

*Language is a
Form of
Experience:
Reconciling
Classical
Pragmatism
and
Neopragmatism*

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Abstract

The revival of philosophical pragmatism has generated a wealth of intramural debates between neopragmatists like Richard Rorty and contemporary scholars devoted to explicating the classical pragmatism of John Dewey and William James. Of all these internecine conflicts, the most divisive concerns the status of language and experience in pragmatist philosophy. Contemporary scholars of classical pragmatism defend experience as the heart of pragmatism while neopragmatists drop the concept of experience in favor of a thoroughly linguistic pragmatism. I argue that both positions engender formidable risks. After discussing the present impasse, I describe a third version of pragmatism which involves a reconstruction of the classical pragmatist concept of experience in light of the criticisms of foundationalism crucial to the neopragmatist linguistic turn. This third version of pragmatism does justice to both Rorty and Dewey by focusing on experience as a temporal field.

Keywords: Richard Rorty, John Dewey, William James, Classical Pragmatism, Neopragmatism, Foundationalism, Myth of the Given, Linguistic Turn

***Experience and Language in
Contemporary Pragmatism***

The revival of pragmatism by contemporary philosophers such as Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, and Robert Brandom has generated a wealth of intramural debates between these upstart neopragmatists and contemporary scholars of classical pragmatism devoted to the work of Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. Of all the internecine conflicts which continue to rage, perhaps the most ink has been spilled

over issues concerning the relative priority of language and experience in pragmatism. While defenders of classical pragmatism defend experience as the conceptual center of an experiential pragmatism, Rorty and many other neopragmatists drop the concept of experience altogether in favor of a thoroughly linguistic pragmatism. While this is certainly not the only debate burning between upstart neopragmatists and contemporary classical pragmatists, it is very much a hot point according to a number of recent surveys of pragmatism by esteemed intellectual historians including James Kloppenberg, Robert Westbrook, and Martin Jay.¹ This is one issue on which nearly everyone agrees that there is an important split within the heart of pragmatism itself.

This essay is offered as a proposal that we now begin to view this debate in a different manner, namely from the perspective of its forthcoming resolution. Rather than understanding experiential primapragmatism² and linguistic neopragmatism as two opposed camps, it is time to consider the possibility of yet another stage in pragmatist thought which will combine the best insights of each of its predecessors. This would require reinterpreting this intramural debate such that primapragmatism and neopragmatism could be seen as two moments in a broader pragmatist sweep. This revision would be in keeping with the temperament of pragmatism itself insofar as it would prove pragmatism capacious enough to house both of its major moments. This attempt at a resolution need not, of course, involve denying that there are other important areas of conflict separating Rorty and Brandom from Dewey and James. Certainly there are. My goal here is only to reconcile some of the central issues concerning language and experience. It is my hope that this will then allow other points of disagreement, which are potentially of far greater moment, to come to the foreground.

It is worth clarifying at the outset the relevance of these matters to other debates taking place outside of the narrow context of pragmatist scholarship. For the intramural debate amongst the pragmatists I am here considering recapitulates larger debates central throughout much of modern philosophy. These debates concern the traditional epistemological issue of the relation between our knowledge and the realities which this knowledge is about. These debates have returned time and time again to the familiar stand-off between those who hold that any claim to truth stands in need of some final extra-human arbiter which makes truths true (foundationalists, realists, externalists) and those who adopt the view that internal factors such as coherence among beliefs is all we could ever need to settle any practical dispute regarding competing truth claims (nominalists, anti-realists, internalists). The latter camps affirm, while the former camps deny, that our beliefs do not really aim at a truth adequate to reality so much as a justification of these beliefs to other rational beings. This debate has loomed large in a variety of contemporary philosophical scenes, from contemporary analytic epistemology, to

the *Hermeneutikstreit* between Habermas and Gadamer, to scholarship on the epistemological status of discourse and language in the work of thinkers such as Foucault and Wittgenstein. Of further note is the appearance of this debate in other disciplinary contexts, most notably history and political theory.³

I point all this out simply to indicate the breadth of many of the philosophical issues featured in the debates between the pragmatist metaphysicians of experience and the pragmatist philosophers of language. Of course, there remain important differences such that the internecine pragmatist debates will not always result in consequences which will be useful elsewhere. All this goes toward stating the obvious: the solution which I sketch below for overcoming the impasse between the two pragmatist camps is by no means a complete solution to the larger epistemological problems at the heart of other domains of contemporary philosophy and yet at the same time a resolution of these issues internal to pragmatism still offers at the very least a promising new approach to these problems as they arise in other contexts.⁴

The Prima-pragmatist Defense of Experience

Rorty's revival of pragmatism under the auspices of the linguistic turn has put a number of defenders of classical forms of pragmatism on the defensive. These contemporary prima-pragmatists are concerned that Rorty's attempt to replace experience with language threatens to eviscerate pragmatism of its philosophical core. In order to save this philosophical core, they have rallied around the concept of experience so as to demonstrate both its centrality for the philosophical positions of the classical pragmatists and its vitality for contemporary philosophy.

The great risk involved in a revival of the concept of experience in the context of epistemology is that of backsliding into some of the philosophical dead ends that Rorty and others helped show pragmatism the way out of. Chief among these is the dreaded dead end of representationalist foundationalism. The risk is that experience will get described in such a way as to make it indistinguishable from what Wilfrid Sellars criticized as the myth of the given.⁵ Foundationalism is the epistemological thesis that there exists some ultimate foundation for knowledge such as basic beliefs, experiential immediacies, or natural traits common to all human activity. In criticizing the conception of the given, Sellars was taking on one of the last strongholds of empiricist foundationalism. If givenism goes, then so too goes foundationalism.⁶ So when pragmatists argue that there is something immediately and directly given in experience, they have already gone a long way (though not quite all the way) toward defending an idea that can be difficult to distinguish from an epistemic foundation. Pragmatist conceptions of immediate and direct experience, in other words, are precisely the sort of thing which gets pressed into service as an epistemic foundation. To

avoid this foundationalism, then, contemporary pragmatists who are eager to revive the concept of experience must be on guard to not treat experience as a kind of ultimate given-ness against which we might be able to measure our truth claims. Pragmatists can indeed return to experience without returning to foundationalism, but they can do so only after they absorb the insights which motivated Rorty's shift from experience to language.

Dewey and James, of course, could not have anachronistically benefited from Rorty's criticisms of foundationalism. The decades of philosophical innovation which intervened between the development of classical pragmatism and the crystallization of neopragmatism helps explain why earlier pragmatists may not have seen themselves as fully clear of representationalist foundationalism as did later pragmatists. The simplest explanation of this historical gap is to say that it took the linguistic turn to get the full depth of the problems of representationalist foundationalism into proper view. The linguistic turn was, to be sure, but one part of a broader philosophical revolt against foundationalism which Peirce, James, and Dewey, along with others in Europe such as Nietzsche and Bergson, had helped launch. But the classical pragmatists were writing at the beginning of that revolt and thus lacked the conceptual tools and philosophical metaphors which could have helped them to get the epistemic role of experience into proper focus. It was only near the end of this revolt, around the time of the linguistic turn, that philosophers began to develop the kind of analytical framework necessary for eschewing the most subtle forms of givenism, representationalism, and foundationalism. Before that turn, philosophers simply did not appreciate all the possible nuances of these complex errors. This does not mean that Dewey and James were foundationalists. It only means that they were not in the best position to understand how they might successfully go antifoundationalist in the right kind of way.

This helps explain James's and Dewey's numerous, even if sometimes merely casual, references to seemingly givenist notions like "primary experience" and "perceptual immediacy." James sometimes described his concept of pure experience, for example, in terms of "a chaos of experiences" or "the immediate flux of life."⁷ Dewey sometimes made loose references to such experiential givens as "the immediate qualitative 'feel'" suggesting a "dumb, formless experience" while also expanding on his central concept of "primary experience" in terms of its "heterogeneity and fullness" and its "coarseness and crudity."⁸ All of these descriptions of experience, and there are countless others, are difficult to distinguish from claims for an immediate experiential content which we then lay our conceptual schemes on top of.⁹ All of these descriptions suggest exactly that sort of primary awareness of raw givens that could be put to excellent use as the grounding level of a foundationalist epistemology.

But what of the epistemic role played by these conceptions of experience? The crucial thing about givenism is not after all the mere existence of the raw feeling of immediate and dumb experience, but rather the epistemic role assigned to this primary experience. Dewey stressed often enough that he distinguished between primary experience as “had” and reflective experiences as “known.”¹⁰ But why, we must ask, did he then go through so much trouble to precisely specify the havings of primary experience in his work on knowledge? Primary experience surely plays some role in Dewey’s epistemology. The problem which he ran up against time and time again was that of specifying this epistemic role without describing primary experiences as givens capable of functioning as foundations. Dewey mostly failed to resolve this problem. Consider his claim in *Experience and Nature* that primary experience “furnishes the first data of the reflection which constructs the secondary objects” such that “test and verification of the latter is secured only by return to things of crude or macroscopic experience.”¹¹ Subsequently in the essay “Qualitative Thought” he repeated the same error in arguing that “the immediate existence of quality” is “the point of departure and the regulative principle of all thinking.”¹² These quasi-foundationalist formulations suggest that we ought to be very cautious when traveling around in the territory of pragmatist experience.

Subsequent commentators considering Dewey’s voluminous discussions of “primary experience” and James’s of “pure experience” have found it extraordinarily difficult to say just how it is that we can deploy these descriptions of immediate and primary experience without specifying them in terms of the outworn dualisms of mind and reality or subject and object that pragmatism was supposed to help us overcome. This occasional proximity to such troubled philosophical paradigms has led commentators from Santayana to Rorty to worry that the pragmatist conception of experience is particularly problematic when put forth in the form of a metaphysics which attempts to describe the context-transcendent traits of all human experience.¹³ Even if we can reasonably dispute the accuracy of Santayana’s and Rorty’s quite different interpretations of pragmatism, it is still difficult to deny their shared point that there is an obvious whiff of givenism in the pragmatist metaphysics of experience. This criticism need not be formulated in positivistic terms such that the concept of experience is problematic simply because it is metaphysical, but can more plausibly be cited as the worry that primapragmatists too often put forth their metaphysics in the wrong kind of way such that their metaphysics resembles first philosophy more than it resembles a postulated tool of inquiry. The lesson we should draw from these criticisms is that pragmatists need to employ special caution when issuing metaphysical theses about experience. My claim is not the strong thesis that James and Dewey were foundationalists, but only the more modest thought that they were not equipped

with a sophisticated enough antifoundationalist repertoire to ensure that their descriptions of experience would not play into the hands of foundationalism and givenism. Dewey and James, simply put, were not always cautious enough even if we can find plenty of places in their writings where they were on sufficient guard against givenism.

Much of what James and Dewey offered as a metaphysics of experience is clearly difficult to distinguish from foundationalism. Fortunately, there is much else in their work on experience that speaks otherwise. Contemporary pragmatists should focus their attention on these other aspects of classical pragmatism just insofar as, unlike James and Dewey, we find ourselves in a position to benefit from the critiques of foundationalism and givenism put forth by Wittgenstein, Sellars, Davidson, and Rorty. It is thus quite unfortunate that many contemporary primapragmatists have not been particularly inclined to absorb these neopragmatist insights. A number of pragmatists have as a result come dangerously near to foundationalism in relying on a metaphysics of experience to guard themselves against Rorty's linguisticism. The proximity of these contemporary primapragmatists to foundationalism is indeed firmly rooted in much textual evidence in virtue of which they can rightly claim titles as loyal classical pragmatists. But such claims to this title owe much to the fact that James and Dewey themselves were not always on sufficient guard against various philosophical conceptions which are difficult to dissociate from the foundationalist notion of an experiential given. Pragmatists at the beginning of the twenty-first century have at their disposal the tools necessary for being more vigilant against these errors than James and Dewey could have been at the beginning of the twentieth century prior to several decades of refining these tools. A quick review of recent work in the primapragmatist vein will provide evidence that many pragmatists are still not on sufficient guard against the doctrine of the given and the foundationalism which it countenances.

Ralph Sleeper's work is probably the most spirited defense of Dewey's pragmatism against Rorty's attempted appropriation. His work is still quoted often by those siding against Rorty's use of Dewey. But Sleeper was, unfortunately, more concerned to salvage Dewey's concept of experience from Rorty's critiques than he was to eliminate foundationalism from his own account of pragmatism. Sleeper was explicit that he did not wish to revive foundationalism, but in prioritizing the rescue of Dewey's concept of experience from Rorty's linguisticism he came dangerously near to foundationalism. This prioritization of experience over antifoundationalism is signaled in such ripostes to Rorty as this: "by concentrating almost exclusively upon the antifoundationalist consequences of pragmatism, Rorty's account is all too 'deconstructionist'."¹⁴ Sleeper's attempt to work out what this something was went as follows: "The foundational function of epistemology is denied by assigning the task of accounting for what explains knowledge jointly to logic and

metaphysics,” which he thought could together provide a complete “system in which the divergent elements all hang together.”¹⁵ Rorty’s convincing reply to this maneuver was to argue that Sleeper’s emphasis on a logic of experience and a metaphysics of existence simply places too much weight on certain notions, such as method, which have been shown to bear too many of the trademarks of familiar forms of foundationalist philosophy.¹⁶ In Sleeper’s version of pragmatism logic and metaphysics turn out to be something quite more than merely postulated tools which may occasionally be useful—they assume the form of special philosophical accounts which promise to offer something like a groundwork of experience and existence.

