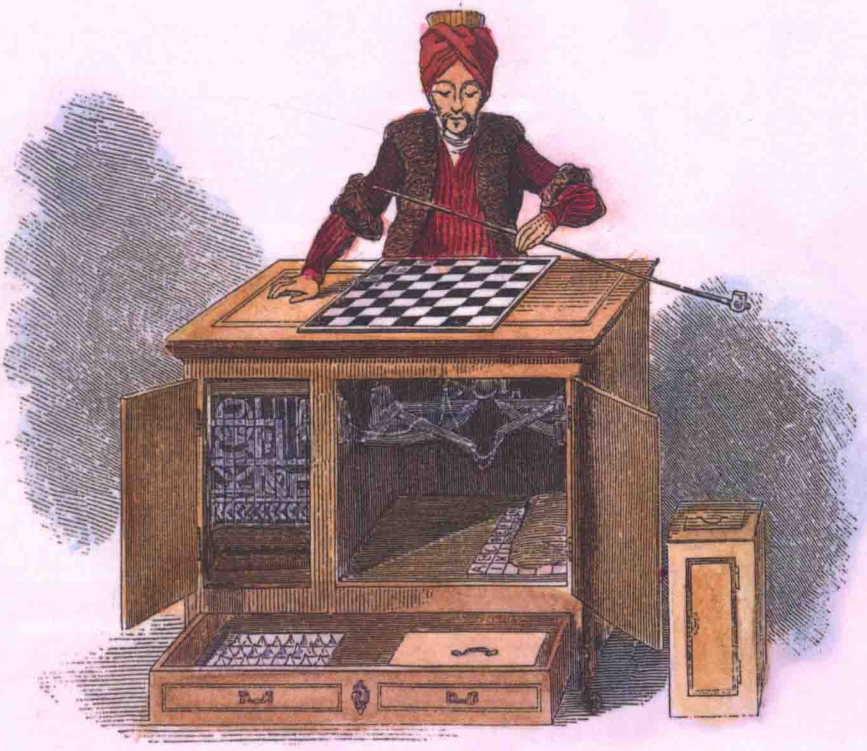

EXPERIENCE and EXPERIMENTAL WRITING

LITERARY PRAGMATISM from EMERSON to the JAMESES

PAUL GRIMSTAD

Experience and Experimental Writing

Literary Pragmatism from Emerson to the Jameses

Paul Grimstad

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Introduction

In the last of the prefaces he added to the New York edition of his fiction, Henry James poses an ambitious thought experiment. What "would be really interesting, and I dare say admirably difficult to go into," James writes

> would be the history of [an] effect of experience; the history, in other words, of the growth of the immense array of terms, perceptional and expressional that... in sentence, passage and page, simply looked over the heads of the standing terms... or perhaps rather like alert winged creatures, perched on those diminished summits and aspired to clearer air. What [such an interest would] come back to is the how and the whence and the why these intenser lights of experience come into being and insist on shining.[1]

What does James mean by experience here? Is he referring to events undergone between the 1892 notebook sketches for the plot of *The Golden Bowl* and the final revisions to it in 1908? Or does he rather refer directly to the "growth of an immense array of terms," as if experience named an impersonal fecundity latent in the very doing of composition? Would the "history of an effect of experience" then be a story about how the new terms—those "alert winged creatures"—had appeared from out of the accidents and surprises of rewriting, and the "admirable difficulty" that of giving an account of how and whence and why such experience had come into being at all? What would you have to take experience to be to think you could arrive at an "intenser" version of it through the process of revision?

