

Self-Reliance in Solitude and Society

Ralph W. Emerson's Conception of Individualism and Its Influences on the Literature of Henry D. Thoreau

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0. Introduction The question of the relation between the individual and society is one of the most central questions in the literature of American Transcendentalism. Most of Ralph W. Emerson's *Essays* deal with it as well as the work of Henry D. Thoreau. Margaret Fullers 'feminist Transcendentalism' propagated emancipation of women from social norms, and George Ripley tried to develop an alternative to society in 'Brook Farm', a social experiment that aimed at giving the individual more freedom in a farm community.

The aim of this paper is to uncover the idea behind all these literary and real-life attempts to define the role of the individual within or without society. The key term for this is *self-reliance*, which basically means idealistic individualism. The paper tries to explain self-reliance as a concept within the broader framework of American Transcendentalist thought. Moreover, I will try to demonstrate where the idea of self-reliance can be found in the work of Henry David Thoreau and how it shapes the relation individual-society therein. The paper is structured as follows: Chapter One is an attempt to define American Transcendentalism as a movement that was deeply individualistic and as a system of ideas which are connected with the idea of individualism. Chapter Two examines the doctrine of self-reliance itself. This is mainly done by examining the essay *Self-Reliance* by Emerson. Chapter Three asks if the doctrine of self-reliance is reflected in American Transcendental literature. As examples, I chose *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience* by Henry David Thoreau. I want to argue that self-reliance has two possible implications, Solitude or Social

Commitment, and that both of them can be found in Thoreau's work. Finally, Chapter Four summarises and analyzes the content of the previous chapters. When quoting German texts I decided not to translate them in order to avoid a distortion of their content.

1. American Transcendentalism

1.1 An Individualistic Movement

American Transcendentalism was a philosophical, literary, and religious movement. It was intellectually most productive between the 1830s and the 1850s. The central events in the history of American Transcendentalism took place in these decades: In 1832, Ralph Waldo Emerson resigned his ministry of the Unitarian Church because he felt unable to administer the holy communion. A group of New England intellectuals, called the 'Transcendental Club', met occasionally at Emerson's house from 1836 on. The most influential transcendentalist literature was published in that time: Emerson's *Nature*, Orestes Brownson's *New Views of Christianity, Society, and Church* (both 1836), Henry David Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* (1849) and *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854), and the magazine *The Dial* (1840 to 1844) which was edited by Margaret Fuller.

For the estimation of the extreme individualism and self-reliance most of the Transcendentalists¹ favoured, it is important to understand that at their time they were outsiders among intellectuals. While the mainstream of philosophical thought in early nineteenth-century New England was influenced by John Locke's empiricism, their philosophy had its roots in German idealism, in Eastern thought, and in Scottish Common Sense Philosophy. The Transcendentalists intended to produce literature that was original American, criticized the American society in their writings, and did not care about formal standards. Therefore, they were in opposition to the established literature, like that of the 'Fireside Poets', which was Victorian, oriented only on aesthetic standards, and very formalistic. Also concerning religion the Transcendentalists were opposed to the beliefs of the majority. With their rather pantheistic religious views they confronted the Unitarian church. The religious and anti-Unitarian element of Transcendentalism was known as the 'New Views'; they lead to a controversy between Ralph W. Emerson and the Unitarian Church of Boston after he had announced the 'New Views' in front of Harvard graduates in his highly controversial *Divinity School Address*. What made Transcendentalism unacceptable for the Unitarian Church was the denial of their authority based upon the assumption that every human being was divine, in combination with the denial of central Unitarian creeds (e.g. the empirical character of the biblical miracles). The Transcendentalist movement was a small protest movement in all of its three aspects: as a philosophical, literary, and religious movement. Moreover, the Transcendentalists were nonconformist beyond the fact that they belonged to a group of intellectual outsiders. Even within the Transcendentalist circle there was a wide range of different opinions on philosophy, literature, and religion. In terms of religion for example, there was a big difference between the views of people like William Ellery Channing, who tried to integrate Transcendentalism and Unitarian Christianity, and those of Henry D. Thoreau, who was radically against the Church and for whom Buddha was as important as Jesus. Therefore, 'American Transcendentalism' is a term that does not refer to a homogenous theory or ideology, but rather to heterogeneous circle of people

who met to discuss their ideas which were similar in some respects². What the Transcendentalists had in common was that they were constantly being misunderstood. At first, 'transcendental' was used by their contemporaries as a derisive term for everything that seemed weird and not understandable to me. Henry David Thoreau described this attitude in a satirical way when he wrote about a discussion with non-Transcendentalists:

