

A breif introduction of transcendentalism essay

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Transcendentalism was a group of new ideas in literature, religion, culture, and philosophy that emerged in New England in the early to middle 19th century.

It is sometimes called American transcendentalism to distinguish it from other uses of the word transcendental. Transcendentalism began as a protest against the general state of culture and society, and in particular, the state of intellectualism at Harvard and the doctrine of the Unitarian church taught at Harvard Divinity School. Among transcendentalists' core beliefs was an ideal spiritual state that 'transcends' the physical and empirical and is realized only through the individual's intuition, rather than through the doctrines of established religions. Prominent transcendentalists included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Amos Bronson Alcott, Orestes Brownson, William Henry Channing, James Freeman Clarke, Christopher Pearse Cranch, John Sullivan Dwight, Convers Francis, Margaret Fuller, William Henry Furness, Frederick Henry Hedge, Theodore Parker, Elizabeth Peabody, George Ripley, and Jones Very. I take Emerson for typical example.

The publication of Ralph Waldo Emerson's 1836 essay *Nature* is usually considered the watershed moment at which transcendentalism became a major cultural movement. Emerson wrote in his speech "The American Scholar": "We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; Divine Soul which also inspires all men. Emerson closed the essay by calling for a revolution in human consciousness to emerge from the new idealist philosophy: In the same year, transcendentalism became a coherent movement with the founding of the Transcendental Club in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on September 8, 1836, by prominent New England

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intellectuals including George Putnam, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Frederick Henry Hedge. From 1840, the group published frequently in their journal *The Dial*, along with other venues. The movement was originally termed “Transcendentalists” as a pejorative term by critics, who were suggesting their position was beyond sanity and reason.

The practical aims of the transcendentalists were varied; some among the group linked it with utopian social change; Brownson connected it with early socialism, while others considered it an exclusively individualist and idealist project. Emerson believed the latter. In his 1842 lecture “The Transcendentalist”, Emerson suggested that the goal of a purely transcendental outlook on life was impossible to attain in practice: