

The plainness of puritanism vs. the individuality of transcendentalism



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The two most prominent groups in American history, Puritanism and transcendentalism, differ in numerous ways such as their views on nature, fate, and conformity. Puritanism was wide spread in the 1600's whereas transcendentalism was more popular in the 1700's. The Puritans were a religious reorganization faction who wanted to reshape society according to their beliefs. Puritanism is based on three basic beliefs that include grace, plainness, and the divine mission. On the other hand Transcendentalism was a literary and philosophical movement. Asserting the existence of an ideal spiritual reality that transcends the empirical and scientific knowledge that is knowlegable through intuition.

Puritanism and transcendentalism differ in nature, fate, and conformity. One reason Puritanism and Transcendentalism are different is their view on nature. Puritans scolded nature and the forest. It was the dwelling of the imp and none ought to enter it. Those who did were accused of bonding with the devil. In the Crucible Reverend Parris accuses Abigail of being in the woods, " Now look you, child, your punishment will come in its time. But if you trafficked with spirits in the forest I must know it now, for surely my enemies will, and they will ruin me with it." (Miller 22)In this passage the Puritans reacted when one is wondering about the forest.

However, the transcendentalist's view of nature was quite the opposite; it was a symbol of the heavenly spirit. God is distinctive in both humans and nature. Therefore, humans could gain access to what the divine is by seeing intuition through nature. Making references to unambiguous things in the environment, which can be seen in Ralph Emerson poem, " Each and All":

Over me soured the eternal sky, Full of light and of deity; Again I saw, again I
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heard, The rolling river, the morning bird;-Beauty through my senses stole; I yielded myself to the perfect whole. (Each 96)In this poem Emerson sees God in the light of the sky and everything he looked else. The beauty he sees is breathtaking and everlasting. For these reasons, Puritanism and Transcendentalism philosophy on nature are completely diverse. Furthermore, Puritanist and Transcendentalist outlook on fate diverge immensely.

Puritans believed in predestination, the idea that every human had a role in life. Their conduit was part of Gods printed record for them to follow. What they are is what they are and nothing could change that. If one was born a slum on the streets then that was what God wanted you to be. Puritans led their lives in hope of salvation through their fate: It was impossible, of course, to be entirely confident of one's eternal fate, but that edge of uncertainty only made believers redouble their efforts to purify their own lives and society as a whole. And nothing was more important than gaining greater reassurance of salvation. (Puritanism)As stated in the passage the puritans of the time lived their lives of pureness, though sometimes uncertain of their fate, to insure total salvation. On the contrary, Transcendentalist meaning of fate goes in the opposite direction.

As an individual one can decide their destiny. What one makes of oneself is who and what you become. Fate is the power in which individuals thrive. This can be seen in Ralph Emerson " Fate", where he describes fate and its power:...Fate has its lord; limitation its limits; is different seen from above and from below; from within and from without. For, though Fate is immense, so is power, which is the other fact in the dual world, immense.

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If Fate follows and limits power, power attends and antagonizes [provokes] Fate. (Adventures 220) Transcendental view on fate is the limitless of power. People can retain as much power as they desire, which in turn determined their fate. As a result, one can clearly see the diverse view Puritans and Transcendental have toward fate. Finally, Puritan and Transcendental overview of conformity are also very diverse. Puritans believed in following everyone else, thus conformity was emphasized. Each person must dress alike and act as one. Individuality did not exist as you can see in this passage written by a New England Puritan " Every Sunday at church sat the men in front followed by the boys, women, and then the girls in the very back.

Each looked and dressed alike" (Puritanism). Quite the opposite, transcendentalists believe in individuality. Become what you want to be, do what you want to do, and worship where you please. An example of this can be seen in David Thoreau writing *Walden*: " If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measure or far away. It is not important that he should mature as soon as an apple tree or an oak." (Prentice) Thoreau was emphasizing the importance of individuality, by going to a beat of a different drummer. Provided this, you can see the ideas of conformity greatly differ from these two groups.

The differences in which puritans and transcendentalists see things are more than immense. You could say these groups have almost nothing in common with their ideological outlooks. I have to concur with the thoughts of the Transcendentalists as they go with my personality greatly.

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Transcendentalism and Puritanism, being Americas two most famous groups, diverge on there views of nature, fate, and conformity.