A number of contemporary pragmatists similarly give metaphysics pride of place in their accounts of pragmatism including such notable pragmatists as Richard Bernstein, Thomas Alexander, and James Gouinlock.¹⁷ In spite of the many merits of their work, there is a clear tension in these authors’ attribution of both a strong metaphysical and a strong antifoundational strain to Dewey. In too many cases, this tension gets resolved by prioritizing a metaphysics of experience in a way that too much risks turning experience into a foundation. Metaphysics can be consistent with antifoundationalism, but only if the antifoundationalism comes first and the metaphysics follows later as a pragmatic tool to be provisionally employed only where it comes in handy. Rather than prioritizing metaphysics in a way that opens the door to foundationalism, pragmatists should prioritize antifoundationalism as the most general context for a reconstruction of experience such that metaphysics gets invoked as just one among many of the tools we postulate in describing and developing experience.

The dangers of taking metaphysics too seriously in this way are evidenced in Gouinlock’s defense of Dewey against Rorty. Gouinlock claims that “Dewey’s metaphysics is an attempt to characterize the inclusive context of human existence in such a way that we might learn how to function in it as effectively as possible.”¹⁸ He elsewhere describes this attempt as “the discrimination of traits common to all contexts, or situations, of experience.”¹⁹ But when the skeptics roll up and start bullying pragmatists about being relativists, these universal traits common to every context, situation and experience are too easily drafted into service as invariant givens capable of functioning as epistemological foundations. The skeptics are defeated, but at the price of retreating to foundationalism. These sorts of foundationalist tendencies in contemporary pragmatism are not restricted to commentators on Dewey. While Charlene Haddock Seigfried carefully guards her own conception of pragmatism against substantive metaphysics and against foundationalism,²⁰ her description of James’s pragmatism approaches the same foundationalism courted by the Deweyan metaphysicians of experience. Seigfried’s claim is that the “organizing center” of James’s thought is “the establishment of

a secure foundation in experience.” She explicates James’s “foundation” of experience in terms of a “priority of lived experience.”²¹ While Seigfried’s account of James’s experiential pragmatism is clearly not metaphysical, I find it difficult to distinguish her position from much that goes by the name of foundationalism. In Peirce’s pragmatism, too, talk of foundations surfaces in debates over whether or not Peirce was a foundationalist, an anti-foundationalist, or closer to some middle position (such as Susan Haack’s foundherentism).²² It is notable that one central issue in these debates concerns the role played by metaphysics in Peirce’s inferentialist theory of inquiry.

Turning now to some of the most recent scholarship on Deweyan pragmatism, this literature clearly indicates an increasing degree of comfort with talk of foundations and givens amongst contemporary commentators on Dewey. Consider David Hildebrand’s recent defense of Dewey’s pragmatism against Rorty’s appropriative neopragmatism. Responding to Rorty’s suggestion that we move everything over from experience to sociolinguistic practice, Hildebrand rightly notes that “there are still cases, Dewey would maintain, in which neither an appeal to social practices nor human needs will do.” And what do we appeal to in such cases? Hildebrand’s answer is that we appeal to “the problematic situation” itself insofar as this suggests that “experience is ‘prior’ to practices and needs.” He backs this up with the claim that “our very ability to reassess ‘needs’ and ‘social practices’ depends upon our ability to measure the meaning of these abstractions against something more intimately present, namely the lived moments to which they supposedly apply.”²³ In a similar vein, John Shook’s excellent book on the development of Dewey’s theory of knowledge attributes to Dewey, or at least to one stage of his thought, the view that “human experience must be the ultimate philosophical ground of appeal.”²⁴ To take a final example, Gregory Pappas’s otherwise excellent work on pragmatist ethics begins with an observation about Dewey’s attempt to “base philosophy in experience” such that experience is “where things are present in their brute and direct qualitative ‘givenness’ and ‘thereness’.”²⁵ This work all indicates that contemporary primapragmatists are growing increasingly comfortable with conceptions of a direct and immediate form of experience despite the fact that such conceptions are extremely difficult to distinguish from the idea of experiential givens. This is reflected in other recent scholarship which explicitly registers the foundationalist residue countenanced by primapragmatist conceptions of experience. Scott Aikin argues that the non-inferential cognitive awareness of givenism is “entailed by a Deweyan pragmatic theory of experience.”²⁶ And Hugh Miller echoes the increasing prevalence of quasi-foundationalist conceptions of the given in contemporary primapragmatism in arguing that “Dewey did not completely fumigate the heavy scent of foundationalism that permeates objectivism.”²⁷

In view of these trends in pragmatist scholarship, it bears repeating at the present moment that a conception of experience as an “ultimate ground of appeal”, a “more intimate measure”, or a “direct qualitative ‘givenness’” serves to make experience virtually indistinguishable from foundational givens. Though most contemporary pragmatists would want to deny that their endorsements of experiential givenism entail foundationalism, it is decidedly difficult to understand how we might detach the theory of the given from the project of developing a foundationalist theory of knowledge. Some pragmatists may wish to follow Dewey in insisting that these experiential givens are but raw feels which can be carefully distinguished from mediated knowings. But it still needs to be spelled out exactly why pragmatists are so insistent on a notion of primary experience if they concede that this notion does not play the sort of epistemic role which givens are supposed to play in foundationalist epistemology. Either primary havings hold no epistemic relations to reflective knowings and so do not play any important epistemic role or primary havings provide the basic stuff out of which reflective knowings are developed and against which they are tested in which case we still need a nonfoundationalist account of the epistemic relation that holds between these havings and knowings.

All of this simply goes toward showing that contemporary prima-pragmatists have made generous use of such conceptions as primary experience and qualitative immediacy without being on sufficient guard against the foundationalism conjured by these concepts. There is a great deal about pragmatism that we can learn from the work of each of the commentators I have quoted above, but we should not turn to their work for lessons about how pragmatism can successfully avoid the pitfalls of foundationalism, representationalism, and givenism. Absorbing the full force of the threat of foundationalism, which neopragmatists like Rorty can help pragmatism to do, will disabuse prima-pragmatists of some of their more problematic ritual incantations as well as the need to do battle with the foundationalist specters these spells revive.

