Walden: Philosophy and Knowledge of Humankind

Kelly Dean Jolley, *Auburn University*

> Ask yourself: How does a man learn to get a 'nose' for something? And how can this nose be used.
>
> Ludwig Wittgenstein

1. What I propose to do here is to follow a path of thinking; more specifically, to follow a path of thinking in *Walden*, a path of thinking about philosophy, hence about the subjects of philosophy.[1] This essay, like the path it follows, opens onto more than it brings to a close. Thoreau might call this writing "undefined in front".

2. Consider this essay work in Conceptual Apprecation. I owe the term "Conceptual Appreciation" to Paul Ziff. It is the subtitle of his book of essays, *Philosophic Turnings.* Since it is relevant to my understanding of Conceptual Appreciation, and to the unwinding of this essay, here is most of Ziff's brief Preface:

> For the time being, the only way to stick to the point in philosophy is to wander: any question is coiled around another; a winding path is followed... The attempt [of these essays] is always the same: to appreciate our conceptual situation.[2]

When working in conceptual appreciation, a philosopher is not providing theories deductive or inductive (in the scientific way), but rather, if he is providing a theory at all, he is providing an exhibitive theory - a theory that shows us our conceptual situation, so that we can come to appreciate it. This is delicate work. The aim of Conceptual Appreciation is to illuminate, and not to disrupt, our whole involvement with our concepts - maybe even to bring us back into whole involvement with them if we were at a loss before.[3] The danger of Conceptual Appreciation is that we will think that the work of Conceptual Appreciation is responsible for our conceptual situation, instead of responsible to it. Thinking this deforms the work of Conceptual Appreciation into system-building, into a theory deductive or inductive. When this happens, our conceptual situation as it is shown to us no longer feels quite *ours*; we begin to feel as though it is ours only for so long as we consciously comply with it. But of course our conceptual situation is not ours through conscious compliance: it is a shared form of life, and we are implicated in it unthinkingly.[4] Bringing us to the point that we can (bear to) acknowledge this is a central task of Conceptual Appreciation.

3. Besides being work in Conceptual Appreciation, this essay is also work on two of the great teachers of Conceptual Appreciation, Thoreau and Wittgenstein.[5] The peculiar problems I face in this essay is that I am writing for two audiences at once, one like-minded and willing to countenance the pairing of Thoreau and Wittgenstein and unsuspicious of the work of Conceptual Appreciation, and the other unlike-minded, unwilling to countenance the pairing and suspicious of the work of Conceptual Appreciation. The fault of the essay for the like-minded will be its lack of detail, the fault of the essay for the unlike-minded will be its lack of justificatory, over-arching argument. Both faults are mine; but they are endurable because I think the primary task of the paper - exhibiting *Walden* as a work of philosophy - both demands them and makes some amends for them.

The faults are demanded because (1) exhibiting *Walden* as a work of philosophy requires that I find a vantage point from which to survey, to overlook, *Walden* entire - and such a survey will lose sight of detail; and, (2) exhibiting *Walden* as a work of philosophy requires that I show *Walden* to be conceptually integral, that I show its central concepts to meld, naturally, one with the other - and showing that leaves little room for justificatory, over-arching argument. If I can show *Walden* to be conceptually integral, show its central concepts to meld, then that will itself constitute all the justificatory, over-arching argument that should be necessary. The faults are amended, at least somewhat, because exhibiting *Walden* as a work of philosophy adds a vital book to the shelf of philosophy books and shows that there is yet another way of inflecting "philosophy", the inflection of Conceptual Appreciation. (I also try to amend the faults in the notes, both by providing a bit more detail and by sketching a few justificatory, overarching arguments - or at least by pointing the way to such arguments).

4. I take it that *Walden* is a book written, to use Thoreau's own words, "deliberately and reservedly."[6] What is it to write deliberately and reservedly? Thoreau's response to this question - at least insofar as the question asks after the writing of such a book as *Walden* - is in the chapter entitled "Baker's Farm". In the course of describing his conversation with John Field, Thoreau comments: "...I purposely talked to him as if he were a philosopher, or desired to be one." This comment may not lighten the deliberate and reserved writing of Walden on its own; but when paired with Thoreau's earlier remarks on philosophy, it is of considerable help. In "Economy" Thoreau writes:

> There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers. Yet it is admirable to profess because it was once admirable to live. 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.

The student of Walden is talked to as if he were a person who loves wisdom enough to live a certain way, or at least as if he were a person who desires to love wisdom enough to live a certain way. Stress here should fall squarely on "to live". Thoreau is not talking to people who want a parcel of information, exactly - who want a record of subtle thoughts had by someone else; a system, say - he is talking to those in the grip of one or more of the problems of life, someone facing a task or lacking a trade. To talk to such an audience is to cast your talk a particular way, to undertake to instruct those to whom you are talking to make correct judgements, i.e. to recognize (in the lives of others but primarily in their own) what is genuine (recognizing what is genuine is a fair characterization of wisdom). Showing how to achieve the knowledge needed for such recognition is Thoreau's occupation in *Walden*. It is hard work because, as Wittgenstein notes in *Philosophical Investigations* (*PI* II, xi., pg.227),

> There is in general no such agreement [like the agreement in judgements of colors] over the question of whether an expression of feeling is genuine or not.
>
> I am sure, *sure*, that he is not pretending; but some third person is not. Can I always convince him? And if not is there some mistake in his reasoning or observations?

