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PHL 472.01: Thoreau

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Thoreau
Philosophy 472/572 Fall 2021

Note: Due to Covid-19, masks are required when attending class indoors.

Instructor Information

Prof. Paul Muench (pronounced "Minch")

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office hours: T 10-12, H 10-12, or by appointment

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Class Time

Monday/Wednesday, 2:00-3:20p.m., TBA

"[I]t is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things" ("Economy," Walden, 7).

"I purposely talked to him as if he were a philosopher, or desired to be one" ("Baker Farm," Walden, 198).

"To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live, according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically" ("Economy," Walden, 14).

"The philosopher is in advance of his age even in the outward form of his life. He is not fed, sheltered, clothed, warmed, like his contemporaries. How can a man be a philosopher and not maintain his vital heat by better methods than other men?" ("Economy," Walden, 14).

"We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn [...]. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor" ("Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," Walden, 88).

"To effect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. Every man is tasked to make his own life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour" ("Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," Walden, 88).

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived" ("Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," Walden, 88).

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) has long been celebrated as a writer who helped to establish a distinctively American literature. Perhaps best known for his writings on nature and the environment, and his defense of the idea that unjust laws should sometimes be disobeyed, Thoreau also thought of himself as a kind of philosopher, someone who investigated “the art of life,” that “economy of living which is synonymous with philosophy” (“Economy,” *Walden*, 49; 50). Thoreau’s significance as a philosopher will be our focus in this course. We will read a number of Thoreau’s shorter writings, including essays about what meaningful work is, Thoreau’s advocacy for the abolition of slavery, and the value he attached to walking and to the wild, before turning to a close reading of *Walden*. Our goal will be to try to determine the sense in which Thoreau is, first and foremost, a philosopher who seeks to equip his readers with tools for a better life.

Learning Goals

Undergraduates and graduate students:

1. Students will be able to articulate the views of Thoreau.
2. Students will be able to articulate the main arguments developed for and against the different positions defended by Thoreau.
3. Students will be able raise their own criticisms of the different positions defended by Thoreau.
4. Students will be able to write a research paper on a philosophical topic, drawing on views defended by Thoreau.

Graduate students:

5. Graduate students will be able to relate the criticisms they develop of the different positions defended by Thoreau to views that have been defended in the secondary literature.
6. Graduate students will be able to write a term paper that draws on views defended by Thoreau, examine these views critically, and relate these views to a larger body of secondary literature.

Course Requirements (Undergraduates)

1. Attendance/Participation	10%
2. Philosophy Journal	10%
3. Portfolio	20%
4. Paper #1	20%
5. Paper #2	20%
6. Take-Home Final Exam	20%

Course Requirements (Graduate Students)

1. Attendance/Participation	10%
2. Philosophy Journal	10%
3. Portfolio	20%
4. Term Paper	60%

Readings

Books

These two books are required and can be purchased at the UM bookstore. It may also be worth checking the prices at www.amazon.com or www.bookfinder.com. They are on two-hour reserve in Mansfield Library.

1. Thoreau, *Essays: A Fully Annotated Edition*, ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer (Yale University Press, 2015 [1842-1863]); ISBN 978-0300216806).
2. Thoreau, *Walden: A Fully Annotated Edition*, ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer (Yale University Press, 2004 [1854]); ISBN 978-0300104660).

The bookstore sells new and used physical copies of books, occasionally allows you to rent books (returnable at the end of the semester), and sometimes has digital copies of books. I personally prefer physical books that I can hold in my hand, write in, etc.

[UM Bookstore link](#)

Additional Required and Recommended Readings

I will make available additional required and recommended readings on the class Moodle page.

Moodle

This course has a Moodle page (<https://moodle.umt.edu>). For more information on how to access Moodle, [login](#) and then select Moodle 101 for Students.

Email

Any email that I send to the class will be sent to your university email address via Moodle. It is your responsibility to check your email on a regular basis.

Office Hours

Due to the risks of COVID-19, my office hours this semester will normally be offered remotely using Zoom. My normal office hours are Tuesdays 10:00 am -12:00 pm and Thursdays 10:00 am-12:00 pm If these times are not convenient, I am happy to make an appointment with you for another time.

Note: I hold office hours on Zoom, but will not be live on Zoom on my scheduled days unless someone has reserved a time slot ahead of time to meet with me.