The Neopragmatist Linguistic Turn

Rorty has described the linguistic turn as a way out of the all-too-common philosophical mistake of foundationalism. By concentrating exclusively on the use of language publicly available to us all, Rorty argues, we can rid ourselves of any hankering for an authoritative sky-hook on which our claims to knowledge could conceivably be hung.

Of course, this was not the original intent of the linguistic turn. Rorty, a quite astute intellectual historian of twentieth-century philosophy, notes this well. He writes that the initial attempt in the early twentieth century to move everything over from consciousness to language was a “rather desperate attempt to keep philosophy an armchair discipline.” The linguistic turn was originally thought to be a way of

rescuing philosophical foundationalism: “The idea was to mark off a space for a priori knowledge into which neither sociology nor history nor art nor natural science could intrude. It was an attempt to find a substitute for Kant’s ‘transcendental standpoint.’ The replacement of ‘mind’ or ‘experience’ by ‘meaning’ was supposed to insure the purity and autonomy of philosophy by providing it with a nonempirical subject matter.”²⁸ Philosophy had always promised a nonempirical foundation for empirical inquiry, but it had never delivered one. But it was this promise (as convincingly made by Descartes, Locke, and Kant) that had secured philosophy its place in the modern world. So at the very moment when it began to look like empirical inquiry could take care of itself without any need for philosophical foundations, the philosophers reissued their bold promise to state the conditions of the possibility of empirical knowledge by removing these conditions of possibility from experience and placing them in language. This saved them from the imminent encroachments of the psychologists only to put them later on in the path of the encroaching linguists.

Rorty notes two crucial premises which lay behind the attempt to replace “experience” with “language”: “First, the two terms had an equally large scope—both delimited the entire domain of human inquiry, of topics available to human study. Second, the notions of ‘language’ and ‘meaning’ seemed, at the beginning of the century, immune to the naturalizing process.”²⁹ Armed with these two premises, the first generation of language philosophers (Frege, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein) argued that language could at last provide that foundation through which philosophy could specify an ultimate court of appeal for all truth claims. But it soon became apparent that once you move everything over to language the foundationalist project begins to seem pointless. And so the second generation of language philosophers (the later Wittgenstein, Sellars, Quine, and Davidson) began to experiment with hooking up linguisticism to the antifoundationalism launched by James and Dewey and by doing so eventually concluded that the premise of language’s immunity against naturalization had failed to hold. This was the premise which was to keep philosophy an independent discipline. But it grew increasingly disreputable as the analysis of words gave way to the analysis of sentences which gave way to the analysis of coherent sets of sentences or vocabularies which finally gave way to naturalized sociological accounts of language use which empirical researchers had already developed adequate descriptions of. Philosophy, it turned out, had lost its special status as an independent area of research.

Rorty’s first book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, is usefully read as an intellectual historical account of this move from the foundation of philosophical explanation to the nonfoundation of sociological description.³⁰ The book made such a splash amongst philosophers

because it carefully traced the history of a doubt about philosophical research which every philosopher had been feeling the force of for years: philosophy had somewhere taken a turn which was leading it down the path of its own ultimate extinction. Thomas Nagel poignantly expressed this doubt in a preface to a book published in the same year as *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*: “I am pessimistic about ethical theory as a form of public service. . . . [P]hilosophy is best judged by its contribution to the understanding, not to the course of events.” While most philosophers continued to practice forms of philosophy which they like Nagel recognized as irrelevant to the actual practices they theorized, Rorty urged that philosophy had lost its reason for existence. Most philosophers were frightened by this frank outlook on the profession and so in response to Rorty’s book leading figures quickly retreated from their early pessimism and rallied in defense of philosophy. Twelve years later Nagel was confidently asserting the very reverse of the skeptical view of philosophy he had earlier stated without much fanfare: “Political philosophy. . . has its role, for some of the apparently practical problems of political life have theoretical and moral sources.”³¹ While most philosophers worried over the intellectual viability of work which they still knew had little actual impact, Rorty traded in his philosophical anxieties for concerns more explicitly public. Confident with a much-deserved MacArthur Prize, he left Princeton’s Philosophy Department for a non-departmental professorship at the University of Virginia. Here he grew increasingly impatient with canonical philosophical problems and increasingly fascinated by the moral and cultural problems of living in a liberal democracy, the very same problems which had obsessed his pragmatist forebears James and Dewey. One way of interpreting the shift from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* to *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* is to view Rorty as trading in a rather private self-image of rigorous professional philosopher for a more public self-image of hopeful American pragmatist, a view that Neil Gross explicates in detail as Rorty’s move to an “intellectual self-concept” of “leftist American patriot.”³² This shift is what eventually led to the provocative view of philosophical inquiry expressed in the title of Rorty’s final volume of collected papers, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*.

But given pragmatism’s typical insistence on the role of experience, how did Rorty ever get to pragmatist cultural criticism by way of the linguistic turn? In one of his final essays, Rorty repudiated the foundationalist premises of the original linguistic turn, but went on to note that “the linguistic turn was useful nevertheless, for it turned philosophers’ attention from the topic of experience toward that of linguistic behavior.” This shift is what “helped break the hold of empiricism—and, more broadly, of representationalism.”³³ The crucially important thing about the linguistic turn for Rorty was that it led the way out of

representationalist foundationalism and all its attendant metaphors of the given, of mind as mirror, and of some way that the world really is. So Rorty saw the linguistic turn as a move toward pragmatism in that it enabled us to stop giving accounts of the experiential grounds of human knowledge and start focusing instead on the sociolinguistic field in which knowledge develops in a self-correcting way.

The central message of pragmatism according to Rorty is that it enables us to give up the search for some deep-seated thing which lies behind all human practices and ties them together in some neat package by explaining all of them. Rorty's view was that pragmatism helps us give up the search motivated by what he once referred to as "a sense of humility, or a sense of gratitude, toward something which transcends humanity."³⁴ This yearning is motivated by a thought that Rorty found severely debilitating, namely "the thought that there is something non-human that human beings should try to live up to."³⁵ The shift from foundationalist humility to pragmatist hope is to be achieved by focusing on the way in which justifications develop internally within an epistemic field rather than foundationally upon an epistemic ground.

For Rorty's money, the best account of this relation between the field of linguistic use and the knowledge which develops within it is the one provided by Brandom's inferentialist pragmatism.³⁶ Rorty thought that Brandom's account helps us see why we need not search beyond the totality of knowledge for something which grounds it because we can simply recognize that knowledge is justified by nothing deeper than just more knowledge. For Rorty and Brandom, the field in which knowledge justifies itself is sociolinguistic practice.

