

THOREAUVIAN TRANSCENDENTALISM: A KANTIAN INTERPRETATION OF
HENRY DAVID THOREAU'S EPISTEMOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS
THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University-San Marcos
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of ARTS

by

Seth Aaron Thompson, B.A.

San Marcos, Texas
May 2007

COPYRIGHT

by

Seth Aaron Thompson

2007

To my mother, for her undying love and support.

Any product of these hands, head, and heart

first owes its creation to her.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In my junior year, I enrolled in Professor Steve Wilson's early American literature course, and for the first time since high school, I read Henry David Thoreau. It was that experience several years ago that prompted my interest in Thoreau, and I credit Steve Wilson and his course for giving me my first meaningful look at this Concord writer. Steve Wilson agreed to chair my thesis project while bearing an incredible load of responsibilities already, and I greatly appreciate his willingness to add this thesis to his list; however, I am even more grateful that he has never viewed this project as an obligation. His continued enthusiasm for my research has, at times, been my greatest motivation, and his many insights have been essential to my work. Steve Wilson has consistently believed in this project, and he has actively helped me on a number of fronts, including to a very large extent facilitating my research trip to the Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods.

Many students in the Philosophy Department circulate a common praise that whatever the philosophical question you might have, Professor Dean Geuras has a satisfying, sufficient, and appropriate answer. I think that that maxim is well deserved, and I have repeatedly tested it over the course of this thesis project. As I explored connections between some of Thoreau's and Kant's ideas in my thesis, I am greatly indebted to Professor Geuras for conveying and clarifying meaning in Kant's complicated text, *Critique of Pure Reason*. I could not have completed this particular research project without his expertise and insights.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Professor Robert T. Tally Jr. whose specialty in 19th century American literature provided a thoughtful and careful read. Moreover, with his background in both philosophy and literature, Professor Tally has also provided a unique view, ensuring that all my ideas translate sufficiently and appropriately across the disciplines.

Professors Steve Wilson, Dean Geuras, and Robert T. Tally Jr. comprise my thesis committee, but aside from providing me with their time and assistance in my research, I have had the even greater privilege of calling each my teacher. All three have provided me with very different perspectives about a wide range of ideas, but each has his own strengths, and I have found myself implementing some of their teaching styles in my own classrooms now. In fact, I consistently steal some of Professor Wilson's material and approaches straight out of my own experience as a student in his classroom. Learning under each of these professors has taught me the kind of teacher I would like to be, and in my opinion, their commitment to teaching is and will be their greatest achievement.

At the beginning of January, I had the great fortune of visiting Walden Pond and the Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods. This trip made my reading of Thoreau more personal, and it reinvigorated my research efforts. My trip there was made possible, in part, by a generous grant from Dean Ann Marie Ellis of the College of Liberal Arts, and for this financial assistance, I am very grateful. This research grant helped enable a weeklong research trip and provided me useful insights for my thesis. Of course, I could

not mention my trip without also thanking the Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods for so graciously accommodating me. The Institute provides an impressive resource of centralized Thoreau manuscripts and manuscript copies, as well as secondary materials about Thoreau. It is a wonderful research facility, and I am particularly grateful for the experience. I would also like thank Jeff Cramer, the Institute's curator, who greatly assisted me in locating my desired research materials and who addressed my many questions patiently and thoughtfully.

Through the course of my research, I have had the fortune of contacting any number of scholars whose books and articles have helped me considerably. Early into my research, Scott Slovic, whose own *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* provided a great starting point for my research, pointed me in the direction of any number of pertinent Thoreau scholars and their works, and he answered many of my early questions. For his time and consideration, I am very appreciative.

Of course, I would be remiss were I not to thank my family, who has felt the greatest strain of my research these last several months. I would like to thank my mother, Susan Thompson, for her unfailing love. Her understanding and support have never been and will never be in doubt. I would like to thank all of my family for patiently renting me out to academia for a while. I hope my mother as well as my brother, Trent, and my father, Timothy, all know that I am as proud to be a part of them as I am of anything that I have achieved or have yet to achieve.

This manuscript was submitted on March 23rd, 2007.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. RATIONALISM AND EMPIRICISM: AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....	10
Kant's Response to Hume.....	12
Kant's Synthetic A Priori Propositions.....	15
Transcendental Reflection.....	16
Transcendental Ideas.....	22
III. THOREAUVIAN TIME AND SPACE AS KANTIAN FORMS OF THE INTUITION.....	24
Thoreauvian Space.....	33
IV. A THOREAUVIAN FACULTY OF THE UNDERSTANDING	36
V. A THOREAUVIAN FACULTY OF REASON	50
Kant and Thoreau on Swedenborg	53
Phenomenal and Noumenal Considerations.....	57
Empirical Thoreau: Phenomenal Preference.....	59
The Noumenal Dilemma.....	61
VI. CONCLUSION.....	64
NOTES.....	72
WORKS CITED	74

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In March of 1853, Henry David Thoreau was troubled over a letter he had received from the secretary of the Association for the Advancement of Science, Spencer Fullerton Baird – a letter extending him membership into the organization. Thoreau’s concern over the invitation might seem particularly unusual considering his serious biological interests as a naturalist. As Walter Harding points out in his brochure *Mr. Thoreau Declines an Invitation*, the invitation was sent to “President Millard Fillmore, F.A.P. Barnard (then president of the University of Mississippi and later president of Columbia), J.A. Dahlgren (later noted admiral in the United States Navy), and to Henry David Thoreau” (3). Though there is some question as to how Thoreau’s name found its way onto such a distinguished invitation list to begin with, the fact that it did seemed deeply to affect him. What is more, according to Harding, there is evidence to suggest that Thoreau retained a profound respect for Baird. On a questionnaire which accompanied the invitation, Thoreau ends his response, “[w]ith thanks for your ‘Directions,’ received long since [...]” (*Correspondence* 310). Thoreau was referring to a small pamphlet written by Baird titled *Directions for Making Collections in Natural History*. The small pamphlet was about natural history and was printed through the Smithsonian Institute not long before Thoreau’s invitation was sent. According to

Harding, Thoreau's respect for Baird, which echoes in his reference to *Directions*, caused Thoreau to reference many of Baird's publications throughout his lifelong journal (6).

For anyone familiar with Thoreau's writing, it would be hard to imagine the reason why he would shy from such an opportunity, and perhaps only a few reasons would come to mind at all when considering how seriously he took his work with natural history and, apparently, the invitation itself. Thoreau took nine months to respond, and he claimed, "for the same reason that I should not be able to attend the meetings, unless held in my immediate vicinity, I am compelled to decline the membership" (*Correspondence* 309). Thoreau rarely responded promptly to a letter, so the time lapse between receiving and responding to this invitation may not indicate much about any special deliberation he might have taken in composing it. However, as Harding rightly addresses, Thoreau reacted to the letter's receipt in his March 5, 1853 journal entry, expressing the real reason for his reluctance to join the society of scientists:

The secretary of the Association for the Advancement of Science requests me, as he probably has thousands of others [...] to fill the blank against certain questions, among which the most important one was what branch of science I was specially interested in [...]. Now, though I could state to a select few that department of human inquiry which engages me, and should be rejoiced at an opportunity to do so, I felt that *it would be to make myself the laughing-stock of the scientific community to describe or attempt to describe to them that branch of science which specially interests me*, in as much as they do not believe in a science which deals with the higher law. (*Journal* 529, emphasis added)

Thoreau clearly expresses his prime motivation for declining the membership: he feared being misunderstood and ridiculed by his contemporaries. This motivation seems natural enough to anyone who has faced rejection before, but from the man of *Walden*, who was characteristically self-dependent, defiant, and often exhortative, it seems a bit out-of-place. However, Thoreau continues his explanation:

So I was obliged to speak to their condition and describe to them that poor part of me which alone they can understand. The fact is I am a *mystic*, a *transcendentalist*, and a *natural philosopher* to boot. Now I think of it, I should have told them at once that I was a *transcendentalist*. That would have been the shortest way of telling them that they would not understand my explanations.

How absurd that, though *I probably stand as near to nature as any of them*, and *am by constitution as good an observer as most*, yet a true account of *my relation to nature should excite their ridicule only!* If it had been the secretary of an association of which Plato or Aristotle was the president, I should not have hesitated to describe my studies at once and particularly. (529, emphasis added)

Thoreau's reluctance quickly turns from fear of rejection into a form of contempt toward his contemporaries because of the eventual misunderstanding his work would provoke among them. He was convinced that the Society would not appreciate his work, and it troubled Thoreau. Clearly, this is the familiar Thoreau of *Walden*, which he would publish just under a year and a half later, and the tone of the entry demonstrates a preachy judgment underlying the experiences recounted in his woodland masterpiece.

More than just resentment, however, Thoreau's journal entry conveys some legitimate concerns and reveals some insightful points about his work and thought. His resentment was probably not far misplaced. Indeed, in the latter paragraph, Thoreau claims, with all accuracy and a hint of modesty, that his relationship to and interest in nature was, at very least, "as near" as any of his fellow scientists' but that it would generate in them nothing but unjust "ridicule." To give a truthful account of his scientific interest would be to incorporate those aspects of the human experience that might seem outside the jurisdiction of science to begin with: ontological, epistemological, and mystical concerns. If anything, Thoreau's declining of the invitation reinforces the idea that he would not misrepresent, in any way, any of his convictions. His resentment in the journal entry also reveals some important characteristics about the nature and scope of his

scientific inquiry. He calls himself “a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher,” and Thoreau calls particular attention to his identification as a transcendentalist, claiming that the mere invocation of the word would repel and baffle society members. This prediction reveals that Thoreau clearly felt a divide between the empirical and rational faculties of natural scientists and philosophers in contradistinction with the emotive and intuitive faculties of Romantics and mystics, and that this tension tugged so strongly at his conscience illustrates the problematic task of categorizing Thoreau as a man, thinker, and writer.

Thoreau’s self-identification as a transcendentalist immediately calls to mind many assumptions about that American movement with which he is often associated. When we consider the American Transcendentalists, Ralph Waldo Emerson usually stands out as the most prominent figure from the movement. His *Nature* outlines his ideas regarding a critical philosophy heavily influenced by the German idealists and the Romantic writers they inspired. Emerson’s publications influenced the Transcendentalist movement more than any other and most reflected its overall sentiment. Emerson posits, in some fashion, an absolute idealism in which the function of nature is to reflect universal truths. He claims, “[e]very natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture” (14).

Henry David Thoreau is often classified among his New England contemporaries as someone who held compatible, synchronous views. However, such an assessment ignores dominant aspects of Thoreau’s thought that distance him from Emerson’s absolute idealism and position him closer to Kant’s transcendental idealism. Thoreau’s

exploration into nature stretches beyond a search for symbols. He places a significant value on the natural world in and of itself. Max Oelschlaeger asserts that “Thoreau, not Emerson, is the American heir to Kant’s critical philosophy” (136). Unfortunately, Oelschlaeger fails to provide adequate evidence for that similarity, offering only vague connections between the two and drawing on only limited selections from Thoreau’s works directly while providing none from Kant. It is my intention to demonstrate a connection between Kant’s critical philosophy and Thoreau’s ontological and epistemological assumptions by reflecting on both thinkers’ employment of transcendental reasoning, their views on time (and, to some extent, space), their treatment of transcendent concepts, and by showing the significance placed by both on the phenomenal world (both objective and subjective) in contradistinction with the noumenal. In accounting for Thoreau’s lifelong and largely unresolved dilemmas with a transcendental epistemology, I will also highlight another similarity he shares with Kant: both struggled with understanding how the noumenal and phenomenal worlds relate.

An immediate problem arises for my task: Thoreau never definitively outlines his epistemological program. Unlike Kant, Thoreau never clearly establishes any *categories of the understanding* through which the mind filters sensory experience, though some more recent work has attempted to construct such a framework from Thoreau’s writings.¹ Though he does seem to agree that time and space are what Kant labels “given” from experience, Thoreau’s ideas on both are hardly as detailed or rigorous as Kant’s treatment of these forms of the intuition. Thoreau seems to have adopted this epistemic framework from Emerson and those who immediately influenced his Concord mentor. However, whether from direct exposure to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* or from an indirect

conveyance of the ideas therein, Thoreau strays from his contemporaries and follows a method far closer to Kant's of examining the world. As the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* points out, Thoreau's distance from the other American Transcendentalists proves problematic for historians of the movement, and Thoreau consistently finds himself reduced to a reference or two, if mentioned at all (Furtak). This is because there are quite a few issues to resolve with Thoreau if he is to fit into the conceptual framework of his contemporaries' ideas.

Thoreau's reluctance to identify his scientific interest to the Association for the Advancement of Science suggests an underlying struggle to identify himself – a struggle shared by his readers trying to classify the *Walden* writer. *Walden*, Thoreau's most significant work made for publication consistently resists classification, never quite fitting any genre completely. In *The Emergence of American Literary Narrative: 1820-1860*, Jonathan Arac argues that Thoreau's writing in *Walden* and *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* amounts to what he calls a "personal narrative," a type of writing that appeals to "what seems a more archaic way of life, a virtual past achieved by travel in space rather than in time, but from the perspective of a narrator who is, like the readership, part of a modern world, making contact with that 'other' world and transforming it while integrating it" (77). Arac aims to demonstrate Thoreau's writing (along with other writers' works) as a type of narrative that competes, reacts, and responds to other narrative types (national, local, and literary) in the development of America's literary sense. Arac finely develops a historical-theoretical framework for understanding the rise of a formal American literature; however, labeling Thoreau's work as a narrative interested in confronting, changing, and incorporating his time in the woods

into a merely didactic exercise for use in that all-too-familiar “modern world” seems to betray Thoreau’s genuine commitment to his project and to the “archaic way of life” that compelled his lifelong attention.

