

Transcendentalism
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Transcendentalism is the belief that matters of ultimate reality transcend, or go beyond, human experience. Transcendentalist thinking began during the American Renaissance with writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. However transcendental thinking did not begin with Thoreau and Emerson, but as Emerson called it, it is the very oldest of thoughts cast into the mold of these new times. Transcendentalism is based on the ancient philosophy of Idealism, which originates with Plato, a well-known philosopher from ancient Greece.

Transcendentalism is an appropriate way of thinking for the period known as the American Renaissance because it puts one into a state of mind that is more conducive to creative writing and thought. Transcendentalism is a lot to swallow, especially for many people of that time. Herman Melville totally captured the common man's reaction to the whole concept when he said, what stuff all this is. It really takes a trained mind to grasp the concept of this spiritual world that Emerson describes. Many people do not believe in things that they cannot see, hear, touch, taste, or smell, so the extremely abstract concept of transcendentalism is totally out of their reach.

However, for the people that can grasp this idea, it is very fulfilling.

Transcendentalism makes people feel closer to God, in tune with nature, and gives a person a sense of self-worth. A major aspect of transcendental thinking is the individual defiance against the established orders of society. Henry David Thoreau conveys his feeling about this when he says; That government is best which governs not at all. He believes that the ineptitude of the political leaders far out-weighs the amount of good that they could do.

He also states that They who have been bred in the school of politics fail now and always to face the facts.

In this, he means that politicians ignore reality when it does not serve their purpose. This is true for modern times as all can see in the present political situation of the United States. Politicians are ignoring reality to serve their own personal and partisan agendas. The transcendentalists even went as far as to set up their own communities, the most famous of which, Brook Farm. Brook Farm, a self-governing, experimental community, lasted only six years, (the longest of all the transcendental communities), is where many famous authors of the American Renaissance call home for a part of their lives, and is even the setting for Nathaniel Hawthorne's Blithedale Romance. Hawthorne lived at the Farm for a little while, but left because he could not stand the highly intellectual and spiritual conversation.

Brook Farm was a great outlet for these people to express their ideas and communicate with people who share those same beliefs without the fear of persecution by people that did not understand. The transcendentalist movement can and often is compared to another famous movement in American history, the hippie movement of the sixties. In many ways the hippies movement paralleled the transcendentalists, and the hippies even form their own little communities, like Brook Farm, called communes.

Both of these movements were important to help shape thinking, writing, and social ideals. The transcendentalist movement brings to the table an increased awareness of the world around oneself, with and a commitment to the spiritual aspects therein, and the hippie movement in the sixties gives

Americans an increased awareness of their fellow man, with an emphasis on freedom and love. The transcendentalist movement has many good aspects to it that if applied today, could still teach everyone a few things about themselves and their lives. Plato, Emerson, Thoreau, and many others really did have a level of intelligence that transcended their contemporaries and the generations and generations after them. Bibliography: