

## Spirituality and Vegetarianism in Thoreau's Higher Laws

Associate Professor Su-chen Wu<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

---

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) was a key figure of the transcendental movement in American intellectual history. *Walden, or, Life in the Woods*, published in 1854, has become one of Thoreau's most famous pieces. Spirituality relates to a person's inner spirit, and therefore intensely to their experience of being human, as well as their meaning and purpose in life. "Higher Laws," a central chapter in *Walden*, provides the philosophical and religious foundations for the text. This chapter places special insistence on the centrality of spiritual life and serves as an illumination of the *Walden* experience. In "Higher Laws," Thoreau claims that human beings have a dual nature, part spiritual and part animal. Human beings are supposed to exercise and nourish the spiritual part, not the animal part. In this chapter, Thoreau argues against meat-eating by discussing its effects on personal spiritual development. Thoreau's vegetarianism manifests the spiritual aspect more than health concerns or the dislike of meat. His practice of vegetarianism emphasizes nonviolence and reverence for life, which gives his position a spiritual matter. The author argues that Thoreau's vegetarian practice presents a binding moral imperative and further shows that vegetarianism is an extension of one's spiritual practices.

---

**Keywords:** Spirituality, Vegetarianism, Higher Laws, Ethic, Transcendentalist

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) was a key figure of the transcendental movement in American intellectual history. Thoreau's intellectual development and literary achievement have over time caused him to be recognized as one of the most original and profound of American authors. *Walden, or, Life in the Woods*, published in 1854, has become one of Thoreau's most famous pieces. His writing in *Walden* focuses on many different themes, including the ideas and importance of nature, the meaning of progress, the importance of detail, and the relationship between the mind and body. He also developed many philosophical ideas concerning knowing oneself, living simply and deliberately, and seeking truth. As an American transcendentalist, Thoreau chose to go to Walden Pond at a time in his life when he was searching for a new perspective on reality. The work *Walden* illustrates an implicit social rebellion through the rejection of materialism and spiritual regeneration. The crucial question of vision that he poses his audience in the chapter "Sounds" is: "Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer?" (*Walden* 79). The word "seer" embodies symbolic meaning. Thoreau challenges his readers to see natural facts more accurately. He also urges them to be "seers" in the sense of a mystical prophet, someone who perceives the spiritual truth contained within nature's reality. In Thoreau's eyes, the seer must be willing to thoroughly "explore and learn all things" in the physical world. The seer must be aware of the higher spiritual truths contained in that reality. Spirituality is recognized as an individualistic quest for meaning. The seer must see the symbolic spiritual meaning contained in the physical. To him, reality and nature symbolize this higher truth, and hence, universal laws are perceived in his work. Overall, he tends to focus his writing on the pursuit of the development of spirituality.

---

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures, FoGuang University, Taiwan.

Before unfolding the main arguments of this paper, the definition of spirituality and its increasing impact on the contemporary world will first be presented. Spirituality, in whatever form it takes, is a vital dimension of humanity. What is spirituality? The contemporary use of the word "spirituality" is difficult to define precisely. The meaning of spirituality can be looked at from its etymology, which "is an enlightening place to begin our exploration" (McColman9). Philip Sheldrake traced the origins of the word "spirituality" as lying "in the Latin *spiritualitas*, which is associated with the adjective *spiritualis* (spiritual)" (Sheldrake 2). In other words, "spirituality" is a construction of the noun "spirit" and the suffix "-al." It includes the quality of being spiritual, meaning something related to the spirit, or something of the spirit. "'Spirituality' implies some kind of vision of the human spirit and of what will assist it to achieve full potential" (Sheldrake 1). It relates to a person's inner spirit, and therefore intensely to their experience of being human, as well as their meaning and purpose in life. The Royal College of Psychiatrists defines spirituality as:

...a distinctive, potentially creative, and universal dimension of human experience arising both within the inner subjective awareness of individuals and within communities, social groups and traditions. It may be experienced as a relationship with that which is intimately "inner," immanent and personal, within the self and others, and/or as a relationship with that which is wholly "other," transcendent and beyond the self. It is experienced as being of fundamental or ultimate importance and is thus concerned with matters of meaning and purpose in life, truth and values. (Cook et al, 2009)

Such definition of spirituality indicates that it is not only concerned with our own inner development, but is a way of living in which we have love and concern for all life in creation. "The spiritual dimension tries to be in harmony with the universe, strives for answers about the infinite, and comes essentially into focus in times of emotional stress, physical (and mental) illness, loss, bereavement and death" (Murray and Zentner 259). Kaiser made similar arguments: "Spirituality means being in the right relationship with all that is. It is a stance of harmlessness toward all living beings and an understanding of their mutual interdependence" (Kaiser 2000). Those on a spiritual path should endeavor to adopt an attitude and consciousness of harmlessness toward all life. Thoreau urges his readers to consider aiming for true spiritual progress: "In the long run, men hit only what they aim at" (Walden 21). He further argues, "Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth" (Walden 222). Therefore, "though they should fail immediately, they had better aim at something high" (Walden 22).

Thoreau firmly believes that we must search for reality. To understand which intellectual ideas underlie Thoreau's pursuit of spiritual enhancement, it will be necessary to gain an insight into the main spirit of the transcendentalist movement, by which Thoreau was greatly influenced. Transcendentalism was a distinctly American literary movement of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It promoted an ideal life of self-reliance which leads to spiritual abundance and focuses on the individual as well as the goodness and perfectibility of man. Transcendentalism then further evolved into an American literary, political and philosophical movement in the early nineteenth century, centered around Ralph Waldo Emerson. Other important transcendentalists were Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Amos Bronson Alcott, Frederic Henry Hedge and Theodore Parker.<sup>2</sup>As the unofficial leader of this intellectual group, Ralph Waldo Emerson pointed out that transcendentalism was not new; it was simply "idealism as it appear[ed] in 1842" (Emerson 201). In Emerson's eyes, the transcendentalist believes in miracles, conceived as "the perpetual openness of the human mind to a new influx of light and power"<sup>3</sup>. Emerson and others founded this "club" with several common beliefs: "Maintaining that the senses were unreliable allies in the personal search for absolute truth, they [transcendentalists] believed that insight into the universal reality of God came directly to each individual human mind. Rational scientific investigation, the transcendentalists argued, uncovered knowledge only of the inferior material world. To know God, each individual must set aside reason and fall back on intuitive perception. Doing so, the individual would discover within knowledge of genuine beauty, morality and justice" (McGregor 1997: 37 – 38).

<sup>2</sup>See Goodman and Russell. "Transcendentalism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), at <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/transcendentalism/>>.

<sup>3</sup> See Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*: Vol. 1, Nature, Addresses, and Lectures (1849; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1971).

For the transcendentalist, one has to be above material concerns and focus one's energies on attaining moral and spiritual excellence. This attitude clearly puts the transcendentalist in opposition to a materialistic society. American transcendentalism illustrates an ideal life of self-reliance which leads to pure spiritual abundance. As a transcendentalist, Thoreau not only had great transcendental thoughts, but also devoted his empirical spirit and personal practice to his ideals.

Thoreau was a Harvard student and became acquainted there with the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson. He is considered as one of Emerson's closest companions and transcendentalist adherents. Thoreau read Emerson's *Nature* during his senior year at Harvard (Sattelmeyer 15).

When asked in 1853 to describe in writing what branch of science Thoreau was interested in, he wrote in his journal, "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" (Shepard, 108). It is important to notice that Thoreau was so impressed by Emerson's ideas that he was eager to live in the woods and away from civilization. Thoreau found, by living such life, he could free himself from social conformity and activate a state of mind where new, universal and more liberal laws were established around and within him. Thoreau remained a transcendentalist for the rest of his life. In 1845, he moved into a cabin on Walden Pond (on land owned by Emerson) and took the natural world as his subject of study. As a thoroughly devoted follower of Emerson's ideology, Thoreau hovered around rebuilding the relationship with Nature to find one's individuality. Emerson described him in this way: "He was bred to no profession; he never married; he lived alone; he never went to church; he never voted; he refused to pay a tax to the State; he ate no flesh; he drank no wine; he never knew the use of tobacco; and though a naturalist, he used neither trap nor gun. He chose, wisely no doubt for himself, to be the bachelor of thought and Nature.... No truer American existed than Thoreau."<sup>4</sup> Transcendentalism focuses on the individual as well as the goodness and perfectibility of man. Thoreau's struggle to make meaning out of his life can be regarded as the presentation of a spiritual need. The quest to make sense of our past, present and future is essentially a "spiritual quest" (Holloway and Moss 110).

There exists a vital connection between our spiritual existence and the food we eat. The food we eat not only has an effect upon our physical, emotional and mental makeup, but on our spiritual consciousness. In other words, diet is a crucial aspect of spiritual development. Diet and consciousness are interrelated, and purity of diet is an effective aid to purity and clarity of consciousness. As the Nobel laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer claims, "When one becomes a vegetarian, it purifies the soul."<sup>5</sup> To be human, one should express reverence for all life that is like our own. Human beings should abstain from acts of violence towards other sentient living things. Meat in itself operates for vegetarians as a symbol of violence. Avoidance of it expresses the rejection of such violence and an affirmation of commitment to the preservation of life. The basic premise of what a vegetarian diet can offer is a nonviolent revolution. Motives for adopting a vegetarian diet vary considerably. Ethical vegetarianism expresses the conviction that to be fully human is to have reverence for all life, especially sentient life. This includes a rejection of violence and opposition to the killing of animals. No action is justified which results in the loss or shortening of the life of any sentient creature. In this sense, vegetarianism is not merely a code of dietary habits, but an essential element to creating a well-balanced connection between the body and mind. If people are trying to lead a life of nonviolence and compassion, and if they want to continue advancing in their spiritual development, then they will naturally want to follow a diet that helps them achieve that goal.

