

Similarities and Contrasts of Transcendentalism and other Ideologies

N. Ankanna
Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Yogi Vemana University, Kadapa.

Article History: Submitted-14/02/2021, Revised-24/02/2021, Accepted-25/02/2021, Published-28/02/2021.

Abstract:

Transcendentalism is a philosophical, aesthetic, and literary movement. It has been defined as the recognition of man's innate knowledge and this knowledge can transcend the senses. Transcendentalism is not a new ideology other writers, scholars and philosophers of the ancient and modern world have given innumerable aspects on this philosophy. This ideology is similar to some ideologies like Idealism & Romanticism and contrast to some ideologies like Materialism, Realism and Existentialism. The following are comparing and contrasting elaborations of Transcendentalism and other ideologies.

Keywords: Transcendentalism, innate knowledge and other ideologies.

Transcendentalism and Materialism

As the term states, materialism concentrates and asserts the importance of material things in one's existence. It is, in one sense, an optimistic viewpoint on the mere well-being of life. In other words, matter is significant and basic to the functioning of mind. It states that when matter is organized, mind feels settled. On the other hand, transcendentalism pays much attention to man's mind in nature around him with certain restricted regimen and decorum. These two ideologies are antonymous to each other.

In western countries, in particular, the Church and its occupational professionals like the Pope, Bishops and Priests were the upholder of the spiritual domain and the spiritual well-being of the society. The community, on the one hand, depends on the Church for fortifying of an individual's spirituality. The spiritual awareness and energy of godliness in a community is the responsibility of the religious authorities concerned. However, when the transcendental aspects

are separated and formed a different ideal approach to the betterment of human beings, materialism became its antonym. The Church remained an institution of spiritual life of man and transcendentalism has been thought as an individual matter that digresses from the main stream of religion or faith.

Materialism believes in the state of world as a gross material that has its own identity and entity. The ideology of materialism focuses on the nature of reality. To be clear and comprehensive, it believes that every object is made of matter which has energy sans such faiths like the existence of souls, gods and spirits. It is contrary to the metaphysics. It does not believe in a religious faith and neither does it have any ethics of life.

Transcendentalism goes higher in thought and the process of the formation of the universe. Materialism is one layer of the universe while the upper or the abstract layer is that of the metaphysical world that does not come in touch with the human beings. Being free from the material world is the aim of transcendental philosophy. For materialists, reality of the universe in the material structure is its core element whereas nature is everything for a transcendental believer.

Another name for materialism is *Physicalism*. Physique is the main matter that relates everything. Everything is intelligible in terms of some kind of material not in terms of any abstract entity. It is consciousness that brings home a train of thoughts.

Transcendentalism and Idealism

Idealism is a philosophical thought that propounds that reality has its origin in the mind. Material phenomena exist as long as the mental awareness exists. Consciousness is a basic component that mainly goes with materialism while the sentiment of divinity is the chief ingredient in nature. In simple terms, material existence needs consciousness.

On the contrary, idealism states that mind is the origin of the whole material world which can be conveniently divided into Subjective and Objective realities and there are certain principles to understand them. If a human being sees this world, when he is conscious, it is subjective and when he learns from others what they feel is objective. It stresses the point that

human beliefs, ideas and values mould a society. A transcendentalist posits subjective awareness and feeling in the divinity of nature.

An ideal life brings tranquility in society is the axiom of idealism in which the state of mind plays a decisive role because every action is an outcome of what we think. So our life is judged by what and how one feels and reacts to the functioning of the mind. The ideals one upholds are the ones that steer the vehicle of life. Idealism may be in the religious garb or in the open social setup. It does not refer to mind but to the lifestyle one maintains. Nature has no part to play here. In certain contexts, idealism may be absurd. The physical body has nothing to do with this philosophy. Man is only a creature who is controlled by mind. No one can escape it. Referring to the transcendental outlook, it says that mind can be molded if it is flanked by the natural environment.

For a transcendentalist, idealism is a foundational ideology on which the edifice of it rests firmly. An idealist is not concerned about the divinity of nature but he confines to his tailored and customized ideals. In individualism, divinity of nature is minus as the individual forms his own opinions and decisions whereas for a transcendentalist, nature is the be-all and end-all of his existence. Belief in God and his pervading universal Supremacy are the two core elements that transcend every living being. They love nature to a great extent. The sanctity found in the ambience of nature is unique. Individuals who have ideals to follow differ from those who base their belief on spirituality in nature.

Transcendentalism and Existentialism

Existentialism is the idea of existence in which the individual concentrates only on his living and what is beneficial to him thinking that 'A life of leisure is a life of pleasure'. Here, there is no role of nature and its resources. It is completely the opposite of transcendental thinking. An existentialist's stand is that individual is the unique agent who has every right to choose whatever he or she likes or needs. His choice depends on his experiences in society with people he comes across.

Transcendentalists believe that man and nature are pure and sacred; the only difference is that man becomes corrupt in the company of social, religious and political parties. Society, as an

institution, is not able to guard the sanctity of human beings as it is usually found adulterated. In the case of transcendental philosophy, it is the belief one has in the Supreme Power while existential ideology, the meaning and purpose of our life is what we give it; it is a personal matter. The transcendental school of thought essence of existence more significant, humans need the company of nature but existentialists are of the belief that human existence is more important than essence which is an abstract entity and there is absurdity in pondering over it.

In a nutshell, life is absurd in the eyes of an existentialist whereas life becomes divine if one takes the help of nature.

- Wealth, pleasure or honour make the good life;
- Social values and structure control the individual;
- Accept what is and that is enough in life;
- Science can and will make everything better;
- People are basically good but ruined by society or external forces;
- 'I want my way, now!' or 'It is not my fault' mentality. (perzi.com)

On the contrary, transcendentalism:

is a philosophy that emphasizes the prior conditions of knowledge and experience of the unknowable character of ultimate reality or that emphasizes the transcendent as the fundamental reality which is fancy talk for believing that there is a divine 'Over-soul' through which everything from rocks, trees, fishes, clouds, and people are connected. The philosophy advocates that the more urban and technologically advanced humans become, the more we pull away from that connection with the universe. (Splitlip's blog)

Transcendental Existentialism

Man has always been inquiring into the ways and means of purposefulness and human well being. Thus, he has been opening innovative and conducive windows towards novel findings and suppositions. One of them is transcendental existentialism in which Death has a crucial role as it ends human existence. Therefore, man comes across his end surpassed or transcended by Almighty, Omnipresent and Omniscient Power. Life ceases when death

overcomes it. Cessation of life and overcoming of the Invincible Energy is the essence of transcendental existentialism.

Transcendentalism and Realism

The proposition ‘In matter, there is no mind’ is the basic and logical statement stressed by the proponents of realism. In other words, every living object or thing is an entity of some reality. The world exists irrespective of a person’s existence. Reality of a thing, living or non-living, is genuine whether one feels it or not. Transcendentalists argue that nature is also a reality that influences human life. This aspect found in nature is ignored by the realists who focus only on humanity. If the notion of truth is upheld, there are two things: one is what is perceived and what is not perceived. However, both are real.

In the backdrop of the above elucidation, the two ideologies have a couple of nuances which are both similar and contrasting. For realism, life in society has two faces of a coin: one is man’s better life and another is his plight. For a transcendental believer, both are realities but life in nature is the cure-all.

Realism rejects all idealistic and philosophical thoughts; may it be ethics or aesthetics:

The question of the nature and plausibility of realism arises with respect to a large number of subject matters, including ethics, aesthetics, causation, modality, science, mathematics, semantics, and the everyday world of macroscopic material objects and their properties. Although it would be possible to accept (or reject) realism across the board, it is more common for philosophers to be selectively realist or non-realist about various topics: thus it would be perfectly possible to be a realist about the everyday world of macroscopic objects and their properties, but a non-realist about aesthetic and moral value. (Online article)

Transcendentalism mainly depends on the inference that Nature is superior to man owing to the fact that it is divine. There are two concepts in every ideology: Concrete concepts and Abstract Concepts. Materialism and Realism belong to what is materialistic and Transcendentalism concerns the domain of individual’s realism and being one with Nature as a

Symbol of Divinity. When one stays tuned with nature, he receives certain sentiments and reactions that create aesthetic experiences.

Transcendental Realism

Human perception understands the existence and essence of nature and its effectiveness on human beings. This comprehension is also realistic in the sense that human mind is able to connect itself to the outer world and its impact on it. Realism is a term that can be applied to any discipline or ism and its denotation is relevant to the situation it refers to.

Transcendentalism and Romanticism

All philosophies aim at bettering and improving human life. Nature is not lifeless and the universe has an interconnection among various and varied animate and inanimate things. Human reasoning perceives reality through subjective means which conforms to the personal matter rather than comprehending the outer world from outside. Nature can be feasibly experienced without any obstruction. There are four major differences. They are:

1. Romanticism brings out the subjective feelings and emotions while transcendentalism is the knowledgeable power that transcends realistic feelings that heightens him to a spiritual level;
2. In the Romantic philosophy, there are only two things: Individual and Nature when there are three factors: Individual, Nature and Divinity;
3. Romanticism may be one-to-one contact with nature while transcendentalism is a power that enables one to reach the boundaries beyond human reasoning;
4. Romanticism does not take God into consideration as an Omnipotent Reality.
5. Transcendentalism literature is very sensible and creates an exaggeration on good vs. evil. Ralph Waldo Emerson is one of the most famous of the transcendentalists. He believed that wisdom with self-realization are the keys for growth. The lack of self growth and terror amongst fellows generates evil, while happiness and generosity are the good results of an act.

Romanticism speaks of the beauty of nature and its inspirational quality for man. It has fantastical situations in which a human being can allow himself to be excited in the context of nature. This is his experiences in a natural atmosphere. However, transcendental aspect is that man can learn from Nature and it is a good guide too.

Transcendentalism and Yoga

Yogic philosophy is the same as that of transcendentalism and vice versa. The spiritual aspect of man's life is more a deciding factor in Yogic literature. Yoga is a systematic approach to life through strict observance of certain principles that ask man to shun and he has to abstain from them. Transcendental ideology is a part of Yogic principles and way of life. There are eight steps which stabilize man's existence towards achieving salvation. Nature is a core subject in the content of Vedic way of life.

Transcendentalism and Individualism

Individualism is the attitude or ideology that shows an individual to possess the habit or principle of being free and self-sufficient and reliant. An individual who thinks that he is independent and self-sufficient deals with his personal matters. Individualism emphasizes the significance of one's decision-making. He who does not follow the social rules, principles and laws, designs and sticks to certain customized tenets of individualistic philosophy. He does not think of the values other have.

The man who concentrates only on his well being; he thinks that he is unique and does not depend on others. The profound connotation is that he is free to choose and abide by the tenets of any religion or faith. Practice of any religion is their personal option. This concept holds that a person who belongs to a society acts upon his own personal interests sans restricting himself to one particular thought, faith or philosophy. On the other hand, he entertains several beliefs i.e., an amalgamation of different thoughts and beliefs. He does not believe in the social strata neither does he connect himself of the societal classification of people on the basis of their faiths.

The difference and link between Transcendentalism and individualism is that individualism develops into transcendentalist philosophy when an individual surrenders to the natural system of the universe and feels healthy and happy among the objects and scenes of nature. Individualistic approach to life has pros and cons; it depends on the situations and the person one is dealing with. The ideology enables one to act according to one's choice and autonomy. Freedom of option is the facility one has. In a nutshell, it results in self-efficacy.

The transcendentalists developed a new and fascinating conception of good life, characterized by self-trust, a joyous love of beauty and an earnest altruism. Transcendentalism had a primitive beginning through the actions and interactions between various ideologies and other forces. The ideology rejected anything which institutionalize human spirit.

Works Cited:

Gura F. Philip. "American Transcendentalism," A History. Hill and Wang, First paperback edition, 2008.

[prezi.com > existentialism-and-transcendentalism](https://prezi.com/.../existentialism-and-transcendentalism)

Transcendentalism Vs. Existentialism, Splitlip's Blog

Realism, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Online, 2002