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ORIENTAL LIGHT SHINING IN WESTERN DARKNESS: THOREAU'S USE OF THE MENGZI IN WALDEN

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In his *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau expresses his interest in Asia. Recognizing Thoreau's use of Chinese philosophical ideas is important not only in understanding various passages but also in developing an appreciation for Thoreau's overall project at Walden Pond. This paper calls attention to the ways Thoreau applied passages and allusions from Mengzi 孟子 (Mencius) to advance his argument on moral development in *Walden*, demonstrating how he throws Oriental light on the darkness in the West.

Oriental Light Shining in Western Darkness:

Thoreau's Use of *The Mengzi* in *Walden*

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In his *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854), Henry David Thoreau expresses his interest in Asia. Arthur Versluis dubbed Thoreau's curiosity about Asia as "sauntering eastwards" (79). Thoreau in turn wrote boldly of his own love for Asian thought, calling it a "saucy Orientalism" (Hodder 174). He spoke of the Oriental light (*le oriente lux*) shining on Western darkness in his 1862 essay "Walking" (2:10). In his *Journal* in 1842, he wondered: "was not Asia mapped in my brain before it was in any geography?" (1: 387). Recognizing Thoreau's use of Asian ideas in *Walden* is important for us not only in understanding of various passages in the text, but also in developing an appreciation for Thoreau's overall project at Walden Pond. Versluis writes, "...without question more than anyone else in mid-nineteenth-century New England, Thoreau tried to live by what he had read and recognized as perennial truth....during his Walden years at least,

he had oriented himself toward and for a while governed his life by Asian teaching”(79).

Accordingly, this paper calls attention to the ways Thoreau uses the Chinese writer Mengzi 孟子 (Mencius)¹ in *Walden* in order to show the importance of understanding Mengzi’s contribution to Thoreau’s project of moral self-cultivation in the text and how he throws Oriental light on Western culture.

Thoreau’s familiarity with Asian materials which were becoming available to the West in the early 19th century was part of the general Transcendentalist engagement with the East. John Orr observes that “[t]ranscendentalism imported its bit of Oriental sky, and called men to admire the constellations it contained” (qtd. in Scott 14). Although Thoreau read and even wrote on Asian texts while at Harvard College, his dedication to Asian materials really began with his residence in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s home in 1841 (Cady 20).² In Thoreau’s time, very few American intellectuals had the Chinese classical texts available to them, and they were virtually unknown to the public at large. Among the Asian books in Emerson’s private library used by Thoreau were two translations of the Confucian classics into English. One was done by Joshua Marshman and entitled *The Works of Confucius Containing the Original Text, with a Translation*. It was from this work that Thoreau collected twenty-one maxims and published them in the *Dial* in April 1843.³ The other was the translation made by David Collie, *The Chinese Classical Works, Commonly Called The Four Books*. This text was the source of Thoreau’s second series of forty-three quotes published in *The Dial* in Vol. 4, No. 2, October

¹ Mengzi (Mencius) is both the name of a second generation follower of Confucius and also the principal character and the probable author of the work called simply *The Mengzi*. When I refer to the work and not the person, I shall indicate *The Mengzi*. All the quotes from *The Mengzi* in this paper are from the translation done by Bryan Van Norden.

² Eui-Yeong Kim provides a detailed chronology of Thoreau’s knowledge of oriental sources (96-132).

³ For a discussion of the use of Asian texts and ideas by transcendentalist writers such as Thoreau and Emerson in magazines and periodicals of the period, please see Roger C. Mueller.

