



Christian Maul **From Self-Culture to Militancy, From Conscience to Intervention**

Henry David Thoreau Between Liberalism and Communitarianism

Readers of Thoreau rarely react with equanimity to his writings. While his admirers celebrate this Transcendentalist as a pioneer of modern environmentalism or as a major inspiration for civil rights leaders such as Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, his detractors tend to dismiss him as a cheap imitation of his mentor, Ralph Waldo Emerson. Moreover, from James Russell Lowell to today, some of the most scathing criticism has been directed at what appears to be the escapist and anti-social thrust of his individualism. This book focuses on the latter charge. It examines Thoreau's concept of the self in light of the recent controversy between proponents of liberal individualism, notably John Rawls, and a group of communitarian theorists that includes Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor, and Michael Walzer. From this perspective, the seemingly isolationist and misanthropic inclinations pervading Thoreau's life and work are revealed as initializing a project of self-fashioning that is profoundly community-oriented and that aims at counteracting the loss of social values.

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