As an American essayist, poet, and practical philosopher, Henry David Thoreau sought to revive the concept of philosophy as a way of life, not only a mode of reflective thought and discourse. His work *Walden* leads to certain later developments in pragmatism, phenomenology and environmental philosophy. *Walden* has been admired by a large world audience. A great number of academic scholars have done extensive research on *Walden* from many and diverse perspectives. *Walden* combines philosophical speculation with the close observation of a specific place. In his article entitled "There Are Nowadays Professors of Philosophy, but Not Philosophers," Pierre Hadot argues that Thoreau's *Walden* displays some important similarities to both Epicureanism and Stoicism. In her article "Hunting the Human Animal: The Art of Ethical Perception in 'Higher Laws,'" Nancy Mayer presents Thoreau's perspectives on the moral aspects of eating animals.

<sup>4</sup>See Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoreau," *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1, 1862, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1862/08/thoreau/306418/>.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://serv-online.org/Meria-Heller.htm>

In *The Claim of Reason*, Stanley Cavell analyzes “the cost of our continuing temptation to knowledge,” namely, “the loss, or forgoing, of identity or selfhood” (241-2), which is precisely what Thoreau works to avoid by relocating to natural surroundings, pursuing a self-possession that an account of himself and his experiment helps to achieve. In his book *The Sense of Walden*, Cavell argues that “our relation to the world’s existence is . . . closer than the ideas of believing and knowing are made to convey” (145).

In “Thoreau and Emerson and Perfectionism,” Stanley Bates follows Cavell in seeing *Walden* as “an epic of self-cultivation” (28). Philip Cafaro’s essay “In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World” reminds us that Thoreau’s relationship to the world is not one of appropriation but non-violence: “Find happiness in knowing, experiencing, and being with nature, rather than in consuming, owning, or transforming it” (89). In “The Value of Being: Thoreau on Appreciating the Beauty of the World,” Rick Furtak argues that our relation to what surrounds us is aesthetic . . . but in a more local and contingent sense of openness and reception, which Furtak doesn’t hesitate to characterize as “a ‘religious attitude’ in which all of existence is regarded with wonder, reverence and awe” (115). Russell Goodman states in “Thoreau and the Body” that Thoreau achieves the Romantic ideal of intimacy with things not as a cognitive ego but as a graceful body that moves in comfort with itself and its surroundings, even when merely sitting (40-41). Thoreau’s purpose is to “re-enchante” a world that has been evacuated by a culture of scientific inquiry—which is basically the gist of Alfred Tauber’s “Thoreau’s Moral Epistemology and Its Contemporary Relevance” (128). In “Wonder and Affliction: Thoreau’s Dionysian World,” Edward Mooney argues that where one’s intimacy with the world is often laced with tragedy. Thoreau’s mode of response to such an event was not to withdraw into apathies but, on the contrary, to redeem the world by celebrating and even collaborating with its wildness. In “An Emerson Gone Mad: Thoreau’s American Cynicism,” Douglas Anderson proposes the Cynics rather than the Stoics as the philosophical company Thoreau chose to keep. In “How Walden Works: Thoreau and the Socratic Art of Provocation,” Jonathan Ellsworth takes the question to be Thoreau’s Socratic method of practicing philosophy.

“Higher Laws,” a central chapter in *Walden*, provides the philosophical and religious foundations for the text. This chapter places special insistence on the centrality of spiritual life and serves as an illumination of the *Walden* experience. In “Higher Laws,” Thoreau claims that human beings have a dual nature, part spiritual and part animal. Human beings are supposed to exercise and nourish the spiritual part, not the animal part. Thoreau believes that one is blessed “who is assured that the animal is dying out in him day by day, and the divine being established” (*Walden* 149). In this chapter, Thoreau argues against meat-eating by discussing its effects on personal spiritual development. A wholesome vegetarian diet is the underpinning of the harmonious balance of body, mind, and spirit. His practice of vegetarianism emphasizes nonviolence and reverence for life, which gives his position a strongly spiritual matter. In this study, the author examines how Thoreau developed the intellectual basis for his vegetarian choice in the chapter “Higher Laws” of *Walden*, which is recognized as an individualistic quest toward spiritual development for Thoreau himself. Diet as a crucial aspect of spiritual development will be explored as well. When one pursues a spiritual life and conforms to higher laws, one should partake less of the grossly sensual. In line with this, Thoreau recommends a vegetarian diet. Vegetarianism comes up quite a lot in relation to spirituality. Thoreau’s vegetarianism manifests the spiritual aspect more than health concerns or the dislike of meat. The author argues that Thoreau’s vegetarian practice presents a binding moral imperative and further shows that vegetarianism is an extension of one’s spiritual practices.

