

TRANSCENDENTAL COMPROMISE: A STUDY OF THE SYNTHESIS OF
MARXIST AND TRANSCENDENTAL IDEOLOGIES IN THE SELECTED
WORKS OF HENRY DAVID THOREAU

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “ Transcendental Compromise: A Study of the Synthesis of Marxist and Transcendental Ideologies in the Selected Work of Henry David Thoreau” written by Malsawmkima has been written under my supervision.

He has fulfilled all the required norms laid down under the Ph.D Regulations of Mizoram University. The thesis is the result of his own investigations. Neither the thesis as a whole or any part of it was ever submitted to any other University for any research degree.

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Declaration

I, Malsawmkima, hereby declare that the subject of this thesis is the result of the work done by me, that the content of this thesis did not form the basis for the award of any degree to me, or to anybody else to the best of my knowledge, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University Institute.

This is being submitted to the Mizoram University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

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Transcendental Compromise: A Study of the Synthesis of Marxist and Transcendental Ideologies in the Select Works of Henry David Thoreau.

Chapter One: Introduction

Henry David Thoreau's work includes missives, historical interpretations, essays, poetry, and nature writings. A transcendentalist and abolitionist, Thoreau is known for his forward-thinking political positions and deeply introspective nature expositions, including his works *Civil Disobedience* and *Walden* (Salt 45). Transcendentalism is an early 18th philosophical movement that stemmed from German romanticism and idealism as a resistance to leading Biblical interpretations (Robinson 93). Transcendentalism stresses subjectivity over objectivity, with particular attention paid to the experiences that contribute to the phenomena described in Locke's empiricism. There are many influential works in the transcendentalist tradition. Some of these works describe specific transcendentalist experiences, while others are more formulaic. Still others may impart transcendentalist ideas into other forms of expression. If there was only a single source for identifying the transcendentalist purpose, vision, and reason for creation, that source would be Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Divinity School Address* to Harvard College. In this address, Emerson connects the experiential grounds with the moral grounds of transcendentalism. He writes:

But when the mind opens, and reveals the laws that traverse the universe, and make things what they are, then shrinks the great world quickly into a mere illustration and simply a fable of the mind. What am I? and What is? asks the human spirit with a newly-lit curiosity, but never is to be quenched. Behold these discovered running laws, which our imperfect apprehension

can only see tended this way and that, but not come to a full circle. Witness these infinite relations, so like, so unlike; many, yet united as one. I would study, I would know, I would admire infinitely in time. Such works of thought have been the sources of entertainment for the human spirit across all ages. A more secret, sweet, and overpowering beauty appears to man when his heart and mind open to the sentiment of virtue. Then he is instructed in what is above him. He learns that his being is without bound; that, to the good, to the perfect, he is born, low as he now lies in evil and weakness. That which he venerates is still his own, though he has not realized it yet. He ought. He knows the sense of that grand word, though his analysis fails entirely to render an account of it. When in innocence, or when by intellectual perception, he attains to say, *'I love the Right; Truth is beautiful within me: thee will I serve, day and night in great, in small, that I may not be virtuous, but virtue;'* then is the end of the creation answered, and God is well pleased. (Emerson 79)

It is clear from this excerpt that the formulation of transcendentalism is based on an internal reflection of experiences.

The emergence of transcendentalism occurred during a very active period for literature and art. Between the 1830s and the 1850s, a spate of literary groups emerged and grew in the U.S. and in parts of Europe. Many of these groups had obscure passions and approaches, favoring specific artistic and literature niches. But others fueled the emergence of major literary and artistic movements. Likewise, many resurrected and revitalized movements that had slowed in growth. A number of these groups were idealistic, basing their positions on German idealism and

Platonism. Such groups took philosophical positions, in addition to taking artistic and literature positions. Many of these thinkers flocked in and around Concord, Massachusetts during the period. These include Frederic Henry Hedge, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, George Ripley, Bronson Alcott, William Ellery Channing, Orestes Brownson, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Henry James Sr. Theodore Parker, Sylvester Judd, John Weiss, David Atwood Wasson and Samuel Johnson. These emerging intellectuals met in one another's homes, at Harvard College, and attended one another's lectures, sermons. They developed intellectual lines of thought and bounced ideas back and forth off one another. Common in the discussions of these intellectuals was criticism of religious doctrine and Christian dogma. Many members were dissatisfied with the failure of Christian churches and leaders to recognize the split of theology and philosophy. Rather than reconsidering, Christian leaders help on tightly to dogma. The intellectuals that would comprise the transcendentalism movement in the U.S. would not be satisfied with the responses from the church and form their own form or forms of religious experience.

George Ripley, the enthusiastic transcendentalist who started The Brook Farm community where many transcendentalists gathered held high esteem for his intellectual contemporaries, stated thus,

There is a class of persons who desire a reform in the prevailing philosophy of the day. These are called Transcendentalists, - because they believe in an order of truths which transcends the sphere of external senses. Their leading idea is the supremacy of mind over matter. Hence, they maintain that the truth if religion does not depend on tradition, or on historical facts, but has an

unerring witness in the soul. There is a light, they believe, which enlightened every man that cometh into the world; there is a faculty in all, the most degraded, the most ignorant, the most obscure, to perceive spiritual truth, when distinctly repented; and the ultimate appeal, on all moral questions, is not to a jury of scholars, a hierarchy of divines, or the prescriptions of a creed, but to the common sense of the race. (Gura 143)

Transcendentalism was an amalgamation of Western intellectual thought that invaded the domain of religion by association and to fill a need left by the Christian churches. The Transcendentalist movement, thus, inherited Locke's philosophy of individual freedom and empiricism, by which individual experiences were invaluable in themselves and the mind a mimesis of society, beginning as a *tabula rasa* and ending heavily influenced by the material world. Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* was another influential source for transcendentalism, as was and John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*. The transcendentalist movement was certainly a liberal one, emphasizing individuality and freedom, rejecting the hold of society and government on people.

The public and intellectual responses to transcendentalism were mixed. In fact, the term *transcendentalism* is more of a *post facto* term used to describe this movement. In their own lifetimes they were often misunderstood, ridiculed and respected at simultaneously. Many viewed this movement as idealistic and not sufficiently grounded. Slowly, their pioneering voices reverberated through intellectual circles, garnering attention if not support. A disciple and friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau inherited the mantle of the preeminent transcendentalist from the architect of the transcendentalist movement. Thoreau's

Walden became the most successful transcendental book ever written and his *Civil Disobedience* the most influential political treatise written by a transcendentalist, shifting the movement into some public favor and interest even into today.

Thoreau was born on 12th July 1817 in Concord, Massachusetts, Massachusetts. His upbringing was quite normal and in his late teens he entered Harvard University and graduated in 1837, at the age of twenty. His return to Concord after graduation was somewhat of an anticlimax. Much had been anticipated of him but Thoreau spent his time in teaching school children, pencil making, surveying and hermitting beside Walden Pond. It was this two-year sojourn on Walden Pond in 1845 that marks the beginning of a literary masterpiece. After jotting down his reflections titled *Walden* during this two-year solitude, he merged himself into the socio-political scenario and became an active member amongst the abolitionists. His refusal to pay taxes for the Mexican war and his subsequent war cry on slavery and individual freedom- *Resistance to Civil Government (Civil Disobedience)*, *Slavery in Massachusetts*, *A Plea for Captain John Brown* would later become the most influential political writings of the 19th Century. *Civil Disobedience* has become a cornerstone in Civil rights movement and is instrumental in making The U.S. of America and India for what it is today.

Elsewhere in Europe, just a year younger than Thoreau, Karl Marx was undertaking an equally enormous task of changing the world through his economic political writing. In collaboration with Friedrich Engels, he wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848. The Manifesto is a “revolutionary summons to the working class”(Marx and Engels 34) and may be succinctly described in a single sentence: “Abolition of private property” (Marx and Engels 14). In the book, Marx and Engels

declared, “Let the ruling classes tremble at a communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win” (Marx and Engels. 41) One of the aims of Marx and Engels in writing the *Communist Manifesto* was the idea that class conflict could explain many of the problems of the modern capitalist society (Cohen 8). The Manifesto became a political basis for countries like China, Russia, North Korea, Cuba and some Eastern Europe.

In *The Struggle of Seemingly Opposing Ideas*, Syzygyastro (Prest. Web page) discusses the two most influential theories of the 19th century - Marxism and Transcendentalism. He noted that “Transcendentalism started in the U.S. while the country was in the throes of expansion into Indian Territory and before the civil war. Marxism began in one of the most turbulent periods of European history” (Prest. Web page). These two theories, borne out of the troubled times Europe and America strove to pull out the miseries of the common man out of his predicament through their respective approach to survival in the modern jungle. Syzygyastro stated thus, “Transcendentalism looked toward the intuitive, ideal and creative as an answer to the problems of life, whereas Marxism took a materialist, empirical and pragmatic approach. Transcendentalism took a spiritual – religious approach and Marxism, a strictly materialist, scientific, economic philosophical, anti-religious approach” (Prest. Web page).

Each of the theories seems not to acknowledge the presence of the other, both totally devoted “to a common cause, the corruption within religion and the oppression of the state. Both sought solutions” (Prest. Web page) but in a different way. Transcendentalism has its roots from the ideas of Kant, that “all knowledge transcendental which is concerned not with object but with our mode of knowing

objects” whereas Marx based his materialist thought on Feuerbach’s materialism that, “matter is the only thing that can be proven to exist”(Prest. Web page). Syzygyastro then pointed out that the two opposing ideas on materialism might be two sides of the same coin. This is where the Hegelian dialectics come in. Syzygyastro argues that “the dynamic process of birth, growth, maturation, reproduction and individual destruction is what causes entities as a species to advance. This law is commonly simplified as the cycle of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis”(Pochmann 12). The author then went on to incorporate Hegelian’s dialectics for the synthesis of the two seemingly opposing ideologies. In order to realize the ideal, the real must be satiated, without fusion, there is no progress. These observations are the key points and shall be used as the theoretical framework for this research proposal.

In his address to Harvard College, Emerson identifies some of the ultimate reasons behind the rejection of orthodox Christian doctrine by transcendentalists. Specifically, Emerson recognizes the role of myth in such doctrine. Looking back, he would argue, that is a discernible lack of experiential thoughts, but merely facts, many of which are illogical in that they contradict with other alleged facts. Emerson writes:

From this point of view, we have become very sensible of the first defects of historical Christianity. Historical Christianity has fallen into the error that corrupts any attempts to communicate religion. As it appears to us, and as it has appeared to us for ages, it is not the doctrine of the soul, but an exaggeration of the personal, the positive, and the ritual. It has dwelt, it continues to dwell, with noxious exaggeration about the person of Jesus. The

soul knows no persons. It invites every man to explicate the full circle of the universe, and will have no preferences but those with spontaneous love. But by the eastern monarchy of Christianity, which indolence and fear have built, the friend of man is made the injurer of man. The manner in which his name is surrounded with expressions, which were once sallies of admiration and love, but are now petrified into official titles, kills all substantial sympathy and liking. All who hear me, feel, that the language that describes Christ to Europe and America, is not the style of friendship and enthusiasm to a good and noble heart, but is appropriated and formal, paints a demigod, as the Orientals or the Greeks would describe Osiris or Apollo. You shall not own the world; you shall not dare, and live after the infinite Law that is in you, and in company with the infinite Beauty which heaven and earth reflect to you in all lovely forms; but you must subordinate your nature to Christ's nature; you must accept our interpretations; and take his portrait as the vulgar draw it. (Emerson 80)

The connection of myth to Christianity is not done as a means to discredit Christianity. Rather, it is the rejection of the sort of historical Christianity and orthodox Christianity that has emerged. Emerson and the transcendentalists who were his contemporaries rejected this historically-based account of Christianity for one that was based on experience and living religiously. For Emerson, having a religious experience was not reading the likely fictionalized account of someone living millennia earlier, but was instead a personal experience.

Pochmann, in his exploration of transcendentalism and the Hegelian synthesis in his *New England Transcendentalism and St. Louis Hegelianism: Phases*

in the History of American Idealism discusses the “The Hegelization of the West” which took its stronghold in St. Louis almost at the same time as that of the transcendentalism in Concord. In the book, Pochmann traces how a refugee from Prussian military, Henry Conrad Brockmayer found refuge in Hegel’s *Logic* in the 1850’s. What follows is the establishment of the Philosophical Society in 1866 in St. Louis where Brockmayer and a circle of friends “counseled that the only way out of the rampant materialism”(Pochmann 13) was to follow the “everlasting verities, the eternal principles, the pure Essence of Hegelian absolutism”(Pochmann 13). Through his new found faith in *Logic*, Brockmayer was able to convert new believers that Hegel’s doctrine offers solutions of contemporary issues, that “all objects and all institutions are but phases of a process referable to a dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis” (Pochmann 13). In the book, Pochmann traces how very often the St. Louis Hegelians, Concord transcendentalists, the Unitarian church, the free Religious Association and Radical Club were at odds but “united under the same banner by which idealism of one is recognizable a not radically different from each others, but rather representing successive extensions or progressions of the same basic spirit or impulse” (Pochmann, 14). Pochmann’s exploration of American Idealism offers a deep insight into the establishment of a philosophical foothold in America and shall play a pivotal part in framing the thesis.

Statement of the Problem.

Transcendentalism and Marxism are two highly influential and disparate ideologies that, while they may share certain German Idealist and intellectual roots, are ultimately contradictory. The current study attempts to bridge these two colossal philosophical and seemingly contradictory ideologies of the 19th century through the

selected works of Henry David Thoreau – *Walden, Resistance to Civil Government (Civil Disobedience), Slavery in Massachusetts; A Plea for Captain John Brown; Martyrdom of John Brown; The Last Days of John Brown* and *Reform Papers*.

At the time when the people of Concord labeled him as “loafer,” Thoreau took to the woods beside *Walden Pond*, built himself a log cabin and moved in on the 4th of July, 1845 and stayed till 1848. It was during this sojourn that he penned *Walden*, his masterpiece. Though Transcendentalism is highly indebted to Romanticism, Thoreau’s self-exile in the woods was nowhere near an act of a romantic escapist. His purpose was to “...front only the essential facts of life...”(Thoreau 66) to discover what nature “had to teach” and practice what he and the other transcendentalist preached. In *Walden* he would lament, “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” (Thoreau 9). His voluminous reading of the ancient classics, of Hindu philosophy opened his eyes than ever before. His daily communion with nature, living life with only the bare necessity of life made him realized that “Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only invisible but a positive hindrance to the elevation of mankind. With respect to luxuries and comforts, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meager life than the poor” (Thoreau 14). Thoreau was completely at ease in the presence of “higher laws.” He not only proved to himself but to the world that communion with nature projects man to a much higher level. By transcending oneself, one can jump beyond the hurly-burly world of capitalism and deliver oneself into the comfort zone of the oversoul. He clearly saw that capitalism hinders man’s relation to the next

level of being because “the mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly but as machines, with their bodies” (Thoreau 14). The connections between Marxism and Thoreau’s writings may be best described as the two being influenced by many of the same ideas and histories. Of course, the shared influences of Hegel and Rousseau have been discussed above, but there are likely many other sources that served to influence both Marx and Thoreau. Marx, for example, was influenced heavily by Adam Smith’s arguments, particularly those regarding human motivation and the drive of capitalism (Tucker 154).

In Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’s seminal work “The Communist Manifesto,” Marx championed the cause of the Proletariat in the ever struggle between the worker and the bourgeoisie in the capitalist world. In a real world of day to day basis, where a man stares starvation right in the eyes, there is no room for solitude or contemplation.

Masses of laborers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army, they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and the machine, by the over looker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful and the more embittering it is. (Marx and Engels 227)

It would be the task of this study to co relate together the two greatest opposing school of thought through the works of Thoreau and in doing so, show that the two opposing forces are corollary to each other in order to survive and evolve into higher realm. As Hegel once said, “Contradiction in nature is the root of all

motion and of all life” (Prest. Web page), so do Transcendentalism and Marxism for their dynamic creativity.

Review of literature

Chapter one is focused on the introduction of the major concepts to be explored in this work, including transcendentalism, Marxism, and Henry David Thoreau’s works. Chapter one, then, serves as the basis for the study and the foundation for inquiry. Hegel’s Theory of Contradiction is also explored in the first chapter, as the theory serves as the primary identified nexus, connecting Marxism and transcendentalism. Moreover, Hegel’s theory is applied throughout Thoreau’s works, making it a particularly important point of investigation and discussion. The second chapter is focused on the socioeconomic and geopolitical histories in Europe and the U.S. at the time of and in the centuries leading up to Thoreau’s writings. This chapter establishing the context in which Thoreau and his contemporaries, wrote in, as well as the context in which Hegel and Marx wrote in before. The third chapter is focused on the transcendentalist faith in Thoreau’s works. An exposition of the transcendentalist position on faith, led by the writings and speeches of Emerson, is included, in addition to analysis of Thoreau’s works. It is noteworthy that the transcendentalists all have their own version of their faith. Thoreau too had his unique religious expressions, captured in his nature writings primarily. This chapter shall highlight the transcendentalist and religious aspects through Thoreau’s works. Thoreau’s works will also be examined, in this chapter, in light of his position as abolitionist and defender of the rights of all people. Chapter four turns to a Hegelian interpretation of Thoreau’s work, with a particular focus on the need for the two contrary states of mind. This chapter, then, serves as the identification of the

primary nexus that connects Marxist and transcendentalist thought in the works of Thoreau. Chapter five, the concluding chapter, features a final analysis of Thoreau's work, through the identification of gaps in the understanding of his works, contrasting opinions on his works, and any lingering issues (and Hegelian contradictions) that remain. The relevance of the results of this analysis is explored, as well as limitations and considerations of future research.

Hegel's Theory of Contradiction

Hegelian dialectic was adopted by Marx and Engels and applied to materialism to form dialectic materialism, the basis for Marxist inquiry (Hegel 45). Dialectics refers to the process or method of philosophical inquiry that involves the back-and-forth negotiations or contradictions that result from two or more contradictory or opposing positions. The notion of dialectics is thought to have started with Plato, particularly in Plato's dialogues in which two or more positions were contraposed in order to find a resolution or pursue a particular problem in more depth (Hegel and Inwood 143). Interlocutors in many of Plato's works embodied particular ideas. Thus, the dialectic conflict between the interlocutors could be viewed as two or more ideas being worked out. Unresolved contradictions, then, could represent problems in the arguments or ideas themselves, but could also mark the advancement of intellectual discourse, given that such contradictions themselves could signal the discovery of new ideas or incompatibilities. For example, imagine a case in which there was some support for two separate ideas and they were each assumed to be correct, given the absence of disconfirming evidence. Now imagine that through intellectual discourse it was discovered that the two ideas led to contradictory conclusions. The discovery of this contradiction reveals that one of the

ideas is likely incorrect. The task, then, would be to determine the source of this contradiction.

One of the contradictions that are particular of focus for Hegel is the contradiction of ideas of consciousness (Hegel 20). Hegel points out that consciousness is often defined in different ways. Some of these definitions of consciousness are based on materialism; others are based on spiritualism; still, others are based on subjectivism and other bases that can be used to explain consciousness. It is often assumed that each of these definitions of consciousness tells part of the story or explain one aspect of consciousness. But Hegel recognized that these different conceptions and definitions of consciousness contradicted. These contradictions should, of course, be recognized, while the recognition of these contradictions in some ways progresses the intellectual discourse on the topic. Concerning the recognition of these contradictions, Hegel held that this provided the opportunity to explore more simple explanations and arguments. After all, the addition of details and complexity in arguments and concepts often leads to these sorts of contradictions. By identifying the contradictions that these details and complexities produce, the dialectic method provides for simpler ideas and explanations.

A notable feature of Hegel's dialectic argument is that it is intended to be a direct response to Hume's skepticism (Redding 103). Hegel's view of religion broke from previous European tradition, at least up to that point in history, in favor of a much more metaphysical interpretation of Christian and even God (Hegel and Inwood 7). Kant favored similar metaphysical positions, but rejected the sort of Hegelian religious dogmatism that underlie Hegel's metaphysical positions

(Houlgate 49). Before Hegel, Kant argued that the basis for Hume's skepticism led to even worse skeptical conclusions. Hume famously argued that reasoning and causality, as conceptions, are simply customs or the results of social norms. Hegel followed Kant in arguing that knowledge and matter could be connected, thus providing a connection between knowledge and reason that avoids many of Hume's skeptical conclusions. Thus, Hegel argued that there is something innate about humans such that they have the capacity to develop knowledge based on experience. In other words, there are innate mechanisms (possibly coupled with *a priori* knowledge) that provide humans the opportunity to develop knowledge, even if it is imperfect. Knowledge, then, is grounded in human experience and in the mechanisms that humans use to develop knowledge. Inter-subjectivity, which is the connected experiences that humans share when they form knowledge, serves as the basis for the human understanding of knowledge. Specifically, Hegel argues that knowledge can be gained outside of this intersubjectivity through the direct observation of the world. For Hegel, it is not the interactions of subjective states, but the interaction of a subjective state with an objective world that produces knowledge. Hegel holds that the objective world is governed by certain principles, much like human minds or subjective states are governed by certain principles.

Based on these epistemological positions, Hegel forms the basis and purpose for his dialectic argument (Redding 156). Hegel argues that reason, or the pursuit of knowledge and the processes by which knowledge can be determined, should be governed by dialectics. Hegel argues that there is objective information that can be extracted from the material, external world. In other words, there is, necessarily, some external world such that information can be extracted from it. It is assumed

that human senses are imperfect and that our experiences will not transpose or even reflect the external world perfectly. Nonetheless, the interactions between the subjective state of experience and the external world can still produce knowledge. Different individuals will explain parts of the world differently, given their different sensory capabilities, their different perspectives, and different interpretations of the external world. There will, necessarily, be variance in the experience and *knowledge* of individuals. Thus, reasoning should, as Hegel argues, include pitting ideas and the fruits of experience against each other to identify contradictions and advance knowledge through reasoning.

A major component of Hegel's contradictions argument is the idea of orders of concepts. Some concepts are of higher orders than others. This idea is based primarily on that of Plato, who argued that the world is organized in forms. There are perfect forms, Plato argued, that humans can never access. Nonetheless, these forms provide the qualities of everything. That is, everything has a perfect form on which it is based. Similarly, Hegel argues that there are universal concepts in the world. Yet, there may be higher-order universal concepts that are not discoverable or knowable by humans. According to Hegel, there are no *perfect* universal concepts. Instead, any universal concept can be quite muddled, difficult to understand and not easily applicable. In this sense, Hegel argues that universal concepts are, themselves, dialectical. In addition, the nature of the universal concepts provides additional grounds for Hegel to justify the dialectical method of reasoning. After all, this type of reasoning is best, according to Hegel, because it matches the nature of universal concepts. Hegel also argues that these universal concepts can change. The universality of these concepts does not mean that they are unmalleable. Rather, these

concepts are subject to change, based on the changing conditions of the external world and of societies, for example. Finally, Hegel argues that universal concepts can have different properties in different situations. For example, something may be considered light in one regard, but not another. Similarly, something may be considered light in relation to certain things, but not others. There are relational properties of the universal concepts, but like there are relational properties of things in the external world.

One of the more popular attributions to Hegel is the Hegelian triad: the relationship between thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (Rodrigues and Craig 740). The Hegelian triad has been applied many times as a way to explain the dialectic method. There are clear parallels between Hegel's theory of contradiction, discussed above, and the Hegelian triad. Both involve that the interactions between ideas and intellectual movements. In many ways, the thesis and antithesis components are replaced with ideological components that are not placed in any order. There may, after all, be two theses that appear to be compatible and even complementary, but ultimately end up being contradictory after thorough investigation.

Hegel's dialectic methods are based in part on some form of this triad. At the very least, Hegel was able to develop the dialectic methods such that they do reflect the triad to some degree. Applying the triad to literary works, such as Thoreau's works, is a matter of identifying theses and antitheses, as well as trying to determine how these may be synthesized or even how the writer has performed such syntheses. Similarly, it may be the case that certain writers are employing some form of this triad during the course of their writings, effectively synthesizing theses and antitheses.

Marxism

Marx grounded his work in the tradition of Hegel's dialectics. But Marx applied such dialectics to materialism, thus forming dialectic materialism. Much like Plato's epistemology, Hegel held that there are universal concepts. But Marx abandons this sort of idealism in favor of materialism. By doing this, Marx holds that ideas are only formed as representations of the world. That is, ideas are a convenient and useful way for humans to try to understand the external world. It should also be noted that Marx's materialistic view of the world is focused on how societies form and change. According to Marx, ideas emerge out of society for specific purposes. Often, these purposes involve the exploitation of certain groups in a society. For example, political groups in a society may form to try to convince the society to adopt certain rules and regulations that promote the interests of these political groups, even if it means that others are exploited and that others are made worse off. It is also important to note that Marx considered resources vital in considerations about the formation and revision of society.

One of the primary institutions that Marx criticizes is religion. Marx's account of religion and of the place of religion in intellectual history is, perhaps, best described in his famous phrase that religion is the "opiate of the people." Specifically, Marx claimed that religions have convinced individuals of a number of harmful illusions that simply placate peoples rather than move them forward. Religion, for Marx, is a device of the bourgeois to control and manipulate the proletariat. It is only through the proletariat and the mobilization of the masses that society can be emancipated. He referred specifically to Germany but extends this line of reasoning to any capitalist state. Marx held that religion has a purpose in

society. Religion was used for various purposes, but, in the case of Christianity, it was used to placate the masses and keep them content with their poverty and being exploited. Marx argued that Christian virtues were designed to encourage people not to seek wealth but to be satisfied with being exploited.

The concept of classes within societies is very important to understanding the arguments made by Marx. For Marx, classes are groups of people that society has organized by socioeconomic factors. Classes form in virtually any society, but of particular interest to Marx is the formation of classes in a capitalist economy. After all, Marx explains many of the problems of modern society as class conflict. In every capitalist society, Marx argues, class conflict occurs. By the very nature of classes, certain classes have advantages over others. In a capitalist society, wealth tends to accumulate. The owners of the means of production, then, are able to grow their wealth much more quickly than the rest of society. But these owners can only do so by using the labor of others. The problem, for Marx, is that the laborers have substantial bargaining power, but such power is only held collectively. If one laborer refused to work, then another will simply take the laborer's place. It takes the unionization of laborers for the working class to make use of its leverage against the owners of the means of production. Class conflict will result in the capitalist society but is often contained by the upper-class population through a variety of institutions and mechanisms. Governments serve as institutions that tend to favor the owners of production being able to exploit the working class. In particular, governments will tend to protect ownership and property rights over the rights of workers. It takes a massive stance by workers, again through unionization, for governments to begin protecting the rights of the working class. The ideal political state under Marxism is

a classless society (Hunt 37). This suggests that Marx identified the problem of class conflict and sought to resolve it through state reformations that would result in a classless society.

Marx traces many of the problems in modern society to class conflict. For example, violence between individuals of different races can emerge in part because of class conflict. Individuals in the upper-class of society or the owners of the means of production may be distributed disproportionately for a particular race. Marxism can also be used to explain racism. After all, racism is a means by which those of the upper-class can exploit the working class. For example, the upper-class may seek to instill the notion that certain races are superior to others. The expected result, at least from the perspective of the upper-class, is an acceptance of racial differences. In such cases, the upper-class is intended to keep working class individuals in a lower position. For Marxism, then, most of the problems that occur within society have class-based explanations, even if such explanations only tell part of the story.

Marx argues that the most appropriate way to determine the value of a particular good or product is not what it can be sold for, but how much labor was instilled or imbued into the good or product. This contrasts heavily with capitalist concepts of value, in which prices are determined by the going rate for goods or simple whatever people can charge. The importance of Marx's conception of labor value is that it can be used to justify the reordering of society and in particular the economic systems in capitalist societies. In capitalist societies, laborers are not getting paid nearly what they are worth. The value that laborers generate for industrializing and industrialized states is much more than their pay reflects. As will be discussed shortly, the differential pay of employees in relation to what they

should be paid under Marx's labor value conception suggests that exploitation is occurring. Moreover, however, it is important to recognize that consumers are being exploited as well. This is because the prices of goods are not reflective of labor value either. Instead, such prices are inflated to maximize the accumulation of wealth by the owners of the means of production. Marx argues that there are few cases in which the price of goods actually reflects the cost of the resources used to make such goods and the actual labor that went into making such goods. Thus, Marx argues that the owners of the means of production in capitalist societies are taking advantage of both consumers and laborers, to the detriment of society. If prices were reflective of Marx's conception of labor value, then more consumers could afford to feed their families sufficiently. In fact, it may be possible, Marx would argue, that if the pay was sufficiently high for labor and prices were reflective of his labor value theory, then class distinctions would be much less severe and those in the working class would have the chance to own the means of production.

Capital is another important concept for Marx. Capital is defined as any resource that can be used, either for the production of goods and services or for some other purpose. What makes the conception of capital so important for Marxism is that in capitalist societies capital allows for the accumulation of wealth. Consider, for example, a geopolitical state that did not have a monetary system and that still relied on barter systems for the exchange of resources, goods, labor, and so forth. Now imagine that this society did not have any sort of credit system either. The combination of these conditions makes the notion of capital not easily applicable. After all, the term capital is a sort of umbrella term that covers a range of resources. When societies can begin speaking in terms of capital, then the accumulation of

wealth and the formation of classes follow naturally (at least in capitalist societies). For Marx, the working class should recognize the advantage that capital brings to the owners of the means of production. This would give the working class an advantage, ideally, in halting exploitation.

For Marx, exploitation is the primary vice of capitalism. In fact, Marx argues that exploitation is all but inevitable in capitalist systems. Exploitation is, at the very least, extremely dangerous, because it can include unsafe working conditions, poverty, and health issues. When the owners of the means of production exploit working class individuals, the former controls how the latter works and how much the latter earns. Moreover, exploitation can lead to the owners of the means of production controlling the working class ideologically, religiously, intellectually, and so forth. The upper-class installs institutions that are intended to control and manipulate the working class. While the economic exploitation of the working class is itself harmful to the working class and creates conditions in which surviving becomes more difficult and less likely for members of the working class, the intellectual and cultural exploitation of the working class can have similar consequences. Marx argues that the working class becomes effectively brainwashed, led to believe in certain political and social values that do not improve their lives in any meaningful way. This suggests that the cultures (which may be quite diverse) of the working class can become diluted by the owners of the means of production. Such dilution is another form of harm to the working class.

