

„SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY!”

Towards an organic criticism of Thoreau

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Abstract

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) has known as a nature- (*Walden*) and a political philosopher (*Civil Disobedience*) nowadays. The old burden of his criticism is the approximation of these two – and the pitfall of it, if it does not happen. The example of this difficulty is Hannah Arendt who, in her essay on civil disobedience places Thoreau to the private consciousness as one who did not lived his doctrine, one who was a radical individualist, so weak and false in his disobedience. I suppose, that if we read Thoreau organically he became the quite opposite of this – and by organicity I mean the approximation of the nature- and the political philosopher on the ground that in Thoreau’s work the main topic is the self-perfection and the self-exceeding.

The essence of this kind of criticism of Thoreau is that the nature philosopher is not a hermit, neither the political one is a buffoon, but the two are in a constant dialogue. The one who seeks solutions for the problems of his life by examining the natural world insights it’s operation: that the inhabitants of this world does not deals with each other but everything is for itself, yet they build a system because they complete one another. This harmony is that never clarified higher law or principle which pervades Thoreau’s philosophy. And the social application of this law is when the now principled individual returns to his artificial environment, where he finds welter, life without principle and uncritical self-abdication – and so he deliver them an example of principled action. This is the organic moment.

Keywords: Henry David Thoreau, organic criticism, self-perfection, self-exceeding, Hannah Arendt

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Introduction

Henry David Thoreau is one of the main figures of the American Renaissance.¹ We know the “hermit of Walden” by two features today: first, his moving to the Walden Pond (July 4, 1845), and second, his one-day imprisonment for tax avoidance (July 24, 1846). The novel *Walden, or Life in the Woods* and the essay *Civil Disobedience* are the documents of these two, his most (and most translated) famous writings. It is a custom in the critical literature concerning him to treat these two separately and to accompany his other writings to this line: to distinguish the nature writer and the political philosopher.² An example of this treating is the history of the edition of his Journals: from H. G. O. Blake (around the 1880’s) this document is published by

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¹ Just as his contemporary new-englishers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Bronson Alcott, Elizabeth Peabody, Nathaniel Hawthorne, George Ripley, William Channing or Orestes Brownson.

² See Ruehl s. a., Sayre 1992: 1-23. and Furtak 2014.

themes mainly (exceptions are the Houghton & Mifflin's from 1906 and the modern Princeton's) – which attitude is unavoidably interpreting the texts. The two texts mentioned before has been published countless times, with and without notes, while the other texts of Thoreau had not got so much attention (if still, then they were themed). This critical attitude is misleading because then we cannot understand the oeuvre as a whole. The edition and the criticism, according to Thoreau, affect each other in a way that this (mis)interpretation of his oeuvre does not function as an oeuvre. The philosopher of the pond and the defiant abolitionist and tax-resister are effectively incompatible in the light of the traditional criticism. By tradition I mean the criticism which uses the *Walden* and the *Civil Disobedience* as black lines. Make no mistake, there are some who wants to approximate the “two Thoreaus”³ but the clarification of the notions are always seems to be a great task. My example will be here the essay of Hannah Arendt and the one of Jack Turner, who debates with the former. I will concentrate on these two in this paper.

All in all, even the traditional criticism is not dilettante when it focuses on the tension of the nature writer and the political philosopher, the retreating and the radical reformer Thoreau, the contradiction of the passive and the active one, because this tension is what makes on tic about Thoreau. This man's worldview is an unusual dynamic one, so alternating. To read and understand him is an uneasy project because once he mucks about wordplay, then he acts like the cynical Diogenes and slips a pithy social criticism, but another time he is totally serious and arguments against the war with Mexico, the slavery or the moral and intellectual decay. But this mode of his cannot be the ground of a divergent criticism of him in my opinion because this criticism will be meaningless and empty.

In this paper I will try to leap toward an organic criticism of Thoreau, I will try to let seem the oeuvre of one of the first of the American literature and philosophy in a coherent system. By organicity I mean here the comprehending of his works as a whole. I will treat the theme by the means of the thoreauvian simplicity, to find out what the criticism is and what the over-complication is, which generates unnecessary contradiction for a philosopher of constant self-contradictions. Of course there is no royal way so the paper must be an insight into the thoreauvian life and work and not just an overview of the criticism. It is practical to examine some concepts of his; here I choose the violence and the civil disobedience. In my opinion, neither of them formed in itself but they got meaning in the light of the oeuvre. Violence means here physical violence in disguise of democracy, oppression, while the civil disobedience is open and conscious protruding against the power of the state – for Thoreau by principle.