Thoreau’s vegetarianism based upon ethical concerns opens up spiritual themes in his ideology and underlying motives, which are illustrated in the chapter “Higher Laws.” He claims that human beings have a dual nature, part spiritual and part animal. Thoreau states, “I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one” (*Walden* 143). The distinction, Thoreau further explains, is between our “higher nature” and the “animal” in us. Thoreau calls the higher nature “divine,” “poetic,” and “good.” It is one’s “spirit,” distinguishing “men” from “brute beasts” which Thoreau speaks of as “wild,” “sensual,” and “reptile” (*Walden* 149), which is the lower, animal nature in us. Thoreau claims that he is attracted to both a mystic spiritual life and a primitive savage life: “I love the wild not less than the good” (*Walden* 143). He displayed deep opposition between the ideas of the body as an instrument of cleansed perception and as a source of pleasure. In his essay “The Religion of ‘Higher Laws,’” John B. Pickard sees Thoreau’s understanding of the body through a lens of dualism. This dualism is characterized with the low-being appetites, the high-being spiritual thirst and the harmonizer-being that mediates between the two.

In Pickard's words, this chapter "reflects Emerson's concepts in Nature, that every man possesses an inner spiritual instinct which, if carefully nurtured, will reveal the divine. Though this force may be weakened and coarsened by man's predatory appetite, it can elevate this physical drive and direct it towards a spiritual goal" (Pickard 85). As previously stated, Thoreau perceives two struggling natures, one a wild, animal nature and the other, a spiritual nature. The natural instincts toward savagery are a part of the complete man. They have the capacity to dehumanize man if they are freely allowed to dominate man's behavior. People can augment the size and vigor of the animal if they neglect the spirit and indulge their animalistic appetites. In the beginning of "Higher Laws," Thoreau describes the natural instincts with a metaphor about food and appetite. He takes "his hunger," an internal desire, as an example to illustrate the savage side of his natural instincts. He describes the struggle with his savage instinct to eat a woodchuck raw.

He sometimes hunted in his youth before his days at Walden Pond. Speaking of his experience at the Pond, he writes: "I caught a glimpse of a woodchuck stealing across my path, and felt a strange thrill of savage delight, and was strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw; not that I was hungry then, except for the wildness he represented" (Walden 143). It is this animal nature which urges his impulse to catch and eat a woodchuck raw. Thoreau believes that hunting may be good for boys because it is likely to be the only thing that gets them out of town and into the woods, where they may develop an appreciation for nature. Fishing and hunting do serve to introduce many children to the woods, and in this way, they may develop an interest in nature. For this reason, these are good activities for young people. By directly participating in killing, a boy comes to understand what killing is. "We cannot but pity the boy who has never fired a gun; he is no more humane, while his education has been sadly neglected .... Such is oftenest the young man's introduction to the forest, and the most original part of himself" (Walden 145). When people hunt, fish and eat meat, they have indulged greatly in sensual pleasures.

People nourish and identify with the animal part of themselves, yet they fail to explore life's higher and more challenging aspects due to their satisfaction with the lower, animal ones. In "Higher Laws," Thoreau gives his emphatic warning of the danger of staying on the surface of sensuality. Man should transcend his natural instincts towards savagery. He advocates that men should dive deeper or soar higher to seek spiritual truth: "Nature is hard to overcome, but she must be overcome" (Walden 150). There are higher laws to be sought by the spiritually enlightened adult. Thoreau calls these instincts toward a spiritual life "the faintest but constant suggestions of [one's] genius" (Walden 147). This instinct symbolizes an attraction toward the spiritual that exists in all men, which transcends the senses and the individual ego without denying them. Thoreau takes his experience of fishing at the pond to illustrate his objection to hunting and killing. In "Higher Laws," Thoreau comes out against hunting, fishing, and eating meat. If human beings intend to exercise and preserve their higher, spiritual nature, they should not include hunting, fishing, or meat in their lifestyles. Fishing and hunting, for instance, he praises as a necessary phase of every boy's education. Yet, children's knowledge and acquaintance with nature's creatures should deepen over time. The phase of fishing and hunting must eventually be left behind because it involves violence toward nature, which humanity must transcend. People will consciously decide not to kill and to act humanely. Instincts belonging to physical nature are elements to master. Thoreau believes that the hunter should put aside his gun and become a poet or naturalist (Walden 145). For his personal experience at *Walden*, Thoreau gave up hunting, at least for the most part. In "Higher Laws," he gave up fishing as well, as evidenced by this statement: "At present I am no fisherman at all" (Walden 145). Of his own fishing as an adult, he says, "I cannot fish without falling a little in self-respect" (Walden 145). Human beings have ideals which point to beyond what feels good to them, and they should follow them. To refrain from these things, Thoreau argues, human beings are living in conformity with "higher laws." He states, "No man ever followed his genius till it misled him. Though the results were bodily weakness, yet perhaps no one can say that the consequences were to be regretted, for these were a life in conformity to higher principles" (Walden 147). In maintaining a sense of brotherhood with the animals, killing animals is seen as killing people and could be regarded as murder. He writes, "No humane being, past the thoughtless age of boyhood, will wantonly murder any creature, which holds its life by the same tenure that he does" (Walden 145). Thoreau emphasizes that a "great consumer of meat" (cold woodchucks were a favorite of his) will be incapable of taking a "spiritual view of things" (Walden 104). In "Higher Laws," he is seen to be aware of his instincts towards savagery, and he deliberately chooses not to tear into a woodchuck even though his physical self craves it.