It is important to recognize, at this point, that Marx's criticism of capitalism includes the recognition that capitalism is the natural progression from feudalism. However, Marx does not argue that there is this sort of natural progression of ideas.

That is, it is not inevitable that capitalism comes directly after feudalism in any conceivable or even likely external world. Rather, Marx argues that the external world is such that feudalism systems will lead to or are very likely to lead to capitalist systems. Again, this highlights the break that Marx takes from Hegel's dialectics. Instead of focusing on the natural order of ideas, Marx focused on a materialistic explanation of the formation of societies and changes in societies, especially changes in the economic systems in societies. Marx recognizes that the material world is such that *capital* can occur and is likely to occur in societies to the degree that wealth can be accumulated. This can be considered a materialist observation from Marx.

American Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism emerged in New England in large part as a response to Calvinist doctrine. Two major points of contention arose against Calvinism from transcendentalism thought. First, transcendentalists challenged the Calvinist notion of inescapable human depravity. Under Calvinism, the chosen few are destined for heaven as *the chosen people*. This means that human actions on earth have no divine consequences. Human actions, then, are not governed by divine order or will, but by the flawed nature of humanity. Calvinism may seem, then, to be quite pessimistic, but only for those who are not *chosen*. For Calvinists, the promise of an afterlife in heaven makes up for the suffering on earth. Yet, the Calvinist doctrine can be seen as quite contradictory. One can imagine that a *chosen* individual will get into heaven regardless of the actions that the person commits. Knowing this, there is no reason that the individual would follow any moral code. Yet, Calvinists may argue that this individual will follow the Christian moral code, effectively obeying God, because

the individual is chosen. But, of course, this means that the individual cannot recognize that he or she is chosen, given that this would mean that the person would not obey God. The argument becomes circular. This sort of contradiction is not easily reconcilable. As such, the argument is viewed by antagonists as not providing any sort of justification, moral or religious, for Calvinists viewing humanity as naturally, inherently, and inescapably depraved. If the *fall of man* is redeemable only by being chosen before one's actions are committed, then it seems that humans are fated for depravity. In rejecting this, transcendentalists aimed at showing that humans could be and are inherently good, although many will become corrupted.

Transcendentalism, especially in its religious capacities, was a movement based on the individuals' experience. Of course, experience is governed by logic. This is not something that needs to be explained idealistically. In other words, the collection of one's experiences demonstrates to people, transcendentalists argued, the rules of logic. There was nothing in experience that suggests that 1 equals 3. Thus, the trinity was rejected for the much more logical assumption that 1 always equals 1. The transcendentalist departure from certain orthodox Christian beliefs did not include the replacement of such beliefs with strict or rigid beliefs. Again, transcendentalists based conclusions on shared experiences, reflective of the sort of dialectical arguments put forth by Hegel. It should also be noted, here, that transcendentalists allowed for substantial variation. After all, individuals had different experiences. Some experiences contributed to the development of certain explanations of phenomena, while others contributed to different explanations. As an ideology, transcendentalism is merely a framework for expression and understanding, rather than a religious doctrine governed by principles and rules

derived from an ancient text or centuries of doctrine being worked out systematically.

In his address to Harvard College, Emerson provides moral reasons for the abandonment of traditional and orthodox Christianity in favor of a more experiential and intellectual pursuit. Emerson writes:

Men have come to speak of the revelation as something long ago given and done as if God were dead. The harm to faith throttles the preacher; and the goodness of institutions becomes an uncertain and inarticulate voice. It is quite certain that it is the result of conversation with the beauty contained in the soul, to beget a desire and need to impart to others the same knowledge and love. If such utterance is denied, the thought becomes a burden on the man. Always the seer is a savior. Somehow his dream is revealed: somehow, he publishes it with earnest joy: sometimes with pencil on canvas; or sometimes with chisel on stone; sometimes in towers and aisles of granite, his soul's worship is built; sometimes in anthems of indefinite music; but clearest and most permanent, in words. (Emerson 80)

Despite the strongly experiential nature of Emerson's formulation of transcendentalism and of the reasons behind the movement, the movement itself is quite social. The question may, then, be why there is such a strong rejection of historical Christianity and of Christian orthodoxy. While rejecting such history and orthodoxy as strict and ever-binding to Christian faith fits the intentions of transcendentalists, it would seem that transcendentalists could view these accounts as the results of experiences. In other words, even if Christian history was formed on the bases of inaccuracies, contradictions, and deception, there are aspects of this

history that were formed from experience. Most likely, Emerson would have argued that such experiences are not reflected in this history. For example, the stories in the Bible are often revelations, organized and amended under doctrine. It is different, Emerson would have argued, for individuals to have their own religious experiences outside of this doctrine. Consider Emerson's own experiential writings being amended and reinterpreted under Christian doctrine. The result may have aspects of Emerson's own religious experiences, but it would not be worth trying to piece these aspects together in the midst of all of the details added under Christian orthodoxy. Educational played a major role in the transcendentalism movement, as transcendentalists generally encouraged a very broad, diverse education be granted to the youth (Johnson 89).

Transcendentalism has religious components. While it may be possible to separate such components from the core tenets of transcendentalism, the historical development of the movement was heavily influenced by religion. The rejection of certain orthodox Christian doctrine does not mean the rejection of the Christian faith. Rather, transcendentalists refined how people interpreted Christianity. A transcendentalist may question why certain orthodox doctrine emerged and whether such doctrine was simply the result of a single set of experiences, such as that of Aquinas. Moreover, the rejection of certain intellectual ideas because they conflicted with or even contradicted orthodox doctrine was viewed as not only counterintuitive, but actually in opposition to religious experience. After all, orthodox doctrine was established during a time of less scientific progress and a much briefer history of societies and human interactions. As history accumulates, science progresses, and

certain ideas prove false, why not update the doctrine to be more reflective of current knowledge or intellectual discourse? It could be imagined that when many of these orthodox ideas were formed if scientific progress and intellectual histories were better developed, then the doctrine may have been different. Why have orthodox doctrine then? It makes more sense, transcendentalists would argue, to let religious experience guide one's own religious beliefs. Nature provided the groundwork for many transcendentalists to have such religious experiences.

A fundamental idea in transcendentalism is the notion that the Bible is a human artifact, rather than the product of divine revelations. This follows closely with Emerson's argument against Historical Christianity. Moreover, Biblical translations and Christian doctrine that relied heavily on such translations were questioned. This went beyond questioning, however, as such doctrine could be rejected simply on the grounds of skepticism. Rejecting orthodox Christian doctrine and Historical Christianity, as Emerson called it, meant some sort of replacement. But such a replacement was not of doctrine. Instead, experience served as the primary source of religious experience.

Frederic Hedge played a major role in the development of transcendentalist ideas. Hedge set out to adapt Kantian ideas to transcendentalism as the movement emerged. In particular, Hedge introduced the possibility of *a priori* knowledge to transcendentalism. After all, an application of Humean skepticism to Lockean empiricism allows for the possibility of *a priori* knowledge. Such a possibility does not deter from the highly experiential approach to religion taken by transcendentalists. Instead, this possibility provided for explanations of variation between such experiences. There was certainly something unique about human

experience, the transcendentalists argued. By the application of *a priori* knowledge, or at least the possibility of it, there was an explanation of the uniqueness of the human experience. This is not to say that all transcendentalists were Kantian, but Emerson, as will be discussed shortly, was certainly quick to adapt Kantian principles to the movement and to his own personal religious experiences.

Another important aspect in the development of transcendentalism is the idea that piety can be applied to nature. This was a major line of reasoning advanced by William Wordsworth, an intellectual of the 19th century who is best known for his Romantic poetry. In his poetry, Wordsworth often focused on his religious experience in nature. Such experiences often involved an intimate experience in nature that led to the extraction of deep phenomenological and religious beliefs and experiences. Wordsworth, along with Emerson and Thoreau, served as the more poetic expressions of transcendentalism. In the 19th century, industrialization was transforming society, moving it out of nature and into buildings. The response from many, including the transcendentalists, was a sort of regression. Industrialization was replacing many of the most positive aspects of human experience. The worker bee, it was argued, did not have human experience, but humans were now resembling the worker bee. In other words, humans were starting to lose what made them uniquely human. A return to nature and introspection served as an important step in the continued progress of humans historically.

Emerson concludes his address to Harvard College with a telling plea. He asks the audience to reflect on the alleged advancement of society and how humans have strayed from virtue. Emerson also directly challenges Christian leaders. Emerson writes:

There is no doubt that all men have sublime thoughts; that all men value very few real hours of life; they love to be listened to; they love to be caught up into the vision of idealistic principles. We mark with light in the memory the few interviews we have had, in the dreary years of routine and sin, with souls that made us wiser; that spoke what we thought; that told us what we knew; that gave us leave to be what we were on the inside. Discharge to men the office of the priest, and, present or absent, you shall be followed with the love of an angel. And, to this end, let us not aim at typical degrees of merit. Can we not leave to such as love the virtue that glitters for the commendation of society, and ourselves pierce the deep solitudes of our own ability and worth? We easily come up to the standard of goodness in society. Society's praise is cheaply secured, and almost everyone content with these easy merits; but the instant effect of conversing with God, will be, to put them away. There are persons who are not actors, not speakers, but influences; persons too great for fame. And now let us do what we can to the smoldering, nigh quenched fire on the altar. The evils of the church that have manifested. The question returns, what shall we do? The remedy to their deformity is, first, soul, and second, soul, and evermore, soul. What hinders that now, everywhere, in pulpits, in lecture halls, in houses, in fields, wherever the invitation of men or your own occasions lead you, you speak the very truth, as your life and conscience teach it, and cheer the waiting, fainting hearts of men with new hope and new revelation? (Emerson 81)

Emerson's plea for the abandonment of the standard church in favor of a more experiential and personal religious experience reflects the transcendentalist

movement quite strongly. Emerson also identifies three Kantian ideas that serve as fundamental precepts of Emerson's transcendentalist philosophy. First, experience is generated by the human mind, rather than through divine extension or some other supernatural source. This is not to say that Emerson did not believe that individuals could not have an interaction with God through religious experience. Rather, Emerson held that there is human experience first. Any human experience is not a religious experience for Emerson, just as any human action is not a reflection of a Godly action.

Second, mental operations provide the grounds to overcome or refute skepticism. Thus, while Humean skepticism remains an important aspect of transcendentalist thought, solving such skepticism and identifying those areas that such skepticism fails to refute. For Emerson, like Kant, skepticism had a far-reaching grasp on knowledge. But this did not mean that near certainties could not be achieved through sufficient experience and through sufficient interaction with the material world. Skepticism is useful for the transcendentalist because it provides a refutation of Christian dogma and of a Historical Christianity that lacks harmony with the intellectual movement of the time. Worse yet, Historical Christianity contradicted not only with some aspects of this intellectual movement, but also with many of the experiences had by transcendentalists.

Third, transcendentalism does not refer to the transcendence of human experience, but, instead, the exploration of the underlying causes of human experience. The uniqueness of human experience and the ability of humans to explicate such experience through communication were interesting to transcendentalists. However, reflection and introspection could not achieve any sort

of existential transcendence. Instead, the movement was intended to explain how human experience and, then, intellectual thought could move beyond the limits of traditional doctrine and dogma. Moreover, religious experiences were not to be confined to Christian doctrine, but instead were allowed to be personal and uniquely experiential.

Romanticism and American Literature

Romanticism, as a literary, musical, and intellectual movements that emphasized subjective experience over objective empiricism. The Renaissance marked the revival of Ancient Greek and Ancient Roman intellectual thought and artistic expression. Many philosophers, artists, and writers intended to emulate the great thinkers and artists of antiquity. A number of intellectual and artistic movements have since emerged, but the movements signifying a return to antiquity out of the Dark Ages remained. Romanticism can be viewed as an extension of the Renaissance and even as the emergence of a second Renaissance that arose as a response to rationalist and empiricist movements. Romanticism in American literature followed many of the conventions of romanticism in art. Many art forms are focused on a particular idea or objective representation, but romanticism is much more heavily focused on subjective experiences and the self. Explored in this section is romanticism, its impact on American literature in general, and its specific influences on Thoreau and transcendentalism.

Much like the Renaissance, Romanticism was intended to be a resurrection of Classical literature and arts, in both expression and form. Thus, it is an assumption of Romanticism, as an intellectual and artistic movement, that something had been lost since antiquity. It may be difficult to determine what was exactly lost

and how Romanticism helped to regain this, but the mere act of mimicking the works of antiquity and the approaches to art and literature from antiquity is, itself, an advancement of intellectual and artistic expression. After all, the replication of the ancient artistic expressions pointed artists and writers towards a certain ideal, often rooted in Platonism, Aristotelianism, or some synthesis of the two. To find inspiration in the Ancient Romans is one thing, but to emulate their expressions and artistic forms is to at least try to identify and make use of the techniques and approaches that made the Romans so expressive and unique.

One key component of Romanticism is emotional expression through art, including literature. That is, the emotional expression in literature serves as artistic expression in the Romantic movement. This is not limited to fiction. As Thoreau demonstrates, nonfiction can include the sort of emotional expressions that are sufficiently artistic and poetic to be regarded as art. The purpose of the expression of emotion in the works of Romantic writers and artists is, again, to capture something uniquely human in these works. Thus, the expression of emotion in these pieces is an attempt to show the reader or viewer a glimpse into a subjective experience. Deep, thorough descriptions of emotions and attempts to evoke emotions in readers and viewers served similar roles. The former allowed the readers or viewers to better understand the emotions that are intended to be expressed. It is likely that the readers or viewers have had similar emotions. Therefore, when a writer describes emotions, from the first-person perspective, the reader gets the opportunity to think back to when similar emotions were invoked in themselves. Similarly, the use of *pathos* in Romantic works reflect the attempts to evoke emotional expressions in readers, often times in an effort to recreate the emotional experiences of the writer.

Thoreau is a master of this, often being able to describe his own emotional responses and, then, evoke similar responses in readers through emotional pleas and persuasion. In Thoreau's multi-part defense of John Brown, Thoreau employs *pathos* to evoke emotions of anger to the prosecution of abolitionists and sorrow for the death of John Brown specifically. This is all accomplished in essay format without the need to establish a fictional narrative as so many others had at the time (e.g., Faulkner).

Another important component of Romanticism is the exposition of the lives of commoners, not simply the most famous figures at the time or in antiquity. This is one of the overlapping characteristics of realism and Romanticism. It makes little sense for Romantic writers and artists to focus exclusively on major figures of the time. The artistic works of many movements were focused so heavily on major figures that, in retrospect, these movements failed to capture human experience, and *typical* human experience more importantly. While Romantic artists continued focuses on major figures in their artistic and literary works, they were quite inclusive of the typical individual in society. The representation of the common individual in Romantic works demonstrates the recognition of the exceptionalism of humans and not only of exceptional individuals. Again, the subjective experience, whether it is that of the king or the common man, is what matters for many Romantic artists and writers. Insofar as Romanticism serves as the artistic and literary basis for transcendentalism, the representation of subjective human experience was passed on from the former to the latter.

However, Romanticists appeared, in general, quite skeptical of human nature. Romantic artists, for example, preferred to depict more realistic expressions

of human nature, rather than idealized forms. This was intended to be a more realistic representation of the human experience, even if, relative to many of the other movements at the time, appeared more pessimistic and skeptical about the goodness of humans. This apparent skepticism was a function of the attempt of Romantic artists and writers to depict human experience with sufficient transparency. Depicting the bravery of soldiers in art can, of course, be a part of Romanticism. But it would be unlikely that a Romantic artist would focus exclusively on the bravery of soldiers. It is much more likely, given the Romantic tradition, that a plethora of human emotions would be explored within the context of war. Thus, it would be expected that Romantic artists would depict bravery, worry, fear, sadness, happiness, and other emotions in their works. After all, it would be to skew and, therefore, misrepresent the experience of the soldier to focus exclusively on bravery. Doing so may elicit charges of propaganda from other Romanticists. While transcendentalists tend to have a positive view of human nature, this is not directly contradictory to Romanticism. After all, writers such as Thoreau focused heavily on the faults of humans and governments. There is no push to idealize humans in transcendentalist works. The appearance of skepticism in representing human nature in Romantic works stems from accurate and transparent representations of human nature being very different from the works of many of the other movements at the time. Thus, there is no fundamental conflict between Romanticism and transcendentalism on the topic of human nature.

Thoreau is considered part of both the romantic movement and the transcendentalist movement, although he tends to have stronger associations with the latter. There are a few points of discernible and relevant disagreement between

romanticism and romanticism, although the representation of human nature is not generally one of these points. Instead, it is how issues are framed in artistic works and literature that may, at times, distinguish Romantic works from transcendentalist works. Transcendentalists viewed and interpreted human nature as fundamentally good, even defining behavior in ways that are generally favorable. Thus, transcendentalist works are often intended to explain behavior in a favorable way, generally in an attempt to show how any problems that have resulted are remediable. Romantic works, in contrast, tend to be less normatively charged and more focused on transparency and accurate representation. Transcendentalist works, then, tend to have more *ethos*, while Romantic works tend to have more *logos*. Both, of course, are most focused on *pathos*, as this mode of rhetoric and expression is most intimately linked with subjective human experience and emotion.

Another feature of Romanticism is a focus on the inner-state of consciousness. As was discussed in the section on Hegel, explaining and defining consciousness can take on multiple forms and approaches, with conflicts and contradictions often arising during attempts to define consciousness with much detail. For Romantic works, however, the many different approaches to consciousness could be depicted, or at least attempts made at such depictions. Hegel's inquiry into consciousness, especially as an example of how dialectics was effective, showed how muddled consciousness discussion was. But expressing consciousness or what consciousness feels like, either through visual arts or literature, simple means trying to put one's own experiences of consciousness onto the page or canvas. There does not need to be any sort of systematic explication of consciousness in Romanticism, nor in transcendentalism. After all, such an attempt,

while it may be considered one way to describe or understand one's own conscious experiences, would go beyond the mere expression of one's subjective experiences and into an objective accounting of consciousness.

Romanticism is often focused on the creator of works. In art, this included portrayals of artists. In literature, this included writers playing more active roles in their works. Most notably, artists of the romantic tradition were and are expected to express their own interpretations and subjective experiences. This is really the point at which Romanticism serves as a literary and artistic basis of transcendentalism. Both movements were intended to express the uniqueness of human experience, though not specifically unique human experiences (i.e., the experiences of kings). Romantic authors were also quite experimental, pushing the boundaries of literary genre in favour of an expression of the unique subjective state and experience of the writer. Poe, for example, emerged from the Romanticism tradition and transformed literature. Thoreau, too, certainly experimented with literary styles and expression, especially in his nature writings.

Romanticism has been praised for bringing attention to the issues facing the general population and those in society who are generally not well-represented in art and literature. After all, if the sufferings of the lower class (or proletariat at Marx would put it) have been largely ignored in art and literature before being widely represented in the Romanticism tradition, then it would seem that Romanticism brought into an intellectual light these sufferings. In contrast, transcendentalism has long been criticized for lacking any ideological push against moral atrocities or any sort of calls to actions opposing institutions such as slavery. Thoreau, of course, avoids much of this criticism, given his extensive writings and experiences that are

aimed at political objectives, including the abolition of slavery. There may be nothing particularly politically active about transcendentalism, in itself at least, but the movement certainly provides a mode for achieving political objectives, as Thoreau demonstrated.

Henry David Thoreau

Born in Concord in 1817, Thoreau spent his entire life in New England (Salt 13). Thoreau's family was heavily involved in politics, even before the founding of the U.S. Thoreau, himself, participated in a number of public protests and acts of civil disobedience against local governances and organizations (Walls 30). Thoreau's early activity in politics likely contributed to his penchant for political activity and resistance later in life. In fact, Thoreau would describe many of his early political experiences in his writings. This not only reflects the transcendentalism focus on the self and human experience, but also how one's experiences shape one's writings. Of course, this may seem obvious. Hobbes wrote political philosophical treatises on centralized government and absolute monarchical power because of his civil war experience. But in Thoreau's works, there is much more self-reflection and introspection. To learn how Hobbes was influenced by civil war in England, a student would need to draw logical conclusions from factual statements. Hobbes indicates that civil war is an evil to be avoided. Hobbes speaks only shortly of his civil war experience. Thus, drawing the conclusion that Hobbes's political theory is based on his civil war experience is not done by Hobbes, but is only accomplished when juxtaposing these facts and drawing the conclusion from them. In contrast, Thoreau is more explicit about the influence of his family's political activity and his

own early experiences on his later political resistance and civil disobedience. This is markedly transcendental.

Thoreau studied philosophy, classics, and rhetoric during his four years at Harvard College. After college, Thoreau returned to his hometown Concord in order to teach and begin writing. While Thoreau held several teaching positions after his return, he never developed a significant penchant for teaching. It was only after attending Harvard that Thoreau met Ralph Waldo Emerson, who would go on to become one of Thoreau's closest friends and a very close intellectual contemporary. While Thoreau, along with Emerson, tends to embody transcendentalism, his wide breadth of writings qualifies Thoreau for recognition in a number of literary categories. Thoreau was a prominent nature writer. In fact, several scholars have described Thoreau as a nature philosopher, emphasizing the deep philosophical inquiry that Thoreau explored during the course of his nature writings. Thoreau is, of course, also known as a prominent political essayist. In particular, Thoreau explored the role of the citizen in politics and the role of dissent in political processes.

This chapter now turns to the selected works of Thoreau. The first is *Walden; or Life in the Woods*. This work features Thoreau's description of the two years, two months, and two days living near Walden Pond. This internal reflection or introspection of life in social isolation and fully immersed in nature represents a turn away from industrialization and urbanization. The next work is *Resistance to Civil Government* (or *Civil Disobedience*). In this work, Thoreau lays out his argument in favor of individuals living under government rule to stand up against governments when such governments act unjustly. In fact, Thoreau argues that such individuals

have a moral duty to stand up against their governments. Thoreau's own civil disobedience is on display in this work, as he refused to pay taxes as a means of protesting America's participation in the Mexican War. *Slavery in Massachusetts* was published in 1854 and features an argument against the institution of slavery. This political work is intended both to provide an intellectual framework on which to base an argument in favor of abolition and to influence the masses to oppose slavery.

In *A Plea for Captain John Brown*, Thoreau stands up for John Brown, an abolitionist who Thoreau strongly supported during Brown's imprisonment. This work is heavily focused on the goodness of Brown and the corrupting influence of society on the leaders responsible for Brown's imprisonment. Despite Thoreau's pleas to government officials and the public, John Brown was sentenced to death and hanged, prompting Thoreau to write his next essay. In *Remarks After the Hanging of John Brown*, Thoreau writes:

So universal and widely related is any transcendent moral greatness, and so nearly identical with greatness everywhere and in every age, as a pyramid contracts the nearer you approach its apex, that, when I now look at my commonplace book of poetics, I find that the best of it is most applicable, in part or wholly, to the case of Captain Brown. Only the truth, and strong, and solemnly earnest, will recommend itself to the mood at this time. Almost any noble verse may be read, either as his elegy or eulogy, or be made the text of an oration on him. Indeed, such are now discovered to be the parts of a universal liturgy, applicable to those rare cases of heroes and martyrs, for which the ritual of no church has provided. This is the formula established on

high their burial service to which every great genius has contributed its stanza or line.

Here, Thoreau gives an emotional and emotion-evoking response to the tragic death of Brown. His intentions remain, however, to convince the people of the wrongness of his death. *Reform and Reformers* is a work by Thoreau in which he tries to demonstrate the ineptitude and ineffectiveness of a number of reforms, including utopian writers, religious revivalists, and prohibitionists. Thoreau's *The Last Days of John Brown* is another essay in support of the abolitionist John Brown. Thoreau is considered by Perry (77) to be among those abolitionists who argued that slavery served as one of the means to reject the obligations established by government on religious grounds. *Reform Papers* offers a defense of the instillation of pro-reform attitudes and positions. Unlike many of Thoreau's other political works, the writer is focused on the importance of the internalization of certain intellectual positions and attitudes.

Thoreau's works may be best characterized as nature writings, political essays, and combinations of the two. Most often, these works are considered transcendental, reflective of the literary and intellectual movement in content and style. But there are many Marxist aspects in Thoreau's writings. Both Marxism and Transcendentalism stem from European intellectual history. Developed in Europe Marxism has been refined and misapplied more than it has been properly interpreted and appropriately applied. Transcendentalism, on the other hand, developed in the U.S. as a force of resistance against counter-intellectual Christian dogma. Both ideologies contain elements of Hegelian thought, yet they are sufficiently distinct that they can be considered contradictory. In the next chapter, the European and

American traditions that shaped Marxism and transcendentalism will be explored.

Hegelianism will be mentioned as shared roots of each of these ideologies.

Chapter Two: The European and American Roots of Transcendentalism and Marxism

The Roots of Hegel

An integral part of German idealism, Hegel serves as an important nexus between transcendentalism and Marxism. The term idealism has had several meanings throughout the history of philosophy and intellectual discourse in general, but has now been settled, for the most part, as forming the basis against materialism. Plato, then, is the father of this sort of idealism. From there, a number of idealistic routes have been taken, one of which is German idealism and Kantian idealism in particular. Leibniz was one of the first philosophers to explicate the distinction between Platonic idealism and materialism, such as Epicurean materialism. Berkeley's idealism arose in the early 18th century and was based on perceptual grounds, namely that the material world is always filtered through our perceptions. Put in a rudimentary way, Berkeley argued that humans had no direct contact with the physical or material world. Instead, humans perceived the world. The variety of perspectives and sensory information meant that each instance of a material object (e.g., a desk) was different for every individual who had perceived the desk uses senses. Thus, it makes much more sense, according to Berkeley, to conceptualize the world not in materialistic terms, but in idealistic terms, which are based exclusively on sensory information and rational thought. Influenced by Plato, Leibniz, Berkeley, and others, Kant formed a much more complex form of idealism, one that relied much more heavily on rational thought, or reason.

Kant's idealism relies heavily on the assumption that space and time are formal features of our perceptions, rather than necessary characteristics or features

of the external world (Marx, 1977, 14). Much like Berkeley, Kant argues that humans interpret the world through senses and never directly come into contact with the material world (at least not in a particular metaphysical sense) (Redding). Objects, for Kant, are mere appearances of the materialistic world. Substance, then, is an idea, rather than something that individuals can be epistemologically sure of. This can be viewed as a skeptical position, such as under Hume's brand of skepticism discussed earlier. However, the distinction to be made, here, is between being unable to know certain ideas (i.e., skepticism) and being unable to know certain ideas from direct interactions with them. There is still room, under Kant's idealism, for knowledge to be gained. Beyond this surface-level description of Kant's idealism, which is referred to as transcendental idealism, there is widespread disagreement about how the details of Kant's idealism should be interpreted. Some argue that Kant's idealism is very closely linked to Berkeley's idealism, thus making it a phenomenological account. Others argue that this sort of idealism is not intended to be metaphysical. After all, it is argued, Kant was heavily critical of many metaphysical accounts and even of metaphysics in itself. It is important to recognize, then, that inspiration drawn from Kant's idealism may be referring to one of many different interpretations.

Hegelianism is quite varied in its approaches (Rosenthal 174). That is, trying to conceptualize Hegelian philosophy under a single, compatible, and complementary system is quite difficult. There are many separate arguments in Hegelian thought. Some of these arguments are directly traceable to Kant and, thus, are viewed as a development or extension of German idealism. But many have argued that some of Hegel's arguments run directly contrary to those of Kant's and

that the connections between Hegel and Kant should be viewed with skepticism. In other words, some argue that tracing some of Hegel's arguments back to Kant means interpreting Kantianism in such a way that makes it seem like Hegel based these arguments on Kantianism. In any case, the breadth of Hegel's arguments is impressive. Hegel covers much ground in his writings, even if no clear system of thought emerges. As Pinkard states:

Clearly, Hegel is a holist. However, exactly what kind of holist he is significantly divides Hegelian scholarship. From Hegel's own time, the dominant subject for interpretation of his work has been, putting it roughly, Neo-Platonism. On the most extensive neo-Platonic interpretation, the whole is something like the Christian God, with the various stages of the famous Hegelian dialectic each something similar to emanations from the Christian God (an emanation which is intended to follow a logic of its own). There is also a small-scale Platonist interpretation that views Hegel's system as tracing out or reflecting the conceptual structures already present in reality; the 'conceptual realist' reading also has neo-Aristotelian aspects. More recently, there has been a gross characterization of Hegelian thought not as any kind of Platonist at all but as a kind of neo- or post-Kantian, a sort of Kantian thinker who has seen the difficulties in these views and has observed that the only way to maintain the key Kantian commitments about the centrality of perception is moving in the Hegelian direction. Another interpretation which has recently emerged holds that Hegel is a kind of inferentialist about meaning, and in this view, is also almost always taken to be a kind of social pragmatist. However, this interpretation has very much in

common with post-Kantian interpretations, although the overlaps and differences are too subtle to discuss here. (Pinkard, 2013: p. 518)

Hegelianism, then, stands on its own, but in parts. The Hegelian system may, itself, be incompatible, as even Hegel might have suggested in his theory of contradictions. Nonetheless, the individual parts can be understood separately.

German idealism often refers to a line of idealistic theories that include Hegelianism and Kantianism and that fall under the German intellectual tradition. Despite the deep complexities in these theories, they were applied very practically across parts of German and Europe. Many ideologies in Europe were inspired by German idealism and many political identities were formed with German idealism in mind in at least some capacity. But there is no single German idealism; that is, German idealism encompasses such a wide number of theoretical that it is difficult to draw any sort of coherent set of fundamental principles or assumptions of German idealism. For example, Hegel's arguments were deeply religious. In fact, Hegelianism has been described as providing the metaphysical grounds for a modern philosophical treatise on religion. At the very least, Hegel provides a theoretical framework on which an understanding of a Christian spirit can be posited. Yet, this fundamentally contradicts Kantianism. Kant, after all, sought to delineate his positions from any Christian or religious dogmatic positions. Kant's focus on reason allowed Kant to ground his arguments in something other than dogmatic beliefs. How, then, can one derive any sort of single ideological position that falls under the umbrella German idealism? Certainly there are idealistic aspects that span many of the German idealists, but even the idealistic parts of these arguments are distinctive. The practical applications of German idealism may be difficult to reconcile.

