

American Transcendentalism: A Liberty Lesson and Individual Reforms

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RESUME :Cet article examine la contribution des Transcendantalistes dans la création d'un individualisme américain et des réformes sociales et culturelles en vue de réorienter les engagements politiques. En tant que réformateurs sociaux, les Transcendantalistes se sont démarqués du conformisme et des normes culturelles standards en prônant le libéralisme et des réformes sociales, tout comme l'auto-développement individuel. Cet apport réformateur et transformatif de l'après-guerre vient en appoint d'une Amérique indépendante résolument tournée vers l'avenir avec des villes industrialisées et une société urbaine culturellement et religieusement pluraliste. A travers des réformes sociales et politiques, les Transcendantalistes incarnèrent une Amérique nouvelle basée sur la certitude morale, le génie individuel et l'autonomie en actions et aux croyances collectives.
Mots clés :*Transcendantalisme, sublimation, Liberté, Individuel, Réformes, confiance en soi.*

ABSTRACT :This article examines the contribution of Transcendentalists in the creation of American individualism and social and cultural reforms with a view to reorienting political commitments. As social reformers, Transcendentalists broke away from conformity and standard cultural norms by advocating liberalism and social reforms, as well as individual self-development. This reforming and transformative contribution of the post-war period complements an independent America resolutely turned towards the future with industrialized cities and a culturally and religiously pluralistic urban society. Through social and political reforms, the Transcendentalists embodied a new America based on moral certainty, individual genius and autonomy in actions and collective beliefs.

Keywords:*Transcendentalism, sublimation, Liberty, Individual, Reforms, Self-reliance.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In any political, intellectual and social movements as well as in religious domain, ideologies constitute a cornerstone on which all theories rest to promote not only the ideas but also to perpetuate them as long as possible. Supported and dubbed by its theorists, ideologies become labels to which the followers and supporters identify themselves.

As an outstanding political, philosophical, religious and literary revolutionary movement, Transcendentalism contended the oneness of God and supported His presence in every element in Nature while celebrating the divine equality of each soul. This new philosophical orientation also brought the movement to muse upon social reforms which, necessarily, would pass through individual reforms. For, the idea according to which all men are spiritually created equal and endowed with the same unalienable rights by the Creator implies that they all deserve to be treated with social and political equality. In this, transcendentalists advocate individual reforms which, necessarily, would lead to social reforms. It is in that sense that Ralph Waldo Emerson and his friend Henry Davie Thoreau, just to name these, invited individuals to adopt inner reforms in order to improve the self and society along moral attitudes through their writings.

But it must be recognized that such far-reaching reforms cannot take place without having major consequences in the society as Transcendentalists resolved to rush into a new dynamic to reverse the tendencies that prevented each individual from being aware of his fully potential values. Such is the fundamental question that we will try to analyze in the course of our reflection.

I- TRANSCENDENTALISM AS A LIBERTY LESSON

1.1. Sublimation of the American Self

In the history of humanity, man has always built his present on the ruins of the past and from the top of his contemporary building he makes future prospects. That is a classical method that man had adopted and has still been adopting as it cannot be possible to carry out one's work from nothingness. But this fact will bring us

to muse upon what might be our current world when humanity remained cloister in the ruins of the past instead of making effort by drawing inspiration from the past so as to be the author of his own history. Men in the past are for their people consciousness rousers. That is why their words and their actions they addressed their fellow men seemed to galvanic energies. Nevertheless, these well-informed men happened to be misunderstood in their seeming-like disturbing ideas in some people's eyes. But as a thrown back stone which becomes the angular one, their messages turned into luminous energy lightening their consciousness and what was considered as a seeming like truth appeared as a revelation. That is why, without any exaggeration, we can be tempted to assimilate the transcendentalists as "prophets" in their reformatory mission and their books as "revelations" in their own epoch.

That is in this vein that Emerson developed the germs of free thinking stemming from his individualistic and practical reformation. His reformatory mission did not consist in outlining subversive reforms which might sap the foundations of the new nation's unity, a "nation of nations" but rather a pacific, and love which he esteems to be favorable to individual inspiration. That is why he considers the past as an inspirational source and not harvest which could nourish the present. That is why in this sense that he develops a philosophy of self hence his essay entitled *Self-Reliance* which will inspire us through our reflection.

Without any willingness or what seems like to be an intentioned exaggeration, you can bear me out that Emerson's sublimation of self begins with the unity and the purity of his religious life. This dualistic complicity between unity and his spiritual life can be found in his work because that is with the same sentiment of confidence, and sincerity, and belief that his life and his work form perfectly their harmony. Emerson as a prophet of his time had a clear consciousness of aspirations which were tormenting his contemporaries and he managed to discover the sense. He would surprise his people for, despite his transcendental philosophy which comes to revolutionize his epoch, his genius rests on an ordinary and pacific virtue.

From this state of fact, Emerson descends into himself in order to discover the inner law which makes his life authentic. And to carry out this purpose, he feels the necessity to go down to nature which its beauty represents this brilliant and symbolical veil that hides not only the approaches of his purpose but also all his reflection, and observations. And in doing so, Emerson discovers through nature all the foundation of his pure reason and his true-seeking. And Hamadi Ben Jaballah in *Le Fondement du Savoir dans la Critique Pure* (1997) declared:

Si nous avons choisi de penser à ce problème, c'est parce que toute réflexion authentiquement philosophique est, pour l'essentiel, une réflexion qui se rapporte non à ce que l'on sait mais au fondement de ce que l'on sait¹.

(our translation) If we have chosen to think about this problem, it is because any authentically philosophical reflection is, essentially, a reflection which relates not to what we know but to the foundation of what we know.

Hamadi was fundamentally preoccupied by the necessity of an authentic knowledge stemming not from what can be termed pre-established knowledge but from the foundation of this very knowledge. In this fact, Emerson looks around himself, and penetrates the mystery of nature from which he draws energy in order to endow man with a new effigy of truth inspired by nature's purity. Emerson invites his contemporaries to trust themselves. He averred in *Self-Reliance: To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men*². In this statement, Emerson highlights the inner light of each individual. For, when thoughts are pure, actions that will follow are pure. That is why he demands a return to our private heart in order to better know our inner self and understand the world around us. That is in this willingness that we can transfigure our beings into creating individual genius to which virtue is an adherent helping the individual to transcend the mass and to perform an individual practical actions according to the principles of his moral sentiment.

Emerson then sees himself as a part of the system that composes the universe. And like the sun and the light which operate according to the laws of nature, he believes to have a specific role to perform for the good harmonization of the universe. He then invites all men to trust themselves, for it is in self-reliance that man, inspired by intuition, will be established on solid basis. That is why in his prophetic mission of guiding people to transcend the ordinary world to the one of truth for the individual development that Emerson calls on people to believe in themselves. He resolves himself to touch his fellow citizen's hearts in order to make them vibrate in unison. But this harmonization of hearts requires, above all, a new code of conduct, that is, to see in oneself one's neighbor all inspired by the Over-Soul. He said in *The American Scholar* (1836), *A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men*³.

¹ Hamadi Ben Jaballah, *Le Fondement du Savoir dans la Critique de la Raison Pure*, Les Editions de la Méditerranée, Tunis, 1997. p.09.

² Lazer Ziff, Ralph Waldo Emerson: *Selected Essays*, Edited with an Introduction by Larzer Ziff, Penguin Books, New York. p.175.

³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, op.cit.p.106.

In fact, by going deeper into the secret of his own spirit, man will descend also into the deepest secret of his fellow spirit. And deeper he will go into himself, clearer truth will be and its universality will embrace all humanity. Then we follow the impulse of our character, universal truth becomes obvious and our actions inspired by our intuition will sublimate all our noble efforts; and in the heart of individual whose thought and action are inscribed on truth, will flow the divine source. And being not able to resist to this celestial force, man obeys to the Supreme law which will decree him the way of his elevation. So we can understand whereby that some of our daily actions are far from favoring our elevation and therefore these actions become of no effect. But when we obey our inspired intuition and inscribe our actions on the supreme law, then we become actors and our personal commitment will but reinforce our selfhood.