I use here the essays titled *Civil Disobedience* (1849), the *Slavery in Massachusetts* (1854) and *A Plea for Captain John Brown* (1859) from his texts and some parts of the *Journal*.⁴

The organic criticism

The organic criticism of Thoreau means embeddedness, that every element of his oeuvre is in organic, integral relation with all the others, that one text is understandable only in light of the rest or else there will be a misinterpretation. So, I try to comprehend his works like this not just because of the razor of Occam, but because of such misreading as Hannah Arendt's, examined below.

For Thoreau, the life is the ultimate medium, our life, because that is what concerns us. It has driving and inhibitory forces either in the natural and the social world (as these are the spheres Thoreau deals with). The organic moment is the initiation of the two.

The life is more valuable and primer than anything else so the inhibitory of it are subject of constant criticism for Thoreau. The higher law could be identified with the ingrowths that the individual finds its place under the sun, that it focuses on itself in its life. This means self-perfection, but self-exceeding also, because while it becomes as it becomes, it will be the part of its medium, the part of the system too. How this law or principle turns out at the public sphere, it could be interpreted by the (a) wilderness; that our human task is to search for the possible best life-condition, to maintain this instinct by perfection, and to synchronize the given circumstances (Ruehl s. a.);⁵ (b) education, to awake our fellows, that the mode of life that they follow will lead them to desperation (Drake 1962); (c) that the truth, the principle is transcendent and only the perspective is up to us – but this is what we have to draw by our life which worth no more but how far the solutions were ours own. However the returning principled individual hardly finds its place in there. It seems to be a radical individualist who only emphasizes the value of its very own life and one who looks down on its fellows and preaches them like a hypocrite – although not.

³ E. g. Gura 1995 and Schneider 1995.

⁴ As I do not have the space here for a deeper textual immersion, the paper could be only a leap toward this kind of criticism.

⁵ The paper puts the Wilderness in the center of Thoreau's philosophy which is an unpredictable drive in us, yet the possibility of the self-renewal also, and this is why we have to rediscover it over and over again.

In my opinion, when we read Thoreau organically we find that life cannot depend on eventuality, inner fears or outer norms. Life is valuable so to try to live it as we prefer to and not by inherited forms and social expectations. This is some kind of perspective realism, that is the formation of an own style of life is the first step towards the truth – but it is not a dualism, it does not mean that that is the one and only true way of life which the author shows us.⁶ The truth is not relative in the sense that however it stands between the spectator and the thing and our knowledge about it comes from this relation, but there it is and knowable. One can see it in the nature that the principle of everything-is-for-itself actually works without changing into solipsism because the individuals build up a system. However this system is constantly changing,⁷ but the necessity of the correct point of view, so to speak the compulsion of the narrative is permanent. Organicity means the application of the natural law in the social environment, the drive of the principled one to awake its fellows to their potential infinity, that to refer to traditions, barriers and advantages is not only foolishness, but a pathological act because the custom of apathy leads to quiet (as it is, unconscious) desperation. The society, any kind of the public pursuing stability by obvious reasons, it tends to become a system regularized by law, where everybody is safe from each other, which is the place of prosperity, because that is the measure of the success and the primary needs of man are physically indeed. Yet, the safety and the well-being cannot surmount the self-perfection. This stationary state is only artificially, because outside of the human world there is no such thing (this is the good news the principled one carries) – moreover, this tendency of stability is the origin of that idleness which obstructs people to try their opportunities, however to try themselves. This is the reason of the desperation, the main feeling the principled one finds among his fellows, which leads to uncertainty, monotony and the feeling of the inability of breaking out. The principled one's plurality is not individualistic selfishness as he speaks and not remains silent – and he speaks exclusively in his own name, about *his* experiences. He writes and proposes and he became communal as he takes part in the social discourse. He preaches dynamism instead of pursuing some false stability, action; try out, to throw ourselves into our infinity to see how big or how little we are comparing to each other or the world surrounding us. This proposal could be interpreted as instinctively disobedience (Ruehl s. a.), which is a good synonym of the organic criticism, but in my opinion this label is too tight: it is understandable only in the social sphere.

