

Free essay on non-conformism in self-reliance

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The world is often very unkind to revolutionary thinkers who advocate for non-conformity, self-sufficiency, and self-determinism. From Jesus, to Moses, to Martin Luther King Jr., to Gandhi, to as far back as Socrates, those who went against the system, or advocated that people need not look outside themselves for confidence with the world, the world has gone on to punish them, and then after their death revere them. What all have in common in the above list is that they were killed for the ideas that they advocated.

Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay "Self-Reliance" advocates a rigid individualism, and reminds us that people must seek their strength not in outside beliefs peddled by others, but in understandings forged within the self.

Emerson begins his 1841 essay by quoting John Fletcher, a sixteenth century playwright, who said, "Man is his own star; and he should that can / Render an honest and a perfect man / Commands all light, all influence, all fate" (Emerson, 1). He uses this quotation as a preview of his own ideas and to set the tone of the essay.

If Socrates' mantra to people was "know thyself" then Emerson's is "Trust thyself." Emerson does not believe that the world can teach a person much about themselves, since it is only a person that can really know themselves. He writes that "every heart vibrates to that iron string [of thyself]" (Emerson, 2).

He writes about "the voices which we hear in solitude" (Emerson, 3). It is through these voices that we learn about ourselves, the silent whispers of our own heart. He says that they grow "faint" or "inaudible" when we enter the world. By world, Emerson means society, which he sees as a conspiracy "

against the manhood of every one of its members” (Emerson 3). This fits well with transcendentalism that believed in a realm of truth and understandings that was beyond the self but could be known through the self. In order to be a man, Emerson believed that a person cannot conform to society as is, but should discover the world and then determine using a person’s own judgment and rationality, how the world should be.

Emerson’s teachings are as relevant today as they were 150 years ago when he wrote them. We live in a world where people are constantly concerned about what other people think. From an early age children are cautioned against what to post on their Facebook page, warned against the boogeyman of “ future employers” and what they will think. It seems Emerson would agree, that if a person is confident is who they are, stands by the decisions they make, then what does it matter if the world at large sees that they have posted aspects of who they are on their Facebook walls. If an employer decides not to hire a person because of who that person is, then would a person really want to work for a place that does not accept them? Would a person want to have to play the con game of hiding who they or for the sake of a paycheck?

Emerson believes that a person should know themselves, and be themselves and that any entity or person that asks them to compromise on that, should be abandoned. In the end, what is at stake is a person’s life and whether or not they decide to live true to themselves or life a lie.

Works Cited

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. Self reliance. Hoboken, N. J.: BiblioBytes, 2010. Print.

" John Fletcher (playwright)." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 30 Nov.

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