In a nutshell, Emerson then advocates an individualism which will manage to dispense with empirical knowledge by favoring reason in all his actions. Since our passions can mislead us from our prime purpose, then it is essential that we resort to wisdom in order to strive for perfection. So, Emerson, through his works, promotes individual reforms, which is able to transcend all trivialities. The individual genius to which Emerson stood for is the one which the purpose consists in helping see and face daily realities and live truth that. For with real inner individual reforms, comes the transfiguration of the soul and therefore man becomes a star illuminating the world. But all this is only possible when we believe in the power of self-reliance.

1.2. The Power of Self-Reliance

It is commonly admitted that every person is countable for his own acts, and therefore he is responsible for his own life and for his acts. The idea according to which self-reliance proves essential for individual development, demonstrates Emerson's commitment to liberating man from the grip of society. But though Emerson brought the concept of self-reliance in the general public in his essay *Self-Reliance* (1841), it is necessary to recognize that the concept is not a new neology in the popular consciousness. And by denouncing and rejecting non-conformism he thought it to be a break necessary for individual liberty and genius creativity. Emerson tried to put self-reliance in parallel with the potential implication of self-worth, self-trust and self-acceptance which are the preamble of individual liberty and genius creativity for individual advancement. And to remove any ambiguity relating to this subject, Emerson defined self-reliance as being not about financial independent, or going it alone in his life, or enduring all the hardships that we face alone in front of us, but rather the ability of man to follow his heart and intuition. So, Emerson believed that the time has come we do everything ourselves. Through our investigations, we will try to demonstrate what being self-reliance really refer to, and how it can help to self-accomplishment.

If Emerson was much considered as a heretic by his fellow clergymen, it is undoubtedly because of his radical and unilateral position with regard to the Unitarian Church. This new way of considering the Revelation and the close relationship between the "Over-Soul", Nature, and the individual, "brought about in Emerson a new spiritual and philosophical reorientation. Because by resolving himself to turn back to old fashions of Christian styles while framing a new way of thinking and doing based on his divine-inspired intuition, Emerson refined a new vertical relationship between man and the Over-Soul. He was against Christian old-fashioned opinions and beliefs to which he opposed radically an "anti". In considering the transcendence of the Revelation through all epochs, Emerson called upon seeking God, not beyond ourselves but rather in ourselves by looking inward. And by saying that "Through me, God acts; through me, He speaks," Emerson meant that in every one of us resides a parcel of God and that through this divine parcel, God manifests Himself. That is why he suggested an inner reforms by starting with theorizing the principle of trust. He said:

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, and the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers, and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort, and advancing on Chaos and the Dark⁴.

Through this passage, Emerson starts by asking everyone to trust himself. He reminds to each individual of their particularity and their connection with the Divine. His call for individuals to transcend the commonplace with the highest mind reveals the dimension of man as a spiritual being with a human experience.

For Emerson, Self-trust is the starting point of any change and progress. That is why he invites men to be guides, and redeemers. But to get there, suggests to be brave to express ideas and opinions without worrying about how your ideas and opinions will be perceived by others because by refusing to express thoughts for fear of being frowned upon by the mass popular, it is clear that man will lose the place that the divine providence has placed him and therefore will not live a satisfying or gratifying life

⁴Lazer Ziff, Ralph Waldo Emerson: *Selected Essays*, op.cit. p.177.

Self-reliance is more than an attitude, it is also a life style, and a philosophy which we have to live with. It is an individual capacity of personal judgment and the power to put forward one's ideas, to defend one's opinions and beliefs. In other words, it is the attitude of man to follow his heart and intuition.