However, as will be discussed later, the application of German philosophy across Europe and the U.S. in the early 18th and late 19th centuries was often based on bits and pieces of German intellectual thought along with plenty of misinterpretation. This would suggest that intellectuals who relied on German philosophical ideas during this time period were at least somewhat inspired by the gist or spirit of German idealism. Kant introduced a few novel ways of approaching older problems and, for the religious, Hegel based some of these Kantian ideas on religious doctrine (or dogma)

The application of German idealism and Hegelianism in particular across Europe and the U.S. varied substantially (Rosenthal 256). One reason for this was stated above: intellectuals picked parts of Hegelianism and expounded on them, even if they ultimately misinterpreted Hegel's works or relied on unreliable translations or commentary on Hegel's works. Another reason for the variance in how German idealism and Hegelianism was applied in the West was variation in how Hegel was interpreted. By establishing Hegelianism in more Aristotelian thought, these intellectuals could ground Hegelianism in such a way that would allow for religious conclusions to be drawn.

Hegelianism, then, does not stop with Hegel's works, but extends also to scholarly interpretation of Hegel, much like Kantianism continues into intellectual discourse today. From this perspective, the roots of Hegelianism, then, include Hegel's works, as they serve as the roots for the interpretation of Hegelianism. The same can be said of the German philosophical tradition in general and, of course, German idealism. For any group or scholar attempting to establish novel ideas,

whether philosophical, political, religious, or otherwise, in Hegelianism or German idealism, it is important to recognize the differing accounts.

The Roots of Marxism

Marx's childhood was one in which he received a high-quality education early on before writing a thesis on Ancient Roman and Greek positions. A recent graduate, Marx sought an academic position but was denied because of the radical positions that he had already held. Marx's early writings were similarly as radical as his later writings. Moreover, Marx met Engels early on and cowrote *The German Ideology* with Engels. Marx also published work on Feuerbach and Hegel. In particular, Marx focused on criticizing the idealistic elements of Hegel's works. Throughout his writings, Marx varies substantially in his arguments. In some ways, his arguments evolve, but in other ways, Marx takes a step back with his arguments. While Marx was quite focused on German idealism and Ancient Greek and Roman works, when he began publishing his own works, he developed historical and economic positions first. Explored in this subsection are the roots of Marxism, in particular, the historical and intellectual roots of Marxist thought.

There is a general scholarly consensus that the strongest influence on Marx early on in his writings was Hegel (Mazlish 336). After all, Marx was part of a group of German intellectuals called the Young Hegelians. Of particular importance, here, is the focus of the Young Hegelians on rejecting the religious and dogmatic aspects of Hegelianism. While the Young Hegelians wrote extensively on Hegelian thought on both theoretical and practical grounds, they did not adopt the religious implications of such thought. Instead, they focused on replacing these aspects with materialistic and metaphysical aspects, thus transforming Hegelianism into what

would become Marx's historical materialism. In fact, Marx wrote several pieces on the problems of Hegelianism and how such problems may be resolved by embracing certain Hegelian arguments and rejecting others. With Marx rejecting the idealistic aspects of Hegelianism, as well as the religious and dogmatic aspects, it may be difficult to see exactly how Hegelianism served as the foundation for Marxist thought and for historical materialism. There are several assumptions and arguments that Marx adopted, but it was the Hegelian methods that were most influential for Marx. As Pinkard writes:

One of the arguments that Marx inherited from Hegel was the position that one may not specify the content of the important ethical conceptions without attending to realizations. But in standing Hegel back on his feet, Marx sought to argue that Hegel got it all wrong on his own views about this idea. For Marx, Hegel's concept of the realization of the concept itself, if nothing else, put too great an emphasis on the concept and not enough on its realization. While for Hegel, the concept gave itself its own actuality, in the regard that the norms of that concept pressed for their own realization, the idea that all are free presses for the sort of institutional reform that took almost 1,800 years to manifest itself—for Marx talking like that simply obfuscated the much more basic fact that concepts themselves were merely normative articulations of the practices in which they are embedded. It is those practices to which the attention should be paid, not primarily the concepts into which they are articulated. To do otherwise, Marx stated, was to fall into the trap of idealism; that is, into the belief that ideas determine the reality of practice and not the other way around. (Pinkard, 2013: p. 520)

The clearest Hegelian impact on Marxism is Hegel's dialectics, again, separated from the idealistic aspects of Hegel's work. Marx applied Hegel's dialectics to materialism. This meant that Marx bought into the Hegelian interpretation of history, but held that ideas were not what brought about the material world or allowed for the discovery of some version of the material world. Instead, Marx held, under his materialism perspective, that the material world allowed for the formation of ideas. Collectively, this led to the formation of the Marx and Engels version of dialectic materialism. It should be noted, here, that Marx did rely heavily on concepts of ideas, especially as the foundation for institutions and to explain the manipulation and exploitation of certain peoples. Thus, an important aspect of Hegelian thought for Marx was the concept of the universal concept. As explained earlier, Hegel (and Kant before him) held that there are certain universal concepts that allow for individuals to perceive and understand, to some degree, an external world. Marx applies the notion of universal concepts, but not as Hegel envisioned and defined them (which will be discussed in the next paragraph). In fact, Marx held that universal concepts formed from the material world. Moreover, Marx specifically criticized many of the utopian conceptions of political, social, and economic ideals because they were based, in part, on Hegelian universal concepts. Utopian socialism had formed before and as Marx wrote. Marx and the Young Hegelians criticized utopian socialism because it rested on the notion that there are certain universal principles or concepts that societies should strive for. According to Marx, these utopian theorists completely ignored the historical factors that contributed to the development of the very geopolitical and economic systems that the utopians were criticizing. In many ways, this marked the abandonment, for

Marx, of the Hegelian sort of idealism in favor of materialism. In fundamental opposition of Hegel's idealism, Marx held that ideas came out of the external material world.

Returning back to the use of universal concepts by Marx, it is important to keep in mind the distinctions between a Hegelian universal concept and one envisioned by Marx. For Marx, these concepts were only universal in that they reflected a particular quality of the external, material world. If the world would have been different, then these concepts would be different or they may not be universally applicable. Ideas, for Marx, can be viewed as convenient and useful means for individuals to try to understand the external world, but, perhaps even more importantly for Marx, ideas reflect some state of the material world. There can be no stand-alone idea without support from the material world. This does not mean, of course, that individuals cannot come up with ideas that are not of this world. For example, the unicorn is not of this world but is comprised of two parts of this world: a horse and a horn. Also, Marx's materialistic perspective of the world is focused on how societies form and change, as well as on how individuals exploit one another. Thus, ideas, for Marx, are ways for individuals to exploit one another. According to Marxism thought, ideas serve specific purposes in individual society. Thus, there are differences in public ideas across society. Of course, individuals also have ideas about how to take care of themselves, outside of any societal influence, but these ideas are different from ideas that are spread publicly, such as religious ideas. The purposes behind these public ideas often involve the exploitation of certain groups in society, especially in capitalist society. Marx traces many of these ideas to falsehoods about the world. For example, Marx may argue that the formation of

political parties was intended to keep certain people in power and in positions to exploit others.

Marx was certainly critical of politics, especially in its capacity to install capitalist economic systems, as Marx witnessed. It is difficult to determine the influence of Hegel in this respect. Marx certainly broke away from Hegelian idealism, in favor of materialism. However, there is another very important area in which Marx rejected Hegelian thought: religion. More importantly, Marx rejected many of the Hegelian dogmatic claims that served as the basis for many of the foundational Hegelian arguments. There are two relevant ways that Marx criticizes religion, especially in the context of the Hegelian influences on Marx. The first is that Marx entirely rejects any Hegelian dogmatic religious claims. Hegel argued that both material and ideas result from God, in one form or another. Marx rejects this position, which not only helps Marx apply Hegelian dialectics outside of any religious context but also allows Marx to argue that Christianity and other religious institutions resulted from the external material world, rather than the other way around. The second important Marxist criticism of Hegelianism is in this very argument. Marx held that religious institutions served many of the same roles that capitalist -favoring governments have. In other words, religious institutions allow certain people to gain advantages over others. Religion is a harmful illusion, according to Marx. It is harmful to those in the lower class, through the placation of people. Religion in capitalist societies, as Marx would argue, is comprised of institutions created or enhanced by the bourgeois class in order to control and exploit the working class. The mobilization of the working class, Marx argued, allows for their emancipation.

Moreover, it should be noted that Marx did not restrict this sort of criticism to economic, religious, or social institutions. Marx held that in capitalist economies, the upper classes would realize that there were a number of ways to placate and control the masses. Again, here, Marx is identifying features of the external, material world that will lead to certain universal concepts to proliferate. Just as religious institutions serve to placate the working class on moral grounds, certain cultural institutions emerge in capitalist economies, Marx argued, that contributes to the exploitation of the working class by the owners of the means of production. For example, materialism—in the sense of a psychological desire to own consumer goods, products, and brands—can be viewed as a cultural institution or phenomenon that exists, at least in part, so that the upper-class can control the working class. Thus, Marx argues that various cultural, religious, political, and social institutions are primarily created to serve the purposes of the owners of the means of production in capitalist societies.

Given Marx's rejection of Hegelian religious claims, how could Marx reconcile his own system of thought with that of Hegel? Again, this question must turn to the difference in the interpretations of Hegelian thought and the different parts of Hegel's arguments that could stand independently. Hegelianism is not heavily systematic, even if it is holistic. Many scholars have separated the different parts of Hegelianism in order to pursue a particular system based only on such parts. Marx borrows certain aspects of Hegelianism thought and rejects others. Later, this project will turn to how transcendentalists and Thoreau, specifically, applies Hegelian thought, often in pieces. An interesting pattern emerges. Thoreau borrows Marxist ideas in many of his political arguments. But Thoreau also borrows aspects

of Hegelianism, with many of these aspects being different than those that Marx borrows. In fact, as will be discussed later, Thoreau adopts some of the Hegelian tenets that Marx rejects.

There is another set of roots that help explain Marxism: European history. Marx was born at a time of relative peace in Europe, but he still witnessed substantial violence and military conflicts. But Marx studied European history quite extensively, identifying many of the causes of conflict. Marx also witnessed many of the hardships of the working class across Europe. With the fall of mercantilism, there was growing economic cooperation between certain European states. Capitalism brought with it industrialization, but also high levels of exploitation, which Marx quickly identified. The problem for Marx and many others at the time was that income inequality in itself was not viewed negatively and could not be traced as the cause of many social ills. Marx, who was actually born in Prussia and understood the history of revolution in Eastern Europe quite while well, was convinced that it would take a revolution to transform society enough to end the sort of exploitative practices that had bourgeoned just before and during his time

Lockean thought provided a moral framework for justifying capitalism, even if capitalists ignored Locke's mixing labor argument. It was the notion that private property was a God-given right that could be evoked in the justification of capitalism. Marx questioned such forms of justification early on. Would it not be better to guarantee that everyone gets paid fairly for their work, than guarantee private property, Marx pondered. After all, Marx had witnessed how certain individuals seemed to pull all of the strings, not only in the economy, but also in governments. Transitions from monarchies to democracies promised changes that

the transitions from feudalism to capitalism did not delivery. This historical understanding contributed to Marx's formation of his various classes. Most notably, Marx identified the owners of the means of production. These were the people who controlled society. Industrialization was important for the growth of society, Marx conceded, but it also contributed to the accumulation of wealth. Marx argued that governments now served as institutions that heavily favoured the owners of production, especially in their capacity to keep the working class in their places and without the sort of political power that would ensure fair play. Effectively, the owners of the means of production were able to prolong their exploitation of the working class because of the political control that they could buy. Governments, Marx argued, not only not only protected the ownership and property rights of the owners of the means of production, but gave them the power to control the rights of workers. In many states, the conception of the union was unfeasible.

One of the most influential aspects of Marxism is his emphasis on exploitation. Marx views exploitation as a natural course of events following the installation of a capitalist economy. Exploitation is the primary vice of capitalist economies. Marx hold that exploitation is inevitable in capitalist economies because such economies allow those at the top (i.e., the owners of the means of production) to dictate the terms of society. This includes the installation of superstructures, which are effectively the institutions in a society, including law, culture, philosophy, media, political systems, etc. Marx presents a sort of reductionist account of society by holding that in capitalist societies all of these superstructures are dictated by the owners of the means of production. But this Marxist position was heavily shaped by his experiences and the historical conditions in which he wrote in. Marx grew up

during much of the industrialization in Germany and across Europe. In the U.S., Marx could observe a nascent society crafting new laws and lacking the traditions to resist the owners of the means of production enforcing their own laws, rules, and institutions on the people. Marx, then, viewed the particular formation of Western societies (the capitalist ones) as being dependent on and decided by the owners of the means of production.

It is no coincidence that such a strong pushback and form of resistance, which was and is Marxism, grew in the years following massive industrialization throughout Europe and the U.S. But industrialization, in itself, would have been insufficient to inspire and demonstrate to Marx the need for a *Communist Manifesto*. No, it was the emergence of the superstructures that demonstrated to Marx the pervasiveness of corruption and the massive influence of the owners of the means of production. After all, the combination of capitalism and industrialization could have led to low unemployment and the peasants and working class of society working their way up, accumulating enough capital to purchase their own land and means of production. Marx, of course, rejects this possibility as a sort of illusion of capitalism. The owners of the means of production would prefer to keep the number of such owners at a minimum. Why would they let anyone else buy land if they could one day just buy more land and become even wealthier? Through his experiences in the industrialization of Europe, Marx learned of the inevitable conclusion of capitalism: the accumulation of wealth at the top. But what prevented the workers from accumulating wealth was not owners of the means of production directly. These owners could only do so much on their own. Through the installation of superstructures, however, they could indirectly retain their power and wealth

without being accused of exploitation, or at least without being able to point the finger elsewhere.

Marx argued that exploitation was extremely dangerous, in large part because it can and often did include severely unsafe working conditions, the impoverishment of the working class, and various health issues. This position was all but proven during the Industrial Revolution in the U.S., as working conditions waned while production and wealth accumulation increased. Even in the years following the Industrial Revolution, workers' rights were being quashed and neglected in favor of Lockean private property rights and, more notably, laws that put the burdens of work entirely on the workers. Exploitation was codified in the U.S., as legal resistance to unionization grew. Exploitation, at this point, was the norm. In much of Europe, the same was true. The negative effects of capitalism, precisely because of exploitation and the institutionalization of exploitation, far outweighed the benefits. The system was unjust, Marx noticed. Hegel's psychological account, combined with Marx's materialistic beliefs, also helped Marx understand the results of capitalism. Humans were self-interested, Marx held. They were likely to help others only when they could deduce that they could benefit themselves, in the future. Capitalism not only removed any restrictions on the flow of capital, but also allowed for the owners of the means of production to establish superstructures. From a Marxist perspective, such owners *would* do that. For sure, Marx argued, a sufficient number of such owners would seek to exploit workers and install superstructures that would ensure long-term exploitation. Marx held that when the owners of the means of production exploited workers, they controlled not only the wages of such workers but also how they work. In fact, exploitation

contributed to the instillation of ideology and religion in these capital economies. One of the factors that made Marx's account remarkable was that it was the combination of philosophical argument and historical observance. Marx observed the results of capitalism and, then, reasoned that capitalist economies will necessarily lead to such outcomes. But Marx took it further, arguing that capitalism was part of the natural progression. From feudalism came capitalism, just as from capitalism would come communism, Marx argued.

Marxism, itself, has been adapted across a variety of political and economic applications, almost always in violation of some of the most basic Marxist principles (Muirhead 227). For example, applications of Marxism in Russia under Communist regimes have always violated many Marx principles. In fact, these regimes have not only violated basic Marxist principles, but actually fell into many of the criticisms that Marx had of capitalism. For many working classes, Marxism embodied the ultimate shift in power, from the upper-classes (whether imperial or bourgeois in a capitalist economy) to the working class (including peasants). Many of the criticisms put forth by Marx were aimed not only at capitalist economies, but also certain social and political structures. These, too, have been changed, misinterpreted, or ignored under subsequent Marxist (or Neo-Marxist) theories and applications. As Pinkard explains:

Marx's critique of the irrationality of capitalist economies was also taken up and incorporated into various continental philosophical positions, which tend to incorporate a Weberian conservative argument, that capitalism locked people into an iron cage of rationalization and economic efficiency, as well as Heidegger's conception of the way in which rationalization indicates some

kind of end-point for the West particularly and perhaps even humanity in general. Nevertheless, one thing that does remain *au courant* is Marx's materialism, or what is today called naturalism, which, apart from how Marx used the term, is a powerful force in contemporary philosophy. Other features of Marx's theory have not fared nearly as well. The labor theory of value is upheld only by adding lots of epicycles into it, and the notion that there are sharp cognitive separations between the sort of science he claims to be doing compared to the supposed exercises in mere ideology that philosophers carry out is, to put it mildly, difficult to defend. Still, now that Marxism is no longer a state orthodox in any major part of the world, Marx can finally take his place beside Hume, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Mill, and various other ethical and political theorists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, all of whom continue to evoke new interpretations of their works and suggest new ways of looking at ancient problems. (Pinkard, 2013: p. 523)

The roots of Marxism certainly include Kantianism and Hegelianism, but the roots of Marxism likely spread even further. Many of the influences of Marx are aimed at political and economic changes. After all, Marx's criticisms of various institutions were framed in capitalist terms. If one were to reject the class conflict claims made by Marx, then it would be difficult to uphold his criticisms of religious and political institutions. Nonetheless, as will be discussed later, much of Marxism can serve as a sociopolitical basis for criticisms of society, even under theories and approaches that are not aimed at criticizing capitalism specifically.

The Roots of Transcendentalism

In the late 18th century and early 19th century, there was a dearth of German literature in the U.S. (Wellek 650). Moreover, the German language was not being spoken by much of the population. The classical languages remained popular. During this time, the U.S. population was quite well-educated, significantly more educated than Europe in general. Many of those who came to the U.S. in the years leading up to and just after the American Revolution were educated, passing such education on to their children. The first public schools, erected by the Puritans and other religious groups, arose quite quickly in the colonies and then the U.S. (Wellek 651). Yet, German thought had not reached the popularity in the U.S. that it had in the U.S. as Wellek states:

It has been shown, convincingly, that intellectual relations between the U.S. and Germany were by no means absent even in the 17th century, and that the general absence of German books or of the knowledge of the German language in the U.S. has been exaggerated. In particular, towards the end of the 18th century, there was growing interest in German. John Quincy Adams, for instance, translated Wieland's *Oberon* into decent verse, and the Reverend William Bentley, pastor at Salem, collected many German books, including the works of Klopstock and Schiller and others. In periodicals, there appeared ever scattered mentions of the most recent German philosophers. An issue of the *Philadelphia Monthly Magazine* in 1798 included the note on Kant based on German sources, which speaks of the *Criterion of Pure Reason*; and the *Boston Register* contained quotations from Fichte refuting the charges of atheism. In Samuel Miller's interesting

Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century of 1803, there was a hostile account of Kant that reproduced a review by William Taylor on Willich's Elements of Critical Philosophy of 1798 from the London Monthly Review of 1799. Obviously not much should be made out of such scattered notes, with the exception of suggesting that the names of Kant and Fichte had begun to reach America. (Wellek, 1942: p. 653)

The intellectuals at this time in the U.S. and in colonial American were most heavily influenced by the Ancient Roman and Greek classics, as well as more recent English literature. French was even better represented than German in the intellectual discourse in the U.S. at this time. Nonetheless, as shown above, there were patches of German thought that entered intellectual discourse in the U.S. at this time. One of the limiting factors was the infrequency with which intellectual knew the German language and the inaccessibility of Americans to German works in English. For those works that had been translated, such as Kant's works, only certain parts became very influential in the U.S. Moreover, it was quite difficult to trace which were directly traceable to an understanding of Kant and which were passed from through intermediaries who had adopted Kantian ideas and lexicon (with at least some accuracy) and passed on these ideas to American intellectuals.

This raises another issue with regard to the access and use of German thought, and especially German idealism, in the U.S. Kantianism includes a number of novel ideas. Many of these ideas share some characteristics with Platonism and Neo-Platonism, but are sufficiently different enough to make misinterpretation all but inevitable. The same can be said of Hegelian ideas or any combination of Kantian and Hegelian ideas. The result was, certainly, the misinterpretation and

mischaracterization of Kantian and Hegelian ideas. After all, the primary access to these German idealist philosophies stemmed from translations and the passage of these ideas from English-German speakers. These errors had an interesting impact on how U.S. intellectuals viewed German idealism in the early 19th century. Most notably, criticisms of German idealism emerged based on misinterpretation and mischaracterization. The unfortunate result was the rejection of German idealism in its misinterpreted forms. For others, however, and especially some of the minor transcendentalisms, these misinterpretations turned into adaptations. In other words, some of the basic ideas of Kantianism and Hegelianism (as well as other German idealism philosophies) were adapted into transcendentalist thought, even if such ideas were not actually reflective of German idealism. In fact, some of the most interesting applications of German idealism to transcendentalism and romanticism were based on misinterpretations. Nonetheless, they often worked, or at the very least made sense in a closed philosophical system (i.e., one in which certain assumptions were taken for granted).

Transcendentalism is an ideology, of sorts, with particular strands of intellectual thoughts and assumptions serving as the basis of the ideology. But there is significant variation in transcendentalism thought. Of course, this may be expected from any ideology in which individual subjective experiences are valued over objective accounts of the world and of nature. Nonetheless, even on scholarly and intellectual grounds, there is some variation in transcendentalist thought. One of the interesting aspects of the emergence of the movement and ideology is that many transcendentalists engaged with a variety of theories and philosophical approaches and positions. This can be viewed as pitting transcendentalist ideas against other

ideologies and theories, but it was often the case that the individual philosophies of transcendentalists were being shaped through the engagement and criticisms of various philosophical systems and ideologies. One such case is that of Brownson, a transcendentalist who engaged with a number of different ideologies, including Hegel. As Wellek states:

From these pronouncements, we can already guess at Brownson's attitude towards Hegel. It was again defined well before his conversion. Brownson first rejected Hegel's deductive method. He cannot believe that "the system of the universe is only a system of logic," adding that the "ideal and essential, idea and being," are the same. Hegel's method "claims for man confessedly finite, absolute knowledge, which implies that he himself is absolute and cannot be finite, but only infinite." Yet "this boast is also in vain, for the order of knowledge is such that we are obliged to reverse the very order of existence. People rise through nature even up to the God of nature, rather than descending from God from man to nature. None except God himself can know according to the order of this existence, for no one but God can know being in itself, from the absolute causal knowledge, have perfect knowledge, *a priori*, of the effect." Though rejecting the pretenses of Hegel's philosophy concerning absolute knowledge, the American Brownson cannot help but smile at Hegel's interpretation that "the infinite God and all his works through all the past have been engaged expressly in preparing and founding the Prussian monarchy" and that the "gracious majesty Frederick William" could be "the last word of creation and progress." (Wellek, 1942: p. 678)

This sort of interaction with Hegelianism reflects the exploratory nature of transcendentalists. In fact, Brownson was not the only to consider parts of Hegelianism, but perhaps gave the most thought to some adoption of parts of the philosophical tradition. Nonetheless, Brownson does not give in to the complexity of Hegelian thought. In fact, Brownson likely misinterprets Hegel on several important points. The analytical nature of Hegel's work seems to throw Brownson off, as he is more concerned with a personal religion than explaining one. This may signify the greatest disconnection between transcendentalism and Hegelianism. That is, the former prefers the subjective to the objective, while the latter offers only a deep analytical exploration of reason and knowledge. Brownson seems to completely ignore the fact that Hegel begins from the supposition of God's existence and through God come all perceptions and matter. The transcendentalism lens may be denser for Brownson than others under this ideology. The rejection of Hegelianism, for Brownson, is a bit of a gut reaction, an immediate turn away from the systematic thinking produced by Hegel. Wellek goes on:

After the conversion of the tones of the objection against Hegelianism become more strident, Hegel's system appears to [Brownson], under other forms, "nothing but a reproduction of old French Atheism," Hegel's principles appear to Brownson to be "unreal and worthless," and his philosophy "much less genuine, less profound, and infinitely less worthy of confidence" than Reid's. Brownson then pays some attention to Hegel's first works, in which he sees a false attempt to determine the real from the merely possible, existence from nothingness. Brownson does not admit that Hegel is any sort of ontologist. For Brownson, he is a pure psychologist, who only

ostensibly attempts to determine the psychological process with ontology. Hegel is a subjective idealist, he claims, who ends in pantheism and atheism, like all the other followers of Kant. (Wellek, 1942: p. 678)

There are other transcendentalists who engaged with Hegelianism, if for no other reason than to test and refine their own beliefs. Hegel may have had the greatest influence on transcendentalism through his influence on Emerson. Ralph Waldo Emerson was well-known for adopting bits and pieces of beliefs systems from across the world. In this way, Emerson was extremely inclusive and willing to challenge his own ideas and conventional traditions for purposes of refinement. One of the aspects of Hegelianism that interested Emerson was Hegel's dialectics. In particular, the systematic way that knowledge arose was of interest to Emerson.

Emerson also found Germany idealism particularly valuable in its responses to English empiricism. What German idealism and Hegelianism in particular provided Emerson was a picture of what may be a possible path for refuting empiricism. Perhaps it was that Emerson was intrigued about where German idealism could be taken. Emerson was clear that Hegel did not provide all of the answers to empiricism, rather there was a framework being laid that could one day provide a very different set of explanations than empiricism. Emerson did not adopt any particular aspect of Hegelianism, with the exception of Hegelian logic, which Emerson said had reached the edge of philosophical inquiry. A few times in his works, Emerson quotes Hegel, but these are more practical recommendations and dares to explore experience in new ways. Like many other major philosophical and political figures, Hegel served as a single point of inspiration and interest to Emerson. The influence of Hegel on Emerson was largely limited to Hegel's

analytical arguments and proofs. Nonetheless, Emerson was often not systematic in his thought, as was the case with many transcendentalists. It is difficult to trace the exact influences of Hegel on Emerson without deep explorations of the context and content of Emerson's work in relation to Hegel. That scope and depth of inquiry are reserved in this work for Thoreau.

The rise of historicism and the importance of history in intellectual thought had a unique impact on the development of transcendentalism in the U.S. (Clemmer, 1969). A focus on historicism had swept through much of Europe, accompanying the British empiricism movement. Under historicism, intellectual development was traced with history being used as a guide to predict future developments. Moreover, history was used as a lens to determine the success of past intellectual movements. The Enlightenment increased the attention paid to history. Just as transcendentalism can be viewed as a countermovement against empiricism in favor of subjectivism and idealism, the movement can also be viewed as a countermovement to the Enlightenment and its emphasis on historicism. Most commonly, history was comprised of objective facts, not accounts of human experience. Those accounts of human experience in history were often tempered by some lens that was intended to transform subjective accounts into objective explanations. But transcendentalists rejected such intellectual attempts in favor of the subjective, of the romantic.

The Roots of Thoreau

Henry David Thoreau never held a major academic position, giving him one immediate point of commonality with Marx. Given a lack of commitment to any particular university or discipline, Thoreau was effectively free to write and work freely. He worked for businesses owned by his family through most of his

adulthood, spending much of his time writing about nature and patterns in nature. Of course, Thoreau participated in the transcendentalist movement, but was not nearly as vocal or active as Emerson.

The social, political, and environmental conditions that contributed to transcendentalism and of Thoreau's writings had some similarities with those of Marx. Industrialization had swept through New England, transforming many residential areas into industrial areas. It is not clear how much industrialization Thoreau witnessed; whereas, Marx witnessed much industrialization through the transformation of urban areas. It is certain, however, that Thoreau understood the impacts that such industrialization and socialization had in general on urban communities around the Boston and Concord areas. With industrialization came pollution and disruptions to the natural environments. While Thoreau spent much of his adult life in relatively rural areas around Concord, he demonstrated a recognition of the environmental damage committed in urban areas.

There are three movements that were particularly influential on the development of transcendentalism and Thoreau's contribution to the movement. The first was an intellectual movement: British empiricism. The development of transcendentalism was based in part on counterarguments against empiricism. Locke's empiricism and several other British empiricists focused on what could be known through empirical observation, namely what could be recorded. This contributed, of course, to scientific movements, but also leaked into a general understanding of the world and an emphasis on the objective over the subjective. In many ways, this sort of empiricism was viewed as a rejection of the notion that the human experience was unique. Thus, the transcendentalists countered with a focus

on subjectivity. The perspectives and unique experiences of individuals were what truly mattered, not simply objective data. After all, many would argue, objective data had to be recorded from a particular perspective. The German idealists provided some of the grounds on which such empiricism could be rejected, even if the transcendentalists never bought fully into any particular German idealism philosophies. Many of the basic tenets and underlying concepts of German idealism was sufficient to reject an empiricist interpretation of the world.

The second influential movement was primarily artistic: Romanticism. While empiricism established a need to find new intellectual ground in the transcendentalism movement, Romanticism was a force for inspiration for the movement. Romanticism was discussed in some detail earlier, but its specific impacts on Thoreau are of particular importance here. Thoreau's work is deeply reflective of the ideas of Romanticism. In many ways, Thoreau and others in the movement applied Romanticism to an intellectual movement in a way that it had not been done previously. That is, they applied the Romanticism ideals of unique human experience and the subjective to living and appreciating the natural. Applied to art, Romanticism is intended to demonstrate such human experiences. Every experience is unique and contained a different perspective. Even if the vantage point is the same, humans are shaped by their past experiences and, consequently, interpret sensory information in very different ways. Expressed through art, Romanticism established intimate connections between particularly individuals (usually the artists) and the viewers.

Similarly, in literature, Romanticism is focused on internal details and in describing the thoughts, motives, and biases of characters. Thoreau in *Walden*

applies many of these Romantic ideals in his descriptions of nature. He describes his experiences, not just objective characteristics and features of nature. He does not say that the blades of grass are about two inches tall, but instead how their size makes him feel. In this way, Thoreau embraces Romanticism in his nature writings. To some extent, he does so too in his political essays. He expresses, for example, his inner-feelings when he learned of John Brown's fate. He also expresses how slavery makes him feel. Again, Thoreau connects much more with the Romantic literary tradition in his nature writings. But Thoreau and other transcendentalists go further than mere literary applications. They take the Romantic ideals and apply them to both morals and religion. Morally, the ideals of Romanticism help shape how the transcendentalists determine the best ways to live. While there are certain agreements on the best ways to live, there is some moral subjectivity. Of course, the violation of rights or the inappropriate infringement on the freedoms of individuals would not be considered moral by any transcendentalist. It was not a movement of moral subjectivity, even if there was some flexibility in the construction of personal moralities. Religiously, the Romantic ideals are applied through the very personal and experiential, even intuitive, way that religion is described.