Owing to the sheer volume of Thoreau’s work, my task to demonstrate Thoreau’s epistemological and metaphysical ideas is a massive effort. Thoreau’s journal, over two million words, served as an essential resource for Thoreau’s other works. He would frequently, and to a large extent, draw on his journal entries for the material in his published books and sometimes even his letters. The journal served a number of purposes for Thoreau, and it has become essential for understanding Thoreau’s intellectual development. Sherman Paul argues that Thoreau’s journal illustrates very distinct periods in Thoreau’s life and thought. Paul claims that there are two contrasting Thoreaus seen over the course of his journals: an Emersonian influenced Transcendentalist; and a phenomena observing naturalist. Paul argues that the journal entries after Thoreau’s stay at Walden Pond demonstrate a greater tendency away from Emerson, and Paul claims that this new direction reveals a disenchanted Thoreau – a Thoreau who sought in nature a connection that he could no longer find (Paul 260-61).

It is evident that Thoreau’s journal reveals an enthusiastic, Emersonian voice early on, and that voice does seem to dwindle into one far more interested in natural observations during the last fourteen years of Thoreau’s writing. However, Paul’s interpretation (one that has become popular) seems to limit Thoreau, but it also allows more freedom for his readers and interpreters: such a view forces Thoreau into a strict dichotomy (either pre- or post-Walden); but, it legitimizes many different interpretations of Thoreau’s thought, depending on which years are emphasized. However, Thoreau’s

journal is not so easily classified. While Paul rightly addresses two distinct periods in Thoreau's writing roughly dividing at or around the end of his Walden Pond excursion, there is never a period when Thoreau is devoid of his Transcendentalist tendencies that he adopted from Emerson or of the naturalistic fascination so prevalent in his later writing. I am approaching Thoreau's writing under the assumption that these two identities never cease to factor into each other; instead, these different aspects of Thoreau are ultimately what position him closer to Kantian philosophy.

Though not autobiography or memoir, Thoreau's works admittedly claim and make a point to justify the implementation of the first person point-of-view (*Walden* 3). For him, it makes no sense to use any other perspective, nor does he find it entirely possible for the narrator to stray from his firsthand account, regardless of the pronoun placed before the verb. Still, despite his referential use of "I" throughout, Thoreau hardly seems the subject of a work like *Walden*. Within its pages, the woods themselves become of greatest interest for the author and reader alike. I believe that they do serve the didactic purposes that Arac describes for Thoreau, but I also believe that Thoreau was more committed to the woods themselves. Though it is true that his admitted reason for going to Walden Pond was "to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, [...] to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it [...]." Thoreau's simplification of life had him sifting through and breaking down appearances to discover what was real (*Walden* 86). These appearances in the phenomenal world held a profound place of interest in Thoreau's life. The other Transcendentalists would look on Nature as a vehicle for spiritual signs and symbols while largely discarding its objective value. Thoreau observed nature as a biologist, careful not to gaze into nature too far beyond the

scope of his vision. He was seeking spiritual truths like Emerson, but he was consistently grounded on and rooted in the hard, empirical world. His emphasis on the phenomenal world consistently prevented him from treating the natural world as a mere series of spiritual signs and symbols waiting to be deciphered; instead, it caused him to view these natural symbols far more cautiously. He would only speculatively derive spiritual truths from the empirical world.

CHAPTER II

RATIONALISM AND EMPIRICISM: AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The crucial thrust of my thesis is to consider connections between Thoreau's philosophical inquiries into knowledge and reality and those of Kant's. In order to do this in any meaningful capacity, I must first elaborate to some extent Kant's own position on these subjects. This is no small task, and the complexities involved with the intricacies and implications of his arguments continue to both baffle and intrigue philosophers. However, the goal of Kant's epistemology is fairly straightforward, even if many of the arguments that he employed to accomplish it are not. In this chapter, I will introduce and examine some of the relevant fundamentals of Kant's epistemological program insofar as they relate to my overall intention of connecting Kant and Thoreau. This is, by no means, an exhaustive exploration of Kant's first *Critique*, nor does my task require it to be. However, a basic understanding of Kant's epistemology is essential.

In the introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (hereafter referred to as *CPR*), Kant asks the central question that consumes and enables the rest of the book: "[h]ow is synthetic a priori knowledge possible?" (B19). In order to fully appreciate just how radical this question is, it is important to understand a significant debate between two schools of thought that consumed Kant's attention: rationalism and empiricism. Rene Descartes, a rationalist (and considered the father of modern philosophy by philosophers

and historians), was interested in what we could know with certainty and rejected any knowledge claim that involved even the slightest doubt. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes employed a deductive method and systematically demonstrated (by way of three different arguments) that, if certainty be the ultimate requirement for knowledge, our sensory experience and our abstractions, like mathematics, could not provide us with sufficient grounds for knowledge claims. However, Descartes did find certainty in the fact that he was thinking and claimed that he could not doubt that thinking was taking place. He inferred from his thinking process his own consciousness as bedrock of certainty. Descartes continued to infer things from the certainty of his consciousness, like God, and the reliability of our abstractions. Rationalism developed through Descartes' philosophy; predictably enough, it places a great emphasis on the mind or thought as being the only reliable source of knowledge. Rationalists believed that knowledge derived from certain innate ideas ingrained in the mind before or apart from any sensory experience. Such knowledge was called *a priori*. According to Kant, in order for a proposition to be pure *a priori*, it had to possess both universality and necessity: i.e., it had to be both true in every instance and incapable of being otherwise (*CPR* B3/B4).

Empiricists rejected rationalists' disregard for the senses and believed that sensory experience provided the only source of knowledge, if for no other reason than that a set of intangible ideas providing us with knowledge is far less plausible than simply trusting our senses. Sensory or experiential knowledge was called *a posteriori*, and proponents of a posteriori knowledge maintained that, upon birth, the human mind served as a blank slate (without innate ideas) filling up with sensory information as the human developed.²

After perceiving the same sets of sense-data for so long, the mind would make conclusions based upon that experience alone, instead of employing certain ideas to our experience. In his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, David Hume took the most radical step among the empiricists, claiming that without innate ideas, such a concept as causation had to be reconsidered. He argues that nothing logically necessitates a given effect to follow from a cause (27). Therefore, the concept of causation could not be given prior to experience. We simply come to expect such results through repeated observation. This even applies to mathematical abstractions when they are implemented in experience (for instance, when adding two apples to one orange) (31). Rationalists would point to the mathematical principles inherent in the idea of two plus one equaling three, and demonstrate that that a priori knowledge was acting upon the experiential operation of combining the three pieces of fruit. However, Hume would claim that what validity we derive from summing the pieces of fruit comes only from experience, not from ideas, and there is therefore no necessity involved in the outcome: the sum of three deriving from adding two and one simply follows as a matter of experiential habit.

Kant's Response to Hume

Hume deeply troubled Kant. Kant claimed, "I openly confess, the suggestion of David Hume was the very thing, which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber, and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy quite a new direction" (*Prolegomena* 260). Kant knew (and was the first to fully understand) that

Hume's empiricism had devastating consequences on any metaphysical framework, and empirical skepticism required an answer. Kant was the first to attempt such a response in his *CPR*, and his attempt involved appropriating several of Hume's ideas. In order for one to understand the nature of Hume's radical skepticism and Kant's response to it, Kant's own terminology proves far more helpful. Kant labeled two distinct propositions with which Hume was working: analytic and synthetic. Analytic propositions are verbally true by definition. Propositions like "The bride is female" and "All bachelors are male" are analytic propositions because the predicate adds nothing to the subject. By definition, a wife is *necessarily* a woman who is married, and a bachelor is *necessarily* a male who is single. There is no way in either example for the subjects to be otherwise (i.e. a wife could not be an unmarried woman, and a bachelor could not be a married man). The predicates gave us no new information than what was easily ascertained by the subject itself. Synthetic propositions, on the other hand, are statements in which the predicate does add something to the subject: "The table is green" or "All canaries sing." No necessity is involved in either proposition. The table could in fact be brown, and some canaries may not sing. These are propositions that would require sensory experience to determine. Therefore, they are devoid of universality; they will not always produce the same result.

Now we return to Kant's question: How is synthetic a priori knowledge possible? We can only conceive of four combinations of possible propositions according to this line of reasoning: (1) analytic a posteriori; (2) analytic a priori; (3) synthetic a posteriori; and (4) synthetic a priori. Propositions of the first type would be regarded by Kant and Hume as altogether ridiculous. If an analytic proposition is always true by definition, and if a

posteriori propositions derive knowledge through experience, then the two are completely incompatible. This is true because a posteriori knowledge attempts to account for particular sense-data as being neither necessary nor universal (think of Hume's treatment of causation: no one event necessarily follows from another), while analytic propositions demonstrate both universality and necessity (think of the bride proposition). Neither Hume nor Kant denied the possibility of the second type of proposition: analytic a priori. More specifically, Hume claimed that even if certain concepts like numbers were in fact a priori, i.e. given apart from any experience, they could only be analytic: they could only describe themselves (*Enquiries* 35). If this is the case, both thinkers admit analytic propositions, but unfortunately this grants knowledge claims very little. I might know a certain concept, but such analytic a priori propositions fail to give me the ability to know anything outside of the concept itself. In so failing, a priori propositions cannot explain how I add two concepts together.

The third type of proposition is what Hume suggests accounts for our knowledge: synthetic a posteriori propositions (36). These propositions add sense-data with other sense-data. They are dependent on experience, so they do not add concepts together (like $1 + 2 = 3$); instead, they synthesize our perceptions, enabling us to connect the observation of greenness with this particular table. They do not involve either necessity or universality.

Kant's Synthetic A Priori Propositions

The last type of proposition would be those that try to combine or synthesize concepts and experience. Hume denied that this was possible, pointing to the inconsistency involved in applying universal and necessary concepts in a realm dependent on experience that does not possess and could not possess either quality. Demonstrating how such propositions were possible was the beginning of Kant's epistemological endeavor. To use Kant's examples, Kant agreed with Hume that a proposition like "All bodies are heavy" was indeed a synthetic a posteriori proposition. Nothing in the concept of a body necessarily involves the concept of mass. We determine that an object has a certain mass through experience: we pick an object up from the ground and *feel* its weight. However, certain propositions, like "All bodies are extended in space," do not function in the same capacity as the previous proposition (CPR A9/B11-B12). Surely, even after stripping from the object of experience all sense-data, we could still conceive of the concept of the space that the object had occupied. Because of this, the concept of space (that, we will note, was synthesized with the object) could not possibly be derived *from* experience, only *through* experience: i.e. experience is a necessary precondition for synthesizing a priori ideas, but it is not responsible for the synthesis. Kant argues that synthesizing what Hume called two analytic a priori abstractions like $1 + 2 = 3$ was also demonstrative of a synthetic a priori proposition.

Kant was ready to build an epistemological framework to account for our knowledge. He was interested in determining the limits of the human understanding, so he accounted for the empirical data that we received (what was, for the blank slate

theorists of empiricism, all of knowledge). He claimed that the human mind possesses different faculties. Our sense-data is “given”³ to us, and our minds receive these appearances by way of a faculty of intuition. This faculty receives all its sense-data pre-coded in particular forms (viz. time and space), which he called the forms of the intuition (*CPR* A19/B34). It is clear that experience plays an essential role for Kant’s epistemology; however, unlike empiricism, Kant does not view the mind as an inactive receptor of sense-data. The human mind possesses a faculty of understanding that filters the given sense-data through different categories of the understanding. Through this filtering alone can the mind understand and make sense out of the sense-data it receives. Without knowing such concepts as unity, plurality, relation, we would be unable to determine anything about the flux of sensory information being given to us. Finally, Kant points out the faculty of reason and claims that this is what the mind employs when it is considering things like “God, freedom, and immortality” (*CPR* A3/B7).

Transcendental Reflection

With a basic idea of Kant’s project in place, it will be easier to illustrate specific points of convergence between Kant and Thoreau. To start with, I must clarify a point about the method first developed and used by Kant, transcendental reflection. A transcendental argument attempts to find the necessary conditions for possible experience instead of deducing from a fact or inducing from an experience. Transcendental reasoning starts with a fact or experience and determines what conditions are absolutely necessary to render them possible (*CPR* A11/B25). It is not concerned with the actual

objects of sensory experience except insofar as that experience enables transcendental enquiry; we must begin with objects of experience as given before determining what, if any, necessary a priori ideas capacitate such experience. Kant developed this type of reasoning to determine whether or not the mind possessed any ideas or concepts inherent in the thinker without relying exclusively on sensory experience.

Here, I must distinguish transcendental reasoning from *transcendent* arguments. Transcendent arguments involve resorting to an intuition as evidence for something, or they argue for the existence of something transcendent apart from actual evidence. In either case, transcendent arguments appeal to something outside of possible experience and use some kind of emotive awareness as a vehicle to truths that reasoning and experience fail to reach (*CPR* A571/B599). Transcendent arguments played a vital role in ascertaining certain truths for post-Kantian movements. For many post-Kantian idealists and the Romantic philosophers, along with the American Transcendentalists, reason failed to arrive at all truth and was doomed to continued failure, so “intuition” served as the emotive means necessary for accessing those truths outside the boundaries of knowledge and reason. However, it was not the same “intuition” that Kant identified. He used “intuition” quite differently than his successors, indicating how the mind apprehends objects in the phenomenal world. He claimed that our intuition directly apprehends objects but does so using formal principles (*CPR* A19/B33). To avoid confusion, I will use “intuition” in the Kantian sense throughout this paper, and when discussing the more Romantic conception of intuition as an emotive apprehension of truth, I will use the term “awareness.” With this in mind, disguised as a byproduct of reason, transcendent arguments veiled an emotive awareness of truth. This was certainly

true for a Transcendentalist like Emerson, who claimed, “[t]he world is emblematic. Parts of speech are metaphors, because the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind. [...] The axioms of physics translate the laws of ethics” (17).