Any interpretation of Thoreau's philosophy is baffling however because he tends to be contradictory. By organic approximation I mean here the analysis of his works one by one and the relation of these works one another.

Let us see, how misleading is if we do not read him as above.

Arendt and the private conscience

Arendt examines the causes, consequences and possibilities of protesting in a consensus-grounded democracy in her essay *On Civil Disobedience* (Arendt 1972: 52). She starts with the apparent contradiction between the democratic-liberal legislation and the citizen, who morally relates to the laws. Here we get Socrates (*Crito*) and Thoreau (*Civil Disobedience*) as the founding fathers of civil disobedience.

Arendt's preliminary comments are in some kind of relation with the modern notions (which are could be linked to John Rawls) of civil disobedience: the disobedient bows before the penalty, or else he is a terrorist or a criminal (Arendt 1972: 54). Arendt finds a possible solution for the tension between the liberal legislation and the act of disobedience and says that America is (she deals with this exact country all along) a united of states so the higher and the lower laws could contradict each other sometimes, and the disobedient only points out these contradictions (Arendt 1972: 55), so here it is the origins of that unclear "higher law". However Arendt pins down that it cannot be the explication of any law-breaking because who breaks a law (yet he wants to certify another), simultaneously gets outside of the system [moreover in the case law the higher and the lower, moral and immoral are dim notions: her example is the Vietnamese war on which the supreme court refused the decision whether it was a just or an unjust act (Arendt 1972: 53)]. In second instance Arendt says that the individual disobedience is an oxymoron, because the individual is lonely, he cannot represent a big cause, he become only a fool (Arendt 1972: 56). Arendt finds only two *groups* who we have to accept as civil disobedient: the conscientious refusals (who protested against any military service during the Vietnamese war because of its injustice) and the ones who protests against a law on the ground of constitutionality (Arendt 1972: 56). And because they work in groups, says the conclusion of the paper, the

⁶ For example in the *Walden*, which is often criticized for its non-fictionality, as Thoreau would say that this is the only possible form of a happy life – although not at all. The *Walden* is a fiction and the evidence of this categorization is Thoreau's constant emphasize of the importance of getting an own way: the *Walden*-experience was *his*.

⁷ Like a river, says Paul Sherman, by whom Thoreau's ontology is waterlike, so to speak never the same, it cannot be picturesque but dynamic (*The Shores of America. Thoreau's Inward Exploration*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1958).

legislation has to accept them as its borders and challengers, as control groups (like the lobbyists), who it have to listen to in order to repair the system of the law in favor of the constitution (Arendt 1972: 82).⁸

Arendt warns us, that the disobedience unavoidably remains a subjective kind of philosophy if it constantly refers to a dim higher law. Anyway, she tries to approach this higher law with the help of Norman Cousins's multistage definition. By Cousins, if the tension is between the sovereignty of the state or the humanity's, the latter is more important. If there is a contradiction between the well-being of the nation or of the well-being of the globe, we have to focus on the last. If there is a decision to make between the satisfaction of the necessities of the present or of the future generations, we have to bring to the fore the future. The rights of the human being have to anticipate the ones of the state, just because the latter's main function is to secure the life of the former. So, it is clear now why he favors the conscience of the individual against any rule. If the individual have to choose between the easy accession and the peaceful, communal life, he has to favor the latter. While Cousins sees the classic comprehension of the civil disobedience justified by these points, Arendt still senses some kind of utilitarianism and subjectivism in it (Arendt 1972: 56). That is why she goes back to Thoreau and Socrates concerning the moral relation between the individual and the laws.

Arendt says, that Socrates refuses Crito's proposal because he thinks that he is in contradictions only with the judges and not with the laws. If he would run, he would become a defaulter, and, furthermore, he would break the peace with the laws. He would not want to be a sinner *in foro interno*, in front of his conscience, so he stays. The Socratic conscience is an inner dialogue before the outer, the political one – but, by Arendt, to act like that is mere individualism. She sees this in action at the second book of the *State*, where the pupils admits the truth of the moral rationalism only after the master has explained it to them. Arendt says that the philosopher of the private conscience remains ineffective because there is no such inner dialogue (Arendt 1972: 59).