By Thoreau's analysis, we come to understand how sensuality and greed often cause us to fall short of higher values. Thoreau believes that people can affect the proportion of sensuality/greed to higher values in their lives by the way they live. People can cultivate and exercise their spirits. Appetite should be disciplined in the name of morality:

"Not that food which entirely into the mouth defileth a man, but the appetite with which it is eaten. It is neither the quality nor the quantity, but the devotion to sensual savors; when that which is eaten is not a viand to sustain our animal, or inspire our spiritual life, but food for the worms that possess us ... [t]he wonder is how ... you and I, can live this slimy beastly life, eating and drinking" (Walden 148).

When one wants to pursue the spiritual life and conform to higher laws, one should partake less of the grossly sensual. If people intend to strive to preserve their "higher faculties" and accept Thoreau's high valuation of principled action, they should be aware that their appetites count much. In Thoreau's eyes, thought is good, while appetite is unqualifiedly bad, an inferior form of consciousness.

The saint has much of the spirit and little of the beast, but the sensualist has a small spirit and a large animal. In line with this, people's appetites should be moderated in an appropriate way. What attitude should people take toward their appetites? Faced with natural inclinations, Thoreau believes his appetite must be overcome. "Who has not sometimes derived an inexpressible satisfaction from his food in which appetite had no share? I have been thrilled to think that I owed a mental perception to the commonly gross sense of taste that I have been inspired through the palate, that some berries which I had eaten on a hill-side had fed my genius," (Walden 48) he says. Thoreau advocates that human beings must overcome their human nature. Thoreau's account of killing and eating a woodchuck offers him "a momentary enjoyment, notwithstanding a musky flavor, (but) I saw that the longest use would not make that a good practice" (Walden 44). As "Higher Laws" develops, Thoreau begins to equate instincts with temperance and chastity. This reflects his faith that the genius can come to a front within man's nature and the savage instincts can be tamed. Thoreau sketches his metamorphosis from fisherman to saint. In the "Conclusion," Thoreau writes:

I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with success in uncommon hours.... In proportion, as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. (Walden 217)

Temperance and chastity are equalizing characteristics when applied to the natural instincts toward savagery. The human exercises of temperance and chastity rely on the will and discipline to transform the brutish appetites of the body into direct "channels of grace and sainthood" (Pickard 86). People are supposed to exercise and nourish their spiritual aspect, not the animal aspect. We find that there is much more required of the self, of the individual, in order to live a life to achieve knowledge of the higher laws.

Thoreau argues against gross sensuality and gluttony and asks people to step back from their desires. The economic life has to be reduced to its bare essentials. He defines a necessity as "whatever of all that man obtains by his own exertions, has been from the first, or from long use has become, so important to human life that few, if any, whether from savageness, or poverty, or philosophy, ever attempt to do without it" (Walden 11). To survive, Thoreau claims that there are only four necessities—food, shelter, clothing and fuel. Heaven boils these four down to one: heat. Food serves as an internal fuel that creates "animal heat," and the other three are external means of maintaining that heat (Walden 12). Thoreau discovered that simplicity in the physical aspects of life brings depth to our mind. In his chapter on "Economics," he reveals the first premise of his philosophy. He saw in the simplicity of life a major condition of the achievement of a natural relation between man and nature: "I do believe in simplicity. It is astonishing as well as sad, how many trivial affairs even the wisest man thinks he must attend to in a day; how singular an affair he thinks he must omit. So simplify the problem of life, distinguish the necessary and the real. Probe the earth to see where your main roots are" (Walden 65). Thoreau goes on to recommend a vegetarian diet. A wholesome vegetarian diet is the underpinning of the harmonious balance of body, mind, and spirit. He seeks in himself and urges in his reader the perfection of the spiritual nature through avoidance of meat and animalistic desires. Thoreau argues, "I believe that every man who has ever been earnest to preserve his higher or poetic faculties in the best condition has been particularly inclined to abstain from animal food, and from much food of any kind.... The fruits eaten temperately need not make us ashamed of our appetites, nor interrupt the worthiest pursuits" (Walden 146).

