

THIS WORLDLY TRANSCENDENTALISM AND THE STRUCTURING OF THE WORLD pdf

1: Transcendentalists, Boomers, and Our Current World Crisis – Universalist Recovery Church

This worldly transcendentalism and the structuring of the world: Weber's "Religion of China" and the format of Chinese history and civilization Unknown Binding -

At camp, I was taught to meditate and smoke cigarettes. My GI parents provided well, encouraged my education, and gave me a lot of freedom. Like most of my generation, I embraced internal reflection, individual spiritual awakening, and social activism based on a moral code that emphasized our responsibility to and for one another. Generational Theory After a study of American history, Strauss and Howe noticed that every 90 years or so, the United States completes a predictable cycle in which a Spiritual Awakening is followed by a Secular Crisis. From this crisis, another cycle starts with a Spiritual Awakening, and so on. Within each cycle, four generations are born, age, and eventually die out. First is the Idealist generation, born during a time of relative peace and prosperity. As they reach adulthood, they discover inner truths and spiritual yearnings that translate into religious fervor and a Spiritual Awakening. Along with values and religious truths, Idealists promote social causes and the equality of all people. Right after the Idealists, a Reactive Generation is born. Raised during a time of instability and left to fend for themselves at an early age, they live by their wits. They seek material comforts, tend to be bitter, to live hard, and to die young. After them, the Civic Generation comes of age during a Secular Crisis. Unlike wars fought during other parts of this repeating cycle, such as the Korean and the Vietnam Wars, Civic men and sometimes women fight wars that end in victory. An invigorated generation is then ready to rebuild the structures of its society. The next generation is the Adaptives. Protected and docile, they mediate between their Civic elders and the Idealists who follow them. So were the Puritans who fled Europe in order to practice their own religion in peace, and the Awakeners who preached fire and brimstone, built hundred of churches, and espoused stern moral values. Like other Idealist generations, they accepted women and people of color as leaders. The idealistic Missionaries came next. They eschewed material and worldly concerns in favor of cultivating the mind and spirit. Moralistic and religious, they again redefined the role of women in public life. Then there were the Transcendentalists. These Idealists also searched within for wisdom, truth, and morality. Unlike previous generations, however, they were more spiritual than religious and less moralistic. They emphasized individual truth, internal reflection, and personal connections with a Source. Like other Idealists, they understood that every individual has worth and divinity, so they championed social causes. A feminist movement started, and abolitionism raged. Transcendentalists spoke out against slavery and oppression in all its guises. Some, such as the abolitionist John Brown, gave their lives for their causes. When the Secular Crisis struck, these Idealists, like previous generations, led the country into a war. Rather than coming out of the war ready to build a new and vibrant society, the soldiers of the Civil War felt disillusioned, angry, oppressed, betrayed, and fatalistic. Previous generations of Idealists were elders by the time they led the nation into war. Softened with age, improved by wisdom, yet still firm in their values and willing to die for what they believed in, these older Idealist elders were more measured in their response to the crisis. They defended truth and freedom with less waste, anger, and violence. Probably it already has. Did the crisis start when the Twin Towers toppled? Certainly the populist revolt that is allowing fascism to sweep across Europe and threaten our own country is part of the crisis. So are terrorism in general, mass murders, racial profiling, the uproar about immigration, and global warming. How will the aging Boomers guide them? War has been the answer in the past, and I suspect war will be part of our current solution. We have been fighting a senseless battle against terrorism, and our president seems quite happy to escalate the war. But is war inevitable? Can we find another way out? Like the Transcendentalists, we Boomer Idealists preach a gospel of inner wisdom, religious truth, and a message of acceptance, inclusion, and love. We value peace over war. We endorse compassion and equality. Surely these values can teach us to communicate with one another, to resist oppression with nonviolence, and to set boundaries that can be enforced with something other than bombs and missiles. The Swing of History The

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Transcendentalists changed their society, and they continue to influence us today. Will Generation X, the Millennials, and their children dismantle all we Boomers have created? If, like the Transcendentalists, we blow this current crisis, we, too, may be vilified by our children and grandchildren. Yet just as the Transcendentalists were redeemed when the new generation of Idealists grew up, so may our own great-grandchildren grow up to appreciate what we Boomers have offered the world. Reactives and Adaptives are also important. Reactives force us to look at the gritty underbelly of life. Adaptives mediate between the Civics and their Idealist children. Twenty-five years ago, Strauss and Howe predicted our current secular crisis. To help our country respond effectively to the problems of our day, we need the wisdom of every generational cohort: Hope for Future Generations The Transcendentalists were unfortunate. It seems that everything we Boomers worked for is also disintegrating. Yet we are in the middle of the crisis. For the Transcendentalists, everything fell apart at the end, after the crisis was supposedly over. Of course, unless we destroy ourselves in the process, that prosperity will not be the end. Another crisis will come. Human nature is like that. And new generations will seek their own way to survive and, hopefully, thrive. In faith and fondness,.

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This-worldly transcendentalism and the structuring of the world: Weber's "Religion of China" and the Format of Chinese History and Civilization Some Observations on the transformation of Confucianism (and Buddhism) in Japan

References and Further Reading 1. Emerson and His Practices Although he denied he was a transcendentalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson was rightly viewed by his peers and is rightly viewed by contemporary scholars as the primary philosophical exponent of American transcendentalism, followed by Henry David Thoreau. Emerson distinguished at least three practices by which facts may be exchanged for ideas. The first enacts a form of idealism. Instead of seeing the world as an independent power that may lay waste to our purposes and plans, we can view it as a display of images or pictures created by us, rendering it harmless and even benevolent. Secondly, we can focus on moral actions and rejoice in their goodness. The third practice distinguished by Emerson is perhaps the one for which transcendentalism is best known. It is that of contemplating beauty. These practices come naturally to many of us. The group convened irregularly for about seven years and grew to include at least a dozen members. It became known as the Transcendental Club. The transcendental refers to the necessary conditions of the possibility of experience. Input from perception is grasped through twelve categories, space, time, and what he calls the transcendental unity of apperception. These are structures of mind, so without them experience would be impossible. In contrast, the transcendent is that which lies beyond the scope of experience and is therefore inaccessible to conceptual knowledge. In his Critique of Pure Reason, Kant rejects the classic arguments for the existence of God on the grounds that knowledge of the transcendent is impossible. Ironically, the transcendental structure of mind is necessarily incapable of providing knowledge of the transcendent. But Kant followed the Critique of Pure Reason with the Critique of Practical Reason, in which he adds an important qualification to his original view that God is unknowable. The transcendent, he argues, is the very foundation of morality. If not for God, the wicked might go unpunished and the righteous unrewarded. We may not be able to have conceptual knowledge of the transcendent, but we are morally obligated to act as the transcendent in the form of the free and rational moral will. Organic beings are purposive, he tells us, though we cannot glean what their purposes are. Their purposiveness consists in the fact that they and their parts are mutually supporting. The parts are means to the wholes, and the wholes are means to the parts. Two important conclusions fall out of this analysis. The first is that everything can be seen as beautiful, because all objects have form, which hints at a kind of purposiveness based on the internal complexity of objects. This purposiveness of form creates a universal disinterested satisfaction that is experienced as beauty. The second conclusion is that conceptual understanding of beauty is impossible for human beings. The Americans eagerly joined him in celebrating the rightness of moral action, the beauty of the world, and the majesty of God. Emerson was a great admirer of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, both of whom he met when he traveled to Europe in 1832. Their romanticism was intoxicating to him, and he seems to have passed some of that intoxication to his friend Thoreau. The British romantics shared the same love of beauty, morality, and God that animated both Kant and the American transcendentalists, but the romantics had developed a unique perspective on our relation to those realities. This perspective provided one of the central features of American transcendentalism. The British romantics saw tremendous beauty and goodness in the world. At the same time, they saw that all of that goodness and beauty is flawed. Human beings often embody great virtues, but this is not always so. Sometimes their behavior is monstrous in its selfishness and cruelty. The sky, the meadow, and the rose are breathtakingly beautiful, but as time passes their beauty fades. This double vision of the romantics, although it did not betray any facts, nevertheless placed them in the uncomfortable position of both hating and loving the world. To get out of their predicament, the romantics made a bold move. They set their sights on the perfect, which for them could exist only beyond the awful limits of the world. Yet they could not forget that they were, as flesh and blood, inextricably tied to those very limits. Nor could they forget that it was those very limits that provided the