In fact, man was born with a natural talent, a creative genius. But this innate intrinsic treasure is often buried by popular belief or the tyranny of the society. To believe it, man is the physical expression of the non-physical dimension. He is born with the ability to create and to co-create in this space-time dimension. In this sense, William James, in his book *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) wrote:

Man is born with a tendency to do more things than he has ready arrangement for in his nerve-centres. Most of the performances of other animals are automatic. But in him the number of them is so enormous, that most of them must be the fruit of painful study. If practice did not make perfect, nor habit economize the expense of nervous and muscular energy, he would therefore be in a sorrow plight⁵

The notion according to which we are all created to the image and the likeness of God corroborates the thesis of man's inner talent, genius creativity. By supporting the inner tendency of man to do more thing than expected to, William James was not reinventing the wheel but did remind that man hides a creative genius, and it does not matter whether he is called genius. As it turns out, many were casting doubt on the relevancy of such an individual reform. However, it is noted with bitterness and desolation of the destructive power of the mass popular. That is why it is important to work on individual reforms in order to give to everyone the possibility to take all his responsibilities to act in harmony with the world around him.

In fact, this individual instinct and spontaneity prove to be sources of man's knowledge, which stems from man wrought-divine soul. Emerson eagerly aspires to individual reform and bravely proclaims individuals to disaccustom themselves to history and create their own one to meet the urging needs of his fellow men and women. That is why in his bold individual reform, Emerson invites every single individual to return back not only to active instinct, but also to lively spontaneity.

Emerson exhorts individuals to point directly their eyes on the future, and go forward, instead of starrng of the way of the past. In that sense, we understand Emerson's enthusiasm, which is the origin of his manifest, the famous speech he entitles *The American Scholar*, an oration delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society on August, 31st 1837 through which he calls all Americans mutually prone to dispense with tradition. Through this new philosophy, Emerson was justifying his new irreducible trend on which Americans must inscribe their actions, and with a prophetic voice, he was shouting through individual's desert heart, and inviting them to level the mountains of the past which stood before them eyes and that prevent them from seeing the gleams of the remote horizon. He invites individuals to descend deep inside of themselves, and listen to their inner voices, which advocates the superiority of man over the world, which made Emerson declared tat:

If there be one lesson more than another which should pierce his ear, it is, the world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all; it is for you to dare all⁶.

Emerson then comes as a liberator who brings to the American genius a new life code according to which dignity and omnipotence of the American scholars are valued. He averred in *The American Scholar: We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe*⁷. Through this declaration, Emerson raised a corner of the veil and made us understand that the American scholars were totally independent from Europe, and that the time has come to do things of their own by trusting and relying on themselves. They were seeing with foreign eyes, and nourishing their ideas with foreign thoughts. That is this state of fact that Emerson was questioning while inviting his fellow contemporary sisters and brothers, and friends to know that intellectual dependence is but a disgrace and that they must walk with their own feet, and think and act according to their intuition, and work with their own hands, and adore the Supreme God according to inner revelation.

All this being said, we understand with ease that self-reliance is a cardinal virtue in the life and conduct of each individual in his daily life and that individual human beings must equip themselves with it to make a difference by creating and innovating.

That being said, it is up to each and every one of us to make it our own and to make a philosophy of our lives for, it allows us to have a realistic vision of our abilities. Being self-reliant gives us the opportunity to manage our emotions in order to meet our expectations. For, when we trust ourselves and listen to the inner vibrations of our intuition then, we give ourselves the ability to make decisions and to take the path to success. But for this life project to bear fruit, individual reforms are necessary, hence our next reflection.

II- TRANSCENDENTALISM: COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL REFORMS

⁵William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1, New York, Henry Holt Company, 1890, p.113.

⁶Lazer Ziff, *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Essay*, op. cit. p.p. 103-4.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 104.

2.1.From Collective to IndividualReform

In a perspective to better understand the philosophy of individualism advocated by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, it seems important to trace it back to post-revolutionary war. At that period of the New Nation a lot of ideology and concepts of life are spreading. In politics as well as in literature, the experience of democracy and individualism brought the political actors, the writers to focus on personal experience, emotions, and love of the country that could be found in most of the literature still under the influence Europe.

But as a Nation and Republic, this period constitutes a turning pointfor the new nation and the Americans.They had to then, notto write their history, but rather to create it, not to remain with the orthodoxy of the Western model of society, but to redefine the plural and diverse society its depth, not to forge a new society based on collectivism, but on individualism. It is this context that the transcendentalistscome together to deal with all the problems that concernsAmerica and the American People. It isin this sense thattheTranscendentalists advocate individualism instead of collectivism.

But to better elaborate our approach and to frame our subject, we will be attemptingto investigatethe individualismto which the Transcendentalists referred to, to study its characteristic features,and to surround the area within whichit applies to.

It is commonly said that” good sense is the thing the most shared. Based on this saying, we can bow to the fact that in coercing a man, we undoubtedly deprive him of freedom or liberty. But to better frame our reflection, it seems essential to remove the nuance between the two concepts:that is, freedom and liberty. According to the Oxford dictionary, freedom is definedas “The power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants” while liberty is defined as “The state of being free within society from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority on one’s way of life, behavior, or political views”. Both, its definition further supports our understanding of the nuances of both concepts. For, moralists in human history and political theorists alike have written a lot of ink on this subject. In fact, our goal is not to focus on the senses of the two protean words but to make a connection between them and to examine their essence and their impacts on individual human being.For a better approach of our topic, we will frame our reflection on the transcendentalist’s period in order to demonstrate the individualism to which they referred to, and to analyze the impact of this individualism in the American populations politically and religiously, and socially.

As the champion of democracy, the United States of America cherishes the concept and identify themselves withit. Built on this ideological concept, the country becomes a laboratory of Democracy and a defender of freedom and liberty. This new configuration of the new Republic and the Nation makes it a country where any individual aspiration can turn a reality. However, the reality was quite different insofar as the country, despite attempts to turn its back on the past and to open a new one in its history, was struggling to depart from the tradition inherited from the Western world.In such a particular context where the new country was resolutely turned towards the future by trying not to write, but to create its own history, and to frame its own identity, it is obvious that individual liberty and reforms become an imperative in the same line with the new march of the country. in fact, promoting and standing for one’s position in the world which is constantly trying to make you something else is the first struggle to which the leading figure of the Transcendentalists holds as a fundamental principle. But as much Emerson advocates individualism, as much he recognizes that it will never be easy to be effectively applied to such a society where poverty struck the major part of the society and that individuals cornered between governmental tax dollar control and individual yearning to remain free, such as Henry David Thoreau experienced it in Walden;or Life in the Woods. In fact, being individual can be considered as being against the very interests and beliefs that society holds dear and therefore, individual actions appear as factors of disintegration to collective society in which you have been constantly made a subject, a follower and a learner. In this sense Emerson writes;

It is harder because you will always find those who think they know what your duty is better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude⁸

At the very beginning, Emerson knows that trying to be who you really are and to remain oneself in a world which seeks to dominate and make you something else by making you believe and live after the world’s opinion, will not be a piece of cake. For, by shielding away from conformism and rejecting traditions, authority, and customs, he seems to be in contrast of the society in which moves about.

In fact, the question that keeps on haunting Emerson’s mind is that whether we, as individual human beings, have to merge to the mass popular, be alike, and be intellectually sluggard and non-productive or to wide awake to do things of our own despite particular considerations. Thoreau supported strongly Emerson’s philosophy and went further in the same logic by declaring that:

⁸Lazer Ziff, Ralph Waldo Emerson: *Selected Essays*, op.cit. p. 181.

We must learn to awaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious elevator.⁹

Thoreau invited to conscience awakening, to individual responsibility and to personal efforts. This could be remarked with his experience in *Life in the Wood*. His stay in the wood clearly demonstrated the philosophy of individualism which energetically Emerson advocates. But it must be admitted that his experience through the building of the cottage also reveals a second facet of his being. But despite his helpless and fragile condition, Thoreau calls upon for an individual awakening amidst the millions of people who, mechanically, implement their daily duties. By inviting to an individual awakening, Henry David Thoreau believe people should think for themselves and to be “men first, and then subject afterwards”, that is to say to be man thinking first, and the authors of their own works. In this sense Thoreau writes;

The millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred million to a poetic or a divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?¹⁰

Through this passage, Thoreau overtly demonstrates the great mistake or the purposely intended individual robotics or manipulation to which millions of people are subject to today. That is why Thoreau calls upon individual reforms and changes by advocating an individualism which makes the individual its main focus, which proves to be the preamble of individual germinating importance in the quest for individual self and the struggle for liberation. By doing so, he invites individual human beings to follow the path towards self-creation and experimentation.

In fact, Emerson did not call for an individual human beings' perfection, which would be a utopia, but rather to an individual self-examination, and self-reliance capable of helping the individual to make one's actions dependent on his own key principles. Moreover, he invites individual human beings not to be their own light, but a heavenly body which enlightens the other celestial bodies around, not to show the straight road, but a be the straight and inspiring road for others. This is why he says:

I will not dissemble any hope that each person whom I address has felt this own call to cast aside all evil customs, timidities, and limitations, and to be in his place a free and helpful man, a reformer, a benefactor, not content to slip along through the world like a footman or a spy, escaping by his nimbleness and apologies as many knocks as he can, but a brave and upright man, who must find or cut a straightroad to everything excellent in the earth, and not only go honorably himself, but make it easier for all who follow him to go in honor and with benefit¹¹.

Emerson promotes individual human beings as an ideal, nay even a virtue. By suggesting a new way thinking and acting within the community, he advocates an individualism that tends to free man from the tyranny of the society, and from dependence which is, for him, a state of degradation fraught with disgrace.

The question of individualism is one of the themes that the transcendentalists advocated in the nineteenth century. Emerson and Thoreau made it a *sine qua non* for the individual to regain his freedom to do and act according to his own convictions.

In conclusion, breaking away from the mass popular to make your own way can be considered the first attempt which leads to individual progress and human advancement. Individualism being essential element of identity, the Transcendentalists level the way to American intellectuals' independence by ringing the national bell of inner revolution. The Transcendentalists' enthusiasm was very great because the new Nation needed new things, and that its population could no longer continue to be fed with foreign thoughts and most importantly its inheritance resembled much more to bondage than tradition. This is why they advocate individual that will naturally lead to collective reforms.

2.2. Social and Political Reforms

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the American society went through unprecedented political, economic, spiritual and social changes. The very young country should conform its national sovereignty with strong and sustainable institutions, build its own history, forge a national culture, intelligently manage the particular interests of the states, and implement the principle of inalienable rights enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, which stipulates that “all men are born equal and that they are endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable Right, that among these are, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”. Beyond the thorny

⁹Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concorde and Merrimack Rivers Walden; or Life in the Woods The Main Woods Cape Cod*, The Library of America, New York, p.394.

¹⁰Henry David Thoreau, *op.cit.* p. 394.

¹¹Lazer Ziff, *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Essay*, *op. cit.* p.130.

issue of the rights of slavery, the young Nation and Republic should deal with a thorny issue of the nagging question of women and the Indian, a worrying situation which, unfortunately, was not on the agenda.

Marked by endless compromises to balance political power between North and South, and free and slave states, this age was also the one of reform movements. And for good reason, the new country was going through cultural, social, and political inequalities, which further fueled the indignation of people who were not even able to make themselves heard effectively in the Congress in charge of elaborating, discussing, and voting laws. It is in that context that the Transcendentalists raised with hue and cry to denounce this social, cultural and political injustice by proposing instead social and political reforms.

How was one to act effectively, then? Small but vocal reforms were generally the path; speeches were made, easy were written, and some people even totally rearranged their lives, establishing small communities to correct problems in education, family and class structures, including sexual and gender norms. Another solution was to go West, looking for freedoms that seemed to be denied in the east, but anarchic lawlessness often replaced the traditional forms of government. Small inroads were made here and there, but certainly not enough to make the sort of changes that would prevent the Civil War.