Thoreau argues against meat-eating by discussing its effects on individuals' happiness and spiritual development. Thoreau was not a strict vegetarian, but he generally preferred not to eat meat. Meat-eating is not necessary for health because human beings can sustain an active, healthy life on a vegetarian diet. For food, he argues that "it would cost incredibly little trouble to obtain one's necessary food, even in this latitude, that a man may use as simple a diet as the animals, and yet retain health and strength" (Walden 45). He describes his own diet as consisting primarily of "rye and Indian meal without yeast, potatoes, rice, a very little salt pork, molasses, and salt, and my drink water" (Walden 45). But for the most part, he followed a vegetarian diet and seems to have felt guilty when he strayed from it. "Whatever my own practice may be," he says, "I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals" (Walden 147). Thoreau himself sometimes ate meat: not just fish, but apparently pork and other forms of flesh as well, and he cooked with lard (Walden 44).

To limit and discipline one's appetites rather than give in to them, in Thoreau's views, is conducive to the higher human pursuits. "If I knew so wise a man as could teach me purity," he says, "I would go to seek him forthwith" (Walden 149). In his eyes, the more important goals are those that enhance a human's spirituality. People should strive to attain the ideal condition of a human being—"purity," he calls it—in which a person is all spirit and no animal.

Thoreau's discussion of hunting and vegetarianism broadens into a consideration of some of the most important and vexing issues in general virtue ethics. Taking animal lives causes terror, pain and suffering. People can see this if they equate true humanity with sensitivity to others' suffering. If people make no distinctions between human suffering and the suffering of other sentient beings, they will come to realize that there is the same suffering when ending either a human or a non-human life. Thoreau appeals directly to experience: It may be vain to ask why the imagination will not be reconciled to flesh and fat. I am satisfied that it is not. Is it not a reproach that man is a carnivorous animal? True, he can and does live, in a great measure, by preying on other animals; but this is a miserable way -- as anyone who will go to snaring rabbits, or slaughtering lambs, may learn. (Walden 147) If killing animals is murder, then eating them is something like cannibalism, which hardly anyone approves of anymore. Thoreau prefers to take food in a sacred manner. Attentiveness to experience allowed him to see ethical issues. He illustrates, "The hare in its extremity cries like a child. I warn you, mothers, that my sympathies do not always make the usual philanthropic distinctions" (Walden 145). He equates a true humanity with greater sympathy for all nature's creatures and with a deep appreciation for their existence. All life is sacred, all life is precious, all life is divine—so how can people justify taking life to satisfy their unnecessary appetites? When people place a focus on higher human activities, they are unlikely to eat meat. They can easily live a life of nonviolence and equality.

Thoreau is deliberate in regulating his ways in the greater world. This is the development of a personal ethic through deliberate living. Thoreau states, "I went into the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and to see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary" (Walden 65). Thoreau's two years and two months at Walden Pond were a deliberate time from which he gained knowledge about life in the wild and searched for his true self. This deliberate life requires that people maintain a constant effort to stay awake, guarding against all human tendencies to conform to the life already molded for them by society. Thoreau wrote confidently of his direction: "If one listens to the faintest but constant suggestions of his genius, which are certainly true, he sees not to what extremes, or even insanity, it may lead him; and yet that way, as he grows more resolute and faithful, his road lies" (Walden 147). He seems to be asking his readers to make a paradigm shift within their lives, to live deliberately as individuals, to reject the comfort and security that society has offered them.

Thoreau asks readers to consider a paradigm shift in their lives towards who they really are. He also uses prison, or the state of imprisonment, to symbolize the desperate condition he sees his contemporaries languishing in because they have taken the wrong way (materialism) or have stumbled into the ruts of tradition. "Look at the teamster on the highway, wending to market by day or night; does any divinity stir within him" (Walden 8)? asks Thoreau. The teamster drives for Squire Make-a-stir and has no time to cultivate his spiritual life. He is the "slave and prisoner of his own opinion of himself....What a man thinks of himself, that is which determines, or rather indicates, his fate" (Walden 8). To do this, individuals must take themselves out of the life that is defined by society and enter into a life that is true to themselves. The dilemma is described even more precisely in the chapter "Where I Lived." Thoreau states: "I perceive that we inhabitants of New England live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things. We think that is which appears to be" (Walden 58, 69).

In living his life deliberately and simply there, he is awake, whereas the people who are living their lives "insensibly" are asleep. Thoreau sees his life and movement at Walden Pond as being an awakening experience. Being awake is a metaphor used throughout *Walden* to describe the life that Thoreau has chosen in contrast to the lives of those who remain inside their structured place in society. "...effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive" (Walden 64). Most people, he argues, are never even partially awake intellectually or spiritually. "The millions are awake enough for physical labor," he says, "but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life.