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precious glimpses of beauty and goodness, however degraded, that they cherished. This was a great tragedy, they decided, and it was made even greater by the fact that it was inevitable. If you live in this world and you have enough humanity to love the good and the beautiful, you will be constantly assailed by the pain of falling short of those ideals. Yet, they suggested, the more the tragedy of life appeared to us in all of its inevitability and pain, the more beautiful life would be in our eyes. Had they embraced this perspective at face value, the transcendentalists might have been cheered. As a sequence of random events, some good and others bad, life is arguably meaningless and not worth living. But view it as a tragedy and life takes on a marvelous aesthetic unity. Anguish and tears become literary realities, beautiful in their significance and in the timeless moral lessons they convey. But the transcendentalists were too pragmatic to embrace such an intellectual view of life. The world was too much with them, and although they never tired of translating facts into ideas, they could not shake the sense that facts were somehow more real. Instead of cheering them up, their contact with romanticism ultimately saddened them. They fell in love with the perfect like good romantics, but they could find little beauty in the countless misfortunes that befell them. They felt betrayed by life. In Emerson, this feeling expressed itself in the form of sheer disbelief at the terrible things that happened to him. In Thoreau, it created a thin layer of bitterness and resentment that never dissipated. Their influence contributed a longing for the perfect, one of the central features of transcendentalism in America. The other side of this contribution, equally central, was a treacherous undercurrent of disappointment and sadness. Idealism The idealism of the American transcendentalists, like their morality and their love of beauty, took the form of practices before it became, as an afterthought, a sort of theory. Emerson stood with his head between his legs and took note of the fact that this opened a very different reality. His long country rambles produced in him a profound feeling of the lawfulness and rationality of nature. The passions that stirred in his breast often burst forth in the form of an essay or a poem. Looking at the world from different angles, delighting in the patterns nature manifests, and writing poetry or prose are idealistic practices in the sense that they give consciousness a kind of priority. In creating new experiences or ideas, we seem to create new worlds, and mind takes on a status close to that of a divinity. The old familiar facts, when filtered through the categories of imagination, are given an almost miraculous appearance. We are free from their tedious and often sorrowful limits to roam at liberty in thought. For the transcendentalists, this freedom was almost always short-lived. This is because they felt they should ground their idealistic practices in a consistent theory. The freedom and satisfaction their practices provided, they reasoned, would be more secure if given an adequate theoretical backing. Their reasoning may have been sound, but their attempt to ground their practices in an adequate theory had the opposite effect. They became tangled in theoretical problems that proved intractable, and this made engaging with ideas for the sake of the activity itself more difficult. An ulterior motive for this engagement was always pressing on them. The ideas could not be fully trusted unless somehow it could be shown that they captured the inner nature of things. There were flashes of verification, as when Emerson dreamed he ate the world, but all too often it was consciousness that had to give way to the cold facts of existence. The loss of his beloved wife Ellen Tucker, his cherished son Waldo, and his dear friend Thoreau signaled to Emerson that something alien to mind was at work in the world. What this alien something might be, the transcendentalists had no clear idea. Their idealism gave consciousness, rational principles, and human values the status of omnipotent governing powers. Evil was that for which there would be compensation, or it was an instrument necessary for the creation of a good far greater than any that would have been possible without its use. It was, in short, thoroughly intelligible, just, and even benevolent: Evil is good, or rather it has to be good if one takes the idealism of the transcendentalists at face value. Not even they were capable of doing this all the time, yet they had no means of understanding evil except through the lens of their idealism, nor would they have been comfortable viewing it through a different lens as a brute fact or an irrational power. The only option for the transcendentalists was to live with one more evil, namely the fact that evil positively confounded their attempts to explain it. This made the evils they suffered that much worse, adding avoidable surprise and puzzlement to unavoidable pain. Had they been content to practice their idealism without attempting to expound it, they might have saved themselves

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considerable grief. Their idealistic practices alone do not give mind the kind of priority proper to a power, but they do give it a sort of valuational priority. In lavishly applying the categories of imagination to the world and marveling at the results, we affirm the priority of consciousness and its products in the sense of loving them the most. As long as this does not lead us to the tenuous theory that all existence must submit to mind, we are free to understand evil through the categories of common sense, as a rogue power that goes against our purposes and often overwhelms them. This does not translate evil into good, but it at least removes the sting of surprise and confusion when evil strikes. Morality Emerson was often accused of being a reluctant reformer, and behind those accusations there was a kernel of truth. His contemporaries in the United States and Europe were hungry for moral progress, and they wasted no time putting shoulder to wheel for their favorite causes. Emerson was different in that his temperament inclined him to be first a scholar. The purpose of scholars, he said, is to nurture the good in others; but what makes a scholar is the ability to see the larger picture of things, and for this a certain distance from the heat of action is required. Emerson was by nature a visionary and a poet, not a man of action. No matter how much he sympathized with the ideals to which reformers aspired, he could not engage in actual reform without some initial discomfort. It was not what he was born to do. He may have hesitated before throwing his weight behind a cause for fear of losing the reflective distance he naturally valued; but if the cause was just he almost always ended up fighting for it. When the government of the United States announced plans to force Cherokees from their native lands, Emerson wrote President Van Buren in protest. The reflective but deeply moral Emerson opposed slavery openly both in writing and in public lectures.

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Natural Life. 'An essential step in Thoreau's recovery of a 'natural life' is to reawaken and expand his awareness of the present moment, not only in the sense of knowing more of the world around him, but of entering into it fully.

Sociologists who have taken civilizations rather than nation states, world-systems, communities, or interacting individuals as their units of analysis have all been deeply concerned with contemporary life. Indeed it was through their efforts to explain the distinctive characteristics of contemporary life that they were led to the comparative study of civilizations. Without it, in their view, contemporary life cannot be sufficiently understood. In locating our efforts to understand contemporary conditions in this intellectual tradition, we need to ask, first, how civilizational sociologists conceive their object of study – civilizations – to be constructed, how they account for their distinctiveness; and, second, what their theoretical accounts of civilizational structures contribute to the empirical study of the issues we find most compelling. Construction problems How have the major civilizational sociologists understood the controlling principles and dynamic potentialities that distinguish one civilization from another? But why does the West possess the switches which other civilizations lack? What do these switches consist of? And this distinctiveness cannot be explained by the theoretical system. Civilizations are marginal to a universal science of social behaviour. There are two types of ideologies. Among traditional civilizations, Dumont has studied only those of India and medieval Europe. He has found them similar in possessing a sociocultural structure in which, on what for him is the superior level of cultural theory, ideology encompasses power as subsidiary to itself, and simultaneously, on the inferior level of social practice, power and ideology are differentiated as opposites, as in the structural distinction between the priest and the ruler in India and between church and state in the medieval West. What are opposites, capable of disruptive conflict, on the inferior level, become integrated into a part-whole identity on the superior level. But the modern egalitarian ideology fails to understand the principle of hierarchic complementarity. In this respect, his is the opposite of the usual Western-centred approach evident in both Sorokin and Max Weber and in such enterprises as the world-systems theory. This case has, more than any other, shaped his general notion of the structure of civilizations. There are three key elements to be considered: In the case of India, it is the principle of group purity and pollution and its dynamic version, the dialectic of being-in-the world and world rejection. In what is coherent in their social structures, each civilization is decisively controlled by a cultural principle of its own. His general explanation is that both the initial symbolic design and subsequent historical choices by elite individuals, mainly religious leaders and various kinds of theoreticians have been important in this process. But why one civilization has allowed transformative choices while others have not remains unexplained. For Weber, it is the ideology the culture-defining strata have found congenial to their spontaneous dispositions and have also employed as a resource in the struggle for power. Coherence is a property not of a civilization as a whole but only of the organization of the life of its culture-defining strata. The durable conditions, while charismatically authorized and imposing normative restraints, to a greater or lesser extent, on their upholders and beneficiaries, are also, in part, coercively maintained and therefore resented by those deriving fewer advantages from them. From this, a potential for change – or at least rebellion – arises in any civilization. A successfully accomplished civilizational transformation – such as the initial breakthrough to modernity – requires a combination of elements that rarely occur together: This suggests a priority of social structure over cultural design in the modernization of the West. The same types of variables, in different combinations, explain structure and change. The distinctiveness of each civilization arises from its unique linkage of dominant ideology with a variety of practical arrangements, none of which is completely explained by the dominant ideology itself. What changes are possible within a civilization also depends on this linkage, the conflicts which arise among its elements, and the methods employed for responding to these conflicts. For Weber, a civilization is not an hierarchically controlled totality, as it is, so far it is understandable, for Dumont, but a conjunction of

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interacting, yet analytically independent elements, each with its own logic of action but not all of equal importance. But Weber provides no theoretical ground for a reconciliation of rationalization and resistance to it. The battle must therefore go on. In contrast to Dumont, Weber lacks a theoretical conception of cultural stability. What is lacking is not social explanations of particular cases of the empirical occurrence of relatively stable conditions but an intellectual device capable, by virtue of its structure, of constituting stability in the sociocultural order. What Weber has traced out through a series of careful case studies and analyses of part-relationships in comparative perspective, S. Eisenstadt aims to state in general theoretical form covering all possibilities. Eisenstadt generalizes across several cases and defines types of civilizations. It is in locating a case under a general category that he is interested. Any information that cannot be fitted into the construction of a type is dismissed as theoretically irrelevant. There are three solutions of the transcendental tension: The transformative potential is determined by solutions of the transcendental tension and increases in this order: Thus the transformative potential of a civilization depends on a stable cultural principle in conjunction with potentially variable features of social structure. It is unclear whether this characteristic of civilizational construction persists in advanced industrial societies. To what extent can they be explained by civilizational theory? What understanding of major types of social change is gained when they are interpreted as products of the controlling principles and the transformative potentials of the civilizations in which they occur? These are the types of change generally conceptualized as economic and technological advances, democratization and totalitarianism, cultural secularization and so on. One or several of the four sociologists considered here " and many others " have sought to explain such changes. I am going to ask what each of them contributes to an emerging issue on which much less theoretical work has been done. The literature on postmodernity which is sometimes, but not consistently, distinguished as a social condition of postmodernism as a cultural programme is immense, intangible, frequently cultist, or self-indulgent. For him only the recurrent has reality. His conception of the distinctiveness of civilizations is weak. He thus contributes little to elucidating the problem of identity maintenance in current inter-civilizational encounters. Will civilizations in close interdependence continue to retain the kinds of distinctiveness they maintained in relative isolation? Or will they merge into a global civilization? It is not, for Sorokin, a major theoretical issue. Eisenstadt so far has not been much more helpful on these questions. This is partly because his variables are pitched on such a high level of generality that they seem to explain any politically relevant development that has happened or continues to be happening, but cannot throw light on what innovations are still to come. Or does a late modern civilization require a central tension less than classical and early modern civilizations did? Beacon Press, " to the interpretation of contemporary conditions. These theories generally do not take acceleration, greater interdependence, and differences in both productive equipment and symbolic design into account. Like most social scientists, Max Weber has such a strong sense of the universalizing thrust of Western modernity that its primary implication for other civilizations can only be a challenge to their distinctive identities. The only question is whether to the same extent. They should hold for other surviving civilizations as well, if they modernize along Western lines. Thus Bernard Lewis writes: Much will depend on their ability to harmonize these different traditions. What must be retained by a civilization in the globalizing stage in order for a cultural identity to continue to exert its integrative thrust? The first is the structural, the second the historical definition of collective identity. In classical civilizations, the historical definition circumscribes the unit of analysis, the structural definition explains what holds it together. But will what has been holding continue to hold? Can a civilization endure without a controlling principle? This issue may become relevant in all advanced industrial parts of the world, East Asia as well as the West. Consistently, with his treatment of the classical civilizations, Weber might answer that a present-day civilization can retain its identity as the conjunction of a particular and expandable set of ideologies with a particular and expandable set of groups and institutions. The Hellenistic world seems to have been capable of incorporating any religion present in its environment, but it subjected the Oriental religions to an interpretatio graeca, and it operated within a shared set of institutions " the royal cult, the cities, religious pluralism. The new prophecies may energize existing civilizations, or fragment them,