> "You're all at sea!" - we say this when someone doubts what we recognize as clearly genuine - but we cannot prove anything.[7]

That there is no general agreement in our putative recognitions of genuineness as there is in our judgements of colors makes the task of instructing others to recognize genuineness especially hard. Someone instructing others in this sort of recognizing, in this sort of judging, cannot make use of the canonical vehicles of instruction: proof and evidence. The instructor must find a way to teach, and the student must find a way to learn, without proof or evidence, without venturing verification. The reason for this is not that proof is impossible, but rather that the concept 'proof' is inapplicable (Wittgenstein's 'cannot' in "cannot prove anything" is grammatical); in such teaching there is no foothold for 'proof' or 'disproof'. This does not mean that there are no terms of criticism for such an instructor - it just means that 'proven' and 'disproven' are not among his critical terms. Nor does it mean that knowledge plays no role in the instructing: the substratum of such recognition, such judgement, is "knowledge of humankind":

> Is there such a thing as 'expert judgement' about the genuineness of expressions of feeling? - Even here, there are those whose judgement is 'better' and whose judgement is 'worse'.
>
> Correcter prognoses will generally issue from the judgement of those with better knowledge of humankind.
>
> Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can. Not, however, by taking a course in it, but through '*experience*'. - Can someone else be a man's teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right *tip*. - This is what 'learning' and 'teaching' are like here. - What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgements. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them right. Unlike calculating-rules.
>
> What is most difficult here is to put this indefiniteness, correctly and unfalsified, into words. (*PI*, II, xi, pg.227).

Wittgenstein's remarks clarify the difficulty of Thoreau's trade in Walden (and, *inter alia*, Wittgenstein's in *Philosophical Investigations*: a compendium of remarks on the "natural history of human beings", of certain "extremely common facts of nature"[8])'; they also clarify many of Thoreau's comments about his trade. For example, in an (in)famously dark passage about the darknesses of *Walden* (in "Economy") Thoreau reveals:

> ...I will only *hint* at some of the enterprises which I have cherished.
>
> In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line. *You will pardon some obscurities, for there are more secrets in my trade than in most men's, and yet not voluntarily kept, but inseparable from its very nature.* I would gladly tell all that I know about it, and never paint "No Admittance" on my gate.

The words I emphasize here disclose that Thoreau recognized two things about his trade: First, he recognized that the best he could offer his reader, his student, was going

to be hints or tips. When Thoreau says he "will only hint" he is not admitting willful obscurity but conceding necessary obscurity - an obscurity that comparing his trade to other trades, trades that apply calculating-rules, shows to be necessary. (Wittgenstein, too, had to concede necessary obscurity (in his Preface to *PI*):

> After several unsuccessful attempts to weld my results together into...a whole, I realized I should never succeed...And this was, of course, connected with the very nature of the investigation.)

Second, Thoreau recognized that a trade that turned on hints was going to be one that traded in secrets, that had trade secrets. The secrets, I think, are secrets only to those inexperienced in Thoreau's trade; inexperienced, that is, in the byways and bywords of *Walden*. Once a person has acquired the needed experience, the secrets will turn out only to be the natural indefinitenesses of a trade (connected with the very nature of a trade) that does not admit of a technique, that is not systematic.

Thoreau continues the passage above by reporting

> I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtledove, and am still on their trail.

Without speculating overmuch here, now, on what these three creatures represent, if anything, I want to consider the trailing comment, about still being on their trail. Why does Thoreau describe his trade in terms of 'trailing'? While Thoreau has lost the hound, the horse and the turtledove, he has not lost their trail. He is still on their track, still on track. He still has the scent.

But, trails and tracks look like evidence; and, I have been construing Thoreau's trade as one that does not allow for evidence. How is this conflict resolved? A bit after his remark about knowledge of humankind, Wittgenstein points out the following:

> It is certainly possible to be convinced by evidence that someone is in such-and-such state of mind, that, for instance, he is not pretending. But 'evidence' here includes 'imponderable' evidence. (*PI*, II, xi, pg. 228).

So the inapplicability of evidence in teaching someone to recognize genuineness is the result of the fact that the evidence that plays a part in such teaching includes imponderable evidence. And evidence that includes imponderables is not what we normally think of as evidence. (Consider: is recognizing that someone is not pretending, where the recognition turns on imponderable evidence, ever sensibly said to be justified, to any degree? Can we make sense of imponderables as necessary or sufficient conditions?[9]) That the trail Thoreau is still on must be such that it includes imponderable evidence is shown, if by nothing else, by the differences in the types of trail each of the creatures would leave. The trail of a hound and a horse might overlap for a space, but the hound can travel where the horse cannot. And the trail of the turtledove, unless it were grounded (which it is not, because, as Thoreau later notes, it has been seen "disappearing behind a cloud"), would not overlap with that of the hound or horse. Since Thoreau claims to be on "*their* trail", i.e. on *one* trail, he must not be following evidences (of their passing) of a normal sort.

The evidence must be or include imponderables. The game that Thoreau is trailing cannot all be afoot.

I am tempted to think that the hound, the horse and the turtledove are all meant by Thoreau to be imponderables - things whose weight, that is, significance, cannot be estimated. If this is right, then the signs of their passing would be evidence of imponderables, imponderable evidence.