1843 under the title “Ethnical Scriptures: Chinese Four Books” (Cady 20). Thoreau arranged these selections under seven topical headings. He also wrote a small preface for the “Ethnical Scriptures” in which he praised Collie’s work and noted that its most valuable contribution was the inclusion of new material by Mengzi. Indeed, about one-half of the quotations in Thoreau’s October 1843 “Ethnical Scriptures” were from *The Mengzi*. Arthur Christy observes, “Through the remaining two decades of his life Thoreau read avidly from these books and his comments on them become more penetrating” (188).⁴

Thoreau took Asian texts with him to Walden’s Pond. He had both the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Confucian works including *The Mengzi*. The importance of these works during the Walden period is documented internally in his writings as we shall see, but it is also verified externally in the reflections made by Moncure Conway.⁵ Conway visited Thoreau at Walden’s Pond on several occasions to discuss Asian texts (Jackson *Pioneer Popularizers* 77-78). After several visits, Conway wrote in his *Autobiography* that for Thoreau “the Oriental books were his daily bread” (142-43). Other observers also knew of Thoreau’s devotion to Asian writings while at Walden’s Pond. In his essay “Henry David Thoreau: His Character and Opinions,” Robert Louis Stevenson wrote that at Walden Thoreau had chosen to “[d]evote himself to oriental philosophers, the study of nature, and the work of self-improvement” (par. 8). In these comments, Stevenson’s remarks represent a fair summary of Thoreau’s project at Walden Pond and how integral the oriental thinkers were to it.

⁴ In 1855, Thoreau received a collection of forty-four Oriental books from Thomas Cholmondeley. However, the gift of this library was almost all of Indian materials, not Chinese. (Jackson *Oriental Religions* 69).

⁵ Conway’s interest in Asia was awakened while he was a student at Harvard Divinity School. In 1853, he was taken by Emerson to meet Thoreau at Walden. When Thoreau asked him what he was studying, he answered, “The Scriptures.” Thoreau inquired “Which ones?” Conway provides a suggestion that he considered the Asian writings to be world scriptures, as indeed he had made plain in his *Dial* publications.

As if to highlight the importance of the Asian writers to Thoreau's *Walden Pond* endeavors, some scholars have made studies of Thoreau's use of Hinduism.⁶ In fact, Christy thinks of Thoreau as a yogi and does not believe that Mengzi or any other Chinese philosopher left any significant traces on *Walden* at all (199). Moreover, even though Lyman Cady makes a brief study of the nine passages from the Confucian classics quoted in *Walden*, giving the source of the quote and a summary of the contents of the passage, his conclusion is that Mengzi exercised little influence on Thoreau. He says, "We must, however, from our study of the *Walden* passages, concur in Christy's judgment on the matter of the influence of the Confucian literature on Thoreau, that there is no deep affinity between Thoreau's mind and temper and this literature, and that its influence on his thought is essentially negligible" (30-31).

The question whether or not Thoreau was impacted by his reading of Mengzi also provoked the attention of other contemporary critics. Cady believes that Thoreau rarely sees *The Mengzi* materials he uses in their "proper implications." He also holds that Thoreau does not share the appreciation for social bonds and conventions which are essential to the creation of the Confucian *junzi* 君子 (exemplary person). So, since Thoreau does not try to interpret *The Mengzi* in its context and seems to advocate a very Western individualism in *Walden*, Cady concludes that Mengzi could not have been of much use to Thoreau in forming his views while living near the pond. Although Versluis writes on the American transcendentalists and Asian religions, he does not offer any reading of Thoreau's use of *The Mengzi* or its influence on *Walden* (83-89). Despite these controversial debates, David Scott has recently called for a new

⁶ For studies of Thoreau's use of the *Gita* see especially those of Barbara Miller and William Stein. Unlike Hinduism and the Confucian tradition, Buddhism was not well known by Americans in Thoreau's 1840s. In fact, the first scholarly article on Buddhism published in America was Edward Salisbury's, "Memoir on the History of Buddhism" in 1849. Thomas Tweed has done a more sweeping study of the early impact of Buddhism on American writers.

study of the Chinese elements in Thoreau's writings (14). This call has yet to be answered, and this paper is an effort to move in a new direction on interpreting Thoreau's use of Mengzi.