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or establish new cultural complexes transcending the boundaries between traditional civilizations. Weber offers guidance on these issues only by insisting that we always look into the group and institutional sources and uses of these rebirths of tradition and prophetic innovations. Louis Dumont may have provided the most useful intellectual categories for thinking about the manner in which civilizational and national identities will maintain themselves in a globalizing world. He suggests that each modernizing culture evolves its own version of the modern ideology by synthesizing elements of its traditional holism with components of the individualistic ethic emanating from its historical centres – France and England. This conception is based, however, mainly on evidence from the peripheral European countries – Germany, Russia – and it is uncertain whether the process will proceed to the same extent beyond the confines of the extended West rooted in Judeo-Christian traditions. Dumont sees this as a process wrought with great dangers, since from pseudo-syntheses of individualism and holism totalitarianism results and could indeed overwhelm modern ideology. But even while posing such dangers, this is the process by which the collective identities of civilizations and cultures maintain themselves in the course of globalization, if the solutions are locally evolved, not imposed by some imperial power. It is this that the West, in his non-ethnocentric conception of modernization, needs to learn from the traditional civilizations at the same time that they absorb from the West elements of the modern ideology. Traditional civilizations do not have solutions for the modern age even for themselves as participants in the modern age, but they have understood the foundational problem of culture construction that modernity still needs to grasp clearly. In global terms, on the superior level of practical values humanity is to encompass civilizations, while on the subordinate level of mythology the particular civilizations are to remain opposites with conflicting perspectives. Within a civilization, cultural meaning encompasses social practice. In the world as a whole, discourse about practices encompasses commitments to mythologies. A symbolic framework is superimposed upon the others, which, however, continue to operate as themselves even while responding to the added overlay again, in their own ways. On the premises of this theory, drives toward revitalization in an updated form of the central mythologies of particular civilizations and of their national components, can be anticipated – as can pressures toward their relativization, on some level, to a more universal discourse of humanity. More than other civilizations, the contemporary West faces a problem of intra-civilizational structuring. Its more intensive modernization, the coexistence of strongly developed religious and secular cultures, the profuseness of forms of artistic experimentation, the challenges of feminism, and a generally self-critical intellectual tradition, add up to the question: But a similar situation is developing in the most modernized or globalized layers of other civilizations as well. Islam poses the most serious difficulty for anticipations of a trend toward putting humanity first. The problem may not be insoluble in the long run if, under the influence of the general processes of globalization, Islam comes to accept itself as a part of the world, rather than as a self-sufficient entity or as the key metaphor of the whole yet to be attained. Self-sufficiency is clearly impossible. Identification of a particular tradition with the universal purpose seems likely, under present conditions, by reducing its adaptability, to decrease even the capacity of this tradition to attain its own purposes, as the history of Marxist societies has demonstrated. In our projection of the global world, symbolic systems remain on the subordinate level of particular mythologies. The superior level can only be conceived of as a world-wide practical discourse entailing moral, political, scientific, and literary orientations as its ever-present constituents. On this point Dumont may even meet Habermas. The development of universal languages concerned with environmental, economic, medical, nutritional, peace, and human rights issues provides its firmest intellectual elements.

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Transcendentalism puts the emphasis on spiritual growth and understanding as opposed to worldly pleasures. Thoreau's idea of transcendentalism stressed the importance of nature and being close to nature.

It is easier to note its pervasive influence, though, than it is to clarify its doctrines. The fluidity and elusiveness of Transcendentalism was registered even by some of its most intelligent contemporaries. Nathaniel Hawthorne, for example, writes: He shouted after us, but in so strange a phraseology that we knew not what he meant, nor whether to be encouraged or affrighted. A Baltimore clergyman noted that "a new philosophy has risen, maintaining that nothing is everything in general, and everything is nothing in particular. But while Kant emphasized the power of the mind he also stressed its limits, its inability to know reality absolutely. The Transcendentalist vision went beyond Kant in insisting that the mind can apprehend absolute spiritual truths directly without having to go through the detour of the senses, without the dictates of past authorities and institutions, and without the plodding labor of ratiocination. In this sense particularly, it was the logical--or supralogical--extension of both the Protestant reformation and American democratic individualism. To grasp the significance of this paradigm shift, we have to understand how dominant, even hegemonic, Lockean thought was in America, and particularly at Harvard College through the s, where most of the male Transcendentalists were educated. Here matter melded with method, since the chief instructional medium at Harvard and throughout American education was the "recitation," where knowledge was demonstrated by replicating the words of the lesson without necessarily showing any operational mastery. So while Unitarianism was more optimistic and rationalistic than the orthodoxy it reformed, it weakened the foundation of Protestant faith by giving more authority to what happens outside the individual conscience than within it and elevating matter over spirit in shaping the mind. The Transcendentalists, in turn, took advantage of the multiple meanings of "idealism" as both an epistemology and as a moral and social critique of the "materialism" underlying the Unitarian alliance of commercial and religious interests, an alliance called by Emerson in another generalizing pun the "Establishment," stressing its static nature, contrasted with the Transcendentalist "Movement," a word suggesting youth, flux, and novelty. The genius of the mind will descend, and unite with the genius of the rivers, the lakes, and the woods. Marsh, who tried to enact this vision educationally as president of the University of Vermont, added his own "Preliminary Essay," underscoring the distinction between "the understanding," that distinctly Lockean faculty of rationalizing from the senses and "the Reason," those higher intuitions valued not only by German idealists but by mystics through the ages. He later described himself as "ecclesiastically conservative, though intellectually radical. In an Christian Examiner article, Bronson made a crucial link between the new epistemology and the limiting temporality and instrumentality of all cultural forms, including those of religion: It contracts, by the very effect of its duration, a stationary character, that refuses to follow the intellect in its discoveries, and the soul in its emotions. Emerson stated this position most eloquently in his "Divinity School Address" of It is not one with the blowing clover and the falling rain. While these two ministers had youthful energy and wide learning on their side, they soon found themselves embattled and isolated within the institution as pulpit exchanges were refused and social pressures mounted. The controversy within the church was paralleled by another conflict between the Establishment and the Movement in the field of education. Bronson Alcott, one of the few non-ministerial Transcendentalists and a self-taught teacher who had run other innovative schools in his native rural Connecticut, opened in near the Boston Common his Temple School. Alcott translated Transcendentalism into pedagogy by having the students shape and share their own thoughts in discussions and journals, instead of rote memory and textbook recitation. Language was seen as not simply a skill but the bridge between the individual soul and the physical and social worlds, so that lessons on vocabulary and grammar were integrated with spiritual matters. Again, a reversion to a more primitive and protestant Christianity was seen as subversively to established Christianity. The Transcendentalists, then, lost their