[To sign up for an office hours time slot](#)
[Zoom link to use the day of our meeting](#)

Accommodation for Disabilities

Whenever possible, and in accordance with civil rights laws, the University of Montana will attempt to provide reasonable modifications to courses for students with disabilities who

request and require them. Please feel free to set up a time with me to discuss any modifications to this course you may require. For more information, contact the [Office for Disability Equity](#) (ODE). Their office is located in the Lommasson Center, room 154.

Attendance, Participation, Class Etiquette

Attendance and Participation:

Your attendance and participation are crucial for the success of this class and will play a significant role in determining whether or not our time together proves to be intellectually fulfilling. As many of you probably know, it is a university requirement that you attend all class meetings for courses in which you are enrolled (See "[Class Attendance/Absence Policy](#)") In my experience, students also get the most out of those classes that they regularly attend. In this course I will take attendance. Everyone may miss three classes, no questions asked (and no justifications/explanations required). After that, each absence will reduce your attendance/participation grade by 10% (that is, 1% of your final grade). If you have to miss a class, it is your responsibility to hand in ahead of time any work that is due and to obtain any new assignments that are handed out.

Participation has many facets and might be compared to citizenship. Those who are good classroom citizens do three things: (1) come to class prepared, having read and thought about the assignment; (2) take an active role in class discussions, sharing their critical insights and raising questions that help to generate further discussion and reflection; (3) take an active role in learning the names of and respectfully listening to their fellow classmates, and in helping to foster a learning environment where all feel welcome to participate and respected as fellow inquirers regardless of the extent to which we may or may not happen to agree about a given topic under investigation.

Etiquette:

As a courtesy to me and to your fellow students, during class please do not (1) talk to a classmate while I or others are speaking; (2) consult other reading materials (such as newspapers, crossword puzzles, etc.), surf the web, or play computer games; (3) use your cell phone.

Philosophy Journal/Portfolio

You will keep a philosophy journal or diary in this course, in which you respond to questions I give you, both about the assignments and about yourself. Some of your entries will be a record of certain experiments in living that you have attempted. I will grade your journal twice during the semester. At the end of the semester, you will turn in a portfolio.

Papers

Undergraduates will write two 5–7-page papers. Graduate students will write one longer, 12–15-page paper.

Six criteria for evaluating a paper:

- Substance;
- Thesis and argument structure, including introduction and conclusion;
- Use of supporting material and evidence;
- Quality of analysis, including the crucial distinction between unsupported assumptions and value judgments vs. analysis and argumentation;
- Use of quality sources;
- Quality of writing, including correct grammar, clarity, concision, and persuasiveness.

A-range:

This paper is outstanding in form and content. The material covered in class is understood in depth: the student shows that s/he has a command of, including a critical understanding of, the material. The thesis is clear and insightful; it is original, or it expands in a new way on ideas presented in the course. The argument is unified and coherent. The evidence presented in support of the argument is carefully chosen and deftly handled. The analysis is complex and nuanced. The sources are original texts or quality secondary literature. The student utilizes appropriate grammar/spelling/punctuation as well as a clear, precise, and concise style.

B-range:

The argument, while coherent, does not have the complexity, the insight, or the integrated structure of an A-range paper. The material covered in class is well understood: the student does not make any mistake on the materials but does not show great depth in critical understanding. The paper's thesis is clear and the argument is coherent. The paper presents evidence in support of its points. The sources are original texts or quality secondary literature. The student utilizes appropriate grammar/spelling/punctuation as well as a clear, precise, and concise style.

C-range:

This paper has some but not all of the basic components of an argumentative essay (i.e., thesis, evidence, coherent structure). For example: the paper features a clear misunderstanding of some of the material covered in class, or the thesis is not clear, or the argument is not coherently structured, or evidence in support of the thesis is lacking, or only non-scholarly sources are used. The student still utilizes appropriate grammar/spelling/punctuation as well as an appropriate argumentative writing style.

D-range:

This paper features very few of the basic components of an argumentative essay. It may be rather poorly written and proofread.

F-range:

This paper does not qualify as an argumentative essay and/or it is very poorly written and proofread.

The Art of Reading

Reading, like writing, is an art that can only be acquired through extensive and intensive practice. In general, you should plan to read each assignment for this course two times before you come to class:

- (1) Do the reading once to get a sense of the overall shape of the discussion and what the chief issues and questions seem to be;
- (2) Do the reading a second time, going more slowly and with an eye to how the different parts hang together. As Thoreau put it, "To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written" ("Reading," *Walden*).