One way of confirming the Oriental light Mengzi sheds on *Walden* is to focus on the specific quotes Thoreau draws from the Chinese text. Although Christy and Cady looked at the quotes from Mengzi, they did not give the attention to the metaphors and allusions used throughout the text by Thoreau. Of course, what Thoreau chooses to quote is significant in the formation of his most fundamental metaphors for self-cultivation as we shall see. Equally important, however, is the fact that Thoreau's quotes from *The Mengzi* are all his own translations from a French source. Hongbo Tan has shown that Thoreau was undertaking the translation of *The Mengzi* while living at Walden's Pond, and this surely was not a task he would have worked at unless he found in the text some values and ideas of great use to him. Of the nine quotations from Confucian materials in *Walden* only one coincides with those Thoreau chose to include in *The Dial*. However, this quote is clearly not taken from the English versions of Marshman or Collie available to Thoreau through Emerson's library. The divergence suggests, according to Tan and others, that Thoreau had come into possession of the French translation of *The Mengzi* done by Guillaume Pauthier and that he did his own translation from the French while at Walden.⁷ David Chen cites the *Catalog of the Stephen H. Wakeman Collection of Books of Nineteenth Century American Writers* in evidence for his claim that the French translation Thoreau was using was Pauthier's *Confucius et Mengzi*. This *Catalog* lists the books from Thoreau's library auctioned by the American Art Association in New York, on April

⁷ In an effort to make Asian texts more available in English readers, Thoreau translated portions of the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Mahabharata*, and sections of Confucius's four books, including *The Mengzi* (Versluis 81).

24-29, 1924. The note on item number 985 confirms that Thoreau had Pauthier's text, *Confucius et Mengzi*.

985. Thoreau (Henry D.) Manuscript Note Book, containing...Translations or portions of two French Works with his notes on the same...Closely written, in ink, on about 225 pages and consisting of approximately twenty eight thousand and two hundred words... Translations from the French: Portion of "Confucius et Mengzi ... Traduit du Chinois" Par M.G. Pauthier. Written on 23 pages. Thoreau has translated many paragraphs, and interspersed are notes by Thoreau on the same.... (qtd. in Chen)

The commitment to translate *The Mengzi* suggests that Mengzi's influence on *Walden* may be embedded throughout the text and not just in those specific quotes in which Thoreau mentions Mengzi by name, and that it may be more far reaching than Cady and Christy thought. Thoreau leaves little doubt that, among the Chinese philosophers, Mengzi was of special interest. In fact, in a letter written to Margaret Fuller (June 1843) before going to Walden's Pond but after reading Collie's work, he wrote, "I have the best of Chinese Confucian books lately, an octavo published at Malacca, in English. Much of it is the old Confucius more fully rendered; but the book of Mencius is wholly new to me" (qtd. in Kim, 121). It was this "wholly new" book that he chose to take with him to Walden's Pond and which he labored to translate.

When Thoreau read ancient Hindu or Chinese texts, it was not with a view to gaining historical or cultural understanding (Morrison, 84). Neither was he trying to contextualize the material or teach the *Gita* or *The Mengzi* to his readers. Thoreau had no interest in being a Chinese philosopher, teaching Chinese philosophy, or helping his readers understand Mengzi's pre-Han context. He looked in *The Mengzi* for timeless moral and spiritual truths he believed to

be universal. This was his motivation in using all non-Western sources. For example, after reading the 13th century Persian poet Saadi, Thoreau said that Saadi entertained “identically the same thought that I did” (*Journal* 5:289). Thoreau’s confidence in the universality of some thoughts and values moved him to go so far as to conclude that he and Saadi were personally identical. Reflecting on his encounter with this writer in his *Journal*, he said the same “sacred self” united his and Saadi’s separate historical identities (*Journal* 5: 289-90). In the chapter “Reading” of *Walden*, he writes, “The oldest Egyptian or Hindoo philosopher raised a corner of the veil from the statue of divinity . . . and I gaze upon as fresh a glory as he did, since it was I in him that was then so bold, and it is he in me that now reviews the vision” (1860). Accordingly, the identity of thought between Thoreau and Mengzi will reveal itself in ways other than direct citation. A more compelling reading will draw on the way in which the “identical thoughts” are expressed without reliance on exact wording or dependent citation.

