

THREE GREAT TRANSCENDENTALISTS

Introduction

In this meeting we will read about and discuss the lives and teachings of three great 'European' philosophers, **Meister Eckhart**, **Louis Claude De Saint Martin**, and **Ralph Waldo Emerson**, who all lived in different centuries, but whose metaphysical and mystical teachings and ideas had a major influence on the society of their day, and on future generations. They are all considered as part of the 'theosophical' influence as exemplified by H. P. Blavatsky in 19th century. They can also be said to be part of a long line of Germanic (i.e. German speaking or of Germanic descent) mystics and reformers over the last 1,000 years, which includes figures such as Jakob Boehme, William Blake and even Albert Einstein as well as several others.

Some quotes

'Religion means "reconnection", and has nothing to do with theological dogmas. Religion is not a supposition, but an absolute knowledge; not a one time historical revelation, but the eternal self-revelation of the Divine in man and in the whole of creation, which in principle may be experienced by everyone.'

'Time is what keeps the light from reaching us. There is no greater obstacle to 'God' than time.' - Meister Eckhart

'All God wants of man is a peaceful heart.'

'What a man takes in by contemplation, that he pours out in love.'

Meister Eckhart Quotes brainyquote.com

'Time does not exist outside the inner circle of this little world.' - W. Q. Judge.

Meister Eckhart 1260-1328

Biography

Meister Eckhart (Von Hochheim) was born in 1260 in Gotha, Thuringia, northern Germany. He died in 1328 in Avignon, France. Called the 'father of German thought,' he has become popular with modern spirituality, as well as with mediaeval studies. He was a German academic theologian, philosopher and mystic. He joined the Dominican Order at 18, and was schooled in mediaeval scholasticism, and was well acquainted with Aristoteleanism, Augustinianism and Neo-Platonism. Although he was a high ranking churchman in his day, with wide ranging responsibility for overseeing many monasteries, convents, and friaries over a vast area of the

then 'Holy Roman Empire' (German Empire), he is famous for his teaching and highly unusual sermons in the vernacular. The central theme of Eckhart's sermons is the presence of 'God' in the individual soul, and the dignity of the soul of the just man. In one sermon, Eckhart gives the following summary of his message.

When I preach, I usually speak of detachment, and say that a man should be empty of self and all things; and secondly, that he should be reconstructed in the simple good that 'God' is; and thirdly, that he should consider the great aristocracy that 'God' has set up in the soul, such that by means of it man may wonderfully attain to 'God'; and fourthly, of the purity of the divine nature.

Making Holy What We Do “People should not worry so much about what they have to do, they should consider rather what they are. If people and their ways were good, their deeds would shine brightly. If you are righteous [just], then your deeds will be righteous [just]. Do not think to place holiness in doing; we should place holiness in being, for it is not the works which sanctify us, but we who should sanctify the works [make holy what we do]....

In so far as we are and have being, just so far do we hallow [bless] all that we do, whether it be eating, sleeping, waking, or anything else...

Therefore, note that all our endeavours should be devoted to *being* good, not caring so much about what we do, or what kind of works, but how the ground of our works is.”

In other words, take care of the being first, and the doing will take care of itself!

- Meister Eckhart, *Their Own Actions in the Light of Self-Knowledge* from M. O'C Walshe, *Meister Eckhart: Sermons and Treatises*, Vol,III,1987, p.15

The Love of Virtue “For it is not enough for a man to perform the works of virtue, or to practise obedience, or accept poverty or contempt, or humble himself in other ways..... When a man finds himself inclined above all else to virtue, and if one performs the works of virtue without any special intention of obtaining some just or important matter, acting virtuously for virtue's own sake, for the love of virtue and no other reason then one possesses the virtues perfectly, and not until then. Let us go on learning to [...] forget ourselves until we hold on to nothing that is our own....”

Meister Eckhart, from Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, trans. *Meister Eckhart: Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defence*, 1981, p. 277

Self-knowledge: Will vs. Motives “In self-knowledge, the innermost core of the world comes to life with spiritual meaning.... Those who are imbued with self-knowledge also naturally conduct their own actions in the light of self-knowledge. Typically, human action is determined by motives.....”