I should have told them at once that I was a transcendentalist. That would have been the shortest way of telling them that they would not understand my explanations.³

1.2 Transcendentalism as a System of Thought

Because of its diverseness, an attempt to define Transcendentalism as a coherent system of thought must be difficult - it was "more a cast of thought than a systematic philosophy"⁴. Nevertheless, Idealism can be identified as the common denominator of Transcendentalist thought. The definition of Transcendentalism Emerson gives in his essay *The Transcendentalist* stresses this aspect. Emerson defines Transcendentalism as a philosophy which is strongly influenced by Immanuel Kant's theory of cognition (i.e. on the assumption that there is *a priori* knowledge in the human mind), and which is opposed to John Locke's empiricist philosophy (i.e. the idea of the mind as a *tabula rasa*):

What is popularly called Transcendentalism among us, is Idealism; Idealism as it appears in 1842. [...] As thinkers, mankind have ever divided into two sects, Materialists and Idealists; [...] The materialist insists on facts, on history, on the force of circumstances, and the animal wants of man; the idealist on the power of Thought and of Will, on inspiration, on miracle, on individual culture.⁵

According to Emerson, individualism, or 'individual culture', therefore is a central element of Transcendentalism. The emphasis on the individual is the logical consequence of the assumption that there was *a priori* knowledge in each individual, or "a very important class of ideas or imperative forms, which did not come by experience, but through which experience was acquired⁶", as Emerson put it. This individualism lead Emerson to postulate the ethical principle of self-reliance. Apart from it, the following *fundamental ideas in Transcendentalism* can be distinguished. The short list is of course incomplete and refers first of all to the Emersonian form of Transcendentalism, though these ideas were shared by most of the other Transcendentalists:

- *Reason and Understanding*. The human mind is divided into an intuitive faculty ('Reason') and a rational faculty ('Understanding'). Man can experience intuitive religious insight by transcending sensible experience through Reason. This conception is a simplification of Kant's ideas about the mind ('Pure and Practical Reason').
- *Microcosm*. Everything in the world is a microcosm containing all the laws and meaning of existence. This idea has its origin in Neo-Platonism.
- *Over-Soul*. All individual souls are part of the Over-Soul, a synonym for God. The idea of the Over-Soul is borrowed from Hindu religion, which regards the individual psyche (in Sanskrit: Atman) as related to the world psyche (Brahma).

Human Divinity. The idea that every soul is a part of the Over-Soul implies that God exists in every human being. Man is divine and external religious authorities become superficial.

Nature. The Over-Soul can be found in natural objects as well as in man. Therefore, life in nature is seen as a way to experience ethical laws and religious truth. In nature, intuition can lead to an ecstatic union of the human with God like the one Emerson describes in his "transparent-eyeball-metaphor"⁷.

2. Emerson's Doctrine of 'Self-Reliance'

In 1841, Ralph Waldo Emerson published his essay *Self-Reliance*. Apart from *Nature*, it has become Emerson's most influential piece of writing, and like in *Nature*, the title refers to one of the central concepts in American Transcendentalism.

Emerson can therefore be regarded as the father of the term "self-reliance", but as a concept self-reliance is rooted in other central ideas of American Transcendentalism. Individualism and self-reliance are a logical consequence of the belief in human divinity and the Transcendentalists assumptions about the nature of the human mind. Moreover, the origins of self-reliance can already be found in the thought of Immanuel Kant whose moral philosophy trusted in the judgement of the individual. (This is the basis for the Categorical Imperative; without trust in the autonomous judgement of the individual it would be illogical⁸.) In *Self-Reliance* Emerson propagates self-trust and the independence of the individual. The very essence of the essay is expressed in its last two sentences when he assures the reader: "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of the principle."⁹ Of course, "the principle" is a moral principle which is to be found in one's own mind. The source of all moral behaviour is the individual. Emerson paraphrases his central message in a more poetic way when he says: "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string¹⁰", or: "Insist on yourself; never imitate¹¹", or, in the motto of the essay "Man is his own star"¹². This high estimation of self-trust can be explained with Emerson's belief in the superiority of Reason. By listening to his inner voice, man follows his intuitions and his Reason, whereas following external guides is only possible through the Understanding. Own thoughts have more significance than any adapted ideas, even if these come from ancient philosophers. As an example of an independent thinker, but not as a role model, Emerson refers among other historical figures to Plato¹³. Here he says that