Thus, the third influential movement was religious: Calvinism (and Protestantism in general). Calvinism was unacceptable for the transcendentalists. There were, of course, many different religious sects, groups, and denominations in New England. The Protestants comprised only some of these groups. But the transcendentalists had been involved directly with many Protestant groups, including Calvinists. They viewed such groups with discontent. Therefore, the transcendentalists sought out a new religious experience, not just a new religion. The

formation of this sort of religious movement was very closely aligned with the ideals of Romanticism. The focus on subjectivity and personal experience in religious expression is very Romantic. The supernatural aspects of most religions in New England were rejected by Transcendentalists, insofar as such aspects were not experienced by the members of this movement. After all, many of the religious experiences that they describe, including some described by Thoreau, could be considered supernatural. In any case, they did not view them as such.

The religious aspects of transcendentalism are very much intellectual. At the time with historicism increasing in popularity in Europe and even Germany, and empiricism remaining popular in Europe and fueling scientific advancements, one may think that applying intellectualism to religion would mean applying empiricism to religion. But this, of course, is not the case in the transcendentalist movement. Instead, the intellectual components were based on deep thinking, meditation, intuition, and reason. Many historical traditions were applied, especially by Emerson, but the general focus was certainly on the subjective experiences of religion. Knowing about the religious experiences of others was insufficient. Religion was deeply personal for many transcendentalists. It should be noted, however, that not all members of this movement were particularly religious. In fact, many were much more metaphysical in their practices (e.g., introspection, meditation). Thoreau was somewhat religious, but thinkers such as Emerson, were more inclined to explore metaphysical experiences and ponder about metaphysical realities rather than try to achieve religious experiences. Therefore, the transcendentalists can be categorized into two groups, even though such a line would likely be arbitrary. Some members were very religious; some somewhat

religious; some very metaphysical; some only somewhat metaphysical; and some practiced a bit of both. In any case, there were certain parallels between the religious and metaphysical experiences of the transcendentalists. Thoreau may be difficult to categorize in this arbitrary way, but he may fall into the camp of practicing a bit of both.

Thoreau's political essays, such as *Civil Disobedience*, reflect strong Marxist affinity. Thoreau was particularly political for a transcendentalist. While others in this movement expressed political sentiments with or without direct applications of the transcendentalist ideology, Thoreau was among the most politically active. For Thoreau, there was a clear relationship between his political beliefs and the transcendentalism ideology. Most notably, the emphasis on the natural and human experience meant that many of the products and institutions in society had negative influences on humans, even without them knowing it. This is a very Marxism interpretation of society; it is also quite reflective of the political arguments set forth by Rousseau, whose ideas may, themselves, serve as the nexus between Marx and Thoreau. But Thoreau was critical of capitalism in the same way that Marx was. While Thoreau certainly identified exploitation in society when it occurred, Thoreau did not take the stance that capitalism was necessarily bad, just that it led to a number of evils. Marx, on the other hand, held that capitalism would ultimately lead to the sort of class formation, class conflict, and exploitation that would be to the detriment of the working class.

Class is an important concept for both Marx and Thoreau. In many ways, Thoreau, like many others, adopts a Marxist conception of class, defined socioeconomically. The concept of class, for Marx, was fundamental to

understanding the natural progression of capitalist societies. For Marx and Thoreau, classes can be considered groups of people who may not share any discernible physical or racial features (although there will be more on this later) and that society has organized primarily by socioeconomic factors. In this sense, classes will form in a capitalist society because not everyone will own the means of production. Those who do can use their positions of bargaining and power to exploit the lower classes and to install institutions that further their own control. Classes are present in pretty much any society, but the formation of classes in capitalist economies has particular features, Marx argues. In some societies, classes form by race or heritage, but in capitalist societies, class demarcations result from income inequality. Thoreau certainly recognized this problem in his own time, as it would be recognized to an even greater extent today. Thoreau's recognition of these socioeconomic classes in his own time is obvious in his discussions on slavery, an institution that Thoreau could follow the Marxist line of reasoning: slavery was the reclassification of a group of individuals in or outside of society that could be manipulated and used to generate wealth for the upper classes.

Marx viewed slavery as a natural extension of the bourgeois classes exerting force over others. The slave class was both a part of the working class and a different sort of class in its own right. Slavers were, after all, workers with diminished or no political rights. Marx said of slavery in the U.S.:

The direct slavery in the U.S. is just as much about the pivot of the bourgeois class and industry as was increases machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery the class has no cotton; without this cotton, they have no modern industry. Slavery has given the colonies their high industrial value. The colonies then

have created international trade, and it is international trade acts the pre-requisite for large-scale industry. Therefore, slavery is considered an economic category that is of the very greatest importance. With no North American slavery, the roost progress of the nations, would be transformed into patriarchal territory. If North America was wiped from the map of the world, you are left with anarchy — the utter decay of modern commercial activity and civilization. If slavery disappears, you have wiped America off of the map of countries. Thus slavery, because it has become essential to industry and commerce is an economic category. It has always existed across the institutions of the people. Modern nations are able only to disguise slavery in their own nations, but impose it with no disguise upon the New World. (Marx in Lawrence, 17)

This direct condemnation of the institution of slavery indicates that Marx lumped slavery in with the upper-class economic controls of the lower class. There is a clear point of overlap in the positions held by Marx and Thoreau on slavery. Namely, each viewed the human as being fundamentally equal. This is more apparent in Thoreau who emphasizes the experiential similarities between all humans. For Marx, this is implied. After all, how could Marx argue that slaves were being exploited in similar ways to other American workers if they were not equal or at least like equals? Thoreau would have certainly held this argument on slavery with no help from Marx, but the Marxism classification system helped Thoreau formulate his political arguments.

Marx explains that many of the problems that are found in capitalist societies can be traced to class conflict. Again, this is a sentiment echoed by Thoreau. In

particular, Thoreau identifies several areas of class conflict, particularly between the rich and poor. Thus, the two make many of the same arguments with regard to exploitation. Capitalist societies result, Marx argues, in class conflict. That is, the very nature of capitalist economies is such that class conflict will occur. One of the potential differences between Thoreau and Marx is on the inevitability of class conflict in society. Marx holds that this is a necessary component or feature of capitalism. But Thoreau seems less willing to hold that this is a necessity. Thoreau recognizes that when governments overstep their boundaries, especially when they engage in poor military conflicts internationally and regionally, then citizens have a duty to stand up to such government, even if in a violent manner. This is, of course, reflective of Marxism, but with the exclusion of the notion that the working class are the only ones involved. After all, Thoreau seems to draw additional class lines between government officials and everyone else. However, Thoreau also never argues that capitalist economies will lead to the sorts of problems he identifies. Instead, Thoreau argues that the population should rise up against the government if and when it recognizes severe injustice or immoral behavior. Thoreau, then, has a much broader scope than Marx.

The ways in which Marx and Thoreau classify people are, thus, not quite the same. Marx is narrowly focused on socioeconomic classification, while Thoreau is willing to go beyond this sort of classification, as are most others. Marx likely would be willing as well, but for the purposes of criticizing capitalism and identifying the causes of class conflict, chooses to focus on socioeconomic classes. Certain classes, of course, have distinct advantages over others. Marx frequently emphasizes this, especially with regard to the luck of the owners of the means of production. In a

capitalist society, Marx argues, wealth will accumulate, which means that the owners of the means of production will be able to grow their wealth at a highly accelerated pace compared to all others. The owners of the means of production may be able to benefit from the labor of others if the workers are willing. Such owners grow their wealth much more quickly than the rest of society because of the exploitation of these workers. But such owners can only accomplish this if the workers do not form a union and demand higher wages, or even fair wages, under Marx's labor theory of value. Thoreau does not hold that this theory should be implemented, but is certainly against the traditional capitalist model in which the wealthy determine the prices.

An issue identified by Marx is that the laborers have high bargaining power, but fail to realize it. This parallels the argument put forth by Thoreau on the unwillingness of the American people to stand up in civil disobedience against the government. For Marx, the workers should unite by forming a union. This will advance the collective bargaining power of the workers. However, if only a single worker refused to work, then another will simply take the laborer's place. This would be ineffective, but still indicate a willingness of the worker to stand up for his rights. For Thoreau, the citizen should not be forced to pay taxes (a form of exploitation perhaps) in cases in which the government is not representing the interests of the citizen or is committing immoral actions. The citizen has the right, according to Thoreau to resist these sorts of uses of taxpayer funds. However, they can only be effective if they work together, much like in a union. The parallels, here, between Marxism and Thoreau's thoughts are clear.

As mentioned above, Rousseau's influence on both Marx and Thoreau serve to establish certain connections between the three intellectuals. Rousseau shares a number of thoughts with Thoreau, but there are two particular lines of thought that are worth exploring here. The first is Rousseau's introspective naturalism. That is, Rousseau sought to discover natural sources of goodness and means of happiness in humans. Rousseau's characterization of the savage in his social contract theory is not a negative characterization. In fact, the use of the term *savage*, by Rousseau here, refers to the lack of socialization and of any societal influence on a person. The savage, for Rousseau, is pleasant, uncorrupted by society. Even if humans becoming socialized and forming societies is natural because of a lack of abundant resources and the need for cooperation in such conditions, the socialization of humans is viewed negatively by Rousseau. It is clear that Rousseau values the natural and that which occurs outside of the influence of society. Through introspection and meditation, of sorts, did Rousseau begin to discover the natural qualities of humans and some of the sources of natural happiness.

Thoreau, too, seeks a natural, society-free experience, especially in *Walden*. Rousseau had a major impact on transcendentalism in general, but was particularly influential to Thoreau. Most transcendentalists seek some sort of separation from society and natural experience, but it is Thoreau's *Walden* that embodies this pursuit. Like Rousseau, Thoreau mediated on natural individualism, as being apart from the influence of society. Thoreau becomes Rousseau's savage, insofar as someone with a Harvard education can escape the influence of society. The meditative and natural experiences of the two intellectuals are quite similar. Both discover much about themselves and derive value from isolation, the absence of

society, and being in touch with nature. In fact, some of the lessons that Rousseau intends to teach his son in *Emile, or on Education*, are reflective in some form in *Walden*. The parallels seem to indicate that Rousseau was very important in the development of transcendentalism, or at least in how Thoreau adopted and practiced transcendentalism.

Rousseau also had a political impact on Thoreau. Thoreau tended to be a bit more political than the typical transcendentalist. Thus, Rousseau's political influence on Thoreau is somewhat constrained to Thoreau and less representative of the greater transcendentalist movement. Rousseau's political influence on Thoreau is primarily on the role of the citizen (or resident) in government affairs. For Rousseau, government and society, in general, served as corrupting bodies. The government enforced the will of the few on the many. For a government not to be corrupt and to be representative of the people, the government must generate a code of laws based on the general will of the people. The general will, here, is a very specific term, one that Rousseau defined in a very abstract way. This government does not need to be a democracy to represent the general will of citizens. Nonetheless, it is clear that Rousseau intends on just government being those that represent all people and promote the well-being of everyone, even those in unfortunate circumstances. Thoreau, too, challenges the authority of the government when the government does not represent the will of the people. Again, Rousseau's general will is a specific term, one that Thoreau does not adopt. Even so, Thoreau picks up on Rousseau's argument and, in a limited way, applies it to his own situations in Massachusetts.

One of the points that Marx and Thoreau seem to agree is one that is heavily rooted in Rousseau's works. Rousseau argues that society is an oppressive force on

people, alienating them from one another and from nature, and helping to ensure that people lose sight of those natural goods that brought them happiness. Diggins (1972) argues that Thoreau was influenced by Marx's alienation. This influence is particularly interesting for two reasons. First, alienation is generally viewed pejoratively, but is quite similar to isolation. Thus, alienation may be viewed, in some regards, as having positive qualities for Thoreau, depending on exactly how Thoreau defines Marx's alienation argument. Second, Marx's alienation suggests a sort of man-made separation between men (i.e., workers) and nature. This leads Thoreau to a very critical view of society, especially those capitalist economies. Marx describes alienation in the following way:

The objects that are created by labor, its products that is, now stand opposed to the labor as an *alien being*, as a type of *power that is independent* of the producer. This product of labor is the labor itself which has been embodied in this object and transformed into a physical thing; the product is what Marx calls an *objectification* of labor. So much de the performances of labor appear as the devaluation (and dehumanization or vitiating) that the laborer himself is devalued (or reduced in some significant way) to the point of starvation even. So much does objectification occur as the loss of the very object that the worker is now deprived of the most essential components of life and also of work. Work itself becomes the object that can be acquired only with the maximum effort and with unpredictable interruptions. The more objects that the laborer produces, the fewer the worker is allowed to possess and the more that the worker falls under the domination of his product, of capital. (Marx 16)

Marx, here, describes an alienation between the laborer and his final product, or the lack of appreciation that the laborer has for his work. This is not quite the alienation that Thoreau might appreciate, in the capacity that it leaves an individual free to be in isolation and introspective. The sort of alienation described by Marx here is one that is likely universally recognized as undesirable. Nobody wants to be deprived of enjoying, in some significant way, the product of one's labor. Of course, adequate pay would help restore any value lost from building goods for others. Even so, it seems that Marx is arguing that this separation is a major cause of problems for the worker. Starvation is a separate problem, of course, but losing the value in what one has created is quite significant. In fact this value is the exact sort of value that Thoreau praises in *Walden*, when discussing building something for oneself and being able to survive on the land, so to speak Thoreau, then, can at least appreciate the argument that Marx is making here, even if Thoreau never directly attributes this theory of labor value to Marx. Thoreau would also likely also recognize how working in a factory for low wages could be alienating, in the same way Marx describes. This is certainly a point that would be consistent and complementary to transcendentalist thought, especially that of Thoreau which is heavily focused, at times, on political matters.

But there is another component to the nexus between Thoreau and Marx at the point of alienation. In the passage below, Marx sounds like a transcendentalist. That is, Marx appears to be appealing to a sort of idealistic, experiential account of value:

All of the consequences of one's work follow from the fact that the laborer maintains a relationship to the *product of his labor* as that of

an *alien* object. For, it is very clear on this assumption that the more that the laborer expends himself in his work, the more powerful the world of objects becomes for the laborer, which he creates in front of himself, the poorer he becomes in his inner life, and the less that he actually belongs to himself. The laborer puts his life into the objects that he makes, and his life no longer belongs to himself but to the object of his creation. The greater his activity in producing the product, therefore, the less he possesses. What is embodied in this product of labor is no longer that of the laborer but of the owner of the product. The greater amount the product is, the more the laborer is diminished. This *alienation* of the laborer in his product means not only that such labor becomes the object that was creates, assuming an *external* existence, but also that it exists independently, *outside of himself*, and now alien to laborer, and that the object stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. This life which was given to the object by the laborer sets itself against him as some alien and hostile force. (Marx 17)

This account of Marx is quite introspective. The value derived from Marx is an internal value, not based on any material good. In fact, Marx seems to derive value from some sort of ideal or idea, rather than from the material good itself. When he speaks of bringing the object to life through labor, this is a very idealistic position, one that is not easily grounded in Marx's historical materialism and one that is more suited to transcendentalism. Marx's argument could fit, in some way, in a political essay by Thoreau or even, in another way, in one of Thoreau's nature pieces. In either case, the inner-focus of this argument is deeply reflective of Romanticism and transcendentalism. This sort of argument is somewhat unique in Marxist literature.

That is, his discussion of alienation and labor theory of value has certain elements and assumptions that may not mesh well with some of his materialistic points. Nonetheless, the argument certainly fits within the transcendentalist movement. *Das Kapital* was finished in 1883 by Engels, working from Marx's notes. This was long after all of Thoreau's writings. Of course, *The Communist Manifesto* was published one year before *Civil Disobedience*. Marxist influences on Thoreau would have come in his later writings, particularly his political writings. But Thoreau and other transcendentalists could have been influential in Marx's later political writings as well. More likely, however, Hegel and the other components of German idealism were influential for both Thoreau and Marx.

The next section begins a deeper exploration into the writings of Thoreau. Up to this point, none of the specific writings of Thoreau have been explored. The first two chapters have laid a context on which an analysis of Thoreau's works can be conducted. It is clear that there are already the grounds laid for the revelation of several nexuses between transcendentalism and Marxism, including Hegel's works. However, without a thorough textual analysis of Thoreau's works, it will be impossible to determine the exact influences on these works and how these many different forces mesh together to create many of Thoreau's most impactful and meaningful lines.

Chapter Three: A Voice in the Wilderness

This chapter features an exploration of Thoreau's transcendentalist views, with a particular focus on his nature and political writings. It should be noted, at this point, that Thoreau's writings are not doctrinal. That is, they do not form a neat, cohesive system. Thoreau's writings, by the very mode of writing chose by Thoreau, are more aphoristic than systematic. Nonetheless, as will be shown shortly, there are certain lines of thought put forth by Thoreau that reflect a transcendentalist perspective, at times, and a Marxist perspective at times as well. This chapter begins the deep exploration of the works of Thoreau.

Thoreau's Religious and Metaphysical Experiences in Nature

There are several different versions or types of transcendentalism. With any movements, be it philosophical, literary or political, in which there are many intellectuals working on the movement, there will be variation in perception and approach. This, of course, is particularly applicable in cases in which the movement develops out of another movement (i.e., Romanticism) and in response to a specific religious denomination (i.e., Calvinism). These different versions of transcendentalism can be grouped into two specific categories. The first is religious and the second is metaphysical. Many transcendentalist thinkers at the time focused on religious aspects, while others abandoned religious precepts in favor of metaphysical investigation. Specifically, many of those that took part in this movement sought separation from traditional Christian doctrines, including Calvinism), in favor of a refined religious experience. In contrast, others distanced themselves from religion altogether, in favor of a centralized focus on metaphysical experiences. In fact, sometimes it is difficult to discern the metaphysical from the

religious, as both are personal, but rarely involve direct connections with deities, such as the Christian God.

If he must be categorized, Thoreau would likely fall in the religious group or possibly some hybrid category. Thoreau does focus on religion some, but is much more critical of it than he advances it in any meaningful way. Thoreau reflects deeply on metaphysical issues throughout *Walden* especially. Often, the writer focuses on his introspection and how he separates his internal states from his experiences of the external world. But he often does so pedagogically, emphasizing lessons to be learned from his own experiences. In fact, this will emerge as a theme throughout his writings. Thoreau begins a line of thought by explaining his experiences. He then turns to a lesson to be learned, often phrased as an aphorism, connected to the passage before but removed from the passage after. Thoreau writes of his own deeply introspective experiences before writing that, “We must learn to awaken and to keep ourselves awaken, not through mechanical aids, but through an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not desert us in our sound sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of men to elevate life through conscious endeavor (Thoreau *Walden* 67).” Here, Thoreau takes a strongly metaphysical position, reflecting on how his consciousness serves as the means for understanding our world. This is fundamentally transcendentalist.

Thoreau’s metaphysical reflections are also intended to demonstrate our own dependencies on the external world and that such dependencies are much less meaningful than our phenomenological experiences. Thoreau is an idealist, like Hegel, but unlike Marxist. But Thoreau is also anti-materialistic, not in a metaphysical sense, but regarding the overdependence of people on material goods.

Again, this is not an epistemological position. Thoreau wants to demonstrate, through his own experiences and introspection that people are relying too heavily on material goods for happiness. One can only imagine how this position would have bloomed in contemporary society. In *Walden*, Thoreau reflects on how he has discovered a number of sources of happiness in nature. By nature, Thoreau is, of course, referring to a lack of society and societal influence, or the natural and vegetative state of the world, as has been retained near Walden Pond. The natural derivations of happiness are also important for Thoreau in eliminating dependencies on material goods. Yet, Thoreau does not reject certain functional material goods. After all, he lived in a cabin, one that was made by humans not nature. The distinction to be made, here, however, is one between functional and non-functional human artifacts. Functional artifacts are those that benefit humans experientially and in the preservation of their lives and health. Even so, there are certain cases in which functional artifacts and goods become non-functional or less functional. Consider, for example, a case in which someone built a cabin to live in. This is clearly functional. But if the individual then builds ten more cabins that are not being used and are not sold, these cabins (even if they were built exactly like the original one) may not be functional and, thus, considered materialistic. It is difficult to tell how Thoreau would value the extra ten cabins. On one hand, they were built by hand, a noble form of work. On the other hand, they have no function. This is one of the problems with transcendentalism, one that Ralph Waldo Emerson may be in a better position to resolve than Thoreau. In any case, this case highlights the sort of personalization and subjectivism found in Thoreau's works.

Even in the expression of art, Thoreau is focused on the role of human experience. Art is, at times, intended to be an expression of human experience. But, Thoreau argues, even when this is not intentional, humans still imbue their own experience in art. This, then, is an important value in art, according to Thoreau. Likewise, when Thoreau writes of human artifacts, he often concentrates on the ways that such artifacts are an expression of human experience. Even in his discussion of art, Thoreau pays attention to the functionality of art and the places in which art is produced and recorded on. Thoreau continues, “It is something to paint a particular picture, or carve a particular statue, and thus to make a few objects beautiful; but it is much more glorious to carve and to paint the same atmosphere and medium through which we look, which ethically we can do. In order to affect the quality of this day; that is the highest of all the arts (Thoreau *Walden* 68).” Thoreau’s discussions of beauty are most reflective of the value that he assigned or recognizes in human expression. After all, it can be difficult to identify the specific reasons that art is considered beautiful or even why beauty is valued. The problem of beauty was raised long before the transcendentalist and Romantic movements, even being raised by Aristotle.

Art and beauty are, thus, intimately related for Thoreau. The nexus between the two is human experience, which in itself cannot explain why some art is considered more beautiful than others. But Thoreau can shed some light on the variance in the beauty that people see in particular artworks. In other words, some people view particular artworks as being beautiful, while others do not. Thoreau would argue that such variance is caused at least in part by the variance in subjective experiences in humans. People have different experiences; therefore, people have

different ideas about what makes art beautiful. This is demonstrative of the important role that experience plays in the formation and the appreciation of art, especially beauty in art. This also explains cultural variation in art. People of any particular culture have some shared experiences or have shared qualities or features in their experiences. Therefore, the art produced by particular cultures tend to be quite similar. Likewise, individuals within specific cultures have similar ideas about what makes art beautiful or similar tastes in art.

One of the interesting problems faced by Thoreau and other transcendentalists is the value of culture. Thoreau values functionality and some sort of conception of natural. Doing functional and natural things, Thoreau would argue, tend to be meaningful and pleasurable for people. These qualities vary across cultures, but the particularities of individual groups of people can be said to largely account for or even define individual cultures. It may appear that Thoreau rejects at least some forms of culture, as the sort of superfluous aspects of groups. However, it is clear that many cultural artifacts and cultural aspects (e.g., food types) are not only based on the natural environments of these people, but also the individual human experiences of these people. Thoreau writes, "Every man has been tasked to make his own life, even in the details, worthy of the contemplation of the most elevated and critical hours. If they refused, or in other words used up, such trifling information as we get, the oracles would definitely inform us how this might be done (Thoreau *Walden* 68)." Thoreau strikes a delicate balance between cultural influence or patterns in individual behavior within certain groups and the sort of individual responsibility and liberties that are fundamental to transcendentalism. It is difficult to determine, at times, whether Thoreau holds that individuals should

embrace their cultures and social norms or set out on their own path. These are not exclusive and Thoreau certainly holds that latter to some degree, but the specific role that culture plays in the formation of individual personalities is uncertain here.

Thoreau's very reasons for living in solitude in the woods reflect his own personal preferences for isolation and a sort of experimental approach to living. He writes, "I went into the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only those essential facts of life, and to see if I could learn what it had to teach, and not, when it came to dying, discover that I had not lived" (Thoreau *Walden* 68). Many people seem to only recognize the experimental nature of Thoreau's decision to live in isolation in the woods, effectively ignoring his preference of isolation. That is, many hold that Thoreau was simply trying to understand something about himself and about his relationship with nature. But that is only part of the story. In fact, a major theme in *Walden* concerns Thoreau's enjoyment in isolation. Other may also enjoy this and Thoreau recognizes that there is something inherently valuable for him and likely others in connecting intimately with nature in isolation and outside of the direct influences of society. Yet, Thoreau also leaves room for individual preferences with regard to isolation. He often discusses the fact that he always enjoyed solitude. Others may have different preferences for the levels of social interact that they have. Thoreau is unlikely to impress upon or try to convince his readers to live a lifestyle of solitude. Rather, he demonstrates his own experiences with solitude and encourages others to pursue those things that may connect them with nature, even if it involves less solitude than what Thoreau experienced at Walden Pond.

Thus, for Thoreau, especially in *Walden*, solitude is a major theme. The term solitude varies in tone and connotation from terms such as isolation and desolation. If not having some positive connotation, solitude may be used with neutrality. For Thoreau, solitude and religious experience are intimately connected. Thoreau states:

I have a great deal of company in my home; especially during the morning hours, when nobody calls. Let me suggest several comparisons, that someone may convey some idea of my current situation. I am not more lonely than the loon who lives in the pond and laughs so loud, or than Walden Pond itself. What company has the lonely lake, I pray? And, yet, it is not the blue devils, but the blue angels in the lack and in the azure tint of its waters. The sun is alone, except during thick weather, when there some times appear to be two, but one is the mock sun. God is alone,—but the devil, he is far from being alone; he sees a great deal of company; he is a legion. I am not more lonely than the mullin or dandelion in a pasture, or the bean leaf, or sorrel, or horsefly, or a bumblebee. I am not more lonely than the Mill Brook, or the weathercock, or even the North Star, or the south wind, or an April shower, or a January thaw, or the first spider in a new home. (Thoreau *Walden* 102-103)

Thoreau's preference for solitude is in part metaphysical and religious. It is during solitude that Thoreau is more reflective and introspective. When Thoreau refers to the isolation of the Sun and of God, he may be making one or more of a few points. For one, Thoreau seems to be indicating some sort of virtue or goodness in being alone. However, Thoreau may also be interpreted to mean that individuality is what is important. When individuals act in accordance with their own perceived

preferences and desires, especially those moral preferences and desires, they do not fall into many of the traps of vice. In addition, Thoreau is naming all of these things in nature (e.g., bumblebee, horsefly, and dandelion) in many ways in order to demonstrate that he is not truly alone, even in isolation from other humans. Nature is his company. In this way, Thoreau is explicating his own experiences involving connecting with nature and its living organizations.

Thoreau holds a high opinion of solitude. Thoreau holds, "I find it quite healthy to be in a state of solitude most of the time. To be in any company, even with the best of men, soon becomes wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found my companion to so companionable as solitude" (Thoreau *Walden* 102). But this is the nature of Thoreau. Others will not share in his penchant for isolation. What he finds as solitude, others may find as loneliness. There is, undoubtedly, an importance to solitude or isolation. After all, introspection is enhanced by such a state. Nonetheless, there will still be variation in the preferences for solitude (and those for company) among transcendentalists. Thoreau goes on, "We are, for the most part, lonelier when we go abroad with men than when we stay in our chambers. A man thinking or working is then always in isolation, let him be where he will. Solitude is not measured by the miles of space that intervene between a man and his fellows" (Thoreau *Walden* 102). Thoreau, here, offers a unique definition of solitude, one not dictated by a state of being alone, but by being introspective or focused depending on the task at hand. Given this definition of solitude, there is much more applicability. After all, entering into either a focused or introspective state quite often is much more accomplishable than the sorts of isolation and loneliness that one may assume are associated with solitude.

One of the connections between the religious and spiritual side of transcendentalism and Thoreau's conception of solitude is the idea that people are often distracted by social events and being around others. In fact, Thoreau, while finding *limited* value in social events, seems to view other people as distractions in general. That is, Thoreau seems to argue that one can accomplish more and have more value (including religious value) in life if one can ignore the distractions of social engagements. Part of this is simply having more time to focus on production, introspection, and the development of religious experiences, but another part is remaining virtuous and moral. Thoreau writes, "The really diligent students in one of the crowds and hives of Cambridge College are as solitary as the dervis in the desert" (Thoreau *Walden* 102), suggesting that isolation from others is important for one's own development. Thoreau goes on to state:

The farmer can work alone in the field or in the forests all day, hoeing or chopping, and not feel lonely, because he remains employed; but when he comes home during the night he cannot sit down in his room in isolation, at the mercy of thoughts, but must be where he can see the folks, and then recreate, and as he thinks remunerates, himself for his day of solitude; and thus he wonders how the student can sit alone at home all night and most of the day without ennui or getting the blues; but he does not realize that this student, though in the house, is still working in his own field, and chopping in the woods, as the farmer in his, and in turn seeks the same recreation and society of latter, though it may be the more condensed form of it. (Thoreau *Walden* 102)

For Thoreau, loneliness stems from solitude when one is idle. But when one is active, especially in a purposeful working capacity, loneliness does not result from solitude. In this way, Thoreau fundamentally connects loneliness and solitude through idleness. The key advice, given above, is that solitude is often required for purposeful and effective work, but that remaining idle during a period of solitude leads to loneliness. As Thoreau explains, “We need the tonic of wilderness—to wade from time to time in marshes where the heron and meadow hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering grasses where only some wild and more solitary fowl builds its nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground” (Thoreau *Walden* 234). Here, Thoreau connects nature and solitude. Nature, in many ways, is solitude and can be particularly enjoyed when one is working productively.

