest men of antiquity have uttered, and whose worth the wise of every succeeding age have assured of; and yet we [the American people] learn to read only as far as Easy Reading, the primers and class-books..."[33]

Rather than be a truly free individual, who experiences the vivacity of emotion, nature, and especially reason in this particular example, who feels, the man Thoreau describes exclusively consumes. He is blind to feeling, and only seeks out materials to physically appease his flesh and to entertain himself. He will not buy a difficult book, since he is ignorant of great literature in the first place, and challenging oneself goes against the patterns of a basic, predictable life.

Thoreau does acknowledge that food, clothing, and shelter are necessities of staying alive, as he writes in *Walden* that, "By proper Shelter and Clothing we legitimately retain our internal heat..."[34] In other words, the human engine cannot function without such items. But to Thoreau, true living should not stop at those aspects of existence, for he also writes in regards the indigenous peoples of Australia, "Is it impossible to combine the hardiness of

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[33] *Ibid.,* 114.
[34] *Ibid.,* 12.

these savages (sic) with the intellectualness of the civilized man?"[35] Thoreau believes that simply surviving is not incompatible with striving towards a more enlightened state. In fact, if one lives without the mindless distractions of material life, as Thoreau claims to do at Walden, survival is not very difficult, and one can devote themselves better to pensiveness and the self.

Thoreau writes in *Walden* how, "[at Walden] I learned from my two years' experience that it would cost incredible little trouble to obtain one's necessary food...that a man may use as simple a diet as the animals, and yet retain health and strength."[36] To Thoreau, it is not the wild which reverts one to clay, but flawed tendrils of civilization. As he also writes, "Not that food which entereth into the mouth defileth a man, but the appetite with which it is eaten."[37] Ephemeral pleasure is what gnaws at integrity, not going back to more primitive living conditions.

One sees another aspect of "clayness" when Thoreau writes in his *Journal,*

> "Moore [a friend of Thoreau's] tells me that last fall his men, digging sand in that hollow just up the hill, dug up a parcel of snakes half torpid. They were both striped and black together. The men killed them, and laid them all in a line on the ground, and they measured several hundred feet. This seems to be the common practice when such collections are found; they are at once killed and stretched out in a line, and the sum of their lengths measured and related."[38]

These men, though they may be well-meaning, law-abiding citizens, do not exhibit a sensitivity to life. Rather than respect the livelihood of the snakes, the men aimlessly destroy them. The snakes are measured only out of an aimless and dim curiosity. Thoreau expresses

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[35] *Ibid.,* 12.
[36] *Ibid.,* 65.
[37] *Ibid.,* 238.
[38] Thoreau, *Journal,* 617.

distaste and worry at such dullness, because he knows it has a tendency to grow dangerously, affecting how one cherishes life. Thoreau understands that as one loses regard for life, they will be able to resist evil less and less.

Hannah Arendt observes the same phenomenon in her *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, where Adolf Eichmann, a dull, average, mediocre man who was "not very much interested in metaphysics,"[39] and who might have led a quiet, mundane life if the cards in the universe were different, became a highly efficient tool of the Nazi killing machine. In Thoreau's time, vicious banality pertained to the terror of slavery. Both Arendt and Thoreau value thoughtfulness and deep self-awareness as the core of human freedom. This is because when one is truly in step with themselves, they can mold their own clay. They can identify evil, resist being manipulated it, and fight it.

Fulfillment, a feeling of properness in the universe, can only be achieved by seriously reflecting about who one is, and how one must go forth to achieve that hypothetical, ideal person, even if that person goes against convention. Thoreau gets at such a phantom guide towards integrity when he invokes the concept of double consciousness in *Walden,* "I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am able of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another."[40] Thoreau wants us to know that stepping outside of oneself, and observing oneself from an imaginary third party perspective is an effective strategy towards integrity, because through such a procedure we are given an opportunity to see what may be lacking in our core without

[39] Hannah Arendt, "Eichmann in Jerusalem Part I," *New Yorker,* February 16th, 1963, accessed March 18th, 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1963/02/16/eichmann-in-jerusalem-i.
[40] Thoreau, *Walden*, 146.

being blinded by passion.

In his work, Thoreau's key message is to get people to wake up, to emerge from their clay cocoons and become free. Thoreau himself says this explicitly when he remarks in *Walden*, "I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up."[41] This sentence is a clarification that Thoreau is not misanthropic. He does not only criticize his fellow neighbors for being simply mass that consumes. He has not given up hope on them. He believes that not some, not many, but the vast majority of people have the capability to open their eyes, and see the beauty of the earth and their individuality. That submission to the banal routine of Western society does not have to rule over everything else in a person, as he puts it at one point in *Walden*, "...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 the slave-driver of yourself."[42] Thoreau believes that part of his duty as an individual is to help bring people out of Plato's cave.

Thoreau realizes a citizenry with integrity is vital towards a healthy society. That is, a society which is educated, open-minded, purpose-driven, life-loving, happy, pluralist, and individualist. If a society does not have integrity, it will not remain in a neutral state of organic mass enacting a chain of random events. Such a society's clay will become susceptible to evil, and fall into a state of darkness, as alluded to previously with the mentioning of Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

Thoreau openly expresses a fear of such a slide into evil when he warns of how the

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[41] *Ibid.,* 90.
[42] *Ibid.,* 6.

devil, and thus evil, on earth is "legion" in *Walden*,[43] outnumbering the good. He also worries about humanity's tendency towards darkness in his *Journal*, "Truly they [men] love darkness rather than light..."[44] Thoreau understands that evil is everywhere on earth, and actively preys on defenseless clay. Thoreau understands that when more people are clay, the more low-hanging fruit evil is able to grasp.

So what can people do to awaken and cast the darkness off of themselves, according to Thoreau? We know Thoreau is not hostile to all of society, for he sojourns in what he calls "civilized life" after his stay at Walden.[45] Thoreau did not go to Walden to escape society, but to learn how to live and act with greater integrity in society. To learn what one's own ideas really are, not to mindlessly follow someone else's, all the while pertaining to a moral core. Thoreau not only did this for himself, but also to set an example for others. In the next two sections of my essay, I will discuss how Thoreau views two cornerstones of society, religion and politics. I will look at the problems of integrity Thoreau sees in those two cornerstones, and what he recommends for improvement.

[43] Thoreau, *Walden*, 148.
[44] Thoreau, *Journal*, 365.
[45] Thoreau, *Walden*, 1.

Chapter 3: Thoreau, Integrity, and the Divine

In this chapter I examine the religiosity of Thoreau, as well as how Thoreau's vision of integrity relates to what religiosity means. I argue that Thoreau is not antireligious because he believed in God from the perspective of a pantheist who associates divine qualities with nature, even if he is against religious institutions, seeing them as deeply corrupted. I argue that Thoreau believes man should be close to God and seek divine instruction because to not do so, to not see God as truly omnipresent, that is in a house of worship as well as streams and mountains, is to deprive oneself of experiencing life vividly and with choice. Since God is a part of the world, to cut oneself off from the world is to cut oneself off from God. To Thoreau, this cutting off deprives people of integrity, because it is another avenue towards the world of dull, unhappy, oppressive non-integrity and evil discussed in the previous chapter.