[...] the highest we ascribe to Moses, Plato, and Milton is, that they set at naught books and traditions, and spoke not what men but what they thought. A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his.¹⁴

As a consequence, old authorities become meaningless for the self-reliant person. History, science, tradition, society, and religion lose their role as guides; they can be criticized by anyone who has gained an insight that is contrary to what they say. Obedience towards authorities for the only reason that they used to be authorities does not only make no sense, disobedience towards them is even healthy for the individual, Emerson says:

The objection to conforming to usages that have become dead to you is, that it scatters your force. It loses your time and blurs the impression of your character.¹⁵

The only authority left is God, but God is not an external lawmaker and judge anymore, God is now *within* man. The divinity of man implies that when man is self-reliant and follows Reason he cannot act against God, but only in accordance with divine laws. God-reliance and self-reliance become one. No outside authority is left for the self-reliant person. As a result, "Self-Reliance" propagates total moral autonomy.

Self-reliance is the individualistic side of American Transcendentalism; it complements the universalistic element which is represented by the belief in the existence of an 'Over-Soul'. The individualistic tendency of *Self-Reliance* is due to the fact that Emerson (like all Transcendentalists) believed that all human beings are created differently. The Over-Soul is represented in the souls of all human beings, but that does not mean that all humans souls are similar. They are only equal under the aspect that they are divine. God manifests himself differently in everyone. All these considerations exclude the question of the effects of self-reliant behavior on other people. As we have seen, Emerson believes that self-reliance is good for the individual human, because he can develop his own thoughts, his own perspective on life, and his own abilities, and act in accordance with God. But what is the impact on society when no one cares about social norms anymore? Emerson does not answer this questions directly, but as he is convinced of the divine energy that lies in every self-reliant action, we can assume that he would not have seen this as a problem. All in all, he is less concerned about the negative impact of individualistic action on society as he is concerned about the negative impact of social rules on the individual. Because of the latter, "society" is seen as something potentially negative. This is not a general evaluation of all societies; Emerson probably welcomes a society which consists only of self-reliant men. Nevertheless, the existing society of New England and its norms are the enemies of self-reliance: "If any man consider the present aspect of what is called by distinction *society*, he will see the need of this ethic¹⁷." Emerson criticizes his contemporary society, because in his opinion it promotes obedience and conformity. Therefore, "representative men" have become rare. His age, Emerson complains, "yields no great and perfect persons."¹⁸ In Henry David Thoreau's words: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. [...] But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to desperate things."¹⁹ When speaking about a society which is dominated by conformity and does not allow self-realization, Emerson probably had his own experiences with the Unitarian Church in mind. Society is weak and false because it is not a product of self-reliant behaviour of its members:

Our housekeeping is mendicant, our arts, our occupations, our marriages, our religion, we have not chosen, but society has chosen for us. We are parlour soldiers. We shun the rugged battle of fate, where strength is born.²⁰

Nonconformity is the word Emerson uses for the right behaviour in society (at least under the conditions that Emerson sees in the society that surrounded him, e.g. Unitarianism). He praises the ideal of the upright man²¹, someone who is willing to show opposition against the opinion of the multitude when he is convinced that it is necessary to do so. On the other hand, nonconformity does not mean to reject all existing social standards mechanically although the self-reliant man is regarded by

others to do so. But being misunderstood by other people and, as the consequence, rejected by society is among the things the self-reliant individual has to bear: "For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure"²². The principle of self-reliance in a broader sense can also be applied to the American nation as a whole. Emerson tried this in *The American Scholar*, where he propagated the emancipation of the American intellectuals from Europe:

We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. [...] We will walk on our own feet. [...] A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.²³

What makes the essay *Self-Reliance* most controversial is its consistency. Emerson makes no restrictions to the degree to which self-realization may be legitimated. It does not aim at removing some old, obsolete customs or institutions only, but attacks fundamental moral standards. This means that 'good' and 'bad' do not exist anymore as social norms. Emerson explains this by describing a conversation with a friend:

On my saying, What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within? my friend suggested, - 'But these impulses may be from below, not from above.' I replied, "They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the Devil's child, I will then live from the Devil." No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong what is against it.²⁴

This radical view about the right behaviour towards oneself and other people lead to radical attempts to live by these principles.

