

Example of book review on the portable thoreau- answer essay questions

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Question 1

Henry Thoreau introduces what has now become a classical philosophical ideology whereby he urges people, though subtly and indirectly, to embrace the natural scheme of things. This scheme, according to Thoreau (93), is inherently simple and does not require a great deal of exertion on a person's part. Perhaps his stay in the wilderness as an experiment was aimed at verifying his own ideas of how people should approach life. In my opinion, this actually bolsters his explicit ideals of economy and simplicity in that he was willing to walk the walk and experience it for himself. This adds credence to his ideals seeing that they are followed by actions and are therefore not merely sophistical platitudes.

Philosophers, and there is no dearth of historical examples in this regard, typically prefer the tenets of simplicity and economy since they seem to coincide with how nature operates. The definition of philosophy entails a rational examination of nature and how things work. Nature, thus, appears to observers to execute its mandate easily and perfectly. Perhaps philosophers see this as a clear indication that life in itself is meant to be approached in a similar manner. This means that people would be much better off, and perhaps even more preferably so, if they adopted the tenets of simplicity and economy.

Question 2

Thoreau was inarguably an avid scholar and a dedicated poet. He perhaps saw the advantages of merging several cultural ideals into a coherent philosophy that could accurately portray the way human society is and ought

to be. It is undeniable that he was influenced by Chinese philosophy, especially since he was a staunch naturalist. This very principle of naturalism is indeed what stands out most clearly in his work as being influenced by such oriental schools of thought as Daoism. Thoreau (313) frowns upon the exaltation of wealth in human society as evidenced by materialism and extravagance. He advocates for simplicity, which is the most fundamental principle of Daoism. He also openly adores the Greek's portrayal of their love for nature, which further contributes to his own ideal of learning from nature (Thoreau 616).

These character traits do not contradict each other. I would not refer to his references to oriental philosophies as elitism. I see this as the markings of dedication on the part of a philosopher and poet. This kind of influence indeed reinforces his message and places him on the firm pedestal of philosophical authority since his ideas are harmonious with a diverse array of cultural dogmata.

Question 3

It seems that most philosophers tend to subscribe to the ideal that man has moved off course from the natural scheme of things. In essence, they emphasize the need to study how nature operates in the absence of artificial influences from mankind. For instance, Thoreau (590) reiterates the way in which nature is the prime determinant of the success or failure of our endeavors. He states that the fertility of our land and seasonality are entirely at the mercy of nature and we would be therefore wise if we took into account how this works and thus position ourselves accordingly. These

thoughts are echoed by many other philosophers, more specifically spiritual leaders and teachers from the Orient, who emphasized the necessity of becoming one with nature.

Perhaps Thoreau would be pleased that his philosophical ideals have been incorporated into mainstream school curricula. This is primarily because it is an indication that many people now have access to firm bedrocks of divergent sets of philosophical ideas. Thoreau's teachings are undoubtedly influential among many people now, which I believe is the ultimate goal any philosopher and teacher.

Work Cited

Thoreau, Henry D. *The Portable Thoreau*. Ed. Carl Bode. Rev. ed. New York, NY: Penguin Classics. 1964. Print.