Thoreau read superficially may come off as antireligious because of how he frequently disparages religious institutions in his writings. In his *Journal*, from when he began it at age twenty-three until he died, Thoreau refers to American churches frequently, most often as grave places. "What is a churchyard but a graveyard?"[46] Thoreau asks in one early entry. Years later he states, "The churchyard is a *grave* place."[47] Rather than associate an institution of God with life, and extol traditional Judeo-Christian practice as moral and proper, Thoreau associates churches with death, and thus rigidity, immobility, thoughtlessness, and rot. Churches are not beacons upon hills, but necropolises to be avoided.

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[46] Thoreau, *Journal*, 97.
[47] *Ibid.,* 398.

Thoreau also enjoyed boasting of his anti-church activities. Again in his *Journal*, Thoreau remarks, "Lectured in basement (vestry) of the orthodox church, and I trust I helped to undermine it."[48] He notoriously writes in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* how, "There are few things more disheartening and disgusting than when you are walking the streets of a strange village on the Sabbath, to hear a preacher shouting like a boatswain in a gale of wind, and thus harshly profaning the quiet atmosphere of the day. You fancy him to have taken off his coat, as when men are about to do hot and dirty work."[49] Rather than try and rebuild and reform religious institutions from the inside, Thoreau only speaks about undermining and going against houses of worship, seeing them as profoundly noxious. He criticizes religious leaders as corrupt and oleaginous, polluters rather than purifiers. Therefore, Thoreau believes that religious institutions and organized religion are inherently wrong.

Yet throughout his body of work, Thoreau also associates nature in all her beauty and power with God-like qualities. He invokes nature as a divine force which influences life. As he remarks about some local Massachusetts reptiles, "Nature does not forget beauty of outline even in a mud turtle's shell."[50] He invokes nature as if nature is a physical expression of God, God's hands, and what causes life to exist on earth, "...the earth is the mother of all creatures."[51] Even when Thoreau sees an act as seemingly mundane as a child dropping fruit, he associates it as a deliberate act of nature, "When yesterday, a boy spilled his huckleberries

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[48] *Ibid.,* 428.
[49] Thoreau, "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," in *Portable Thoreau*, 111.
[50] Thoreau, *Journal,* 261.
[51] *Ibid.,* 284.

in the pasture, I saw that Nature was making use of him to disperse her berries."[52] The boy did not spill the huckleberries out of sheer accident, he did so because the natural world intended him to perform such an action in order to spread seeds. By almost always referring to nature with a capital N,[53] Thoreau makes clear even further that he believes the force of the earth is beyond man.

However, Thoreau's disapproval of organized religion and association of nature with the divine is not incompatible with belief in God. Instead, Thoreau sees God as an overseer of humanity and something that nature is a part of. Alan Hodder, author of *Thoreau's Ecstatic Witness*, notes that Thoreau, "...never repudiated religion itself, nor even Christian values as such, but only their corporate, ecclesiastical, and political forms.[54] Thoreau is a pantheist, in that he believes in God as a force above man's comprehension that drives the universe, and Nature is a divine agent of God, like an angel. Thoreau reflects this idea when he proclaims towards the end of *Walden,* while observing the formation of a sandbank, he, "feels the presence of the Artist who made the world and me."[55] Thoreau acknowledges a divine force of creation separate from nature. Further on he references God with capital letters, acknowledging the Builder of the universe,[56] and the Benefactor and Intelligence that stands over himself the insect.[57] When Thoreau refers to nature he never neglects to call her Nature. But Thoreau realizes that she is a creation of God as well.

To further make clear that God is supreme, and Nature is God's hands, Thoreau

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[52] *Ibid.,* 220.
[53] *Ibid.,* 267, 277, 356. These are only a few out of many examples besides the last two cited quotes. To see more, one needs only to look through a few pages of the *Journal* or *Walden*.
[54] Alan Hodder, "Born to Be a Pantheist," in *Thoreau's Ecstatic Witness* (Yale, 2001), 138.
[55] Thoreau, *Walden,* 331.
[56] *Ibid.,* 358.
[57] *Ibid.,* 360.

quotes a Chinese proverb in his *Journal*, translating it as, "God's order is nature -- man's order is law -- and the establishment of law is the subject of instruction."[58] With such statements, Thoreau means that God controls nature, and man controls the law, but man and his control are within God's circle. If nature is divine, as stated previously, it is because God is in all parts of nature, from sandbanks to snowstorms to swarms of birds. God is omnipresent, and God is the universe's ultimate driver. While human beings may be creatures who have the greatest capability to go against nature (and thus God), they are still part of the earth too, and can never sever their ties to God and his circle. People may ignore God. But people are still judged by God, and can rediscover God should they wish to.

What does Thoreau's religiosity have to do with integrity? Only by seeing the world as divine is it possible to love the world with the intensity and power that lends meaning and purpose to human life. Seeing the world as God-infused allows Thoreau to experience the world with vivacity, to aspire to live up to the demands of a divinely created being in a divinely directed world.

Purpose, a faith in the meaningfulness of life, is essential to integrity, because being morally upright means to stand up for sublime virtues. God is connected to purpose because there is no purpose without God -- God is the impetus of everything. Therefore, hardship is meaningful if it has purpose -- if it brings one closer to integrity, to God. Thoreau invokes this idea when he tells the story of the artist of Kouroo in *Walden*,

> "There was an artist in the city of Kouroo who was disposed to strive after perfection. One day it came into his mind to make a staff. Having considered that in an imperfect work time is an ingredient, but into a perfect work time does not enter, he said to himself, it shall be perfect in all respects, though I should do nothing else in my life.

[58] Thoreau, *Journal*, 11.

> He proceeded instantly to the forest for wood, being resolved that it should not be made of unsuitable material; and as he searched for and rejected stick after stick, his friends gradually deserted him, for they grew old in their works and died, but he grew not older by a moment. His singleness of purpose and resolution, and his elevated piety, endowed him, without his knowledge, with perennial youth."[59]

The artist endures hardship by giving up all other activities outside of staff-making, as well as his friends. Yet, he has found a higher purpose with wood -- staff-making is not detrimental repetition to the artist, but rather his Walden. The artist sees all of nature in the quest for the perfect staff, in the trees, the forests, mountains, and reservoirs he travels. He may never truly arrive at the perfect stick. But because the artist lives the life he sees fit, he obtains greater integrity while searching, and is rewarded with health by the forces above man. While the artist's path to integrity, to his Walden, is a lonely one, it is not the only one. Thoreau acknowledged his mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had many friends and a large family,[60] as a man of integrity. This is because Emerson was responsible for igniting Thoreau's own spark of individuality in the first place, by speaking about achieving one's potential in *Walden*-anticipating ways.[61]

Thoreau believes that man needs divine instruction to have greater integrity, that man has an obligation to seek out God, the heartbeat of the universe. This is because God is sacred to Thoreau, since God underlies all of nature. But man attains true religious wholeness by seeing God in forests and clouds, not exclusively in crucifixes, Star of Davids, Buddhas, or other man-made religious totems.