5. At any rate, Thoreau's trade, the trade that *Walden* has to teach, is a trade not easily learned. And it is a trade not to be picked up in a trade school. When the trade is acquired independently, it is acquired by experiment, by conducting "a thousand simple tests", by plain living and plain thinking. When it is learned from another, it is learned by living with the teacher, in close companionship and sympathy. The student of *Walden* does nothing so much as spend time with Thoreau, listening while Thoreau drops hints. (Wittgenstein assembled reminders.) What the student picks up - if lucky[10] - is a sensibility, a knack, a nose for something - call it almost a methodology; or, an unmethodical method; or, a method that can only be demonstrated; or, the fragments of a system. (Socrates, in the *Phaedo*, terms his way of attacking philosophical questions a "haphazard method"). There is no methodology, exactly, for inventing experiments or tests: There is no methodology, exactly, for taking hints: No matter how much we strain, no matter how closely we listen (think of the chapter "Sounds" as a tutorial in sounds, as a phenomenology of listening, and mot merely of hearing), we may, and unfortunately typically do, fail to test all that needs testing or fail to take the hint.[11] Thoreau travels the physical terrain of Walden, the conceptual terrain of *Walden*, criss-cross in every direction because he wants to maximize our chances of testing all that needs testing, of taking the hint: *Walden*'s repetitiveness is the repetitiveness of effective teaching.

6. So what is Thoreau teaching, what knowledge is he proffering? Knowledge of humankind. He stakes his claim to this knowledge, to expert judgement or at least better judgement, in the opening passages of *Walden*. Consider the diagnoses. "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation"; or "I would fain say something... [about] you who read these pages"; or "But men labor under a mistake"; or "Most men...are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them"; or "It is very evident what mean and sneaking lives many of you live, for my sight has been whetted by experience..."; etc. These diagnoses are necessary if Thoreau is to stake his claim to be his student's teacher in this knowledge, if he is to alert his student to the need to be listening for hints or tips. Thoreau's deliberate style is necessary for putting the indefiniteness, the obscurity, of his trade into words correctly and unfalsified; Thoreau's reserved style is necessary because his trade requires him to keep secrets.[12]

Thoreau provides diagnoses and while doing so he is talking to his student as if the student were a philosopher or desired to be one. So Thoreau thinks of the philosopher as a person with knowledge of humankind or as a person who desires such knowledge. This knowledge is then to be employed in recognizing what is genuine, in solving some of the difficulties of life. Because the rules that are a part of this knowledge require experience in order to be put to use, in order to be applied rightly, Thoreau shares his experiences

with his students. When Thoreau refers to his students as "poor", the poverty to which he refers is a poverty not only of knowledge, but of experience. In his essay "Walking" he underscores this. "It is remarkable...how little exercised we have been in our minds; how few experiences we have had."

If I was right before in maintaining that claims to knowledge of humankind cannot be proven and that evidence for them includes imponderable evidence, then it may seem as if knowledge of humankind could not be something philosophical, something that concerns the philosopher. Most philosophers disrelish obscurity, have no appetite for indefiniteness. Knowledge of humankind looks to be too "unlicked and incondite" (to borrow Lamb's phrase) to have any claim to the attention of the philosopher or would-be philosopher. So, if Wittgenstein is right, and even the most general claims of this sort "yield *at best* what looks like the fragments of a system" [emphasis mine], then knowledge of humankind does not look to be philosophical knowledge. Indeed, knowledge of humankind may not look to be knowledge at all.

7. From one angle, these charges are all right. A philosopher who is interested in knowledge of humankind, who is swayed by remarks on the natural history of human beings, who reads *Walden* as a work of philosophy, is a philosopher reconstituted. To most philosophers, whether analytical or metaphysical (i.e. Continental), a philosopher reconstituted is someone without a philosophical constitution - without a philosophical bone in his body, without a philosophical charter. But to the philosopher reconstituted, the anlaytical and metaphysical philosopher alike resemble John Field's wife "with the never absent mop in one hand, and yet no effects of it visible anywhere" ("Baker's Farm"). The analytical and metaphysical philosophers both contend that they will mop the floor so well that it will be possible to see the super-floor beneath it, a crystalline floor, like slippery ice, frictionless, ideal (*PI* 107). The philosopher reconstituted points to the dirty floor, the rough ground, that actually allows for and supports everyday traffic, and recommends that the analytical and metaphysical philosophers give up on the mop, except perhaps for occasional tidying-up.

Anyway, the philosopher reconstituted is willing to make do with less, is willing to live with the obscurities and secrets, the indefiniteness, of knowledge of humankind. Because this philosopher regards the hankering for systematic knowledge of humankind as bootless, he confines himself to hints and tips, so that he will not give the impression that philosophy as he practices it promises more than scattered, occasional certainties. These certainties, the certainties that knowledge of humankind allows, are not certainties at all to the analytical or metaphysical philosopher.

Thoreau's reacts to their complaint by reminding the analytical and metaphysical philosophers that

> There are other letters for the child to learn than those which Cadmus invented. The Spaniards have a good term to express this wild and dusky knowledge, - *Grammatica parda,* tawny grammar, - a kind of mother-wit... ("Walking")[13]

Wittgenstein responds to their complaint by pointing out that it results from thinking that there is only one kind of certainty (a complaint resulting from a one-sided diet), so that

the certainty Wittgenstein and Thoreau think present in knowledge of humankind seems to the analytical or metaphysical philosopher *blinkered* certainty, certainty, at its highest, of low degree. Wittgenstein represents their complaint this way:

> "But, if you are *certain*, isnt' it that you are shutting your eyes in the face of doubt?"
> - They are shut.

He then continues

> Am I less certain that this man is in pain than that twice two is four? - Does this shew the former to be mathematical certainty? - 'Mathematical certainty' is not a psychological concept.
>
> The kind of certainty is the kind of language game. (*PI*, II, xi, pg. 224)

Wittgenstein's point is that there is more than one kind of certainty. Many, if not all, of the kinds of certainty admit of degrees. However, there is no one kind of certainty that allows us to rank the other kinds relative to it or each other: there is no one Divided Line for certainty. So, the certainty we can have that a man is in pain is not, somehow, a lesser certainty than the certainty we can have that twice two is four. In each case I can be completely certain; neither complete certainty is more complete than the other. The language-game of pain is not the language-game of mathematics, and their respective certainties, while comparable with one another are not comparable to one another.