To be awake is to be alive" (Walden 64). In becoming awake, one leaves the comforts of a set path and is challenged to hear the music of a different drummer and follow it. "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away" (Walden 219). Thoreau uses the idea of slumbering as a metaphor for mankind's propensity to live by routine, without considering the greater questions and meaning of existence. Therefore, he urges his readers to seek spiritual awakening. He emphasizes the perspective he gains by awakening early and experiencing nature. He is Chanticleer crowing to awaken his neighbors to new life. As he says in "Where I Live, and What I Lived for": "I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as Chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up" (Walden 60). He uses the metaphor of awakening in the morning to demonstrate the difference between himself and the Concord townsmen.

The slumbering of mankind in his village, in Thoreau's eyes, needs spiritual awakening. He believes that we are "sound asleep" half of the time because we let society's norms guide us through life rather than making our own set of norms. This is a critique of society because generally society is sound asleep and unaware of these truths that Thoreau knows as an individual. Fischer states that it is important "to know truth from falsehood, necessity from accident, simplicity from unwarranted complexity, purity from contamination, fact from fiction, nature from artifice, freedom from slavery and reality from appearance" (Fisher 97- 98). Thoreau's confidence that he knows what it really means to be awake is to know a series of truths presented in *Walden*: "We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us, even in our soundest sleep.... It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do" (Walden 64). Thoreau's metaphor of awakening from the slumber of life illustrates his hope and belief in the progress of human beings to a newer, greater understanding of themselves. He believes in the individual's capacity to transcend a life determined by his/her human nature and to become awake and know his/her true self. Spirituality is recognized as an individualistic quest for meaning. The word "spirituality" refers to the deepest values and meanings by which people seek to live. It involves bringing us closer to our true nature, our true self. Thoreau was devoted to fostering this spiritual quest—a quest for meaning or belief or experience that transcends the daily grind.

Those on a spiritual path should endeavor to adopt an attitude and consciousness of harmlessness toward all life. Thoreau's vegetarianism, at its roots, was not a simple dietary choice. It presents ethical considerations against the taking of life. The logic of his argument for vegetarianism leads finally to a "moralistic" position. *Walden* offers new values through giving a new perspective to its audience, which changes life's meaning and purpose. Thoreau went to Walden Pond at a point in his life when he realized he needed to search within himself and to discover his true self. For the person who is spiritually awake, however, "the spirit can for the time pervade and control every member and function of the body, and transmute what in form is the grossest sensuality into purity and devotion" (Walden 149). Human beings can transcend their desires if they recognize nature's value and live accordingly. His life as a social rebel, naturalist and transcendentalist is a worthy example to others, and he thus "affected the quality of the day" (Walden 65). *Walden* develops a moral awareness of his self-fulfillment which results in acceptance of what he truly is and what kind of a world he truly seeks to live in. Thoreau's emphasis on nonviolence and reverence for life endorse the reasons of his vegetarianism. His writings are a fit expression of a life based on high ideals and aspirations which integrate integrity and morality.



