Jacobson's book presents a carefully crafted account of the evolution of Emerson's thought which focuses on a philosophical analysis of pivotal texts in the context of his life work. At the outset, Jacobson describes his project this way: "Understanding how he moved from a spiritualist faith in the creative thought of the individual to a philosophy of obedience at odds with a customary understanding of Emersonian self-reliance is the topic of this book" (2). The book is divided into three parts. The first explicates Emerson's early understanding of the human situation as captured in the theme of self-reliance. The second examines Emerson's essay, "The Method of Nature," as expressive of the beginning of a shift in his thought. The third articulates the relation of fate to human thought and activity.

Jacobson sees the early stage of Emerson's vision as a radical form of humanism. He claims that

Emerson succeeds in the early essays in articulating the synthesis of thought and will as the foundation of the essential worth of Man. Locating value in the unconcealment of human power, he challenges the individual, not only to build his own world, which is inevitable in any case, but to take responsibility for the world by laying its relations bare. The imperative to self-reliance consists in no more than such an act of unconcealment or resolution that brings the universe into focus and thereby articulates the universal sense.

(19).

Jacobson explores the pragmatic dimensions of this vision by contrasting the Kantian and Emersonian perspectives on the relations between thought and action.

The fundamental imperative standing behind "Self-Reliance" is not Kant's imperative on freedom to legislate rationally, an imperative that presupposes thought's priority over action, but the Emersonian command to act freely and give rise to thought as the presence of oneself in the world, to ignore the external language of grounds and principles and to "speak rather of that which relies, because it works and is" (CW, 2:40) (60-1).

Jacobson then considers Emerson's move away from humanism in the second part of the text. He sees 1841 as the critical point in what he calls "... the turn from humanism to antihumanism ..." (91) Whereas humans are masters of nature in Emerson's version of humanism, this transitional phase places significant limits on the human sphere of influence. "Emerson views Man as a function of nature, a facet brought into existence..."
to manifest nature's presence. Whereas action was essential to the humanist synthesis, there is nothing now for the individual to do but play the role assigned by nature.\" (p. 100) Jacobson situates this shift in perspective in Emerson's growing realization that human activity does not determine the nature of thought and reality.

... Emerson's shift away from the primacy of Man derives from his recognition that thought and action are not reciprocal, as he thought in his early period, that rather, thought and action represent two quite different ways of viewing and understanding the essential fact of human being in nature. Importantly, Emerson privileges the perspective of intellect ... (103).

One of the key themes in Emerson's later thought is the idea of fate. Jacobson characterizes his conception of fate this way:

It [fate] has no place in the field of nature's presencing dynamic. Rather, fate is the limit that stands around the presencing activity that is nature -- stands around nature as what we may do. Properly speaking, fate has no existence. It is not. Fate is the condition of presence and Being and the limit of the dynamic of revelation and concealment. (p. 177).

Fate forms the backdrop against which human thought and activity must be understood. The human role of unlimited interpreter of nature is transformed into one of obedience to a dynamic source of which cannot be comprehended.

This book, in my estimation, contributes in an important way to a deeper understanding of Emerson as not only a primary inspiration for the development of pragmatism, but also as an anticipator of important strands of post-modern thought. As such, it is much more than a welcome addition to Emersonian scholarship. It demands the careful attention of anyone who seeks to gain insight into the development of American philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

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The deaths of John Weiss in 1879 and Ralph Waldo Emerson and Samuel Johnson in 1882 mark the end of what might be called the "American Transcendentalist Era." By the turn of the century, American Transcendentalism, at least as a movement of sorts, dissolved into anthropocentric rationalism, universalism and free religionism. Taking up where Arthur Christy's pioneering 1932 study The Orient in American Transcendentalism left off and