In his writings, Thoreau laments how not enough of his contemporaries seek out God

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[59] Thoreau, *Walden*, 354-355.
[60] "Ralph Waldo Emerson," American Transcendentalism Web, accessed April 28th, 2016, http://transcendentalism-legacy.tamu.edu/authors/emerson/.
[61] Cramer, "Introduction," in *Portable Thoreau,* xiv-xv.

in the natural world, or beyond the mundane procedures of their townships and bourgeois lives. Shortly after the Chinese proverb in his *Journal*, Thoreau writes, "Men see God in the ripple but not in miles of still water. Of all the two-thousand miles that the St. Lawrence flows, pilgrims go only to Niagara."[62] To Thoreau, when people fail to embrace an all-encompassing view of God, they shut another door towards being awake and understanding the self. They do not see God everywhere, but only in certain, limited aspects of society. If the world is the St. Lawrence river, Niagara Falls is human society. People, despite their best intentions to see the St. Lawrence, miss the mark. They are distracted by Niagara Falls and thus trapped. If persons cannot comprehend the wholeness of God as the river, then they cannot really understand the wholeness of themselves. Such people only comprehend the small, not the large as well as the small. Only a ripple, not a ripple and a reservoir.

Thoreau sees the world as uninspired in most of its existence, which leaves people uninspired, lazy, and dead. But by arguing that people need to open the door towards God, towards the world of color, Thoreau implies that people need a spark to get rid of their ignorance. That spark is the realization one must find themselves and truly think.

Moreover, peoples' myopic tendencies towards God are why Thoreau sees religious institutions as espousing a frozen, two-dimensional, and false doctrine cut off from life. Thoreau reasons that rather than teach man to think for himself, to decide what is right for himself, the doctrines of organized religion are absolutist. The Ten Commandments simply are, the story of the Bible is indisputable. There is no questioning the divine. Scripture is rigid. The flowers and trees are God's creations, but they are separate from God. God is an external entity that must be obeyed simply because he is God, and God's essence is applied

[62] *Ibid.,* 12.

almost exclusively to a mode of procedure through life, of a routine of working based around institutions, that is houses of worship.

So to Thoreau, the god of such institutions as conventionally worshipped in the United States in the 19th Century is not actually God, since the real God is involved with the entire world. Thoreau sees the god in the churches around Concord as one of rote and habit, false, an anti-Walden, a clay compeller. To Thoreau, such a god is a misinterpretation of God. God is Spinozistic to Thoreau.

That is not to say that Thoreau thinks the Ten Commandments or the Bible are inherently wrong, or not really part of the real God. Core edicts of religious texts, particularly Judeo-Christian ones, coincide with Thoreau's view of God. For instance, it is Thoreauvian to cherish life, individuality, and thus integrity, so it is still a sin to kill senselessly. This is implied in the *Journal* account of the snake killing from the previous chapter. Thoreau's principal gripe with the men is that they destroy an intriguing and beautiful aspect of nature, a cluster of snakes underground, for no apparent purpose other than to go through the motions of the routine of digging robotically.

But Thoreau also writes explicitly about how such mindless, clay acts of non-integrity profane against the divine, and go against Western religious pillars such as the Ten Commandments. Thoreau cries out to God when he sees mankind damaging God's world through acts motivated by the society of clay. Thoreau writes early on in his *Journal,* "Thank God, they [people without integrity] cannot cut down the clouds!"[63] And on the *Journal*'s very last pages, he also writes, "Thank God, men cannot as yet fly, and lay waste the sky as well as the earth! We are safe on that side [though no longer in today's world] for the

[63] *Ibid.,* 106.

present."[64] Thoreau acknowledges God's skies, and is grateful for the fact that they remain pure, unmolested by what he sees in his time as mankind's sad (although not irreversible) trudge away from integrity.

Most significantly, the sentiment of protest against man's defacing of divine nature is seen in Thoreau's sorrow against the naming of Flint Pond, a sister reservoir to Walden Pond, in *Walden,*

> "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...who never bathed in it, who never loved it, who never protected it, who never spoke a good word for 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, the wild flowers which grow by its shores, or some wild man or child the thread of whose history is interwoven with its own; not from him who could show no title to it but the deed which a like-minded neighbor or legislature gave him...who would carry his God, to market, if he could get anything for him; who goes to market *for* his god as it is; on whose farm nothing grows free, whose fields bear no crops, whose meadows no flowers, whose trees no fruits, but dollars; who loves not the beauty of his fruits, whose fruits are not ripe for him till they are turned to dollars."[65]

In this quotation, the farmer, Flint, is the embodiment of the man drained of the true integrity. He has no vivacity, respect towards the world outside of man, reason, and positive moral choice. He is completely blind to the vibrancy and thus divinity of nature. He does not see any beauty of the land around Flint Pond. Everything besides his own base cravings, his will to simply consume instead of think, usurps his faulty way of being. His clay has been corrupted so much by the faulty, consumerist, rote path of his degenerate society that he has

[64] *Ibid.,* 656.
[65] Thoreau, *Walden*, 214-215.

been shaped into a devilish monster with claw-like hands.

To Thoreau, Farmer Flint is as far from God as one can possibly be. God made the beauty of Flint Pond, but Farmer Flint spurns God with his unholy obsession with materialism, with the "dollar". The great irony of the name Flint Pond is that the name is the opposite of the pond's beauty. In Thoreau's eyes, Flint would even sell his God for some ephemeral material pleasure. Farmer Flint, in his extreme state of non-integrity, does not thank God for anything. Rather, he insults God through idolizing and prostituting himself to material gain, killing his fellow organisms, stealing from the land, and coveting money.

To Thoreau, Farmer Flint is the opposite of how people should be towards themselves, the world, and God. Therefore, to Thoreau, basic tenets of morality, such as the Ten Commandments should be seen not just as laws and commands in and of themselves, but calls to look into one's soul and determine one's own fate, all the while respecting God and nature's beauty. To Thoreau, the Ten Commandments should be obeyed, just not in a way closed off from the natural world.

Thoreau's overarching religious message is that humans need divine instruction in order to achieve greater integrity. Simply attending a religious institution such as a church and not being aware of deeper, broader, meanings of Scripture is what a wooden doll does, not a truly awake human. In order to be more whole, Thoreau wants people to understand that God teaches self-reliance, and that non-human aspects of the natural world are sacred. Thinking of God as only in the church and nowhere else are clay thoughts, not the thoughts of a genuine individual. Farmer Flints will always exist in every society so long as there is evil in the world, but Thoreau hopes to aid the many who are still malleable in finding integrity. One way Thoreau does is by pointing out how God is in the world far beyond houses of worship.

