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### PHIL235 Environmental Ethics Discussion Board Posts

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## **PHIL 235: Environmental Ethics**

**Professor: Dr. Barbara Lowe**

**Assignment:**

**Discussion Board Posts**

**SUBMISSION for Cardinal COVID Journal**

**The following are responses to a Discussion Board prompt students completed in PHIL 235: Environmental Ethics in the Spring of 2020. After reading chapter two of Henry D. Thoreau's Walden, students were asked to pick a quote from the chapter and consider how it might connect to our situation today and, specifically, to COVID19. A sampling of student responses are offered below and, when responded to a same or similar quote, are grouped together.**

### **QUOTE:**

"I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of a man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor."

### **Meg Bilodeau**

"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 in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to 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. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour" (Thoreau 13).

I believe what Thoreau is saying is we need to reawaken ourselves from this "sleep" we are all in, and keep ourselves awake with things that will improve the quality of everyday life. There is so much hate and so many problems in the world today and everyone is so engulfed in their work and with politics and hate, and it is so important for our generation to wake up from this sleep and do things that will save us from the sleep we've been in. For example, the corona virus is our current "sleep" and everyone is so sucked up in it, which is normal, but everyone is stuck at home and not doing things to improve the quality of the days. In these times, it is important to "paint a picture" or "carve a statue" and ultimately, "make his life...worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour".

### **David Blair**

"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 in our soundest sleep. I know of no

more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to 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. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour. If we refused, or rather used up, such paltry information as we get, the oracles would distinctly inform us how this might be done.”

From this passage from Walden and addressing the theme of awakening I believe this quote relates to society today because the way humans value and derive a common likeness and attitudes and behaviors to the consumers taste and use of devices that causes a disconnect to a grander theme that we often neglect because of our reliance on luxury and the ease of purchasing and living according to a system that places intrinsic values on the things that provide us with comfort. Walden's connection with nature as he resides away from those in isolation comes to realize some of these daunting things that hold such meaning and significance to one end of what keeps people connected. The essence of what is around us is often taken for granted at times and puts us in a state of dormancy to life and the constraints of how we view things around us. In which nature is around us and using nature to form artistic and mindful acts holds more fluidity then not utilizing the environment to boost the imagination and production of a person. So like Walden could possible suggest stay woke.

### **Selin Kahyaoglu**

"I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor."

In this quote, Thoreau is trying to say that individuals have the ability to improve their life on their own by becoming more conscious. This relates to the theme of awakening because when you are more "woke" you are more conscious of the life you live. By living consciously, one can live in the present moment. When we live in the past, we are living in a depressive state and when we live in the future, we are living in an anxious state. By simply making an effort to live consciously, one's outlook and general life can greatly improve. This can greatly be related to society today in our current COVID situation, since many of us struggle to live in the present. Many people are currently living with their minds in the future which is creating a lot of anxiety. Many people are worried about what is going to happen and about what happened in the past that they may wish they can change. In situations like this, it is especially important to remain conscious and present in order to continue enjoying every day life without becoming highly stressed.

### **Zack Thomas**

"I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of a man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor."

I think that Walden is trying to tell us that he encouraged that man is able to make his life better by doing something based on being aware and responding to his surroundings. If you are

aware, then you will be able to make your life more yours and live it the way that you want. This shows the theme of awakening because a person is realizing what is actually going on around them. And once you understand what is going on around you, then you are able to make a "conscious endeavor" and can make your life greater than what it is. For myself and I think a lot of people have had an awakening with the current state of the world. Being at school you take a lot of things for granted, like going to classes and interacting with people there and living with some of your best friends. I think most people look at going to class as a pain, but now that we are home and have to do the work, everyone I have talked to misses the classroom and want to learn their instead of a computer screen. And being with your friends all the time will make you take for granted how much they mean to you, but once they are taken away you have an awakening at how great life "normal" life is.

### **QUOTE:**

"It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to 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."

### **Tanner Brightman**

"It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to 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."

This quote relating to wakefulness demonstrates that living your best life doesn't come from having a good job or a specific talent; according to Thoreau your best life is found through your perception of the world. He believes that if you're able to see beauty in every environment then you'll be truly awake intellectually, since your surroundings can always be shifted into a positive, creative domain with the proper lens.

As it stands, it's no secret that technology among other things has made the world increasingly complex. Fewer people seem to be engaged with others and just life itself, and in many cases they live in search of approval from the outside rather than from within. Humans are naturally born to be positive, confident, and intelligent beings, but today many children are raised with a whole slew of factors that misguide them and thus I believe current and future generations are less awakened than those prior.

### **QUOTE:**

"Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry..." (Thoreau, 13).

