

Transcendentalism (1830-1860)

Began as a reaction to:

1. Economic prosperity
2. Social problems (slavery, child labor, materialism, etc.)

New England (American) Renaissance

1. The flowering of our nation's thought in literature, poetry, art, etc. (Brodsky et al. 207).

Transcendentalist Club & Literature

1. Group of intellectuals
2. Formed around 1836
3. Met at Emerson's house
4. Discussed philosophy and how to instruct others
5. "Transcendentalist writers delved deep into the mysteries of human personality, especially its irrational elements" (Brodsky et al. 209).
6. Focused on nature, emphasized respect for it, and examined the details of it (208).
7. Writers also focused on the philosophy itself

Ralph Waldo Emerson

- * Son of Unitarian minister
- * Harvard at age 14
- * Felt the church had "no real life" (Brodsky et al. 212).
- * "Drew his ideas from many artists [and] philosophers" (made them his own) (Brodsky et al. 212).

* Plato's Idealism (Brewton).

- * Spiritual existence is reflected in the world of nature (Brodsky et al. 212).
- * His goal was "to give moral and spiritual meaning to the individualism that Americans so prized" (Brodsky et al. 213).

Henry David Thoreau

- * "The end of life is education" (quoted in Brodsky et al. 233).
- * Lived by the philosophy
- * Lived in a hut on Walden Pond
- * Worked to afford basic needs
- * Arrested for tax evasion ("Civil Disobedience").
- * Wrote *Walden* (wrote about the four seasons and the spiritual truth and symbolism)
- * Felt he proved that it is possible for us to transcend this physical world and "feel our individual being in relation to all being" (234).

Definition of Transcendentalism:

1. "The basic truths of the universe lie beyond the knowledge we obtain from our senses," reason, logic or laws of science (Brodsky et al. 208).
2. We learn truths through our **Intuition**
 - a. Intuition (we just know)
 - b. Part of God in man
 - c. Direct line of communication with God (the Oversoul)

- d. Innate understanding of what is right and good (“Transcendentalism”).
3. **Transcendentalists believe two realities/levels of knowledge exist:**
- a. **The physical world:** our senses and laws of science help us make sense out of this realm
 - b. **The spiritual world:** the human spirit can transcend to a higher spiritual plane, discover fundamental truths about life and death, and experience a union with God through an altered state of consciousness.
- * Senses and Science = Physical World
 - * Intuition = Spiritual World
- (“Transcendentalism”).

The Oversoul

1. Extension of God, part of God, the Universal Being (Emerson’s Term)
2. Permeates all beings (like the force)
3. Man is inherently good, even divine, not evil because God exists in man

Nature

1. Inherently good
2. A reflection of man; part of the same soul (mirror images)
3. Man can unite with God via nature
4. Man can discover truths in nature

Miscellaneous

1. Man must rely on himself
2. Take care of self; then everything else will fall in to place
3. Society is the source of corruption, not man

Summary

- * Goal: Transcendence (the spiritual world)
- * How does one transcend? Intuition
- * How does one tap into his intuition? Nature and Experience
- * To understand the part (the self) is to understand the whole (nature and the Oversoul)