



A Philosopher Walks to Think: Reading Henry David Thoreau's *Walking*
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Abstract:

The essay “Walking” (1862) depicts walking, the act of putting one step in front of another to move forward, as a tool to create embodied creative experience. It also poses some questions. What is walking? How does it relate to thinking? In this paper, we will provide the answers. The ability to walk upright marked a turning point in the history of human evolution, and paved way for the development of speech and thinking. Thus, walking is unique to humans on the planet. Moreover, for Thoreau, walking is not so much a physical act as a trope for thinking. As a result, walking becomes a metaphor charged with contemporary ideas. The practice of walking, therefore, has been juxtaposed with some contemporary theories to develop an understanding of the concept. Moreover, since *Walden* (1854) and “Walking” are related works, some cross references have been made between the two. In brief, the paper probes how the act of walking can become instrumental in one's quest for self-knowledge coupled with a profound bond with the natural surroundings.

Forming part of my proposed Ph. D. thesis, *Thinking on Feet: A Selected Study of the Literature of Walking*, this paper deals with Henry David Thoreau's “Walking” and *Walden*, as works belonging to the genre of the literature of walking. In addition to exploring the relationship between walking and thinking, the paper posits that walking and thinking together can be instrumental for gaining experiential wisdom about oneself and one's surroundings.

Key Words: Art of walking, Experiential Thinking, Self and Nature, Philosophy and Living.

The experience of human beings as travellers in nature has been largely forgotten. Since the beginning of settled way of life, complains Thoreau, the civilised human being has overshadowed his/her precursor, the “sojourner in nature” (“Walking”) in art and literature. Thoreau recommends walking in the wild to excavate and relive that experience stored in the



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collective human memory. With walking, suggests Thoreau, the walker can time-travel in the mind to the phase just before the arrival of the civilised way of life in human evolutionary journey. In the essay “Walking,” Thoreau demonstrates that walking in nature can help us reconnect with pre-civilized way of life once again. How can walking do it? One might ask, Walking, which Thoreau speaks of, has nothing to do with physical exercise. The practice of walking as an art, argues Thoreau, helps in exploring the deep mind to unravel that buried experience in the collective unconscious¹ of human race, which is free from any cultural conditioning. All subsequent utterances about walking in the essay can be understood in this perspective. However, walking is not so much a physical act of putting one step in front of another, as it is a mixed metaphor of movement in diverse directions in non-physical sense as well – yet there is a subtle play between the physical and the transcendental aspects of walking, and therein lies the “absolute freedom and wildness” (“Walking”) of a walker. In other words, the act of walking is to reconnect dispersed fragments of experience encountered along the way to reconstitute a whole. To switch the metaphor further, walking is like an *invisible* thread joining the scattered beads of a broken rosary together (my emphasis). It may also be called an exercise in reconstruction² undertaken in the aftermath of deconstruction.³

Thoreau observes that any walking saint, who pretends to walk to the “Holy Land”(a geographical destination) is jestingly regarded either as a “Sainte-Terrer,” a “Holy Lander” or “sans terre,” someone who does not have a “home” at a particular place, and who as a walker is always on the move. However, adds Thoreau, he is a walker in “good sense.” In other words, Thoreau finds a saint’s walking similar to his practice of walking because a walking saint leaves “home” behind for ever before he/she sets out. Thoreau views “Holy Land,” the idealised imagined land, as a metaphor of the state of consciousness. Since travelling continuously would divest the walker not only of “home” as a particular place, but also all the cultural, social, national identities that “home” invokes. Walking to the “Holy Land” is to abandon the settled mode of life. According to Thoreau, a walker has to rediscover in himself/herself that original “sojourner in nature” in order to relive the experience of the human ancestors before they embraced settled mode of life. Thoreau cautions that once a walker gains access to this deep mind, there is no stopping and no return, because walking takes control of the walker. In other words, a walker “arrives” if he/she is able to reverse the binary between walker and walking, and once walking takes over the walker, there is no