### **Zoie Carlisle**

Something that really stuck out to me was when Walden said "Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry...Hardly a man takes a half-hour's nap after dinner, but when he wakes he holds up his head and asks, 'What's the news?' as if the rest of mankind had stood his sentinels" (Walden, p. 13).

Essentially what Walden is saying is that we as humans live life in the fast lane, without taking the time to relax or enjoy ourselves. I think that this is very true, especially because society places expectations on when things are supposed to be accomplished over the course of our lifetimes, and we feed into it, rather than making our own path so to speak. I think that this quote, and the idea of simplicity as a whole, can be applied to what is happening today in the sense that we are almost being forced to slow down our lives right now. There are very few things we can actually go out and do. I think slowing down can be healthy, and I also think that it will give many people a newfound appreciation for many things and encourage people to live in the moment a little bit more once this is all over.

### **Camryn Clements**

A quote that really stuck out to me and conveyed the idea of simplicity was when Thoreau wrote "Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry..." (Thoreau, 13).

This quote shows how many people, especially Americans live a very fast-paced lifestyle. Many people are so worried about going to work and taking care of their children that they rarely take time to relax and enjoy life, especially nature. Many Americans work five days a week and by the time the weekend comes they are too tired from working or have to do chores around the house that they barely get any time to enjoy themselves and relax. I connected this idea of simplicity to our world's current COVID-19 pandemic. The quarantine due to COVID -19 has caused many people all over the world to be stuck at home and in many cases unable to work. This has forced us to have to slow down our lifestyles and spend more time at home with our families. I believe that this quarantine has been very difficult for many Americans to adapt to because we are not used to this slow lifestyle at all, and I think that it is good for us to slow down a little, but I believe that this quarantine and lack of productivity will make us all go crazy.

### **Lindsey DeBonis**

"Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry" (Walden, 14).

I believe that many of us would occasionally exclaim that they were too busy or that they had too much to do. Now, during these times majority of us are within our own homes or isolated in some fashion. Some may say that they're bored or that they have nothing to do now but reflecting on this quote, it reveals that if we have the time during this pandemic to take a breath and search for our values. What do we want to do with our lives or all this extra time that some of may have? We have a need to be doing activities and the drive to accomplish goals. Thus we are busy, busy, busy. Now that many of us can't be that busy, we have the opportunity to think about what we want to do with our extra time. We spend time with our families if the family is important to us, we go on hikes in nature is influential, we go on a run every day if exercise is a big part of our lives. There are many examples of how we can take control of our actions during this pandemic in a positive way, but I hope that some of those actions fold over to when it's over. Being able to think about where time should be spent based on one's values can be all we need to slow down our lives just the slightest which is what all of us need at some point.

**QUOTE:**

"The morning, which is the most memorable season of the day, is the awakening hour. Then there is least somnolence in us; and for an hour, at least, some part of us awakes which slumbers all the rest of the day and night" (Thoreau 13).

**Kaity Keihl**

"The morning, which is the most memorable season of the day, is the awakening hour. Then there is least somnolence in us; and for an hour, at least, some part of us awakes which slumbers all the rest of the day and night" (Walden 13).

I chose this quote because it resonated with a part of me that likes to focus on positivity. If you read further on in this paragraph, you will see that Thoreau describes that those who do not wake up every morning believing that this day is sacred, will simply lead a despairing and dark life. In all honesty, I think he is very much correct. I have seen people in my own life who wake up and only see the negativity. These people do not amount to much in their days, which are gifts in my opinion. I have done my own research and it is true that mornings are one of the most important parts of a persons day. I have seen many people who look like they have their life together and discuss how important it is to start your day off with proper intentions. Thoreau makes it clear that each day can be impactful, if we choose to do so. Being awake does not mean going through to motions of everyday life (which is kind of what everyone is doing right now during COVID-19.), but rather it means being truly aware of your surroundings and of the life that is in your own hands. By only thinking about the negativity during this time, we won't amount to much as a human race and individuals. If we simply wake up every morning and dread having to deal with the rest of the day, how can we expect to lead meaningful lives even in the face of chaos? I really enjoyed this reading for today's assignment.

**QUOTE:**

*"...I sold him the farm for just what I gave for it..."*

**Brynn Filsinger**

*"...I sold him the farm for just what I gave for it..."*

The theme that stood out to me throughout the reading is the idea of simplicity. Thoreau lives such a simple life and the way that he describes his life is simple. He does not need a lot and he would never take a lot. In fact, he would not even take what some may consider reasonable, always less. Thoreau never seems concerned about money, just concerned about having enough of what he truly needs. In this same paragraph, he says that he still had his ten cents, seeds and materials for a wheelbarrow, which was all he needed and he was happy with that. He easily could have taken advantage of the owner and accepted the offer but he knew the owner of the land was in a difficult position and needed it just as much as he did.