In what follows I take James up on his invitation to go into these questions, finding in what he calls a "history of an effect of experience," not only a way of thinking about composition, but the prehistory of the pragmatist insight that experience is not a matter of correspondence but of process and experiment. When the classical pragmatists talk about experience they do not mean getting inner representations to correspond with outer phenomena, nor of securing conditions of possibility for rationally justified knowledge, but an experimental loop of perception, action, consequences, further perception of consequences, further action, further consequences, and so forth. Richard Poirier, for one, links this understanding of

experience to composition, such that for "poet-pragmatists" like Ralph Waldo Emerson, the Jameses, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, and Gertrude Stein, experience is not so much a matter of securing correspondence between mind and world as it is modeled on "writing itself as an activity . . . as a dramatization of how life may be created out of words."[2] If the preface to *The Golden Bowl* invites us to imagine an "effect of experience" that is one with the process of composition, I follow Poirier in finding a version of that idea beginning in Emerson, and in his description of the writers he discusses as Emersonian pragmatists.[3] But rather than moving to writers more typically thought of as "modernist" (Stevens and Stein), I turn here to two of Emerson's contemporaries, Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville.[4] In treating all three of them—along with James—as exemplifying in their poetry and prose an experimentation typically associated with modernism, I want not only to identify an arc of influence in American literary history—roughly from Emerson's leaving the Unitarian ministry to Henry James's late style—but to offer an account of the relation of literature to pragmatism as a function of the relation of experience to experiment.[5]

To make concrete the transition from thinking of experience as the squaring of inner and outer matters to thinking of experience as a process continued in composition, each chapter is organized around a particular scene or encounter: Emerson, in the middle of a crisis of vocation, arrives at a method for treating his journal entries as material for building up lectures and essays after seeing George Cuvier's cabinets of comparative anatomy in Paris; Poe, precariously launched on a career as a work-a-day magazinist, invents the analytic detective story after witnessing and devoting an editorial to Bavarian inventor Johann Maelzel's traveling exhibition of a mechanical chess-player; the impacted style of Melville's *Pierre* emerges out of his agon with the literary-critical dogmas of New York literati, specifically some less than favorable reviews of *Moby-Dick*. These three different ways of dramatizing in prose the replacement of experience as correspondence with experience as composition is made most explicit in the relation between Henry and William James. Despite William's complaint that his brother's late style was "all perfume and simulacrum," Henry's 1903 novel *The Ambassadors* takes as its formal organizing principle precisely the central claim of his brother's radical empiricism: that relations are external to, and as real as, their terms. In building a novel around the multiple ambassadorial relations between New England and Paris, Henry enacts at the level of style William's most ambitious and encompassing account of experience, despite William's professed impatience with the indirection of that style. The "encounter" described in the final chapter is then between the Jameses themselves.

Other figures play a role in the span of time I am calling "Emerson to the Jameses." Most immediately, there are the three representatives of classical pragmatism: Besides William James and John Dewey (whose naturalist account of experience I take up in detail in the remainder of this introduction), there is Charles Peirce, often considered to be the founder of pragmatism. Usually remembered for his magazine articles of the 1870s on truth and verification, and for his work on

semeiotic, Peirce enters the picture here as the author of some little-known essays on reasoning machines and for a specific innovation in the theory of inference. Also discussed are Georges Cuvier, whose work on taxonomy and comparative anatomy were not only a decisive influence on Emerson at a crucial moment in his search for a vocation, but factors centrally in the dénouement of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"; Evert Duyckinck, whose role as publisher and critic in New York City in the 1840s and 1850s in part made careers (however precarious) like Poe's and Melville's possible; Friedrich Nietzsche, who turned to making some of his most experimental books just after re-reading and re-annotating German translations of all of Emerson's *Essays* in 1881 and 1882; Henri Bergson, whose ongoing friendship and correspondence with William James was decisive for the development of James's radical empiricism; and George Santayana, who said that the James brothers were unique for their way of breaking with what he called the "Genteel Tradition"; a claim that could be made for all the writers to whom I have devoted chapters here (even if Santayana himself believed Emerson and Poe were still in that tradition's grip).[6]

No treatment of Emerson as anticipating pragmatism's account of experience can ignore Stanley Cavell's formidable challenge to the idea that Emerson is any kind of pragmatist. Asking whether the phrase "Emersonian pragmatism" is "intended [as] the idea that there was a particular brand of pragmatism called Emersonian, or rather that Emersonianism was always a kind of pragmatism," Cavell finds in this identification "one more form in which the distinctiveness of Emerson's prose is repressed."[7] This worry over the repression of Emerson's distinctiveness as a writer continues a conversation—conducted mostly in remarks made *en passant* and in footnotes—begun in Poirier's *Poetry and Pragmatism.* There Poirier acknowledges at the outset an affinity with Cavell, saying that he feels some "exasperation" at the way Emerson's achievement as a prose stylist has been overlooked in the literary culture he helped to found.[8] And while Poirier is concerned to treat pragmatism as a "form of linguistic skepticism" (a claim that places him squarely in dialogue with Cavell's specific concerns), he also says that part of the distinctiveness of Emerson's writing is the way it is "to be experienced as it is written, and not in any clarifying translation into some other syntax."[9] The description is echoed later in *Poetry and Pragmatism* in a footnote addressed explicitly to Cavell, in which Poirier says that in Emerson's sentences experience is to be found in "the actual accomplishments *in* the writing, word by word."[10] Cavell's reservations about seeing Emerson as any kind of pragmatist are also voiced in relation to prose style; what Cavell calls Emerson's "difficulty."

The simultaneous convergence and conflict between Poirier and Cavell around the distinctiveness of Emerson's style might be considered in light of questions Cavell raises in his *Senses of Walden*: "Why has America never expressed itself philosophically? Or has it, in the metaphysical riot of its greatest literature?"[11] The questions seem both to signal Cavell's attraction to great nineteenth-century American

prose—not only Emerson's, but Thoreau's, Poe's, and Henry James's—and to profess a commitment to working through aspects of the metaphysics pragmatism set out to reject. The tension between metaphysics and pragmatism, though, conceals a deeper one, between skepticism and naturalism; a difference that depends on differing construals of the meaning of experience. That Poirier finds in Emerson the beginnings of pragmatism and that Cavell distrusts this idea—conflicting convictions held for the same reason: the *way* Emerson writes—invites us to unpack the distinction between skepticism and naturalism in relation both to Emerson's style and to different understandings of experience.

Cavell says that in the essay "Experience" Emerson "explicitly challenges the . . . idea of experience to be found in Kant and in the classical empiricists."[12] Both of these models of experience—on the one hand, the way the making of determinate judgments functions as the condition of possibility for objects to become intelligible at all; on the other, the mechanism by which sense impressions come to furnish the mind with ideas—are representationalist. That is, both descriptions of experience come down to giving an account of how "outer" phenomena can be made to square with "inner" representations.[13] Consider this, then, in relation to what Cavell takes to be Emerson's challenge to such models of experience, particularly his line, "but far be it from me the despair which prejudges the law by a paltry empiricism."[14] Cavell takes the line to say that what is wrong with empiricism is "not its reliance on experience but its paltry idea of experience"; a reading that leads him to consider a "little argument" he takes Emerson to be having with Kant about "the nature of experience in its relation to, or revelation of, the natural world."[15] Cavell sees this argument at work in Emerson's saying that "the secret of the illusoriness [of life] is in the necessity of a succession of moods or objects. Gladly we would anchor, but the anchorage is quicksand. This onward trick of nature is too strong for us. *Pero si muove.*"[16] Finding in these lines an engagement with Kant's second Analogy of Experience, Cavell hears in the word "anchorage" an allusion to Kant's well-known example of a boat moving down a river: if an anchorage in *outer* succession were to turn out to be quicksand, then our inner representations would be set adrift. Since the point of the boat analogy for Kant is to give a proof for the objectivity of outer succession (and thus avoid what he calls "dogmatic" idealism), the melting away of *this* anchorage would indeed lead to an extreme form of external world skepticism.[17]

But matters are not so simple as this. Cavell rather tells us that for Emerson "the succession of moods is *not tractable* by the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity Kant proposed for experience," and that it is "*this* onward trick of nature that is too much for us; the given bases for the self are quicksand. The fact that we are given over by this succession . . . means that you can think of it as at once a succession of moods (inner matters) and a succession of objects (outer matters). This very evanescence of the world proves its existence to me; it is what vanishes from me."[18] On Cavell's account, Emerson is saying that the "secret of the illusoriness of life" is our inability to gauge the one order of succession by the other,

because you can think of succession as at once a series of moods or objects. And if neither is tractable by the other taken as fixed, then the "given bases of the self are quicksand," since for Kant one of the conditions of the self's unity—"unity of apperception" as the necessary ground for the synthesis of experience—requires and implies an isomorphism between inner and outer matters. Cavell's recognition of Emerson's "bringing to mind the characteristics of skepticism's mood"[19] thus leads him to hear in these lines from "Experience" both an acknowledgment of one of the more sophisticated efforts at heading off at the pass the threat of the world's becoming alien to us, and a resistance to the idea that the skeptical mood either arises out of or is properly addressed in relation to a problem of inner representation of outer objects. This wariness about the effort to provide an answer to the skeptic is an instance of what Cavell elsewhere calls the "truth of skepticism"; as if Emerson's disappointment in the proof Kant offers as a way of dealing with skepticism were not a failure to be persuaded by Kant's arguments but a part of skepticism's mood.[20]

While Cavell finds in Emerson a skeptical mood not so much characterized by a doubt about knowledge of the external world, but by an inability to feel satisfied with Kant's effort at "answering" the skeptic, he does so by pointing precisely to that feature of Kant's empirical realism—the boat as an emblem for the objectivity of outer succession—that brings Emerson's lines back to the epistemological problem of representation. If our moods succeed each other (even if, as Emerson has it elsewhere, they "do not believe in each other"[21]) then the "logic of moods" remains expressible in the kind of argument that would ground the fact of their succession in something outside us. And that last *Pero si mouve*—an allusion to Galileo's tactful response to his persecutors that, while he did not mean to suggest that the Earth moves around the Sun, nevertheless added "and yet it does move"—while pointing to Copernican turns both astronomical and epistemological, might then be read as a sort of *sotto voce* reminder of the nagging pull on us of Kant's understanding of experience as (in part) premised on the gauging of inner by outer succession. Changing course from riverboats to celestial bodies, we might say that Cavell's effort to show Emerson both feeling the gravitational pull (or getting out of the orbit) of skepticism, nevertheless depends on the intelligibility of its threat for a finding in "Experience" a little argument with Kant.

Despite this rendering of the role of succession in Emerson, and despite Cavell's own disappointment with the Kantian "settlement with skepticism"—for all the glory of transcendental idealism, it still requires that things in themselves drop out of the picture (to this gift from Kant Cavell has replied: "thanks for nothing"[22])—Cavell's reading of Emerson's lines returns experience to the problem of aligning "inner [with] outer matters"; that is, to the problem of representation, or at any rate a successor of this problem.[23] We might push this further and say that to get off the ground as a genuine problem skepticism *must* understand experience as some form of (however failed) representation. If we are worried about our access to the external world, or to other minds, or whether we can have a firm grasp on what it means

to follow a rule, or whether we can have our selves reflected back to us in another's recognition; or if it is just that we have begun to wonder how a simultaneous respect for, and doubt about, efforts to answer the skeptic might stand for some deep truth about us: in each case, what we are worried or wondering about is the correspondence of some set of representations with a condition of life.

But consider some of the steps that led to the making of Emerson's essay "Experience." A journal entry of January 1841 says "the method of advance in nature is perpetual transformation," and on September 11, 1841, Emerson says: "It is much to write sentences; it is more to add method & write out the spirit of your life symmetrically... to arrange many reflections in their natural order so that I shall have one homogeneous piece... this continuity is for the great."[24] Here, the role of "succession" seems not to be bound up with the problem of representation, but of arriving at a practicable method of composition. The move from the "perpetual transformations" of nature to what Emerson calls "writing out the spirit of your life" is made more explicit in the lecture "The Method of Nature," given at Waterville College in Maine, also in 1841. In that lecture Emerson says to his audience that they (and he) will "celebrate this hour by exploring the method of nature. Let us see that, as nearly as we can, and try how far it is transferable to the literary life."[25] Some months later in his lecture called "The Poet," Emerson describes what the poet does as "vehicular," "fluxional," and "transitive," such that the poet's lines "flow with the flowing of nature."[26] Rather than think of outer succession as lost to us, because of a veil or an imbalance between inner and outer matters, Emerson wants to find a continuity running from nature to composition.

Given Cavell's assertion that Emerson's idea of experience is a challenge to both transcendental idealism and classical empiricism (a claim with which I agree), I want to treat that challenge as the way he replaces a worry over the vicissitudes of representation with what he simply calls "method." And given that Cavell is as concerned as Poirier with the distinctiveness of Emerson's way of writing (yet is reluctant to find in Emerson any form of pragmatism) we ought to consider how the method by which Emerson got his sentences to sound the way they do informed John Dewey's description of experience as the "continuity between natural events... and the origin and development of meanings [as a] naturalistic link which does away with the often alleged necessity of dividing the objects of experience into two worlds."[27] Dewey's naturalist rejection of correspondence epistemology, and the way it informs his aesthetics, encourages us to stop puzzling over how to connect the chasm between mind and world and imagine rather a course or continuum of experience moving from one to the other. In his 1925 Paul Carus lectures, *Experience and Nature*, Dewey offered a naturalist account of experience premised on what he called a "shift of emphasis from the experienced (the *what*) to the experiencing, the *how*, the method of its course." He later describes this move from the "what" to the "how" of experience as a desire to eliminate the "division of everything into nature *and* experience," encouraging us rather to think of experience as the "direction of natural events to meanings"; what John Murphy

has called "opposing the spirit of Cartesianism with what might be called the spirit of experimentalism."[28]

All of this sounds like a belated reformulation of Emerson's "Method of Nature." Indeed, in his 1903 essay on Emerson, Dewey challenges the view of Emerson as a mere amasser of charming aphorisms, or of having a "lack of method."[29] Instead, Dewey praises Emerson's "movement of thought"; a thinking that happens through "art" not "metaphysics"; the way he "set out to be a maker rather than a reflector."[30] More attuned to the "surprises of reception than any fixed goal," Emerson's prose arises as a "following the unfolding of perception," of the "*way* of things"; a form of making that "takes the *way* of truth... for truth."[31] Summarizing the importance of method for Emerson, Dewey quotes from "Spiritual Laws," that a man is "a method, a plan of arrangement" and, taking literally the etymology of the word "method" (μέθοδος; road), quotes Emerson's line from "Experience," "everything good is on the highway."[32]

Despite the differences between Dewey's naturalist inheritance of Emerson and Cavell's finding in his writing a grappling with the problem of skepticism, Cavell too sees composition as linked to method and to experimentation. In an essay written before he'd found a model pitch for his own prose in Emerson and Thoreau, Cavell asks, in "Music Discomposed": "What is composition, and what is it to compose?"[33] The question for Cavell amounts to asking—in keeping with his concern, in all his work, with the notion of criteria—What is to *count* as an example of composition? Answering his own question, he calls composition the "search for an object worthy of our attention"; a process he describes as an "experimental problem."[34] By "experimentation" Cavell seems to mean an activity taking the form of a search; one which does not know where it is going ahead of time, fashions provisional goals as part of the unfolding of the process, and remains open to the surprises that emerge from an attention to work as it is being made.[35] When Cavell extends this idea to a discussion of Emerson's and Thoreau's practice of working up from journal entries into lectures, essays, and books, it is just this kind of experimentation he has in mind. What the earlier essay calls "attention" is now called "interest":

> Emerson [and Thoreau's] relation to poetry is inherently their interest in their own writing... their interest in the fact that what they are building is writing, that their writing is, as it realizes itself daily under their hands, sentence by shunning sentence... the making of it happen, the poetry of it.[36]

If we put together some of his different claims, we might say that for Cavell the words "composition," "experiment," "attention," "search," "interest," and "poetry" are related in the way they each contribute to a description of experience. And this would then be one that bears some affinity with Dewey's description of Emerson's open-ended, experimental method.[37]

If both Dewey and Cavell can be said to find in Emerson a notion of experience as experiment, there is still the fundamental difference between Cavell's staying

within the problem of skepticism and Dewey's naturalism. Cavell acknowledges this in a recent book, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, saying of Dewey's work that it "sometimes... demonstrates how a mass of experience can go philosophically almost nowhere (for Dewey into a hundred abstract rejections of some patently unintelligible thesis together with its obviously undesirable antithesis)."[38] An entire philosophic position is squeezed into that parenthetic aside, and it is worth unpacking a bit. The "hundred abstract rejections" are presumably the relentless critique of representationalism that is the backbone of *Experience and Nature*, and the "patently unintelligible thesis" must be that experience can (or should) be understood as a continuum running from nature to meaning. But given Cavell's claim that Emerson offers a challenge to the models of experience found in classical empiricsm and Kant, we are left to wonder if Cavell has still a different idea of how such accounts of experience might be challenged, and in a way that would be both attuned to Emerson's literary method, and yet not fall into line with Dewey's "abstract rejections."

Here, then, we ought to turn to Cavell's essay "What's the Use of Calling Emerson a Pragmatist?," which both develops the idea of composition as a form of experimentation and offers a new set of arguments for why Emerson should not be thought of as a precursor to pragmatism. Cavell describes Emerson's writing as an appeal to "the words we are given in common," and the way the "proposals for what we say... require something like experimentation... trials that inherently run the risk of exasperation [and so leads to a] writing which is *difficult* in a way no other American philosopher's (save Thoreau's) has been, certainly not that of James and Dewey. Are these different responses to language not philosophically fundamental? They seem so to me."[39] Here the relation of philosophy to style—the claim that the doing of philosophy is inseparable from a way of writing—is used to buttress Cavell's annoyance at how pragmatism seems "designed to refuse to take skepticism seriously, as it refuses [in Dewey's case] to take metaphysical distinctions seriously."[40] But in linking the issue of prose style to the accusation that Dewey refuses to recognize the problem of skepticism, Cavell implicitly suspends aspects of his earlier account of composition as experiment. If, for Cavell, "the sound [of prose] makes all the difference," and Emerson and Dewey sound just too different for there to be a substantive link between them, it should be remembered that Dewey treated Emerson's method—his "movement of thought"—as the basis for his naturalist account of experience. Rather than treat Emerson's difficulty as forming a difference in kind from Dewey's way of doing philosophy (for Cavell presumably too drably scientistic), we should see Dewey as belatedly formalizing, in his account of the relation of nature to meaning, what Emerson had all along been doing at the level of the sentence.[41] In this sense at least, we can counter Cavell's assertion that Dewey "never took up [Emerson] philosophically."[42]

I want to turn now to two thinkers who, while taking themselves to be inheritors of the pragmatist tradition, nevertheless, raise a different set of objections to Dewey's

naturalism.[43] While a self-identifying pragmatist like Robert Brandom entirely rejects the word "experience" (it is "not one of his words" as he puts it), he nevertheless offers one of the best descriptions we have of what Dewey means by experience. Brandom tells us that for Dewey experience is

> transactional and structured as learning; a process rather than a state or episode. Its slogan might be "No experience without experiment."[Dewey] conceives experience as *Erfahrung* [such that] the unit of experience is a Test-Operate-Test cycle of perception, action and further perception of the results of the action. On this model, experience is not an *input* to the process of learning. Experience *is* the process of learning.[44]

Brandom's characterization of Dewey's replacement of a "state" or "episode" with "process"—what he has more recently described as "processual, developmental *Erfahrung* rather than episodic, self-intimating *Erlebnis*... a feedback loop of perception, responsive performance, and perception of the results of performance"[45]—imagines experience as developmental learning over time rather than encounters with discrete bundles of impressions. To say that experience *is* the process of learning is to get out of habit of thinking of experience as a matter of leaping the chasm between mind and world, and to start thinking of it as a process running from perception to meaning.

While Richard Rorty, Brandom's *Doktorvater*, thought of Dewey as one of his philosophical heroes and inherits from him and the other classical pragmatists the desire to abandon representation in favor of process and practice (what he sometimes simply calls "conversation") he, like Brandom, rejects the term "experience."[46] Specifically, he rejects Dewey's notion of experience as a continuum bridging the causal order of nature to the normative order of linguistic meaning.[47] Taking Dewey to task in his essay "Dewey's Metaphysics," Rorty says Dewey makes the mistake of "cross[ing] the line... between causal [relations] and the self-conscious beliefs and inferences they make possible," cautioning that "nothing is to be gained for an understanding of human knowledge by running together the vocabularies in which we describe the causal antecedents of knowledge with those in which we offer justifications of our claims to knowledge."[48] In a later essay, "Dewey Between Hegel and Darwin," Rorty makes more explicit his criticism of what he calls Dewey's "running together sentences with experiences," which he says amounts to a blurring of the "distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive states... between sensations and beliefs... the distinction between the question 'What causes our beliefs?' and the question 'What justifies our beliefs?'"[49] Presuming pre–Linguistic Turn forms of pragmatism have not entirely expunged the false problem of representationalism, Rorty goes on to critique the radically empiricist aspect of classical pragmatism, saying that "the blurring of cause and justification of belief is characteristic of both British empiricism and of British idealism [and] all that the 'radical empiricism' side of pragmatism did was to qualify this blurring by denying that relations among ideas are 'contributed by the mind' rather than 'given.'"

Rorty singles out as evidence of this qualification Dewey's claim that "unless there is a breach of historic and natural continuity, cognitive experience must originate within that of a non-cognitive sort."[50]

James Kloppenberg describes Rorty's hard-and-fast distinction between the cognitive (linguistic) and the non-cognitive (causal) as part of his treating the Linguistic Turn as "as a step forward rather than a dead end [and so Rorty] dogmatically refused to accept any philosophy in which something other than language, namely experience... plays an important part."[51] Brandom inherits this apprehension about the blurring of experience and language, saying that what separates late-twentieth-century analytic philosophers from classical pragmatists is that "they do not share the distinctively twentieth century philosophical concern with... the *discontinuities* with nature that it establishes and enforces [since the classical pragmatists] emphasize the *continuity* between concept users and organic nature."[52] In short, for analytic neopragmatists like Rorty and Brandom, it is not so simple to move from causal mechanism to linguistic meaning simply by intoning the word "experience." You cannot set up, as Dewey puts it, a "continuity between natural events... and the origin and development of meanings," without accounting for the fundamental discrepancy between nature as the order of causes and the linguistic as the normative order of reason giving and justification.[53]

The analytic critique of classical pragmatism thus hinges on the idea that language is bound up with justification, and so is something qualitatively different from experience understood as the causal impingements of the senses: you can't move from the cause to the justification of a belief because to be able to say something at all is to be in what Wilfrid Sellars called the "space of reasons." A thinker of immense importance for both Rorty and Brandom, Sellars is best known for his critique of what he called the "myth of the given"; the myth that causal determinations—what the classical empiricist might call "impressions"—could serve as a foundation for discourse in the space of reasons. The critique of givenness follows from the view that the deliverances of the senses alone are not enough to get a language game going; indeed, that the capacity even to make non-inferential observation reports already *depends* on the normative ability to subsume experienced particulars under general concepts.[54] Mere reliably differential responses to stimuli are not enough for an autonomous discourse, since bare causal transactions cannot stand as reasons for holding a belief. While, say, parrots can be trained to be reliable differential responders, parrots (or ravens, to use Edgar Allan Poe's example, about which I will have more to say below) do not then go on to keep playing the game of giving and asking for reasons. Parrots are in this sense like a piece of iron that "responds" to rain by rusting, or a photo-electric cell wired up to a tape recorder that "says" "red" when we shine red light on it.[55]

With the analytic pragmatists' sensitivity to the myth of the given in mind, I want to return to Cavell's description of composition as an experimental search, with the aim of finding in it an account of meaning that would be sensitive to the tension between the "given" and linguistic meaning, yet not reduce meaning simply