'It is indeed correct to say that the human will is not free insofar as its direction is always determined by the strongest motive.' (Robert Hamerling)

For every action that does not take place in the light of self-knowledge, the motive, the cause of the action, must be felt as a compulsion. It is a different matter when the cause falls within the bounds of self-knowledge. Thus, the cause becomes part of the self, The will is no longer determined, but determines itself.

Louis Claude De Saint Martin 1743-1802

'The most instructed, the wisest, and the most elegant of modern theosophists, Saint Martin.'
- Count Joseph De Maitre

'... never had mysticism possessed in France a representative more complete, an interpreter more profound and eloquent, or one who has exercised more influence than Saint Martin.'
- Victor Cousin

'The feet of Saint Martin are on the earth, but his head is in heaven.'
- Joubert

Saint Martin, the “unknown philosopher of the 18th century” was born in Amboise, France in 1743. After a brief career in the army, he pursued his philosophical and theosophical studies in Paris, during the Revolution. He was an ardent disciple of Jakob Boehme and studied under the Portuguese kabbalist and Rosicrucian Martinez Paschalis, who had founded a masonic order in Paris. He established a School of Occultism in Bordeaux, where theosophical principles were taught, and a high code of ethics was maintained. When Paschalis left Bordeaux in 1773, Saint Martin took over the running of the school. A year later he founded an occult masonic Society in Lyons, where he endeavoured to restore masonry to its true primeval character of Eastern Occultism. Out of this grew an organisation known as the Martinists. Although Saint Martin was fully aware of the elemental forces in Nature, and the occult powers in man, he told the Martinists, that “moral development was the true basis of Occultism,” warning them that occult powers without an underlying moral background were dangerous weapons. He wrote to a friend:

I will not conceal from you that formerly I walked in this external way. Nevertheless I at all times felt so strong an inclination to the intimate secret way, that the external way never further seduced me, even in my youth; for at the age of 23 I had been initiated into these things.

J.G. Findel declares that Saint Martin gave “the key to all the allegories and mystical fables of the ancients, the source of all religions and political institutions, and a model of all the laws which should regulate the universe, as well as single persons, and without which no real science could exist.

In his second book he traced the correspondences between man and nature, painted a glowing picture of man's Divinity, and showed the whole purpose of the evolutionary scheme is to bring man to a realisation of his godlike nature. Although he took no active part in the Revolution, apart from briefly serving in the Garde Nationale, it was the sacred ternary of the Martinists – Liberty, Equality, Fraternity – which was adopted as the special motto of the French Revolution.

In 1782, the 'Big Four' – St Germain, Saint Martin, Cagliostro, and Anton Mesmer – met at the great Masonic convention in Wilhelmsbad. In 1785 they met again at the Paris Convention. In 1794 he turned his attention to the subject of numbers. “Numbers”, St. Martin said, “are the only sensible expression of the different properties of beings, which all proceed from the one and only essence.” He declared, that the number seven is the ruling number of the manifested universe, and that, “it is by multiplying this number that we find its fruits.” One of his last

statements was an expression of regret that he had to die leaving the mystery of numbers still unsolved. He died a great philanthropist in 1802. His final words were:

Principles are all I have to offer them (man). I would animate them with a glorious desire to renew their alliance with ' Universal Unity ', but they are in arms against that Unity, and it seems as if they wished to efface its very existence.

from the Great Theosophists Series no. 26, pp 482-488, Theosophy, Vol. 26, No.11, September,1938

Ralph Waldo Emerson 1803-1882

Biography He was born in Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A., in 1803, and died in Concord in 1882. Emerson's ideas formed the backbone of a school of thought known as 'transcendentalism'. This philosophy flourished in mid 19th century America, at a time when it seemed the nation was poised on the edge of great change. Adherents such as Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Bronson Alcott believed that a 'universal spirit' joined all humans, and that truly Divine revelation came from personal reflection. In many ways they anticipated the later Theosophical Society of 1875. from their headquarters in Concord, Mass. The Transcendentalists encouraged communion with nature, self-reliance, and criticised slavery severely. They believed they could help the world be better than it is. In 1829 Emerson became a pastor of the Second Church in Boston. In 1836 he published the essay *Nature*, which outlines his ideas about the manifestation of the Universal in nature. Later essays were entitled *Self-Reliance*, and *The Oversoul*, which would come to define his philosophy. In 1847 he pursued a European lecture tour, including The United Kingdom, during which he spoke out against the pernicious 'Fugitive Slave Law' in the U.S. he was full of praise for President Abraham Lincoln, when he eventually proclaimed the Act of Emancipation in 1863. Through his work and teachings Emerson became known as the 'Sage of Concord'.

Nature (1836) — Ralph Waldo Emerson

Chapter I

To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and vulgar things. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. Seen in the streets of cities, how great they are! If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown! But every night come out these preachers of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile.

The stars awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are always inaccessible; but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence. Nature never wears a mean appearance. Neither does the wisest man extort all her secret, and lose his curiosity by finding out all her perfection. Nature never became a toy to a wise spirit. The flowers, the animals, the mountains, reflected all the wisdom of his best hour, as

much as they had delighted the simplicity of his childhood.

When we speak of nature in this manner, we have a distinct but most poetical sense in the mind. We mean the integrity of impression made by manifold natural objects. It is this which distinguishes the stick of timber of the wood-cutter, from the tree of the poet. The charming landscape which I saw this morning, is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms, but none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. This is the best part of these men's farms, yet to this their land-deeds give them no title.

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says,—he is my creature, and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me. Not the sun or the summer alone, but every hour and season yields its tribute of delight; for every hour and change corresponds to and authorizes a different state of the mind, from breathless noon to grimmest midnight. Nature is a setting that fits equally well a comic or a mourning piece. In good health, the air is a cordial of incredible virtue. Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. Almost I fear to think how glad I am. In the woods too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period so ever of life, is always a child. In the woods, is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life,—no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. 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. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental. To be brothers, to be acquaintances,—master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance. I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty. In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature.

The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right.

Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight, does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both. It is necessary to use these pleasures with great temperance. For, nature is not always tricked in holiday attire, but the same scene which yesterday breathed perfume and glittered as for the frolic of the nymphs, is overspread with melancholy today. Nature always wears the colors of the spirit. To a man laboring under calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. Then, there is a kind of contempt of the landscape felt by him who has just lost by death a dear friend. The sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population.

Self-Reliance

by Ralph Waldo Emerson

In "Self-Reliance," philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson argues that polite society has an adverse effect on one's personal growth. Self-sufficiency, he writes, gives one the freedom to discover one's true self and attain true independence.

“Self-Reliance” Key Points:

- Emerson urges his readers to follow their individual will instead of conforming to social expectations.
- Emerson emphasizes following one's own voice rather than an intermediary's, such as the church.
- Emerson encourages his readers to be honest in their relationships with others.
- Emerson posits the effects of self-reliance: altering religious practices, encouraging Americans to stay at home and develop their own culture, and focusing on individual rather than societal progress.

Emerson advocates his readers to avoid blindly following the paths of others and instead to trust and follow their own instincts and blaze their own path. Conformity, according to Emerson, is death to an individual. Both hope and optimism is the essence of self-reliance. Emerson admonishes his readers to avoid debt as debt will rob them of opportunities and self-confidence. Self-reliance is the foundation of a productive, efficient, and self-sustaining society.

- emersoncentral.com

Self-reliance

HENCEFORTH, please God, forever I forego
The yoke of men's opinions. I will be
Light-hearted as a bird, and live with God.
I find him in the bottom of my heart,
I hear continually his voice therein
The little needle always knows the North
The little bird remembereth his note,
And this wise Seer within me never errs
I never taught it what it teaches me;
I only follow, when I act aright.

October 9, 1832

from: [wikisource.org](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Self-Reliance)