> I can be as *certain* of someone else's sensation as of any fact. But this does not make the propositions "He is much depressed", "25 x 25 - 625" and "I am sixty years old" into similar instruments. The explanation suggests itself that the certainty is of a different kind. - This seems to point to a psychological difference. But the difference is logical. (*PI*, II, xi, pg. 224)

But what of the shutting of the eyes? Wittgenstein's seemingly abrupt, impolite "They are shut" makes it sound as if the person who claims that he is completely certain that a man is in pain is ignoring or trying to ignore doubts about the matter (like the person who tries not to hear a painful confession by singing and sticking his fingers in his ears). Is this what Wittgenstein is saying? Notice that Wittgenstein does not answer his interrogator by saying "Yes; I am shutting my eyes to doubt" or "Yes; I see that there is reason to be dubious, but I am going to ignore it." Instead he says - neither abruptly nor impolitely, but simply - "They are shut". I understand Wittgenstein to be saying that he is not, exactly, *ignoring* doubt, but rather that he is, as it were, *asleep* to it, that he is not awake - or, perhaps, alive - to it. (If you enter my room to lecture me and find, upon finishing, that I've been asleep the whole time, you cannot accuse me of ignoring you or of pretending you are not there). In other words, the doubt that the analytic or metaphysical philosopher is distressed by is doubt that we typically do not see, of which we are typically unaware. If this is correct, then Wittgenstein is not only saying that we do not ignore these doubts, he is also saying that we do not overlook or miss them either. Rather, just as it would be wrong to say that we overlook or miss the ticking of the alarm clock while asleep, it is wrong to say that we overlook or miss doubts about others being in pain.

One problem, at least one potential problem, with what I am saying is that it makes the doubts of the analytic or metaphysical philosopher look alarmingly real: while I may not overlook or miss the ticking of my alarm clock when I am asleep, it nonetheless *really is* ticking. So, the analytic or metaphysical philosopher can claim that the doubts that distress him are doubts that are really there, doubts he discovers. But this gives listening to the ticking the wrong significance. While it is true that any expression of pain can be doubted, not every expression of pain is a genuine opportunity for doubt. In fact, if we were to treat every expression of pain as a genuine opportunity for doubt, we would lose our hold on the concepts of "simulating pain" and "being in pain". If I were to listen to every tick of my alarm clock, the alarm clock would no longer be able to perform its function: since I would never sleep, I would never need the alarm.[14]

As I said, this does not mean that we never doubt that others are in pain. Instead it means that we are only awake to that doubt when we are called to it - when an alarm goes off. Such doubt is doubt to which we must arise. If we judge that someone is pretending to be in pain, then we open our eyes to doubt. But we open our eyes to doubt only because of our judgement about the pretending: if I do not judge that someone is pretending to be in pain *and* if I do not judge that he is in pain, then, again, doubt has no place. I simply do not know what to think; I am certain of nothing and doubt nothing.

Thoreau treats the analytic or metaphysical philosopher's distress about these doubts by pointing out (in "Economy") that

> ...we may safely trust a good deal more than we do...Nature is as well adapted to our weakness as to our strength. The incessant anxiety and strain of some is a well-nigh incurable form of disease...How vigilant we are! determined not to live by faith if we can avoid it; all day long on the alert, at night we unwillingly say our prayers and commit ourselves to uncertainties.

Thoreau is well aware of how difficult it is to cure someone kept awake by these doubts (someone suffering from, to twist Joyce's phrase, an "ideal insomnia"). His therapy consists in reminding his student of the central place of trust in our dealing with things, with one another. (A therapy Wittgenstein will later try in *On Certainty*: "At the bottom of human life is trust.") Trust is not a response to doubt. (And, importantly, neither is faith). When we trust someone or something, we do not close our eyes to our doubts about him or it. When we doubt, we do not trust. When we trust, we foreclose doubt. This is why a breach of trust matters so much, is so painful - such a breach blindsides us. If trust were a response to doubt, then when someone we trust fools us, it ought normally to be something that we are, in a way, prepared for: we knew that it might happen but chose to ignore it, to shut our eyes in the face of the possibility. Such a breach would then normally chagrin us, annoy us, perhaps disappoint us. But this is not our normal response to such a breach. When we trust someone, we normally are not, in any way, prepared to be fooled: Not to chivvy language too far beyond its coarser nuances, but there *is* a difference between *hoping for the best from someone* and *trusting* him.

8. Thoreau's point in telling his student that Nature is as well adapted to our weakness as to our strength is that our budget of concepts, and hence our certainties and uncertainties (which stand in the middle of our nature as well as Nature) are not poorly fitted to our

lives. (This "not" (and the one to follow) is grammatical, not a confession of sartorial impotence). The fact that someone may pretend pain, may fool us, does not stretch the seam of the concepts in question, does not mean that our concepts are foolish, does not mean that they cannot render us good service. In fact, a central project of *Walden*, and of *PI*, is rejecting talk of concepts "fitting" things. The relationship, so to speak, between concepts and our lives is too tight for such talk to be comfortable. The relationship is too tight because concepts make up our lives, are the very stuff of them; this is the way I take Wittgenstein's comment that "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (*PI* 19). But all this makes it sound as if our particular concepts were, somehow, indispensable, necessary.[15] All this makes it sound as if "one could use one's mind to vouch for reality"; which would be strange.[16] Still, our concepts are not just convenient, handy.