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immediate skirmishes within the Unitarian church and the field of education, however much their ideas were later to shape both these institutions. An alternative strategy was to extrapolate Transcendentalist ideas in a world outside these spheres, and no one did this more expansively than Margaret Fuller. She applied the notions of self-reliance and equality to gender roles in the first significant feminist essay in America, published in *The Dial*, the Transcendentalist journal she edited and helped found in 1840. Later, the piece was expanded to the book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. She then left New England scene completely to become first literary reviewer and then reporter on social issues for the *New York Tribune*, finally widening her circle even beyond America to become involved in the failed Italian revolution of 1848 and dying soon thereafter in a tragic shipwreck. The largest organized secession, though, from Boston Unitarianism and its values was the communitarian experiment in rural living known as Brook Farm, initiated by George Ripley in 1840. The goal was to unite the mind with the hand, and eliminate the corresponding invidious distinctions between classes in society. Everyone participated in farm work and its excellent school on the premises underlined the pedagogical nature of the entire enterprise. Despite its demise and that of the even smaller, shorter-lived Fruitlands community of Bronson Alcott, the notion of a pastoral retreat of simplicity and cooperation confronting by example the capitalist industrialism of the larger society became fixed in the American imagination. Brook Farm threw into relief a basic tension in Transcendentalism between joint action and individual development. At one pole, Emerson and Thoreau, who both declined to be Brook Farmers, felt that improvement must begin with the self, that many of the specific reforms rampant in Jacksonian America such as prohibition and vegetarianism were too narrowly conceived and that to engage in social and political action was to dissipate creative energies. On the other side were Brownson, Peabody, and, intermittently Alcott, who felt that rampant individualism was part of the problem, not part of the solution, and that social change could be effected only through social means. But even Emerson and Thoreau recognized that when evils such as slavery and imperialistic war reach a certain enormity, one must speak out and act, and they, along with other Transcendentalists, most notably Theodore Parker, joined the abolitionist cause. Well before the firebell of the Civil War, Transcendentalism as a living force seemed to be extinguished as quickly as it flared up. As Perry Miller pointed out: What did remain as a living movement was the ongoing effect of Transcendentalism in literature and philosophy. Most of the Transcendentalists were writers: As often the most influential formulations are in the works of Emerson. In that epitome of Transcendentalism, *Nature*, Emerson posits language as originating in names for natural objects which, through the doctrine of correspondences, have intrinsic spiritual and symbolic significance. Thus, every word was once a poem, or, more specifically, a metaphor, since it combines a sensory meaning with a more intangible or psychological one, the "natural fact" conveying a corresponding "spiritual fact. The truly creative writer is one who can "pierce this rotten diction and fasten words again to visible things," liberating us from the most pervasive and imprisoning of cultural forms, the categories of ordinary language. Emerson thus rescues the creative writer from the belletristic margins of American society to the epistemological center where the husks of old meanings are discarded and new ones made. This aesthetic of deconstructing conventional language to open the doors of perception, of using fresh concrete description that at the same time has symbolic resonance, was internalized by writers who reject any trace of Transcendentalist metaphysics like Ernest Hemingway and William Carlos Williams "No ideas but in things". Transcendentalism also remains a shaping force at the heart of American philosophy, but unlike its role in literature, its centrality to American philosophy has only recently been argued, by contemporary philosophers such as Stanley Cavell and Cornel West. Any reader of German philosophy would then predict that through a long series of dialectical manipulations of abstract propositions the two turn out to be identical, two faces of the same unitary reality. But Emerson takes a different road and immediately collapses the distinction through a direct personal experience, that of crossing a bare common and becoming "a transparent eye-ball" instead of simply an "I. Both Transcendentalism and Pragmatism articulate and conceptualize peculiarly American dispositions towards knowing, as Daniel Boorstin writes: To act, to move on, to explore also meant to push back the frontiers of knowledge; this inevitably gave a practical and dynamic

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character to the very idea of knowledge. To learn and to act became one. For this reason Transcendentalism remains in American life less as a specific doctrine--no one now calls oneself a "Transcendentalist"--than as presiding spirit behind many movements that resisting the dominant culture. The writings of Thoreau, for example, shaped both the passive resistance methods of the civil rights movement and the underlying vision of the ecology movement. Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Peabody are role models for feminist intellectuals who also espouse activism. At its core, Transcendentalism was a youth movement, making eloquently obvious one of the first generation gaps in American history. Emerson wrote, "This deliquium, this ossification of the soul, is the Fall of Man. The redemption is lodged in the heart of youth," and went on to contrast the Party of Hope with the Party of Memory. Based on the foundational American assumption that the future can be better than the past through imagination and effort, the Transcendentalists envisioned a culture that would foster further acts of culture-making, a community that would also liberate the individual, a way of thinking that would also become a way of doing. Martin Bickman, University of Colorado.

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5: American Transcendentalism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy

How to Change the World: Self and Society in American Transcendentalism Philip F. Gura University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill In the months since publishing my recent work on Transcendentalism, I have had the pleasure of speaking on the topic at several venues in some way or other associated with my topic, most memorably.

About Biographical Note Shmuel N. Recipient of many prizes and awards, he is author of more than 50 books. Table of contents 1. The Civilizational Dimension in Sociological Analysis 3. Social division of labor, construction of centers and institutional dynamics: A reassessment of the structuralevolutionary perspective 4. Some Observations on the Dynamics of Traditions 6. Liminality and Dynamics of Civilizations II. The emergence of transcendental visions and the rise of clerics 8. Cultural traditions and political dynamics: Transcendental vision, center formation and the role of intellectuals Utopias and Dynamics of Civilizations: Some concluding observations B. Analyses of Selected Axial Civilizations and of Japan This-worldly transcendentalism and the structuring of the world: Some Observations on the transformation of Confucianism and Buddhism in Japan The Crystallization of Christian Civilizations in Europe Japan and the multiplicity of cultural programmes of modernity Modernity as Civilization The Civilizational Dimension of Modernity: Modernity as a Distinct Civilization Multiple Modernities in an Age of Globalization Origins of the West. The origins of the West in recent Macrosociological Theory. The Protestant Ethic Reconsidered Frameworks of the Great Revolutions: The Sectarian Origin of Modernity V. The Classical Age of Modernity The Breakdown and Transformation of Communist Regimes The First Multiple Modernities: The civilization of the Americas Contrasting Religious Premises of Japanese and U. Israeli Politics and the Jewish Political Tradition: Principled Political Anarchism and the Rule of the Court The Puzzle of Indian Democracy The Limits and Direction of Convergence The Contemporary Scene Globalization, civilizational traditions and multiple modernities The Jacobin Component of Fundamentalist Movements

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6: Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities (2 vols)

Table of contents for Comparative civilizations and multiple modernities / by S.N. Eisenstadt. This-worldly transcendentalism and the structuring of the world.