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return, no brakes. We found this notion of walking “never to return” (“Walking”) most intriguing in the essay. Note this, “If you are ready to leave father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again – if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man, then you are ready for a walk” (“Walking”). This forewarning poses some puzzling questions: Is walking such a risky proposition that one has to write his will before setting on walking? What does Thoreau mean by “readiness” to walk? Whether or not these words echo Shakespeare’s “ripeness is all” (Act V, Sc. II, p. 175, line 11), the question remains. If it means maturity of age, then why does Thoreau start walking – begin a quest for the lost knowledge – at a young age of 34 or may be earlier?⁴ The answer seems to lie in another question. At what point of time should one ideally start walking? Since Thoreau was deeply influenced by the classical Sanskrit literature, especially the epics, The *Vedic* practice of *varnasramadharama*⁵ (Basu 30), which is central to the Hindu religio-philosophical writings, can be brought into discussion. *Vanaprastha* is the last of the four stages in the orderly unfolding of human life as envisaged in the *Vedic varnasramadharama* system. If so, then, why does Thoreau want to disrupt the established chronology by setting on a walk at a young age of 34 or so? If *vanaprastha* is meant for a retiring person who has fulfilled all the previous three phases of life, why does Thoreau decide to walk the path ordained for a retiree? These are the queries that we will respond to in this paper with respect to “Walking” (1862) and *Walden* (1854). It is remarkable that “Walking” unravels the background of *Walden*; some of the motifs, especially the leitmotif of the practice of walking, which were behind the scene in *Walden*, are brought out in “Walking”. In other words, the dynamics of the art of walking and thinking are put forth in “Walking”; whereas in *Walden*, it is the product, not the practice of walking and thinking, which is foregrounded.

Let us take up the first question. What does Thoreau mean by walking? As mentioned above, walking and solitary living, are the two enabling practices in Thoreau’s spiritual and philosophical journey in the woods. Though, at times, he compromises with the latter, as he receives quite a few visitors at his Cabin in *Walden*, yet he practises walking everyday religiously – therefore it merits particular attention. Elsewhere, he says, “the swiftest traveller is he that goes afoot” (*Walden* 53). Obviously, he is not talking about walking as a physical act of moving from place A to place B only. Rather he is considering walking as a human act,



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as an act that has influenced human evolution deeply, when our ancestors walked their way from their fellow species to become the masters of the planet. Therefore, a brief look at the evolutionary history of walking is necessary. Unwritten anywhere in history books, the hi(story) of walking writes itself on human anatomy (Amato 21). Walking, on two feet, might have necessitated erect posture, which reshaped human pelvis and limbs. The anatomy shaped by bipedalism not only set hominids apart from other species in terms of posture but also allowed them “to make a fuller use of their breath and vocal chords, enabling them to issue more complex and diverse sounds than their sniffing and panting cousins...” (Amato 21). The ability to walk has helped to develop the competence for speech. The rhythms of walking led to the making of accompanying sounds, which eventually assumed the form of language and song. Amato quotes Robert Provine who claims, “hominids had to walk before they could talk” (Amato 21). He further observes, significantly, that perhaps this song and rhyme evolved, not only to sustain them on their long walks across landscapes, but also allowed them to weave narratives about the places they visited. Therefore, it can be argued that bipedal locomotion has produced the conditions for humans to develop the capacity to walk and talk at the same time, and, also, for the creation of song and story (Amato 22). Moreover, walking as movement on foot is different from travel, as one can travel around the world yet not move at all. What the movement on foot can give, travelling in a vehicle cannot give at all. It is the body propelled locomotion, and the sights, scents and scenes as well as the people one meets on the way that makes the movement experientially special. Rebecca Solnit⁶ notes, in this way walking becomes ambivalent and enormously creative, and, in a sense, the walker “arrives” as soon as he takes the first step. Walking through sights and scenes allows the mind to connect the internal and abstract, with the external and concrete, to join the unfamiliar with the new, to form new thought compounds. Hence walking has been an indispensable activity for thinkers through the ages. Thus, the history of walking is inextricably associated with the history of thinking and writing. Walking physically is to “move at a regular pace by lifting and setting down each foot in turn, never having both feet off the ground at once”⁷. However, it is not the physicality of walking only that is our central concern. On the contrary, it is walking, except the physicality of walking, which is crucial to our study. It can be termed as transcendental walking, that Thoreau alludes to, when he says that the art of walking comes to a walker “only by the grace of God,” that such walkers are