Contemporary pragmatists ought to pay more attention to these strategies for overcoming foundationalism. Rortyan and Brandomian strategies for giving up the quest for the grounds of knowledge in favor of specifying the field in which knowledge operates are likely to prove invaluable for the future of pragmatism. To see this, consider not pragmatism's futures, but pragmatism's pasts. Rorty's particular strategy for avoiding foundationalism did not properly come into view until philosophers began to seriously question the relation between language and experience. In under fifty years, this relation (whose paradigmatic instance in the early part of the twentieth century had been that of correspondence) became the primary problem animating the school of analytic philosophy into which Rorty initiated himself. While this relation was clearly of some concern to James and Dewey, it was not the primary object of concern in the larger philosophical milieu in which they developed their pragmatism. As such, they were not always pressed to formulate their pragmatism as a response to those problems which would become of primary concern only later on with Rorty's generation. The result was that they did not sufficiently focus on developing the philosophical metaphors and conceptual tools necessary for avoiding the

subtlest forms of foundationalism and givenism. This does not mean, again, that the classical pragmatists were foundationalists. It only means that they did not equip themselves with the kind of philosophical repertoire necessary for overcoming foundationalism in all its varieties. This is why contemporary prima-pragmatists risk backsliding into foundationalism if they do not reformulate their conceptions of experience and knowledge in light of the later antifoundationalist vocabulary which came into proper view only with neopragmatism. Fortunately, all of the central themes of pragmatism lend themselves quite readily to antifoundationalism. If pragmatism is to remain a viable philosophical tradition, it must focus on developing these antifoundationalist resources.

This brings me to a crucially important question facing pragmatists today. Is Rorty's and Brandom's linguistic turn the best way to make the move to an explicit antifoundationalism? The question concerns whether or not we should agree with Brandom when he laments that "what one misses most" in James and Dewey is that they did not buy into "the distinctively twentieth century philosophical concern with language."³⁷

The upshot of replacing experience with language was a nonfoundational conception of knowledge as arbitrated not by subjective mental certainty but rather by intersubjective conversational consensus. The idea that intersubjective conversational consensus is all that we antifoundationalists need has been defended by Rorty with more cogency and commitment than anyone else. In doing so, Rorty provided a tremendous service to contemporary intellectual culture by laying his thought out as a coherent field upon which others could dispute the important intellectual issues described therein. This should be applauded insofar as Rorty has thereby subjected his thought to continuous and often heated criticism. By considering certain of these criticisms in the remainder of this section I can show why pragmatists may want to now begin looking for a route to antifoundationalism different than that of Rorty's and Brandom's linguistic turn. My conclusion will be that contemporary pragmatists ought to adopt Rorty's strategy of shifting from foundationalist talk of epistemological grounds to pragmatist talk of epistemological fields, but without adopting Rorty's view that linguistic practices by themselves constitute the totality of these epistemological fields.

Rorty's linguisticism about knowledge is nicely summarized in his claim that "there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones—no wholesale constraints derived from the nature of the objects, or of the mind, or of language, but only those retail constraints provided by the remarks of our fellow-inquirers."³⁸ One common criticism of this sociolinguistic theory of epistemic achievement is that it cannot see its way clear of relativism. Can sociolinguistic consensus provide a criterion of truth any stronger than the manifest non-criterion

defended by the relativist? John McDowell thinks not and so urges against Rorty that we should conceive of “inquiry as normatively beholden not just to current practice but to its subject matter” as well.³⁹ McDowell’s criticism rests on the intuition that “if our freedom in empirical thinking is total. . . that can seem to threaten the very possibility that judgments of experience might be grounded in a way that relates them to a reality external to thought. . . Surely there must be such a grounding if experience is to be a source of knowledge.”⁴⁰ The difficulty facing McDowell’s position, which McDowell himself of course recognizes, is to tell a convincing story about how these relations between our judgments and something external to them might function in a way that is not equivalent to the foundational and representational function which these relations typically play. Rorty’s reply to epistemologists like McDowell has always been that we philosophers ought to stop waiting around for this sort of philosophical story to write itself.

Numerous other critics have pointed to the seemingly obvious truth that Rorty’s linguisticism is unable to come to terms with non-linguistic experiences.⁴¹ However, these critics overlook Rorty’s claim that he can accept the existence of experiences outside the realm of sociolinguistic consensus without contradiction by simply urging that these experiences have nothing to do with knowledge and justification. Replying to Richard Shusterman on these points, Rorty writes that “[w]e can agree with Gadamer that ‘being that can be understood is language’ while remaining aware that there is more to life than understanding.” Some parts of life are irrelevant to social practices of justification and others are relevant to these practices. Rorty’s strategy is to claim that these two sides of life “do not stand in a dialectical relationship, get in each others’ way, or need synthesis in a programme or theory.”⁴² This point, by the way, nicely lines up with Rorty’s arguments elsewhere for a split between public and private spheres in liberal culture. In both contexts, Rorty’s strategy consists in arguing for a deep bifurcation in the human condition which he thinks does not stand in need of reconciliation.

Another critic of Rorty’s linguisticism puts the point in a somewhat different way which I find especially useful for my purposes here. Barry Allen’s criticism is that Rorty’s sociolinguistic epistemology fails to capture not only experience but more importantly knowledge itself. Allen’s point rests on two claims. The first claim is that there are a diverse set of skills, performances, and technologies which make an essential contribution not only to our actual knowledge but also to the concept of knowledge itself and the very possibility of our sensibly deploying this concept. The second claim is that these skills, performances, and technologies cannot be reduced in their entirety to linguistic, propositional, or doxastic entities. Allen’s own view is that knowledge is better understood in light

of complex artifactual achievements than in terms of either linguistic or mental states. A well-made bridge is a better example of human knowledge than some justified true belief about some cat on some mat. Allen's point as I understand it is that the cat on the mat is more like a parody than a paradigm of knowledge.⁴³

Rorty's reply to this line of thought is that bridges can be well-made and so exemplary of knowledge only in virtue of the sociolinguistic practices in which alone we can justify or warrant such assertions. But Allen thinks that Rorty misses "the crucial difference between the accomplishment of knowledge and the conventional, social weight of institutional authority."⁴⁴ Allen's critique is that Rorty's linguisticism about knowledge fails to account for some of our best epistemic achievements as well as some of our worst epistemic failures. How, Allen asks, can Rorty account for that incredibly narrow but infinitely important gap between agreeing that we know and actually knowing? In that narrow gap lies the enormous difference between our saying that we have got it right and our actually getting it right. Allen argues that this gap is real (he cites examples where all the certified experts said we had it right and it turned out later on that we had it wrong) and that it should "disabuse philosophers of the notion that knowledge is nothing but the consensus of disciplinary or professional peers."⁴⁵