Many of the allusions and metaphors Thoreau used when talking about some major themes in *Walden* have a deep affinity with those central to the argument of *The Mengzi* as well. It is not surprising, then, that Thoreau should be drawn to Mengzi and even to feel a unity of thought with one whose philosophy Philip Ivanhoe describes as linking “the task of self-cultivation with the development of one’s Heavenly conferred nature” (*Self-Cultivation* 17). According to Philip Cafaro, the development of the moral self is a central theme in *Walden* (57). Seeing Mengzi’s imprint in *Walden* requires giving attention to the allusions and metaphors that represent the shining of the oriental light of this Chinese philosopher onto Western darkness. Consider, for example, that Thoreau quoted *The Mengzi* in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack* only one time: “If one loses a fowl or a dog, he knows well how to seek them again; if one loses the sentiments of his heart, he does not know how to seek them again The duties

of practical philosophy consist only in seeking after those sentiments of the heart which we have lost; that is all” (215).⁸ In its context in *The Mengzi*, the author is comparing a person’s heart that has gone astray from the virtuous way to losing a dog. Mengzi says that a man has sense enough to go after his chicken or dog, but unfortunately many will not try to draw their heart back into the way of morality (*The Mengzi* 6A11). This single quote from *A Week*, which is surely based on *The Mengzi*, actually represents a remarkable connection to what is often regarded as one of the most puzzling passages in the “Economy” chapter of *Walden*. In this chapter, Thoreau writes, “I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle dove, and am still on their trail I have met one or two who . . . seemed as anxious to recover them as if they had lost them themselves” (1815). When we just take this passage in *Walden* as a stand alone observation, we might be confused about its meaning. But if we consider this remark in light of *The Mengzi* passage and note as well that Mengzi is explicitly cited in *A Week*, then an interpretation of the *Walden* text comes clearly into view. We understand that Thoreau is not talking about losing animals at all. Neither is this merely some homespun comment he makes based on living out in nature. Instead, he is closely following Mengzi’s point and alluding to the danger of losing the moral sentiments in his heart and to the few people he has met who are as anxious to uncover and nourish the sprouts of their own virtue as he is. We can best know the meaning of this passage if we think of its connection with the remark from *The Mengzi*.

Interestingly, this passage alluding to Thoreau’s anxiety about finding only one or two other people who are as anxious as he is to nourish the sprouts of virtue in the heart is located just a few paragraphs after the following remarks in *Walden*’s chapter “Economy:”

⁸ Jackson thinks *A Week* is the work in which Thoreau reveals most clearly his dependence on Asian thought. He also believes that Thoreau’s praise for Oriental materials in this work was the principal reason why it was a dismal failure in sales (*Oriental Religions* 68).

The ancient philosophers, Chinese, Hindoo, Persian, and Greek, were a class than which none has been poorer in outward riches, none so rich in inward....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.... How can a man be a philosopher and not maintain his vital heat by better methods than other men? (1814)

Once again, the allusion to *The Mengzi* seems clear enough if we focus on connecting *Walden* with *The Mengzi*. Mengzi says, “The duties of practical philosophy consist only in seeking after those sentiments of the heart which we have lost; that is all” (6A11). In the passage just quoted from *Walden*, Thoreau says that philosophy must be about solving the practical problems of life and that no man can be a philosopher who does not maintain the vital heat of virtue from his heart by better methods than other men.

Within this same stream of passages from “Economy,” Thoreau writes:

The soil, it appears, is suited to the seed, for it has sent its radicle downward, and it may now send its shoot upward also with confidence. Why has man rooted himself thus firmly in the earth, but that he may rise in the same proportion into the heavens above?—for the nobler plants are valued for the fruit they bear at last in the air and light, far from the ground, (1814)

In this passage, Thoreau employs the same metaphor used by Mengzi in describing moral self-development. Thoreau likens moral self-cultivation to cultivating the seeds or sprouts of virtue inherent in the soil of every man’s heart. As James Hamby says, “The metaphor of growth, symbolized by a plant, constitutes the internal organizing principle [of *Walden*]” (18).

When Thoreau speaks of the seeds of virtue in *Walden*, he is referring to the passage in which Mengzi lays out his theory that all humans have four innate moral sentiments, each of which he describes under the agricultural metaphor of “seeds” or “germs” (*duan* 端).⁹ Mengzi uses *duan* in 2A6, but he also employs other characters when expressing his belief that all humans have an inborn disposition to be moved toward virtue and to recoil from vice. He also speaks of the innate sentiments as *meng* 萌 “sprouts,” *nie* 蘖 “buds,” and *miao* 苗 “sprouts of grain.” In *The Mengzi* the four inborn moral dispositions common to all humans are compassion, disdain for evil, propriety, and the power of discretion to choose right and wrong (2A6), and it is to these kinds of things that Thoreau refers even if he does not list them. For both Mengzi and Thoreau, no being lacking these seeds is human because it is precisely these features that distinguish humans from other animals (Liu 55). The governance of the human self empowered by these sentiments lies in the activity of what Mengzi calls the heart-mind *xin* 心 within all persons, and what Thoreau names as “the vital heat” of men.

For Mengzi, these moral sentiments delight the heart in the same way that some foods please the palate (Shun 137). Underscoring his belief in the universality of these moral sentiments, Mengzi reasons in this way: “Mouths have the same preferences in flavors...ears have the same preferences in sounds, eyes have the same preferences in attractiveness. When it comes to hearts, are they alone without preferences in common?” (6A7). Although Thoreau never lists the four inborn moral sentiments specifically, in *Walden*’s “Higher Laws” he surely seems to agree with Mengzi about the universality of moral sense, comparing it to the way all persons hear the musical score of the cosmos:

⁹ Important studies of Mengzi’s theory of human nature include Graham, Shun, Ivanhoe *Ethics*, and Allan.

Our whole life is startlingly moral. There is never an instant's truce between virtue and vice. Goodness is the only investment that never fails. In the music of the harp which trembles round the world it is the insisting on this which thrills us. The harp is the travelling patterer for the Universe's Insurance Company, recommending its laws, and our little goodness is all the assessment that we pay. Though the youth at last grows indifferent, the laws of the universe are not indifferent, but are forever on the side of the most sensitive. (1922)

Thoreau, like Mengzi, is also puzzled about why these inborn moral dispositions so often find no expression in a person's outward conduct.

In *Walden's* "Spring" chapter, Thoreau gives evidence of a close reading of Mengzi's discussions of why all humans are not naturally moral. Like Mengzi, Thoreau realizes that even in the thief and drunkard one sees "some innocent fair shoots preparing to burst from his gnarled rind . . . tender and fresh as the youngest plant" (1972). Even the evil person nevertheless has the fair shoots of morality in what is now his gnarled rind. Thoreau goes on to show that he understands Mengzi well by advancing his discussion with a clear allusion to the Chinese philosopher's text:

A return to goodness produced each day in the tranquil and beneficent breath of the morning, causes that in respect to the love of virtue and the hatred of vice, one approaches a little the primitive nature of man, as the sprouts of the forest which has been felled. In like manner the evil one does in the interval of a day prevent the germs of virtues which began to spring up again from developing themselves and destroys them. After the germs of virtue have thus been prevented many

times from developing themselves, ...then the nature of man does not differ much from that of the brute. (1972)

In the passage to which Thoreau is referring, Mengzi describes Ox Mountain *niu shan* 牛山, a place that once had seedlings which developed into mighty trees, but the trees were cut down to the ground because the mountain bordered a large estate and persons took the beautiful wood to use for their own benefit (6A8). As Mengzi tells the story, after the stripping of the mountain, when people see the barren land, they believe the slope was always only stubble and dried stumps. Likewise, a person, who through his own actions, destroys the moral values that are the seeds of his heart and spring from the inherent moral dispositions of his nature will appear to be a brute (literally, a bird or beast 鸟兽). Thoreau follows *The Mengzi*'s wording almost exactly when he says, "After the germs of virtue have thus been prevented many times from developing themselves, ...then the nature of man does not differ much from that of the brute." For both Thoreau and Mengzi, to speak of the inborn seeds of virtue is not to say that we are automatically good, but only that we have a natural capacity and inclination for the good. We may become evil, and the beautiful sprouts of our inherent sentiments may atrophy and turn to waste in the same way in which "the forest has been felled" in Thoreau and the trees were cut down in Mengzi's parable of Ox Mountain.

In *Walden*, Thoreau makes extensive use of the metaphor of what he calls the "seeds of a higher life." Cafaro follows Hamby's point that the metaphor of growth is the internal organizing principle of *Walden*. Applying this reading, Cafaro believes the chapter "Higher Laws" in *Walden* may be read as having as its main theme the cultivation of the "seeds of a better life" (147). Thoreau does his own translation of *The Mengzi* 4B19 in an important passage in this chapter: "That in which men differ from brute beasts, is a thing very inconsiderable; the

common herd lose it very soon; superior men preserve it carefully” (210). For Mengzi, the human capacities represented in the four seeds of morality likewise distinguish persons from other animals, but if we neglect them, the seeds wither, and we lapse into an animal-like existence. In such a state we are immune to moral influence (4B28), and this point is made also by Thoreau (see Morrison, 89). In “Higher Laws,” Thoreau tells us that the boy who has “the seeds of a better life in him” will graduate from hunting and fishing to possess a morally superior view of nature (1919).

When Thoreau takes up hunting and fishing in these passages, he is not principally writing about whether we should hunt or fish, but rather more generally about where we stand in the process of moral development. His point is that as a boy allows the seeds of his moral dispositions to develop, he will set aside hunting and fishing. It is a marker for him if he does not feel some loss of self-respect or a little defeat morally if he still enjoys hunting and fishing. Interestingly, it is in this connection that Thoreau writes about his own success at quitting hunting, but he says he is still trying to break the habit of fishing. Seen in this context, Thoreau’s reflection on his own moral self-development becomes clear. He writes in the chapter “Higher Laws”:

I have found repeatedly, of late years, that I cannot fish without falling a little in self-respect. I have tried it again and again. I have skill at it, and, like many of my fellows, a certain instinct for it, which revives from time to time, but always when I have done I feel that it would have been better if I had not fished....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, as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other when they came in contact with the more civilized. (1919)

Thoreau is brutally honest. He is aware of a battle inside himself to overcome the instinct to fish, to eat flesh that he associates with the lower orders of creation, yet he has the pull of his innate moral sentiments that always make him feel when he fishes that he has fallen “a little in self-respect.” Accordingly, he concludes, “if he has the seeds of a better life in him, he distinguishes his proper objects, as a poet or naturalist it may be, and leaves the gun and fish-pole behind” (1919).

Thoreau’s introspection about his moral development as disclosed in the example of his ongoing desire to fish may be read against the background of Mengzi’s famous story of King Xuan, the emperor of Qi state in the Warring States Period between 5th and 3rd century BCE. Mengzi acted as a counselor to King Xuan, and one of their most important exchanges concerned the King’s compassion for the lower forms, which as with Thoreau, was taken by Mengzi to be evidence of the King’s moral progress.

Xuan asked, “Can one such as I care for the people?”

Mengzi answered, “He can.”

Xuan asked, “How do you know that I can?”

Mengzi said, “I heard your attendant Hu He say, The king was sitting up in his hall. There was an ox being led past below. The King saw it and said, “Where is the ox going?” Someone responded, “We are about to consecrate a bell with its blood.” The King said, “Spare it. I cannot bear its frightened appearance, like an innocent going to the execution ground.” Someone responded, “So should we abandon the consecrating of the bell?” The King said, “How can that be abandoned? Exchange it for a sheep.”

Mengzi continued, “I do not know if this happened.”

Xuan said, “It happened.”