Chapter 4: Thoreau, Integrity, and Politics

In this chapter I argue that politics is significant to Thoreau despite his seemingly anti-government statements, and that the notion of Thoreau as cut off from politics is false. I argue that, to Thoreau, government can be highly imperfect, but is not inherently broken. This is because Thoreau realizes that a politics which concentrates on morality and the development of the individual, as opposed to the empowerment of commerce for commerce's sake, enables a healthier society of greater integrity to exist. I argue that, to Thoreau, the political and moral issue of the most pressing importance to the United States of his time was the problem of slavery. Thoreau believed that abolitionism was of paramount importance in the politics of his day, in order to create an America of unbroken integrity. I argue that Thoreau believes seemingly apolitical acts can be expressed as political acts of integrity, due to how they enable people to think and react. Lastly, I argue that John Brown is a powerful example of example of political integrity to Thoreau, due to the principles of abolitionism he fought for, as well as his courage to follow through on his individualistic passions and not accept the status quo. Although Brown was not a perfect figure.

A substantial number of commentators on Thoreau, even ones who hold him up as a positive intellectual force such as Hannah Arendt, describe him as averse to the process of politics and government.[66] This is because it is possible to misread Thoreau as not only pessimistic and cynical towards the nature of politics itself, but excusing political action in favor of the exclusive pursuit of higher aspects of life (such as integrity), viewing politics as trivial and irreparably corrupted.

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[66] Jack Turner, "Thoreau and John Brown," in *A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau,* ed. Jack Turner (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 134.

It is true that Thoreau generally holds politicians in very low regard. On the subject of politicians supposedly maturing with experience and age, Thoreau remarks in his *Journal*, "The oldest, wisest politician grows not more human so, but is merely a grey wharf rat at last. He makes a habit of disregarding the moral right and wrong for the legal and political, commits a slow suicide, and thinks to recover by retiring on a farm at last."[67] There is something about the practice of politics in 19th century America that is poisonous and integrity-draining to Thoreau. He sees 19th century American politicians emerging out of politics as no longer men but lower animals which act as clay, cogs, and Flints do.

In *Civil Disobedience,* Thoreau appears to excuse the practice of politics in order to pursue the integrity of the self when he writes,

> "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 may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support. 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."[68]

Thoreau is stating that if a person finds a cause unjust, e.g. slavery, he does not need to devote his entire life to stopping the cause. Thoreau argues that there is more to life than moral and political activism, because one must contemplate and achieve integrity in order to act meaningfully politically, otherwise one's actions will be empty and thoughtless.

But just because Thoreau makes frequent jabs at politicians and political institutions, and claims that political participation should not make up the entirety of one's life, does not mean he is against politics altogether. I remind the reader that Thoreau states in *Walden*, "I

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[67] Thoreau, *Journal,* 229.
[68] Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," in *Portable Thoreau*, 81-82.

do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up."[69] Waking up does not have to be purely about finding ourselves. Waking up is also about helping one's fellow human beings in a variety of ways including political, since social interactions, no matter their scale, are inherently political.[70] Thoreau understands that politics is a tool, and is necessary to combat the forces of non-integrity and evil. He is not against government for the sake of being against government.

Thoreau opens his essay *Civil Disobedience* with the statement, "I heartily accept the motto, 'That government is best which governs least...' Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe, 'That government is best which governs not at all...'"[71] Taken as a sound bite, this is a rejectionist statement towards politics. The best government is no government, period. But what so many readers fail to remember regarding this passage is that Thoreau also carefully adds something else immediately after the statement. He states that, "...when men are prepared for it, that [no government] will be the kind of government which they will have."[72] Thoreau does not endorse the violent destruction of his native country the way anarchists such as Sergey Nechaev do, who writes in his *Revolutionary Catechism* that, "The revolutionary is a dedicated man, merciless toward the state and toward the educated classes..."[73] Instead, Thoreau acknowledges that governments may only cease to exist once

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[69] Thoreau, *Walden*, 90.
[70] Aristotle, *Politics,* "Book One, Section 1253a," http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0086,035:1:1253a, accessed April 11th, 2016.
[71] Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," in *Portable Thoreau*, 75.
[72] *Ibid.,* 75.
[73] Sergey Nechaev, "The Revolutionary Catechism," bullet point 5, Marxist.org, accessed April 5th, 2016, https://www.marxists.org/subject/anarchism/nechayev/catechism.htm.

people are sufficiently enlightened. Thoreau concedes that such enlightenment is an extremely distant prospect, if one that is even possible at all, given the imperfect nature of humanity.[74] Thoreau subscribes to the Madisonian notion that men are no angels.[75]

As noted in the beginning of this chapter, Thoreau rarely hesitates at the chance to make fun of the government. For instance, in his *Journal* he calls the government of Massachusetts a hellish, rotten place, "...morally covered with scoriae and volcanic cinders, such as Milton imagined."[76] But he also reluctantly recognizes government as necessary to hold societal stability in place. Thoreau still describes government as expedient when it is properly functioning.[77] To Thoreau, government might be highly susceptible to incompetence and evil, but lawlessness can only hurt people to a greater extent. Moreover, governments can still do some good.

Thoreau reluctantly accepts conventional politics as necessary to society, so what does an ideal conventional politics of integrity look like to Thoreau? A conventional politics of integrity is possible to Thoreau within the traditional American political institutions, given his respect for the practices of the American Founding Fathers.[78] Thoreau desires a conventional politics comprised of individuals with the aim of furthering individuality, who embrace the integrity of the self discussed in the second chapter of this essay.

To Thoreau, since moral rectitude is essential to integrity, morality must also be at the core of all political decision making within political bodies. Mindless, cursory, and habitual

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[74] Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," in *Portable Thoreau*, 75.
[75] James Madison, *The Federalist*, paragraph 4, accessed May 3rd, 2016, http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa51.htm.
[76] Thoreau, *Journal*, 267.
[77] Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," in *Portable Thoreau*, 75.
[78] Turner, "Thoreau and John Brown," *Political Companion to Thoreau,* 157.

political decision making must be resisted and halted. Thoreau implies this when he criticizes the political participation of his day in his *Journal*,

> "The majority of the men of the North, and of the South and East and West, are not men of principle. If they vote, they do not send men to Congress on errands of humanity; but, while their brothers and sisters are being scourged and hung for loving liberty, while (insert here all the inhumanities that pandemonium can conceive of), it is the mismanagement of wood and iron and stone and gold which concerns them."[79]

Thoreau deems his fellow citizenry as lacking individuality and integrity, since he sees them as not caring about moral issues and the upholding of moral truths. He specifically sees them as rejecting the sanctity of life as well as a broader, more well-informed concept of equality in regards to one's fellow human beings, the rejection of slavery. Such a lack of caring is a problem in and of itself, as discussed in the second chapter of my essay, since the pursuit of integrity and individuality should be something for all people to keep in mind in order to live a fulfilling life. But the apathy of the citizenry and its representatives also indicates a deficiency of positive politics. If enough people are clay, their politics becomes clay. Thoreau is deeply concerned that the integrity-deprived elected and non-elected citizenry of his time worry exclusively about how the management of materials and commerce affects their lives. Thoreau wants his fellow Americans to take more of a moral stand against slavery.