Similar concerns related to Allen's also emerge when we shift contexts from knowledge to politics. Just as linguisticism fails to confront artifactual and embodied instances of knowledge, so too does it fail to confront embodied and otherwise non-propositional aspects of politics. Since I have raised problems with these political aspects of Rorty's views elsewhere, I here only mention this point in passing so as to register the depth of the problems facing his linguisticism.⁴⁶

The important point about Allen's critique for my purposes here is that he finds Rorty's linguisticism lacking not just in terms of an account of human experience (after all Rorty doesn't really care about that) but in terms of an account of human knowledge. Allen thus criticizes the linguistic turn on its own grounds. His claim is that the linguistic turn leaves us feeling a lack precisely where it promised a plentitude. He goes on to argue that we can respond to this epistemological deficit in linguisticism without returning to foundationalism. While I do not agree with Allen's particular solution, which urges the provocative thought that knowledge should be understood as primarily artifactual,⁴⁷ I do agree with him that there is something amiss in the usual proposed dilemma between epistemic foundationalism and epistemic linguisticism. The promising possibility which Allen thus raises in his response to Rorty is of a conception of knowledge as neither purely linguistic nor as grounded in an ultimate appeal to human experience. I shall now turn to exploring this possibility, but in a different way than Allen does.

The False Dilemma between Foundationalism and Linguisticism

What is the upshot of this intellectual historical review of the pragmatist debates over the relation between experience and language? If the critics of both foundationalism and linguisticism have valid concerns, as I have urged they do, then these debates clarify the central problem facing pragmatism today: *pragmatists must find a way of reviving a concept of extra-linguistic experience without returning to a concept of an immediate experiential given capable of functioning as an epistemic foundation.*

I argue in the remainder of this paper that this revival of a non-foundational conception of experience can be achieved only if pragmatists can find a way of differentiating antifoundationalism from the linguisticism which has typically been its handmaiden. This would show that the familiar alternative between foundationalism and linguisticism is truly a false dilemma. A third and hitherto neglected approach would thereby become viable. On such a third account, knowledge would be neither grounded in anything ultimate nor a mere effect of what we agree to say. Knowledge would be understood as both broader than linguisticism would allow and more flexible than foundationalism could acknowledge.

I shall argue that such a third version of pragmatism is made viable by focusing on the thoroughly temporal quality of experience. On this account, knowledge is understood as occurring within a temporal field of experience which is neither narrowly linguistic nor rigidly foundational. The temporal flow of experience, understood as the very field in which knowledge continuously evolves, is both broad enough and flexible enough to accommodate all of what we should want to count as knowledge without forcing this knowledge to conform to a pattern which would evade the contingencies of the human condition. I will refer to this new third form of pragmatism as transitionalist pragmatism in recognition of one of William James's most generative phrases: "Life is in the transitions."⁴⁸

The transitionalist approach is particularly attractive because it can be built out of notions of temporality and historicity which are already central in both primapragmatism and neopragmatism. Unfortunately, neopragmatists like Rorty and Brandom often cast their historicism in terms of language and so miss the benefits of a philosophical account of experience. These benefits were realized by James and Dewey, but owing to their lack of appreciation of the risks of foundationalism they did not always place enough stress on historicity in explicating their philosophy of experience. My solution blends the best of both pragmatisms. From James and Dewey it takes a commitment to the present experiences which we find ourselves in the midst of as the only possible resource for overcoming the problems presented by these experiences. From Rorty and Brandom it takes the crucial nonfoundationalist strategy of replacing

the search for epistemological grounding with an account of the epistemological field. At the same time, this new version of pragmatism dispenses with Rorty's argument that nonfoundationalism requires linguisticism and also eliminates the foundationalist tendencies found in much of James's and Dewey's work on experience. What I thus propose is a return to the conception of experience articulated by James and Dewey but now armed with a proper view of the problems of foundationalism articulated by Rorty. This means, in good pragmatist fashion, reconstructing the primapragmatist conception of experience in light of subsequent developments in neopragmatism. The result is that we no longer need see these two pragmatisms as opposed factions vying for control of the pragmatist banner. These pragmatisms can rather be seen as two coherent moments within the broader development of a resynthesized pragmatism.

I shall sketch my proposed pragmatist synthesis by answering, in turn, two questions which immediately present themselves to such a reconstruction. First, what, on this picture, is experience? Second, how, on this picture, is experience related to language?

Temporalizing Experience

The view I am proposing begins with the idea that experience is a temporal field within which knowledge develops. This conception combines primapragmatism and neopragmatism. James and Dewey focused attention on the centrality of temporality and historicity for experience, but they did not always realize the full consequences of their position. By playing up the temporality and historicity emphasized by some aspects of their conceptions of experience and by following out some of the implications of this emphasis, and by at the same time playing down the foundationalist tendencies sometimes present in their descriptions of experience, we can slowly work our way toward a conception of experience that is sufficiently appreciative of the motivations behind Rorty's linguistic turn. The result will be a conception of experience that is explicitly opposed to the doctrine of the given. Some will complain that my version of pragmatism strays too far from its sources by freely taking those parts of James, Dewey, and Rorty that I like and discarding the other parts that do not suit my purposes. My reply is that we should take our pragmatism from where we need it, not worry too much over the parts we find troublesome, and judge the resulting product by its flowers and their fruits.

In developing a temporalized and historicized conception of experience we can begin with James. "The fundamental fact about our experience," James wrote, "is that it is a process of change."⁴⁹ James's view was that "experience leans on nothing but itself" and that it could do so only because experience does not stand still (for it would then fall over upon itself) but rather constantly ambulates forward (and so constantly

catches itself in each new step).⁵⁰ James vividly described his view with his famous metaphor of the ever-rushing “stream of experience.”⁵¹ It is within this stream of experience that knowledge operates as an element within the field of experience rather than as a representation of the ground of experience.⁵²

The paradigm of experience for James and Dewey was the experiment. Dewey described knowledge as a relation between an organism and its environment in which organisms introduce controlled changes into environmental realities. Knowledge, on this model, does not consist in an accurate representation of a prior independent reality, but rather in a transformative intervention into a reality which is itself nothing but an accumulation of prior such interventions. It is in this sense that Dewey described James and himself as developing “the experimental theory of knowledge.”⁵³ In working out this theory, James and Dewey distanced themselves from modern conceptions of experience as isolable mental states and recalled pre-modern views of experience as a test, a trial, or an experiment with temporal duration. When early modern philosophy abandoned experimental conceptions of experience in favor of an atemporal conception, it invited a view of knowledge as a static property which could be either anchored in a foundation such as experience or isolated as a discrete stage of a linguistic consensus. James and Dewey sought to do away with all that.⁵⁴