Mengzi said, “This feeling is sufficient to be a king.” (1A.7)

In this conversation, we notice that King Xuan was moved by his sprout of compassion to take pity on an ox being led to sacrifice, and he commanded that it should be spared by substituting a lamb. We may wonder why the king did not also feel compassion for the lamb as well? The king, like Thoreau, is still struggling to nourish and cultivate his innate moral sentiments. The King’s compassion needs to be cultivated in order to extend to the lamb, just as Thoreau will only cease feeling a loss of self-respect when his compassion includes the fish and not just the game of the hunter. Read in this way, Thoreau’s use of the fishing example is directed to a “higher law.” Arguably, we might hold that the whole point of *Walden* is that we can and must, in the words of “The Pond in the Winter” chapter, “dive deeper and soar higher than Nature goes,” by allowing the moral seeds that make us human to grow and flourish (1957).

If we follow our reading, consistently applying Thoreau’s use of Mengzi’s metaphor of the seeds, then *Walden*’s chapter on “The Bean-Field” is much more than a few remarks about Thoreau’s style of farming. It is extending the agricultural metaphor for moral development which he derived from Mengzi. Actually, it seems that Thoreau makes this clear when he says in this chapter that he wishes to plant the moral seeds of “sincerity, truth simplicity, faith, innocence, and the like” (1894). He asks the following thought-provoking question:

Why concern ourselves so much about our beans for seed, and not be concerned at all about a new generation of men? We should really be fed and cheered if when we met a man we were sure to see that some of the qualities which I have named, which we all prize more than those other productions, but which are for

the most part broadcast and floating in the air, had taken root and grown in him....
(1894)

Thoreau finds Mengzi's analogy between the growth of moral self-cultivation and the planting of the bean field to be a fine instrument for making his point. What matters most is not that we concern ourselves with the almanac or the placing of seeds in the ground to harvest them for soup and porridge. What matters is the cultivation of the moral seeds broadcast by nature and needing to take root in each person and grow there to full flower.

Moreover, even in the "Conclusion" to *Walden*, Thoreau cautions us in a way that reminds us readily of one of Mengzi's most famous parables. Thoreau tells us to trust nature and not to think that our moral development is more a matter of effort than nature. He writes, "Do not seek so anxiously to be developed, to subject yourself to many influences to be played on; it is all dissipation" (1979). Thoreau's stress that we must not seek so anxiously to develop ourselves echoes Mengzi's famous story of the Farmer of Song. This is the way Mengzi tells the story: There was a man of Song who pulled at his shoots of grain, because he was anxious for them to grow. After pulling on the shoots, he went home, not realizing that he had done. He said to his family, "I am worn out today; I have been helping the grain to grow." His son rushed out of the house to look at their plants and found that they all had withered" (2A2). Mengzi's famous parable teaches a similar lesson to that of Thoreau: too great an effort to be moral may actually destroy what nature will produce of its own.

Both Mengzi and Thoreau have a strong confidence that every person has in their heart the ability to judge right from wrong, to be moved with compassion, and to have the moral sense which sets humans apart from lower forms of life. Thoreau's life at Walden's Pond was not evidence of his desire to be a hermit or yogi. He was there to allow the moral sentiments in him

by nature to flourish and grow. A reading of *Walden* that gives careful attention to Thoreau's use of Mengzi's ideas can be based on the explicit fact that Thoreau actively translated the text of *The Mengzi* while at Walden's Pond. He carefully incorporated a considerable number of quotes representing some of the most important of Mengzi's points, and used the principal metaphor of seeds growing to cultivation derived from *The Mengzi* to make his own case in *Walden*. Thoreau was probably much more influenced by Chinese philosophical ideology than early interpreters of *Walden* believed; the more we understand *The Mengzi*, the more we will also see its connections to *Walden* and vice versa. As Lin Yutang, a well-renowned scholar and translator in China, articulates, "Thoreau is the most Chinese of all American authors in his entire view of life and being a Chinese, I feel akin to him in spirit....I could translate passages of Thoreau into my own language and pass them off as original writing by a Chinese poet without raising any suspicion" (128). Like Ezra Pound after him, Thoreau believes that Chinese philosophy should ignite the sparks which could shed Oriental light on the Western world and its social culture. In reality, we have seen that the lamp is already burning in *Walden* through his strategically employing *The Mengzi*.

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