

# Transcendentalism Literature Student Notes

**Transcendentalism**—19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy rooted in English Romanticism which held the belief that in order to understand the universe and “Truth,” one must transcend, or go beyond, human rationality and experiences in the physical world

## Characteristics of Transcendentalism

### 1. The Divine Soul

- everything in the universe is part of one soul or spirit (God)
  
- every being is separate, but share the same divine essence

### 2. Perfectibility of Humanity

- human beings have the potential to be perfect
  - stark contrast to Puritanism
  
- evil and sin are societal concepts, but a part of “natural law”

### **3. Nature as a Doorway to “Truth”**

- like Romantics, believed that nature is the “face of God” and a doorway to an “ideal world”
- natural laws lead to understanding the “Truth” of the universe
  - “Truth” is meaning, purpose, and metaphysical (beyond the observable) vs. practical (observable) truths

### **4. Intuition, the Divine Sense**

- using intuition (natural insight, ability to understand instinctively rather than consciously), people can see the Divine Soul in nature and ourselves
- by “experiencing” rather than “observing,” we transcend the mundane (ordinary) world

### **5. Self-Reliance and Individualism**

- the individuality of a person outweighs traditional authorities and customs
- self-reliance is the only way to find individual “Truth”