This picture of Whitman with a butterfly appeared in the edition. Transcendentalism is a very formal word that describes a very simple idea. People, men and women equally, have knowledge about themselves and the world around them that "transcends" or goes beyond what they can see, hear, taste, touch or feel. This knowledge comes through intuition and imagination not through logic or the senses. People can trust themselves to be their own authority on what is right. A transcendentalist is a person who accepts these ideas not as religious beliefs but as a way of understanding life relationships. The individuals most closely associated with this new way of thinking were connected loosely through a group known as The Transcendental Club, which met in the Boston home of George Ripley. Their chief publication was a periodical called "The Dial," edited by Margaret Fuller, a political radical and feminist whose book "Women of the Nineteenth Century" was among the most famous of its time. The club had many extraordinary thinkers, but accorded the leadership position to Ralph Waldo Emerson. She helped plan the community at Brook Farm, as well as editing The Dial, and writing the feminist treatise, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Emerson was a Harvard-educated essayist and lecturer and is recognized as our first truly "American" thinker. In his most famous essay, "The American Scholar," he urged Americans to stop looking to Europe for inspiration and imitation and be themselves. His intellectual contributions to the philosophy of transcendentalism inspired a uniquely American idealism and spirit of reform. The theory of books is noble. The scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again. It came into him, life; it went out from him, truth. It came to him, short-lived actions; it went out from him, immortal thoughts. It came to him, business; it went from him, poetry. It was dead fact; now, it is quick thought. It can stand, and it can go. It now endures, it now flies, it now inspires Precisely in proportion to the depth of mind from which it issued, so high does it soar, so long does it sing. But the most interesting character by far was Henry David Thoreau, who tried to put transcendentalism into practice. A great admirer of Emerson, Thoreau nevertheless was his own man "â€" described variously as strange, gentle, fanatic, selfish, a dreamer, a stubborn individualist. For two years Thoreau carried out the most famous experiment in self-reliance when he went to Walden Pond, built a hut, and tried to live self-sufficiently without the trappings or interference of society. Later, when he wrote about the simplicity and unity of all things in nature, his faith in humanity, and his sturdy individualism, Thoreau reminded everyone that life is wasted pursuing wealth and following social customs. Nature can show that "all good things are wild and free. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have somewhat hastily concluded that it is the chief end of man here to "glorify God and enjoy him forever. Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail. In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, by dead reckoning, and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds. They criticized government, organized religion, laws, social institutions, and creeping

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industrialization. They created an American "state of mind" in which imagination was better than reason, creativity was better than theory, and action was better than contemplation. And they had faith that all would be well because humans could transcend limits and reach astonishing heights.

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7: The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism - Wikipedia

Eisenstadt, S.N. () *'This-Worldly Transcendentalism and the Structuring of the World: Weber's Religion of China and the Format of Chinese History and Civilization'*, *Journal of Developing Societies* -

The adherents to Transcendentalism believed that knowledge could be arrived at not just through the senses, but through intuition and contemplation of the internal spirit. As such, they professed skepticism of all established religions, believing that Divinity resided in the individual, and the mediation of a church was cumbersome to achieving enlightenment. The genesis of the movement can be accurately traced to and the first gathering of the Transcendental Club in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The father of the movement, an appellation he probably did not relish, was Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson lacked the vitality and desire to follow in her path. Though their hold on the public imagination was short-lived, the long-lasting influence that the Transcendentalists had on American literature cannot be denied. For Transcendentalism was a distinctly American expression, with concerns and ideals that perhaps did not fully translate in England or Continental Europe. A philosophical-literary movement cannot solve such problems, but it can provide the vocabulary to discuss them reasonably. On the most basic level, Transcendentalism represented a new way of understanding truth and knowledge. The roots of the philosophy go back to Germany, specifically the writings and theories of Immanuel Kant. In contrast to the scientific revolutions which were daily adding to the store of facts, Kant concerned himself with the abstractions of existence – those things which cannot be known for sure. He argued that individuals have it in their power to reason for themselves whether a thing be true or not, and how to fit their reasoning into an overall view of the world. Kant set himself apart from those who believed the senses to be perfect measures of reality. He encouraged a healthy level of doubt and skepticism, but not to the point of nihilistic despair. Kant asserted that humans must embrace the fact that some things cannot be known with certainty, no matter how advanced science and technology become. In addition to their heady philosophical forebears, the Transcendentalists owed a great debt to the English Romantics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many distinctly Romantic tropes echo through the pages of Transcendental literature. Obviously, the predilection to turn to the natural world for intimations of truth was a recurrent theme for the Romantics. In Transcendental philosophy, the grind of ordinary life and society are seen as barriers between the self and the spirit. Thus, Nature presents a way to free the mind of its typical distractions. Another strongly Romantic concept that the Transcendentalists embraced was the renewed potency and potentiality of the individual. Specifically, the imagination was glorified as one of the defining, almost divine characteristics of consciousness. Through imagination, the human mind could extend itself in ways that had never been considered. Transcendentalists differed somewhat from the Romantics in that they ultimately wanted to effect change, both personally and globally. Romanticism, generally speaking, was too much preoccupied with the ego and aesthetics to work for change in the real world. This newly enlightened, transcendent individual could go into the world and work to make it a better place. The Transcendental Movement was nothing if not idealist. Not surprisingly, the conflation of German philosophy and English Romanticism transplanted on American soil produced something quite original. The fact that the United States was still such a young nation, still seeking out her borders, had a powerful impact on the literature being produced. Emerson and his contemporaries saw a nation on the brink of discovering its own voice. Until that time, American literature had merely replicated the fashions of Europe. There was precious little originality or innovation. Furthermore, the cultural hub of the new nation was firmly rooted New England. The Transcendentalists saw an opportunity to make a break with England and forge a new literature for a new continent. That literature would be bold and expressive, and a bit wild, like the land itself. If the Transcendental Movement had a founding father, then he was most certainly Ralph Waldo Emerson. However, he only reluctantly adopted the role of figurehead. He mostly preferred to remain behind the scenes, observing the action but not participating. Emerson was a man of deep faith, though in his personal life he was

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struck down more than once by tragedy. His first wife Ellen Tucker died of tuberculosis after just two years of marriage. The loss was deeply felt by Emerson. He later remarried, only to lose the first child of that marriage to illness as well. Despite such ample experience of the dark side of life, Emerson managed to carry forward with a sort of resolute stoicism, if not optimism. The belief that the young nation was fertile ground for a new and more enlightened kind of citizen was quite popular at the time. The Puritan forebears planted the seed of American exceptionalism, which grew fast and strong in the intellectual atmosphere of nineteenth century New England. Not content to simply muse and write about the new way of thinking, Thoreau sought to live the Transcendental life to its fullest potential. He spent two years living in a self-built cabin on Walden Pond on land that belonged to Emerson. His goal was to simplify his existence, get back in tune with the natural world, and have more freedom to write and meditate. Thoreau would later recount his experience in Walden, or *Life in the Woods*. By far his most famous work, *Walden* is part autobiography and part rambling essay. He anticipates stream of consciousness narratives, while laying the foundation for later forms of social activism and naturalistic living. While living on Walden Pond, Thoreau was arrested and spent a night in jail for tax evasion. He argued that his political beliefs forbade him from supporting the government through taxes. The experience of his arrest served as the inspiration for an essay which would later be known as *Civil Disobedience*. The individualist politics of Henry David Thoreau sometimes earned him the label of anarchist. He was vehemently anti-slavery his whole life, though he also opposed warfare as a kind of barbarity. Though no one can know for certain, it is probable that Thoreau was chaste his entire life. From many corners, he was decried as cowardly in his retreat from the normal flow of life. For Thoreau, retreating to the isolation of Walden was absolutely necessary for his creative impulses to flourish. He was firm in his beliefs, which he arrived at through steady and careful reasoning. More than any other intellectual, Thoreau put into practice many of the basic assumptions of the Transcendentalist way of thinking. At Walden Pond, he lived almost entirely on what the land would provide for him. He communicated little with the outside world, despite the fact that he was only a few miles from civilization. Not everyone can retreat into solitude for years at a time. Society would grind to a halt were the whole world to go on leave. However, the literary output that Walden Pond allowed for is a landmark in American philosophy. Ralph Waldo Emerson may have been the father of the Transcendental Movement, but Margaret Fuller had arguably as much influence on its development as anyone else. Emerson was somewhat reluctant to attach his name to progressive political initiatives. He reportedly turned down invitations to speak at abolitionist meetings. It was not that Emerson disagreed with such political and social ends; rather, he simply lacked the necessary egotism to take the lead of those movements. Easily the most important contribution Fuller made for the Transcendental Movement was in her publishing ventures. With some support from Emerson, Fuller was the main publisher behind *The Dial*, which ran from 1840 to 1842. A journal devoted to printing the work of prominent Transcendentalists, *The Dial* holds a place of high esteem in the history of American letters. More than any other collection of documents, the publication history of *The Dial* reveals the heart, soul, and mind of the Transcendental Movement. The Transcendentalists were not without their critics. Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was marginally associated with the movement, eventually developed distaste for their utopian idealism. He wrote a satirical novel, *The Blithedale Romance*, based largely on his experience at Brook Farm, a Transcendentalist utopian commune. On the political front, Transcendentalists were frequently the targets of ridicule for their abolitionist beliefs and generally pacifist stance on national affairs. More than anything, they were accused of lacking concrete ideas, instead dwelling in a foggy abstract world of their own creation. This criticism is not without merit. However, the lasting impact of the Transcendentalist philosophy testifies to the influence of the philosophy. With his grandiose themes and national idealism, Emerson extended the limit of the essay form. Henry David Thoreau contributed his own wit and clarity to the body of Transcendental literature. The death of Margaret Fuller took much of the steam from the Transcendental Movement. Coupled with the growing unease over slavery and the economy, the intellectual climate simply no longer supported the high-minded idealism of the Transcendentalists. Everyone sensed that the nation was headed towards a cataclysm that a

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quasi-philosophical literary movement was in no position to avert. Writers growing up in the shadow of Transcendentalism largely reacted against its unbridled optimism. Nathaniel Hawthorne in particular saw the world through a very different lens. Where Emerson saw limitless potential and a growing confidence, Hawthorne saw doubt, mistakes, and the darker side of human nature struggling towards the surface. Of course, Hawthorne would not have produced the literature that he did without the influence of the Transcendental Movement. It is often those ideas and philosophies that an author most vehemently discards that come to inform their work most strongly. Although Transcendentalism in its proper sense did not last much into the 1850s, American literature as a whole saw a revival that may not have been possible without the inspiration of Emerson, Thoreau, and their ilk. The decade or so before the Civil War has in the last century come to be known as the American Renaissance. The new American literature was bold, fresh, and young. It encompassed the sweep of the prairies and the energies of the explorers. Not everything was glory and progress, however. Social historians look back today and see that other cultures suffered at the hands of American settlers and American industry. For their time, the Transcendentalists were remarkably attuned to the needs and interests of non-white persons, namely Native Americans and African Americans. In the realm of art, Transcendentalism was the intellectual fuel that stoked the fires of American literature for years to come.

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8: An Overview of American Transcendentalism | www.enganchecubano.com

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Origin[edit] Transcendentalism is closely related to Unitarianism , the dominant religious movement in Boston in the early nineteenth century. Transcendentalism was not a rejection of Unitarianism; rather, it developed as an organic consequence of the Unitarian emphasis on free conscience and the value of intellectual reason. The transcendentalists were not content with the sobriety, mildness, and calm rationalism of Unitarianism. Instead, they longed for a more intense spiritual experience. Thus, transcendentalism was not born as a counter-movement to Unitarianism, but as a parallel movement to the very ideas introduced by the Unitarians. From , the group frequently published in their journal *The Dial* , along with other venues. Second wave of transcendentalists[edit] By the late s, Emerson believed that the movement was dying out, and even more so after the death of Margaret Fuller in . This is the underlying theme in the majority of transcendentalist essays and papersâ€”all of which are centered on subjects which assert a love for individual expression. It focuses primarily on personal freedom. Their beliefs are closely linked with those of the Romantics , but differ by an attempt to embrace or, at least, to not oppose the empiricism of science. Transcendental knowledge[edit] Transcendentalists desire to ground their religion and philosophy in principles based upon the German Romanticism of Herder and Schleiermacher. The transcendental movement can be described as an American outgrowth of English Romanticism. Individualism[edit] Transcendentalists believe that society and its institutionsâ€”particularly organized religion and political partiesâ€”corrupt the purity of the individual. They have faith that people are at their best when truly "self-reliant" and independent. It is only from such real individuals that true community can form. Even with this necessary individuality, transcendentalists also believe that all people are outlets for the " Over-soul. Indian religions[edit] Transcendentalism has been directly influenced by Indian religions. Henry David Thoreau In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagavat Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions. I lay down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! I meet his servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges. Some adherents link it with utopian social change; Brownson , for example, connected it with early socialism, but others consider it an exclusively individualist and idealist project. Emerson believed the latter; in his lecture " The Transcendentalist ", he suggested that the goal of a purely transcendental outlook on life was impossible to attain in practice: You will see by this sketch that there is no such thing as a transcendental party; that there is no pure transcendentalist; that we know of no one but prophets and heralds of such a philosophy; that all who by strong bias of nature have leaned to the spiritual side in doctrine, have stopped short of their goal. We have had many harbingers and forerunners; but of a purely spiritual life, history has afforded no example. Shall we say, then, that transcendentalism is the Saturnalia or excess of Faith; the presentiment of a faith proper to man in his integrity, excessive only when his imperfect obedience hinders the satisfaction of his wish. Influence on other movements[edit].

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9: Natural Life, Thoreau's Worldly Transcendentalism

Definition. Transcendentalism or Transcendentalist movement which began flourishing in the early 19th century America, especially in New England, was based on some of the concepts of Transcendental Philosophy but did not strictly follow it.