Although seen by many as an Emersonian Transcendentalist, Thoreau employed transcendental reasoning far more than transcendent arguments, especially as he grew further from his college years and the influences that he adopted there. He rigorously explored sensory experiences in an attempt to find what necessary conditions enabled them, and he rarely relied exclusively on awareness to carry him to a truth beyond the reach of his intellect or senses, often undercutting any appeal to emotive awareness with sentiments of doubt about trusting anything beyond the phenomenal world around him.⁴ Awareness certainly factors into Thoreau’s epistemological program, as I will explore later in this paper. However, as I will demonstrate, his tendency toward transcendental reasoning and his reluctance to appeal to emotive awareness (transcendent argumentation) is the crucial alignment between Thoreau and Kant. This distinction separates Thoreau from other Transcendentalists who were far more interested in arguments rooted in awareness, like Emerson, and his employment of Kantian transcendental reasoning underlies each section of this exploration into his ideas.

If Thoreau sought to expound the concepts of a transcendental system of knowledge, he meant to *do* so. That is, if Kant was interested in developing a logically systematic account of a priori ideas as applied to experience, Thoreau meant to derive such a system through actual application and experiment – a sort of applied epistemology. While his scientific method may be questionable at times, his interest in the empirical world cannot be doubted. Thoreau believed in the significance of nature,

not merely as signifying some spiritual truth but as being very much a part of that truth. While the other Transcendentalists in America followed the tendencies in thought of some of the German Idealists after Kant (Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel), positing in some fashion an absolute idealism, which in turn led them to seek in reality “the self-unfolding of absolute reason” (Copleston 9), Thoreau places the empirical world in a primary position enabling a concept’s apriority. In so doing, he becomes vulnerable to questions regarding the nature of experience’s role in his account of knowledge.

Determining where and how experience fits into an epistemological scheme is a difficult task for both Thoreau and Kant. As seen in Kant’s *CPR*, even with rigorous detail, attempts at reconciling rationalist and empiricist theories of knowledge (i.e., knowledge prior to experience and knowledge derived through experience, respectively) can still lead to problematic points, unintentionally giving priority to one of these intellectual movements where it claims to find resolution between the two. Thoreau’s system lacks the attentive logical detail found in Kant; therefore, he often struggles much more with resolving just how the world of ideas relates to the world of experience. However, I will demonstrate that Thoreau’s epistemological program does seek such resolution between knowledge through innate ideas and knowledge through experience.

Locating the cooperation of ideas with experience in Thoreau’s thought is best accomplished by examining one of his most common sentiments. Throughout his writing, Thoreau often charges his readers to simplify their lives. In a letter to his friend and disciple, H.G.O. Blake, Thoreau explains his emphasis on simplicity after it had been challenged by Daniel Ricketson, another of Thoreau’s disciples:

Why will not I, having common sense, write in plain English always; teach men in detail how to live a simpler life, etc.; not go off into ---? But

I say that I have no scheme about it, – no designs on men at all; and, if I had, my mode would be to tempt them with the fruit, and not with the manure. To what end do I lead a simple life at all, pray? That I may teach others to simplify their lives? – and so all our lives be simplified merely, like an algebraic formula? Or not, rather, that I may make use of the ground I have cleared, to live more worthily and profitably?
(*Correspondence* 384)

Here Thoreau admits that his goal is to simplify life, but not for simplicity's sake. He recognizes that his task of focusing on the purest empirical experience in the phenomenal world aims for the *manure* rather than the *fruit*. The *fruit* refers to universal truths, God, immortality, and questions answered only in the noumenal world, but Thoreau's quest for truth involves no fruit picker or basket; instead, Thoreau claims that the value in simplifying his life is to *make use of the ground* that he has *cleared*, a task more easily accomplished with manure. This physical metaphor emphasizes that Thoreau believed truth-seeking should involve attending to the process rather than the product. Instead of beginning with some idea outside of possible experience like God, Thoreau, similar to Kant, explored the phenomenal world and our experience in it, believing that this method was the only way of deriving any necessary a priori ideas enabling that experience.

But just what does Thoreau intend to achieve in the employment of this transcendental model of reasoning that underlies his simplification process? Thoreau's idea of simplifying life is commonly cited as evidence for his disdain for the accumulation of material excess, the unnecessary overburdening of people's daily schedules, and people's tendency to focus on the insignificant. However true these observations often are, as we have just seen, Thoreau uses the idea of simplification to convey a different sentiment on several occasions. Most important for my thesis, he uses the idea of simplifying life to reflect his adoption of a transcendental argumentation for

determining fundamental aspects concerning reality and our knowledge of it, not just as a means for arguing what significant things should be occupying our time. In *Walden*

Thoreau's famous justification for his woodland experiment is

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach [...]. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it [...] or if it were sublime, to know it by experience [...]. (86)

Thoreau claims that his reason for moving into the isolated woodlands is to strip his daily life of the pretense developed by the social, commercial, industrial world. By returning to nature and simplifying his daily routine, Thoreau hoped to deduce *the essential facts of life*, but he hoped to deduce them – *to know* them – through *experience*. His approach contrasts with the other Transcendentalists who attempted to build a metaphysical framework out of a transcendental epistemology – an attempt that extends beyond possible or actual experience. Thoreau's act of simplifying life aimed at finding concepts necessary for experience itself, since reducing life *to its lowest terms* delivered Thoreau either the harsh or lovely reality of *it* – the *it* referring to experience in the world and proving to be Thoreau's desired end. As he reinforces in his very first letter to his friend H.G.O. Blake, who was seeking Thoreau's spiritual guidance, “[s]o simplify the problem of life, distinguish the necessary and the real. Probe the earth to see where your main roots run. I would stand upon facts” (*Correspondence* 215). Thoreau's interest in “facts” rather than speculation compels his search for “the necessary and the real,” and in this

light, he resembles Kant's emphasis on actual experience in the phenomenal world as the only means of certainty.

Transcendental Ideas

Though Kant and Thoreau both prioritize actual experience in the phenomenal world, both also address ideas that have no reference in the phenomenal world. According to Kant, transcendental ideas are not connected to actual experience; however, because our consciousness uses its principles of understanding to determine concepts existing in the phenomenal world, our faculty of reason attempts to mimic this process with certain concepts – ideas like God, the world as a totality, immortality, freedom – treating such ideas as if they were within the realm of possible experience. In Kant's *Transcendental Dialectic*, he challenges reason's ability to access such ideas that are devoid of experience, calling reason's attempt "the logic of illusion" (*CPR* A131/B170). Kant considers this illusory exercise a natural feature of our consciousness and considers the desire propelling its employment what he calls "the greatest possible unity of reason" (*CPR* A309/B365). That is, since we have no actual experience to inform us of the existence or nature of ideas like God, our minds treat these ideas in a similar fashion than ideas of which it does have experience. Transcendental ideas play a significant and problematic role in Thoreau's thought. As we have already seen in several of his passages, and will soon see to an even greater extent, Thoreau remains cautious of asserting too much significance regarding transcendental ideas, insisting on experience in the phenomenal world as the crucial and necessary indication of truth.

Still, despite their priority of the phenomenal world, both Thoreau and Kant address transcendental ideas. Kant concludes in his Transcendental Dialectic that reason's attempt to treat transcendent concepts like God inevitably fail because they lack experience to validate their conclusions. He does not believe that speculating about such concepts is worthless though. The operation of our reason on transcendent concepts provides for Kant a heuristic model whereby we have some basis of direction in regard to questions for which no experience is possible (*CPR* A298/B354). Hence, Kant separates such concepts from knowledge, committing them to the realm of faith and safeguarding them from skepticism. If actual experience is a requirement for claiming that we know something, and ideas like God, freedom, and eternity all lack actual experience, then we must accept that these ideas remain outside the realm of knowledge. Our mind's treatment of them can give us helpful indications concerning them, but indications never amount to knowledge.

Kant and Thoreau were largely responding to a philosophical debate between empiricists, claiming sensation and experience as the root of all knowledge, and rationalists, pointing to innate ideas in the mind independently of experience as the source of knowledge. It was precisely the tension between both schools of thought that informed Kant and Thoreau regarding their ideas about knowledge and reality. With a basic framework established, we are better prepared to consider Thoreau's more specific alignment with Kant's epistemology. The first step will be to explore the nature of the appearances that the mind intuits.

CHAPTER III

THOREAUVIAN TIME AND SPACE AS KANTIAN FORMS OF THE INTUITION

Thoreau, like Kant, addressed time and space (though this chapter will pay particular attention to the former) throughout his writings, as these two concepts¹ carry great significance for any epistemological or metaphysical framework and as the questions surrounding these concepts consumed a great deal of attention from the intellectual community in both thinkers' times. For Kant, time and space constituted the forms of our appearances, not their matter. Kant believed that these *forms of the intuition* are a priori structures embedded in our minds and through which sensory experience is possible (*CPR* A39/B56). He provided several arguments to demonstrate the apriority of these representations. In the case of time, he argued that imagining appearances of objects without time is impossible, though the opposite holds true when imagining the idea of time without any appearances. If the idea of time maintains even without actual experience to legitimize it, it must be an a priori structure. In this way, Kant agreed with the rational notion of time as being a product of our minds. However, in Kant's account of time, the empirical focus on an absolute time with essential existence external to the perceiver is not altogether abolished. Time is an absolute precondition to all experience, not necessarily created – though imposed – by our minds, and as such it retains universality in the phenomenal world (*CPR* A37/B53-4).

Thoreau's conception of time bears certain similarity with Kant's in that he recognizes a necessary role of the mind imposing on experience its a priori structure and recognizes time's lack of meaning in the world outside of actual and possible experience. Kant claims, "I can indeed say that my representations follow one another; but this is only to say that we are conscious of them in a time-sequence, that is in conformity with the form of inner sense" (*CPR* A37/B54). Thoreau's notion of time is compatible:

How simple is the natural connection of events. We complain greatly of the want of flow and sequence in books, but if the journalist only move himself from Boston to New York, and speak as before, there is link enough. And so there would be, if he were as careless of connection and order when he stayed at home, and let the incessant progress which his life makes be the apology for abruptness [...]. Is not my life riveted together? Has not it sequence? Do not my breathings follow each other naturally? (*Journal* 341-42)

Here Thoreau is concerned with the sequence of events in our lives that time imposes. The most telling aspect of this passage is that Thoreau recognizes this sequence as a part of our subjective experience in the world. He metaphorically relates this time sequence to a journalist moving between two cities and claims that the retained connection in the two separate worlds is "the incessant progress which his life makes." Sequence is a construct of living life for Thoreau – a necessary condition for experience, and lest the reader assume too much about the universality of time and "the natural connection of events," Thoreau soon makes clear that this sequence does not lie outside of subjective experience in the sensory, phenomenal world.

Also, this passage's emphasis on sequence in our subjective experience highlights an important principle in Kantian epistemology: the unity of apperception (*CPR* A17). In order to account for our ability to self-reflect on our experiences, Kant modified Descartes' thinking, substantial self-consciousness into a process. For every sensory

experience we have, we are able to connect to it the idea of a thinking self – a consciousness actually having the experience. Descartes’ famous statement “I think, therefore, I am” requires the existing agent to first recognize his own thinking capacity, as thought provides the only means whereby someone can avoid doubt and discover the certainty of his own existence. However, Kant observed that in order for that momentary, subjective assertion to be in any way tied to other equivalent assertions (i.e., in order for me to say that I recognize my thinking self typing on this computer and connect it to the thinking self who planned the writing of this section last week), there would have to be some principle unifying those different subjective experiences of self-awareness that constitute our overall sense of self. Again employing transcendental reasoning, Kant tries to determine what is required or necessary in order to even have self-consciousness. He calls the principle enabling self-consciousness the transcendental unity of apperception, and as a part of the faculty of our understanding (not given or intuited), it synthesizes our independent, self-reflecting instances into one thinking subject (*CPR* A19). Thoreau’s passage echoes Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception emphasizing the retained thinking self within the apparent sequence of daily life – his one breath following another.

As Kant determined this unity of self through transcendental reflection, Thoreau questioned his different subjective experiences through time and considered just what linked them together. Similarly, Thoreau examined other aspects of the phenomenal world using transcendental reasoning, seeking a priori ideas that underlie the very possibility of his actual experience. Time and space are such ideas for Thoreau. In his article, “Aulus Persius Flaccus,” which he wrote for *The Dial*, Thoreau analyzes the

works of the Roman satirist by directly examining some of his verses. “‘Securus quo pes ferat, atque ex tempore vivit’ is then the motto of a wise man,” writes Thoreau (“Aulus” 5). The line quoted and esteemed by Thoreau as a worthy maxim comes from Persius’ third satire, in which the poet decries the principle that Thoreau means to extol (viz. living without regard for the future). Thoreau offers no translation, but it translates “[are you] not caring whither your feet are taking you, and living from one moment to another?” (Persius 351). While the Roman poet was denouncing the youthful disregard for choices made in and for each moment – living “ex tempore,” or “from one moment to another” –, Thoreau appropriates this passage for his own purposes and continues, “[t]he life of a wise man is most of all extemporaneous, for he lives out of an eternity that includes all time.”⁵ Thoreau intentionally takes Persius too literally by insisting that the wise lead *extemporaneous* lives. It is the spontaneous life that excites Thoreau’s interest, and only by embracing time as we experience it can anyone live extemporaneously.

However, spontaneity as a concept fails to achieve the full significance that Thoreau intends to convey. His use of *extemporaneous* in direct relation to Persius’ Latin expression *ex tempore* places a literal hue on his meaning that extends the term to imply significance in the moment of action. The only time worthy of our attention for Thoreau is any given moment in which we exist and act. Elsewhere Thoreau claims, “In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line” (*Walden* 11). It is not past failures or achievements nor choices affecting the outcome of the future (as Persius argues) that are worthy of our concern. Experience yields our only source of certainty,

and it is only in the *manifold of experience* whose form is given through space and time that we find any valuable answers. Just a few lines after intentionally misinterpreting Persius' meaning, Thoreau claims, "All questions rely on the present for their solution. Time measures nothing but itself" ("Aulus" 5). Like Kant, Thoreau understands the necessity of grounding his inquiry of knowledge and reality on the solid foundation of that which is given through our sensibility; thus seen, time must be viewed as a form in which all sensory experience is intuited or given. Talk of time outside of our given sense data, as in time's continued existence, or its beginning, simply lies beyond the capacity for human understanding, and any such speculation, for both Kant and Thoreau, must begin within the boundaries of human sensibility and understanding, and must never be understood as anything more certain than speculative reason.

However, it would be negligent to ignore the distinctions between Thoreau's and Kant's treatment of time and eternity. Eternity suggests what Kant called "the complete series of conditions" and involves the continued existence of the outer intuition⁶ of space that cannot be demonstrated since, in our perception, space is only a *form* of intuition, not its *matter*, and eternity implies that the matter of the manifold of experience is continued (CPR A453/B481). The idea of eternity is what Kant labeled one of the *antinomies of reason*, which demonstrate that an idea of "absolute totality, which holds only as a condition of things in themselves" has been applied to appearances (A506/B534). The problem with the Rationalist's attempt to employ reason in discovering ideas outside of actual experience is that their arguments used (theses) have equally compelling counterarguments (antitheses). In the first antinomy, Kant identifies the thesis as an argument for time having a beginning, while the antithesis argues for time's continued

existence. Kant claims that both contrary arguments bring the debate to an irreconcilable stalemate concluding that reason's employment outside of actual and possible experience fails to answer the dilemma. However, as seen in some of Thoreau's passages, the idea of eternity is readily evoked. Unlike Kant, Thoreau assumes time's continued existence outside of experience. However, this assumption never relies or appeals to that apparent belief in eternity, and Thoreau always insists on the present, observable moment. This interest in the present is reinforced when Thoreau claims in his July 14th 1840 journal entry, "[o]ur discourse should be *ex tempore*, but not *pro tempore*" (61). Both "ex tempore" and "pro tempore" emphasize a commitment to the present moment, but "pro tempore," or "for the time being" is a phrase interested in the present moment insofar as the choices in the present might lead someone to a more desired future time. The present moment almost seems like something to endure. Again, Thoreau clearly means to insist that living in the present moment is our only option, but also that we must fully embrace our subjective experience of time for its own value, not in lieu of or as a means to some better time to come.

Keeping this in mind, it is important to understand the nature of the present moment in Thoreau's writing. Max Oelschlaeger examines Thoreau's famous passage from *Walden* that states:

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I cannot count one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born. The intellect is a cleaver; it discerns and rifts its way into the secret of things. (93)

Though Oelschlaeger does argue that “Thoreauvian time is organic, a temporal flow to be enjoyed immediately,” he also claims that Thoreau’s conception of time reverberates an Emersonian idea that all time outside of our present experience is an almost fictive construction created by the present moment (155). Such a view grants access to eternal laws and truths and, in fact, eternity itself through some intuitive factor that relies on transcendent reasoning.

However insightful his analysis, Oelschlaeger takes far too much creative liberty claiming at one point that Thoreau’s metaphor, which equates time to a fishing stream, eliminates the possibility of a Newtonian absolute time altogether. This simply does not follow from the metaphor. Instead, it highlights Thoreau’s immediate, subjective relationship to time; it does nothing to eliminate its intrinsic, necessary qualities in his actual experience. What is more, in the metaphor of time as a stream, which directly relates to our own subjective experience, the water is reflecting the sky – a pool of stars out of reach from direct interaction, out of the reach of our casting lines. Thoreau states, “I *would* drink deeper; [I *would*] fish in the sky” (emphasis added). He never claims that he *does* fish in the sky. This sky represents eternity for Thoreau, and instead of proving that time is barren of any intrinsic qualities, it demonstrates that the phenomenal world gives us our only intelligible grasp on the elusive qualities of time: time (as a precondition for our experience) imposes itself upon the phenomena of our subjective experience. Again, here Thoreau’s understanding of time resembles the Kantian notion that all our perceptions must be structured by it, and it reinforces the belief that speculation into eternity must begin with actual perception (and the structures that enable that perception within the perceiver), and it insists that whatever speculation that follows

of eternity must exclusively be treated as such. Thoreau reinforces this commitment to the present moment, claiming, “[t]ime hides no treasures; we want not its *then*, but its *now*,” (*Week* 124). Thoreau would assuredly claim also that “we want not its” tomorrow as well. Time’s continued existence need not consume our attention; the present moment offers the only experience that we can have or should want for Thoreau.

However directly Thoreau seems to state his focus on the present subjective moment as a necessary condition for experience, objections arise regarding the compatibility of Thoreau’s and Kant’s views on time. In some instances, Thoreau seems to treat time as if he were not bound to it by experience and seems, instead, to support a view demanding a transcendent appeal to intuition in order to fully understand the perplexities and mysteries involved. However, such passages are written within a certain context often ignored by those seeking to align Thoreau with his Transcendentalist neighbors and often involve Thoreau adding retractions or stipulations in the very same work. In H. Daniel Peck’s *Thoreau’s Morning Work*, these objections are examined, and the work speaks directly to the common confusion over Thoreau’s treatment of eternity. In his first chapter, Peck studies some of Thoreau’s reflections on time written near and around his brother’s death. First Peck highlights the January 8, 1842 selection from Thoreau’s journal written days before his brother died:

Of what manner of stuff is the web of time wove, when these consecutive sounds called a strain of music can be wafted down through the centuries from Homer to me, and Homer have been [sic] conversant with that same unfathomable mystery and charm which so newly tingles my ears? These single strains, these melodious cadences which plainly proceed out of a very deep meaning and a sustained soul, are the interjections of God.
(*Journal* 97)

Here we find an account of time much closer to Oelschlaeger's interpretation. Again, Thoreau emphasizes a sentiment far closer to one of Emerson's by finding some access to a manifold of experience (outside the one present to him) being "wafted down through the centuries."⁷ This passage produces a problem for my thesis that Peck soon attempts to clarify. The problem that arises is that, unlike the passage cited by Oelschlaeger, here it would seem Thoreau sees time as something that we can transcend, giving us access to a world outside our immediate perceptions – access to a universal spirit or sentiment – rather than something compelling us to possible and actual experience. If we were to stop our inquiry here, we might be forced to accept a largely anti-Kantian view on time from Thoreau.

Of course, it can easily be noted that since Thoreau wrote the passage quoted above while awaiting his brother's death, his sentiments could easily have been uncommon to his typical beliefs regarding time. However, Peck answers this dilemma through textual support by contrasting this first passage with another journal entry from March 26, 1842, just months following his brother's death. In it Thoreau claims, "I thank God for the cheapness which appears in time and the world, the trivialness of the whole scheme of things, is in my own cheap and trivial moment. I am time and the world. I assert no independence. In me are summer and winter" (*Journal* 105). Peck rightly concludes that this sentiment, a bit removed from the turbulent emotional state of the previous entry, shows Thoreau straying from identifying time as bound to his subjective service, something capable of being surmounted. Instead Peck claims that "[s]udden inexplicable death [...] shook Thoreau's faith in the benign continuity of time's

progression, which was the very thing that made possible an intimate relation to the past” (8).

However, Peck did not need to refer but to that very same January 8 entry to discover such evidence. At the end of that Emerson-like entry, following his equating musical sounds to certain universal truths, Thoreau claims,

I think of that everlasting stable something which is not sound, but to be a thrilling reality [...] for a year of the gods were as nothing to that which shall come after. What then can I do to hasten that other time, or that space where there shall be no time, and these things be a more living part of my life, – where there will be no discords in my life?” (*Journal* 318)

In this passage, Thoreau reduces the sounds, referred to earlier in this entry as “the interjections of God,” to merely impressions. Whatever universal experience they *suggest*, they cannot deliver us outside of our subjective experience in time. This is indicated by Thoreau’s questioning how he might arrive at that eternal, non-temporal space where the mere impressions he experiences from the sounds of music earlier in the entry will “be a more living part of [his] life.” He offers no answer to this question because such a solution rests beyond the scope of his subjective experience and would require employing *transcendent* argumentation, an emotive move of awareness which Thoreau avoids. This reluctance echoes in his insistence, “I live in the present. I only remember the past – and anticipate the future” (*Correspondence* 216).

Thoreauvian Space

Just as Thoreau saw time as a necessary condition for the mind’s perception of the phenomenal world, essential for Thoreau’s excursion to Walden Pond, and indeed for his

lifelong commitment to observing nature, was a fascination with the form of space through which empirical, phenomenal observations could be made at all. The form of space plays an important role in Thoreau's thought, and its role in his writing demonstrates another connection to Kant. For Kant, space itself is not empirical, i.e. nothing observable in our perceptions can be identified as space; it is a form that all of the matter in our perceptions must presuppose (*CPR* A23/B37-8). Similarly, Thoreau hints at the form of space serving as an underlying precondition for our empirical observations. In his *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Thoreau reiterates his emphasis on the empirical world, writing, "[w]hat is this heaven which they expect, if it is no better than they expect? Are they prepared for a better than they can now imagine? [...] Here or nowhere is our heaven" (308). Thoreau's attention to our present moment, and the world intuited by us through our senses in that moment, centers his emphasis on consciousness serving as the root of what constitutes knowledge. In this passage he even labels the world that he intuitively "heaven" and denies that some better place can exist.

Thoreau's claim that we presently live in heaven is not commenting on the brilliance of the objective world around him. Instead, Thoreau is claiming that it is our subjective experience of the world deserving the title of "heaven." In this claim, the actual matter of our experience means far less than the form by which we experience it, and one of those forms for Thoreau would most certainly have to be the form of space. In another passage, Thoreau remarks, "Not till we are lost, in other words not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations" (*Walden* 162). Realizing "the infinite extent of our relations"

means, for Thoreau, how we make sense out of all the appearances as they relate to each other under one intuition. Thoreau claims that in order to “realize” this we must first lose “the world,” and by this he recognizes that the actual matter of our intuitions must be less significant than the means by which we perceive them in time and space. It is this realization that causes him to write

The wisest man preaches no doctrines; he has no scheme; he sees no rafter, not even a cobweb, against the heavens. It is clear sky. If I ever see more clearly at one time than at another, the medium through which I see is clearer. [...] What right have you to holdup this obstacle to my understanding you, to your understanding me! You did not invent it; it was imposed on you. (*Week 57*)

Thoreau regards “the medium” that allows for perception far more significantly than the actual appearances, claiming that it is the mind’s ability to perceive the world in space that improves if his perceptions are improved. That Thoreau recognizes this mental framework for perception is “imposed” signifies that the forms through which matter is intuited are necessary conditions for all perception. Without time or space, the mind could not intuit any perception.

CHAPTER IV

A THOREAUVIAN FACULTY OF THE UNDERSTANDING

Thus far we have seen how Kant distinguishes time and space as forms of the intuition, and we have also examined similarities that Thoreau's ideas on these forms share with Kant's. Time and space constitute the faculty of the intuition, and as such they demonstrate how sensory experience is both given to the mind and how the mind receives such sense-data. However, Kant intended to show that the mind is not an inactive receptor of sensory experience; it also engages and makes sense of the intuitions it receives. In order to account for this function of the mind, Kant first needed to establish that whatever operations go into structuring its sensory intuitions, they must be synthetic a priori judgments (*CPR* A2/B5). That is, whatever means the mind employs in structuring its intuitions must be categories of the mind that are independent of the sensory experience being perceived. Max Oelschlaeger already attempted to locate such categories of the mind in Thoreau's work, pointing to ecophenomenologist Neil Evernden, specifically in an effort to explain Thoreau's category construction.¹ In his *The Natural Alien: Humankind and Environment*, Evernden states:

The inclination to tell the story of 'how the world is' seems basic to being human [...]. We can only hope that when the story turns out to be too far removed from actual experience to be reliable, we still have the skill to return to the world beneath the categories and re-establish connection with it. (96)

Evernden clearly intends “categories” in this sense to refer to categories developed through experience and not as a priori ideas – a point Oelschlaeger surely understands, yet fails to acknowledge in his effort to align Thoreau with phenomenology. In fact, what Evernden calls humankind’s “social construction of reality” is entirely based on inferences made through the empirical world (96).

Identifying Thoreau’s conception of a type of faculty of understanding is a difficult task, and aligning any such conception too closely with Kant’s is somewhat misleading. Thoreau was evidently not openly or consciously interested in developing the strict, formal construction of a table of categories that consumed, in part, Kant’s epistemology, if for no other reason than that Kant’s project was a logician’s task. This is evident when recognizing that much of Kant’s terminology in *CPR* was borrowed from Aristotle’s *Categories*, one of the most significant works of logic in Western thought.⁸ Thoreau, on the other hand was no logician, nor did he ever claim to be. However, we need not logically detail just how Thoreau envisioned categories of the mind as they applied to experience in order to recognize his interest in them. In this chapter, I will examine H. Thomas Peck’s attempt at identifying categories in Thoreau’s thought, and I will demonstrate that such an attempt fails to reveal any a priori categories in Thoreau’s work for similar reasons that Oelschlaeger’s attempt failed. However, I will also show that in his failure, Peck misses the most telling indication of a priori categories. Pointing out the means by which Thoreau rigorously and meticulously examined the empirical world announces the types of categories that he was interested in and reveals something akin to what Kant called *transcendental schema*, which were the means by which concepts of the mind could be applied to the empirical world (*CPR* A138/B177).