Reshaping and reforming culturally accepted laws and norms in light of new cultural paradigms through which constituted a commitment. Supplementing this social reforms the idea social reform can occur at local, regional, national, or even global level. The most effective means of achieving social reform is through social movements, which Emerson early understood and advocated

When the Transcendentalists propounded the concept of individualism, it might shock anyone because of its singular character. For, advocating individualism in a society with common standards of use and shared common popular thoughts may seem to sail against the tide of the mainstream. Going with the flow and “doing as they do” is the most naturally accepted thing in a society that constantly tries to make individuals something else. But staying yourself despite the pressure that society exerts on the individual turns out to be the greatest individual success. And to do this, we must build a society on moral principles, which would have a purpose in the political sphere. It is that sense that Robert A. Goldwin in The Moral Foundation of the American Republic (1986) said that:

Moral principle has weight and force in American political discourse, even if we assume—as we must assume if we remember that men and women are not angels—that people act in politics primarily in pursuit of interests that are advantageous to them, and usually not advantageous or even disadvantageous to them, nevertheless, in American individuals and groups are greatly strengthened if they can connect their cause to moral principles¹².

In this passage, Goldwin evokes the omnipresence of moral principle in the American political discourse while reminding the limits and the weaknesses of men and women as human beings. This two-sided nature makes men and women both angelic and bestial beings.

In fact, in a well organized society such as the United-States of America where public affairs are almost sacrosanct and the managerial system elevated to a moral principle, the incarnation of ethical and moral codes becomes a fundamental principle in the good governance of the actions of all involved parties. Because by adhering to a set of ethical standards, those in power will manage to handle public affairs, despite everything, with transparency and integrity. Moreover, they help learn how to get along with others. Moral principles teach us that we all deserve the same rights, not as privileges, but because we are all created equal by the Creator and endowed with certain inalienable among these life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Many transcendentalists became involved in effort to reverse conditions that prevented individuals from realizing their full potential. They believed that reforms of the society must begin within the individual reform. They called for the moral reform of the individual. This individual reform is not about an eccentric individualism, but rather an individualism which inscribes its actions to central ones. That is why, Emerson makes us understand that the best reform which has existed is the one that the individual himself accomplishes. Because from this inner reform, all deeds are coordinated and implemented by an inner source which accomplishes silently all our actions. That is why, Emerson’s message transcends all the prejudices and customs, and conformism which prevents the individual from valuing his creative genius. It is in that sense that he said in *Self-Reliance* that:

See the line from a sufficient distance, and it strengthens itself to the average tendency. Your genuine action will explain itself and will explain your other genuine actions. Your conformity explains nothing. Act singly, and what you have already done singly will justify you now. Greatness appeals to the future¹³.

In this passage, Emerson announces a total rupture of the individual in his daily practices. He suggests to remain aloof from “a sufficient line”, a way of not becoming involved in anything until we parse it. By doing so, the individual will free himself from conformism to which Emerson considers to “explain nothing”.

¹² Robert A. Goldwin, *The Moral Foundation of the American Republic*, Carletonville, University Press of Virginia, Third edition, 1986. p.26

¹³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, op. cit, p. 184.

In fact, the figuring tower of the transcendentalist movement advocates a ‘new man’ who is brave enough to trust his heart and intuition. This implies the intervention of two driving forces: Attention to which Emerson suggests in order to ‘see the line from a sufficient distance’ and effort that outsources individual genius, which is the preamble of genuine and pure actions. It is the reason why he suggests single actions that reflect the ability of the individual to focus and stay with regard to our real dream or desire.

III. CONCLUSION

In short, Ralph Waldo Emerson, as preacher, philosopher, and poet, embodied the finest spirit and highest ideals of his age. A thinker of bold originality, his essays and lectures offer models of clarity, style, and thought, which made him a formidable presence in 19th century American life. Emerson's insistence that humans live in the present and trust their own impulses helped American writers forge their own identities at a time when European influence was still high and American confidence perhaps was still low. The soil of the new nation was creatively barren and to fertilize this land with intellectual and spiritual production, the American Scholars satisfied themselves to evoke the “clouds” of European tradition which flow into the scholars’ soil of inspiration. That is why Emerson’s invitation comes in due , and he inscribes his action as a dogma of non-conformity that help individuals to discover their fullest expressions of themselves.

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