Plagiarism/Academic Dishonesty

I will not tolerate cheating or plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty in this course. In addition to being a violation of [the University of Montana Student Conduct Code](#), cheating harms your fellow students by giving you an unfair advantage, and harms you since you thereby fail to take yourself seriously. In general, the first instance of cheating or other forms of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade ("F") for the course and will also be subject to University sanction.

Thoreau Links

Here are some links to resources about Thoreau:

[Digital Thoreau](#)

[Henry David Thoreau online](#)

[Mapping Thoreau Country](#)

[The Thoreau Society](#)

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

(Subject to change with advance notice)

Week 1

M 8/30

Introduction

- (1) Lewis, "The Case Against the Past" (**Moodle**)
 - (2) Dean, "A Thoreau Chronology" (**Moodle**)
- Recommended:
- (3) Witherell, "[Life and Times of Henry David Thoreau](#)"
 - (4) Furtak, "[Henry David Thoreau](#)"
 - (5) Hohn, "Everybody Hates Henry" (**Moodle**)

W 9/1

Working for a Living

- (1) Thoreau, "Life Without Principle," *Essays*, 346-368

Recommended:

- (2) Solnit, "Mysteries of Thoreau, Unsolved: On the Dirtiness of Laundry and the Strength of Sisters" (**Moodle**)

Week 2

M 9/6

No Class (Labor Day)

Taylor, "Henry Thoreau, Nature, and American Democracy" (**Moodle**)

W 9/8

Nature #1: Walking (Why and Where)

- (1) Thoreau, "Walking," *Essays*, 243-260 (¶¶ 1-37)
- (2) Harding, "Thoreau's Reputation" (**Moodle**)
- (3) Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau as Remembered by a Young Friend*, 1-5 (**Moodle**)

Week 3

M 9/13

Nature #2: The Wild

- (1) Thoreau, "Walking," *Essays*, 260-280 (¶¶ 38-87)
- (2) Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau*, 6-10 (**Moodle**)

W 9/15

Politics #1: Slavery and the Constitution

- (1) Delbanco, *The War before the War: Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America's Soul from the Revolution to the Civil War* (selections) (**Moodle**)
 - (2) Declaration of Independence (**Class Handout**)
 - (3) U.S. Constitution (**Class Handout**)
 - (4) Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau*, 11-15 (**Moodle**)
- Recommended:
- (5) Harper, "[Fugitive Slaves](#)"

Week 4

M 9/20

Politics #2: Fugitive Slaves in Massachusetts

- (1) Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," *Essays*, 172-189
 - (2) Albrecht, "Conflict and Resolution: 'Slavery in Massachusetts'" (**Moodle**)
 - (3) Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau*, 16-20 (**Moodle**)
- Recommended:
- (4) Harper, "[Slavery in Massachusetts](#)"

W 9/22

Labor; Desperation; Necessaries of Life

- (1) Thoreau, "Economy," *Walden*, 1-13 (¶¶ 1-18)
- (2) Harding, "Five Ways of Looking at *Walden*" (**Moodle**)
- (3) Walker, "Thoreau's Alternative Economics: Work, Liberty, and Democratic Cultivation" (**Moodle**)
- (4) Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau*, 21-25 (**Moodle**)

Week 5

M 9/27

Philosophy; Trade Secrets; Clothing; Shelter

- (1) Thoreau, "Economy," *Walden*, 14-39 (¶¶ 19-59)
- (2) Jolley, "Thoreau as Philosopher" (**Moodle**)
- (3) Hadot, "There are Nowadays Professors of Philosophy, but not Philosophers" (**Moodle**)
- (4) Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau*, 26-30 (**Moodle**)

W 9/29

Building; Statistics

- (1) Thoreau, "Economy," *Walden*, 39-62 (¶¶ 60-88)
- (2) Jolley, "Walden: Philosophy and Knowledge of Humankind" (**Moodle**)
- (3) Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau*, 31-35 (**Moodle**)

Week 6

M 10/4

Furniture; Philanthropy

- (1) Thoreau, "Economy," *Walden*, 62-77 (¶¶ 89-111)
- (2) Borjesson, "A Sounding of *Walden's* Philosophical Depth" (**Moodle**)
- (3) Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau*, 36-40 (**Moodle**)

Undergraduate Paper #1 Due

W 10/6

Where I Lived, and What I Lived For

- (1) Thoreau, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," *Walden*, 78-96
- (2) White, "A Slight Sound at Evening" (**Moodle**)
- (3) Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau*, 41-45 (**Moodle**)