Given these comments on nature and solitude, a sort of triangle is formed by Thoreau between nature, solitude, and religious experience. Nature is an environment that promotes solitude. There are other positive qualities of nature. Moreover, nature is an environment that is conducive to having the sort of transcendentalist religious experiences. Solitude, of course, is another contributing environmental factor for the transcendentalist religious experience. Productive labor can also be inserted into these relationships, however, not at the point of religious experience. Solitude provides an environment that promotes productive work, while productive work may be particularly fulfilling and more satisfying. Concerning nature, Thoreau writes, “At the same time that we are earnest enough to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplored, that land and sea be infinitely wild, not surveyed and unfathomable by men because of their

unfathomable nature. We can never have enough of Nature, but must be refreshed by any sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and Titanic features, the seacoast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets” (Thoreau *Walden* 234). Thoreau’s appreciation for nature is demonstrated here. The thinker is very specific in his descriptions of nature, suggesting a familiarity and near-expertise on nature, or at least on the local wilderness near Concord. For the purposes of this project, the question now becomes *to what degree is Thoreau’s arguments on the value of nature reflective of the transcendentalist movement?* Certainly, Thoreau is making the case to the reader that having these intimate experiences with nature produce positive experiences and can actually be useful for having the deep religious and metaphysical experiences that are essential to transcendentalism, but not all transcendentalists were that tuned to nature or had such a depth of knowledge.

One of the most common arguments made by Thoreau is that there are many animals that are more free and more liberated than humans. Thoreau and other transcendentalists certainly recognize the uniqueness of humans, but, during Thoreau’s time, he viewed a number of people who were completely bound to their material goods, professions, family, or social lives. Thoreau states, “There was a deceased horse in the hollows by a path leading to my house, which compelled me to sometimes go out of the way, especially in the night when the air was heavy, but the assurance it gave me of the strong appetite and inviolable health of Nature was my compensation for this” (Thoreau *Walden* 234). Thoreau’s attraction to nature is quite similar to other transcendentalists, even if his appreciation and attraction is quite high, even in relation to others in the movement. He goes on, “I love to see that

Nature is so rife with life that many 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, tad-poles which herons gobble up, and tortoises and toads run over in the road; and that sometimes it has rained the flesh and blood!" (Thoreau *Walden* 234). Here, Thoreau makes sense, in effect, of the problem of evil from a transcendentalist perspective. After all, one may argue that under a philosophical movement in which all life is considered in some way sacred would have difficulties explaining the constant death found in nature. But Thoreau's argument, above, addresses this issue quickly by noting that there is a sufficient quantity of life such that some may be sacrificed. Otherwise, this quantity could not be maintained. Moreover, there is an assumption that human life is more valuable than others. After all, as the Romantic thinkers argued, there is something unique about the human life and, for the transcendentalists, the human experience. Thoreau goes on, "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. Poison is not poisonous after all, nor are any wounds fatal. Compassion is a very untenable ground. It must be expeditious. Its pleadings will not bear to be stereotyped" (Thoreau *Walden* 234). Thoreau, then, rejects the notion that there is room for compassion in nature. There are predators and there are prey, he would argue. The role of humans in such affairs is certainly an important one.

Transcendentalism is in part a response to certain religious doctrine that was considered counterintuitive or in some other way unacceptable to many of the intellectuals in New England. This response was aimed specifically at Calvinist doctrine, including the doctrine of the trinity. For transcendentalists, there is no

Christian trinity. For those who believed in Christianity or some form of it, there was a Christian God and no supernatural son or holy spirit. This is reflected, above, when Thoreau mentions God being alone. It may also be no coincidence that Thoreau refers to the sun being alone in the preceding sentence as well. Here, then, Thoreau has taken a hard stance on the Christian trinity and on the reduction of the sort of supernatural forces behind Christian doctrine. Much like Marx with Hegelianism, Thoreau removes the dogmatic aspects of religion in favor of a more metaphysical and experimental account.

Thoreau also demonstrates a sort of religious relativism, stating “ministers who spoke of God as if they enjoyed a monopoly of the subject, who could not bear all kinds of opinions” (Thoreau *Walden* 114). On one hand, this is a rebuke of Christian ministers who preach specific doctrine that is not left up for interpretation. On the other hand, Thoreau here is making a case for individuals to have various beliefs, based not on doctrine, but lessons from past experiences and subjective religious experiences. Thoreau goes on, “Look at the meeting-house, or courthouse, or a jailhouse, or a shop, or a dwelling, and say what it really is before a true gaze, and they would all go into pieces in your account of them. Men esteem truth to be remote, in the outskirts of this system, behind the furthest star, before Adam and after the very last man” (Thoreau *Walden* 73). This is very much aligned with Berkeley’s phenomenology, in which everyone interprets and experiences reality differently, including how individual objects are conceptualized and experiences through the sense. In the same ways that Berkeley holds that experience is relative to the sensory information received by individuals, Thoreau lays the groundwork for a sort of religious relativism in which individuals are free to form their own

interpretations of religion and faith based on their own individual experiences. Such a relativism does not mean that transcendentalism has no religious or metaphysical meaning other than to be skeptical of doctrine and accepting of individual experiences. Both the metaphysical and religious transcendentalists hold that intuition plays a major role in shaping one's own pursuits for metaphysical and religious meanings and truths.

Through such intuition, Thoreau argues, we can develop some sort of metaphysical relationship with God, in a tradition of transcendentalism and Unitarianism. Thoreau writes, "In eternity there is in fact something true and sublime. But all the times and places and occasions are here and now. God, himself, culminates in the current moment, and will never be even more divine in the lapse of all ages. And we are able to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instillation and drenching of this reality that surrounds us" (Thoreau *Walden* 73). This parallels Platonic idealism, perhaps even more than Kantian or Hegelian idealism. After all, Thoreau is talking about some universal and sublime truth in eternity which is realizable through a sort of metaphysical transcendence. Hegel stuck with much of the Christian doctrine, but Plato viewed a purer and less detailed image of perfection and the ideal. Of course, Plato could not describe these ideals in much detail, given that he held that people could not realize the perfect forms or ideas. Such perfection is divinity for Thoreau, who holds that "The universe constantly and obediently answers our conceptions; whether we travel quickly or slowly, the track is laid out to us. Let us spend our lives in conceiving them. The poet or artist never yet had as fair and noble design but some of his posterity at least could accomplish this" (Thoreau *Walden* 73). Again, this reflects a

quite Platonic idealism, but still one that is compatible with the basic tenets of transcendentalism. The recognition of the universe as an active participant in the metaphysical and religious experiences of individuals suggests that Thoreau views the religious and metaphysical ideals or universal concepts as realizable or at least in some ways revealed.

Reflecting the class conflict established by Marx and Engels, Thoreau also discusses the transcendental and metaphysical conceptions, "I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have had inherited farms, barns, cattle, homes and farming tools; for these are more easily-acquired than gotten rid of. It is better if they had been borne in an open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they may have seen with more clear eyes what field they were called in to labor" (Thoreau *Walden* 7). Later, Thoreau discusses the inherent evils of slavery. But, here, Thoreau is concentrated on the burdens facing people whose lives are at least somewhat decided for them. Emphasized above by Thoreau is the importance of freedom and liberty. After all, one would generally think that those who inherit property are considered fortunately, not unfortunate. Yet, from Thoreau's perspective and that of transcendentalism in general, such inheritance serves as a yoke for the beneficiaries. This yoke is not easily undone and bounds the beneficiaries to the fulfillment of certain duties and responsibilities, thus filling in the details of the lives of the beneficiaries for them. This reduction in liberty and choice runs contrary to the individuality and autonomy so heavily valued by transcendentalists and Romantics.

Thoreau goes on to expand on these ideas, he says "Who made the serfs of this soil? Why should they eat sixty acres, when men are condemned to eat only his pecks of dirt? Why should they begin digging graves as soon as they are borne?"

They must live the life of a man, pushing all of these things well before them, and get on as well as possible” (Thoreau *Walden* 7). Again, this reflects Thoreau’s dislike of inheritance of both property and burdens, given that such inheritance minimizes one’s liberty and autonomy. Thoreau goes on, “How many poor immortal souls have I met that nigh crushed and smothered under this load, creeping down this road of life, pushing before it the barn seventy five feet by forty, the Augean stables are never cleaned, and one-hundred acres of land, tillage, mowing, pasture, and wood-lot!” (Thoreau *Walden* 8). Augean stables refer to the herculean task of trying to completing a task that may not be completed with any practicality because of the prodigiousness or circularity of the task. This suggests that the beneficiaries of inheritance, especially those whose lives are pretty much decided for them, are not able to derive value from life. Their experiences are decided for them and their lack of freedom prevents the sort of professional and metaphysical growth that transcendentalists seek. Thoreau also discusses the finite nature of humans, especially in a materialistic sense, he states, “The portion-less, who struggle with no unnecessary inherited encumbrance, find it laborious enough to subdue and cultivate several cubic feet of flesh. But men labor under conditions of mistake. The better part of men is soon ploughed into the soil used for compost” (Thoreau *Walden* 8). This finite nature means, for Thoreau, that individuals should take control of their lives, especially through a targeted pursuit of meaning and having the sorts of experiences that contribute to the development of meaning and purpose in life.

One of the interesting aspects of Thoreau’s discussion of religious doctrine and the Bible is that Thoreau seems to adopt and, then, teach some of the messages of the Bible. That is, Thoreau is not in favor of any sort of dogmatic, systematic, or

even church oriented religion, but is in favor of reading and developing an understanding of religious texts such as the Bible. Thoreau writes, “By a seeming fate, commonly called necessity, [men] are employed, as it says in the [Bible], laying up treasures which moths and rust corrupt and thieves break through and steal. It is the life of a fool, as they will find out when they get to the end of life, if not before it” (Thoreau *Walden* 8). Here, Thoreau is applying Biblical wisdom in his own form of lesson against acting immoral. It should be noted, however, that Thoreau seems to be taking each bit of information from the Bible and considered it on its own grounds. In other words, Thoreau is neither relying on Christian doctrine nor any cohesive system of Biblical text. Rather, Thoreau does find value in at least some of the individual bits of advice within the Bible. The application of these bits likely come in many different forms, but is particularly useful when considered in isolation and in relation to one’s experiences. In many ways, Thoreau’s moral lesson, here, is intended to be sufficiently flexible for it to be applied across virtually all experiences. This sort of general advice does not include specific instructions, but widely applicable advice. This bit of advice and others like it seem to reflect at least one of the universal concepts (a moral concept) discussed by Hegel. After all, such universal concepts were muddied, in that they were not specific and may be difficult to understand. Platonic idealism is similarly applicable, but would need to rely on the fact that humans cannot access the perfect forms and must, then, only access the imperfect forms.

Based on Thoreau’s discussion of purity, it seems that his particular philosophy is quite influenced by the Indian Vedas whose religion served as the religious precursor to Hinduism (Goldberg 45). Thoreau writes, “Who knows what

type of life would result if men had attained purity? If I knew so wise a man as could teach purity, then I would go to seek him immediately. The command over our passions, and over those external senses of our bodies, and good acts, are declared by the Indian Vedic to be indispensable to the mind's approximation of God" (Thoreau *Walden* 163). There are two aspects of the Indian Vedic culture and religion that have been particularly adopted by transcendentalists, including Emerson and Thoreau. The first is the egalitarian nature of the culture. Indian culture had a long history of castes. Yet, the Vedic culture was vehemently opposed to castes, given their resulting inequality. This egalitarian aspect includes the notion that everyone should be treated equally, even laying the foundation for the idea that all life is sacred and should not be harmed intentionally. While the transcendentalists did not fully adopt this egalitarian aspect, the nature of the social positions under the Vedic culture promotes the abolition of slavery and a reduction in the socioeconomic inequalities across the society. While Ralph Waldo Emerson focused quite heavily on the religious aspects of the Vedic culture, Thoreau applied the political aspects of the Vedic culture much more liberally, especially the egalitarian aspect. Thoreau established the foundations of many of his egalitarian approaches and conclusions regarding slavery and the economy from the Vedic culture. Specifically, Thoreau agreed with the Vedic culture that there was a certain equality in people and even that other forms of life have substantial value beyond their direct value to people.

The second aspect of Indian Vedic culture that was applied broadly during the transcendentalism movement was *satya*, which refers to the integration of the world into an absolute pure state. What makes this particularly applicable to the

transcendentalism movement is the notion that the soul or spirit transmigrates, becoming part of the larger world. Everything with a soul or spirit, then, participates. This, again, supports the egalitarianism of the transcendentalist movement. More importantly, however, there are certain parallels to the transmigration and integration components of Vedic culture and the transcendentalism in Thoreau's writings. Thoreau describes this process of the Vedic culture: "Yet the spirit can for now pervade and control all members and functions of our bodies, and transmute what in form is considered a gross sensuality into purity and devotion. The generative energy, which, when we are slack, dissipates and makes us uncleanly, when we are continent invigorates and inspires [people]" (Thoreau *Walden* 164). Clearly, there is an assumption in Thoreau's writings that reflects the integration into a purer form of experiences and religious devotion. The Vedic culture was, perhaps, more personal in their religious expressions than transcendentalists. Even so, Thoreau's religious experiences and introspection involve the establishment of deep religious connections, with God in particular. But this is not as much a personal connection as a religious, individual, and internal connection with the wider world, nature, and one's self, especially one's soul.

Like the India Vedas, life is cyclical, both materialistically and spiritually. Materially, human life goes in cycles, with the bodies of babies being formed from the nutrients provided in some indirect way by the bodies of the deceased. Thoreau writes, "We need to witness our own limits transgressing, and some lives pasturing freely where we never wander. We are cheered as we observe the vulture feeding on the carrion which disgusts and disheartens men and deriving health and strength

from the repast” (Thoreau *Walden* 234). Spiritually, the cyclical nature of life suggests some transmutation, as the Vedas held. Transcendentalists including Thoreau held that this sort of spiritual cycle can be at least partially uncovered through introspection, meditation, and the sort. It should also be noted that the transmutation and transcendentalist transference or absorption of spirits are quite distinct from the Hindu notion of reincarnation.

Concerning this state of introspection and transmutation, Thoreau finds more than mere religious experiences, but many of the emotional states and feelings that have been categorized by individuals. Thoreau writes, “Chastity is the flowering of man; and what are called Genius, Heroism, Holiness, and the like, are but numerous fruits which succeed it. Men flow at once to God when the channels of purity are opened. By turns, our purity inspires us and our impurities cast us down” (Thoreau *Walden* 164). Here, Thoreau describes the results from the religious, spiritual, and metaphysical interactions between individuals and the world (e.g., spiritual). For Thoreau, then, qualities and characteristics such as genius and heroism stem from such interactions. From this perspective, then, God provides the sort of life-giving and enhancing qualities. Nonetheless, this spiritual quality given to people does not dictate their actions, but only provides them with the grounds for action. Many of the details of this account are a bit difficult to determine. That is, Thoreau does not go into any deep explanation concerning these processes. Moreover, any details given by Thoreau do not suggest that he or other transcendentalists follow the Vedic religious strictly, but only on some of the basic foundations of the Vedic religion.

There are a few mystical or supernatural elements also found in Thoreau’s works on his own religious beliefs and experiences. Thoreau writes, “He is blessed

who is assured that when the animal is dying out in him day to day, and the divine being established. Perhaps there is none but have cause for shame on the account of inferior and brutish natures to which he is aligned. I, then, fear that we are considered such Gods or Demigods only in the form of fauns and satyrs, the divine allied to the beasts, the creatures of appetite, and that, to an extent, our very lives are disgraceful”(Thoreau *Walden* 164). Thoreau refers to a sort of immoral set of emotions and impulses. This would seem to indicate that Thoreau has a quite grim and pessimistic perspective on human nature. Yet, Thoreau holds a perspective on human nature that is similar to that of Rousseau. Specifically, Thoreau, like many other transcendentalists, argues that society has been a corrupting influence on humans; Thus, what Thoreau is referring to above is not human nature *proper*, but the results of a corrupting societal influence on the emotions, feelings, and impulses of individuals. The natural human, it may be argued by transcendentalists, is not at all pessimistic or immoral.

An important aspect of Thoreau’s work is his discussion of his routine. Thoreau states, “Then to my morning work. First, I take an axe and pail and go in search of water, if that be not a dream” (Thoreau *Walden* 210). Thoreau goes on, “After a cold and snowy night, a divining rod was needed to find it. Every winter, the liquid and unsteady surface of this pond, which was so sensitive to even breath, and reflected all lights and shadows, becomes solid to the depth of a foot or a foot and a half, so that it will support the heaviest teams, and perchance the snow covers it to an equal depth, and it is not to be distinguished from any level field” (Thoreau *Walden* 210). The details that he includes suggests that he is very familiar with his work and with nature, holding very closely to his commitment to productive work

and eliciting religious and metaphysical experiences when immersed in nature. He goes on, "Like the marmot in the surrounding hills, [Walden Pond] closes its eyelids and becomes dormant for three months or more" (Thoreau *Walden* 211). Thoreau gives life to the pond through anthropomorphizing the pond. This connects the different parts of nature: the living with the non-living. Thoreau writes, "Standing on the snow-covered plain, as if part of pasture among the hills, I cut my way first through a foot of snow, and then a foot of ice, and open windows under my feet, where, kneeling to drink, I look down into the quiet salon of the fishes, pervaded by a softened light as through a window of ground glass, with its bright sanded floor the same as in summer" (Thoreau *Walden* 211). Having spent two years at Walden Pond, Thoreau experiences all of the seasons and was able to draw details about each season. It is clear that he paid such close attention to nature that he was being highly experimental and phenomenological.

The nexus between nature and religious and metaphysical experiences concerns how nature serves as a source of divine inspiration or at least metaphysical inspiration and awe in transcendentalists. Thoreau formulates an argument for this earlier on in *Walden*, but puts forth his argument in even greater terms implicitly in narrative. Thoreau states, "There a perennial wave less serenity reigns as in the amber twilight sky, corresponding to the cool and even temperament of the inhabitants. Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads" (Thoreau *Walden* 211). The last line above reflects the transcendentalist criticism of religion. After all, Thoreau is arguing that religious experiences can be had through an appreciation of nature in addition to forming any sort of spiritual connection to God. Thoreau goes on, "A single gentle rain makes the grass a number of shades greener. So, these

prospects brighten on the influx of better thoughts” (Thoreau *Walden* 233). This is an example of how Thoreau’s uses his mindset and thought patterns to actually view nature more vividly. Recent research, in fact, indicates that one’s state of mind and the presence of problems, such as mental health disorders, can drastically impact the way that one sees colors, thus affirming with empirical evidence of Thoreau’s observation.

Thoreau continues his astute observations of the grass and of nature in general. He states, “We are quite blessed if we lived in the present always, and took advantage of every accident that befell us, like the grass which confesses the influence of the slightest dew that falls on it; and did not spend our time in atoning for the neglect of past opportunities, which we call doing our duty” (Thoreau *Walden* 233). Here, Thoreau shifts the focus to a metaphor of the grass. Just as the grass grows as the direct result of the water that it receives, individuals should be as transparent, rather than denying their own missed opportunities for growth. This is more of a personal growth metaphor, but remains closely tied to Thoreau’s central focus on nature. He continues, “We loiter in the winter as if it was already spring. On a pleasant spring morning all men’s sins are instantly forgiven. Such a day is considered a truce to one’s vices. While such a sun holds out to burn, the vilest sinner may return” (Thoreau *Walden* 233). Here, Thoreau moves onto making the point that nature can serve to cleanse individuals, not so much of sins, but more of the negative feelings and emotions that one may be experiencing. Thoreau continues, “Through our own recovered innocence, we discern the innocence of our neighbors. You may have known your neighbor yesterday for a thief, a drunkard, or a sensualist, and merely pitied or despised him, and despaired of the world; but the

sun shines bright and warm this first spring morning, recreating the world, and you meet him at some serene work, and see how his exhausted and debauched veins expand with still joy and bless the new day, feeling the springtime influence with the innocence of infancy, and with all one's faults completely forgiven" (Thoreau *Walden* 234). Thoreau continues his use of nature to provide examples on how to live a good life. In this case, Thoreau provides a framework for recognizing and understanding the goodness in others.

This section will conclude with one final examination of a part of Thoreau's *Walden* that is aimed at presenting the ways in which God communicates and interacts with individuals under transcendentalism. One of the major points of Thoreau, here, is that God does not interact directly with people. As one might expect, God communicates through nature, Thoreau argues. Thoreau discusses the means by which individuals can seek out interactions with God. Individuals have a number of means for such interactions, with religious experiences being the primary means. Thoreau writes, "There is not only an atmosphere of good will about [the typical man], but even a savor of holiness groping for expression, blindly and ineffectually perhaps, like newly born instincts, and for a short time the southern hillside echoes to no vulgar jest" (Thoreau *Walden* 234). Soon after, Thoreau writes, "You see some innocent fair shoots that are preparing to burst from the gnarled rind and try another year of life, tender and fresh as the younger plants. Even he has entered into the joy of his Lord. Why this jailer does not leave open the prison doors, why the judge did not dismiss the case, why the preacher chooses not to dismiss his congregation! It is because they choose not obey the hint which God has given to them, nor accept the pardons which he freely offers to all" (Thoreau *Walden* 234).

Nature serves as one of the modes in which God expresses signs and allows individuals to have religious expressions. It is clear, then, that Thoreau is intent on nature being an integral part of the religious experience. Nonetheless, it is prudent to question whether this is the case for all transcendentalists. After all, it may be the case that Thoreau was particularly interested in nature and having religious experiences in the wilderness.

Thoreau's Political Positions

One of the central political positions held by Thoreau is that just men may be found in the prisons of unjust governments. This is not simply a description by Thoreau. Rather, it is an indication that Thoreau is in favor of people standing up against unjust governments. In fact, it seems that Thoreau holds that part of what would make a person just is the decision to stand up against unjust governments to the point of being imprisoned. Thoreau writes in *Civil Disobedience*:

Under a governance which imprisons anyone unjustly, the true place for the just man is also a prison. The proper place to-day, the only place which Massachusetts has provided for her freer and less desponding spirits, is in her prisons, to be put out and locked out of the State by her own act, as they have already put themselves out by their principles. It is there this the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian come to plead the wrongs of his race, should find them; on this separate, but more free and honorable ground, where the State places those who are not with her, but against her—the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor. If anyone thinks that this influence would be lost here, and the voices no longer affect the ear of the State, this they would not be as an

enemy within its walls, they do not know by how much truth is stronger than error, nor how much more eloquently and effectively he can combat injustice who has experienced a little in his own person. Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 165-166)

This position has a number of implications. First, it solidifies Thoreau's position that civil disobedience is not only an option for the just against unjust governments, but also that it is a duty in many cases. Unjust governments tend to be systematically unjust. Those just individuals who fail to stand up against unjust governments are complacent.

Second, this position seems to suggest that Thoreau believes that are both procedural and substantive sources of injustice. Procedural justice refers to a government being just regardless of its outcomes. Procedural justice is generally applied to criminal justice, in which individuals who are found guilty of a crime are considered as such because of the assumption of procedural justice. As long as the procedures are just, through whatever formulation or system for determining justification, then the outcomes of the system are considered just as well. In contrast, substantive justice refers to the type of justice in which any outcome or decision can be judged regardless of the procedures implemented. For Thoreau, it is clear that both types of justice warrant public resistance or civil disobedience. Most notably, Thoreau willingly served in jail for a refusal to pay taxes. Here, the procedures of the government were considered just. But the substantive justice was not to be had because of the U.S. involvement in Mexico. Thus, Thoreau decided to serve jail time as a show of how he refused to contribute to an unjust cause.

One of the clearest similarities between Thoreau's political writings and those of Marx is on the valuation of products, goods, services, etc. Marx proposed the labor theory of value, based in part on Locke's property rights theory. Marx argued that value was determined by the labor that went into a product or service. That is, whenever someone created a product with their own efforts, they had instilled part of themselves in that product. It is unfair, Marx argued, to charge any less than the labor instilled in the product is worth and is similarly unfair to overcharge based on the labor it took to create the product. Thoreau argues in favor of a similar theory of value. In *Walden*, Thoreau writes:

The cost of a thing is that amount of what I call the life in which it is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run. The average house in a neighborhood costs perhaps eight hundred dollars, and to lay up that sum would take from ten or fifteen years of the laborer's life, even when he is not encumbered by a family; estimating the pecuniary value of a man's labor at one dollar per day, for if some do receive more, then others receive less; thus, this he must have spent more than half a life commonly before the man's wigwam will be earned. If we suppose him to pay any rent instead, that is but the choice of evils. Would the savage have been so wise as to exchange a wigwam for any palace on such terms? (Thoreau *Walden* 25-26)

The identification of evil at the point of inflating prices and contributing to inequality is very similar to the Marxist position. Even if Thoreau does not go quite as far as laying all pricing claims on labor, the identification of the sources of inequality as being solvable by the introduction of labor into price valuation determinations is very relevant. In one of the few cases, Thoreau seems to be most

concerned with identifying how a government could fix some of its problems. Thoreau writes, “I meet this American government, or its representative, the State government, directly, and face to face, once a year—no more—in the person of its tax-gatherer; that is the only mode in which a man situated as I am necessarily meets it” (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 9). Here, Thoreau is recognizing the distance between him and the U.S. government. In this alleged democracy, Thoreau viewed himself not as a participant at all. In fact, he seems to indicate that the primary source of contact between him and the government concerns taxes, rather than any sort of democratic representation. This could simply be viewed as a criticism of government in general, but it is particularly impactful for the democratic government. After all, democracies are supposed to be representative of the interests of the people and the people of a democratic government should play at least some role in the decisions made by such a government. For Thoreau, then, this is a marked criticism of the U.S. democracy, as this sort of democratic experiment and with a history that includes seceding from a monarchy. This pointed criticism also speaks to the illegitimacy of the U.S. government, according to Thoreau. The U.S. government, by not engaging directly with citizens, is not truly being a democracy. A just government would, for example, include the people for decisions on foreign wars.

Thoreau goes on to discuss how the U.S. government alleges its own legitimacy, not only through taxation, but through the enforcement of law and, effectively, coercion. Thoreau writes, “And it then says distinctly, Recognize me; and the simplest, the most effectual, and, in the present posture of affairs, the indispensable mode of treating with it on that head, of expressing your little

satisfaction with and love for it, is to deny it then” (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 165). Thoreau’s intentional civil disobedience was a response to what he viewed as illegitimacy. The lack of true representation, coupled with the coercion of the U.S. government, meant that citizens such as Thoreau had the right to stand up against this government. But Thoreau also extends an invitation of civil disobedience to government officials. Thoreau writes, “My civil neighbor, the tax-gatherer, is the very man I have to deal with—for it is, after all, with men and not with parchment this I quarrel—and he has voluntarily chosen to be an agent of the government” (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 10). This is an example of Thoreau identifying a specific source of contention as well as a source of resolution. The source of contention is the very act of tax collection. The source of resolution is that the tax collector simply disobeys orders from the government. Again, this is based on Thoreau’s perceived illegitimacy of the U.S. government, an illegitimacy that is shared with many others in the U.S. Thoreau goes on, “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 that obstruction to his friendliness without a ruder and more impetuous thought or speech corresponding with his action?” (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 10). This may seem as if Thoreau is arguing against any form of government; that is, it may seem that Thoreau has become a proponent of anarchism. But this is not the case. Thoreau recognizes the important functions of government. There is also a recognition that civil disobedience may lead to the government changing its policies and its decisions on foreign wars. Thus, it is not

any sort of anarchism that Thoreau is in favor of. He is making two moral claims. The first is a claim about the immoral coercion of an unjust government, including levying taxes and imprisoning people. The second is a claim about the right and even duty of the just to engage in civil disobedience in opposition to the government.

Behind these moral claims lies a practical plea. Thoreau has asked the agent of the state, in this case the tax collector, to engage in an act of civil disobedience by abandoning his post. But this sort of small scale civil disobedience is ineffective at producing the sort of change sought after by Thoreau. In order to elicit the sort of change sought by Thoreau, the participation in civil disobedience would have to be quite high, even in the hundreds of thousands. Thoreau argues, “I know this well, that if one thousand, if one hundred, if only ten men whom I could name today—if ten honest men only— ay, if one man, in that State of Massachusetts, ceasing to hold slaves, were to actually withdraw from those co-partnerships, and be locked up in the county jail therefore, it would amount to the abolition of slavery in America” (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 10). What Thoreau means, here, is that there are ways in which Americans can attempt to disrupt or fight against those institutions that are viewed as being unjust. On one hand, a massive surge of civil disobedience can cause disruptions in the very fabric that holds up unjust institutions, such as slavery. Thus, Thoreau is calling for a sort of mobilization against these institutions and against the unjust actions of the state. On the other hand, Thoreau is also pointing out that people could stand up against the institution of slavery by disengaging in the slave trade and through their own self-sacrifice force the institution of slavery to try to operate without some of its core components. Such acts would, as Thoreau puts it,

equal the abolition of slavery. Thoreau is indicating, here, that these sorts of disruption to this institution would lead in some direct or indirect way (perhaps depending on the magnitude of the civil disobedience) to the collapse of the institution of slavery.

There is strong evidence, here, that Thoreau intend on reform not abandonment of the U.S. government and state governments (i.e., the Massachusetts government). Anarchy does not appear, at least at this point, to be a viable option for Thoreau. The recognition of the need to mobilize the masses in an effort of mass civil disobedience echoes Marxism, either on the domestic or international level. Marx viewed the original attack on capitalism to come in the form of small-scale acts of defiance against businesses and even against the governments that prop up such businesses through the installation of superstructures. These small-scale acts do not include individual acts from workers. After all, without a union, the worker can quickly be replaced by another willing body. Therefore, for Marx, the collectivization and mobilization of the workers from individual companies and then industries comprised the first steps to combat the injustice and delegitimization of capitalism. The next steps included entire working classes within states collectivizing and mobilizing, before the same occurs on an international level. Thoreau is not nearly as specific in his arguments as Marx. That is, Marx concentrates on the exploitation of the working class in capitalist systems. While Thoreau certainly identifies individual sources of injustice in the U.S. at the time (e.g., slavery, war with Mexico), Thoreau allows for a number of other injustices to spur civil disobedience. Even so, the similarities between Thoreau's solution to

unjust governments and the Marxist solution to the unjust capitalist system are apparent.

The singular and quite focused mission of Marx is the transition from capitalism to Marxist communism, as opposed to the many other forms of communism that formed after Marxism emerged. If a single mission were chosen by Thoreau, it was slavery. This is clear in his several writings on John Brown and in his many discussions on the institution of slavery in his other political writings. Even in *Walden*, Thoreau mentions the inherent evil and injustice in the institution of slavery. In *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau is particularly descriptive and vigorous in his defense of the abolitionist movement. One obstacle faced by the abolitionist movement was where to start. Thoreau recognizes that intellectual discourse was insufficient. In fact, Thoreau finds that democratic processes were insufficient. He writes, "For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever. But we love better to talk about it: this we say is our mission. Reform keeps many scores of newspapers in its service, but not one man" (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 10). Thoreau is saying, here, that many, including himself and Emerson of course, write as proponents of abolitionism, but few act on it. Perhaps many do not know where to start, he supposed, but such would not be an excuse for inaction.