One useful way in which philosophers have thought about epistemic concepts is to take them as explaining epistemic relations. Approached in this way, the whole point of epistemology is to explain those relations holding between beliefs and their objects in virtue of which the beliefs are true. Whereas philosophers have typically treated these relations as atemporal, a better approach might be a form of pragmatism that treats temporality as internal to epistemic relations. Foundationalist empiricism takes knowledge to be a static relation between a belief and an immediate percept: knowledge is an accurate representation. Linguisticism takes knowledge to be a static relation holding between a belief and the broader social mass of beliefs in which that belief is articulated: knowledge is a sociolinguistic consensus. By temporalizing experience, however, we can redescribe knowledge as a relation holding between prior and future experience. On this transitionalist pragmatist account, knowledge is an epistemic relation in which prior experiences (e.g., beliefs) lead to the future experiences that they aim at (e.g., the objects of beliefs). The mark of epistemic achievement (which can be variously construed in terms of justified true belief, warranted assertability, or some other theoretical apparatus) is neither agreement with experience nor sociolinguistic consensus, but is rather temporal mediation or, put more simply, getting from here to there. The knowledge relation is that which carries us through time from beliefs to their objects.

This transitionalist conception of knowledge is certainly quite close to certain conceptions which can be gleaned from the work of James and Dewey. "Knowledge of sensible realities thus comes to life inside the tissue of experience. It is *made*; and made by relations that unroll themselves in time."⁵⁵ Thus wrote James in his *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. Knowledge, he argued there, is an affair of leading. "Life," he noted in his signature poetic style, "is in the transitions as much as it is in the terms connected; often, indeed, it seems to be there more emphatically, as if our spurts and sallies forward were the real firing-line of the battle, were like the thin line of flame advancing across the dry autumnal field which the farmer proceeds to burn."⁵⁶ Internal to the structure of knowledge is the experiential temporality within which thought unrolls. Take away this temporal field of experience and you take away any context in which knowledge could operate. Knowledge, if life and experience stood still, would have no point. Dewey plainly summarized the pragmatist position in urging that "knowledge appears as a function within experience" such that "its work and aim must be distinctively reconstructive and transformatory." Meanwhile, experience itself is "not a rigid and closed thing; it is vital, and hence growing." Mind, for Dewey following James, is "a moving stream, a constant change which nevertheless has axis and direction, linkages, associations, as well as initiations, hesitations, and conclusions."⁵⁷

Too often, however, James and Dewey described their temporal conception of experience in terms that are difficult to distinguish from foundationalist accounts of successful epistemic consequences being grounded in immediate experience. Rorty subsequently brought into clear view the deep problems with these sorts of foundationalist epistemologies. In order that we may continue to benefit from the contributions of both primapragmatism and neopragmatism, I am urging that we play down James's and Dewey's talk of immediate perceptual experience and focus instead on their underdeveloped descriptions of knowledge as a temporal relation in which prior experiences successfully lead to their objects in future experiences. We ought to focus on this nonfoundationalist historicist strain in James and Dewey whilst setting to the side the foundationalist empiricist tendencies they sometimes exhibited.

But doesn't this lead us back to the old question of what makes truths true? Who and what gets to say if one experience successfully leads to its object or not? What exactly is the criterion of truth? The pragmatist answer is that nothing, in general, makes our truths, in general, true. Pragmatism is best understood as situating truth and knowledge within the field of experience without the support of foundations. Within this field we do not stand in need of foundations since things will work themselves out within that field as best they can. Truth and knowledge develop within practices and cannot be specified in advance

of actual practical inquiry. One point on which all pragmatists surely agree is that it is not the job of the philosopher to devise a theory which defines, in advance of practice, what forms truth and knowledge must assume. The point of a pragmatist philosophy is rather to give an account of how truth and knowledge function in our lives and why these functions might be thought to be valuable. Knowledge is what gets us there—and that is how it functions but we need not specify in advance what getting there must always consist in. Pragmatism prioritizes the *value* of truth and knowledge by leaving to the side the *what* of truth and knowledge.

My argument, to summarize, is that a pragmatist conception of experience can be nonfoundationalist by temporalizing and historicizing experience itself and in its train the standard menu of epistemic concepts. Such a conception was already inchoate in James and Dewey but it could really be brought into acute focus only after Rorty clearly articulated the terms on which pragmatism must put forth its historicist sensibility. It was Rorty who really unpacked the resounding importance of the fact that the two greatest historicists of the nineteenth century, Darwin and Hegel, enabled the pragmatists to replace vertical accounts of human representation with horizontal accounts of human development. Rorty, however, wrongly thought that this historicist point had to be cast in terms of language rather than experience when he argued that, “The effect of adopting Gadamer’s slogan [‘being that can be understood is language’] is to replace [foundationalist] metaphors of depth with [historicist] metaphors of breadth.”⁵⁸ Rorty denied that an experiential version of historicism could do the philosophical work we want out of a historicist philosophy.⁵⁹ My argument is that pragmatism can achieve the historicist’s horizontal perspective on knowledge without moving everything concerning knowledge over to language. Experience is not necessarily vertical and language is not necessarily horizontal. Just as foundationalist philosophy of language is one possible configuration, so too is non-foundationalist philosophy of experience.

Reconsidering the Relation between Experience and Language

We can now return to the issue which initially inclined neopragmatists to abandon experience: the relation between experience and language. How is language related to experience if the latter is reconceived as the flowing field in which knowledge develops? We seem to return to two familiar options. Either temporal experience is a foundation for knowledge and so language is a mere representation of experience or all epistemically-relevant temporal experience is already linguistic all the way down. Within the context of the temporalized conception of experience I have proposed, both of these options are still untenable. Allow me to summarize why.

The first option is still problematic for all the familiar Sellarsian and Wittgensteinian reasons so clearly summarized by Rorty. The foundationalist view makes everything depend on the representational relation that supposedly holds between sentences and sentence-shaped entities. But there has as of yet been no adequate account of this relation. Representational foundationalism thus riddles our epistemic conceptions with all the old intractable problems familiar from modern epistemology. On this view, problems of the relation between subject and object or mind and world return with a vengeance. Whatever one happens to think of these dichotomies, it is clear that one of the central concerns of every variety of pragmatism is to rid philosophy of the problems they engender. While some philosophers remain foundationalists and dualists, pragmatism countenances neither, and for good reasons which have been spelled out adequately elsewhere, by pragmatists from Peirce to Putnam.