As mentioned above, there has been some effort to identify in Thoreau's works certain categories as a "social construction." Another attempt to point out Thoreau's categories of the mind admittedly draws evidence from his writing of observational categories found in nature. Peck argues that Thoreau compared observations of the same object in experience from different journal dates to find natural categories. According to Peck, Thoreau's journal, especially in its later years, served primarily as a text for comparing natural phenomena, and Thoreau's search signified a pursuit for categories based on empirical relations. Peck claims, "Relations are always perceived, by Thoreau, within categories – within predetermined, cognitive frameworks" (82). Peck claims that despite describing the categories as "predetermined, cognitive frameworks" they are most certainly not synthetic a priori Kantian categories: "Thoreau's categories, unlike Kant's, are of the world – they emerge from it, even as they engender fresh new explorations of the world, which in turn lead to the creation of still further categories. Categorization in Thoreau is an earth-bound, perceptually grounded process" (84-5). Peck openly admits that Thoreau's categorization operates a posteriori, and in doing so, Thoreau's categories can only be determined through experience. However, in contrast to what he claimed just pages earlier in his book, Peck identifies Thoreau's categories as "predetermined, cognitive frameworks" and thus defines them as a priori categories.

Peck's fumble in describing Thoreau's categories points to something more significant than a slight misrepresentation of his own argument. As I have already addressed, Thoreau's inability to reconcile his sharp objections to both rationalist and empiricist epistemologies led him through a frustrating intellectual struggle, similar to that which motivated Kant's Copernican revolution⁹, but one that never quite found the

supposed resolve of his German predecessor. I believe that Peck's temptation to classify Thoreau's categories as innately inherent in the mind reflects Thoreau, the rationalist; while his identification of Thoreau's undeniable interest in constructing categories from the empirical, observable world points to Thoreau, the empiricist, forming a two-fold persona for the woodland writer. It is this chronic dialogue within Thoreau's intellectual life that leads readers to form two separate camps and often has them wavering in and between the interpretative party lines. It is also indicative of the noncommittal tendencies of Thoreau on this issue.

However, we need not abandon any attempt at uncovering Thoreau's ideas regarding the mind's faculty of understanding simply because he does not propose the formal, logical resolve that Kant establishes with his categories. Instead, it is precisely within this rationalism/empiricism tension where we find the greatest indications about Thoreau's understanding of the mind, its representations, and its relationship to the empirical world. Peck rightly identifies that certain categories do emerge from this constant dialogical tension of Thoreau's, even if Thoreau never consciously identified them or fully resolved their employment in the mind as applied to experience. Peck argues that Thoreau established certain categories of relation by his constant comparisons of natural, empirical observations (largely stemming from his journal); in turn, these categories became experiential, a posteriori structures. However, Peck forgets that there was an evident reason why Thoreau employed such an empirical method to begin with. Thoreau had discovered *through* his comparisons of natural phenomena something of a categorical nature. Relation, itself, was the operative category for Thoreau; though he may not have fully discovered why such a method of comparison compelled him, he

certainly was not satisfied with the empiricist synthetic a posteriori categories that Peck attributes to the process. Thoreau was not only building categories from experience; he was seeking some means by which he could find a truth, and he hoped to do so by moving back and forth between rationalism and empiricism.

Thoreau's back-and-forth search for a priori categories is evident enough when comparing two passages of Thoreau's written just a year apart. On the one hand, a very rationalistic Thoreau writes, "I find the actual to be far less real to me than the imagined. Why this singular prominence and importance is given to the former, I do not know. In proportion as that which possesses my thoughts is removed from the actual, it impresses me. I have never met with anything so truly visionary and accidental as some actual events" (*Journal* 155). Here Thoreau seems to be relegating experience to a less-significant status than thought and ideas. This seems contrary to the idea that experience is a necessary condition for a priori ideas, something that Kant was trying demonstrate. However, just one year earlier, Thoreau writes, "You have constantly the warrant of life and experience in what you read. [...] The sentences are verdurous and blooming as evergreen and flowers, because they are rooted in fact and experience" (*Week* 85). Here Thoreau admits that the reason why the ideas and thoughts conveyed on a page have any truth or "life" is because they are based on the actual. Thought is inseparably bound to experience. Both passages demonstrate Thoreau's struggle to locate thought's relationship to experience, and we will continue to see this to be true.

Understanding the relationship between thought and experience for Thoreau also highlights just how these two sources of knowledge interact. In doing so, we can better locate Thoreau's categories of the mind that lie independent of experience – categories

that are applied to experience. Here, we will explore the effects of Thoreau's processual epistemological program and determine how any categories derived from such a method. In his essay "Thoreau's Philosophical Apprenticeship," Joseph J. Kwiatt rightly identifies certain essays from Thoreau's college years as displaying a similar tension. Kwiatt highlights the heavy Empiricist teachings in the Harvard curriculum during Thoreau's school years, and he positions Thoreau among the post-Humean Empiricists (52). He argues that this philosophical leaning makes it a bit easier for Thoreau to move toward the American Transcendentalist frame of mind since these empiricists were beginning to move toward a philosophy of "common-sense," which resembled more and more rationalistic innate ideas while remaining committed to empirical observation as their claim to knowledge (59). However, Kwiatt equates this two-fold character of Thoreau's as eventually leading him to a nearer alignment with his Concord contemporaries. Such a reading minimizes the radical reaction against empiricism by the American Transcendental movement, including "common-sense" empiricists, and it neglects the fact that Thoreau never uprooted his deep-planted, empirical germ.

In his 1836 essay, "The Love of Stories," Thoreau writes,

We are curiously and wonderfully made, yet, how few comparatively, see anything to admire in the structure of their bodies. How then shall we account for this indifference to what is common – this appetite for the novel? By accident, through the medium of the senses first, the child is made acquainted with some new truth. (Early Essays 45)

Here Thoreau claims that experience holds an essential place in his thought by admitting priority to our empirical senses. A "new truth" is learned through the senses, and this epistemological model aligns with Locke's "blank slate" theory – a theory that proposes that at birth our minds are similar to a blank slate, which becomes filled with sensory

information as we grow. This theory denies that the mind possesses innate ideas at birth, independent of experience. Thoreau seems to esteem the senses to a similar degree in this passage. Even if pressed to account for the prepositional phrase that begins the sentence, “[b]y accident,” the admission of the “new truth” *accidentally*¹⁰ being found by empirical means still admittedly ends in a truth being learned, intentionally or not, through the senses. Though this very early writing need not define a more mature Thoreau, there are ample accounts in his journals to suggest that his lifelong interest in the empirical world reflects an underlying empiricist influence that, throughout his life, is to some extent in accord with the statement “through the medium of the senses first, the child is made acquainted with some new truth.” In fact, the last fourteen years of his journals reveal an almost exclusively empirical Thoreau. Passages detailing seeming insignificant natural observations like “[t]here is now a remarkable drought, some of whose phenomena I have referred to during several weeks past [...]. The *Populus grandidentata* perhaps suffers equally, and its leaves hang down wilted [...]. Many white birches long since lost the greater part of their leaves [...].” (*Journal* 780).

Thoreau recognized that experience plays a profound role in our acquisition of knowledge, even if he sometimes failed to fully understand just what that role is. For Thoreau, the empirical world served a more significant role in gaining knowledge than it did for his Concord contemporaries. Thoreau never strayed far from his empirical leanings. This fact seems to be, in part, one of Emerson’s greatest frustrations with him. In his eulogy for his young friend and disciple, Emerson complains:

Had his genius been only contemplative, he had been fitted to his life, but with his energy and practical ability he seemed born for great enterprise and for command; and I so much regret the loss of his rare powers of action, that I cannot help counting it a fault in him that he had no

ambition. Wanting this, instead of engineering for all America, he was the captain of a huckleberry-party. Pounding beans is good to the end of empires one of these days; but if, at the end of years, it is still only beans! ("Thoreau" 823)

For some years prior to Thoreau's death, there was a rift between the two friends, and among the chief explanations for this separation – a separation that prevented Emerson from visiting Thoreau even once during the bed-ridden year of his death – was a great disappointment that Emerson felt in Thoreau's failure to become the profound and important American writer and thinker that Emerson had envisioned. However, the cause of that failure, for Emerson, was "that he had no ambition," and Emerson certainly knew what he had in mind in defining Thoreau as lacking ambition: "[Thoreau] was the captain of a huckleberry-party." Emerson believed that, if "[Thoreau's] genius [had] been only contemplative," he could quite understand and accept his friend's death more easily; however, coupled with Thoreau's power of mind was "his energy and practical ability," which led Emerson to hope for a more meaningful life from his young friend. Emerson could see no value in Thoreau's practical, empirical application of a Transcendentalist philosophy, and their separation reveals that Thoreau the Empiricist could not be easily reconciled within a movement that largely rejected this empiricist influence and tendency of thought.

If one of the key points to Thoreau's distance from the other Transcendentalists was his similarity with Empiricist philosophers, it would seem that attempts such as Peck's that try to identify Thoreau's categories as "earth-bound" are completely consistent with his character. Indeed, I do believe that Thoreau was interested, to a great extent, in a posteriori categories as well. In fact, Thoreau claims that his interest in simplifying life is to discover the limits necessary for living life, and this exploration

would be discovered through empirical means. In some respect, his search for “the essential facts of life” (a posteriori principles) serve as an empirical reflection of Kant’s transcendental search for the limits of the human consciousness (a priori principles). However, Peck illustrates, in his attempt to outline Thoreau’s categories as empirical, that certain ideas become important to Thoreau in his empirical method (by Peck’s account, relation is the main one). Not surprisingly, one of the four types of categories of the mind in Kant’s *CPR* is the categories of relation that the mind employs as a means of distinguishing between one appearance and another, or between an appearance and a concept. There are three types of relational categories: of inherence and subsistence; of causality and dependence; and, of community (*CPR* A80/B106). Each of the categories of relation deals with how it is that the appearances within manifold of experience connect with one another, and how it is that these appearances connect with the mind’s understanding of them.

In his category of community, Kant deals with disjunctive judgments (either/or judgments) and claims that, even though they are mutually exclusive – only one statement will be true of the two – a totality of knowledge develops from both statements being taken together. He then claims that these concepts are analogously employed to experience or the “whole which can be made up of things” (B112). Kant describes the coordination between the concept of community and the actual, empirical world as separate parts existing independent of one another and “yet combined together in one whole” (*CPR* B113). Instead of looking at the empirical world and then deriving categories of relation (or any category), which would be a posteriori and as such dependent on experience, Kant aims to demonstrate that without categories already

operating in the mind independent of experience (a priori categories) there could be no way of deciphering relationships between different objects of experience, for example, no conception of particulars in relation to the whole. So, for Kant, the principle that substances perceived as coexisting in space “stand in thoroughgoing reciprocity” could not possibly be derived by simply observing the empirical world; our minds must employ categories to their intuited sensory experience (B256). As we will soon see, Thoreau, too, addresses such “reciprocity.”

Weighed against what critics like Peck and Oelschlaeger emphasize about Thoreau’s empirical categorization, this stands in direct contrast with how Thoreau develops his categories. However, such a reading of Thoreau’s method is limiting, and it tends to overemphasize Thoreau the Empiricist while ignoring passages like the following:

We think that that *is* which *appears* to be. If a man should walk through this town and see only the reality, where, think you, would the "Mill-dam" go to? If he should give us an account of the realities he beheld there, we should not recognize the place in his description. Look at a meeting-house, or a court-house, or a jail, or a shop, or a dwelling-house, and say what that thing really is before a true gaze, and they would all go to pieces in your account of them. (*Walden* 65)

Thoreau categorized from experience, but as this passage suggests, he was also careful not to trust appearance as reality. He highlights his own skepticism in a purely empirical account of the world, indicating that our observations through experience need something to connect them located outside of merely empirical means. In trying to describe an ordinary and familiar building in town, Thoreau emphasizes that our sensory and empirical tools can only provide fragmentary sense-data, with nothing connecting the images together. By claiming that we would not be able to understand a man’s “account

of the realities” of his perceptions of a town, Thoreau illustrates that a recitation of subjective images alone could not possibly convey any meaning. The buildings “would all go to pieces” in the man’s description without some means of ordering the images he sees and describes. This is why just lines later, Thoreau claims

And we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us. The universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions; whether we travel fast or slow, the track is laid for us. Let us spend our lives in conceiving then. (65)

Here Thoreau offers an interesting dichotomy: on the one hand whatever is “sublime” is apprehended by “the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us,” or by experience, while on the other hand he claims that the universe “answers to our conceptions,” or our ideas. If this does nothing else, it certainly emphasizes the point that the two-fold intellect of Thoreau cannot be easily overlooked. However, Thoreau also seems to be suggesting that our mind requires some means or concepts by which it can decipher the sensory experience it intuit. This indicates that Thoreau was interested in categories of the understanding. While Thoreau was evidently interested in the empirical world and establishing categories of experience within it, he also assumed concepts that ordered that experience to some extent. If this were not the case, it would be difficult to make much sense out of “the universe” showing obedience to our conceptions, and it would also render nearly indecipherable Thoreau’s illustration of the man’s observations of town buildings drawn just lines earlier.

