AP Language and Composition: Summerwork

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After listing the various ways in which mankind suffers from uncertainty, Thoreau follows with a quotation from Confucius providing a mindset able to transcend this anxiety and affect positive change. Directly following a celebration of the miracle of contemplation, Thoreau writes, "Confucius said, 'To know that we know what we know, and that we do not know what we do not know, that is true knowledge'" (7). Thoreau utilizes the ethos of Confucius to emphasize the quintessential example of an individual with the ability to surpass the strain of everyday life. This ideal alleviates the pessimism of the negative musings in the preceding paragraph through the provision of a concrete mindset to strive towards. This paragraph, taken as a whole, formulates a method of resisting descent into nihilismtic pessimism whilst simultaneously building its ethos. Thoreau first presents his understanding of the reasons behind why mankind "commit[s] [it]sel[f] to uncertainties" (7) to later strengthen the credibility of his solution: that the act of contemplation directly combats nihilistic pessimism.

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Through the use of first person narration, Thoreau crafts the narrative persona of an elder imparting knowledge to younger generations through both a description of his own life experiences and the creation of a feeling of collective responsibility with the use of the first person plural pronoun. An example of this dualistic impartment and acceptance of responsibility rises during Thoreau's admittance of his seldom reading of classical authors such as Plato: "His Dialogues, which contain what was immortal in him, lie on the next shelf, and yet I never read them. . . . We should be as good as worthies of antiquity, but partly by first knowing how good they were. We are a race of titmen, and soar but little higher in our intellectual flights than the columns of the daily paper" (60). By creating a feeling of responsibility alongside the rest of mankind, Thoreau morphs this otherwise negative statement into an insight suggesting hope for the future. In this way, he creates ethos through eunoia; however, Thoreau also relies on other methods of forging his credibility. Often when Thoreau crafts an argument, he proceeds to explain the counterargument in detail showcasing phronesis as he posesses the experience to understand not only his argument, but also the opposite of his argument.

Out of the many passages in *Walden* lending themselves to syntactical analysis, Thoreau's most poigniant thus far appears near the beginning of his chapter on sounds: "I had this advantage, at least, in my mode of life, over those who were obliged to look abroad for amusement, to society and the theatre, that my life itself was become my amusement and never ceased to be novel. It was a drama of many scenes and without an end" (63). Thoreau's use of irregular syntax in this passage cements the stark contrast between the perpetual novelty of his everyday life and the fleeting amusement found by a society that seeks entertainment from the external. The first example of this peculiar prose arises in the syntactical choice to use "was become" instead of the present perfect "has become." In doing so, Thoreau draws attention to the anteriority of his life becoming an amusement, thus increasing the magnitude of the period of novelty he finds throughout his time at Walden Pond and comparatively morphing the effect of external entertainment into that of infinitesmal significance. One other notable syntactial choice appears in Thoreau's literal separation of the theatre from society. Although a product of society, theatre represents society's attempt to escape the tedium of societal obligation; moreover, Thoreau sees this attempt as having failed due to its brevity and uses the subject as a metaphor to liken his life in nature to that of a drama which succeeds in creating perpetual entertainment.

The primary argument against the philosophy of Transcendentalism suggests that the solitude of isolation degrades mental health whilst cultivating feelings of loneliness. Throreau implicitly counters this argument during his chapter on solitude: "We are for the most part more lonely when we go abroad among men than when we stay in our chambers" (75). At first glance, this contention appears flimsy at best; however, the argument's genuity appears when applied to life experience. Thoreau continues his rebuttal stating that "[s]olitude is not measured by the miles of space that intervene between a man and his fellows" (75). This statement of the conjugate of solitude combined with the previous comparison of loneliness in different types of isolation provides the ideal example of Thoreau's philosophy of Transcendentalism. The emphasis on transcendental knowledge appears in his definition's implicit proposition: that Thoreau discovered this meaning for himself. His remark on loneliness clearly displays Thoreau's belief that he is at his best when truly independent of society.

