Emerson's Epistemology

Emerson's epistemology The argument of the essays

David Van Leer

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Ralph Waldo Emerson, an important figure in the popular understanding of America has been rediscovered by scholars and critics, yet there has been no critical study of Emerson's relation to traditional nineteenth-century questions about ethics and epistemology. In Emerson's Epistemology David Van Leer turns to this unexplored area of Emerson's philosophy and especially to the problem of his relation to the central intellectual issue of his age - the transcendental idealism of Immanuel Kant. Although Emerson would throughout his life try a number of vocational roles, he considered himself primarily a thinker. He saw his roles as poet and prophet as versions of the more fundamental one of philosopher. Thus an understanding of Emerson's relation to traditional problems about the theory of knowledge clarifies not only the arguments of the specific essays, but the shape of his complex career.

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