Just how Thoreau is to make sense out of the relations of appearances is problematic. Kant, too, struggles with this issue. The means by which Kant applies a category of the mind to its unrelated empirical experience are called transcendental

schemas. The difficulty for Kant is in explaining how a schema applies a concept to an appearance: how does it enable the intuition or appearance to be ascertained by the concept of the mind; and how does it harmonize a specific concept to apply to the appearance? The schema must be able to answer both questions. I have mentioned that his solution for the category of community is “the co-existence, according to a universal rule, of the determinations of the one substance with those of the other” (*CPR* A144/B183). Important to Kant’s elaboration of schemas, though, is a distinction between the schema itself and the visual image. Kant wanted to be careful not to conflate the two.

Thoreau often ignores this distinction, relying heavily on the world of experience to guide his understanding of whatever a priori categories his mind was employing. Thoreau looked to the empirical world for *evidence* of categories, rather than hoping to find those categories *within* the experience. That is, he was looking to see the mind’s conceptions in praxis. He began by seeking out the transcendental schema in nature and from there, tried to determine the conceptions of our mind that the universe obeyed. Since the schema have something in common with both concepts and appearances, locating them in the empirical world indicated something about the operative concepts for Thoreau. For Kant this would be a faulty step, since it relies on experience to derive a priori categories – categories independent of experience. However, Thoreau may have already assumed these categories prior to the actual experience, and he used them in his meticulous observations of nature to establish other categories as well, a posteriori categories. The images or appearances of the buildings in the passage above came under rules of relation that operated to make sense out of the appearance as a whole. These

rules or concepts compelled him to offer his statement, “[l]et us spend our lives conceiving then” (*Walden* 65).

From this vantage, it seems that Thoreau is largely misclassified even by those most sympathetic to his ideas. This temptation and habit stem from a failure to reconcile Thoreau the empiricist with Thoreau the rationalist, and it typically leads to identifying only those categories of Thoreau’s that are derived from experience. In so doing, Thoreau’s ideas were often criticized for being located too closely to empiricism by his contemporaries; they failed to understand the significance of his thought and method (as was seen in Emerson’s eulogy). For the other Transcendentalists, Thoreau’s estimation of the natural world as meaningful in-and-of-itself placed too much significance on natural processes, where they emphasized nature’s ability to convey spiritual truth. However, Thoreau’s emphasis on the empirical world strays from Kant’s own ideas about categories of the understanding, as well. Kant began with the logical necessity of a priori categories that apply to our intuited experience, and tried to account for this application of concepts to appearances through transcendental schemas. Already assuming that the mind had conceptions to which the natural world adhered, Thoreau began his formal exploration of such categories in his identification of these schemas to and in experience. This is evident when considering his interest in the relation between different appearances addressed earlier. Also, Thoreau’s profound interest in cataloguing natural phenomena provides just such an array of detailed relations to compare with one another. He diverges from Kant in this respect, and in this processual movement between rationalist and empiricist conceptions of knowledge, Thoreau sought something akin to

Kant's categories, or at least a similar resolve to the same frustrating questions regarding the relationship of concepts and appearances that consumed Kant.

CHAPTER V

A THOREAUVIAN FACULTY OF REASON

As we have seen, Thoreau's outlook on space and time are compatible with Kant's explanation of how the mind intuits phenomena of the empirical world. We find some similarity with Thoreau's explanation of how the mind categorizes these intuited phenomena into categories, although distinctly different from the Kantian faculty of the understanding. Here I will examine an area of great interest for both Thoreau and Kant and one of the most significant points of divergence between Thoreau and the other Transcendentalists: the faculty of reason.

Reason, for Kant, is the faculty of the mind responsible for extending the functions involved in intuiting and categorizing actual and possible sensory experience to explain the nature of ideas entirely outside the arena of experience. This faculty deals with what Kant labels transcendental ideas. According to Kant, transcendental ideas are not connected to actual experience (*CPR* A311/B368). However, because our consciousness uses its principles of understanding to determine concepts existing in the phenomenal world, our faculty of reason attempts to mimic this process with certain concepts (ideas like God, the world as a totality, immortality, and freedom), treating such ideas as if they were within the realm of possible experience. In Kant's Transcendental Dialectic, he denies reason's ability to access such ideas that are devoid of experience,

calling reason's attempt "the logic of illusion" (*CPR* A293/B349). Kant considers this illusory exercise a natural feature of our consciousness and explains the desire propelling its employment as what he calls the greatest possible unity of reason (*CPR* A309/B365). Just as Kant had to account for things outside actual experience, Thoreau's interest in God, eternity, infinite space, and freedom had to find a resolution in a mind that so greatly valued empirical observation. These transcendental ideas play a significant and problematic role in Thoreau's thought. As we will soon discover, Thoreau is cautious of asserting too much liberty regarding knowledge of transcendental ideas; he insists on experience in the phenomenal world as the crucial and necessary indication of truth.

In addressing transcendental ideas, Kant concludes in his *Transcendental Dialectic* that reason's attempt to treat transcendent concepts like God, eternity of time, and infinity of space inevitably fail to be known, because such concepts lack experience to validate any conclusions about their nature. He does not believe that speculating about such concepts is worthless, though. The operation of our reason on transcendent concepts provides for Kant a heuristic model whereby we have some basis of direction in regard to questions for which no experience is possible. Kant separates such concepts from knowledge, committing them to the realm of faith and safeguarding them from skepticism (*CPR* A377).

Thoreau comes to a similar conclusion regarding transcendent concepts. Throughout his journal (even its rationalistic, Emersonian beginnings), as well as his published works like *Walden* which accounts for his life in the woods, Thoreau consistently emphasizes the empirical, phenomenal world as the source of our knowledge and certainty. In place of Kant's speculative model for reason, Thoreau employs a type

of emotive awareness¹¹ bearing resemblance to the Romantic philosophers. However, his awareness fails to achieve the status that it earns in other Transcendentalists, and it is in fact quite a different tool altogether. Instead, Thoreau advocates a unique emotive awareness for understanding transcendent concepts; like Kant's heuristic model, Thoreau's emotive response serves only as a kind of guideline, never delivering absolute certainty, only impressions. In a letter to Blake justifying his emphasis on the phenomenal world and his reluctance to speculate too greatly on transcendental ideas like God and immortality, Thoreau claims, "I would fain lay the most stress forever on that which is the most important, – imports the most to me, – though it were only (what it is likely to be) a vibration in the air" (*Correspondence* 384). Here Thoreau reduces this emotive impression of transcendent concepts to merely "a vibration in the air", denying it the certainty required to amount to knowledge. Again we see this awareness addressed in another letter to Blake:

As for passing *through* any great and glorious experience, and rising *above* it, as an eagle might fly athwart the evening sky to rise into still brighter and fairer regions of the heavens, I cannot say that I ever sailed so creditably [...] but I trust – what else can I trust? – that, with a stiff wind, some Friday, when I have thrown some of my cargo over board, I may make up for all that distance lost. (286)

Here Thoreau denies that he has ever gained access to transcendent truths or ideas "through" his "experience" in the phenomenal world, and he relegates any hope in finding such truth to "trust," or faith. Nothing highlights this point better than Thoreau's brief confession to Blake, "My only integral experience is in my vision. I see, perchance, with more integrity than I feel" (222). Thoreau clearly gives priority to a Kantian intuition of the phenomenal world through our sensory experience rather than a more Romantic intuition that involves an emotive insight. Thoreau's emphasis on a Kantian

intuition is again echoed when he claims, “[w]e can conceive of nothing more fair than something which we have experienced” (*Week* 308). Actual experience roots all our fairest, most desirable conceptions for Thoreau, and there can be no doubt that Thoreau understood and used “experience” here to mean our sensory experience. Just pages earlier he claims, “[o]bservation is so wide awake, and facts are being so rapidly added to the sum of human experience, that it appears as if the theorizer would always be in arrears, and were doomed forever to arrive at imperfect conclusions [...]” (297). The “theorizer” in this passage, by employing reason, fails at his task to find adequate knowledge when he pays no attention to the empirical world. Similarly, Romantic poets and philosophers fail at their emotive insight when they rely on their symbol-searching awareness over-and-beyond the actual experience from which they draw their conclusions. For Thoreau, experience itself provides knowledge, and the spiritual signs he seeks from that knowledge is purely speculative. This point is reinforced by his March 23rd, 1848 letter to Blake in which he states “Probe the earth to see where your main roots run. I would stand upon facts” (215).

Kant and Thoreau on Swedenborg

The reluctance from both Thoreau and Kant to ascribe knowledge of transcendental ideas to the human mind is evident through observing what both have said regarding the Swedish mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg was interested in determining a connection between the dualistic spiritual and physical worlds. He believed “that all beings exist simultaneously in the spiritual and material worlds, that all

beings have both spiritual and material aspects, and that even disembodied spirits exist in relationships of ‘correspondence’ to material objects” (*Dreams* xvii). However, what is particularly unique to Swedenborg is obviously not his subscription to a type of dualism; instead, Swedenborg’s uniqueness lies in his explanation of how such insight into these correspondences was to be known at all. He believed that transcendental ideas like God and immortality could be known through mystic, visionary moments, denying the ability of any intelligible means of finding that reason (*Dreams* 107).

In his *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, Elucidated through Dreams of Metaphysics* (hereafter *Dreams*), Kant hostilely attacks Swedenborg’s mysticism. In the newest translation’s introduction Gregory Johnson writes,

Kant wished to guard against Swedenborg’s mystical ‘enthusiasm,’ i.e., his claim to have special access to the secrets of heaven, a claim that replaces publicly available and empirically verifiable knowledge with the authoritative ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ pronouncements of an oracle or a prophet. (xix)

Building on his own demand for experience as a necessary condition for knowledge, Kant clearly establishes the limits of the human mind. Swedenborg’s visions enable the mind’s access to knowledge beyond its limitation – beyond actual sensory experience. Kant ridicules the notion of visionary moments, but there also seems to be evidence that Kant was actually deeply fascinated in and sympathetic to Swedenborg’s works. Johnson argues that Kant’s harshness toward Swedenborg was largely based on fear of ridicule and persecution. He claims that in many of Kant’s personal letters, he demonstrates an admirable fascination with accounts of Swedenborg’s more notable visions (xv). Despite the many merits in Johnson’s revisionist effort, we need not concern ourselves with Kant’s sympathy or antipathy for the Swedish mystic specifically. What is evident is that

fifteen years after publishing *Dreams*, Kant would sharply contrast Swedenborg's mystical claim to knowledge, demanding that we work within the limits of the human mind – limits rooted in experience.

However, this does not mean that Kant necessarily suggests a state of atheism either. He consistently sought for knowledge within the bounds of human understanding; of ideas outside that understanding, he admitted only speculative reasoning. Claims against God's existence assume knowledge of the transcendental idea of an eternal being, and such knowledge is outside the boundary of human understanding for Kant. In *CPR* he claims about the speculative nature of reason

I have not evaded its questions by pleading the insufficiency of human reason. On the contrary, I have specified these questions exhaustively, according to principles; and after locating the point at which, through misunderstanding, reason comes into conflict with itself, I have solved them to its complete satisfaction. The answer to these questions has not, indeed, been such as a dogmatic and visionary insistence upon knowledge might lead us to expect – that can be catered for only through magical devices, in which I am no adept. Such ways of answering them are, indeed, not within the intention of the natural constitution of our reason; [...] it is the duty of philosophy to counteract their deceptive influence, no matter what prized and cherished dreams may have to be disowned. (Axii-Axiii)

Here Kant decries the “visionary” attempts of mysticism to solve the mysteries underlying transcendental ideas like God, ridiculing mystical solutions as “magical devices” and “cherished dreams” and as having a “deceptive influence.” His solution is not to ignore such questions, though. He claims to have laid a foundation for speculative reason that is grounded in the actual functions of the mind. Kant connects metaphysical questions to the mind's faculties of sensibility and understanding, avoiding rationalism's attempt to obfuscate experience (or what he calls the “dogmatic insistence upon

knowledge”). For Kant, answers to transcendental ideas can only be guided or hinted at by our actual experience.

Thoreau also writes about Swedenborg, and in so doing, his sentiment bears a remarkable similarity to Kant’s. In his December 12th, 1856 letter to B.B. Wiley, Thoreau responds to a previous letter asking him about Swedenborg’s influence on his own writing. Wiley might have initially asked the question because of Emerson’s evident praise of Swedenborg on several occasions,¹² but Thoreau’s response demonstrates a telling difference between him and Emerson:

I cannot say that Swedenborg has been directly and practically valuable to me, for I have not been a reader of him, except to a slight extent [...]. He had a wonderful knowledge of our interior and spiritual life – though his illuminations are occasionally blurred by trivialities. He comes nearer to answering, or attempting to answer, literally, your questions concerning man’s origin, purpose, and destiny [...]. But I think that this is not *altogether* a recommendation; since such an answer to these questions cannot be discovered, any more than perpetual motion, for which no reward is now offered. The noblest man it is, methinks, that knows, and by his life suggests, the most about these things. Crack away at these nuts however as long as you can – the very exercise will ennoble you.
(*Correspondence* 447)

Thoreau treats Swedenborg’s mystical insights more sympathetically than does Kant, but he expresses the same concern about the inability for these visions to provide us with any knowledge. Thoreau applauds Swedenborg’s efforts, but he claims that questions about God, “man’s origin, purpose, and destiny” have no discoverable answers. However, like Kant, Thoreau does not mean to suggest an altogether atheistic position. His recommendation for Wiley to continue to “crack away at these nuts” – to continue asking and speculating about transcendental ideas – is justified through Thoreau’s belief that employing our speculative reason “will ennoble you.” Again, Thoreau reaffirms the value in speculation. In his May 2nd, 1848 letter to H.G.O. Blake, Thoreau begins by

claiming, “[t]he body can feed the body only. I have tasted but little bread in my life [...]. Of bread that nourished the brain and the heart, scarcely any” (219). And later in the same letter, he writes, “[i]n my cheapest of moments I am apt to think that it is not my business to be ‘seeking the spirit’ [...]” (221-22). Here Thoreau reemphasizes the significance of the empirical world admitting that actual experience amounts to nearly the only “bread” that he has “tasted.” Of the nourishment for both reason and his emotive faculty, Thoreau suggests that he has found little correspondence. Lacking evidence of correspondence, Thoreau resolves to avoid “seeking” the spiritual in nature; however, this resolve comes only in his “cheapest of moments,” and that he would devalue his denial of seeking the spiritual illustrates some appreciation for speculation, even if he could find no evidence of correspondence.