Yet, Thoreau speaks about the injustice laws – however, from the perspective of the individual, his possibilities for the disobedience and his morality (Arendt 1972: 60). Arendt pins down, that by Thoreau our humane task is to stay away from the bad, to not participate in it. Thoreau becomes the philosopher of the private conscience when he focuses on the protesting against the unjust laws because they are incompatible with that inner forum. Thoreau is irresponsible for the society, says Arendt, so he is consistent but weightless. Here Arendt refers to Machiavelli and Lincoln: while the Italian favored his town instead his own conscience, the American preferred the interests of the Union instead of the slavery (Arendt 1972: 61). By her, Thoreau is a selfish moral rationalist, who does not want to obey the law, but not because it is unjust, but because if he would obey, he would become unjust also – and this is what falls in front of his inner forum. Thoreau's civil disobedience is just washing hands and turning away, concludes Arendt.

Instead of these Arendt declares that the law only deals with social affairs and not with good and bad. So, who transgress a law, abuses the whole society. However, the state builds upon consensus, and when it is a group of people who sticks together on another consensus to protest against a law, this act is mirror yet before the legislation and not transgression anymore. This is how it works, the act become granite grounded instead of the individual conscience's quagmire one. The intelligent authority has listened to a protesting *group* while the individual is could not be more but a separated actor. Consensus cheers consensus.

However, in my opinion, Arendt misunderstood Thoreau. This misunderstood comes from her thin textual immersion – and that she reads this only text just in one light.

In my opinion, a well-marked counterpoint between the Thoreau-oeuvre and its arendtian criticism is that by Thoreau the state, so the citizenship is an a priori being-in-violence – so, his civil disobedience cannot be else but subjective, however Arendt accounts him on some kind of legislation. Thoreau's main text on the correlation of the state, the statehood and the citizenship as being-in-violence is the *Slavery in Massachusetts*, which deals with the anomalies of the Fugitive Slave Act. In this essay Thoreau draws the tense relation of the antebellum North and South which culminated in such an inhuman act in 1854 according to which the northern courts had to catch and let out any black person to any southern slaveholder if he proclaimed his wish – without negotiation. In this essay, Thoreau's hero is Anthony Burns who had been deprived his human rights and deported to a plantation – in the name of the so called greater good, the toiling converge of the Union. By Thoreau, a state like this (Burn's case was at the Boston Court), who supports the slavery like this, is a slave itself also. Moreover, his fellows are slaves too: the slaves of the public opinion and of the newspapers; they synods upon the remote Kansas-Nebraska Act instead of the closer Slavery one. Thoreau proposes to refuse the obedience towards the contract which binds his fellows to their state in order to deny its violence – and he thinks his words murder to the state like the bottom of his shoes for a worm.

⁸ To tell the truth, there is some doubt in me that this categorization is really a domestication: when the disobedient become the friend of the legislation it gets inside of the system and loses his power to criticise it from outside, I think.

We see the violence here as a consequence-violence from the perspective of the individual: the principled one's duty is to protest against the state without principle. It does not really matter if there is a counter-violence to be made. Here it is, that the violence is not a philosophical topic for Thoreau (Thoreau s. a.). I have to admit that the expression is mine, but Jack Turner had examined it already in his paper (examined below) – however, he did not deal with the Slavery-text, but the John Brown-one.

But first we have to analyze that if the arendtian criticism copes with that exact text. Thoreau starts his “famous”⁹ essay with the Jeffersonian¹⁰ motto of the *Democratic Review*: “that government is best, which governs least” – from here, he shortens perplexing that “that government is best, which governs not at all” (Thoreau 1937: 789). This is a *petitio principii* if we take the whole essay. Thoreau declares that, on the one hand, the American government is popular will, so deformable, on the other hand, tradition, but because of its Americanism, newfangled. A government like this should be rousseauian as its subjects would happily leave each other alone – but as he looks around, he sees only the unquestionable domination of the majority. A physical domination where the subject cedes his soul to the ruler as it would not exist. The conscientious man clearly understands this subjection, this being-in-oppression because being-in-violence and he instinctively protests against actions like the war against Mexico (which the American government fought between 1846 and 1848 to extend the territory of slavery). This is the violence I referred to. This is the violence which is nothing in itself but when one sees its inherency – everything. The violence, by the way, is still a central and always problematic notion concerning the civil disobedience.

