

The Essays Of Henry David Thoreau And Ralph Waldo Emerson

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Thoreau, Emerson, and the Foundations of Transcendentalism

Henry [David Thoreau](#) and Ralph [Waldo Emerson](#) are early transcendentalists of the early 1800s. They wrote essays and lectures in support of this philosophy. Thoreau went further and lived at Walden Pond to find the meaning of life. Among the essays that Emerson has written are “Self-Reliance,” which was published in 1841 and “Nature”. (“Emerson & Thoreau: Figures of Friendship,” 2009; Emerson, 2009; Emerson & Appelbaum, 1993)

Both Emerson and Thoreau support the idea that people ought to live as individual persons, portraying their independent thoughts and ideas. Emerson argues that for a person to live wholly, they need not blend into what everyone else in society is doing, but instead, they should be guided by their instincts and intuition. He says that freedom is required to express individuality in persons. (Emerson & Appelbaum, 1993)

Emerson and Thoreau also address the changes that need to be made in society to bring about the freedom of individuality. While Emerson focuses on the changes that one needs to make in one’s own life, Thoreau, on the other hand, focuses on the things that an individual is required to do to change society. Emerson says that people who follow others “kill” their own lives by actually living out what they are not. He advocates for people to lead rather than follow others. He supports independence. (“Emerson & Thoreau: Figures of Friendship,” 2009; Emerson & Appelbaum, 1993)

Solitude, Self-Reliance, and the Discovery of Inner Truth

Similarly, Emerson and Thoreau share the idea that people learn much by themselves by existing in solitude. The more they get into the world and follow the simple majority, the voice of enlightenment within them is dimmed and can no longer be heard. Thus, people lose their selves. Emerson and Thoreau believe that everyone has a soul to build or destroy. They think that the soul is more valuable than any other thing that humanity pursues. Emerson says that to be excellent means never to be understood by everyone and that we ought to live not to please the world but to live out reality and bring out the individuality in our being. (“Emerson & Thoreau: Figures of Friendship,” 2009; Emerson & Appelbaum, 1993)

In “Nature,” Emerson says that for us to experience the wholeness of life, we need to interact with nature, and we need to isolate ourselves from the world and learn from nature itself. He writes that the demands of the world distract our souls from living life in its wholeness. Whereas plants keep giving, humanity fails to reciprocate and learn from the lessons that it renders to us. To support this idea of nature, Thoreau goes to live at Walden Pond, where he discovers that simple life in man’s physical aspects deepens the mind and soul to its fullest potential. He realizes that nature enables us to be independent and make our own choices. He writes that nature develops our imagination and builds us up to pure power. (“Emerson & Thoreau: Figures of Friendship,” 2009; Emerson, 2009)

Emerson and Thoreau suggest that nature is the lesson book that everyone should learn from. Emerson, in “Nature,” says that nature alone has everything that humanity needs to learn. The only thing that one is required to do is isolate oneself from the world, go deep into nature, think independently, and then allow nature to give lessons. Nature has a language that speaks to the soul. It provides experiences that no other source can provide. It teaches patience, selflessness, and service. It gives a deep impression on the human mind concerning simple details in life and improves creativity. (Emerson, 2009)

Nature as a Source of Spiritual and Moral Renewal

Emerson and Thoreau also address the way in which nature is useful to humanity. Emerson states that while the world drains the human soul of its value, nature nourishes it. He goes on to further say that all the parts of nature work together for the ultimate profit of man. While the wind sows the seed, the sun evaporates the sea, the wind blows the vapour to the field, the ice condenses the rain, and the rain feeds the plant, which ultimately feeds humanity. This is the endless circle through which nature works to feed man. In essence, nature provides beauty, discipline, language, and commodity to man. (Emerson, 2009)

Emerson says that for men to interact with nature, they need separation and solitude from the world. It is the only way that a person can be able to engage fully in nature. When one is in a pure, quiet spirit, nature is everything. In this solitary moment with nature, man learns ideas independent of other people. They learn self-reliance as well as coming up with ideas and implementing them. Identifying problems and getting the strength, nerve, and stamina to solve them without despair. Nature fastens the material man requires to handle life appropriately. It gives simplicity, purity, and wholeness of life. (Emerson, 2009; Emerson & Appelbaum, 1993)

The whole idea brought out by Thoreau is that man needs to learn independence, and then the world will be diverse. People need to shun peer pressure and influence in the kind of lifestyle they lead. If the world had every person living out who they are and pursuing to add value to the soul, then society would be a better place. (“Emerson & Thoreau: Figures of Friendship,” 2009)

Patience, Growth, and the Lessons of the Natural World

A man learns to give what is required of them in due time through the lessons of nature, which plants blossom and give fruit in due season. Forbearance in pain is learned through the painful pruning process that ultimately leads to abundant, healthy produce. Dependence and trust in God are also learned from the reliance on plants for the rain and sunshine from above. Language is learned from the blossoming flowers, thistles and thorns. Hope in adversity is learned from the stump of a tree which still blossoms. All these, rightly employed, package humanity into completeness and pure power. (Emerson, 2009)

The essays of Emerson and Thoreau address an essential aspect of society today which is always ignored. Parents are called to bring up their children in a manner that will be able to foster individuality around them and avoid peer influence. This will be instrumental in building a robust and morally upright society.

Works Cited

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