This quote is very simple and just a thought that he had, not a truly enlightening quote, but nonetheless still something that I feel is really noteworthy and speaks to his life and his character because he did not feel the need to live a life of excess and would never allow someone to give more than what was necessary. I believe by including this point, he is emphasizing the

fact that we should never give more than we can take, but in addition to that, we should never take something just because we can.

This quote is very applicable to our current situation because people need to live a life of simplicity and not take more than they need, or accept more than others can afford to give. The message behind this quote is that the owner of the land is not any better off than Thoreau is. In society today, we are all at risk and we are all living in a way that seems foreign to us. It is important that we recognize that everyone is going through the same situation. This makes me think about grocery stores are being cleaned out of essential items because people are afraid and are only considering themselves. In reality, people need to realize that others may not be able to stock up on items as easily because of a burden whether that be financial or otherwise. Which brings me back to the idea that simplicity is necessary.

### **QUOTE:**

“The millions are awake enough for physical labor; 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.”  
(Thoreau, 13).

### **Sam Gruttadauria**

Theme: Awakening

"The millions are awake enough for physical labor; 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"

I believe that Thoreau uses this quote to display the proportion of people who are truly in touch with nature and our earth in a divine sense to the large masses of those who are not and are just "awake" enough to operate on a physical sense of getting by every day. Those who understand nature in a divine sense see the connections between all of us and understand how the actions of one party can lead to the demise of others. Applying this to our current situation, I believe there's a lot of people who are only "physically awake" and not taking the CDC recommendations seriously because they don't see how their actions could affect others. Those who are the divine beings are the ones who are social distancing and taking measures to prevent the spread because they understand that we are all one and we must act for the greater good of the entire community.

### **Adrienne Weber**

“The millions are awake enough for physical labor; 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.”  
(Thoreau, 13).

This quote struck me right away because I found it easy to relate to many topics that we have discussed throughout this course. In this quote, Thoreau is commenting on the fact that the majority of people in this life simply go through the motions without truly being open to the world around them. He is trying to express that people tend to wake up everyday and pursue life in the same way they always have. They get up, do their jobs, come home, and go to sleep again.

He is expressing that people tend to not expand their minds, rather they stick to what is comfortable and what is easy. Thoreau believes that only a slim few have the ability to see beyond the drags of everyday life. He believes that only a select group of people go through life with a deeper sense, one that is truly awake. This truly awake sense is one that does not simply see the outlines of the world around them, but they see the colors and the stories behind it. With the theme of awakening Thoreau makes it clear that, every one of us has the ability to become truly awake. He expresses that it is a man's highest power to be able to change his life for the better through a conscious effort. I think that this relates to a lot of the topics that we have discussed in class. People tend to be stuck in their ways and only open to the mindsets that they have had for years. Thoreau is challenging others to open up and change for the better because they want to live more fulfilled lives. When it comes to environmental ethics, many ideas are not traditional or even widely accepted. However, if one wishes to make an impact to better themselves and the world around them, it starts by breaking the traditional, "easy way" of life. It starts by them waking up.

**QUOTE:**

"Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest." - (Thoreau 13)

**QUOTE:**

"To be awake is to be alive... 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 in our soundest sleep" (13).

**Carolyn Hilburger**

"To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake" (Thoreau 13).

I believe that both the theme of awakening and simplicity is expressed by this simple quote. Throughout Chapter 2 Thoreau takes the time to discuss the idea of awakening. This quote stuck out to me because Thoreau isn't holding back. Thoreau admits that he has never met a man, in his eyes, that was "quite awake". This quote gets the audience thinking about what he means when he says awake. Thoreau believes that awakening is the ability of an individual to do more than simply go through the motions of life. An awakened man is one that has thoughtful actions, one that takes the time to further develop their intellect, one that wants to improve themselves and the world around them. Thoreau argues that human beings today simply go through life's motions without any thought. We as a society don't consider how our actions will pan out, we just simply do them as part of a routine we are used to. This routine is a zone we are comfortable with, but an awakened man would step out of this routine and set goals for themselves. The idea of awakening is something we can consider with recent events. COVID-19 has pretty much forced individuals to confine themselves in their homes for an extended period of time. How is one supposed to be awakened in a time like this? How is one supposed to break the ice and improve themselves and the world around them? The way I look at it is that we have an opportunity, everyday, to wake up and choose to set goals for yourself and to have a positive mindset about

the situation. We can encourage ourselves and the individuals around us to find ways to cope with this form of isolation. We can be awakened, despite being confined and away from others.

