

Transcendentalism

A person is silhouetted against a vast, golden sky filled with large, billowing clouds. The sun is positioned in the upper right, creating a bright glow and lens flare. The person stands on a grassy hill, looking out over the landscape. The overall mood is contemplative and majestic.

INDIVIDUALISM IS EVERYTHING, BE SELF-RELIANT

History of Transcendentalism

In the 1830s, a group of authors, poets, and philosophers decided to take some Romantic concept a step further, and developed a new branch of Romanticism. They called themselves “Transcendentalists”.

Transcendentalists got their name from the word “transcend,” which means to get beyond, or overcome.



Basic Beliefs



Transcendentalists believed in a higher reality beyond human reasoning, that could only be reached through a connection to nature and intuition (“gut feelings”)

Transcendentalists value relying on themselves and seeking spiritual truth over blind conformity to authority, customs, and traditions. Question authority!

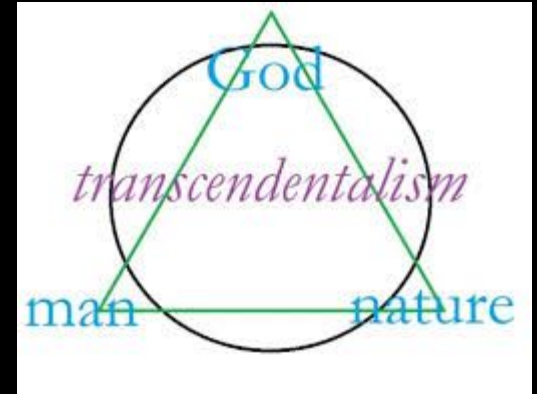
Transcendentalists believed in the goodness of ALL people, including women and slaves. Were avid supporters of the abolitionist and early feminist movements.

The Over Soul

Transcendentalists have unique spiritual beliefs that centered on the idea of the Over Soul (or Divine Soul)

Though they often referred to “God” in their works, they did not believe in God in a traditional sense. Rather, they believed that God, Nature, and Humanity all shared the same “soul,” and were part of the same complex being.

All people have access to the Over Soul through their intuition and by seeking understanding.



The 10 Tenets of Transcendentalism

Nature = God: We should live close to nature, for it is our greatest teacher. Nature is symbolic, and understanding its “language” and “lessons” can bring us closer to God. In fact, Nature = God. The words Nature, God, Universe, Over-Soul, etc. all mean the same thing.

God is Omnipresent: God is everywhere and in everything, so there is no need for specific religions or churches. The transcendentalists did not believe in organized religion because they wanted that direct relationship with God, not one through a pastor or a priest. They thought organized religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, etc.) were all just made up by people anyway.

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Man is Divine: Since Nature is divine, and we are literally creatures of Nature, we are also divine. Therefore, we have a direct relationship with God. In a sense, we are God or particles of God

Intuition: Since God is within us, every person has “intuition,” an essential understanding of right and wrong (morality). We don’t need to learn morality from so-called holy books, laws, or society.

The 10 Tenets of Transcendentalism

Self-Reliance: Our intuition and natural instincts guide us to do the right things. In nature, we are uncorrupted. It is only when we let society influence us that we start to conform and hence, be corrupted.

Society is the Source of Corruption: We are born pure, but society misguides us and corrupts us as we grow old. Society demands conformity, and conformity kills individuality. If we are all to follow our own free will and listen to our intuition, we would be much better off. WE don't need artificial laws, customs, fashions, or values.

The 10 Tenets of Transcendentalism

Idealism: Human beings are naturally good at their core. Again, it is society that corrupts us. Human beings left to their own devices are good.

Materialism is Bad: Striving for material goods is worthless and an unhealthy pursuit. It is totally superficial. Money is evil because it causes us to place artificial and false value on objects and people.

The 10 Tenets of Transcendentalism

Technology is Bad: Advances in technology only caused more problems for society. For example, we build the railroad so we could go, go, go. First of all, we should stay home and get in touch with ourselves. Secondly, now we need people to build the track and make the cars and drive the train and maintain everything. Technology ends up running us and not the other way around.

Emphasis on here and now: The past is unimportant. Knowledge comes from experience. It is not derived from studying the past. We can't learn anything truly valuable from the past or from the people who lived before us. Their knowledge was based on their experience, and ours should be too. We should not worship anybody or anything that has come before us.