

Nature and materialism in walden

Philosophy



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Henry David Thoreau, an American author, lived alone in a small cabin which he himself built on the banks of Walden Pond near Concord, Massachusetts for two years and two months starting in July 4, 1845. He gave an interesting account of this experience and experiment in living alone in a place close to nature and away from civilization in his book entitled *Walden* published in 1854.

I especially liked Thoreau's philosophical ideas and reflections that he learned while living in Walden. His experiences in living in Walden Pond encourages people to slow down and reflect on the kind of life that they are living whether they are supposedly living the kind of life that was meant to be. According to Miller, " He [Thoreau] endeavored to find the foundation for a more simple, honest, and pure life which he contrasted to the lives of " quiet desperation" led by most of his contemporaries" (Miller 1995).

In relating his experiences, Thoreau also used wit and humor so that he made life away from civilization an interesting idea. What I do not like is that Thoreau can be extreme in his advocacy for simplicity. For example, he believed that " water is the only drink for a wise man; wine is not a noble liquor; and think of dashing the hopes of a morning with a cup of warm coffee, or of an evening with a dish of tea!" (Thoreau 182). I do not agree that moderate drinking of tea and coffee is harmful to man.

Throughout the book, Thoreau praised the life living in simplicity close to nature. For him life with nature is like living life in innocence. Every morning with nature, he felt renewed as he was far from noise and disturbance. In the cabin, he felt remote from the life that he had left behind with civilization

and in so doing, he had the time to think about life in its purer form, to have an effective intellectual exertion. I do agree with Thoreau that nature had its positive effect of renewing the inner spirit of man for in their presence one felt relaxed and calm.

Life away from nature can be very stressful and demanding and with time, one no longer knew what was important about living. Modern civilization in particular can be very stressful as more emphasis is put on the acquisition of material wealth. One is caught in the never-ending web of earning money as much as he can to live a supposed comfortable life so that he had no time to stop and smell the flowers.

Yet the truth in most cases is that oftentimes modern man would not be able to enjoy what he worked so hard for either because he had no time to do so or that he got sick for working too hard so that his money was spend in medical expenses (MedicalScienceNews 2005). According to Thoreau " Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind (Thoreau 10)". I totally agree in this judgment because I have noticed that some of the inventions of modern man only deprived him of the exercise that he needs for healthy living.

For example in cleaning the house he had floor polisher that replaced manual floor scrubbing so that in return he sweats less than he used to. Also, man had used the luxury of cars at his disadvantage for even in a short distance he will not take a walk. No wonder Thoreau had concluded, " the nation itself ... its so-called internal improvements, which, by the way, are all

external and superficial... is cluttered by furniture and tripped by its own traps ... (Thoreau 75)".

In my life, these ideas had largely opened my eyes to the reality that I do not have to compete for the acquisition of wealth for in so doing I may fail to really live. I believe now that many people who only spend their whole lifetime gaining possessions never actually lived after all. Their bodies and minds are like machines that are employed to acquire many of the supposed luxuries of life. For me, to avoid such a mistake, I must see to it that I spend sometime with nature in order to reflect and to be renewed.

Thoreau's Walden therefore revealed to man the need for simple living and to be close to nature and avoid the extreme need to acquire life's luxuries. In order to really live and enjoy life man needs time to relax, to be calm, to reflect and be renewed by nature.

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