The government takes this man, the hero, the patriot, the martyr and the reformer as enemy (Thoreau 1937: 791) – because the concrete actions of the government had fallen in foro interno. But for Thoreau the authority of the state is what generalizes the behavior and not inversely. According to our life, the living of this life it is not weightless what we think about the decisions made about us, but above us. “How does it become a man to behave toward this American government today? I answer, that he cannot without disgrace be associated with it. I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as *my* government which is the *slave's* government also (Thoreau 1937: 792)” – says Thoreau. The alternating between the singular and the plural is not just a rhetorical device but a demonstrational one also (Anderson 1962: 9). Thoreau blames his fellows for their life without principle and recalls them their inherited right to revolt: nor the perpetration, neither the suffering of the violence is fair. “This people must cease to hold slaves, and to make war on Mexico, though it cost them their existence as a people” (Thoreau 1937: 793) – speaking about the latter. He sees the contract breakable toward an oppressive government like this and this is what he proposes his state, Massachusetts – however, that is “a drab of state” (Thoreau cites Thomas Middleton) or one who serves authorial interests, so he does not expect much. “Action from principle, the perception and the performance of right, changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary, and does not consist wholly with anything which was. It not only divides States and churches, it divides families; ay, it divides the individual, separating the diabolical in him from the divine” (Thoreau 1937: 796). To take action grounded on principle is our duty by Thoreau. It is our duty as a citizen also, occasionally as disobedience. It could be roughly summarized, that the injustice is the friction of the machine of the society and if could be stopped by injustice in turn, we should refuse the obedience to it. “... any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one already” (Thoreau 1937: 797). Here is the counterpoint with Arendt, who, because of her collectivism, does not believe in individualism as an executable and usable philosophy. She sees possible to act by principles on legal ground, while Thoreau thinks it possible by belief and instinct. So, for him the civil disobedience is just one form of disobedience. We have to disobey toward everything what lessens our powers to gain self-perfection – so in the civil sphere, it is just natural. Thoreau saw the violence of the majority (e. g. the Mexican war or the slavery) as obstacle in his self-realization – yet he eluded it because the principle is important, to act by the principle. Considering this the violence (as like many more traditional philosophical commonplaces) is not a problem. That is a different question, that this attitude makes Thoreau an idealist who places the principle above the law.¹¹

It is a good question now to ask that where the border between two conscientious men is. Between the patriot, the martyr, the reformer or that man who does not want to take part in the injustice? Thoreau did not pay his war-tax (but he paid road tax and other communal taxes) – did he really oppose the government? Arendt clearly says no. The citizen as a lonely disobedient is nothing. Or, by Arendt, is weightless. But for Thoreau the exemplification is what matters and not the previous concordance what Arendt stresses. „For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever” (Thoreau 1937: 798).

⁹ Arendt's attributive, showing, she has a bias towards Thoreau.

¹⁰ To tell the truth, this sentence cannot be found in Thomas Jefferson's oeuvre.

¹¹ But I cannot deal with this topic now.

I think this exemplification is the most important element of Thoreau's social philosophy; to inspire our fellows to live their life with principle. The principled one is not an anarchist or a terrorist, but rather Nietzsche's unreasonable. Only he does not seek God with a lantern at daylight, but show the way of the organic self-exceeding. This individual sees the bad and the possibility of good either and he has got the benefit of dynamism because of his solitude, not like the plurality. So, the thoreauvian particularity is not disruption.

To act by principle could be the way of healing also. To break or take (like Prometheus) our chains with conscious dignity are timeless examples toward the society and this could be the way to pursuit happiness – to which the American constitution guarantees the right.

So, in my opinion Arendt makes a mistake when she refers Thoreau to the private conscience and she thinks it has done. Thoreau's civil disobedient acts against the overpowering government, against the being-in-violence, in a dangerous situation in which his power of life lessened by injustice. Yet Arendt is right when she thinks that Thoreau's civil disobedience is not the part of some kind of political philosophy – because it really is not! That was not Thoreau's concern, as we saw. For Thoreau, the political is not a different branch of philosophy because his philosophy is an organic one. What makes Thoreau tic is that the principled one has to disobey anything what lessens his power to self-fulfillment by drawing him into something he would not want to take part in. So, here Arendt, yet unconsciously, refers to something crucial in the thoreauvian philosophy: that we misunderstand him if we read his works separately. Arendt saw that Thoreau's civil disobedience is empty in itself – but this does not mean, that his civil disobedience is empty in itself but that there are more things, we have to read ourselves deeper.