Throughout *Walden*, Thoreau mainly crafts implicit arguments due to his belief in the superiority of transcendental knowledge. He seeks to provide experiences tied to various conclusions; however, Thoreau purposefully omits the link between these two in an effort to force his readers to infer the effects of his experiences. Focusing in on the chapters relating to his bean-field and trips to the village, Thoreau provides multiple implicit arguments in which he indirectly supports the conclusion with his experiences. An example of one of these contentions arises after Thoreau lists the profits of his bean-field and concerns the clash between mankind's focus on its own labor versus the wellbeing of its posterity: "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, . . . had taken root and grown in him" (91). This statement displays Thoreau's realization of humanity's misplaced concern for its own wellbeing outweighing concern for its posterity. Despite not providing any immediate explanation for this conclusion, Thoreau places his support for this contention in the lessons resulting from the completion his bean farm harvest after which he declares, "I will not plant beans and corn with so much industry another summer, but such seeds, . . . even with less toil and manurance, and sustain me" (90). Through this declaration, Thoreau urges readers to infer his newfound desire to plant seeds for sustenance for the sake of both having more time to expand his knowledge and be able to provide more for visitors and those in the village alike. He places his conclusion two paragraphs later to further allow this idea foster and allow the reader to more easily realize the connection upon reaching Thoreau's conclusion.

Throughout my reading of *Walden*, I became accustomed to Thoreau's rhetoric style of providing his experiences then presenting his conclusions derived indirectly from said experiences. However, whilst reading Thoreau's chapter on the various ponds surrounding his residence, I noticed that this rhetorical style abrubtly disappeared. In its place resides simply imagery coupled with Thoreau's explanation of his fondness for Walden Pond specifically. At first, I believed that he would leave his argument at the tail-end of the chapter for the sake of magnitude; however, I was mistaken as Thoreau completely omits any argumentation from this chapter. The entire chapter contains a wealth of vivid imagery which appears to flow in a manner akin to a river. The closest substance to an argument is a philosophical description of the water of Walden Pond in which Thoreau writes, "Yet a single glass of its water held up to the light is as colorless as an equal quantity of air. It is well known that a large plate of glass will habe a green tint, owing, as the makers say, to its 'body,' but a small piece of the same will be colorless" (98). Perhaps, Thoreau includes this entire chapter of imagery as a metaphorical gate to the more philisophical upcoming chapters.

Through *Walden*, Thoreau seeks to provide an answer to which mode of being provides the most satisfaction in life. Under Stasis theory, this question is obviously one of policy which suggests actions to take for the betterment of life. During his chapter on higher laws, Thoreau crafts an argument giving a clear indication of his purpose: "If the day and the night are such that you greet them with joy, and life emits a fragrance like flowers and sweet-scented herbs, is more elastic, more starry, more immortal,—that is your success. All nature is your congratulation, and you have cause momentarily to bless yourself" (118). Through this argument, Thoreau provides a goal with which to orient towards and declares the merit of doing so. In regards to his rhetorical choices, Thoreau's providing conclusions with hidden links to his experiences lends itself to the answering of questions of policy by forcing the reader to further ponder his argument and thus increasing the chance of a change in future actions. An example of this effect arises during his's encounter with John Field in which Thoreau writes, "here you could get tea, and coffee, and meat every day. But the only true America is that country where you are at liberty to pursue such a mode of life as may enable you to do without these" (112). By placing the suffering of John Field before this quotation, Thoreau urges the reader to infer that Field's suffering derives from his dependence upon the village's luxuries. Upon reaching this declaration, Thoreau's priming takes effect by linking a now present element of the reader's thought process to a Transcendentalist interpretation of America.

Thoreau himself states that he wrote *Walden* to answer the wealth of inquiries he would recieve concerning his time at Walden Pond after his lectures. However, Thoreau actually targets an even more specific audience: young men seeking a higher mode of living. Thoreau attempts to further pinpoint those for whom this desire has spawned on account of a newfound dissatisfaction in their current modus operandi. One clear intimation towards the nature of his audience appears in Thorea's sarcastic comparison of an ant battle to the Revolutionary War: "I have no doubt that it was a principle they fought for, as much as our ancestors, and not to avoid a three–penny tax on their tea; and the results of this battle will be as important and memorable to those whom it concerns as those of the battle of Bunker Hill, at least" (125). This passive aggression following Thoreau's vivid description of the ant battle emphasizes his distaste for the Revolutionary War whilst simultaneously allowing his audience to follow the train of thought leading to this deep-seated abhorrence. However, an understanding of the quintessence of this passage only manifests in readers whom already possess a predisposition towards agreeing with anti-war sentiments.