

Roots of Transcendentalism

- Offshoot of Romanticism
- German Philosopher Immanuel Kant first used the term Transcendentalism (1788)
- American Transcendentalism (1830s-1850s) is based on several theories – Kant and German thought, Plato and Idealism (the idea that true reality involved ideas rather than the world as perceived by the senses), Eastern philosophy (Buddhism)
- Am. Transcendentalism challenged both organized religion (theology) and rationalism.
- Emerson believed that religion and science had become too sterile and too detached from God.

What is Transcendentalism?

“The Over-Soul – a universal and benign omnipresence... a God known to men only in moments of mystic enthusiasm, whose visitations leaves them altered, self-reliant, and purified of petty aims.” - Emerson

- Faith in human potential – a positive movement
- All people capable of higher knowledge on an individual basis which leads to individualism and self-reliance
- Reveres nature

-The spiritual reality is the ultimate reality (intuition over senses)

-humans knows the spiritual reality by intuition and moments
of mystical insight

-Everything in the world, including people, is a reflection of the
Divine Soul

-People can use their intuition to behold God's spirit revealed in
nature or in their own souls

-Self-reliance and individualism must outweigh external authority
and blind conformity to custom and tradition

-Spontaneous feelings and intuition are superior to deliberate
intellectualism and rationality

Confused?

-Not all Transcendentalists agreed on a definition of the
movement.

-Emerson would say that it was fine to change your mind or even
contradict yourself.

“A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.”

– Emerson