

I. Transcendentalism: The World as We Want It

Wouldn't it be great if we got as many chances as we needed until we got it right?

We've been talking about the worldviews that are all around you. You see them in popular culture: at the movies, in the music you listen to, even in television commercials. Worldviews are at the heart of politics and why certain politicians have certain views. Worldviews are at the core of what you are taught in your science and history classes — and what you are not taught.

The reason is, of course, that everyone has a worldview. And, almost everything that we do and say arises from our worldview. It's the way we answer the ultimate questions of origins, meaning, morality, and destiny.

We talked about Naturalism as a worldview. We called it "The World as We See It." Naturalism teaches there is no God, heaven, or hell, or anything that is not physical. You don't have a soul that continues on after you die in the naturalistic worldview.

The next worldview we are going to discuss is very similar to Naturalism, except it provides a spiritual dimension. This worldview is called Transcendentalism. We call it "The World as We Want It."

C.S. Lewis describes this worldview as, "the natural bent of the human mind." Why does he call it this? Because traditional religion, particularly of a Christian variety, teaches that humanity is sinful. Transcendentalism teaches the exact opposite: humanity is divine. Further, most forms of Transcendentalism teach that every person eventually makes it back to an existence of bliss. It may take 20, 50, a thousand, or an infinite number of lifetimes, but sooner or later everybody gets there. To describe this worldview in the short time we have is difficult, but I will try my best to give you the major points so that you can begin to understand and recognize Transcendentalism.

Let's look at our square again. If this square represents everything that exists, of course it contains the natural world. However, Transcendentalism teaches that the natural world is divine, that is, that everything that exists is "god." There is really nothing that exists that is not part or parcel of "god."

II. Transcendentalism: God, the World, and Me

It is important to note that God is not seen as a personal being in Transcendentalism. In fact, Transcendentalism teaches that “god” is an impersonal energy, force, power, or chi. This idea of “god” leaves little room for developing a relationship with Him. It is difficult to carry on a conversation with energy!

This energy or life force comprises what is ultimately real in the universe of Transcendentalism. Everything that we see and experience comes from this universal energy; it flows all around us and is within us. It is the animating force of everything in the universe. We only need to look within to connect with ultimate reality.

III. Transcendental Religions: Some Examples

For many of the transcendental religions, the physical world is an illusion. This doesn't mean that the physical world is not real, only that it is not ultimate reality. Ultimate truth is spiritual and goes deeper than our eyes can see.

So what does this mean for you personally? You are essentially spiritual. The spiritual “you” now inhabits the body that most people recognize as you. Who knows how many different bodies you've had over the past centuries or how many you will have in the future? Being confined to a physical body is not a good thing. The goal in most transcendental religions is to break out of this cycle of birth and rebirth sometimes called reincarnation and go back into that cosmic oneness. Different transcendental religions teach different ways of achieving this salvation. These religions, by the way, are embraced by billions of people, so understanding them is important if we want to have a worldview that truly encompasses the world.

The most common and well-known of the transcendental religions is **Hinduism**. Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world. Actually, Hinduism is really a family of religions that arose in India thousands of years ago. Hinduism calls the ultimate reality and force in the universe “Brahman”. Brahman is in everything.

Hinduism became popular in the U.S. and Britain after the Beatles went to Rishikesh, India, in 1968 to learn transcendental meditation. This meditation became popular and still is prevalent throughout the West. Many use it as a relaxation tool. Others use transcendental meditation to help them focus on the deeper areas of life. In fact, many Hindus believe that intense meditation on the

unity of all things will allow you to escape this world of illusions and return to the “One.”

Hinduism has neither founder nor specific beginning, but **Buddhism**, which grew out of Hinduism, had its beginning about 500 years before Christ. The ultimate goal in Buddhism is finding nirvana. The word “nirvana” is actually a negative term which means “blowing out”. The concept involves “blowing out” all of your personal desires so that you ultimately extinguish your own individual identity and become one with all things.

In Brad Pitt’s 1997 movie *Seven Years in Tibet*, the Buddhist workers digging the foundation for a theater stopped working because they came across earthworms in the soil. The young Dali Lama informed Pitt’s character that they could no longer dig in the soil because they might kill an earthworm and the earthworm “might have been your mother.”

Other Eastern religions that fall under the worldview of Transcendentalism are **Confucianism** in China and **Shintoism** in Japan. Now this, of course, in no way exhausts the literally thousands of religions that in one way or another arise from a transcendental worldview. But I hope you can see the essential features of each of these. Each of these answers some of the nagging questions that Naturalism has to leave open: questions regarding meaning and purpose in life, the nature of morality, and our desire for a positive destiny.

IV. Transcendentalism Answers the Ultimate Questions

Here’s how Transcendentalism answers the ultimate questions.

As far as origins are concerned, Transcendentalism teaches that the universe has always existed. The physical universe has not always been around, but it exists only through a mysterious unknown process.

Meaning in life is found in recognizing our own divinity and acknowledging the divinity of all things. Morality is different in each of the religions, but mostly they point to behaviors and attitudes of peace and oneness.

Destiny for the individual, for most transcendental religions, includes numerous incarnations until the cycle of birth and rebirth is broken through one of the many paths to enlightenment.

Many of you may know people who follow one of these Eastern religions now. The number of adherents to Hinduism and Buddhism particularly has risen in the United States dramatically. But what catches your attention even more are not the Hindus and Buddhists among us, but the Americans who have adapted the

transcendental worldview and Eastern religions into American forms. You'll be surprised at whom some of these people are and what they believe. Everything from horoscopes and astrology to numerology and tarot cards, the transcendental worldview is very much a part of our society.

In fact, Hollywood stars have been jumping on the transcendental bandwagon in record numbers. Scientology, kabala, Buddhism, and Wicca – all claim celebrities as followers.

It's easy to see why these approaches to life are popular. We get all the benefits of a religious feeling without any of the responsibility. No wonder C.S. Lewis called it "the natural bent of the human mind."

Both Naturalism and Transcendentalism tell us to look inside for answers. But maybe the answers are found in looking up.