3. Consequences of the Idea of Self-Reliance 3.1 Life in the Woods: Solitude

"I must be myself"²⁵, Emerson says in "Self-Reliance". His inference is: "We must go alone"²⁶. The second statement can be understood in different ways. In the context of self-reliance, it implies in the first place that everybody has to find his own way of *thinking*.

Henry David Thoreau took it literally. In March 1845, he borrowed an axe and went alone to Walden Pond near Concord where he built a hut in which he lived (from the 4th of July on) for two years, two months, and two days. He wrote about his experiences at Walden Pond in *Walden, or Life in the Woods*. *Walden* is the most consequent attempt in the literature of the Transcendentalists to promote self-reform in isolation from society. The idea of solitude in nature is very dominant in transcendentalist literature. It is connected with the idea of experiencing higher laws in nature. For example, Emerson wrote a poem with the pseudo-German-Romantic title *Waldeinsamkeit* that begins with a praise of solitude in the woods:

I do not count the hours I spend
In wandering by the sea;
The forest is my loyal friend,
Like God it useth me. ...²⁷

Nevertheless, Emerson and others restricted their solitude in nature to long walks after which they returned to their home. No Transcendentalist was as radical as Thoreau in turning his back on society. There were other attempts to live separated from society, like Brooks Farm or Fruitlands, but they still included a greater number of people and therefore to some degree had the character of *social reform*, whereas Thoreau's life at Walden Pond could only be an attempt to *individual reform* because Thoreau voluntarily isolated himself from nearly any human contact. Thoreau implicitly gives a statement about the (un-)importance of society when he explains the purpose of his life in the woods:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. [...] I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, [...] to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world;²⁸

The explanation is coherent with Thoreau's motto: "Simplify! Simplify!". He turns his back on everything that makes living complicated and blurs the view on the "essential facts of life". It is remarkable that he regards books and nature as "essential" but not the fact that man is surrounded by other people. Social relations seem to be an aspect of minor importance in life. This may have to do with a refusal of life in the existing modern society - "still we live meanly, like ants"²⁹. Life in the city is an insect-like life, whereas in solitude the individual can "suck out all the marrow of life". Therefore, Thoreau chose not only simple life in nature, but he chose a place which was remote from any other human being.

My nearest neighbor is a mile distant, and no house is visible from any place but the hill-tops within half a mile of my own. [...] for the most part it is as solitary where I live as on the prairies. It is as much Asia or Africa as New England.³⁰

On the other hand, Thoreau was not totally isolated all the time. His solitude was interrupted by visitors from time to time as well as by regular walks to Concord. Like Emerson, he has a rather negative attitude towards his Concord neighbors. He expresses this in the satirical opening of the chapter *Visitors* when he compares them with animals whose "habits" he "observes"³¹. Thoreau was not disinterested in his fellowmen in general; he was only dissatisfied with his Concord neighbors who were not self-reliant, or "full-blooded", as he puts it in the chapter *Visitors* in *Walden* - again using a metaphor from the realm of nature:

I think that I love society as much as most, and am ready to fasten myself like a bloodsucker for the time to any full-blooded man that comes in my way. I am naturally no hermit, but might possibly sit out the sturdiest frequenter of the bar-room, if my business called me thither.³²

Thoreau writes about various encounters with other people in Walden, and goes very much into detail when he describes his conversations with a wood chopper from Canada who occasionally visited his hut. But at least from the context of *Walden*, it can be concluded that all social contact Thoreau had was accidental (except the visits to Concord); he did not look for companionship himself, but his solitude was

interrupted by visitors from time to time. The key passage in *Walden* concerning the role of society in self reform clearly shows that the visitors could have stayed away as well. Thoreau thought that he did not need even the little contact with humans he had because "the most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural object"³³. He felt that the Over-Soul was present in nature as well; for this reason nature became society to him:

I have never felt lonesome, or in the least oppressed by a sense of solitude, but once, [...], when, for an hour, I doubted if the near neighborhood of man was not essential to a serene and healthy life. To be alone was something unpleasant. But I was at the same time conscious of a slight insanity in my mood, and seemed to foresee my recovery. In the midst of a gentle rain while these thoughts prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, [...]³⁴

3.2 Life in Society: Civil Disobedience

Transcendentalists have been criticized as anti-social because their individualism was so extreme that it prevented most of them from acting against social and political problems, e.g. the slave problem. One of Emerson's statements about the slave problem is a good example:

Then again, how trivial seem the contests of the abolitionist, whilst he aims merely at the circumstances of the slave. Give the slave the least elevation of religious sentiment, and he is no slave; you are the slave; he not only in his humility feels his superiority, feels that much deplored condition of his to be a fading trifle, but he makes you feel it too. He is the master.³⁵

The view Emerson expresses here goes beyond favouring individual action in maintaining that action which is directed towards the situation of others is not necessary - the slaves can change their situation from within. This idea of subjectivity is inherent in American Transcendentalism. This is due to the influence of Hindu philosophy which is based upon the doctrine of the illusory nature of the sensible world. The distinction between subject and object vanishes. This can be seen in the first stanza of Emerson's poem *Brahma*:

If the red slayer think he slays
Or if the slain think he is slain
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.
Far or forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear;
And one to me are shame and fame. ...³⁶

These influences lead the Transcendentalists to passively accept the society of New England like the Hindus accepted the caste-system. Self-reliance did not always lead them to raise their voices against the opinion of the multitude, but to simply ignore the multitude and stay isolated for themselves even when they lived within society and

not in solitude. A perfect example for this was the young Henry David Thoreau who did not attend town meetings and was rather apolitical. Contrary to this position is the attitude expressed by Thoreau in the essay *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, where he explains why he spent a night in jail for not paying a tax. Here, Thoreau comes to the conclusion that it is the duty of every citizen to act against the state where the citizen feels that the state is morally wrong. He even claims that "under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison"³⁷. Thoreau does not reject politics in general, but demands of the state to act in accordance with the moral principles of all its members: "I ask for, not at once no government, but *at once* a better government."³⁸ This is not, as has often been claimed, an anarchist or apolitical position. The question of the good government and the personal independence of the governed has its origins in Aristotle political theory.³⁹ Civil disobedience is still an individualistic concept. In accordance with the ideas expressed in Emerson's *Self-Reliance*, Thoreau puts the upright man above the state (unlike the theoreticians of a social contract, such as Hobbes and Locke). Nevertheless, it demands the individual to think about the good organisation of society and is therefore community-oriented. Regarding that *Civil Disobedience* was not only meant as a report of Thoreau's experiences in jail, but also as a proclamation to his fellow citizens to end their political passiveness and take action, one can say that it is a manifesto for social reform. C. Gayet interprets the essay as the first indication of a developing 'community consciousness' in Thoreau's thinking:

[...] it is evident that the night he spent in the Concord jail in 1846, for refusing to pay his poll-tax, marked his first deliberate involvement in the affairs of the society he was living in. Although Thoreau's act was basically an individualistic response to central issues in nineteenth-century America, its true import resided in a change of attitude towards man's place and significance within the community.⁴⁰

Gayet argues that Thoreau left the influences of Transcendentalism behind when he wrote *Civil Disobedience* and *A Plea for Captain John Brown*. This is partially correct regarding that Thoreau ceased to be an inactive beholder corresponding to Emerson's ideal of the passive philosopher⁴¹. Especially with his support for the violent anti-slavery group of John Brown, Thoreau even left the path of individual resistance. Nevertheless, the anti-government action also has its roots in Emersonian Transcendentalism. Emerson said about 'the idealist':

[...] he does not respect government, except as far as it reiterates the law of his mind; nor the church; nor charities; nor arts, for themselves; but hears, as at a vast distance, what they say, as if his consciousness would speak to him through a pantomimic scene.⁴²

In 1851, Thoreau helped a fugitive slave to escape to Canada. Personal pro-slave activities like this one, his support for John Brown, and his civil disobedience all had their roots in self-reliance. They are only divergent from the original Emersonian Transcendentalism insofar as they include active commitments to social reform.

3.3 A Parallel Between Thoreau's Life in Solitude and in Society

Solitude (as described in *Walden*) and civil disobedience are two different modes of living. In Thoreau's radical practice, the former means voluntary self-isolation from

society, whereas the latter demands involvement in society and politics where they are felt to be unjust and suppressing.