Phenomenal and Noumenal Considerations

Both Kant and Thoreau place emphasis on a phenomenal and noumenal world, and both account for the relationship between the two. In the next two sections, I will examine a problem existing in both Kant’s and Thoreau’s transcendental methods: the uncertain relationship between phenomenal and noumenal worlds. For both thinkers, the tendency emerges to separate the phenomenal from the noumenal, but at the same time both Kant and Thoreau have the difficult and necessary task of accounting for the connection between the two worlds. For Thoreau’s part, this task proves particularly problematic. Thoreau struggles between his desire to achieve universal laws (access to

transcendental ideas) and his reluctance to admit any truths outside actual experience. In his August 10th, 1849 letter to Blake, Thoreau claims,

The laws of earth are for the feet, or inferior man; the laws of heaven are for the head, or superior man; the latter are the former sublimed and expanded, even as radii from the earth's centre go on diverging into space. Happy the man who observes the heavenly and terrestrial law in just proportion; whose every faculty, from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head, obeys the law of its level; who neither stoops nor goes on tiptoe, but lives a balanced life, acceptable to nature and to God. (247)

Since Thoreau never uses the words “noumenal” and “phenomenal,” I will apply them in a Thoreauvian context by aligning Kant’s noumenal world with those ideas outside of experience, or what Thoreau loosely calls the “laws of heaven.” Kant’s phenomenal world will similarly apply to Thoreau’s “laws of earth,” which are bound to the physical, observable, empirical world. Here we see the problem with just how the noumenal and phenomenal worlds relate echoing in Thoreau’s words. His reluctance to conflate the two reverberates throughout this passage, though we also witness here admission of a connection between the phenomenal world and a noumenal world wherein universal laws exist. Thoreau asserts the existence of both, on the one hand separating the two and on the other indicating that nature bears a significant relationship to those universal principles. He claims that universal laws are a “sublimed and expanded” manifestation of natural laws. Thoreau believes that the laws of nature elevate universal laws, reflecting them purely and, as we will soon see, allowing for speculative leeway; he does not reduce nature to merely symbolic significance, for in his very next sentence he praises the moderation of viewing both sets of laws “in just proportion,” living a life “acceptable to nature and God.”

This division and simultaneous connection between nature and God in Thoreau's writing amounts to the phenomenal and noumenal worlds, respectively, and Thoreau commits the things outside possible experience to the noumenal and unknowable. In the next section, I will examine Thoreau's heavy emphasis on dividing the phenomenal and the noumenal, and elaborate his reasons governing this belief (a belief shared by Kant). I will then compare how both Thoreau and Kant intend to explain the necessary connection between the phenomenal and noumenal after placing the latter outside of possible experience, and therefore outside of knowledge.

Empirical Thoreau: Phenomenal Preference

Thoreau aligns with Kant in admitting the necessity of a kind of noumenal existence affecting his conception of the phenomenal world. That is to say, he carefully recognized the value and necessity of both a noumenal and a phenomenal world in our system of knowledge instead of conflating the two – a move that leads to regarding the natural world as a reflection of universal principles, as his contemporaries commonly did. Unlike the German idealists and his Concord neighbors, who advocated eliminating the “thing-in-itself” (Kant's term for distinguishing transcendental ideas outside possible experience – a term referring to the noumenal world),¹³ Thoreau believed that some relation exists connecting the unknowable principles and ideas of a noumenal world with the world of our actual sensory experience. For this reason, Thoreau esteemed the empirical as it is inside experience in the phenomenal world that grants us our only access to knowledge. This fact prompts Thoreau to spend the majority of two million

words in his journal recalling, in a fragmentary fashion, minor and meticulous observations about the natural world around him. As I have already argued, his interest in the phenomenal world was his attempt at deriving a priori ideas necessary for the actual experience.¹⁴

The divide between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds frustrates Thoreau's efforts. On the one hand, he wants to discover rational, universal truths through his simplification process; on the other, he recognizes that to do so would be to leap outside of his possible experience and thereby invalidate his fundamental, critical program. In his first letter to Blake, Thoreau opens, "I do believe that the outward and the inward life correspond [...]. The outward is only the outside of that which is within" (*Correspondence* 214). Here "the outward life" refers to the empirical world as given and "the inward life" refers to our conscious apprehension of it.¹⁵ In this sense, the world that we experience carries subjective significance. Clearly both inward and outward in this respect belong to the phenomenal world and demonstrate Thoreau's insistence on the phenomenal as the basis for any deduction of a priori ideas. It further emphasizes Thoreau's difference from his Concord contemporaries.

In his July 21st letter to H.G.O. Blake, Thoreau continues, "I am too stupidly well these days to write to you. My life is almost altogether outward, all shell and no tender kernel; so that I fear the report of it would be only a nut for you to crack, with no meat in it for you to eat" (284). Remembering that these letters served as a spiritual guidance for Blake helps to highlight their significance. Thoreau spent most of his time during the period that the letter was written surveying land. However, he begins the letter by describing himself as "stupidly well." Also, the metaphor he uses – equating a truth to a

nut – inseparably conveys a great deal about Thoreau's preference for phenomenal inquiry. The kernel is not exclusively symbolic of the inward truth he is to deliver to Blake. Instead, the entire nut serves part of that function, and because this is so, even if Thoreau had been living a completely contemplative life at the time of the letter, there would be no shell to protect and nurture the corresponding inward truth. Thoreau uses the metaphor to convey to Blake that he has no spiritual truths to deliver due to his life in the sensory world.

The Noumenal Dilemma

While Thoreau and Kant emphasize the phenomenal world, a problem arises when considering the noumenal. As forms of our intuition, time and space enable us to *intuit* (in the Kantian sense) the manifold of experience. This experience involves the subject's apprehension of phenomena. From what does the perceiver intuit the phenomenal world? Kant argues that the things-in-themselves (parts of the noumenal world) cause the production of the sensory, phenomenal world, and it is for this reason that Kant calls the phenomena that we intuit *given*. Thoreau also addresses just how the two worlds relate, claiming that Nature (some noumenal force) *wafts* the phenomenal world to us. Both thinkers attempt to account for the connection between noumena and phenomena similarly, and in-so-doing, both suffer from the same criticism inherent in this task.

All throughout the body of Thoreau's works, he consistently employs the same metaphor when describing how we come to have our perceptions in the phenomenal

world. “At present I am subsisting on certain wild flavors which nature wafts to me,” writes Thoreau (*Correspondence* 250). Again, he writes “Then is she my mother earth. I derive a real vigor from the scent of the gale wafted over the naked ground” (*Journal* 315), and “Music wafts me through the clear, sultry valleys, with only a slight gray vapor against the hills” (316). This expression is one of Thoreau’s favorite metaphors as he uses it hundreds of times within his writing, almost always indicating how he explains the apprehension of the phenomenal world. Thoreau uses the active verb *waft* to illustrate how the noumenal relates to the phenomenal: it *wafts* to the perceiver the sensory characteristics of the phenomenal world. This active verb aligns Thoreau’s ideas about the noumenal/phenomenal connection with Kant’s. In Kant’s account, there is a vaguely specified causal connection between noumena and phenomena that is hardly any clearer than Thoreau’s “wafting” (*CPR* A580/B608).

However, in order for Kant and Thoreau to argue this position, they must posit the principle of causation to the noumenal world if they are both to claim that from the noumenal we receive our phenomenal intuitions. Attributing causation to the noumenal world introduces a problem for both; it grants us knowledge of the noumenal world where Kant claimed we could have none. Thoreau agrees with the need to attribute a causal connection between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds, as demonstrated by his consistently reducing the impressions of his emotive awareness to mere guides. He therefore, suffers the same dilemma as Kant, attempting to describe just how the phenomenal, perceivable, and knowable world can be “given” from the noumenal, unperceivable, and unknowable world. Finding such a connection would require some

knowledge of the noumenal, and, as we have seen, neither Kant nor Thoreau claim knowledge to be possible of the noumenal world.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Thoreau's concern over his letter from Spencer Fullerton Baird inviting him into the Association for the Advancement of Science attests to Thoreau's full understanding of the complexities and complications involved in his philosophical interests. A questionnaire accompanied the invitation, and in the section for remarks, Thoreau writes, "I may add that I am an observer of nature generally, and the character of my observations, so far as they are scientific, may be inferred from the fact that I am especially attracted by such books of science as White's *Selbourne* and Humboldt's 'Aspects of Nature'" (*Correspondence* 310). Thoreau's commitment to observing nature raises many questions about his ideas concerning epistemology and metaphysics. What end did Thoreau believe his observations served? What did he hope to learn in his process? Thoreau cites Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne* and Alexander von Humboldt's *Aspects of Nature, in Different Lands and Different Climates* as books that indicate his own interest in nature, but both books are exclusively interested in observing and cataloguing natural facts rather than inferring anything from their observations. Why does Thoreau point to such naturalistic sources as indicative of his own project instead of also including in the questionnaire a remark about his alignment with Transcendentalism (something he claims that he was tempted to do)?

I have argued that Thoreau's philosophical inclinations fell far closer to a Kantian epistemology and metaphysics than did his contemporaries' notions. To this end, I have urged that Thoreau's interest in the natural, phenomenal world provided his only glimpse of certainty; any spiritual laws derived from such experience could only be speculative, while the other Transcendentalists argued that the end of observing nature should be locating spiritual truths or symbols. Referring again to Thoreau's remarks on the questionnaire, there is evidence of his Kantian similarity even in his citing Humboldt and White. Thoreau claims of these naturalistic influences that "the character of [his] observations, *so far as they are scientific*, may be inferred from [his reading of Humboldt and White]" (310, emphasis added). Thoreau adds the stipulation "so far as they are scientific" in his response to the questionnaire in order to leave open another type of enquiry, suggesting that insofar as knowledge and certainty are concerned, his naturalistic observations were his only "scientific" interest. However, this says nothing of his other metaphysical and speculative interests, which is why, as we have seen his journal admit, he fought the temptation to label himself a Transcendentalist in this questionnaire (529).

Thoreau is a puzzling figure, and as I have argued a Kantian interpretation of Thoreau's work through examining a wide selection of his writings, I have met with an equal number of enigmatic passages of Thoreau's that suggest a more Emersonian interpretation of nature, knowledge, and reality. Thoreau's journal embodies the widest span of his thought, not simply because of its length, but because he drew heavily from his journal when writing his published works and even many of his letters. As Sherman Paul pointed out, using Thoreau's journal as a measure for his thought, a general trend seems to emerge in his writing (261). At the beginning of Thoreau's journal in 1837, we

see a rationalistic voice proclaiming the existence and nature of innate ideas like God and immortality, somehow accessible to humankind, and this voice predominates much of Thoreau's writing for nearly fifteen years after Thoreau's first journal entry. In 1845, the eighth year of his journal, we see Thoreau using nature and literature frequently as the means to arrive at such universal truths, or ideas – a fact contrary to my project.

Consider the following July 14th 1845 entry, “[w]hat sweet and tender, the most innocent and divinely encouraging society there is in every natural object, and so in universal nature [...]” (109). This passage suggests that Thoreau was interested in finding universal truth by reflecting on the natural, empirical world. However, as his journal progresses throughout the 25 years of its production, Thoreau steadily speculates less about innate ideas and focuses much more heavily on empirical observations of nature. By the year 1851, fourteen years into his journal writing, Thoreau's entries become almost exclusively empirical accounts until Thoreau's death in 1862. In his September 2nd, 1852 entry, Thoreau writes, “[t]he seringo, too, has long been silent like other birds. The red prinos berries ripe in sunny places. Rose hips begin to be handsome. Small flocks of pigeons are seen these days” (485). Passages detailing natural events and observations litter Thoreau's mature, later journal entries, and Thoreau largely avoids inferring universal laws or truths from these experiences.

The greatest problem for me in synthesizing Thoreau's voluminous works and wide-ranging ideas is making sure not to highlight only those that support my research, especially when the body of literature from which to draw provides a vast well for many other interpretations. In my project I have tried to consistently account for Thoreau's often contrary ideas regarding knowledge and reality, viewing his entire body of work as

an organic process developing alongside the writer himself. However, I have been careful not to emphasize these latter writings of Thoreau's, which signify his largely empirical interest, as more significant than his earlier writings – a temptation that could only have aided my argument. I have taken into consideration the totality of his thought, and I have argued that even within his early years, there are numerous indications that innate ideas are never known with certainty, only speculated. For instance, in an August 1845 entry – just one month after we saw Thoreau looking for “universal” laws in the phenomenal world in the July passage cited above – Thoreau writes, “[e]very natural form – palm leaves and acorns, oak leaves and sumach and dodder – are [*sic*] untranslatable aphorisms” (113). Admitting that the aphorisms in nature are untranslatable seems contrary to Thoreau's ability to claim anything about a “universal nature” (109), and such claims are detectable throughout Thoreau's early rationalistic (and Emersonian) period.