## References

- Bates, Stanley. (2012). "Thoreau and Emersonian Perfectionism." *Furtak, Ellsworth, and Reid*. 14–30.
- Cafaro, Philip J. (2012). "In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World: Thoreau's Environmental Ethics." *Thoreau's Importance for Philosophy*. Eds. Rick Anthony Furtak, Jonathan Ellsworth, and James D. Reid. New York: Fordham University Press. 68-90.
- Cavell, Stanley. (1981). *The Sense of Walden: An Expanded Edition*. Chicago University.
- Cavell, Stanley. (1979). *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*. Oxford University Press.
- Chatterjee, Margaret. (1989). *The Concept of Spirituality*. Ahmedabad: Allied Publishers.
- Cook, C., Powell, A., Sims, A. Eds. (2009). *Spirituality and Psychiatry*. London: RCPsych Publications.
- Douglas R. Anderson. (2012). "An Emerson Gone Mad: Thoreau's American Cynicism." *Thoreau's Importance for Philosophy*. Eds. Rick Anthony Furtak, Jonathan Ellsworth, and James D. Reid. New York: Fordham University Press. 185-200.
- Ellsworth, Jonathan. (2012). "How Walden Works: Thoreau and the Socratic Art of Provocation." *Thoreau's Importance for Philosophy*. Eds. Rick Anthony Furtak, Jonathan Ellsworth, and James D. Reid. New York: Fordham University Press. 143-158.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. (1971). "The Transcendentalist." *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by Alfred R. Ferguson, Jean Ferguson Carr, and Douglas Emory Wilson. Introductions and notes by Robert E. Spiller et al. 7 vols. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1862) "Thoreau," *The Atlantic Monthly*,  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1862/08/thoreau/306418/>.
- Fisher, Michael. (1992). "Walden and Contemporary Literary Theory." *New Essays on Walden*. ed. Robert F. Sayre. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Furtak, Rick A. (2012). "The Value of Being: Thoreau on Appreciating the Beauty of the World." *Thoreau's Importance for Philosophy*. Eds. Rick Anthony Furtak, Jonathan Ellsworth, and James D. Reid. New York: Fordham University Press. 112-126.
- Goodman, Russell B. (2012). "Thoreau and the Body." *Furtak, Ellsworth, and Reid*. 31–42.
- Hadot, Pierre. (2005). "There Are Nowadays Professors of Philosophy, but Not Philosophers." *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 19:3 (2005): 229—237.
- Holloway, M., and Moss, B. (2010). *Spirituality and Social Work*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kaiser, L. (2000). "Spirituality and the Physician Executive: Reconciling the Inner Self and the Business of Health Care." *The Physician Executive*, 26(2). March/April".
- Mayer, Nancy. (2009). "Hunting the Human Animal: The Art of Ethical Perception in 'Higher Laws.'" *The Concord Saunterer*, 17 (2009): 27-43.
- McColman, Carl. (1997). *Spirituality: Where Body and Soul Encounter the Sacred*. Georgetown, MA: North Star Publications.
- McGregor, Robert Kuhn. (1997). *A Wider View of the Universe: Henry Thoreau's Study of Nature*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Mooney, Edward F. (2012). "Wonder and Affliction: Thoreau's Dionysian World." *Thoreau's Importance for Philosophy*. Eds. Rick Anthony Furtak, Jonathan Ellsworth, and James D. Reid. New York: Fordham University Press. 159-84.
- Murray, R. and Zentner, J. (1989). *Nursing Concepts for Health Promotion*. London: Prentice-Hall.
- Pickard, John B. (1968). "The Religion of "Higher Laws."" *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Walden*. Ed. Richard Ruland. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Sattelmeyer, Robert. (1988). *Thoreau's Reading: A Study in Intellectual History with Bibliographical Catalogue*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sheldrake, Philip. (2007). *A Brief History of Spirituality*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Shepard, Odell. (1927). *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*. Boston Houghton Mifflin, Riverside Press.
- Tauber, A. I. (2012). "Thoreau's Moral-epistemology and Its Contemporary Relevance." *Thoreau's Importance for Philosophy*. Eds. Rick Anthony Furtak, Jonathan Ellsworth, and James D. Reid. New York: Fordham University Press. 127-42.
- Thoreau, Henry David. (2008). *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings*. 3d ed. Edited by William Rossi. New York: W. W. Norton.

Does being vegetarian makes you more spiritual? Here we will investigate these assumptions and put to rest vegetarianism and spirituality. Will you have more psychic powers by eating less meat? Vegetarianism and Spirituality – Is it Necessary? These widely held belief can be traced to the misinterpretations of ancient teachings. Moreover, if we are to be enlightened, we must put past our preconceived ideas and find the truth for ourselves. Here we will investigate these assumptions and put to rest the notions between vegetarianism and spirituality. Does being vegetarians make you more spiritual? Modern spiritual teachers say that eating meat makes us less spiritual. That the body will plunge into spiritual filth, makes our mind unclear, and retards our spiritual progress. An investigation of vegetarianism, spirituality and health in the light of Occult Science. It is only a difference in degree because we regard a cow as a higher form of life than a lettuce. Whether the Creators make the same distinction is something we leave you to ponder. This Law applies throughout the manifested universe, from atoms to Angels, however unpalatable it may be to those zealots who embrace vegetarianism as a dogmatic religion, rather than through economic necessity or life-style choices. Whilst the primary aim of this investigation is to present the facts of vegetarianism in the light of spirituality it is appropriate that we consider physical and mental health too, for the benefit of those who may be conflicted about the pros and cons of a vegetarian diet. Vegetarianism and veganism are central to the path of spirituality and the ascension of the soul back to its true realm, the journey of mysticism or gnosis. The Gnostics, for instance, were vegetarians. In addition to the disability produced by living in an unaware, high violence culture that doesn't see the problem with that, I wouldn't be surprised if there are actual chemical influences in the meat that adversely effect meditation, along with the other health issues (growth hormones, antibiotics, cardiovascular decline, inflammation, carcinogens) that have been documented. For thousands of years, spiritual paths that are visionary, that advocate meditation practices pertaining to seeing inner Divine Light and hearing inner Divine Sound have been vegetarian. In "Higher Laws," Thoreau deals with the conflict between two instincts that coexist side by side within himself – the hunger for wildness (expressed in his desire to seize and devour a woodchuck raw) and the drive toward a higher spiritual life. In discussing hunting and fishing (occupations that foster involvement with nature and that constitute the closest connection that many have with the woods), he suggests that all men are hunters and fishermen at a certain stage of development. Although most don't advance beyond this stage, if a man has the "seeds of better life in him," he may evolve to understanding nature as a poet or naturalist and may ultimately comprehend higher truth.