Nonetheless, *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience* are not contradictory; they are comparable under the aspect that both are based upon a strong individualism, or self-reliance. This individualism never takes the form of pure egotism or misanthropy⁴³ but is idealistic and originates from the belief in the divine spirit in man; it leads Thoreau to act on his own moral standards, to estimate individual action higher than collective action, and to put his moral autonomy above social norms. Emerson regarded the principle of self-reliance as equally applicable in solitude and in society, but he favours self-reliance in society:

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 the solitude⁴⁴

It is doubtful if Thoreau's solitude and civil disobedience are *totally* coherent with Emerson's conception of self-reliance. On the one hand, Emerson criticized Thoreau's project of self-realization at Walden Pond because he thought that physical remoteness from society was not required in order to be independent from society mentally, and that only the latter was necessary for a self-reliant life⁴⁵. On the other hand, Thoreau's civil disobedience and social engagement went beyond the transcendentalist refusal to act for others. Although it was based upon individual moral considerations and mostly (but not always) took the form of passive resistance, civil disobedience can be regarded as involvement in the affairs of the community. In *Self-Reliance*, Emerson had only propagated disobedience for the purpose of self-fulfilment, not for the purpose of social reform.

4. Conclusion

The content of the paper can be summarized as follows:

Self-reliance is an central conception within American Transcendentalist thought. The idea of self-reliance has been most explicitly formulated in Ralph W. Emerson's essay by the same title. It is based upon the transcendentalist assumption of the divinity in man and promotes individualism in the form of intellectual independence. The recommendation of self-reliance went hand in hand with the rejection of the norms of the society in New England. Transcendentalism as an individualistic protest movement can be regarded as a realization of the idea of self-reliance within the New England community. The influences of the idea of self-reliance is visible as well in *Walden* as it is in *Civil Disobedience*. Although it takes different forms, the independence of the individual from society is the fundamental idea behind both. *Walden* goes beyond the idea of self-reliance because it exceeds the idea of mental independence from society by adding physical remoteness. *Civil Disobedience* abandons the individualism inherent in self-reliance partially by demanding political reform, though still based on individualism.

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1 P. Reuben lists the following persons as "assumed, presumed, or self-identified Transcendentalists": Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody, Sophia Ripley, William Ellery Channing, Frederick Hedge, James Freeman Clarke, Theodore Parker, Orestes Brownson, William H. Channing, George Ripley, Bronson Alcott, James Marsh, John Sullivan Dwight, and Jones Very (Reuben, p. 1).

2 "There is no pure Transcendentalist", wrote Emerson (in: Poirier, p. 102)

3 Thoreau in: Reuben 1997, p. 5

4 "Transcendentalism" in: *Oxford Companion to American Literature*

5 Emerson in Poirier, p. 97

6 *ib.*, p. 102

7 "In the woods, we return to reason and faith. [...] Standing on the bare ground, - my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, - all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God." (*ib.*, p. 6).

8 Lutz 1995, p. 441-142

9 Emerson in Poirier, p. 151

10 *ib.*, p. 132

11 *ib.*, p. 148

12 From the play *Honest Man's Fortune* by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, quoted by Emerson (*ib.*, p. 130)

13 Later, in 1850, Emerson also portrayed Plato as one of ten "Representative Men" in a book by this title.

14 Emerson in: Poirier, p. 131

- 15 ib., p. 135
- 17 Emerson in: Poirier, p. 144
- 18 ib., p. 144
- 19 Thoreau, p. 7
- 20 Emerson in: Poirier, p. 144
- 21 At present, Emerson says, "Man is timid and apologetic, he is no longer upright;" (ib., p. 141)
- 22 ib., p. 136
- 23 Emerson in: Pütz, p. 67
- 24 Emerson in: Poirier, pp. 133-134
- 25 ib., p. 143
- 26 ib., p. 143
- 27 ib., pp. 546-547
- 28 Thoreau, p. 67
- 29 ib., p. 67; The parallel between ants and humans is drawn again later in *Walden* when Thoreau observes fighting ants (ib., pp. 171-172).
- 30 ib., p. 97
- 31 ib., p. 125
- 32 ib., p. 104
- 33 ib., p. 97
- 34 ib., p. 98
- 35 Emerson in: Gayet, p. 33
- 36 Emerson in: Poirier, p. 538
- 37 Thoreau, p. 260
- 38 ib., p. 252
- 39 cf. Kateb, p. 190
- 40 Gayet, p. 101
- 41 "You might say of a philosopher that he was in this world as a spectator" (Emerson in: Gayet, p. 101).
- 42 Emerson in: Poirier, p. 99
- 43 The argument that Thoreau went to Walden not "for himself alone but to serve mankind" (Paul in: Drinnon, p. 415) sounds like an exaggeration, but it is right under the aspect that Thoreau thought that his self-reliant would be a good example for his fellow-citizens.
- 44 Emerson in: Poirier, p. 135
- 45 cf. Klumpjahn, p. 82