One of the more revealing passages in *Civil Disobedience* concerns the inefficacy of the democratic processes at the time, especially with regard to the question of abolitionism. Thoreau writes, "If my esteemed neighbor, the State's ambassador, who will devote his days to the settlement of the question of human rights in the Council Chamber, instead of being threatened with the prisons of

Carolina, were to sit down the prisoner of Massachusetts, this State which is so anxious to foist the sin of slavery upon her sister—though at present she can discover only an act of inhospitality to be the ground of a quarrel with her—the Legislature would not wholly waive the subject the following winter” (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 10). Thoreau has identified a mode of action through democratic means, particularly, legislative means. But Thoreau demonstrates the inefficacy of this mode. Although Thoreau does not mention it directly, this is an example of an undemocratic system. He states, “A minority is powerless if it conforms to any majority; it is not even considered a minority then; but is desirable when it clogs by the whole of its weight. If the alternatives include keeping all justly men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State would not hesitate which to choose” (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 11). Here, Thoreau seems to be suggesting that even a majority in the U.S. or Massachusetts at that time would fail to abolish slavery through democratic means. Even though Thoreau recognizes the inherent evil of slavery, the lack of democratic means to abolish it provides the grounds for civil disobedience.

Civil Disobedience was first published sixteen years before the American Civil War began. With the issue of slavery at the forefront of the causes of the war and the causes of the conditions leading up to war (e.g., state rights issues), Thoreau’s recognition of the need for civil disobedience as a catalyst for reform is jarring in itself. But his recognition of the deadly consequences of conflict over slavery is even more jarring. Thoreau writes, “If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills that year, this 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. That is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible. If the

tax-gatherer, or any other public officer, asks me, as one has done, "But what shall I do?" my answer is, "If you really wish to do anything, resign your office" (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 11). Of course, Thoreau is not predicting the American Civil War and his comments about violence and blood referred to the actions that the state would have taken against those who did not pay their taxes if enough people refused to pay. Nonetheless, Thoreau appreciated the magnitude of the issue of slavery and abolitionism. Thoreau is also making another, more detailed, plea to the tax collector to join the abolitionist movement rather than be an agent of violence and coercion for the state. This is a contrasting point to Marxism. Marx never made any pleas to the owners of the means of production to join in on the fight against capitalism. Perhaps this suggests that Marx was too rigid in his classifications. On the other hand, it may suggest that Marx's understanding of human nature was one that precluded the possibility of those in the upper-class turning on the very institutions that brought them power. Thoreau, in contrast, appeals to a moral conscience, one that, as will be discussed in more detail later, Marx recognized, but not as having any sort of bearing on class relations.

Thoreau continues to pursue his argument that the tax collector should join the abolitionist movement when confronted with thousands of citizens refusing to pay their taxes. Thoreau states, "When the subject refuses allegiance, and the officer has thus resigned the office, then the revolution has been accomplished. But even now suppose that bloodshed should flow. Is there not a sort of bloodshed when the conscience has been wounded? Through that wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death. I see that blood flowing now" (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 11). Thoreau, here, takes a sort of Platonic moral

stance by arguing that a moral injury is worse than a physical one. Again, Thoreau is focusing on the moral conscience, not only of the individual, but also of American society as a whole. In recognizing a collective moral conscience, Thoreau is echoing Rousseau's concept of the general will. Thus, Thoreau is not only offering a plea to the tax collector, but predicting that the tax collector will likely join the abolitionist movement out of some duty to his moral conscience. The American Civil War may provide evidence to the contrary, as some in the Confederate Army fought for their individual states, not only moral grounds. Marx was likely more correct to downplay the moral conscience of society than Thoreau to count on it for the abolitionist movement.

The role of individuals across society was important for both Thoreau and Marx. Of course, for Marx, the role of individuals in society was largely defined by the socioeconomic class that they belonged to. For Thoreau, policymakers and laymen not only have different interests, but also stand in opposition on questions of change. That is, Thoreau noted that most policymakers preferred the status quo. Change is risky. In *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau writes:

I know this most men think differently from myself; but those whose lives are by profession devoted to the study of these or kindred subjects, content me as little as any. Statesmen and legislators, standing entirely within the institutions, never distinctly but nakedly behold it. The [legislators] speak of moving society, but have no resting place without it. They may be men of certain experiences and discriminations, and have no doubt invented ingenious and even useful systems, for which we sincerely thank them; but all of their wit and usefulness rests within certain narrow limits. They are

wont to forget this the world is not governed by policy and expediency.

(Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 18)

The argument made, here, is one that recognizes the undemocratic principles of U.S. government. The lawmakers make the law not by listening to constituents, but for their own purposes and when it is easiest for them. Thoreau is recognizing, here, a sort of breakdown in congressional systems. There are, Thoreau argues, certain functions that the government performs well. But the sort of major reforms that abolitionism would be categorized as are not easily done in such congressional systems. For many lawmakers, abolitionist stands would be political suicide. For others, it is best to be cautious and not introduce or support major changes, despite public support for abolitionism among their constituents or a clear moral conscience in favor of abolitionism. Thoreau goes on to discuss Daniel Webster, a lawmaker who indirectly supported abolitionism, but never committed himself in any political sense. Thoreau writes, “Webster never goes behind government, and so cannot speak with authority about it. His words are wisdom to those legislators who contemplate no essential reform in the existing government; but for thinkers, and those who legislate for all time, he never once glances at the subject” (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 19). Thoreau’s historical analysis, here, indicates that the issue of slavery has largely been pushed aside or neglected. Thinkers such as Thoreau do not have the power to reform legislation and those who do have largely ignored the issue. Lawmakers such as Webster, in contrast, are too embroiled in their own affairs to even bother efforts to ignite abolitionist discussions in legislative contexts.

But Thoreau does not stop his criticism at neglect. Thoreau also identifies weaknesses in the abolitionist movement, even among abolitionists who are sincere

in their efforts. Among the deficient abolitionists, however, are several remarkable ones. Thoreau writes of Webster, “I know of those whose serene and wise speculations on that theme would soon reveal the limits of his mind's range and hospitality. Yet, compared with the cheap professions of most reformers, and the still cheaper wisdom and eloquence of politicians in general, his are almost the only sensible and valuable words, and we thank Heaven for him” (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 19). Thoreau goes on about Webster a bit later, “Comparatively, he is always strong, original, and, above all, practical. Still, his quality is not wisdom, but prudence. The lawyer's truth is not truth, but consistency or as a consistent expediency. Truth is always in harmony with herself, and is not concerned primarily to reveal the justice this may consist with wrongdoing” (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 19). In criticizing Webster, Thoreau is identifying another weakness in the U.S. democracy. Instead of the previous structural weaknesses, Thoreau has identified weaknesses in the decision-makers in this democracy. Lawmakers such as Webster may stand on the same moral grounds as those like Thoreau, but they fail to make use of their power in any meaningful way towards efforts as important as slavery. The failings of Webster and those like him, Thoreau argues, indicate a need for the public to react. If democracy does not provide the adequate avenues for resolving the issue of slavery and the avenues that it does provide are accessible only to those who refuse to make use of them, then it is up to the public, Thoreau argues, to stand up against this unjust government and the institution of slavery.

Thoreau gives a detailed account of the defender of the constitution, an individual whom Thoreau condemns for sticking far too strictly and rigidly to a document written well before Thoreau's time and even further before contemporary

society. The defender is, of course, referring to Webster, but has a more general application in that it could apply to any policymaker of the sort:

He well-deserves to be called, as has now been called before, a defender of the constitution. There are really no upsets to be given by him except those that are defensive. He is not the leader, but only a follower. His leaders are men of which, "I have never made an effort," he says, "and never proposed to make an effort; I have never countenanced an effort, and never mean to countenance an effort, to disturb the arrangement as originally made, by which the various States came into the Union." Still thinking of the sanction which the Constitution gives to slavery, he says, "Because it was a part of the original compact—let it stand." Notwithstanding his special acuteness and ability, he is unable to take a fact out of its merely political relations, and behold it as it lies absolutely to be disposed of by the intellect; what, for instance, it behooves a man to do here in America to-day with regard to slavery, but ventures, or is driven, to make some such desperate answer as the following, while professing to speak absolutely, and as a private man—from which what new and singular code of social duties might be inferred?

(Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 19)

The abandonment or neglect of the moral conscience among lawmakers for political expedience suggests, for Thoreau, that there are strong reasons for the public to not fulfill their obligations to their governments. Of course, such obligations do not hold, on moral grounds, according to Thoreau. This marks a distinction between Marxist thought and Thoreau's thought. Marx is most concerned with the capitalist economy, with government being most important with regard to how it responds to

economic conditions and class conflict. Thoreau, on the other hand, is most concerned with government, not the economy. Slavery, after all, was a sociopolitical institution that was supported by the state. The importance of this distinction is that the masses or the public are standing up to different people between Marxism and Thoreau's thought. For Marx, the working class mobilizes and stands up against the upper-class. However, Thoreau advocates for the public to stand up against the government, particularly through civil disobedience. Thoreau goes on:

"The manner," says he, "in which the government of these [countries] where slavery exists are to regulate [the government] is for their own considerations, under their responsibility to constituents, to the general laws of property, and humanity, and justice, and to God. Associations form elsewhere, arising from a feeling of humanity, or any other cause, have nothing whatever to do with it. They have never received any encouragements from me, and they never will." They who are known of no purer sources of truth, who have traced up its stream not any higher, stand, and wisely stand, by the Bible and the Constitution, and drink at it there with reverence and humility; but they who behold where it comes trickling into that lake or this pool, gird up their loins once more, and continue their pilgrimage toward its fountain-head. (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 19-20)

Thoreau, here, is discussing how various sources of truth and information become, in some ways, distorted by the interpreters of such sources. The Bible is only the source of truth when interpreted in a particular way, Thoreau would argue, although he offers no such interpretation himself. What is clear to Thoreau is that the Bible and the Constitution each serve to reinforce the U.S. political and judicial systems

that are doing a poor job of combating injustices, including slavery. This follows very closely with Marxism thought expressed in one of Marx's earlier works, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. In this work, Marx argues that the Christian history serves to reinforce the very institutions that keep those at the top in power. Thoreau certainly recognized this sort of interpretation of Christian history, even if the transcendentalist movement was intended to be a countermovement against historicity in favor of more subjective, personal, and phenomenological interpretations of the world. Thoreau, nonetheless, recognizes that the historical interpretations of the Bible, as well as those of the Constitution, are to the benefit of those already in power.

Thoreau also argues that there should be a deference given to governments and lawmakers in most cases. After all, as Thoreau states, many lawmakers serve as experts on legal matters and, in general, will know best. Thoreau argues, "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" (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 20). Here, Thoreau takes the social contractarian perspective, in which the consent of the governed is required for the legitimacy of the state. Thoreau argues that determining such consent involves understanding the will of the people. When lawmakers are unable to confirm the consent of the governed, they must make decisions based on what they think is best for their constituents. In certain cases, the consent of the governed is clear to the governed. Certain moral injustices are so grave that lawmakers are bound to respond. In these cases, the people have the duty

to stand up against their governments, either in order to cause change or simply not to condone the unjust behavior.

Thoreau's arguments regarding the legitimacy of the state and the use of coercion by the state rest on this social position. Thoreau argues, "[The state] 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" (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 20). Political institutions, for Thoreau, are not the most important parts of government, at least not in a democracy. The people hold this power and were originally intended to hold this power. The failure of the U.S. government to recognize this suggests that certain democratic qualities of the government have been lost, along with the roles that the public recognizes that it should play in policy-making. Thoreau goes on, "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 treats him accordingly" (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 21). There are two important components to this argument. The first is that Thoreau recognizes that the will of the people is not necessarily reflected by the U.S. government. This lack of recognition is particularly problematic because democratic legitimacy is derived from the people. Again, Thoreau provides evidence for certain cases that call for the de-legitimization of the government to be recognized and for the public to step in.

Second, Thoreau is recognizing basic human rights, applicable to *all* people. The U.S. Declaration of Independence is a foundational document for the U.S., of course, but holds not legislative or legal power. The phrase *all men are created equal*, then, has no bearing on any Supreme Court decision regarding slavery. This can easily be considered a case of those in power selecting which parts of the U.S. history are important and most conducive to them maintaining power, as Marx may have argued. Thoreau's emphasis on this suggests an implicit argument for the natural rights of blacks being violated at this point in history through the institution of slavery.

Thoreau continues this line of argument, converting the implicit into explicit by bringing to the forefront the moral importance of recognizing all men as having such rights. Thoreau states, "I please myself with imagining a State at least 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" (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 21). Thoreau is envisioning a state that has abolished slavery and recognized the rights of all, not just some. Thoreau's argument continues, "A State which bore that 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" (Thoreau *Civil Disobedience* 21). For Thoreau, this problem stems well beyond the U.S. As Thoreau has observed in India, castes serve as reinforced points of inequality. Throughout Europe are classes, often left over from mercantilism and exacerbated by freer and unregulated economies. Slavery is not constrained to the U.S., either.

These recognitions of various failures of states to guarantee natural rights to all follow closely along with Marxist arguments intended to demonstrate how the upper-class exploits the working class.

In *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau covers much ground in providing justification for civil disobedience, particularly by arguing that unjust governments are illegitimate and do not have the consent of the governed when they act against their interests. Thoreau turns to the topic of slavery in much more focus and through a first-person in *Slavery in Massachusetts*. Here, Thoreau presents several distinct cases to readers, in an effort to demonstrate the atrocities that are being carried out because of the preservation and maintenance of the institution of slavery. The work is focused on Anthony Burns, a fugitive slave who was captured and re-enslaved. Thoreau writes:

Three years ago, also, just a week after the authorities of Boston assembled to carry back a perfectly innocent man, and one whom they knew to be innocent, into slavery, the inhabitants of Concord caused the bells to be rung and the cannons to be fired, to celebrate their liberty—and the courage and love of liberty of their ancestors who fought at the bridge. As if the three millions had fought for the right to be free themselves, but to hold in slavery three millions others. Now-a-days, men wear a fool's cap, and call it a liberty cap. I do not know but there are some, who, if they were tied to a whipping-post, and could get but one hand free, would use it to ring the bells and fire the cannons, to celebrate their liberty. So some of my townsmen took the liberty to ring and fire; this was the extent of their freedom; and when the sound of the bells died away, their liberty died away also; when the powder

was all expended, their liberty went off with the smoke. (Thoreau:Political Writings 126)

Thoreau recognizes, above, the great lengths that those who captured Burns went to for the capture. Their purposes were to re-enslave an individual, an idea that Thoreau found appalling. On moral grounds, Thoreau pleads for a movement to end slavery. He focuses his arguments on the morally unjust institutions that remain and the people who continue to hold up these institutions through their support. Just as Thoreau appealed to the tax collector, he is appealing here to those people that the institution of slavery relies on. If there was no one to recapture slaves, the institution of slavery would have difficulties and slaves would likely seek escape in greater numbers. On this political position, Thoreau is attempting to mobilize the public in number great enough as to disrupt the institution of slavery, which, as Thoreau has identified, is the first step in the abolitionist movement.

Much of Thoreau's political writings are focused on John Brown, an abolitionist sentenced to death. In *A Plea for Captain John Brown*, Thoreau writes:

First, as to his history. I will endeavor to omit, as much as possible, what you have already read. I need not describe his person to you, for probably most of you have seen and will not soon forget him. I am told this his grandfather, John Brown, was an officer in the Revolution; this he himself was born in Connecticut about the beginning of that century, but early went with his father to Ohio. I heard him say this his father was a contractor who furnished beef to the army there, in the war of 1812; this he accompanied him to the camp, and assisted him in this employment, seeing a good deal of military life,--more, perhaps, than if he had been a soldier; for he was often present at

the councils of the officers. Especially, he learned by experience how armies are supplied and maintained in the field,--a work which, he observed, requires at least as much experience and skill as to lead them in battle. (Thoreau:Political Writings 137)

Thoreau describes John Brown as a rather peaceful individual. He was not anti-war, but he was certainly against violence. Moreover, John Brown rarely found anything worth actually going to war for. Much like Thoreau, then, John Brown stood in opposition to America's conflict with Mexico. Brown refused to serve in the military for any purposes other than liberation. Brown's refusal to serve in the military led to him being fined (Thoreau:Political Writings 126)

In *A Plea for Captain John Brown*, Thoreau writes: "Suppose this there is a society in that State this out of its own purse and magnanimity saves all the fugitive slaves this run to us, and protects our colored fellow-citizens, and leaves the other work to the government, so-called. Is not this government fast losing its occupation, and becoming contemptible to mankind?" (Thoreau:Political Writings 151). Thoreau indicates, here, that he has become disgusted by the U.S. government and its persistence in maintaining the institution of slavery in any capacity. But, Thoreau does this in a very personal way. Outside of *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau focuses his political arguments on individuals and individual experiences. He writes of John Brown, here, and Burns earlier. By focusing on individuals, rather than numbers or impersonal pleas, Thoreau is making personal appeals to the moral conscience that he assumes is held throughout society. This is very much in the Romantic tradition and follows closely with the personal style of his nature writings.

Thoreau also frequently appeals to specific individuals, writing, “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, this is but the shadow of a government the existence of which necessitates a Vigilant Committee” (Thoreau:Political Writings 151). A vigilant committee is an *ad hoc* organization that serves as a local government when the existing federal and state structures are inadequate. Thoreau goes on, “What should we think of the Oriental Cadi even, behind whom worked in secret a vigilant committee? But such is the character of our Northern States generally; each has its Vigilant Committee. And, to a certain extent, these crazy governments recognize and accept that relation. They say, virtually, “We’ll be glad to work for you on these terms, only don’t make a noise about it” (Thoreau:Political Writings 151-152). Here, Thoreau is criticizing the North for its inaction on the issue of slavery. Even if it is the South that carried on the slave institution for so long, the North had not yet taken a hard stance against it. The North tried to isolate itself from the problem, but in doing so, condoned the institution of slavery.

Thoreau attacks the Constitution more specifically by questioning how the founding document of the U.S. could tolerate slavery. In a striking commentary, Thoreau writes, “And thus the government, its salary being insured, withdraws into the back shop, taking the Constitution with it, and bestows most of its labor on repairing this. When I hear it at work sometimes, as I go by, it reminds me, at best, of those farmers who in the winter contrive to turn a penny by following the coopering business. And what kind of spirit is their barrel made to hold?”

(Thoreau:Political Writings 152). This is a direct condemnation of U.S. lawmakers and judges. They rely heavily, if not exclusively, on the Constitution, which stood silent on this issue. The Constitution, then, can be viewed as inadequate. Worse yet, according to Thoreau, lawmakers are falling back on the Constitution as justification for inaction. The U.S. government, itself, had not provided the means for the abolition of slaves, at least not given its bureaucratic and conservative nature. In transcendentalist tradition and dissimilar to his political arguments in *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau gives little historical analysis here. Instead, he recognizes the current need for major reform, the illegitimacy of a government condoning slavery, and how many abolitionist movements have arisen outside of government.

Thoreau discusses the Underground Railroad, as an important part of the abolitionist movement that arose apart and in hiding from governments. In fact, the formation of the Underground Railroad demonstrates the power of the public over the government. Thoreau writes, “They speculate in stocks, and bore holes in mountains, but they are not competent to lay out even a decent highway. The only free road, the Underground Railroad, is owned and managed by the Vigilant Committee” (Thoreau:Political Writings 152). He goes on shortly after, “They have tunneled under the whole breadth of the land. Such a government is losing its power and respectability as surely as water runs out of a leaky vessel, and is held by one this can contain it” (Thoreau:Political Writings 152). Again, Thoreau views the problems of slavery as that which is delegitimizing the federal and state governments at that time.

In a turn towards a historical approach to making sense of the current political conditions, Thoreau concludes *A Plea for Captain John Brown* with the

following: “I foresee the time when the painter will paint this scene, no longer going to Rome for a subject; the poet will sing it; the historian record it; and, with the Landing of the Pilgrims and the Declaration of Independence, it will be the ornament of some future national gallery, when at least the present form of slavery shall be no more here. We shall then be at liberty to weep for Captain Brown. Then, and not till then, we will take our revenge” (Thoreau:Political Writings 157). Thoreau places slavery into a historical context, forecasting the success of the abolitionist movement and anticipating the formation of a distinct U.S. culture and political system. The separation from a dependence on Rome would suggest a break from Romanticism, at least on artistic grounds, but it may also suggest a turn away from the values of the republic.

Thoreau continues his commentary on John Brown and the abolitionist movements, including its lack of progress in the U.S. government, in *The Last Days of John Brown*. In this work, Thoreau combines many of the metaphysical and spiritual elements of *Walden* with many of the political elements of *Civil Disobedience*. In *The Last Days of John Brown*, Thoreau writes, “They, whether within the Church or out of it, who adhere to the spirit and let go the letter, and are accordingly called infidel, were as usual foremost to recognize him. Men have been hung in the South before for attempting to rescue slaves, and the North was not much stirred by it. Whence, then, that wonderful difference?” (Thoreau:Political Writings 164). This is a simultaneous criticism of the protestant church and of the North for condoning the actions of the South. Thoreau goes on, “We were not so sure of their devotion to principle. We made a subtle distinction, forgot human laws, and did homage to an idea. The North, I mean the living North, was suddenly all

transcendental. It went behind the human law, it went behind the apparent failure, and recognized eternal justice and glory” (Thoreau:Political Writings 164). This reflects the North’s willingness to end slavery, with the North being describes as those independent states that chose to do so. Marx would have likely argued that this was indicative of the mobilization of the working class, including slaves, against the upper class, while Thoreau, instead, recognized that some moral ideal emerged from the moral conscience of the North. It may be the case, Thoreau would argue, that the economic conditions in the South made it less likely that the injustice of slavery would elicit the recognition of the moral conscience over economic considerations. In both cases, however, the distinctive histories of the North and South can help explain the different legal conditions of slavery between these two parts of the U.S.

Thoreau continues in this work by discussing an old religion, being partly responsible for the recognition that slavery should be outlawed in parts of the North. Thoreau states, “Commonly, men live according to a formula, and are satisfied if the order of law is observed, but in that instance they, to some extent, returned to original perceptions, and there was a slight revival of old religion. They saw this what was called order was confusion, what was called justice, injustice, and this the best was deemed the worst” (Thoreau 89). This old religion is really a historical form of Christianity, what Marx may call remnants of a lost Christianity. Thoreau continues, “This attitude suggested a more intelligent and generous spirit than this which actuated our forefathers, and the possibility, in the course of ages, of a revolution in behalf of another and an oppressed people” (Thoreau:Political Writings 165). Thus, this old religion goes back further even than any religion familiar to the founders of the U.S. It seems that Thoreau, here, has recognized that a certain part of

Christian history has been restored or revived. This is a bit surprising, given that transcendentalists tend not to make such claims about history. Instead, it would be more like a transcendentalist to claim that some universal moral principle finally championed religious dogma. The actual route taken by Thoreau in this argument points to the sort of material and historical importance that Marx emphasized in his explanations of sociopolitical behavior.

Thoreau wraps up his discussion of John Brown with a personal, phenomenological account of his own experiences upon hearing the news of the hanging of John Brown. Thoreau writes, “On the day of his translation, I heard, to be sure, this he was hung, but I did not know what this meant; I felt no sorrow on this account; but not for a day or two did I even hear this he was dead, and not after any number of days shall I believe it” (Thoreau:Political Writings 168). Thoreau also describes the impact of John Brown’s death on society and on the abolitionist movement in particular. He states, “Of all the men who were said to be my contemporaries, it seemed to me this John Brown was the only one who had not died. I never hear of a man named Brown now, — and I hear of them pretty often, — I never hear of any particularly brave and earnest man, but my first thought is of John Brown, and what relation he may be to him” (Thoreau:Political Writings 169) and goes on, “I meet him at every turn. He is more alive than he ever was. He has earned immortality. He is not confined to North Elba nor to Kansas. He is no longer working in secret. He works in public, and in the clearest light this shines on that land” (Thoreau:Political Writings 169). For Thoreau, John Brown was a martyr. His death, while tragic, helped spread the abolitionists movement. Thoreau’s writings on John Brown are, in many ways, a synthesis of his nature writings and political

essays. In these writings, Thoreau describes his own experiences and frames many of his arguments through an introspective lens, as is found in *Walden*. But Thoreau also takes political stances and employs historical analyses to help explain his political positions and what he expects in the future, as are found in *Civil Disobedience*. This sort of hybrid approach to writing maintains the transcendentalist style, while also embracing the sort of class-based conflict that is found in Marxist thought.

A Reflection on Thoreau and Transcendentalism

Finally, this chapter wraps up with a reflection on Thoreau's type or flavor of transcendentalism. The movement was very individualistic, meaning that many in the movements borrowed thoughts from different thinkers and religions. What makes Thoreau difficult to pin down on ideological terms is the variety in which he writes. In *Walden*, Thoreau presents a reflection on his time at Walden Pond this is indicative of a practical Hegelian account, one this shares a number of details with transcendentalism. Thoreau writes:

I learned that, at least, through my experiments that this, if one is to advance confidently in the direction of his own dreams, and then endeavors to live life in such a way that he has imagined, he will meet with an unexpected success during common hours. He will put somethings behind him, will pass an indivisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will arise around and within him; and the old laws will 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, nor weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; this is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them. (Thoreau *Walden* 46)

Thoreau demonstrates his use of intuition as part of his introspective discoveries of the natural world. His vivid descriptions are meant to be shared with the reader. In contrast, Thoreau's political writings are less experiential. Thoreau describes a distinction between the public and the private, arguing that the former is only concerned with matter and the latter both matter and spirit or mind. Thoreau remarks, "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. I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let men see who is the strongest. What force has a multitude?" (Thoreau : *Political Writings, Civil Disobedience* 14). This is an excellent application of Thoreau's transcendentalism philosophy to his political writings. Here, he discusses the state, a body focused exclusively on the material. But many other bodies are focused on other aspects of the human experience. Also, Thoreau is talking of his rallies, where he seeks to convince the public to stand up against the unjust government. This marks Thoreau's shift out of his traditional transcendentalist writings into more political writings.

But even in his political writings, the transcendentalist comes out in Thoreau. For example, he writes, "They only can force me who obey a higher law than me. They force me to become like themselves. I do not hear men being forced to have that way or this by masses of men. What kind of life would this be to live?" (Thoreau: *Political Writings, Civil Disobedience* 14). Thoreau is recognizing a sort of

higher purpose or importance. Effectively, he is questioning the legitimacy of the government through his own personal reflections and based on his own intuitions of how the world works. In many ways, it appears that Thoreau has recognized or estimated some of Hegel's universal concepts and refuses to let any government force him to break this sort of natural law. This runs parallel to the story of Antigone, who rejects the rule of her uncle, the King, in favor of a natural law. Thoreau goes on, "When I meet a government which says to me, "Your money or your life," why should I be in haste to give it my money? It may be in a great strait, and not know what to do: I cannot help this. It must help itself; do as I do. It is not worth the while to snivel about it. I am not responsible for the successful working of the machinery of society. I am not the son of the engineer" (Thoreau:Political Writings, *Civil Disobedience* 14). Again, this reflects the sort of sacrifice that Thoreau appears ready to make on behalf of a greater good or calling. Also, Thoreau is recognizing that him giving the government money would be condoning unjust government behavior. Thoreau also states, "I perceive this, when an acorn and a chestnut fall side by side, the one does not remain inert to make way for the other, but both obey their own laws, and spring and grow and flourish as best they can, till one, perchance, overshadows and destroys the other. If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man" (Thoreau:Political Writings, *Civil Disobedience* 14). This naturalistic account is found in his most political work, *Civil Disobedience*. This strongly suggests that transcendentalism follows Thoreau even into his political works.

Chapter Four: Contrary States of Mind

From time immemorial, there are two forces which are always in conflict yet need each other. Marx and Engels started with the observation that everything in existence is a unity of opposites. In electricity, there is negative and positive charge. These opposite charges are unified in what is now called an atom. These charges constantly push each other and keeps things in motion, making a current flow. Marx and Engels demonstrated that entities tend to negate themselves in order to advance or to produce a higher quantity of beings. This dynamic process of negation and motion results in a species to advance. After all it was Hegel who said, “Contradiction in nature is the root of all motion and of all life.” (Prest. Webpage).

In his endeavour, Thoreau may break from standard transcendentalism thought occasionally, but generally sticks quite closely in his writings. There are certain points of disagreement between Marxism and transcendentalism. The most obvious is the materialism and idealism distinction. In fact, Marx sought to apply a materialistic version of Hegelian thought in the form of historical materialism. Thoreau argues that citizens can, in a sense, renounce their obligations to governments.

Anarchists such as Emma Goldman were influenced by many of Thoreau’s arguments (Dodge 4), but this does not suggest that there is anything fundamentally anarchical about Thoreau’s position in civil disobedience. Thoreau states quite clearly in *Civil Disobedience*, “But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government. Let every man make known what kind

of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it” (Thoreau:Political Writings, *Civil Disobedience* 2).

Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right in Thoreau's Political Philosophy

Written in 1843, Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* was originally published in 1844 as an essay, intended to be an introduction to a larger work on Hegel. Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* was published in 1849. The connection between these two works are likely not direct. Thoreau was trained in the German language, but there is no evidence that Thoreau read Marx, but there is evidence of many transcendentalists reading Kant. As discussed earlier, the American transcendentalists of the 19th century were in general not well-read in German idealism, with the exception of Kant. The combination of inaccessibility to these texts and the preoccupation with Romanticism, for example, meant that the works of Hegel and others in the German idealism tradition were quite unrepresented in standard transcendentalist scholarship, essays, and the like. But there may be an exception for Thoreau. His German training may have set him apart from his contemporary transcendentalists on the influence of German idealism and Marxism, especially in its nascent form. The problem, however, is that Thoreau was rarely in any academic position. It is, thus, difficult to identify and trace the origins of his thoughts. Thoreau occasionally refers to the origins of his ideas in his works, but it is more common for him to apply ideas from prominent thinkers directly and with no attribution. This characteristic complements Thoreau's stream of thought writing style, especially present in his nature works. It is as if Thoreau is constantly applying Western intellectual tradition alongside the Indian Vedas spiritual tradition

through his transcendentalism lens, with no academic rigor and without any express recall of the sources of the intellectual tradition. Thus, it is the task, here, to identify reflections or representations of particular ideologies in Thoreau's works, as he has not done this for us.