I remind the reader that Thoreau does believe that the management of resources and materials in and of itself is meaningless, since people and thus society cannot stay alive without material foundations, that is food, clothing and shelter. This is something Thoreau

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[79] Thoreau, *Journal,* 265.

admits to early on in *Walden,*[80] as mentioned in the second chapter of this essay. To Thoreau, commerce for commerce's sake is a moral failing, since it distracts from or emboldens evil. Thoreau believes that commerce must always be subservient to morality, and abolitionism was the greatest moral duty in Thoreau's time.

That racism is an evil lie is obvious today, given the tremendous amount of empirical scientific evidence disproving it.[81] While the falsity of racism was less scientifically clear in the antebellum United States, that was because of a lack of research in the first place. That fact still does not excuse antebellum racist behavior, because true integrity on its own supplies fairness and empathy, the ability to see people as people regardless of their skin color.[82] True integrity was something at least some 19th century abolitionists such as Thoreau and John Brown were capable of.

With regard to showing how a specific person as opposed to a collective may participate in politics with integrity, Thoreau's own seemingly apolitical activities may be seen as examples, albeit unorthodox ones. As political scientist Jack Turner notes, "his [Thoreau's] sojourn at Walden can also be viewed as a political performance."[83] This is possible because certain activities, while not directly involved with government, may provoke political thought relative to government and society. Philosopher Stanley Cavell observes in *The Senses of Walden* that in going to Walden, Thoreau consciously withdraws

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[80] Thoreau, *Walden*, 12.
[81] Robert Wald Sussman, "There is No Such Thing as Race," *Newsweek,* November 8th, 2014, accessed April 12th, 2016, http://www.newsweek.com/there-no-such-thing-race-283123.
[82] Carter, *Integrity*, 18.
[83] Turner, "Thoreau and John Brown," *Political Companion to Thoreau*, 154.

from society.[84] By going to Walden, Thoreau compels his fellow citizens to think about why such a rejection of society might beneficial to their own lives. Such thought changes the citizenry, however implicitly. Thus, one of Thoreau's many reasons for publishing *Walden* is to make citizenry elsewhere in the United States ponder life beyond society, and revise their politics. To Thoreau, building an America of greater integrity means a reformation of political practice as well as personal practice. Making the exploration of the self an act of protest is one way to spur political reform.

If a 19th Century American man were to evaluate the efficacy of Thoreau's unorthodox political actions in the woods, they would most likely say that Thoreau was laughable, as evidenced by the puzzlement of Thoreau's behavior by his fellow citizens,[85] and the modest circulation of *Walden* in Thoreau's lifetime.[86] But ultimately, Thoreau's actions have been enormously politically effective. This is evidenced by subsequent political actors throughout history being influenced by Thoreau including Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi, and the many thousands of people in and outside of America who engage with Thoreau's ideas from a political perspective (among other perspectives) today.

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[84] Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 86.
[85] One Concord farmer, observing one of Thoreau's meditations, observed, "Why, one morning I went out in my field across there to the river, and there, beside that little old mud pond, was standing *Da*-avid Henry, and he wasn't doin' nothin' but just standin' there -- lookin' at that pond, and when I came back at noon, there he was standin' with his hands behind him just lookin' down into that pond, and after dinner when I come back again if there wasn't *Da*-vid standin' there just like as if he had been there all day, gazin' down into that *pond*, and I stopped and looked at him and I says, 'Da-avid Henry, what air you a-doin'?' And he didn't turn his head and he didn't look at me. He kept on lookin' down at that pond, and he said, as if he was thinkin' about the stars in the heavens, 'Mr. Murray, I'm a-studyin' -- the habits -- of the bullfrog!' And there that darned fool had been standin' -- the livelong day -- a-studyin' -- the habits -- of the bull-frog!" Thoreau, *Journal*, 493. Originally quoted in *Memories of a Sculptor's Wife* by Mrs. Daniel Chester French, 1928.
[86] "Henry David Thoreau," in *Encyclopedia Britannica,* accessed April 15th, 2016, http://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-David-Thoreau.

However, Thoreau was not arrogant enough to think that he was the only bastion of integrity alive during his lifetime. Thoreau is confident in his message of integrity, but consciously acknowledges he is not perfect, comparing his writings to wheat and chaff,[87] as mentioned in the second chapter of this essay. Thoreau is well aware of his own shortcomings as well as the strengths of others. As mentioned in the third chapter, Thoreau thought of Emerson as a man of integrity. Given his high regard for the acts of brilliant men such as Shakespeare and Newton,[88] it is difficult to imagine Thoreau saying these figures did not have integrity.

Thoreau holds up the abolitionist John Brown as a paragon of political integrity. John Brown, the leader of an abolitionist task force in pre-state Kansas, was not above using brutal, deadly force to accomplish his aims.[89] Brown led the infamous raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia in 1859, in which he attempted and failed to take over a federal armory to initiate a slave revolt.[90] In Thoreau's time, many thought of Brown as a violent, insane extremist vigilante.[91]

But in his emotional *Plea for Captain John Brown*, Thoreau describes Brown as a pure, ideal American. Thoreau cites how Brown's grandfather fought in the Revolution, and

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[87] Thoreau, *Walden*, 52.
[88] *Ibid.,* 81.
[89] "John Brown," PBS, accessed April 28th, 2016, http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/a_c/brown.htm.
[90] *Ibid.*
[91] "John Brown's Raid," *New York Times*, October 16th, 1909, accessed April 28th, 2016, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9800E0D61539E733A25755C1A9669D946897D6CF&rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FBrown%2C%20John&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=search&contentPlacement=3&pgtype=collection.

how Brown himself appreciated the Constitution.[92] How Brown was a man of moral rectitude, God, transcendentalism, and thoughtfulness.[93] Most importantly in regards to Brown, Thoreau writes that Brown was an autodidact, a man who learned on his own, from his own experience of living in America,

> "He [Brown] did not go to the college called Harvard, good old Alma Mater as she is. He was not fed on the pap that is there furnished. As he phrased it, 'I know no more of grammar than one of your calves.' But he went to the great university of the West, where he sedulously pursued the study of Liberty, for which he had early betrayed a fondness, and having taken many degrees, he finally commenced the public practice of Humanity in Kansas...such were *his humanities*, and not any study of grammar. He would have left a Greek accent slanting the wrong way, and righted up a falling man."[94]

Thoreau knows that Brown understood you don't learn integrity by going to a fancy school and memorizing tables of letters and numbers, however helpful and interesting such letters and numbers may be. Thoreau knows that John Brown had exemplary political integrity because in addition to his connection with God and broad vision of the world, he devoted his life to fighting for a higher moral politics in the freeing of slaves, and was willing to pay the ultimate price to do so.