> Language is an instrument. Its concepts are instruments. Now perhaps one thinks that it can make no *great* difference *which* concepts we employ. As, after all, it is possible to do physics in feet and inches as well as in metres and centimetres; the difference is merely one of convenience. But even this is not true if, for instance, calculations in some system of measurement demand more time and trouble than it is possible for us to give them.
>
> Concepts lead us to make investigations; are the expression of our interest, and direct our interest. (*PI* 569-70).

The subject of these remarks is the tightness of the relationship between our concepts and our lives. Wittgenstein's notion is that our concepts are as necessary as our interests; and of course our interests can change. But it is easy to overestimate our own changeableness and hence the changeableness of our concepts. We could, for instance, change our system of measurement. But even such a change as that exacts its price in terms of time and trouble. And the time and trouble that such a change would cost is not something simply up to us, at least not as long as our interest in measurement remains constant. Our interest in measurement is not something we chose to have; our interests force themselves upon us (and hence so do our concepts; cf. *PI* pg. 204); we *find* that we have them; we *recognize* them. These findings and recognizings are what knowledge of humankind equips us for, are what knowledge of humankind comes to. Our interests can change, but we do not change them; or, *better*, we do not change them as we change our clothes.[17]

9. To understand Wittgenstein here, and to understand Thoreau (who is interested, remember, in the "*necessaries* of life"), we need to keep before us the fact that concepts are expressions of our interest, not expressions for it, and that the logic of *expressions-of* is not the logic of *expressions-for*: e.g. the logic of expressions-of-pain is not the logic of expressions-for-pain. If y is an expression of x, then I can observe x in y: e.g. I can see pain in someone's face or hear it in his words. (Note that I am assuming that we are certain of the truth of the antecedent; we are not always certain of it, as per above). There is no room for me to interpose something, like language, between x and y (*PI* 245). X is, as it were, wherever y is.[18] The analytical or metaphysical philosopher's retort to this is that talk of, e.g. hearing pain in someone's words or seeing pain in someone's face is not literal talk - pain cannot be heard or seen, not *literally*. The pressure to talk about literal talk here is exerted, I think, by the analytical or metaphysical philosopher's assurance that the word 'in' is used in such statements in a way that is parasitic on the spatial use of the word.[19]

(So much of philosophy turns on, over, against, around prepositions.[20]) But this assurance is the assurance of someone hard up for categories. (Just as the argument over whether there is one world or two, the argument between the monist and the dualist, results from the same assurance: assurance that there are only a few worlds - surely two at most, or maybe one, instead of, say, nineteen.[21]) If someone were to stare at a statement, or to repeat an utterance again and again and explain his doing so by saying that he was looking for the pain in the statement or listening for the pain in the utterance - would we correct him by saying that he took something literally that was meant figuratively? Or, would we simply say that he misunderstood? The claim that pain cannot be seen or heard is the result of a prejudice, an ancient prejudice at that, about what seeing and hearing come to, about the proper objects of the various senses. It is true I guess that 'pain' is not normally accepted as a candidate for completing the statement "I see __." or "I hear __.", but this does not entail that 'see' in statements like "I see that he is in pain" or "I see the pain in his face" is misused or mismodelled or mistaken. We can see more than colors and can hear more than sounds.[22] Only someone plumping for a particular theory of sight, and not someone who has appreciated the concept of 'sight', might think otherwise (*Zettel* 223). As Hanson and Ziff realized, there is more to seeing than meets the eye (and more to hearing than meets the ear). Thoreau calls this into view by underscoring that "his sight [had] been whetted by experience." Seeing and hearing are not always only states; they are also *often* achievements. We can and are taught to see and to hear. ("This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear.") The eyes of critics of painting or the ears of critics of music are different in degree, and not in kind, from the eyes and ears of the rest of us. Statements like "I see the pain in his face" or "I hear the pain in his words" are in order as they stand; we do not need to explain them, or explain them away, by falling back on the literal/figurative distinction. Seeing and hearing are more complicated businesses than this distinction allows.

An expression of something - say, pain - differs from an expression for it in that (in painful circumstances) occurrences of the former are natural and non-occurrences unnatural whereas occurrences and non-occurrences of the latter are neither. Yelling or grunting or whining or exclaiming "That hurts!" is a natural expression of pain. Waving a red flat is not natural (nor is it unnatural); although it could be agreed upon as an expression for pain. Expressions-for are conventional in a way that expressions-of are not. If I accidentally drop a huge rock on your foot and hear bones break and see blood, your scream would be a natural expression of your pain. If you do nothing, not even grimace or whimper, I will think that something is wrong, that your reaction is unnatural. However, if we agree that waving a red flag is to be an expression for pain, and I then drop the rock accidentally and you wave the flag, I will not think your waving natural; I will think that you have remembered our agreement. If you do not wave the flag, I will not think your failure to wave it unnatural; I will think that you have forgotten our agreement. But expressions of pain are not things that can sensibly be remembered or forgotten. (Can babies forget to cry?) If I accidentally drop the rock and you do nothing and then, responding to my expression of worry, you claim that you forgot to grimace or whimper (or something), I will not know what to make of your claim. You may, of course, explain to me that you are a stoic sort of fellow and I may accept this as an explanation of what looked to me unnatural; but this is nothing like forgetting to grimace or whimper (or something); it

would in fact tell me that you felt the need to grimace or whimper (or something) but that you succeeded in resisting it.

This is why expressions-of are not such as to fit or not fit what they are expressions-of. Fittingness or the lack of it is something that makes sense where the expressions that concern us are expressions-for. Expressions-for are tailored, as it were, to the things they are expressions-for. There is room between x and y, where y is an expression for x, room for us to move between x and y, to consider their fit. Where y is an expression for x, it makes sense to talk, e.g. of inferring x from y. But this does not make sense where y is an expression of x: Your cry "That hurts!" *reveals* your pain to me. I observe it (I can hear your pain in it). Waving a red flag lets me *conclude* that you are in pain.[23]

10. If our concepts are expressions of our interests, our concepts neither fit nor fail to fit those interests, neither fit nor fail to fit our lives. Instead our concepts reveal our interests, our lives, show them to us. And our concepts enable us to direct our lives, to lead them and not merely live them. Living, like seeing and hearing, is not always only a state; it is also *sometimes* an achievement. Our lives are gravid with our concepts and our concepts gravid with our lives: lives without concepts are blind, directionless; concepts without lives empty, senseless.[24] Our concept of measurement reveals our interest in it, shows us that, as things stand, a human life is in part a life of measurement. The human predicament is a measurable predicament and leading a human life is often a matter of making measurements, of taking the measure of things.[25]

11. This turn-of-philosophical-phrase brings me full circle. Thoreau understands a philosopher to be someone who, because of his knowledge of humankind, can recognize what is genuine and, in turn, solve some of the difficulties of life, both theoretically and practically. Recognizing what is genuine is no science. (Nor is it the result of science. Recognizing what is genuine is what is possible before all new discoveries and inventions (*PI* 126).) However, such recognizing is no nescience, either. It is part of knowing what to make of things. What Thoreau does in *Walden* is to set himself up as someone who is genuine and who can instruct others to recognize genuineness. There is throughout *Walden* a subtle, dialectical interplay between Thoreau's genuineness and his instructing: if Thoreau manages to get his student to recognize genuineness and the student recognizes that Thoreau is not genuine, then Thoreau's instructing becomes suspect, as well as the putative recognitions of genuineness to which his instructing led. If the student recognizes that Thoreau is genuine, then progress continues. Initially trusting Thoreau (and then continuing to find him trustworthy) is thus crucial to learning the lessons he has to teach. Think of this as Thoreau's way of meeting the Learner's Paradox.

Walden is the expression of Thoreau.

Endnotes

1. I thank David L. Norton, Iakovos Vasiliou, Rupert Read and Clif Perry for helpful comments on this essay. I also record my debt, first to the writings of Stanley Cavell and Virgil Aldrich, and then to those of John McDowell and Cora Diamond.

2. Ziff, P. *Philosophic Turnings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), pg. vii.

3. I have transposed into these remarks some remarks of Virgil Aldrich's. Cf. Aldrich, V. *Philosophy of Art* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. ix and 5.

4. Because it is so tempting to think that we could steal a philosophical glance behind our conceptual situation - a glance that would permit an account of it, or a justification - I note an argument of David Bell's (*Frege's Theory of Judgement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 138-9):

> Any acceptable philosophical account of human judgement must have a terminus. But for obvious reasons that terminus cannot be, or presuppose, those very discursive abilities which were to be elucidated. And so our ability to think, to judge, to manipulate concepts depends upon our performing acts which are essentially non-conceptual, and which are, therefore, inaccessible to philosophical analysis...There can no more be a philosophical account of [human judgement] than there can be a philosophical account of the human digestive process: both are non-conceptual, non-discursive processes. At this point one's philosophical spade is turned. Kant, having argued that the categories are the fundamental rules governing the creation of propositional unity, observes that 'this peculiarity of our understanding, that it can produce *a priori* unity of apperception by means of the categories, and only by such and so many, is as little capable of further explanation as why we have just these and no other functions of judgement' (B146). All we can say here is: this is what we do.

Bell argues that Kant, Frege and Wittgenstein all participate in a philosophical tradition that centers on the notion of judgement (cf. pp. 1-12 and *passim*). A secondary task of this paper is to scrape together more reasons for thinking of Thoreau as participating in that philosophical tradition. I say "more", because a theme of Cavell's masterpiece, *The Senses of Walden*, is that Thoreau does participate in the tradition. (On this tradition, see also James Conant's invaluable "The Search for Logically Alien Thought", *Philosophical Topics*, Fall, 1991, pp. 115-180). Frege, Wittgenstein and Thoreau are all "gifted composers of variations on Kantian themes" (Sellars).

5. This is another way in which Thoreau belongs to the Kantian tradition (cf. note 4): As Conceptual Appreciation, Thoreau's philosophy continues Kant's Critical Philosophy - and I don't think this twists "Critical" in a way disloyal to Kant's use of it.

6. Thoreau, H. *Walden* (New York: Modern Library, 1950). All quotations from *Walden* will be taken from this edition. I will identify passages (in the text) by noting the title of the chapter in which they occur.

7. Anscombe, G., trans. *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1953), Third Edition. All quotations will make use of Anscombe's translations, unless otherwise noted.

8. I have changed Anscombe's translation of Wittgenstein's comment on *PI* 142 (pg. 56). Anscombe's translation runs: "What we have to mention in order to explain the significance, I mean the importance, of a concept, are often extremely general facts of nature: such facts as are hardly ever mentioned because of their great generality." Strictly speaking, there is nothing at all wrong with translating 'allgemeinheit' as 'general', but so translating is I think unhappy because of Wittgenstein's famous use of 'generality' in the *Blue Book*. There Wittgenstein upbraids philosophers for their "craving for generality". Anscombe's translation makes it sound as if Wittgenstein is now trying to satisfy the same craving. A better translation, one that avoids this problem and so clarifies the thought of the passage, is 'common': "What we have to mention in order to explain the significance, I mean the importance, of a concept, are often extremely *common* facts of nature: such facts as are hardly ever mentioned because of their great *commonness*." The same change would also clarify Wittgenstein's remarks at II, xii.

9. Since this may make recognitions of genuineness seem hopelessly dark, let me add a few relevant words, first from David Bell (*Frege's Theory of Judgement*, pp. 138-9), then from Kant, and then from Kendall Walton ("The Dispensibility of Perceptual Inferences", *Mind* July, 1963, pg. 362). Bell:

> One's behavior can conform to a given rule - and this behavior can be learned - without its being the case that certain conditions are judged satisfied, or that certain behavior is called for on the part of the person acquiring the ability. Kant expressed this succinctly: 'judgement is a peculiar talent which can be practiced only and cannot be taught...Examples are thus the go-cart of judgement' (B171ff).

Kant continues the lines Bell quotes by saying:

> [Judgement] is the specific quality of so-called mother- wit; and its lack no school can make good. For although an abundance of rules borrowed from the insight of others may indeed be proferred to, and as it were grafted upon, a limited understanding, the power of rightly employing them must belong to the learner himself; and in the absence of such a natural gift no rule that may be prescribed to him for this purpose can insure against misuse. [Footnote: Deficiency in judgement is just what is ordinarily called stupidity, and for such a failing there is no remedy.] (B172-3).

What is said about judgement here is true, I think *a fortiori*, of recognition. Walton:

> We rarely make mistakes in recognizing our friends, but we could not begin to describe many of their facial characteristics, certainly not enough to enable another person to identify them with assurance. Is our inability due to language difficulties? Do you know what a friend's facial features are, but just do not know what words to use in describing them? If so, you could at least describe his features to yourself, i.e. you could make up completely arbitrary symbols to stand for them. But try to describe to yourself, say, an identical twin of one of your friends. Can you say much

> more than 'He looks like my friend', and is not this entirely sufficient? Do you keep a card file in your head of all your acquaintances' facial and bodily characteristics, and thumb through it every time you see someone to find who it is?

10. Think here of the need for what Kant above (note 9) calls "a natural gift."

11. Some comments from G.A. Paul's essay, "Wittgenstein" (in Ryle, G. ed. *The Revolution in Philosophy* (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1957), pg. 96), are in order here:

> Here is why Wittgenstein presents no method in philosophy; there is no method for inventing cases, no method for arranging them.
>
> And there is no method for "*being struck by*" one fact rather than another...The fly in the fly-bottle may countless times eye the way out - and not be particularly struck by it.

12. Since my talk of necessary obscurity may seem unnecessarily obscure, let me say a word or two more about it. Another way of thinking about the necessary obscurity in Thoreau's trade is this: the obscurity embodies a knowledge of the unsayable. Stanley Cavell, from whom I have borrowed the phrase "knowledge of the unsayable," introduces it by noting that

> The knowledge of the unsayable is the study of what Wittgenstein means by physiognomy. His continuous sketches of it occur in Part II of the *Philosophical Investigations* [in section xi]...(*The World Viewed* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), pg. 157).

So we can say of Thoreau's obscurity that it embodies a knowledge of physiognomy. But what does that mean? "Knowledge of physiognomy" looks to be a more drumly phrase than any I have used so far.

Wittgenstein uses the term "physiognomy" four times in *PI*: *PI* 568; II, vi, pg. 181; II, xi, pp. 210 and 218. The last three times he uses it, he uses it when talking about words. Wittgenstein's idea is that words have a familiar physiognomy, a face - that words "look at us" (pg. 181). At 568, after talking about the distinction between what is essential and inessential (in a game), Wittgenstein notes, parenthetically, that "Meaning is a physiognomy". I take this to mean that meanings, like words, have familiar physiognomies, faces. And I take this to mean that we can recognize a meaning, just as we can recognize a face. When I recognize the meaning, say, in a passage of music, I have seen its face, recognized it. This hooks up, in ways that I hope are obvious, with my construal of Thoreau as teaching his reader to recognize genuineness. *Walden* sketches the face, the physiognomy, of genuineness - first from one angle, and then from another. (For more on the notion of faces, of physiognomies, cf. Diamond, C. "The Face of Necessity", in *The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge, Massuchesetts: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 243-66.) Why does such teaching by such sketches involve knowledge of the unsayable? Well, part of the answer is that such teaching involves imponderable evidence; but another part of the answer is that we cannot detach the expression of genuineness from that which expresses it. The content of genuineness, we might say, is in the face that expresses it. This means that Thoreau cannot

provide, nor can we provide ourselves with an abstract, or a composite, sketch of genuineness - a sketch that we could carry around to help us out. (We could, of course, carry *Walden* around?) In other words, the expression of genuineness cannot be digested into a brief description. No matter how much someone says about the expression of genuineness, there is always something more to be said, something to be taken back, something to be qualified: about the expression of genuineness, there is something unsayable.

13. Since the coincidence of terms is of more than passing interest, compare this quotation with the quotation from Kant above (note 9).

14. Another, related, worry about my handling of the shutting of the eyes is this: Haven't I made the shutting of the eyes altogether too passive? Isn't Wittgenstein's point that he, for whatever reason, *decided to shut* his eyes - actively? I think the answer to both these questions is "No". Wittgenstein ends the remark that comes before the shutting of the eyes remark by saying that the differences among kinds of certainty are logical, not psychological differences. He glosses this in the remark following the shutting of the eyes remark by saying "The kind of certainty is the kind of language-game". I take these remarks to point out that my eyes are shut to doubts because I play certain language-games; my eyes are not shut because I have actively decided to shut them. And of course I typically did not actively decide to play the language-games I play.

