

Intro to Transcendentalism American Romantics

Post-Kantian philosophy, where the individual and the individuals intuition/perspective takes precedence.

Who were they?

Educated people in New England/Boston area

Many were trained as Unitarian ministers and teachers at Harvard

Reacting against Enlightenment thinking and building upon romantic thinking

Idealists rather than materialists

“What is popularly called Transcendentalism among us, is Idealism; Idealism as it appears in 1842. As thinkers, mankind have ever divided into two sects, Materialists and Idealists; the first class founding on experience, the second on consciousness; the first class beginning to think from the data of the senses, the second class perceive that the sense are not final, and say, The senses give us representations of things, but what are the things themselves, they cannot tell. The materialist insists on facts, on history, on the force of circumstances and the animal wants of man; the idealist on the power of Thought and of Will, on inspiration, on miracle, on individual culture.”

Emerson from “The Transcendentalist”

Matters of ultimate reality go beyond human experience.

Transcendentalists sought permanent spirituality that lay beyond transitory physical experience.

The Transcendental (that which transcends, goes beyond) v. The Transient (impermanent, changing)

Some say transcendentalism is a mixture of European, Far Eastern and Native American philosophy.

The idea is to tap into, get a glimpse of the transcendental. Into nature to find it.

**God manifest himself/itself in the natural world.
An expression of God.**

This mystical view did not spring from logic it came from intuition/feeling

**Physical world is the doorway to the spiritual realm.
Nature is a gateway.**

The “Over Soul” aka “The Divine” all of us contain part of the Divine and it speaks to us through nature and intuition. While we are all individuals, we all part of the greater whole-united by our bond with the Divine. “part and parcel” or “part and particle”

Most were abolitionists, in favor of women’s rights and generally very concerned with society’s well-being

Major thinkers

Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, Greely, Margaret Fuller

Some communalists:

Brook Farm / vegetarianism/ anti-industrialists/ some were inspired to revolutionary activities.