Thoreau and his civil disobedience divide in his plea for John Brown when he idealizes the captain. His essay on *Civil Disobedience* is an acute cure of the problem – but the problem has escalated in the meantime and Thoreau, as a good philosopher, reacted. Let us see now Jack Turner's comments on Thoreau's John Brown, then the speech itself – but stay sharp, concerning the arendtian criticism and the notion of violence.

Turner and the a priori being-in-violence

Turner starts with that the plea for John Brown was Thoreau's only political act. Yet it is a distortion (philosophy of exemplification!), however a more accurate approach than Arendt's, who said that Thoreau was a hypocrite. Turner says that Thoreau's assumption that our freedom expands just only while we do not contribute to any wrong is not negativism or passivism (what Arendt thought), but an actual act because we have to act to become independent so we will be political. Because of his individualism we could call Thoreau an amoralist, but, concerning the speech for Brown, we can find the Thoreau of the active consciousness also (Turner 2009: 155). The counterpoint between Arendt and Turner is their focus: while Arendt concentrates only on the *Civil Disobedience*, Turner reflects to the plea, too.

Turner sounds more like a modern, than Arendt, when it come the question of the violence. He finds collision between Thoreau and Brown concerning this question. Brown was a scripturist, his motto comes from the letter for the Jews (9:22): „and almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.”¹² However, he used intervention instead of violence, while Thoreau referred exactly to the philosophical dictionary of the revolution and the active protestation concerning this term (Turner 2009: 162). So, this violence means physical violence. Two question remains to answer: what are the borders of this violence and what are its motivations. May the abolitionist kill the slaveholder in order to free the slave or vice versa: may the slaveholder kill the abolitionist to protect his property? What can we do with Harper's Ferry? Was Brown right, by the thoreauvian philosophy, when he occupied and then held the fort, while his men (among them his sons) died around him?

Turner blocks the tide as he says that for Thoreau the slaveholder state loses its trustworthy because it cheats its subjects, belies the constitution when it constitutes the injustice. So the visible violence refers to the unseen (Turner 2009: 165).

Turner declares that Thoreau transcends Brown and exemplifies him as the archetype of the consciously lived life. So, he does not preach to go after Brown but calls us to start living serious, a just life. To act by principle has a few components however: the sense of justice is important, just as the actualization of the principle and to get over our vulgar instincts. So the moral act will be a sign between two infinities, the past and the future (Turner 2009: 168).

Turner lists the Americanisms of Brown by Thoreau. First, he disparaged the earthly life against the ideal one. This consideration faces off the Anglo-Saxon liberal tradition on the first hand, by which the defending of the physical life is primary, and, on the other hand, asks the question, whether the life and the freedom is

¹² *Holy Bible*. Authorized King James version. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1962.

secured what remains to die for. It is some kind of legislative individualism which says that only the free life is worth to live. John Brown stayed principled all along: he still kept his diet after sixty. The second feature of Brown's ascension into an American martyr is the simple and clear division of morality and legality. While in the monarchies everybody (the king and his subjects either) thought that the law is godlike, so just, in the world of the contract theories people thought that something will not become just because it is legal and vice versa, an act is not legal because it is just. But this assumption brings dichotomy: the priority is unclear. Brown cut order in this quagmire. The state becomes its own parody when it explains the slavery with the constitution. Another feature of Brown's exemplification by Thoreau is that he lived his life with dignity. This means the discovery of his own and the other's responsibility, but so (and because of this) it becomes more than mere compassion: it is an act now. Interfering ourselves instead of turning away. The fourth feature of Brown thoreauvian Americanism by Turner is his thought upon the equal human dignity, the recognition of the equality between the individual and the state (let us think about the Missouri Declaration as the vindication of the sovereignty of the people – and its usage at the Kansas-Nebraska Act). So our morality and responsibility become measurable with our legislation's and with our fellows'. Brown's example so educates conscious and conscientious voter, who knows, he has word. So, says Turner, however the violence is not too far away from Brown, it does not constitute his Americanism, by Thoreau (Turner 2009: 156-161).

As a closing accord let us examine Thoreau's speech of John Brown. When he stood before the Concord Hall it was really a symbolic act. The philosopher of the lake, the strange man of the town "once in his life"¹³ grew ten feet tall and he was "all respectfully, by many with a sympathy that surprised themselves" (Canby cites Emerson in Thoreau 1937: 827). In the big picture Brown's case was petty, he wanted to grasp a lot he held a little. On the other hand, by the media it was a terrorist act, a fool's particular one. That he vaunted it does not mean that Thoreau was a fan of terrorism but that he was an educator, who exemplified a man before his fellows who noticed the merchant selling fool's gold and points to the mendacious state apparatus.