Thoreau acknowledges further on in his *Plea* that Brown not only understood incorrect human laws, but resisted them.[95] That Brown thought in terms of the big picture about laws and realized the importance in defending some and objecting to others. Thoreau understands that Brown was not distracted by the "shiny objects" of money and false,

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[92] Henry David Thoreau, *A Plea for Captain John Brown Part 1*, paragraph 2, accessed April 15th, 2016, http://thoreau.eserver.org/plea1.html.
[93] *Ibid.,* paragraphs 9, 12.
[94] Thoreau, *Plea Part 1,* paragraph 7.
[95] Thoreau, *Plea Part 2*, paragraph 36.

illusionary quietude, something Thoreau likely saw in certain morally diluted antebellum public figures of his time, such as the presidents Millard Fillmore and James Buchanan.

When John Brown was hanged by the government of the United States, many in the North and the South criticized him for what they termed his extreme, militant actions in Bleeding Kansas and at Harpers Ferry.[96] Many today would not hesitate to call violence towards government property by a United States citizen in the name of ideology terrorism. Indeed, in perhaps 99% of all cases, such acts are. But that is because the vast majority of those who blow up buildings to make points are not only committing to violence with insufficient moral cause, but also committing acts of unquestionable, unspeakable evil, destroying any possible sliver of legitimacy to what they stand for.

The actions of terrorists such as Timothy McVeigh and Nidal Hasan are not the same as John Brown, because the actions of such criminals came out of confirmed disturbed, inconsistent selfishness alongside a complete lack of regard towards the value of human life.[97] As history has shown, there are ideals of sufficient right worth fighting for, even with terroristic force. For example, the resistance against the Nazis by members of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. John Brown's actions are another example, because he did not seek to be violent towards others just for the sake of appeasing his own malignant delusions.

Moreover, Brown was capable of living in harmony with himself despite his militant

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[96] "John Brown's Execution. The Execution of Capt. Brown," *New York Tribune,* December 3rd, 1859, accessed April 15th, 2016, http://www.wvculture.org/history/jbexhibit/tribunedeath.html.

[97] Dale Russakoff and Serge F. Kovaleski, "An Ordinary Boy's Extraordinary Rage," *Washington Post,* July 2nd, 1995, accessed April 15th, 2016, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/oklahoma/bg/mcveigh.htm. As well as, Jeff Brady, "Portrait Emerges of Hasan As Troubled Man," *NPR*, November 11th, 2009, accessed April 15th, 2016, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=120317524.

abolitionist actions. This means Brown had a moral core. I will explain this by discussing the concept of two-in-one that Arendt notes in her essay *Thinking and Moral Considerations*,

> "When we say what a thing is...all we can say about it in its sheer identity is: A rose is a rose is a rose. But this is not all in the case if I in my identity ("being one") relate to myself. This curious thing that I am needs no plurality in order to establish difference; it carries the difference within itself when it says: 'I am I.' So long as I am conscious, that is, conscious of myself, I am identical with myself only for others to whom I appear as one and the same. For myself, articulating that being-conscious-of-myself, I am inevitably *two-in-one*..."[98]

What these words mean is that we are not just we. We are not simple objects, like a rock, or a lamp, that just exist. Rather, we have a conscious which we judge ourselves with, engage in dialogue with. Only we can feel our own conscience -- it does not factor into other peoples' judgment of us. The consciousness is a part of us, but since we judge ourselves with it, it is also apart from us. Hence, who we are (as thought) plus our conscience constitutes something that is two-in-one.

But Arendt also notes that for someone to be able to be comfortable with oneself, they must be comfortable with their conscience. As she also writes in *Considerations*,

> "For Socrates, this two-in-one meant simply that if you want to think you must see to it that the two who carry on the thinking dialogue be in good shape, that the partners be friends...who would want to be the friend of and have to live together with a murderer? Not even a murderer. What kind of dialogue could you lead with him? Precisely the dialogue which Shakespeare let Richard III lead with himself after a great number of crimes had been committed: 'What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by...'"[99]

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[98] Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," *Social Research* 38:3, 1971: 441-442.
[99] *Ibid.,* 442-443.

The conscience is an ideal of integrity, in that it is morally high and authoritative towards how we should be, and we measure ourselves against it. If we have the approval of the conscience with our actions, we attain fulfillment and happiness. If we go against our conscience, we live with great tension and quiet desperation within ourselves. Arendt cites Shakespeare's Richard III as an example of someone who is in conflict with their conscience. He knows he has committed evil due to his conscience. Therefore, he fears and loathes himself.

Brown committed his at times violent acts because of his conscience. He determined that he could not live with himself if he did not commit his acts of abolitionism. In finding a fugitive slave during his younger days, Brown remarked, "I found him [the fugitive slave] behind a log, and I heard his heart thumping before I reached him. At that I vowed eternal enmity to slavery."[100] After hearing about the death by mob of the abolitionist Elijah P. Lovejoy, Brown stood up in church and made an oath, "Here before God, in the presence of these witnesses, from this time, I consecrate my life to the destruction of slavery!"[101] Brown understood history was on his side. By listening to his conscience, Brown made the decision to stand up for the morally just cause of abolitionism. Brown realized that God's world and laws are broader than simply going to a building and praying every Sunday, that a society without slaves is one that is closer to God and nature.

Thoreau was not naive about his support for Brown, oblivious towards how Brown's violent actions could be perceived as morally wrong. As Thoreau writes about Brown in his

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[100] Oswald Garrison Villard, *John Brown 1800-1859: A Biography Fifty Years After* (New York : Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910), 18.
[101] Louis Ruchames, *John Brown: the Making of a Revolutionary* (New York: Grosset's Universal Library, 1969), 189.

Journal,

> "It galls me to listen to the remarks of craven-hearted neighbors who speak disparagingly of John Brown because he resorted to violence, resisted the government, threw his life away! What have they thrown their lives, pray?...They preserve the so-called peace of their community by deeds of petty violence every day."[102]

Thoreau understands Brown did what he believed was right in combating the scourge of slavery, in order to preserve more lives in the long run. Thoreau also understands that support for the status quo is violent in its own way, since evil is permitted to run amok. Northerners buying Southern goods made from slaves in antebellum America feel an illusionary peace only because evil is not right in front of their very eyes, and they have not yet made the mental leap to see why a life of blind materialism, especially at the expense of fellow human beings, is wrong.

Thoreau further expresses such a sentiment when he writes in *Civil Disobedience*, "There are thousands who are *in opinion* opposed slavery and to war, who yet in effect do nothing to put an end to them; who, esteeming themselves children of Washington and Franklin, sit down with their hands in their pockets, and say that they know not what to do, and do nothing."[103] To Thoreau, there is no excuse to sit by the wayside while evil happens. To simply accept one's own lack of integrity and tolerate injustice is terrible weakness. To Thoreau, people, whether they are doctors or woodcutters, have a moral obligation to do something when faced with malevolence.