In determining the relations between transcendentalism, Marxism, and Thoreau's works, it is important to identify the areas of ideology overlap, as such areas may serve as the reflections or representations of these ideologies in Thoreau's works. In comparing Marxism in its refined form, such as it is in *Das Kapital*, there are too many points of distinction. Again returning to Hegelian dialectics, the deeper that one goes with a thought, the more complex the thought becomes, with such complexity ultimately resulting in numerous contradictions with other accepted thought. The point of entry into intellectual thought for Marx was not *Das Kapital* or even the *Communist Manifesto*. Rather, Marx and other Young Hegelians began developing a materialistic view of the world in which material conditions and history were major factors in political and social change. It is from his core set of ideas, this nascent, raw form of Marxism, that the clearest parallels between Marxism and Thoreau's political writings can be drawn.

Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right is the best written representation of this early form of Marxism. Marx had not yet developed his more detailed political thoughts, but had already made great progress on historical materialism. Likewise, this work is highly reflective of the thoughts of the Young Hegelians. The focus of Marx in this work is how the material world explained the formation of governments and ideas. Of course, Marx argues that ideas may impact

governments, but only given such ideas resulted from a specific set of materialistic circumstances.

Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* begins with a chapter on commerce, which most closely parallels early Marxist thought. Thoreau writes, "Trade and commerce, if they were not made of india-rubber, would never manage to bounce over the obstacles which legislators are continually putting in their way; and, if one were to judge these men wholly by the effects of their actions and not partly by their intentions, they would deserve to be classed and punished with those mischievous persons who put obstructions on the railroads" (Thoreau 17). Thoreau, like Marx, holds that historical conditions and the establishment of *status quo* conservative politics allow for the reification of policies that benefit the well-off and, at other times, the majority over minority classes. Thoreau writes in *Civil Disobedience*, "After all, the practical reason why, when the power is once in the hands of the people, a majority are permitted, and for a long period continue, to rule is not because they are most likely to be in the right, nor because this seems fairest to the minority, but because they are physically the strongest. But a government in which the majority rule in all cases cannot be based on justice, even as far as men understand it" (Thoreau 17). Thoreau argues that a solution to this sort of corruption and unjust show of force can be overcome through the recognition of a moral conscience. In fact, Thoreau argues that under unjust governments the majority of society will bend to the will of the government, against their own consciences and against their own wills. Marx, similarly, recognizes that many in society will act against their own consciences and wills. For Marx, however, the solution is not a mere recognition of such conscience and a willingness to stand up against

government, but the collectivization of society against the ruling powers. This distinction is slight, as Thoreau would surely recognize that one man standing up against the government in favor of his or her own conscience is not impactful, while the collectivization of people in this manner would be.

The Marxist position on religion, as explained earlier, is one of mistrust and viewing religion as providing illusory promises. In itself, this condemnation of religion would seem to be damning to the transcendentalist position. After all, the transcendentalists are in favor of religion. However, Marx is speaking in historical terms. Likewise, Marx never comments on any sort of transcendentalist religion, especially not one that breaks from Christian tradition. In investigating the historical importance of religion, Marx argues that religion serves to deny many in society the opportunity to define meaning in their own lives. Rather, religions, such as Christianity, fills in this meaning for individuals. In *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx writes:

The foundations of irreligious criticisms are: *Man creates religion*, religion does not create man. Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. But *man* is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is *the world of man* – state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an *inverted consciousness of the world*, because they are an *inverted world*. Religion is a general theory of our world, its encyclopedic compendiums, its logic in some popular form, its spiritual point of honor, its enthusiasm, its moral sanctioning, its sober complement, and its universal basis of consolations and justifications. It is the *fantastical realization* of

human essence for the reason that the *human essence* has not acquired any true and meaningful reality. The struggle against religion is, thus, indirectly the struggle *against this world* whose spiritual sense is religion. (Marx and Arnold 5)

In the last line above, Marx seems to favor a sort of transcendentalist religion. Specifically, Marx identifies the prospect for a purely spiritual religion, one separated from the material bounds of Christianity, for example. After all, Marx seems to be accepting any sort of spiritual components of religious, but rejecting all physical components or, more accurately, all components that connect spirituality with the material world. An interesting aspect of this sort of Marxist argument is his materialism. Marx views the world through a materialistic lens, meaning that Marx views all ideas as manifesting from materialism. Thus, Marx holds that people created religion, not God created people. But for Marx, the spirituality can be kept separate from the material. After all, those who engage in purely spiritual activities are doing so on their own time and, while they may be physically expressing their religion, such spirituality does not have nearly the impact that Catholicism or Calvinism does, for example. Given this, it seems that Marx may have few qualms with transcendentalism and Unitarianism.

From a historical context, Marx would likely argue that religions have generally negative impacts on society. That is, Marx would hold that the materialistic effect of religion on society is one that deters people from true happiness. Moreover, Marx holds that in capitalist societies, religion serves to create superstructures that aim at controlling the working class. Thus, the criticism that Marx levies on religion is one that is based on religion as a corrupting force.

Similarly, the transcendentalists tend to view orthodox religions as being particularly corruptive or bad for society. For example, transcendentalists tend to argue that religions such as Calvinism tend to promote governments that are contrary to the public good. Thoreau certainly recognizes that religious influence on governments tends to be negative. Specifically, Thoreau found that religions tend to corrupt societies, even if it is the case that societies also corrupt religions. In this way, Thoreau and many other transcendentalists find fault with modern religions and their influences on societies.

The problem, for transcendentalists, especially when viewed in light of Marxism and historical materialism in general, is actual application and appreciation of history to prescriptive claims. Marx was quick to lump religion in with other superstructures to help explain the maintained control of the upper-class over the working class. But the transcendentalists are less inclined to even consider the role of history in any prescriptive arguments. After all, it is a focal point of the transcendentalist movement to stand against historicism and to explain phenomenon through intuition. For the transcendentalist, history is not a primary factor for explaining society or changes to society. Thoreau's political essays are quite contrary to this position, however, as Thoreau frequently refers to the historical conditions in which a society formed. From this perspective, then, Thoreau is a bit of an outlier in the transcendentalist tradition. This may be because Thoreau is much more willing than the typical transcendentalist to venture outside of intuitive and introspective claims, seeking to provide prescriptive accounts for governmental decisions.

Nonetheless, it must be recognized that Marx views all forms of religion as disruptive of the human pursuit of happiness. Marx writes, “The abolition of religion as an illusion of happiness for people is the demand for any sort of *real* happiness. To call on these people to give up the illusions about their current conditions is to call on them to sacrifice the condition that requires such illusions. Thus, the criticism of religion is of religious in an embryonic stage and the, the criticism of the valley of tears of which religion serves as the halo” (Marx). It seems that there are no exceptions to Marx’s critique of religion. That is, it seems unlikely that Marx would carve out any exception to this critique. The religious experiences of Unitarians and transcendentalists may qualify for many of Marx’s critiques. The question, now, is whether the religious experiences of transcendentalists would be viewed as illusory. The emphasis on intuition would not seem to reconcile transcendentalism with Marx’s criticism of religion.

Nonetheless, there are certain qualities of Marx’s criticism that may suggest that the sort of religious experiences that serve as the aims of transcendentalism religious experiences. The direction of Marx’s criticism is aimed at religion as being part of a deceptive system. That is, the major problem with religion, according to Marx, is that it leads individuals, especially the lower class, away from truth and towards a system of oppression and exploitation. Marx goes on, “Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers on the chain not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower. The criticism of religion disillusion man, so that he will think, act, and fashion his reality like a man who has discarded his illusions and regained his senses, so that he will move around himself as his own true Sun.

Religion is only the illusory Sun which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve around himself' (Marx). This suggests that religious institutions are the sources of illusion and that such illusions serve to deceive society. Religion, Marx argues, tends to present itself as a justification of certain actions and, more notably, as a power beyond that of human comprehension or even worthy of human acceptance. In reality, however, religion is the creation of humans to serve the purposes of particular humans.

Applying this criticism to the religious experiences under transcendentalism and Unitarianism more specifically, means identifying the purposes of religious illusion. However, transcendentalism strips down religion to the point that it becomes a reflection of human experience and intuition. Christian dogma and systematic beliefs are abandoned in favor of individualistic interpretations and intuition-led intellectual descriptions of religious experience. While many transcendentalists borrow certain aspects from other religions, dogma is never embraced. This sort of skeptical, Romantic approach to religion in some ways avoids many of Marx's criticism. Nonetheless, the perceived religious experiences of many transcendentalists would still be viewed under Marxism as illusory, even if it is unclear what purposes such illusions serve. For Marx, they likely do serve some purpose though. After all, the intellectual bases on which transcendentalism was formed are the very sorts of philosophies and ideologies that Marx refers to as supporting structures for certain societal and organizational structures.

Much has been stated, thus far, on the Marxist criticism of religion and its applicability to transcendentalism religious experience. But, there are two sects of transcendentalism: one focused on metaphysical experiences and the other on

religious experiences. Overlap between the two is common. Thoreau may be considered more focused on metaphysical experiences, but does connect his experiences to some version of Unitarian spirituality. The question, then, becomes to what degree are Marxist religious criticisms applicable to Thoreau's writings, especially his experiences described in *Walden*. The distinction between metaphysical and religious experiences may not be so important, however. If Marxism insists on explaining religious experiences as having particular purposes that are likely to serve those already in power, then the same can be said of the metaphysical experiences. Nonetheless, this seems somewhat less applicable. The metaphysical experiences of the transcendentalists follow along the lines of Kantianism and the pursuit for a higher order of knowledge and understanding. Such efforts likely serve no social or state purpose. Therefore, the Marxism critique of religion as illusory and serving the interests of those in power is only partially applicable to Thoreau.

Marx goes on to discuss another religious critique, one based on a historical understanding of Christianity, especially in Europe. Marx argues that history serves to reify institutions, both those that have existed and those that currently exist. Marx states, "It is, therefore, the *goal of history*, once the alternative *world of truth* has vanished, to establish the *truth of the actual world*. It is the immediate *goal of philosophy*, which is considered to be in the service of history, to uncover self-estrangement in all *unholy forms* once these *holy forms* of human self-estrangement are uncovered. Thus, the criticism of Heaven turns into the criticism of Earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law*, and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*" (Marx). Here, Marx is laying out the beginnings of an

argument that shows how religion is intertwined among what he would later call the superstructures that direct the masses. From history comes the sort of theology that serves as the basis for law. By imbuing religious elements into law and the formation of a government, as is the case in the U.S., these institutions (or superstructures) become more solidified. Their origins, Marx argues, are masked behind the veil of religion and their impacts become greater and more entrenched.

Marx gives the example of Germany to demonstrate the impact of such institutions on the people and governments. Marx writes, "Indeed, the German history has prided itself on having ventured down a trail that no other nation in the entirety of history has ever travelled down before, or will ever travel down again. We have thus shared the restoration of those modern nations of history without ever sharing revolutions" (Marx). Marx continues, "We have been restored, first of all, because other nations have dared being these revolutions, and, next, because others have suffered counterrevolutions; on one hand, because their masters have been afraid, and, on the other hand, because they were unafraid. With shepherds at the forefront, we only one time kept company with freedom, on the day of its confinement" (Marx). For Marx, even the modern German state (in Marx's time) has had institutions become entrenched, stopping revolutions and counterrevolutions by pointing to history. History for Germany, then, serves to maintain and solidify the status quo.

Religious history, in particular, is employed, Marx argues, to defend and maintain institutions. Religious history establishes religious tradition. Religious tradition is used to establish religious doctrine. Translations and interpretations of the Bible, for example, depend on historical accounts, Marx argues. In developing

an understanding of how the current state of Germany and other states in modern Europe came about, including the details of their formation and the institutions and classes contained within, Marx argues that religious history has had many strong effects. Marx writes:

A school of thought that has served to legitimize the infamy of with that of the infamy of yesterday, and a school that has stigmatized every plea from a serf against the whip as mere rebellion once the whip has aged a bit and acquired the inherited significance and history; a school in which history shows us nothing but its posterior, as did that God of the Israelites to His servant Moses; this *historical school of law* – the school that would have invented German history were it not for the invention of that history. A Shylock, albeit a cringing Shylock, who swears by a bond, a historical bond at that, and its Christian-Germanic bond, for each pound of flesh that is cut from the heart of the masses. (Marx)

Here, Marx connects Christian history and tradition to the institutions of the German state. The serfs of the past have become the working class of the present. The industrialization of the U.S. and Europe advanced all interests, but none so much as the upper-class. It is at this point that Marx recognizes the codification of these historical traditions and norms in the codes of law. It was insufficient for states such as Germany to remain bound by monarchical edict. The advancement of the industrial state requires transformation, but such transformation preserves and in many ways restored the religious traditions that have helped to erect and bring to life the superstructures that are required to maintain classes.

Marx's application of history in his sociopolitical analysis follows closely along the lines of the sort of historical analysis that transcendentalists rallied against. Yet, this is the case of Marx attributing many of the problems in modern society to the maintenance of institutions (or superstructures) that serve to promote inequality and class conflict. Thoreau does not avoid such historical analysis altogether. In fact, Thoreau is more than willing to engage in historical analysis of the Christian tradition, as an explanation of the emergence of the moral condemnation of slavery. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that Marx remains much more committed to historical analysis than Thoreau, who, as the transcendentalist movement would suggest, values experience and intuition over historical analysis.

Continuing his exploration of the emergence of the German state in its modern form, Marx writes, "Good-natured enthusiasts, or German-maniacs through extraction and freethinkers by reflection, on the contrary, seek a history of freedom beyond the German history of the ancient Teutonic forests. Yet, what difference exists between any history of our freedom and a history of that of the boar, if it can only be found in the woods? After all, it is now common knowledge that the woods echo back what you have just shouted into it, thus providing peace in the ancient Teutonic forests" (Marx). The woods that Marx is referring to represent the old Germanic traditions, from which various customs, cultural norms, and religious doctrine emerged. Understanding the emergence of these historical traditions is important for Marx, given that the decisions on which traditions that the German people and state would follow largely shape the emergence of institutions in Germany. In many ways, it can be said that these traditions were selected by those in

power. Marx would hold some form of this argument, but emphasize the emergence of capitalism in Europe and Germany in particular.

But not everything in Marx's historical accounts fit so neatly. In fact, many of the intellectual movements were difficult to explain by Marx. Perhaps it was simply that he did not have enough information about the material world in which these movements developed. Marx writes, "On the other hand, the current German regime is a modern anachronism, a flagrant contradiction of generally recognized axioms, the nothingness of the ancient regime exhibited to the world, only imagines that it believes in itself and demands the world must consider the same thing. If it believed in its very own essence, would it even attempt to hide the essence under any resemblance of an alien essence and seek refuge in any sort of hypocrisy or sophism?" (Marx). The question now turns to how Marx would have attempted to explain transcendentalism. It seems, given Marx's reliance on history and material explanations, that Marx would attempt to frame the movements as a countermovement, as a resistance movement. Yet, this would only partially explain the emergence of American transcendentalism in the 20th century. Perhaps Marx could turn to the prevailing problems with Christianity and the extreme class conflict, which can be viewed as a major cause of the American Civil War.

Marx and Thoreau each recognized the disparate nature of modern governments. For Marx, this was largely the result of no clear unifying ideology or movement. The Christian Church had split up several times, as had the emerging ideologies of the 17th and 18th centuries. For Thoreau, it was only nature that governments would grow increasingly complex as populations grew. After all, the various perspective and different interpretations of the material world would surely

form many different ideas, many of which would be contradictory. Marx states, “The modern ancient regime is rather only the comedy of a world order the true heroes of which are long dead. History is detailed and goes through several phases when carrying an old form to the grave. The last of these phases include a world historical form as its comedy” (Marx). Marx later states, “The gods of Ancient Greece, already tragically wounded to death in Aeschylus’s tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, had to die again in a comic death in Lucian’s Dialogues. But why this course of history? In order for humanity to part with its past amicably. Such amicable historical destiny is what is vindicated for the political authorities of modern Germany” (Marx). These legends served as important lessons for Thoreau, but for Marx, they were explanations. The legends, for Marx, did not simply arise out of a need for moral explanations and rules, but out of material conditions. In fact, even the differences in the ways that states recognized and applied myth and legends said something about the conditions in which those states developed.

Even though Marx’s Critique is an early entry into Marxism, the importance of industry comes of quickly. Marx writes, “Meanwhile, once the modern sociopolitical reality is subject to criticism, once criticism rose to particularly human problems, it finds itself outside of the modern German status quo, or else it would have reached out for its object below the object. For example, the relation of industry, of the world of wealth in general, to the political world is one of the significant problems of modern times. In what form has this problem started to engage the attention of the modern German? In the form of protective duties, of the prohibitive system, of national economy” (Marx). With the industrial revolution, came a number of changes, many of which seemed reasonable at the

time, but ended up being different versions of antiquated institutions of control.

Marx goes on:

Marx, here, indicates the persistence of certain traditions and historical realities that get passed down from government to government even if they lost their practical value long ago. For Marx, these vestigial institutions allow for further inequalities to emerge and for wealth to accumulate further. Marx goes on to discuss the variance in the development of intellectual thought. This would suggest that material conditions dictate such development. Marx states, “If, thus, the entire German development does not exceed the current German political development, a German could, at the very most, have a share in the current problems that the Russian empire has. But, when the separate individual is not bound by the limitations of the nation, the nation as a whole is still less liberated by the liberation of one individual. The fact that Greece had Scythians among its philosophers did not help the Scythians to make a single step towards any sort of Greek culture” (Marx). The emergence of intellectual thought in different parts of the world rarely leads to a consensus, Marx would argue.

Marx continues his discussion of the German state by identifying those institutions or superstructures that have long served as bolstering mechanisms for those in power. The German philosophy of the right and of the state are the only German histories which are in part with the official modern present. The German state must, then, join this, with its dream-like history, to the current conditions and be subject to criticism not only the existing conditions, but simultaneously their abstract continuances. Such a future cannot be limited either to an immediate negation of its actual conditions of both state and right, or to the

current implementation of the ideal state and appropriate conditions, for it has the immediate negative of its actual conditions in such ideal conditions, and it has almost outlived the current implementation of the ideal conditions in the contemplation of adjacent states. Therefore, it is with good reason that the practical political party in Germany demands the negation of philosophy.

Here, he is suggesting that there are times in which the prevailing intellectual thought, or philosophy must be rejected for the advancement of new types of thought. The materialistic failure of the previous thought demands this in certain cases, Marx would argue. Marx goes on, "In the current struggle, only the critical struggle of philosophy against the German world was realized; it did not give a single thought to the fact that philosophy up to the present itself belongs to the world and is its completion, albeit an ideal one" (Marx). Marx goes on to state, "Critical towards its counterpart, it was not critical of itself when, proceeding from the premises of philosophy, it either halted at the results given by philosophy or passed off demands and results from elsewhere as immediate demands and the results of philosophy" and then Marx continues, "though these, provided they are just, can be realized only by the negation of philosophy up till now, of philosophy as such. We have reserved ourselves the right to a more detailed description of this: it thought it could make philosophy a discernible reality without actually abolishing it" (Marx). Philosophy, or intellectual discourse and history, serves as one of the institutions on which those in power can evoke certain principles and rules to keep them in power. This, of course, is not a direct criticism of all philosopher, but instead as a criticism of a specific strain of philosophical thought. Marx may have in mind the sort of scholasticism that helped to maintain the monarchical feudalist

political and economic structures in Europe during the Middle Ages. Residual philosophical and theological principles and rules helped to solidify practices that remained even during Marx's time.

During the Middle Ages, theology and philosophy were largely inseparable. It took a Cartesian revolution to separate the two, as philosophy outside of theological contexts (and even science in a rudimentary form) was often disallowed by those in power. Naturally, the same arguments against religion that Marx waged early on can be waged against theology and philosophy, as they serve many of the same purposes. But Marx pinpoints one of his religious critiques at Protestantism in Germany during the 18th and 19th centuries. Marx argues, "If Protestantism is not the real solution to the problem, it is at least the real setting of it. It is no longer a case of the common man's struggle against the priest outside of himself but of his struggle against the priest inside of himself, or his priestly nature. And if the Protestant transformation of the German layman into priests that have been emancipated under the lay popes, the princes, with the whole of the priestly groups, the privileged and philistines, the philosophical transformations of the priestly Germans into men will free the people" (Marx). This is a direct shot at the religious institutions that comprised Protestantism, just as similar arguments had been thrust on Catholicism by Martin Luther and other reformists.

Marx goes on to identify a bridge that has served to cover any gaps between his identified superstructures. After all, many churches and Christian doctrine throughout Europe have emerged only to fade away, yet inequality remains and the accumulation of wealth persists, much like it did after the fall of feudalism. For Marx, even the secularization of society cannot stop the continued wealth inequality.

Marx writes, “Yet, secularization will not halt at the seizure of church property set in motion primarily by the hypocritical Prussians any more than freedom stops at the princes. The Peasant War, the most radical part of German history, came upon grief because of theology” (Marx). Marx’s historical analysis, here, reflects his argument that there will always be more attempts to establish the sorts of superstructures that maintain power for certain peoples. Marx continues his critique of religion and theology in particular by focusing on the philosophical components of theology: “Now, when theology has come upon grief, the most restrained fact of German history, which is our status quo, will be dismantled against philosophy. On the eve of the Reformation, the official German state was the most unconditional slave of the Roman state. On the eve of this revolution, it was the unconditional slave of less than Rome, of Prussia and Austria, of state junk and philistines” (Marx). Here, Marx holds firm in his conviction of the multitude of these superstructures, which often intertwine. Without the targeted mobilization of the masses, the sort of required reform will not occur.

Marx argued that “No class of civil society had a major role without an arousal of the moment of enthusiasm in itself and of the masses, a moment in which it associates and merges into society in general, becomes confused and is viewed and recognized as its representative, a time in which its claims and rights are rightfully the claims and rights of the society itself, a moment that is truly the social head and social heart” (Marx). This does well to describe Thoreau’s recognition of the mobilization of the North against slavery. The individual states and communities in the North banded together to make slavery illegal, despite the U.S. government’s inability to pass abolitionist legislation. As Marx may have predicted, the

dependence of the Southern economy on slavery, especially under a capitalist system, meant that the South would be very resistant to the recognition of these rights of all men. This materialistic explanation suggests that both the North and the South had the opportunity to realize that change was inevitable. The Southern resistance does not necessarily suggest that there was not such realization. As Thoreau argues, the decision was simply easier for the North. There were reasons for some Northerners to want to continue the institution of slavery, but they were outvoted and their ideas not nearly strong enough to overcome the strong moral sentiments behind the abolitionist movement in the North.

Parallels between how Thoreau and Marx viewed classes and institutions are clear. Thoreau, like Marx, identified many institutions as being highly conducive to poor societal conditions and to immoral behavior. Slavery may benefit a few, but as an immoral practice, Thoreau would argue, it should not stand. As mentioned above, Thoreau often appealed to a sort of social conscience, which he thought guided social behavior and should have guided government behavior. Similarly, Marx identified certain social moral positions that *ought* to have determined social and political reform. Marx writes, “Only in the name of general rights of society can any specific class justify for itself a very general domination. For the sake of any emancipatory position, and thus for the political exploitation of any section of society in the interests of its own section, rebellious energy and spiritual introspection alone are insufficient” (Marx). Marx goes on:

For the revolution of a nation, and the emancipation of any specific class of civil society to accord, for one estate to be acknowledged as the domain of the whole society, all the flaws of society must conversely be concentrated in

other classes, a particular estate must be that estate of the general stumbling block, the incorporation of any general limitation, a particular social sphere must be recognized as a notorious crime of the entirety of society, so that emancipation from this sphere appears as general self liberation. For one estate to be par excellence the estate of liberation, another estate must conversely be the obvious estate of oppression. The negative general significance of the French nobles and the French clergymen determined the positive general significance of the nearest neighboring and opposed class of the bourgeoisie. (Marx)

Here Marx identifies not only a general social moral position, one that is expected, in some sense, to guide the long-term changes made to society, but also the inefficacy of this position in enacting actual societal and political change. The parallels between Marx and Thoreau on this issue are striking. Both hold that a social moral force pushes society in certain directions, but that inequality and other forms of social injustice and remain. They both argue that major change must come from the mobilization of the masses. Marx argues:

The only emancipation of Germany that is actually possible is emancipation from the viewpoint of that theory which declares men to be the supreme being for men. Germany can emancipate itself from the Middle Ages only if it emancipates itself simultaneously from the semi-victories across the Middle Ages. In Germany, no form of captivity can be fragmented without breaking all forms of captivity. Germany, which has been renowned for its thoroughness, cannot make a revolution unless it is a deep one. The emancipation of the German is the emancipation of man. The forefront

of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart is the proletariat. Philosophy may not realize itself without the transcendence of the proletariat, and the proletariat may not transcend itself without the realization of philosophy. When all the inner conditions are met, then the day of the German resurrection will be foreshadowed by the crowing of the rooster of Gaul.

Even the application of philosophy and intellectual discourse in uncorrupted forms requires the rise of the masses in revolt against the dominating classes across all societies, even though Thoreau identifies the U.S. and Marx Germany specifically.

In the many ways Thoreau seems to be reflecting Marxist thought, the nexus may very well be centered on Rousseau's political philosophy. They each may have adapted many of Rousseau's arguments for their own purposes, but it is in a shared context that their works turn out to be so similar. In the formation of Marxism as an ideology during the life of Marxism and in interpreting Marxism decades later, many of Thoreau's positions seem to directly reflect Marxist lines of thinking.

The influence of Hegel is clear in both Marxism and Thoreau's works. But Hegel's influence on Thoreau is primary through transcendentalism, namely the metaphysical and epistemological positions adopted by the transcendentalist movement. The close affinity of Marx with Thoreau, on the other hand, is primarily on political matters. Hegel argued that political realities require a historical understanding (Tunick). That is, understanding political decisions requires understanding the sociopolitical histories behind such decisions, a position that Marx would adopt in some form. Marx held a dialectical interpretation of history and, therefore, viewed social reform as resulting from the sort of dialectic approach set forth by Hegel (Balibar 185). Of course, Marx had a materialistic view of the

world and, thus, did not adopt Hegel's idealism. Even if Hegel serves as the nexus and point of reconciliation for Marxism and transcendentalism in Thoreau's works, Marx is the more influential source for Thoreau on political matters.

Contradiction between Transcendentalism and Marxism

As Hegel writes in *The Science of Logic*, "Everything is inherently contradictory," and then "It shows an excessive tenderness for the world to remove contradiction from it and then to transfer the contradiction to reason, where it is allowed to remain unresolved" (Hegel 12, 34). The first point of contradiction between transcendentalism and Marxism concerns the dichotomous relationship between idealism and materialism. The two are really not reconcilable, at least not in the forms presented by Marx and Hegel. After all, Marx deliberately rejected Hegelian idealism in favor of materialism. Transcendentalism is intended to embrace the sort of Hegelian or Kantian idealism that shapes religious thought in particular ways, separating the historical accounts and Christian dogma from more idealistic accounts of religious that are not reliant on such dogma. Based on the examination of Marx's critique of Hegel and Thoreau's political writing

The second point of contradiction arises naturally from the first point and is on the historicism of Marx and the counter-historicism position adopted by the transcendentalists. It is not the case that transcendentalists rejected any role of history in the formation of thought. Rather, the transcendentalists sought to discover, primarily through introspection and intuition, the sort of natural universals described by Hegel and other human features (i.e., features of the mind-material connection). Thoreau undoubtedly applies the transcendentalist approach in his nature writings. In *Walden*, for example, Thoreau is most concerned with introspective and intuitive

reflections. From introspection and intuition, then, Thoreau sought to discover things about himself and the natural world. But in his political writings, especially *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau is more than willing to consider and apply the historical conditions surrounding the formation, developing, and reformation of government and public policies. In fact, Thoreau, as shown earlier, stresses many of the historical conditions when discussing issues such as slavery.

American transcendentalism is distinct from other forms of transcendentalism and from German idealism (Goodman). While many of the American transcendentalists explored the works of various thinkers, Thoreau was particularly influenced by the Indian Vedas, especially in relation to the spiritual and religious development of the other transcendentalists. Thoreau's Indian Vedas influences were primarily spiritual, although the political elements did seep into Thoreau's writings (Bhatnagar 52). This made Thoreau's writings and religious experiences quite distinct from the others. Thoreau's accounts that are most influenced by the emerging transcendentalist ideology are largely descriptive. Most notably, *Walden*, is focused on explaining to readers the value of nature and how Thoreau has appreciated nature. Thoreau includes prescriptive elements in this work, but focused much more heavily on his own experiences and trying to describe these experiences in ways that readers could understand. These nature writings include large descriptions of nature, all of which come through Thoreau's transcendentalist lens. In contrast, Thoreau's political writings feature many more prescriptive accounts. Thoreau is arguing in favor of a position, generally an abolitionist position or a justification of civil disobedience, in these political works. There are some descriptions in these works, but generally only as a means to bolster Thoreau's

political positions. This is a point of distinction between these two types of works. Given that the goal of the current work is to argue in favor of Thoreau's synthesis of Marxism and transcendentalism, it may be tempting to simply separate the influences of the two ideologies between Thoreau's political essays and his nature writings. But this is untenable. There are traces of Marxism in Thoreau's nature writings. There is also a strong transcendentalism influence in Thoreau's political essays.