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“the chosen” ones belonging the “select class” of humans, and that a walker, in this sense, must be born into the family of “the Walkers” (“Walking”). In this way, walking is neither travel in physical sense, nor an exercise nor a pastime. But physical aspect of walking is an indispensable precondition for the transcendental walking to follow. One can understand it with an analogy: physical walking is the root, while transcendental walking is the fruit. To put it differently, the physical act of walking is the science of walking, while transcendental walking is the art of walking. It is the union of physical and transcendental walking – the union of walker with walking – that produces embodied experience, which is the hallmark of the literature of walking. Such experience is unique to the person yet embedded in the place. In nutshell, a walker experiences his thoughts sensuously to arrive at, what can be termed as experiential thinking. If walking is so easy and universal, why does Thoreau declare it an art that only the artists ordained by God can practise? Walking, observes Thoreau, is an art lost long ago, when humans ceased to be walkers in nature; this lost art needs to be rediscovered. But only the practice of walking can rediscover the art of walking because, in it is hidden the secret of poise between the mind and the body perfected for millions of years, since human ancestors first scrambled to two feet. Who will discover it? A normal walker begins walking on the physical plain, and ends it on the physical plane itself. The walking artist too, no doubt, begins it as a physical act, but he knows how to take off and float in the transcendental realm, and it is in this realm that the walking artist is able to think creatively. Thoreau terms the transcendental plane as the heavenly plane of walking, to enter which the walker requires “direct dispensation from heaven” (“Walking”). And this is the reason Thoreau never attempts to define walking in positive terms, he only approaches it in negative terms, so that the walking is kept out of the trinity of power as the “fourth estate,” never to be appropriated by institutions like “church, state and the people” (“Walking”). In other words, he does not want walking to be put under “institutional closure” (Caputo, 333) by imposing a definition on it.

The physical and transcendental concept of walking can be further elaborated with reference to Freud’s psychoanalytical theories of the human mind. According to Freud, a large part of the mind is unconscious, consisting of instinctual wishes and repressed desires that, despite being unconscious, have a strong influence on the conscious mind of an individual.⁸ The unconscious always undercuts the conscious mind to thwart the equilibrium



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between the two. This elusive equilibrium provides the basic environment for creative thinking. Annie Dillard confesses, the unconscious can neither be silenced, nor ignored, only allowed to flow.⁹How can walking help achieve and sustain this equilibrium? We have enough archaeological and paleontological evidence to support the hypothesis that walking is not only unique to human species, but also is an unparalleled achievement in terms of use of human mind coupled with a perfect alignment with human body for achieving the gravity defying erect walking movement on two legs. Human mind and body both strike a precise balance to achieve the feat of erect walking. It is no less than a revolution in the hi(story) of human evolution. Moreover, findings in the field of clinical research establish that walking movements are achieved when babies are still in the womb at seventeenth week, when the cortex, the part of the brain responsible for thinking, is not yet functional,¹⁰ suggesting that walking is the function of the unconscious mind. The equilibrium between the unconscious and the conscious, which is so essential for thinking, is achieved when the unconscious mind is pleurably engaged as it works on pleasure principal.¹¹Moreover, practising walking, as an art, stirs libido pleurably, (Forel and Fetscher)¹²which can lead to the opening of a brave new world of epiphanic awareness about oneself vis-à-vis the surroundings. It is this function of walking that Thoreau is referring to in the essay “Walking”. Now, why does Thoreau begin walking at an early age? This question relates to *Walden* as much as to “Walking.”Thoreau responds to this question in *Walden*. He says he took the radical step, when he could not find an established teacher-disciple tradition in his times, which could initiate him in the search for self-knowledge. To put it simply, when Thoreau found no archetypal wise old man (Stein)¹³ having first-hand experience of such spiritual quest, he was compelled to set forth alone at the first stage of his life. This disruption of chronology¹⁴ has far-reaching consequences, and that is why Thoreau forewarns any dilettante who aspires to follow his path.

Thoreau notes that William Wordsworth, the romantic poet, would first get a feel of his thoughts before writing them down. It was in his walking and thinking sessions across the Lake District, that he composed most of his poems. Relating thought to experience, Thoreau observes, thought should bear same relation to experience as day bears to night, and the summer to the winter. Abstract thought can be compared to “indoor” study, and practising walking, with a thought in the mind vis-à-vis the surroundings, is like testing the thought on