Likewise, just as Thoreau demonstrates reserve in such claims about Nature's “untranslatable aphorisms,” the largely empirical accounts seen in the latter half of Thoreau's journal are not without their rationalistic speculation either. Only nine months prior to the 1852 journal entry cited above, Thoreau writes, “[h]ow nakedly men appear to us! for the spiritual assists the natural eye” (308). Though strikingly more empirical, the latter accounts of Thoreau's journal are not without their speculation. Thoreau is not exclusively interested in nature for nature's sake. He still clings to some, much slighter, desire to discover the universal in or from the particular. There is never a period in Thoreau's writing in which we can strictly identify him as either an Emersonian Transcendentalist or a Lockean empiricist. Both Thoreau the empiricist and Thoreau the

rationalist coexist throughout his writings, and his journal only emphasizes this fact. It is this coexistence at any given point in Thoreau's writing that suggests his Kantian ties. The benefit of arguing a Kantian interpretation is that such a view can much more easily resolve the rationalistic and empirical voices that underlie not only Thoreau's journals, but all of his works. The more difficult task lies in the assumption that he is either an Emersonian Transcendentalist or an empirical naturalist. Either view argues a limited interpretation of Thoreau that ignores very problematic passages.

Thoreau's interest in the phenomenal world as the limit of human knowledge owes a great deal to the Kantian epistemology that preceded him. I have aimed at aligning Thoreau with Kant in three significant aspects. First, I have considered Thoreau's own conceptions of time and space as Kantian forms of the intuition. Kant knew that all appearances we perceived have to be given under certain forms that do not constitute their matter. These forms for Kant also had to be synthetic a priori forms: forms independent of the experience or appearances that they enabled. These forms of the intuition launch Kant on his search for the limits of knowledge, and they serve as an equally significant starting place for Thoreau. When Thoreau deals with time especially, he emphasizes the subjective nature of appearances given in time, and the necessity of such a form to enable the observable world. Second, I also aimed at demonstrating Thoreau's interest in Kantian categories of the understanding. I specifically pointed to Thoreau's interest in the relation of and between appearances to reveal his emphasis on just how the mind structures the sensory observations that it receives. The last thrust of my paper addressed questions that rest outside the "scientific" enquiry that he mentions in the questionnaire from Baird – metaphysical questions that addressed ideas like God,

eternity, infinite space, and anything that lacked actual, empirical experience to evidence them. In Chapter IV, I pointed to Thoreau's writings to show that throughout, he maintained an overall speculative tone when writing about these subjects: instead of trusting his observations of nature as a vehicle to reach universal, spiritual truths, he would only admit conjecture when regarding these ideas.

In aligning Thoreau with Kant, I raise an important question: just how did Thoreau come to be influenced by Kant? It is certainly possible that Thoreau was familiar with some of Kant's works. As an alumnus of Harvard Divinity School, Thoreau was certainly familiar with philosophical tensions between rationalism and empiricism;¹⁶ he also studied German for four terms while there, showing an interest in German literature.¹⁷ However, there is no evidence of Thoreau ever reading Kant himself. Regardless, many of the Transcendentalists were interested in reading and translating Kant and the German Idealists following him. In 1844, Elliot Cabot wrote an article in the very last issue of the Transcendentalist publication, *The Dial*, giving an account of Kant's epistemology. Thoreau would have had easy access to many of these translations and writings, and he would have certainly been somewhat familiar with Kant through secondhand conversations. However, whether or not Thoreau was intimately familiar with Kant's philosophy or only vaguely familiar through secondhand sources, I argue that there is a connection between both thinkers' ideas; I do not speculate how that connection developed. Thoreau may have used a direct or indirect knowledge of Kant's epistemology as a model or guide in establishing his own notions, or he may have been responding to the intellectual atmosphere into which he was born – an atmosphere that was, in large part, owed to the epistemological framework established by Kant.

Regardless of how it happened, Thoreau demonstrates certain similarities with Kant, and it has been my exclusive interest to highlight those parallels.

The points for arguing a connection between Thoreau and Kant are numerous, and each contributes to a fuller understanding of Thoreau. One important aspect of comparing Thoreau and Kant is that in doing so, we might better understand the unique contributions that the *Walden* writer made. Thoreau often treads in the shadow of one of America's first intellectual giants (Emerson). While I believe Emerson deserves our attention, Thoreau's thought has consistently been subdued by, misunderstood in comparison to, and conflated with Emerson's monumental force in American thought. I hope that a fresh look at Thoreau's differences from his contemporaries might salvage some value and appreciation for Thoreau – a man in the unfortunate position of following in the footsteps of Emerson, who would almost singularly herald a unique American voice in literature. Another important reason for my project is to draw attention to the vast philosophical influences and differences in and between the Transcendentalists. This interesting American movement has no simple definition, and unfortunately, attempts at classifying the different thinkers involved under one simple set of ideas spreads an umbrella far too expansive to safeguard against the winds of scrutiny. Such classifications are bound to one of two fates: they serve as little more than an illusory label classing together different thinkers only nominally and, subsequently, producing a set of ideas so extensive as to tear at the first sign of careful examination; or they create a group of thinkers so loosely connected to very general, commonly shared ideas as to be almost meaningless at the invocation of the term. Transcendentalism is often used in the latter sense connecting thinkers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Orestes Brownson, Theodore

Parker, Amos Bronson Alcott, and sometimes Henry David Thoreau by whatever ideas they commonly shared. Unfortunately, such a list of shared ideas (emphasis on man's relationship to nature, nature reflecting moral or philosophical truth, self-consciousness, subjective experience, etc.) often seems to obscure their actual differences. While such general commonalities may at times be helpful for the basic understanding of a movement, they only reinforce the habit of placing Thoreau in Emerson's shadow.

Thoreau adopted many of his rationalistic tendencies from Emerson, but Thoreau's emphasis on a phenomenal, observable nature earned him distinction among his contemporaries, and this "captain of a huckleberry-party" (Emerson, "Thoreau" 823) managed to diverge from Emerson, his teenage idol, and find a voice of his own. Had Emerson not been so disappointed by Thoreau, he might have recognized in his young friend traces of the unique American voice that he so anxiously sought. In any event, Thoreau's voice still clearly resonates in our modern day – an age that has learned at a much slower rate the intrinsic value of the natural world. His emphasis on the empirical world positions Thoreau near Kant's own belief that knowledge derives from experience, and caused Thoreau, like Kant, to limit his conjecture about those "universal truths" that his New England contemporaries sought in Nature, classifying it outside of actual knowledge.

NOTES

1 Peck, 79-114

2 The “blank slate” theory was developed by John Locke in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and this idea was adopted by his successors, including Hume.

3 Kant consistently refers to sense-data as given, and a later section of this thesis will explore this idea in more detail. I will employ the same term frequently throughout this thesis, and will, therefore, not use quotations each time I do.

4 Instances when Thoreau unapologetically appeals to intuition will be explored later. Suffice it to say that this tendency is usually an early, sporadic one in his career. Also, they often involve more poetic ambiguity than is common in Thoreau’s writing, and they are usually quickly countered by sentiments and thoughts in subsequent journal entries and letters.

5 Though this passage implies a somewhat cosmological consideration of time as eternal – a notion rejected by Kant –, it is important to note that this passage actually emphasizes that Thoreau is not interested in the eternal here. This becomes clear through Thoreau’s own words just lines later, which I have included in the next paragraph. Thoreau uses eternity here to suggest that the present moment is the convergence of “two eternities”: the *past* and *future*.

6 In this paragraph I am using *intuition* in the Kantian sense.

7 The significance of this metaphor (Nature *wafting* to us our experience) will be explored later in this paper.

11 To see Kant’s use of Aristotelian terminology, one need only compare both works’ tables of contents. However, Kant directly addresses this fact in his *CPR* (A80/B105).

12 The Copernican revolution refers to the shift that man undergoes in Kant’s critical philosophy. Kant claims that man is at the center of both conceptual and perceptual experience, and this shift undermines both rationalist and empiricist models of knowledge. See Chapter 2.

13 I am assuming that Thoreau is using the word “accident” to mean “unintentionally,” though it is unclear as to whether or not he is using it in a Lockean sense, pointing to the substance/accident distinction.

11 In chapter 4, I use the term “emotive awareness” to describe the kind of intuition employed by the Romantic poets and philosophers. It will be remembered that I highlighted the term “awareness” to distinguish the Romantic’s intuition from the Kantian idea of intuition as an apprehension of the phenomenal world.

15 Examples of Emerson's praise of Swedenborg are readily available throughout his writing. See Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Modern Library, 2000) 18, 37, for references in *Nature*; 58 for a reference in "The American Scholar" in which Emerson calls Swedenborg "a man of genius"; 75, in "The Divinity Address," in which Swedenborg is mentioned for his "secondary knowledge of God."

13 A thing-in-itself for Kant is an idea that cannot be known because it lacks experience to grant such knowledge; however, it can be *thought* if it meets the requirements of a possible thought, i.e. it is not self-contradictory.

14 See the "Thoreau's Employment of Transcendental Reasoning" section of this paper.

15 Thoreau's identification of the inward life does refer to the possibility of universal truths as well as consciousness of the world, but those truths only amount to impressions as we will see.

16 In Joseph Kwiat's article, "Thoreau's Philosophical Apprenticeship," Kwiat addresses much of the curriculum being taught during Thoreau's studentship. He also points to several of Thoreau's college essays in which Thoreau deals on several occasions directly with empiricist thinkers.

17 For evidence of Thoreau's ability to read German, see Robert Richardson, *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*, 27.

WORKS CITED

- Arac, Jonathan. The Emergence of American Literary Narrative, 1820-1860. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005.
- Aristotle. The Basic Works of Aristotle. Ed. Richard McKeon. 18th ed. New York: Random House, 1941.
- Cabot, Elliot. "Immanuel Kant." The Dial: a Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion. 4.1 (1844): 362-65.
- Copleston, Frederick. A History of Philosophy. Vol. 7. Westminster, MD: Newman, 1963.
- Descartes, Rene. Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy. Trans. Donald A. Cress. 4th ed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Ed. Brooks Atkinson. New York: Modern Library, 2000.
- Evernden, Neil. The Natural Alien: Humankind and Environment. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985.
- Frothingham, Octavius B. Transcendentalism in New England: A History. Boston: American Unitarian, 1878.
- Furtak, Rick Anthony. "Henry David Thoreau." The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Fall 2006 ed. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2006/entries/thoreau/>>.
- Harding, Walter. Mr. Thoreau Declines an Invitation: Two Unpublished Papers by Thoreau, an Original Letter and an Annotated Questionnaire. Richmond: The Attic Press, 1956.
- Humboldt, Alexander von. Aspects of Nature in Different Lands and Different Climates with Scientific Elucidations. Trans. Sabine. New York: AMS, 1970.
- Hume, David. Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals. Ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon, 1990.

- Kant, Immanuel. Critique of Pure Reason. Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. New York: St. Martin's, 1965.
- . Dreams of a Spirit Seer. Ed. Gregory R. Johnson. Trans. Gregory R. Johnson and Glenn Alexander Magee. London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1900.
- . Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics. Ed. Lewis White Beck. Trans. Carus and Lewis White Beck. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1950.
- Kwiat, Joseph J. "Thoreau's Philosophical Apprenticeship." The New England Quarterly 18.1 (1945): 51-69.
- Locke, John. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Ed. Raymond Wilburn. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1948.
- Oelschlaeger, Max. The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology. New Haven: Yale UP, 1991.
- Paul, Sherman. The Shores of America: Thoreau's Inward Exploration. Urbana-Champaign: U of Illinois, 1958.
- Peck, H. Daniel. Thoreau's Morning Work: Memory and Perception in A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, The Journal, and Walden. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990.
- Persius [Aulus Persius Flaccus]. Juvenal and Persius. Trans. G. G. Ramsay. London: William Heinemann, 1969.
- Richardson, Robert D., Jr. Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind. Berkeley: U of California P, 1986.
- Slovic, Scott. Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing. Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1992.
- Thoreau, Henry D. The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau. Eds. Carl Bode and Walter Harding. New York: New York UP, 1958.
- . Early Essays and Miscellanies. Ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer, Edwin Moser, and Alexander C. Kern. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975.
- . The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau. Ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen. New York: Dover, 1962.
- . Walden and Other Writings. New York: The Modern Library, 2000.

---. A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers. Ed. Carl F. Hovde. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980.

White, Gilbert. The Natural History of Selborne. Ed. Richard Mabey. New York: Penguin, 1997.

VITA

Seth Aaron Thompson was born in Sierra Vista, Arizona on March 8, 1980, the son of Susan Carol Thompson and Timothy Wayne Thompson. Upon graduating from J.M. Hanks High School, El Paso, Texas, in 1998, Seth attended El Paso Community College for one semester before transferring to the University of Texas-El Paso. In 2000, Seth transferred again, to Texas State University-San Marcos, then Southwest Texas State University. He graduated with his Bachelor of Arts degree in English in August 2005, and he enrolled afterward into the Graduate College of Texas State University-San Marcos during the fall semester of 2005. During the course of his graduate studies in literature, Seth has been actively interested in philosophy as well, minoring in it for both his undergraduate and graduate degrees. He also works as a Graduate Instructor's Assistant in the Department of Philosophy. Upon graduation, Seth seeks to continue his study of philosophy and literature.

Permanent Address: 338 Copper Mountain

New Braunfels, Texas 78130

This thesis was typed by Seth Aaron Thompson.