Week 7

M 10/11

Reading

- (1) Thoreau, "Reading," *Walden*, 97-107
- (2) Gould, "Reading on: *Walden's* Labors of Succession" (**Moodle**)
- (3) Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau*, 46-50 (**Moodle**)

Philosophy Journal Due

W 10/13

Sounds

Thoreau, "Sounds," *Walden*, 108-124

Week 8

M 10/18

Solitude; Visitors

- (1) Thoreau, "Solitude," *Walden*, 125-134
- (2) Thoreau, "Visitors," *Walden*, 135-149

W 10/20

The Bean-Field; The Village

- (1) Thoreau, "The Bean-Field," *Walden*, 150-161
- (2) Thoreau, "The Village," *Walden*, 162-167

(3) Walker, "Thoreau on Democratic Cultivation" (**Moodle**)

Week 9

M 10/25

Politics #3: Disobedience vs. Submission

- (1) Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Essays*, 145-160 (¶¶ 1-24)
- (2) Paley, "The Duty of Submission to Civil Government Explained" (**Moodle**)
- (3) Solnit, "The Thoreau Problem" (**Moodle**)

Recommended:

- (4) War Tax Resisters League, "[War Tax Resistance](#)"
- (5) Descendants of Mexican War Veterans, "[Concise History of the U.S.-Mexican War](#)"
- (6) Descendants of Mexican War Veterans, "[Chronology](#)"

W 10/27

Politics #4: Taxes and Prison

- (1) Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," *Essays*, 160-171 (¶¶ 25-45)
- (2) Rosenwald, "The Theory, Practice, and Influence of Thoreau's Civil Disobedience" (**Moodle**)

Week 10

M 11/1

Politics #5: Conscience and Knowing How to Die

- (1) Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," *Essays*, 190-216
- (2) Thoreau, "The Last Days of John Brown," *Essays*, 217-224
- (3) Turner, "Thoreau and John Brown" (**Moodle**)

W 11/3

The Ponds

- (1) Thoreau, "The Ponds," *Walden*, 168-193
- (2) Baker, "'The Ponds' as Linkage" (**Moodle**)
- (3) Sattelmeyer, "The Remaking of *Walden*" (**Moodle**)

Week 11

M 11/8

Baker Farm; Higher Laws

- (1) Thoreau, "Baker Farm," *Walden*, 194-201
- (2) Thoreau, "Higher Laws," *Walden*, 202-210 (¶¶ 1-9)

Undergraduate Paper #2 Due

W 11/10

Higher Laws; Brute Neighbors

- (1) Thoreau, "Higher Laws," *Walden*, 210-213 (¶¶ 10-15)
- (2) Thoreau, "Brute Neighbors," *Walden*, 214-227

Week 12

M 11/15

House-Warming

Thoreau, "House-Warming," *Walden*, 228-245

- W 11/17 **Former Inhabitants; Winter Visitors; Winter Animals**
 (1) Thoreau, "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors," *Walden*, 246-261
 (2) Thoreau, "Winter Animals," *Walden*, 262-272
- Week 13
 M 11/22 **The Pond in Winter**
 (1) Thoreau, "The Pond in Winter," *Walden*, 273-288
 (2) Borck and Rothschild, "Meditative Discoveries in Thoreau's 'The Pond in Winter'" (**Moodle**)
Philosophy Journal Due
- W 11/24 **No Class (Thanksgiving Break)**
- Week 14
 M 11/29 **Spring**
 (1) Thoreau, "Spring," *Walden*, 289-308
 Recommended:
 (2) Cavell, "Night and Day: Heidegger and Thoreau" (**Moodle**)
- W 12/1 **Concluding *Walden***
 Thoreau, "Conclusion," *Walden*, 309-325
- Week 15
 M 12/6 **Nature #3: Savage, Awful, Beautiful Nature**
 (1) Thoreau, "Ktaadn, and the Maine Woods" (**Moodle**)
 (2) Hoag, "The Mark on the Wilderness: Thoreau's Contact with Ktaadn" (**Moodle**)
- W 12/8 **Conclusion**
 (1) White, "Henry Thoreau" (**Moodle**)
 (2) Emerson, "Thoreau" (**Moodle**)
 (3) White, "One Man's Meat" (**Moodle**)
- Week 16
 M 4/26 **Philosophy Portfolio Due**
- W 4/28 **Take-Home Final Exam Due**
Graduate Student Term Papers Due