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the touchstone of felt experience. In other words, he invites sedentary thinkers/philosophers to take a walk with a thought in the mind to experience it sensuously, before presenting them to the readers/listeners as knowledge. Staying indoors makes one oversensitive to impressions so that even raw, unfelt thoughts are presented to the reader. A thought is raw when it is not sensuously experienced by the thinker. A thought, to be experiential, must be felt by a walking/waking body, whereas the unfelt thought is a thought of the mind with the body “etherized upon a table” (Eliot)¹⁵. And it is this walking/wakeful body that Thoreau takes along on his long walks as a companion. The walker while walking in the woods has to be mindful of his surroundings with an aim to connect with them sensuously. Walking in the woods, says Thoreau, while “thinking out of woods” is of no use. Sharing his experience of outdoor walking, Thoreau notes that walking can cast a veil of creative unfamiliarity over a mundane landscape. As a result, a walker can discover immense creative potentialities in a given radius of land. Thoreau bemoans the cutting down of forest, and erection of fences resulting in a fragmentation of landscape. While for a walker there is nothing like an expanse of open land. Thoreau states that he can walk any number of miles – ten, fifteen, twenty. The mention of number of miles walked in the wild, away from human dwelling, seems to be another benchmark for a walking artist. In other words, Thoreau seems to suggest that after having done twenty miles, in the woods, the walker starts *thinking* (emphasis mine). Literary works, belonging to the literature of walking, epitomise the actual walking trail of the walker with all the twists and turns in the narrative of the text. For example, in “Walking”, Thoreau’s walking away from the realm of civilized life into the woods, is accompanied by a parallel switch in the mind, which develops an ability to view the human civilisation from the perspective of an outsider. In other words, the walker is able to somewhat distance himself from the cultural conditioning to rediscover in him the pre-cultural human nature. Moreover, the roads, he says, are not for a walker, as he/she is not walking to reach a destination; rather, he/she is wandering aimlessly. Thoreau decries degradation of the landscape into private property, which imposes restrictions on free walking. His words sound prophetic when he says, “[L]et us improve our opportunities, then, before the evil days come” (“Walking”).

Walking indoors and outdoors presupposes a “house”. Is it the same house that the walker has left behind before setting on a walk? Thoreau employs the “house” as a complex metaphor which is mentioned in “Walking,” and developed further in *Walden*. Though



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initially in “Walking” Thoreau regards “house” as a physical structure and a place of dwelling, he almost immediately endows it with the richness of a deep metaphor. One of the most sustained and elaborately developed tropes in *Walden* is the “house.” Since Thoreau is deeply influenced by Indian philosophical literature, especially, *The Bhagvad Gita*, his conception of the “house” is akin to the motif of an *ashram* (hermitage) in the Sanskrit literature. Beginning with a cabin in the Walden woods, the house assumes cosmic proportions by the end of the text. From being a cabin initially, the “house” begins to suggest one’s spiritual self. “Better paint your house your own complexion; let it turn pale or blush for you” (*Walden* 45). With the onset of certain seasons, observes Thoreau, the instinct to migrate affects not only “nations and individuals” (“Walking”), but also birds and animals. This urge to travel to new places becomes so strong that even the fear of death does not deter the migratory birds and animals from their path. While the birds and animals instinctually know the direction they should travel to, humans seem to have lost this capacity to feel the “subtle magnetism in Nature” (“Walking”) which invites the walkers to certain directions. As a result, in the absence of walking, human evolution has reached stagnation not only physically but also spiritually. If walking upright is the only act that distinguishes human beings from all other species, if it is a human act, or the act that made us human beings, the corollary of it is if we shun walking, do we cease to be human beings? – *Walden* and “Walking” answer in the affirmative. Moreover, states Thoreau, while one has to travel towards the East to “realise history and study the works of art and literature” (“Walking”), one has to return to the West for progress. Humankind should seek, to quote him, “from the East light; from the West fruit” (“Walking”). In other words, human beings began their journey of progress from the East to the West. If the West symbolises material progress, the East epitomises spiritual excellence – both are complementary to each other. As a result, just like the travelling sun in the sky, walking back and forth is the only way to join progress with spiritualism, the body with soul, and science with art.