How to Change the World: To be sure, today spiritual seekers often find their ways to UU through routes other than those charted by the Transcendentalists, but there is no denying that once we begin to probe the history of our movement, at some point or other we have to confront this remarkable group of nineteenth-century thinkers. I mean, look where we are now, for example, in the neighborhood of Ft. And, equally important, what did they think was the matter with the United States, a beacon for democracy, only half a century after its founding? There was no central creed that identified a Transcendentalist or any roll that certifiably recorded participants. Cabot, takes us to the heart of the matter. Representing this new thought, they were viewed suspiciously by many contemporaries. The Transcendentalist Theodore Parker humorously provided an index to the fears the group engendered in the general public. Alas for churches in New England! We be all dead men, for the Transcendentalists have come! To many people, the Transcendentalists were just this unsettling, and as often ridiculed or reviled as respected. Some remained in the ministry as Unitarians, while others redefined the nature of the churches they ledâ€”Clarke and Parker, the most notable examplesâ€”, while still others left the church altogether. There also were many in the cohortâ€”among them, prominent womenâ€”who found their way to Transcendentalism through association with one or more of the just-named individuals. In turn, she influenced such younger women as Caroline Healey Dall, who gravitated in the Transcendentalist orbit. The poet William Ellery Channing, nephew of the Unitarian clergyman of the same name, owed much to his association with Thoreau. In Charles Mayo Ellis, a Massachusetts attorney active in the anti-slavery movement, provided a book-length account. Innately present in each individual, in other words, is a spiritual principle which, of itself, without any external stimuli, allows one to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad, God and Satan, and that supersedes any outward laws or injunctions. The highest law comes from the promptings of the spirit, a potentially anarchic belief held in check by the universality of the religious sentiment. But the potential effects of this heady premise, the spiritual equivalent of the democratic ideal that all men and women are created equal, was problematic, and particularly so in a nation that did little for the rights of women, labor, the indigent and infirm, and also still protected slavery. The Transcendentalists were split, however, over how to effect such reform, and here we come to the heart of my topic tonight, for they argued over whether the project was the reformation of self or society. Was it the individual who had to be redirected or the society that had to be reconstructed? Another group, centered on Ripley and Brownson, argued that reform was most effective when self was subsumed into work for humanity. They stressed the brotherhood of man and outer-directed behavior for the common good, an ethic inherited from the civic republicanism of the post-evolutionary generation as well as from contemporary European socialism. He believed that only after an individual experiences the paradise within should he join with others, similarly enlightened, to restore the outer paradise. Only then would institutions, comprised as they were of discrete individuals, change. Admittedly, men and women at work together appear to accomplish more. Coupled with his frequent lecture series in Boston as well as individual appearances in cities and towns throughout the Northeast, for many people Emerson typified American Transcendentalism, even as others in the group began to condemn the egotism to which his ideas led. Even more problematic was his sense of what such beliefs implied for the nature of social reform. But other Transcendentalists lamented how such self-regard impeded response to pressing social problems. Channing also noted a constant danger that beset Transcendentalists: After resigning from the ministry Ripley tried to drum up support among his friends for a socialist commune. In particular, he sought the commitment of those like Emerson, Fuller, and Alcott in hopes that their endorsement would generate widespread interest in his plan. These individuals, however, proved

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recalcitrant. He doubted that any reform could occur by merely changing social arrangements and later started his own community, Fruitlands. She supported his plans but, like Alcott, wondered if they would bear lasting fruit. Failing to convince him in person, Ripley sent his cousin a long letter in which for the first time he detailed his goals for the community. The site of this socialist paradise was in then-rural West Roxbury, where a large dairy farm formed the basis of their labor and where they also operated a school for the children of members, and of others by tuition. Indeed, Emerson had his own, admittedly narrow, conception of the plight of labor and his complicity in it, which he described in a way that reveals a certain naivety and even moral obliquity. Consider now how other Transcendentalists understood the relation between self and society. Utterly reprehensible, then, were capitalists who perpetuated the wage system because it brought them great profit even as the true producers, the workers, suffered. Brownson rejected outright the individualism Emerson preached. The entire economic system, not the reading habits of its managers, had to be changed. He understood that the problems of the poor—their seemingly inexorable descent into crime, drunkenness, and prostitution—were caused as much by the complicity, and complacency, of the comfortable and well-off as to any personal faults. The battles against intemperance, and for prison reform and universal education, would only be won after Christians took control of corrupt political parties. Pointing to the election of 1840, in which in a hard-fought contest Whig candidate Zachary Taylor had defeated Democratic nominee Lewis Cass and Free Soil aspirant, Martin Van Buren, Parker approvingly observed that this election had proved what resolute men could do. Parker also inveighed against the war with Mexico, a boondoggle that eerily bears much comparison to our current situation in Iraq. Hitting his fellow citizens where it hurt, Parker asked if they realized the toll war would take on their purses. Add to this economic disruption the immense waste of goods and property, and the terrible loss of human life that accompanied the conflict, and they knew the true dogs of war were at their doors. Parker spoke to them not only as Americans but as Christians. Finally, Parker reminded them that war, horrible as it was, was not the worst calamity that could befall a nation. A good man had to speak out and vote against the slave power. By organized action, by voting corrupt politicians from power and putting in their placemen of character and conscience. Moving to New York, she became an advocate of the imprisoned, the mentally disabled, and those locked in the shackles of vice. Upon a subsequent trip to Europe to report on the democratic revolutions of 1848, she was converted to the socialism that had so long attracted Ripley and his cohort. In contrast, Emerson, who himself witnessed some of the revolutions while on a trip to the Continent, continued to trumpet the solid middle-class virtues of the English and those who he saw as their children, his fellow-Americans. But what happened next among the Transcendentalists as a group? Was this bifurcation healed? For a while, the movement held together, its members united by their opposition to the one overwhelming social problem of their time, slavery. Toward its abolition both sides united, speaking against it from their different viewpoints. Proponents of individual conscience believed they could convince Southern slaveholders to act as moral individuals to free their slaves; others worked tirelessly to sway politicians to legislate against the cursed form of labor. But, concomitantly, as the sectional crisis of the 1850s challenged Americans to confront the immense fact of chattel slavery, the larger, vital culture of social reform—that which had included agitation for the rights of women, labor, and the indigent, for example—was lost in the maelstrom, viewed as less significant than the horrors of the Southern plantation. Further, it was decades before such issues again became front and center, for in the post-Civil War era the uneasy balance between the parties of self and of society tipped irrevocably in the direction of the former, whose philosophy supported individual rights and market capitalism, or what is now called democratic liberalism, rather than humanitarian socialism. More and more, American Transcendentalism became identified with his vision of the imperial self, a process only accelerated after his death in 1842. What the nation remembered of Transcendentalism, in other words, was put to the use of embellishing the American dream of self-sufficiency so triumphant in the Gilded Age. If I were a Puritan minister, I would say, you have heard my text and its explication. Now comes the most important part, the application. Is the project reformation of self or society? But I cannot answer that for you. I only wish to observe that this fissure is not something that arose with the Transcendentalists. And yet

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both counsel an ethic diametrically opposed. We all know the most famous line from the former: Listen to his words. Wee must entertaine each other in brotherly affection. Now consider our other founding document, in which Jefferson declares that all men are created equal and have an inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Winthrop and Edwards both place Americans on a starting line and urge them to run toward a goal. And in his Treatise of the Religious Affections, in which he strived for those things which most identified true religion, declared as its highest sign, that true religion has its fruits in Christian practice. And so here is the greatest irony about the Transcendentalists, and perhaps their tragedy: Margaret Fuller drowned in a shipwreck as she was returning from Europe. Thoreau lived as a bachelor of nature in his beloved Concord. In one sense Transcendentalism offered perhaps the last best chance to inculcate social responsibility on a larger level. Respect for the self should indeed lead to respect and care for any and all others. But we are far from that state now. The world is judging our place in history, and, however special you think it is, we are being judged on our ability to understand, and on our commitment to, others not as fortunate as we are. For wee must consider that wee shall be as a citty upon a hill. Finally, let me remind you that in recent times this dream has still been alive. But we cannot dwell upon remembered glory. This eloquent individual was President Jimmy Carter, at his inauguration, thirty years ago. I leave you with this:

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