In general, Thoreau's works are highly reflective of the transcendentalism movement. This is especially present in his nature writings. Thoreau has a rather wide selection of works, but was particularly focused on forward-thinking political positions and deeply introspective nature expositions. This includes his works *Civil Disobedience* and *Walden*, the former of which is a brief political treatise and the latter is a deep exploration into nature. Transcendentalism is considered an early 18th century philosophical movement that emerged from Romantic ideas that emerged in Europe and especially Germany. Many attribute the idea of transcendence as part of Kantian philosophy and German idealism specifically. German romanticism and idealism served, collectively, as a sort of resistance to leading Biblical interpretations, especially certain versions of Protestantism. Transcendentalism focuses on subjectivity over objectivity, with particular attention paid to the experiences that contribute to phenomena. There are a number of influential works in the transcendentalist tradition, primarily from Thoreau and Emerson. Transcendentalism may be viewed, specifically, as the resistance against Christian doctrine. The transcendentalist movement represents the acceptance of human intellectual progress against religious dogmatism. The transcendentalist movement

is considered a grouping of Western intellectual traditions that had emerged in Christian religion traditions. The Transcendentalist movement adopted Lockean ideas on freedom and empiricism, by which individual experiences were invaluable in themselves. The transcendentalist movement is considered a particularly liberal one because of the individuality and freedom that is emphasized in the movement. Thoreau's works were likely most influenced by the transcendentalist movement. From his introspective natural writings, to his pointed political writings, Thoreau did not embrace religious dogma, but was intensely interested and focused on a metaphysical, intuitive, and personal religion.

In many ways, Thoreau developed his own version of transcendentalism. This is rather typical of the transcendentalism movement, which has a myriad of positions. In fact, the idea of transcendentalism, as an intellectual and religious movement, was developed after its core tenets had been well-established. In understanding Thoreau's variation of transcendentalism or at least the influence of transcendentalism on Thoreau, it is important to examine the specific influences of transcendentalism on Thoreau and the ways that Thoreau, himself, was responsive to those intellectual and religious movements that resulted in the transcendentalist response. Transcendentalism is largely an intellectual, religious response to Calvinism, empiricism, and historicism. In fact, it is often argued that transcendentalism arose in New England in as a direct response to the dogmatic aspects of the Calvinist doctrine. Transcendentalists challenged the Calvinist notion of inescapable human depravity. In dogmatic Calvinism, the chosen ones are destined for heaven. This suggests that human actions have no truly divine consequences. For Calvinists, the promise of an afterlife in heaven makes up for the

suffering on earth. Yet, the Calvinist doctrine can be seen as quite contradictory. Even so, Calvinists hold that this individual will follow the Christian moral code, effectively obeying God, because the individual is chosen. This suggests that the individual cannot recognize that he or she is chosen, given that this would mean that the person would not obey God. The argument becomes circular. This sort of contradiction is not easily reconcilable, even under Hegelian dialectics. Such an argument is viewed by antagonists as not providing any sort of justification, moral or religious, for Calvinists viewing humanity as naturally, inherently, and inescapably depraved. Rejection of American Puritanism and other religious traditions had further spurred skepticism of religious dogmatic principles. This trend in religious skepticism is present in Thoreau's work, especially his works on nature. In fact, the many religious experiences that are shared in works such as *Walden* indicate no commitment to any sort of religious dogma.

An extension of the transcendentalism movement, the transcendentalist Unitarians were a deeply religious group focused on using intuition and introspection rather than religious doctrine. Thoreau was among the most famous transcendentalist Unitarians. The intellectual components of the transcendentalist movement meant that traditional and dogmatic Christian doctrine, such as the trinity were to be rejected. The strongly experiential nature of many of the transcendentalist formulation of transcendentalism and the reasons behind this movement meant that members of the movement, including Thoreau and Emerson, were in close contact and shared intellectual ideas. Transcendentalism is a social intellectual movement, as would be suggesting by the nature of transcendentalism as a *movement*. Although rejecting such history and orthodoxy as strict and ever-binding to Christian faith fits

the intentions of transcendentalists, it would seem that transcendentalists could view these accounts as the results of experiences. In other words, even if Christian history was formed on the bases of inaccuracies, contradictions, and deception, there are aspects of this history that were formed from experience. Emerson and Thoreau wrote many experiential writings that reinterpreted Christian doctrine, especially through the reinterpretation of Biblical text. These aspects of Thoreau's religious experiences are important for understanding transcendentalism and the context for Thoreau's writings. The challenge to Christian orthodoxy is crucial to Thoreau's nature writings, but is less important for understanding his political works.

The philosophical foundations of transcendentalism may be considered a scientific, intuitive idealism (i.e., German idealism) and skepticism. The skeptical nature of transcendentalism centralizes the theory on science, rather than dogma. It would seem, then that Hume's skepticism played a major role in the development of transcendentalism. Hume firmly denounced any religious doctrine based on miracles or supernatural events, primarily because individuals, he argued, should not trust these account that directly contradicted their experiences. Similarly, Hume held that the existence of God could never be proven with any significant level of certainty (and thus could be rejected outright). Thoreau seemed to embrace Humean skepticism or at least a version of skepticism that rejected anything being scientific or intuitive notions. Based on such a skepticism, the questioning of many of the Calvinist doctrines was natural. The orthodox doctrine was established during a time of less scientific progress and a much briefer history of societies and human interactions. Throughout history, science progressed quickly, especially during the centuries leading up to the transcendentalist movement. If many of the orthodox

Christian notions were formed from scientific progress, while intellectual histories were better developed, then it follows that the doctrine would have been very different. The role of history in the development of the religious aspects of Thoreau's type of transcendentalism.

One of the most important ideas in the transcendentalist movement is the idea that the Bible is an artifact, instead of any product of divine revelations. This idea follows closely with transcendentalist arguments against Historical Christianity. In addition, Biblical translations and Christian doctrine relied heavily on translations that were questioned by transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau. This went well beyond questioning, in contrast, because this doctrine could be rejected on skeptical grounds. The rejection of orthodox Christian doctrine and Historical Christianity, or an over-reliance on history as an explanation of Christianity and Christian dogma especially, was intended as a kind of replacement. Yet, experience served as the primary source of religious experience for Thoreau and other transcendentalists.

A strong connection can be drawn between the works of the transcendentalist Hedge. Hedge was highly significant in the development of transcendentalist ideas, especially those that arose from Kantian metaphysics and German idealism. The deeply metaphysical nature of this transcendentalist line of development was particularly influential for those thinkers, such as Thoreau, who focused on a very metaphysical religion. Virtually all transcendentalists sought out and had religious experiences, but only some of these thinkers were focused on deeper metaphysical meanings than even the Bible could explain. Hedge set out to adapt a number of Kantian ideas to transcendentalism as the movement emerged in New England in the

18th century. Specifically, Hedge introduced the idea of *a priori* knowledge to transcendentalism. The deep skepticism that formed as one of the bases of transcendentalism contributed to the possibility of the *a priori*. This does not, of course, dissuade from the extremely experiential approaches taken to religion taken by Thoreau and other transcendentalists. Rather, this possibility provided for explanations of variation between such religious and metaphysical experiences. Likewise, the application of the notion of *a priori* knowledge served as an explanation of the uniqueness of the human experience. This is not to say that all transcendentalists were Kantian, though many transcendentalists were very fast to adapt Kantian principles and other German idealist to the movement.

Thoreau's religious connection with nature is most directly influenced by the transcendentalist movement, but is also influenced by the Indian Vedas tradition. The development of transcendentalism can be traced to the notion that piety is inherently applicable to nature. That is, it is not only that there are certain experiential aspects of religion that make it universally applicable, but that there is also a sort of virtue in certain natural religious experiences. Rational operations provide the grounds to overcome or refute skepticism. Thus, while Humean skepticism remains an important aspect of transcendentalist thought, solving such skepticism and identifying those areas that such skepticism fails to refute. For many transcendentalists including Thoreau, skepticism had a wide spread impact on knowledge and the societal understanding of knowledge. A mere challenge to knowledge was insufficient; the sources of knowledge should be traced, as Descartes attempted to do. The transcendentalists followed most closely to the Kantian epistemological approach, by which intuition plays a major role in influencing how

individuals experience the world. This does not suggest that knowledge could not be achieved through sufficient experience and through sufficient interaction with the material world. Rather, Kant met skeptical claims with an alternative source of knowledge, a more experiential source, as the transcendentalists drew from. Skepticism provides a refutation of Christian dogma as well as of the Historical Christianity that lacks consistency with the intellectual movement of the time.

Historical Christianity contradicted not only many ideas of the transcendentalist intellectual movement, but also with many of the experiences had by transcendentalists, including Thoreau and Emerson. The sort of transcendentalist movement that Thoreau embraced included a deep exploration of the underlying causes of human experience and what makes *human* experiences unique. The unique qualities of human experience and the ability of humans to explicate such experience through communication were interesting to transcendentalists. Inward reflection and introspection could not achieve any sort of existential transcendence. Rather, the movement was intended to be able to explain how human experience and intellectual thought could move beyond the limits of traditional doctrine and dogma. In fact, religious experiences were not to be confined to Christian doctrine, opening up an entirely new dimension of religion: the phenomenological and metaphysical religious experience. This is at the heart of Thoreau's nature writings and virtually any mention of religion by Thoreau. It is clear, then, that the Kantian epistemology is used by transcendentalists. Transcendentalism also borrows heavily from Kant's metaphysics and, specifically, the idea of intuition and reasoning guiding human behavior. While Thoreau was quick to adopt a sort of Kantian epistemology, Thoreau did not entirely adopt Kantian metaphysics, nor did any of the

transcendentalists. After all, Kantian metaphysics abandons some of the religious components that transcendentalists embrace. For Thoreau, Hegelian metaphysics were closer to the truth in that Hegelian metaphysics were quite amiable to religious belief. However, the transcendentalists rejected the Hegelian Christian *dogma*, with Thoreau continuing this trend throughout his works on nature.

Transcendentalism also borrows heavily from Romanticism. In fact, the influence of Romanticism on Thoreau's works is quite clear, especially in Thoreau's works on nature. Romanticism emphasized subjective experience over objective empiricism. In this way, Romanticism can be viewed, much like the transcendentalist movement, as a countermovement against empiricism. The Renaissance is the intended revival of Ancient Greek and Ancient Roman intellectual thought and artistic expression, which emphasized the subjective. Romanticism can be viewed as an extension of the Renaissance, especially in its reaction to empiricism. For the transcendentalist movement, the advancement of empiricism meant a much stronger foundation for scientific inquiry, yet there are certain aspects of empiricism that are considered too rigid under Romanticism. Of course, the Scottish Enlightenment spurred the reaction against empiricism and included a more nuanced explanation of human behavior, setting serving as the foundation for modern psychology and providing a basis for transcendentalist thought to develop. The Scottish Enlightenment is considered a major advancement of human intellectual thought across many dimensions and its effects of American Romanticism were strong. Thus, there are roots of transcendentalism in the Scottish Enlightenment through Romanticism.

Like the Renaissance, Romanticism emerged a resurrection of Classical literature and arts. It is assumed under Romanticism that something had been lost since antiquity. This may include a sort of idealism, as opposed to a materialistic vision of the world. The replication of the ancient artistic expressions represented a certain ideal that stemmed from Platonism. To find inspiration in the Ancient Romans is one thing, but to emulate their expressions and artistic forms is to at least try to identify and make use of the techniques and approaches that made the Romans so expressive and unique.

An important aspect of Romanticism is emotional expression through art, including literature. That is, the emotional expression in literature serves as artistic expression in the Romantic movement. As Thoreau demonstrates, nonfiction can include the sort of emotional expressions that are sufficiently artistic and poetic to be regarded as art. One of the purposes in the expression of emotion in the works of Romantic writers and artists was to capture something uniquely human, which is, of course, a goal of transcendentalism. Investigations of emotions and attempts to evoke emotions. One allowed the readers and viewers to better understand the emotions that are intended to be expressed, while the other is more personal. Nonetheless, the influence of Romanticism on the transcendentalist movement is two-fold. First, the recognition that there is something unique about humans. The recognition of human exceptionalism and the use of it in expression and writing are major parts of both Romanticism and transcendentalism. Second, transcendentalists rejected many of the recent developments in intellectual thought, especially empiricism as a basis for understanding human experience. Thoreau clearly emphasized the second position more than the first.

Romanticism impacted the development of transcendentalism and Thoreau's nature writings, but there is also a political impact of Romanticism, one that may even be connected to Marxism. Specifically, Romanticism served to connect the masses to politics, not in a particularly democratic way, but in the recognition of the lives of those who are considered quite normal. Romanticism was often focused on the lives of commoners, not simply the most famous individuals at the time or into antiquity. The characteristics of Romanticism bled into transcendentalism. The representation of the common people in Romantic works demonstrates, on one hand, the recognition of the exceptionalism of humans, including common people. Thoreau's descriptions in works such as *Walden* are highly reflective of this Romantic, especially given Thoreau's focus on his own experiences and the experiences of others with whom he comes into contact.

There is one particularly important part of contrast in Thoreau's line of thinking and Romanticism. Romanticists were generally quite skeptical of human nature. Romantic artists generally chose to depict more realistic expressions of human nature, rather than idealized forms, in order to represent human experience with higher accuracy, which suggests a more pessimistic and skeptical about the inherent morality of humans. Such skepticism was a function of the attempt of Romantic artists and writers to depict human experience with sufficient transparency and in a way that is highly reflective of the truth. In contrast, transcendentalists such as Thoreau have a much more idealistic perspective of human nature. For Romanticism, this would indicate a misrepresentation of the human experience. While transcendentalists, including Thoreau, tend to have a positive view of human nature in most respects, Romanticism does not. Nonetheless, thinkers such as

Thoreau focused heavily on the faults of humans and societies, reflecting a sort of classism recognition and even Marxism. There are, thus, no fundamental conflicts between Romanticism and transcendentalism regarding the inherent goodness of people. For Thoreau, society generated many of the problems that turned into what could be considered inherently immoral human behavior, but only if society was considered a natural result of human development. Of course, Marx argued that certain political structures, including capitalism, were natural in this sense. Thoreau may even seem to adopt this sort of perspective.

From this perspective, Thoreau is considered part of both the American Romantic movement and the transcendentalist movement. There are a few points of discernible and relevant disagreement between romanticism and romanticism, although the representation of human nature is not generally one of these points. Rather, it is how issues are framed in artistic works and literature that may distinguish Romantic works from transcendentalist works, including those of Thoreau. Transcendentalists, such as Thoreau and Emerson, viewed and interpreted human nature as fundamentally good, even defining behavior in ways that are generally favorable. Therefore, transcendentalist works are often intended to explain behavior in a favorable way, generally in an attempt to show how any problems that have resulted are remediable. Romanticism works, on the other hand, tend to be less normatively charged and more focused on reflective representations of reality, marking a distinction between Thoreau's works and Romanticism. This distinction is particularly important for understanding Thoreau's political writings. After all, Thoreau's political writings are often normatively charged, but do not quite contain

the sort of inherently negative views on human nature. This distinction, then, is an important one, but not one that pushes Thoreau off of the Romanticism spectrum.

One final connection between Romanticism and Thoreau's works occurs at the point of the focus of the works. In fact, Romanticism, like Thoreau's *Walden*, is highly introspective, even exploring the state of human consciousness. Under Romanticism, the many different approaches to consciousness maybe depicted through art and literature. Certainly, Thoreau tried to capture this in *Walden* and other writings on nature. Although it may be considered one way to describe or understand one's own conscious experiences, would go beyond the mere expression of one's subjective experiences and into an objective accounting of consciousness. Romanticism is quite concentrated on the artists and writers of works. The Romantic movement, then, featured portrayals of artists, while literature included writers playing more active roles in their works, as Thoreau is considered in his nature writings. Thoreau is even considered among the first scholars of nature, even sparking a movement of nature writings. Likewise, artists of the romantic tradition were and are expected to express their own interpretations and subjective experiences. Romanticism serves as a literary and artistic basis of transcendentalism. Both movements were intended to express the uniqueness of human experience, though not specifically unique human experiences. Romanticist writers were very experimental, pushing the boundaries of literary genre in favor of an expression of the unique subjective state and experience of the writer. Thoreau reflects this sort of approach in both his nature and political writings. In *Walden*, Thoreau translates his own phenomenological experiences and metaphysical positions to the reader, while in *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau frames his political and social critiques through his

own experiences, as well as those of John Brown. Such framing is markedly Romantic.

Romanticism surges through the works of Thoreau. This is more apparent in his nature writings than in his political writings. However, Thoreau's political writings have many Marxist components, straying from certain transcendentalism traditions in favor of strict classifications and even bits of historicism. Forming the basis of many of the Germany idealism and transcendentalist positions is the combination of Humean skepticism and Berkeley phenomenology. Kant developed his idealism on similar grounds, just as Hegel did. Yet, for Marx, mistrust and not skepticism *proper* stood as most important, leading to the development of Marx's sociopolitical ideology. The strongest influence on Marx early on in his writings was Hegel. This is similar for some transcendentalists as well, though likely not Thoreau. Marx was part of a group of German intellectuals called the Young Hegelians, who developed the historical materialism that Marx is so well known for. This marks a discernible split in Marxist ideology from the political writings of Thoreau, who was, of course, a proponent of a Hegelian idealism. The Young Hegelians rejected religious and dogmatic aspects of Hegelianism, as did Thoreau and the rest of the transcendentalists. Although the Young Hegelians wrote extensively on Hegelian ideas, they did not adopt the religious implications or underlying assumptions of such thought. It is important to note here that Thoreau and the rest of the transcendentalists shared this approach with the Young Hegelian. The transcendentalists, after all, rejected religious dogma in favor of a more metaphysical and personal religious experience.

Marx developed much of his early work around the problems identified under Hegelianism and how such problems may be resolved by embracing certain Hegelian arguments and rejecting others, including religious doctrine. As Marx denounced the idealistic aspects of Hegelianism, as well as the religious and dogmatic aspects, it is not easy to determine how Hegelianism served as the foundation for Marxist thought and for historical materialism. First and foremost, there are several assumptions and arguments that Marx adopted, but it was the Hegelian dialectic method that was so important for Marx. Thoreau, in contrast, did not adopt a strictly Hegelian dialectal epistemology. Nonetheless, the transcendentalist movement, in general, applied a dialectical method in which intuition served as a basis for knowledge. In this sense, the transcendentalists, including Thoreau, frequently employed various schools of thought and ideological approaches in an effort to extract information about what Hegel called universal principles and Platonic ideas more generally. Thoreau and Marx, thus, shared some of the same epistemological approaches, especially in response to skepticism. Thoreau and the transcendentalists were, of course, also responding to the empiricists, while Marx was not.

Marx's choice in preferring materialism over idealism is very important in distinguishing Marxism from Thoreau's political ideology or political positions in general. Marx's motives in developing his positions on history and how historical and intellectual movements shaped societal development in particular ways are aligned with his historical materialism. That, Marx did not hold on to the phenomenology of Berkeley that many German idealists viewed with such regard. Even so, the impact of Hegel's methods is obvious on the formation of many of

Marx's positions. The dialectic methods allowed Marx, as well as the transcendentalists, to deconstruct many of the dogmatic positions of the time. Skepticism may have drawn many thinkers towards dogmatism, but Marx and Thoreau were much more drawn to practical explanations and in identifying the causes of social change, both in an effort to explain such change in itself and to determine how to go about enacting similar changes in the future. Thus, despite taking different positions on materialism and idealism, Thoreau and Marx shared, in some sense, an epistemological approach and even, perhaps to a lesser degree, took seriously the impacts of historical analysis on political and social change.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

A very important impact of Hegel's ideology on Marxism is the dialectic method which served to separate Marxism from the idealistic aspects of Hegel's work. Of course, Thoreau and the transcendentalists would adopt the Hegelian idealism, or some form of German idealism, as opposed to Marx's materialism. Marx applied Hegel's dialectics directly to materialism, meaning that Marx bought into the Hegelian interpretation of history, but held that ideas were not what brought about the material world or allowed for the discovery of some version of the material world. In its place, Marx held, under his materialism, that the material world allowed for the formation of ideas. Together, this contributed to the formation of the Marx version of dialectic materialism: historical materialism. Even so, Marx depended heavily on concepts of ideas, especially as the foundation for institutions and to explain the manipulation and exploitation of certain peoples. Therefore, an important aspect of Hegelian thought for Marx was the concept of the universal concept. As explained earlier, Hegel argued that there are certain universal concepts that allow for individuals to perceive and understand an external world, apart from idea or Platonic forms. Marx, then, applied the idea of universal concepts, but not quite as Hegel had imagined. It was the transcendentalists who would lead the way in America in a search for universal truths through sort of Kantian or Hegelian dialectic methods, particularly through intuition and direct religious or metaphysical experiences. Thoreau was no exception, as is exemplified in *Walden*.

The application of Hegelian universal concepts is a major point of distinction between Marxism and transcendentalism, and one that was not directly brought to light in any of Thoreau's works. Marx argued that universal concepts formed from

the material world. That is, Marx was highly critical of many of the utopian conceptions of political, social, and economic ideals because they were based, in part, on Hegelian universal concepts. Marx argued that these utopian theorists simply ignored the historical factors, out of convenience, that contributed to the development of those geopolitical and economic systems that the utopians were intent on criticizing. In fact, this suggests that the abandonment, according to Marx, of the Hegelian sort of idealism in favor of materialism. In fundamental opposition of Hegel's idealism, Marx argued that ideas came out of the external material world. Thoreau would not embrace this sort of Marxist regulation of Hegelianism. In fact, this may be the point at which the nexus of Thoreau's thought and Marxism lies: Hegelian dialectics and ideas serving particular political and social purposes. Thoreau was not a utopian writer, He did not envision any sort of perfect political society or socially-controlled government. Instead, Thoreau was focused, much like Marx, on the means for political change. The universal concepts, for Marx, were useful in explaining and, then, enacting such change. But for Thoreau, the universal concepts represented the truth. Without such concepts, it seems, there could be no reality. This, again, marks the distinguishing epistemological and metaphysical differences between Marxism and transcendentalism.

Hegelian thought also serves to connect Marxism and transcendentalism at the point of political reform, outside of any universal concepts or idealistic discussions. Marx was highly critical of politics, especially in its capacity to install capitalist economic systems, as Marx often stated. Ascertaining the influence of Hegel on this matter involves determining how well Marx and Thoreau embraced the Hegelian reasoning on political reform. Marx rejected Hegelian idealism, in

favor of materialism, there is another important subject in which Marx rejected Hegelian thought. For Marx, religion was an institution that promotes the accumulation of wealth among the already wealthy. Marx rejected many of the Hegelian dogmatic claims that served as the basis for many of the foundational Hegelian arguments. The transcendentalists may not have done so directly, but in rejecting Christian and religious dogma and fundamentalist doctrine in general, did so indirectly. This holds true for Thoreau as well. Marx criticizes religion in many ways, but was especially critical of religious institutions. Marx entirely rejects any Hegelian dogmatic religious claims. Hegel claims that both material and ideas result from God, in one form or another. Marx rejects this Hegelian position, which serves to bolster Marx's application of Hegelian dialectics outside of any religious context but also gives Marx the chance to argue that Christianity and other religious institutions resulted from the external material world. Thoreau and the transcendentalists, likewise, reject these institutions. Transcendentalism and Unitarianism, in general, may not be considered institutions, at least not under Marxist critique.

The Marxist criticism of Hegelianism, especially concerning religious beliefs concerns such institutions, only. Marx was not particularly metaphysical, relying primarily on materialism and empiricism. Marx, thus, believed that religious institutions served many of the same roles that governments have. That is, religious institutions allow certain individuals to gain advantages over others. Thoreau would not disagree with this. In fact, many transcendentalists recognized that religious institutions were particularly likely to corrupt governments and to influence society in negative ways. Thoreau's own political writings are quite reflective of this

Marxist critique. It should be noted, however, that many of Marx's other arguments regarding religious are directed towards any religion, including Unitarianism. Marx argued, after all, that religion is a harmful illusion, especially for those in lower classes, through the pacification of the masses. Religion, for Marx, then, and especially in capitalist societies, is established by the institutions that were created or enhanced by the wealthy or those in power. Transcendentalism may escape this criticism, if only because of the lack of institutional nature of the movement. The religious experiences may be placating, but they do not seem purposeful. Moreover, Marx argued that the mobilization of the working class allows for the emancipation of this class. Such mobilization would, of course, include civil disobedience. On this, Marx and Thoreau are in quite strong agreement, with Thoreau recognizing the use of religious institutions for political gain. The application of history in the development and criticism of political positions serves as a point of contradiction in Thoreau's arguments. After all, a major part of the transcendentalist movement was the notion that it is a response to such historical applications, while Marx's historical materialism is heavily focused on the application of history both in the explanation of the rise of capitalism and as a criticism of capitalism.

The importance of the Hegelian Triad, viz. Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis in investigating the nexus between transcendentalism and Marxism in Thoreau's works involves how Hegel viewed progressions in intellectual thought throughout history. In many ways, Marx applied this sort of epistemological tool in his historical analysis. On political matters, Thoreau seemed to apply some form of the Hegelian Triad. Thoreau was more willing to apply historical analyses than other transcendentalists. This marks a direct discordance from a epistemological method

that was developed by Hegel passed on to Marx and applied, in limited form, by Thoreau. Again, Hegel never directly used the Hegelian Triad, which is a term later applied to this epistemological method. Instead, Hegel used a similar method. In any case, Thoreau's use of some form of this epistemological method draws a line directly to Hegel through Marx.

Thoreau's synthesis of Marxism and transcendentalism involves the identification of those areas in which the two contradict and identifying how Thoreau resolved these issues. It should be noted, first, that the influence of Marxism on Thoreau is difficult to determine directly. The two thinkers wrote simultaneously, with Marx's critique of Hegel's right coming out early in Thoreau's life. Nonetheless, the Marxist ideas of classes, class struggle, and the illegitimacy of oppressive governments are well-represented in Thoreau's political writings. Thoreau takes a narrowed view, of course, of such political critiques, focusing on individual governments and what the average individual can do to be just under an unjust government. Nonetheless, if Thoreau is to have a political ideology, it is quite like Marxism. Whether it is through many of the same influences (e.g., Hegel, Rousseau) or some direct influence of Marxism on Thoreau's political writings, Thoreau appears to have adopted a very Marxist set of political positions. At several points, reconciliation between the Marxist-like ideas of Thoreau and his transcendentalist ideas must occur to eschew or being to resolve contradictions.

The first point of reconciliation is between the inclusion of religious belief with Marxist religious criticism. Marx was a staunch critic of religion. In fact, Marx viewed religion as just another superstructure that emerged in order to keep those at the top in power. But, in doing so, Marx was critical of religious institutions and of

Christian dogma in particular. Thoreau, too, was highly critical of both religious institutions and Christian dogma. By personalizing religion and separating it from the roots of Christian doctrine, the transcendentalists, including Thoreau, did not create any sort of binding religious doctrine such as Calvinism, but, instead, offered a phenomenological type of religion that offered the opportunities for deep religious experience without the need for dogma. Marx's religious criticism, thus, need not be abandoned by Thoreau. Instead, Marx's criticism can remain and even be viewed as complementary to the transcendentalist criticisms of Christian dogma and Calvinist doctrine. Considered the religious institution of transcendentalists, Unitarianism is a very metaphysical institution and may not even be considered the sort of religious institution that qualifies for Marxist criticism. Perhaps transcendentalist religious experience serves as an *opium of the people*, but it is quite clear, at least to Thoreau, that such religious experience does not have the purpose of controlling any part of society, which is the thrust of Marx's religious criticism.

The second point of reconciliation is between idealism and materialism. Thoreau rejects materialism in favor of idealism. Marx and the Young Hegelians applied materialism to Hegelian dialectics in order to avoid the idealistic and religious claims made by Hegel. From a Marxist perspective, Thoreau seems to shift this back towards Hegelian idealism. Certainly, Thoreau and the transcendentalists adopted idealism. But they also reject Hegelian religious dogma. Thus, Thoreau does not quite go as far as Hegel in adopting any sort of religious dogma or doctrine to serve as part of the basis for idealism. Rather, Thoreau, in acknowledging skepticism and the importance of individual human experience, rejects a merely materialistic metaphysics in favor of a sort of Hegelian idealism. It is difficult to

determine, in Thoreau's works, the thinker's thoughts on idealism or if there was any systematic attempt to construct a metaphysical account. Nonetheless, the clear influence of German idealism on the transcendentalist movement suggests that idealism was quite important to Thoreau's works. Again, this synthesis requires the Thoreau favor idealism, which he clearly does. Abandoning materialism and historical materialism in particular does little to devalue the Marxist positions found in Thoreau's works. After all, Hegel was able to develop his dialectic methods and a number of political positions on the grounds of idealism.

The third point of reconciliation is between Marx's reliance on historical interpretation for understanding political development and the general rejection of historicism by the transcendentalists. Thoreau indicates, especially in *Civil Disobedience*, that examining history can provide fruitful information about the current conditions of society, as well as on how to change the political positions of policymakers and other important stakeholders in society. Thoreau, then, takes a mild position on the role that historical analysis plays in the development of society. Thoreau certainly does not take the strong Marxist stance on the issue, but also does not eschew it as many transcendentalists do. The transcendentalist idealism certainly has room for historical analysis. That is, there is nothing inherently contradictory about historical analysis and transcendentalism. Ideas, after all, have historical bases, even when such bases have been corrupted by those who rewrite history or only present one side of history. Even though transcendentalism arose, in part, as a response against an empiricism that was based somewhat on historical analysis, Thoreau's use of historical analysis in his political descriptions and normative political positions does not suggest an abandonment of any transcendentalist

positions. Again, Thoreau does not go anywhere near the lengths that Marx does to analyze the historical conditions that give rise to certain political systems. That is, Thoreau is not a historical idealist, as Marx is a historical materialist. Even so, in Thoreau's political writings, there are sufficient traces of historical analysis to suggest a mild Marxist-like historical analysis that serves as both an explanatory method and a method for prescribing actions to change society.

Thoreau did not write systematically. His writings can be distinguished as nature writings, on one hand, and political essays, on the other. Contrasting with transcendentalist movement that relies so heavily on German idealism in Thoreau's writings is his Marxist political positions. Thoreau was not a Marxist and there is scant evidence that Marx was directly influenced by reading Marx, although this possibility remains open. Instead, many of the trending political ideas in Europe at the time of Thoreau's literary ascendance were Marxist in nature, even if they would only be identified as such later. Thoreau's writings on nature carry only traces of Marxist thought, while his political essays have heavy doses of Marxism throughout, especially regarding the issue of slavery and the role that the civilian plays in government. Thoreau's synthesis of Marxist thought (in some form) and transcendentalism requires the return to Hegelian idealism. Thoreau best echoes or even predicts Marxist thought through the advancement of the notion that the collective mobilization of the masses is not only required for moral and just political change, but is, in fact, the duty of the just living in an unjust society.

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