As a way of introduction one can notice that Thoreau speaks about Brown as a dead man, however at this time he was only before the court. This attitude shows the tendency of transcending the man and presenting the principle.

"It costs us nothing to be just" (Thoreau 1937: 827) – starts Thoreau. And by "just" he means the equal treatment as it seems from the press review. The newspapers reacted to the Brown-case quite unilaterally and they seem hypocrites to Thoreau when it is about the question of madness. He thinks, Brown was a good old-fashioned man, the believer of the constitution and of the Union and this attitude made him an inexorable foe of the slavery. He differed from the abolitionist and the philanthropists in his Yankee spirit: while they impeached other states, he did this with his own and was a constant critic of the corrupt and flighty New York. Thoreau highlights the Puritan spirit in John Brown, also as a pledge of indestructibility: they tried to kill it in the time of Cromwell too, but they failed. Concerning his physical death Thoreau pins down that we could say that he was a madman or a suicide outrage but we are more correct if we say that he *lived* for something instead he died for something. Thoreau comments on this topic that if one did not live, so did not fulfilled himself cannot really die – so, he does not worry about his dunderhead neighbors. Brown, for Thoreau, was a good seed in the biblical sense what could produce good fruits. A shining example of individualism and self-validation is Brown's riposte to his judges' question on by whose behalf did what he did: "under the auspices of John Brown and nobody else" (Thoreau 1937: 836). Thoreau's sees Brown's supremacy in his style of living: by the truth and not by some accidental legal frames.

"A government that pretends to be Christian and crucifies a million Christs every day!" (Thoreau 1937: 840) – Thoreau meditates further. Christ and Brown parallels in their way of life: they lived by their belief, and their belief was the truth. So, they were members of that approximately half a dozen men who died only to live truly after. The Christ-metaphor is a bit overwrought in the essay but here is important because of the philosophy of exemplification.

"We talk about a representative government; but what a monster of a government is that where the noblest faculties of the mind, and the whole heart, are not represented! A semihuman tiger or ox, stalking over the earth, with its heart taken out and the top of its brain shot away" (Thoreau 1937: 840) – speaking about the slaveholder state.

He calls America a sinner and impeaches her in treason because she sentenced to death her single just citizen. He thinks that there is immediate violence around his fellows: "I know that the mass of my countrymen think that the only righteous use that can be made of Sharp's rifles and revolvers is to fight duels with them, when we are insulted by other nations, or to hunt Indians, or shoot fugitive slaves with them, or

¹³ Emerson's comment about this act of Thoreau in his eulogy for him; a comment became commonplace – a comment which is untrue anyway.

the like. I think that for once the Sharp's rifles and the revolvers were employed for a righteous cause. The tools were in the hands of one who could use them" (Thoreau 1937: 844) – declares Thoreau. This is why Brown's philanthropy is more sympathetic to him than of the armchair philosophers': because Brown arranges things by action.

In the end he diagnoses that the legislation is a freak because it stands on the free ground with one leg, while with the other on the plantation. "I foresee the time when the painter will paint that scene, no longer going to Rome for a subject; the poet will sing it; the historian record it; and, with the Landing of the Pilgrims and the Declaration of Independence, it will be the ornament of some future national gallery, when at least the present form of slavery shall be no more here. We shall then be at liberty to weep for Captain Brown. Then, and not till then, we will take our revenge" (Thoreau 1937: 846).

Conclusion

There is a radicalizing arc in Thoreau's political oeuvre: while the essayist of the *Civil Disobedience* does not pay his tax, then the author of the *Slavery in Massachusetts* breaks the contract with his state unilaterally. Finally, the speaker of the *A Plea for Captain John Brown* threatens with revolution and, consequentially, violence. Turner does not go beyond such questions just leaves the Arendt-polemics to the extent that we have to read the Brown-speech also. In my opinion it has to be emphasized that Thoreau has nothing to do with the private conscience if we read him organically. If we take his oeuvre as a whole we can see the non-romantic Henry Thoreau also. Thoreau and the private conscience separate at two points: first, when Thoreau exemplifies Brown and, second, when he realizes the a priori being-in-violence and that the principled one stuck on the way of self-perfection by the oppressive legislation.

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