15. And, in a way, they are. After all, it makes sense to say that humans have five senses. It is not clear what sense it makes to say that humans have only five senses. But this does not make philosophy Profound Science.

16. O'Shaughnessy, B. "The Origin of Pain", *Analysis*, June 1955, pg. 126.

17. Cf. *PI* II, xii: "Compare a concept with a style of painting. For is even our style of painting arbitrary? Can we choose one at pleasure?...Is it a mere question of pleasing and ugly?"

18. There is serious danger here in treating x and y as separate *things*, a danger that has as its parent danger the danger of treating x as a thing at all. As Wittgenstein notes, x, where y is an expression of x, "is not a *something* and not a *nothing* either" and this amounts to a rejection of the grammer of 'things' where x is concerned (*PI* 304).

For more, cf. Cook, J. "Human Beings" in Winch, P. ed. *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), pp.117-151, especially pp.145ff; and, McDowell, J. "One Strand in the Private Language Argument" in McGuinness, B. and Haller, R. eds. *Wittgenstein in Focus* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989), pp.285-304.

19. The little word 'in' can turn out a lot of philosophy, as Aldrich points up:

> [Wittgenstein] is trying to do justice to the preposition 'in'. His whole philosophical psychology gravitates around this concern. The meagre, usually monolithic, treat-

> ment of 'in'...has impoverished and caricatured philosophy into lopsided monism, impossible dualism, etc. ("Kripke on Wittgenstein on Regulation", pp.380).

20. "Philosophy has always turned on grammatical particles." William James ("A World of Pure Experience", *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1943), pg.45).

21. Cf. Austin, J.L. "Intelligent Behaviour: A Critical Review of *The Concept of Mind*" in Wood and Pitcher, eds. *Ryle: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1970), pg. 48. Austin ends the section I am echoing by asking "Why, if there are nineteen of anything, is it not philosophy?"

22. As Kendall Walton observes,

> ...[T]here seems to be no reason to suppose that there are any limits at all to the kind of empirical facts that can be known directly. Contrary to traditional philosophical doctrine...our knowledge of other people's minds is not usually inferred from their behavior and facial expressions...Which information we receive directly from sense experience and which must be inferred...does not depend on an intrinsic difference between two kinds of empirical facts, but on the practical conditions of ordinary life which determine our perceptual dispositions. ("The Dispensability of Perceptual Inferences", pp.363 and 368).

Walton's argument is strikingly like that of Austin's in *Sense and Sensibilia* (Austin makes his point in connection with language, not facts):

> ...[T]he question of truth and falsehood does not turn only on what a sentence is, nor yet on what it *means*, but on, speaking very broadly, the circumstances in which it is uttered...[F]or much the same reasons there could be no question of picking out from [a] bunch of sentences those that are evidence for others...What kind of sentence is uttered as providing evidence for what depends, again, on the circumstances of a particular case; there is no kind of sentence which *as such* is evidence-providing... (Austin, J.L. *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pg.111.

Aldrich is fond of reminding himself and his reader of a line from Aristotle:

> ...[I]t is important to notice that, for such matters, the decision rests with perception, to use Aristotle's phrase, though it is just as important to remember that perception is decisive *in context*. ("Behavior, Simulating and Nonsimulating", *Journal of Philosophy*, Sept. 1966), pg.457).

Note, too, the opening lines of Wittgenstein's remark quoted on pg.14: I can be as *certain* of someone else's sensation as of any fact.

23. Of course, after repeated uses, some expressions-for can become an expressions-of, although there is no algorithm available for capturing just what "after repeated uses" comes to. In some cases, after repeated uses, I no longer conclude (that, say, you are in pain), but see.

24. This is the reason why an inability to enter into an activity in which words play a part renders the activity and those words (as used in the activity) pointless or unintelligible to the person with the inability. Activities in which words play a part cannot be explained to someone unable to enter them.

I owe the form of the remark in the text partially, of course, to Kant, and partially to Virgil Aldrich ("Kripke on Wittgenstein on Regulation", pg.377). Aldrich notes:

> Maps and rules presuppose practices as their substrata but, on the other hand, there is no practice that is not gravid with rules or maps. Neither has ultimate priority.

Cora Diamond has said similar things: cf. "Rules: Looking in the Right Place" (in Phillips and Winch, eds. *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), pp.12-34). For more general thoughts in this connection, cf. John McDowell's *Mind and World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), especially Lecture II, pp.7-9. What McDowell calls "The Unboundedness of the Conceptual", his contention that the reach of the space of reasons does not exceed the grasp of the space of concepts, forms a useful backdrop to what I have said.

25. At this point, someone might object: "Ok - I've let you get away with a bunch of sentences like this one until now. But now, I've had enough. This sentence is a tissue of equivocations." My response to this lines up with Wittgenstein's response to a similar objection.

> Then has "understanding" two different meanings here? - I would rather say that these kinds of use of "understanding" make up its meaning, make up my *concept* of understanding.
>
> For I *want* to apply the word "understanding" to all this. (*PI* 532).

Just so: I would rather say that these kinds of use of "measurement" make up its meaning, make up my *concept* of measurement.

This sentence, and its similar predecessors, are sentences that compact (at least part of) the complicated grammar of a word. Their point is to reveal the variety of inflections of a word. (Think of the variety of inflections of a word as, to borrow a Tractatarian term, its internal properties).