However, Thoreau does not believe everyone should aspire to be a Brown, politically

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[102] Thoreau, *Journal*, 584.
[103] Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," in *Portable Thoreau*, 80.

or otherwise. Thoreau understands that Brown was enlightened enough to find his own Walden in combating slavery. But Brown's Walden was different than Thoreau's Walden. The Waldens of everyone are different on some level. As Thoreau writes at the end of *Walden,* "Be rather the Mungo Park, the Lewis and Clarke and Frobisher, of your own streams and oceans; explore your own higher latitudes...be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought."[104] Thoreau understands there are universal moral truths which the legitimacy of all actions must be weighed against. But that does not mean there are archetypes to be filled by Walden-finders. As evidenced by his aforementioned disdain in chapter two for how people get used to the motions of materialist habit and fall into rigid, mindless patterns, conformity and routine are two of Thoreau's biggest enemies. Such pitfalls lead to great evil. One must be wary of too many Browns in society because while it is deeply good for citizenry to stand up for justice, as thinker David Brooks notes, a culture of martyrdom is conformist in its worship of death.[105]

As Thoreau believes integrity is a necessary trait for humanity, politics, which is an inevitable part of the "civilization" Thoreau states he returns to and tolerates after living at Walden,[106] must also have integrity. The first chapter of this essay defines integrity as involving moral uprightness. This uprightness requires a politics that is not corrupted by apathy and shortsightedness. Specifically, Thoreau believes Americans must work to eliminate slavery, and not become obsessed in the management of consumer goods, or

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[104] Thoreau*, Walden,* 348-349.
[105] David Brooks, "The Culture of Martyrdom," *Atlantic*, June, 2002, accessed April 15th, 2016, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2002/06/the-culture-of-martyrdom/302506/.
[106] Thoreau*, Walden,* 1.

appease industries that abuse human life. Thoreau believes Americans can practice a positive politics, a politics of integrity, in all sorts of diverse ways, such as withdrawing from society for a period of time. But Thoreau holds up the abolitionist John Brown as a great example of political integrity because, in his core, Brown knew what was morally right to do in regards to slavery -- tenaciously fight against it, in order to wake Americans up. Thoreau understands that Brown was not a simple criminal, motivated by narcissism, greed, and selfishness. Thoreau understands that Brown chose to sacrifice a routine, simple life in favor of integrity.

Conclusion: Thoreau, Integrity, and Music

In this essay, I have discussed how Thoreau calls for people to think deeply about who they are, away from the blinding distractions of society. Thoreau believed that in order to be truly human, one must see and love God in nature and outside of totems. He believed that one must treat thought as one of man's greatest treasures. He argued that man should not lose sight of indisputable morality, such as the abolishment of slavery, and that man must always serve morality, and not give in to evil just to be comfortable. In this essay, I have attempted to correlate how all of these points are a part of the notion of integrity. Therefore, integrity is one of the most important concepts people and society should hold on to. We must never lose sight of integrity as Americans, or tragedy, unjust suffering, and death will come our way, as the Civil War did for Thoreau's time.

Writing this paper has caused me to think about how Thoreau's ideals of integrity relate to my own journey through life. I think, like most people, I have a lot of clayness I can still shed. I expect to be shedding clayness for the rest of my life. However, I do think I have found my own Walden. Music is my own Walden, because when I write music, I know I am free -- I am not afraid to write what I feel. I have the capability to exist in a place away from society and its distractions, where I grow my ideas, and thus myself. I discover how to justify my piece to myself and to the world.

Furthermore, music, whether it be my own or that of others, causes me to be engaged with the broader world, as well as think about morality, religion, and politics. Of course sometimes I listen to music simply to enjoy it. But other times when I listen to a piece of music, be it my own, Beethoven's, Ligeti's, John Coltrane's, or Katy Perry's, I try to think about all of the ramifications such a piece of music has. Some questions I ask myself are:

What is the story of the music? Is the music abstract? Why does this music exist? Such questions often lead to moral, political, and religious realms.

Thoreau loved music, and viewed it as one of the most wonderful aspects of the world. In his *Journal*, Thoreau writes that, "Beauty and music are not mere traits and exceptions. They are the rule and character. It is the exception that we see and hear."[107] In other words, beauty and music are not pleasant, mild, wisps in the world. Rather, they are bedrocks of existence, pure, and ideal. Thoreau also writes in his *Journal* that, upon imagining himself as a fish in Walden Pond, "I can only think of precious jewels, of music, poetry, beauty, and the mystery of life."[108] To Thoreau, music is a treasure, of the same caliber as understanding why people exist.

Since music is so significant to myself as well as Thoreau, I sought to incorporate it into this senior project. Therefore, I have written a short composition for choir which sets poetry of Thoreau that I believe relates to his message of integrity. I have attached the score to the end of this essay. The poem I set is unnamed and comes from *Walden*,

"It is no dream of mine,
To ornament a line;
I cannot come nearer to God and Heaven
Than I live to Walden even.
I am its stony shore,
And the breeze that passes o'er;
In the hollow of my hand
Are its water and its sand,
And its deepest resort
Lies high in my thought."[109]

I will parse this poem, and then explain how it relates to integrity. A dream is a fantasy, a

[107] Thoreau, *Journal*, 349.
[108] *Ibid.,* 530.
[109] Thoreau, *Walden*, 211.

departure from reality. Thoreau tells us at the beginning of the poem that ornamenting a line is not a fantasy to him. Ornamenting is making something more intricate. In the case of the poem, a line is being made more intricate. A line is simply a representation of the distance between two points, but lines lend themselves well to conceptualization. Many ideas are linear, for instance, the idea of having a life, which has a birth and a termination. Thoreau symbolizes his life with his invoking of "a line", because the following text relates to himself, the "I". The first two lines of the poem mean that it is no fantasy for Thoreau to make the choice to make his own life more intricate, interesting, and detailed. It is reality.

Thoreau then tells us the closest he can get to God and Heaven, the highest aspects of everything, is through Walden. This makes sense because, to Thoreau, Walden, is a serene area where people do not live. At least in Thoreau's time, Walden was much closer to how God originally intended it to be, compared to cities, townships, and greater "civilization". As mentioned in chapter two, Walden is also a metaphor to Thoreau, as the place where he goes through the process of discovering himself, away from the distractions of society. Thus, at Walden, Thoreau becomes less clay and more man, more of God's child.

The subsequent four lines fuse the separate entities Thoreau and Walden together. Thoreau's body and thought become Walden, its shore, and its breeze. Thoreau's hands become Walden's water and sand. Such a fusion is justified as rational by the end of the poem, because the last two lines state that Walden's deepest reason to exist is engrained in how Thoreau thinks. Walden, the pure entity separate from society and its negativity, causes Thoreau to find himself. Therefore Walden is a part of Thoreau as it becomes his instincts towards finding the self.

