

# The ideas of transcendentalism and its development

Society



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During the 18th century in the north, several philosophical movements were beginning to occur. One in particular happening during the market revolution was the Transcendentalism movement. It involved the combination of European Romanticism and the lifestyles of the United States. Just like other movements happening, this one started with one person and grew by people agreeing with that one person, in this case Ralph Waldo Emerson. Those who continued to follow this movement created artwork, wrote poems, and had ideas made for this term. Transcendentalism has more than one understanding and has evolved since then.

During the market revolution, civilization was evolving with more and more ideas every day. With that beginning, it was “encouraging the identification of American Freedom” (Froner 268). Emerson is known to be the father of transcendentalism and wrote about alongside Henry David Thoreau.

Emerson believed that one could have their own “judgment over existing social traditions and institutions” (Froner 268). One could have more freedom to think whatever they wanted to instead of having to think thoughts they are influenced to follow and spread to others. Emerson helped shaped the becoming of others and the nation’s self-identity.

One of Emerson’s writings includes “The American Scholar,” where he “urged Americans to stop looking to Europe for inspiration,” but instead do what they want to do for themselves (ushistory. org). Transcendentalists believed that God also had his part, but anyone could freely think what they wanted to about him. Emerson believed that God was in fact “revealed through nature” (pbs. org). In the first section of his essay, he states that “the first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is <https://assignbuster.com/the-ideas-of-transcendentalism-and-its-development/>

that of nature” (Emerson). Nature was to be seen as a big key during this time period. Nature was connected to everything man. Meaning without nature a person could be lost. Which is where the phrase manifest destiny became in to play.

Manifest Destiny also came about during the 18th century and its ideas was that the “ United States is destined by God” (Ushistory. org Editors). More than how transcendentalists saw God, manifest destiny made it look like anyone could do anything with the power of God and believing in him. The first person to mention this phrase was John Sullivan. Sullivan worked as an editor for two newspapers columns and had mentioned this was the expansion towards the “ new frontier” was going to occur (Ushistory. org Editors).

Others who contributed to transcendentalism were Henry David Thoreau and Alexis de Tocqueville. Tocqueville, being from France, has a piece called “ American Democracy” in which he states five key things Americans go by from what he saw happening in the American society. Love of equality, absence of tradition, individualism (just like transcendentalism and manifest destiny), tyranny of the majority, and the importance of free association were the five characterized features.

Henry David Thoreau was another who followed into what Emerson had said, he had “ admired” Emerson for his great work (Ushistory. org). He is also known as another original thinker alongside Emerson. Thoreau’s idea was focusing more on the nature part. He is also known as one of the original thinkers of transcendentalism. His book “ Walden”, he discusses himself

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being more in the wild and living with it. He then goes on to question “ whether it is of the devil or of God” making one wonder that they did think of the two during their time period (USHistory. org). Like many other movements, this one had other ideas made by ones who did not quite look at it the same way. As events occurred, the subject of transcendentalism had been seen as another thing to some.

One like Immanuel Kant, believed to have built the system, was to understand that “ the mind was not a blank slate that is written upon by the empirical world...” (“ Immanuel Kant”). He talked how this dealt with ethics and that everything was constructed by our environment and what happens due to our actions. Another who was not in fact a man to follow transcendentalism was Margaret Fuller. Fuller, who wrote “ Woman in the Nineteenth Century” where she “ sought to apply to women the transcendentalist idea that freedom meant a quest for personal development...” (Froner). John Muir was also inspired by the transcendentalists of the “ pre-civil war era...” (Froner) like Thoreau. He had considered that “ forests were God’s first temples” (Froner).

As many things’, transcendentalism led to artwork was another big thing during this time period. One in particular was the one involving the Hudson River school. One of the members, Asher B. Durand, made a painting called “ Kindred Spirits”. The painting symbolized the group who followed transcendentalism. In the painting you can see two men on a cliff, nature surrounding them. The men were said to be speaking “ the wilderness is yet a fitting place to speak of God” (“ Nature Transformed”). Nature is where

everything is calm, and one can find themselves. To them, it was their reality.

Transcendentalism has changed very much since then.

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