Using the insights of Laurence D. Cooper, we can make a clearer sense of Thoreau’s understanding of the human condition. He, indeed, makes a similar observation: “Human beings and human life must be understood in light of their having *become* (emphasis mine) what they are” (474). The idea of the decline of human spiritual capacities is not just a recent phenomenon; it can be traced back to very old, even prehistoric times. The Christian myth of



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the Fall is in fact an epoch in the quasi-mythical hi(story) of evolution of humankind condensed into the span of a day that saw humans descend – reverse evolution – from the Eden, the first home and the original place of grace.¹⁶ Jean Jacques Rousseau, in *Second Discourse*, states that being subjected to civilized culture, humans had to discard a great deal of their original nature – he terms this loss as the second fall, the cultural fall (Rousseau qtd. in Skillen 107). Before the original fall from goodness, human virtue lay in “undeveloped innocence, as the self was not social or self-conscious” (Cooper 472). The second fall is considered worse than the first, as it has resulted in the self’s alienation from itself (Rousseau 58). Like Rousseau, Thoreau is emphasising humankind’s twice fallen state, and advocating the urgent need for a quest for wholeness and redemption - a profound inner quest, but not without strong external reverberations also. Obviously enough, a philosopher like Thoreau did not have any other choice than walking into the woods in the quest for knowledge, which actually means “gnosis,” i.e. knowing through experience *and* observation (Borror 43) (emphasis added).

Thoreau states that “knowledge is our positive ignorance; ignorance our negative knowledge” (“Walking”). Factual knowledge does not serve any purpose when a person walks into the woods on a quest to know himself and the world. Human hubris in regarding knowledge as possession may be dangerous, especially when someone is ignorant of his ignorance, and the actions, on the basis of *one’s* (my emphasis) knowledge, might harm others, who might have *their* (my emphasis) own version of knowledge to guide their actions; this is the dilemma of the modern idea of knowledge making it subservient to the individual ego, which is liable to undergo changes.¹⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno term it as “the triumph of subjectivity” (20). As a result, the idea of knowledge, as an abstract concept, to be fulfilled by its “social, historical and human meaning” is abandoned (20). Likewise, Thoreau wants us to develop transcendental ignorance, i.e. to be aware of the limits of our knowledge to prevent its misuse while acting out the worst fears of an individual ego. Moreover, just like nature accords equal place to light and darkness, knowledge should give way to ignorance and vice versa, in tune with the natural cycles; knowledge and ignorance should be treated as two sides of a scale. Thoreau’s idea of nature is human nature in perfect harmony with the external nature; out of this consonance is born awareness of the impossibility of knowledge as a matter of subordination to the ego. To quote Thoreau, “I do not know that this higher



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knowledge amounts to anything more definite than a novel and grand surprise on a sudden revelation of the insufficiency of all that we called knowledge before....” (“Walking”). If “our philosophy” is a dream, we know that dreams are never fully recalled and understood. Being asleep to the call of the cock, which awakes every morning with nature, is a refusal to connect with nature, which is intelligence personified. To quote Thoreau, “Nature is a personality so vast and universal that we have never seen one of her features.” Thoreau conveys the same idea of impossibility of complete knowledge with the help of an image of a philosopher looking at the sun to “know” it. Laws of natural sciences, observes Thoreau, can be transcended if one develops a relation with the “lawmaker”. Therefore, instead of striving to master nature, humans should respect nature and its intelligence. This humble acceptance can liberate humankind from the bondage of the notion of knowledge as personal possession. The image of the sunlit meadow near the end of the essay “Walking” appears like a paradise reached, not in the physical sense, but as a transcendental awareness of higher reality. It recalls the opening image of the “Holy Land,” which every walker desires to achieve. Moreover, the awakening, for Thoreau, is more of a metaphor to exemplify “individual growth” (Champion 47). It connotes development of an awareness of light in our mind, to see ourselves and our world clearly. Is it not the profession of philosophy to see clearly?

To conclude, “Walking” and *Walden* exemplify how the practice of walking and thinking together can lead to experiential thinking. Thus, the practice of walking enables Thoreau to break free from mundane reality that was holding him back from an epiphanic awareness about himself and the external nature. In a nutshell, the knowledge and experience of one’s self is essential to the knowledge and experience of the external nature and vice versa, to arrive at a wholesome wisdom.

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¹ A walker has to relive the experiences of humans as "sojourner[s] in nature" in the collective unconscious. Propounded by C. G. Jung, the term, the collective unconscious, is that part of the unconscious, which contains archetypes or universal images that are shared by all humankind. It is different from personal unconscious, in the sense that personal unconscious contains the memories of individual experiences.

See. Collective Unconscious, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica Press, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/science/collective-unconscious>, July 09, 2020.