Finding oneself is a key aspect of integrity, since knowing who one is enables a

person to live their life with choice and fulfill their potential. Being close to God is another key aspect of integrity, because the world can be appreciated more broadly by seeing it as God-infused, and God is the ultimate moral center. Thoreau's poem announces his achievement of integrity through his intimate harmony with Walden.

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Daniel Zlatkin

It Is No Dream

For SATB chorus, from words of Henry David Thoreau.

It is no dream of mine,
To ornament a line;
I cannot come nearer to God and Heaven
Than I live to Walden even.
I am its stony shore,
And the breeze that passes o'er;
In the hollow of my hand
Are its water and its sand,
And its deepest resort
Lies high in my thought.

-Thoreau, *Walden*

To Roger Berkowitz.

IT IS NO DREAM

From words of Henry David Thoreau.

Daniel Zlatkin (b. 1992)

March - April 2016

♩ = 69 **Appassionato**

Soprano: It It is It is no dream It is no dream

Alto: It It is It is no dream It is no dream

Tenor: It It is It is no dream It is no dream

Bass: It It is It is no dream It is no dream

Piano Reduction*

7

S: It is no dream of mine, to or - na-ment

A: It is no dream of mine, to or - na - ment

T: It is no dream of mine, mine, to or - na - ment to or -

B: It is no dream of mine, mine, a

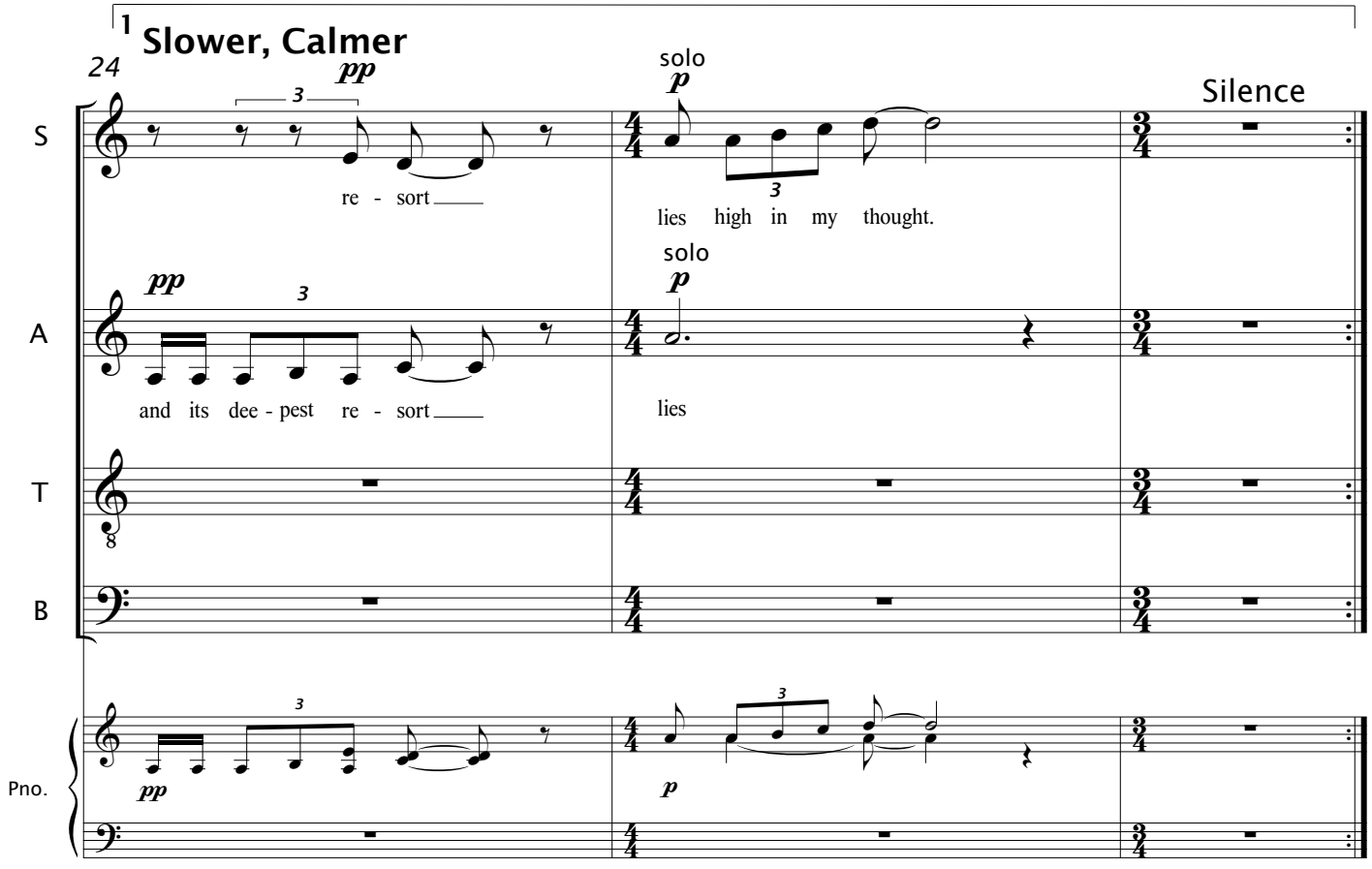
Pno.

*Intended as a rehearsal aid. Perform the music a cappella.


12
S
I can - not come near - er to God and Hea - ven. come near - er
A
I can - not come near - er to God and Hea -
T
na - ment a line a line I
B
a line a line
Pno.
14
S
to God and Hea -
A
- - ven. God and Hea -
T
can - not come near - er to God and Hea - ven than I live to Wal - den e - ven.
B
I can - not come near - er to God and Hea - ven e -
Pno.


16
S
A
T
B
Pno.
- ven.
I am its sto - ny shore,
and the
I am
- ven
19
breeze that pas - ses
I I am
breeze that pas-ses o'er; in the hol - low of my hand are its wa - ter
I am I am


21
S
A
T
B
Pno.
sand,
and its sand,
and its sand,
and its sand, are its wa - ter and its sand,


1
Slower, Calmer
24
S
A
T
B
Pno.
re - sort
lies high in my thought.
Silence
and its dee - pest re - sort
lies
solo
solo

2

27 **Slower, Calmer**

S: solo *pp* — lies high in my thought.

A: solo *pp* — lies high in my thought.

T: *p* — re - sort ___ | *pp* — re - sort ___

B: *p* — and its dee - pest re - sort ___ | *pp* — and its dee - pest re - sort ___

Pno. *p* | *pp*

Even Slower

30 all *pp* — *poco* ... *poco* ... *pp*

S: lies high in my thought ___

A: all *pp* — lies high in my thought ___

T: thought ___

B: thought ___

Pno. *pp*