### **Paris Howard**

In chapter two, Thoreau writes "to be awake is to be alive". I found this statement from this chapter to be so profound, and believe that Thoreau is advising us to truly open our eyes and take in our surroundings. We need to analyze every aspect carefully and appreciate our surroundings. I think this quote can also be related to the COVID-19 situation as I personally feel as though this time has given me the opportunity to appreciate the little things. I feel as though before the pandemic, I was on auto-pilot in a sense with my life, I just went from day to day without really taking in my surroundings and appreciating things. This has caused me to truly open my eyes and treat each day as a blessing and something that is not to be taken advantage of. Following the end of this I will take the time to be more appreciative of little things and not on auto-pilot, but to live more in the moment.

### **Ben McFall**

I chose awakening for this thread and chose the quote "To be awake is to be alive" because this quote really stuck out to me. What I think he is trying to say with this quote is that often times people never really live their life. You have to do things in your lifetime that make you feel alive and make unforgettable memories. Going through the motions is not what life is about. I think this is definitely something that people need to hear, especially while everyone is cooped up in their homes. It is important to get away from the world once in awhile and do something that makes you feel alive. Looking at our phones all day and sitting around the house is not something that makes us feel alive. This quote directly relates to society today because a lot of people can get wrapped up in their routine of just going to work and going home and not doing anything fun. I feel that a lot of people need to start actually living and getting out there to feel alive again, once this is all over. Getting out of this quarantine shouldn't be the only time that you are active and doing a lot of fun things, it should be all the time.

### **Corrine Sicker**

Thoreau writes, "To be awake is to be alive". I think what Thoreau is trying to say is that you must truly be awake and in the moment to be fulfill the act of living. He goes on to write, " 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 in our soundest sleep" (13). This quote also stood out to me a lot. The way I interpreted this was that we aren't truly living if were not fully attuned with our surroundings and natural state of mind.

Today in society, I think it becomes harder and harder to be "awake". We have so many distractions that fill our lives each day, and we don't focus on what really matters. There are bigger things out there than the stuff you're stressing about that cause you to be "asleep". Each day, do something that makes you feel awake, feel alive.

## **Grant Stokoe**

"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 in our soundest sleep" (Thoreau 13).

The theme of awakening is exemplified in this quote by Thoreau. I believe that Thoreau is trying to show people that they cannot lose interest in their life. He does not want people to simply go through the motions of life without trying to make improvements on themselves. The "awakening" associated with Thoreau's quote is shown by the "infinite expectation of the dawn." He wants people to never lose sight of our goals even when we are most at rest. A new day holds new possibilities to improve ourselves and accomplish something we did not have or do yesterday. I believe this applies to our current situation with staying home for weeks due to the virus. During this time, we cannot lose hope for a better tomorrow where people affected by the virus become healthy again. I also believe Thoreau's message encompasses how we hold the power to make today better than yesterday. Once we awake from the sadness surrounding this disease, we have the potential to work out, read a book, or spend time with family in order to make today a better day. Moreover, keeping ourselves preoccupied with self goals will make us live with more meaning and purpose.

### **QUOTE:**

"I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born."

## **Sydney Merz**

I chose the theme of simplicity, and Thoreau's quote in chapter two I think best encompasses it with "I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born."

I think that what he means by this is that when we are born, we are free from all the unnecessary distractions that come with growing up. As we age, we experience things that complicate our lives and leave us with feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, jealousy, etc. These are all feelings that bring us down and make us lose track of what is really important. Thoreau is saying that when we are born, we have yet to be poisoned with those thoughts, and we are still one with our most primal state. At birth, we are so pure- and for that reason, we are wise. We are simple humans at that point, with simple needs. Today, this quote is very relevant. Our entire world has come together to simplify things in these uncertain times. I believe it has helped people realize what's important. Now that we are stuck at home, we have come to appreciate the simple things, and we vow to never again take them for granted. At the same time, we are also engaging in modest activities, like playing a board game with family or cooking a meal together. Simplicity is what is getting us through right now.

"The present was my next experiment of this kind, which I purpose to describe more at length, for convenience putting the experience of two years into one. As I have said, I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer [rooster] in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up."

## **Madison Rooksby**

“The present was my next experiment of this kind, which I purpose to describe more at length, for convenience putting the experience of two years into one. As I have said, I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer [rooster] in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.”

My chosen theme was awakening. I personally feel like the tragedy that COVID-19 has brought this world really opened many people's eyes. I know for me, I learned to be much more appreciative. I will never take for granted small actions like going outside, seeing my friends or eating in a restaurant. This quote made me think of this feeling because I thought of COVID when he explains an "experiment". Although, this is no experiment I think it changed how a lot of people feel and see things in the world for the future. I think once this is all over, America will come out stronger than before.