² A deconstructionist claims that the meanings are falling apart resulting in undecidability of meanings, and that there is not centre that can hold them together; while a walking artist demonstrates that he/she can put his/her body at the centre, and start reconstruction of the



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scattered text. Therefore, the walking artist's "I", unlike the deconstruction's "I" which is a linguistic effect, is a living, breathing, throbbing, walking and thinking "I".

³Named and pioneer by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, it is a practice of critical analysis of a text. It contradicts Western philosophical tradition of certainty of meaning. On the contrary, it seeks to grant equal free play to all the presences of traces of meanings to prove that they are in fact limitless. See. *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Third Edition.

⁴ If we presume that he started walking, when he wrote *Walden*, i.e. he was not walking earlier than he began his experiment at the Walden Pond, then, we can say, he began practising walking at the age of 34.

⁵*Varnasramadharama* is a Hindu Vedic prescription on the conduct of human life, defining the orderly unfolding of human life in four stages: *brahmachari-ashram*, studentship; *Grihastha*, the family life after marriage; *Vanaprastha*; life as a hermit in retreat, and *Sannyasa*, life as a wandering ascetic. Jogiraj Basu quoted by Patrick Olivelle. See. Olivelle, Patrick. *The Asrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution*. Oxford University Press, 1993. Print.

⁶Solnit, Rebecca: *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. Penguin Books, 2000. Chapter 1, EBook.

⁷ See *Oxford Dictionary of English*, Third Edition.

⁸ Thurschwell, Pamela. *Sigmund Freud, Routledge Critical Thinkers: Essential Guides for Literary Studies*, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 4, EBook.

⁹ See the chapter "Seeing" in Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Harper Collins, United Kingdom, 1974. EBook.

¹⁰ Nicholson, Geoff. *The Lost Art of Walking*. p 11. Print.

¹¹ Freud maintains that libido is always inclined towards pleasure. Therefore, if it has to be engaged in walking, it must have an element of pleasure in it.

See. Thurschwell, Pamela. *Sigmund Freud, Routledge Critical Thinkers: Essential Guides for Literary Studies*, Routledge, London, 2001, EBook, p. 85-86.

¹² Walter Benjamin cites his youthful experiences of practising walking in the city of Berlin. He discovers that walking can transform the way the city is experienced by the walker; it



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can even lend sexual appeal to inanimate objects on the cityscape. During one of those casual walks to explore the city, he “discovers his own libido”.

See. McElligott, Anthony. Editor, *The German Urban Experience: Modernity and its Crisis, 1900- 1945*, Routledge, 2001, Digital Edition, 2005. p. 209.

¹³ Thoreau cites “the failure of the old men of his culture to pass on to the succeeding generations an enduring legacy of wisdom.” He is longing for the “guru-shishya parampara” (translation mine), of the East, in America. Voicing his strong spiritual relation with the East, he wonders elsewhere, “[W]as not Asia mapped in my brain before it was in any geography?” See. Scott, David. *Rewalking Thoreau and Asia : “Light from the East ‘for’ A Very Yankee Sort of Oriental.”*

¹⁴ Thoreau decided to go walking at the age when he ought to be absorbed in his family life. His case has echoes with that of Pāṇḍavas in *TheMahabharata*, who were forced into exile by treachery of theircousins. This disruption in the orderly unfolding of life of the princes eventually has catastrophic consequences for the entire dynasty.

See. Parkhill, Thomas. “Going To the Forest : The Case of the Pāṇḍavas.”

¹⁵ Opening line from a poem “Prufrock and other Observations” by T. S. Eliot. In this poem, the poet seems to be admitting that the poem is a thought (un)experienced by the body as it is lying anaesthetised on the table. The poem seems to be complaining about the neglect of felt experience in the writings by the contemporary poets and philosophers.

¹⁶ Georges Buffon quoted by Robert Macfarlane in *Mountains of the Mind: A History of a Fascination*. Granta, 2009. Page 24.

¹⁷ Ego (Latin: “I”), Freud posits ego as the mental agency guiding rational thinking of personality by mediating between the outer and inner worlds. In the mind ego works as a balancing agency between the opposite drives of the id and the superego. The ego provides stability and uniformity to behaviour by providing a “personal point of reference” with the help of memory. The ego is liable to change throughout life, especially under challenging conditions such as perception of threat, illness, and other changes having a significant bearing on it.

See. “Ego”. The Editors of Encyclopaedia, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2018.

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