The second option, linguisticism, may seem to have been given a new lease on life by the historicist perspective I have articulated. That things may seem this way is due to the not uncommon tendency to associate the historicization of experience with its linguistification. This association plays a large role, as I have shown, in Rorty's view. It also happens to play a large role in the views of many another notable twentieth-century philosophers whose perspectives share much with Rorty's neopragmatism. Take for example Hans-Georg Gadamer, who took the linguistic or hermeneutic turn as a reaction against the foundationalist philosophy of experience offered by Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. Gadamer argued that the best way out of phenomenological foundationalism was to redescribe phenomenological experience as historical in structure. He further argued that such a redescription could be achieved only if experience gets redescribed in terms of linguistic understanding. It is thus not at all incidental that Rorty made extensive use of Gadamer in the final chapters of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Nor is it incidental that Rorty fondly quoted Gadamer's most quotable line: "Being that can be understood is language."⁶⁰ Gadamer and Rorty bear a striking resemblance to one another on these matters insofar as both claim that the linguistic turn is essential for turning away from foundationalism.⁶¹ Both, in other words, deny the claim for which I have argued here, namely that nonfoundationalism can be detached from linguisticism. Gadamer is especially worth considering at this juncture insofar as he emphasizes as a crucial aspect of his view the very idea which I have here argued for, namely that experience is thoroughly temporal and historical in character.

Gadamer's argument against foundationalist epistemology, like Rorty's, took its cue in part from Heidegger's radicalization of the basic hermeneutic situation.⁶² This radicalization consisted in showing that all understanding is historically situated such that temporal finitude is

taken as a basic context for human understanding. This perspective enables us to see that the foundationalist attempt to ground knowledge in something universal and unchanging is not only impossible, but also unnecessary. Gadamer, also like Rorty, takes this Heideggerean radicalization as resulting in the idea that all understanding is linguistic. Critics have replied that there is much in human experience that seems manifestly non-linguistic.⁶³ But Gadamer, again also like Rorty, never denied that there is such a thing as non-linguistic experience. His point was that all experience is in principle potentially linguistic or capable of being understood in language—insofar as experience can be meaningfully understood it must be capable of being rendered into language.⁶⁴

But Gadamer's argument at this point, once again like Rorty's, betrays a troubling ambiguity. If foundationalism is to be avoided by way of the strong claim that all understanding is *actually* linguistic, then it is not at all clear that the weaker claim that all experience is *potentially* linguistic gives us quite the foothold against foundationalism that the stronger claim does. Potentiality is cheap, but actuality is expensive, and it is not clear that we can use potentiality to buy our way out of foundationalism. So not only does linguisticism face internal problems regarding non-linguistic elements of knowledge, as I discussed in reference to Rorty above, it also faces external problems regarding its ability to actually evade the snares of foundationalism, as my discussion of Gadamer here shows.

Having now considered both proposed options concerning the relation between experience and language, I can conclude that neither horn of the dilemma can be grasped. At this point, some philosophers might wish to urge that there is an important third option which is particularly enticing because it seems to rid us of foundationalism without moving us over to linguisticism. This third option amounts to taking what some philosophers have called the semiotic turn or the symbolic turn. This path shares much with both Rorty's pragmatism and Gadamer's hermeneutics. Historically, its greatest proponent is probably Charles Peirce. More recently, it has been urged by philosophers who borrow generously from both pragmatist and hermeneutic thought, such as Jürgen Habermas and Robert Brandom. In the interim decades of the middle twentieth century it can be found in the work of a wide variety of different thinkers ranging from psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to naturalist Suzanne Langer. If the linguistic turn amounts to repudiating foundationalism by insisting upon the irreducible linguisticity of all experience, then the semiotic turn attempts to repudiate foundationalism by more modestly insisting upon the irreducible meaningfulness of all experience. The semiotic view obviously shares much with Rorty's and Gadamer's claims that all experience is potentially linguistic insofar as it is actually meaningful or, in another idiom, actually semiotically rich. The semiotic turn has much to recommend it. But serious

problems continue to plague these semiotic or symbolic philosophies insofar as nobody has yet convincingly shown just how it is that meaning takes us beyond self-evident experience without taking us all the way to language. Some semiotic philosophers have explicitly relied on a primary category of self-evident awareness and in so doing baldly buy into the givenism which leads to foundationalism. Others have more carefully sought to avoid foundationalism, but have not made it clear where it is that meaning exists if it exists neither in the originary consciousness of mind nor in the diffuse behavior of language use. An exhaustive consideration of the semiotic approach is beyond my scope here, so I shall simply provisionally accept that such problems continue to plague this tradition. Doing so enables me to explore a different kind of alternative to foundationalism and linguisticism, namely that alternative brought into focus by my claim for the historical and temporal quality of experience. It may turn out, of course, that the semiotic turn can come to be regarded as just one aspect of the transitionalist turn I am urging. Yet I shall in what follows say little more about semioticity and instead focus my attention on temporality and historicity. I will leave it for another occasion to explore whether or not the third way of transitionalism which navigates between foundationalism and linguisticism is also compatible with the third way of semioticity.⁶⁵

A thoroughly temporalized and historicized conception of experience enables pragmatism to redescribe the relation between experience and language as analogous to that between a field and a type of action which occurs in that field. The idea is that *language is a kind of experience*. To put it more simply, the idea is that speaking and listening and writing and reading are simply kinds of experience. There is, on such a view, neither a foundationalist question of how language represents experience (because language is here part of the field experience) nor a linguisticist question of how language hooks up to something other than language (because there are all kinds of things in the field of experience which language hooks up with). On this view, language is not different from other forms of experience in any deep and philosophically instructive way. The view holds that speaking and writing are not radically different from cooking. Or hammering. Or hiking. Or wild-orchid-hunting. There are of course certain obvious important differences separating each of these forms of experience. But these are innocent piecemeal differences, not the kind of big metaphysical differences which philosophers have often supposed.

Why, we ought to ask, did philosophers ever think that language was so different from all other forms of experience that it deserved philosophical analysis in its own right? Why not accord similar privilege to any other form of experience basic to the human condition, such as eating, procreating, ambulating, building, or using an opposable thumb? What motivates the nearly exclusive concern so many

philosophers have had with the truth of sentences? What presuppositions lurk behind this kind of talk? Foundationalists generally thought of epistemology as an attempt to explain the conditions under which our beliefs are true. This ultimate basis of belief, the truth-making conditions, could then serve as a foundation for human knowledge. This project, however, only makes sense if we stipulate in advance that the truth of beliefs, or propositions, or sentences is a unique form of practical success which stands in special need of explanation. Even after foundationalists had failed to deliver on their promises and pretty much gave up, their linguisticist successors continued to think that truth was a unique form of practical success which deserves to be singled out as an item for special philosophical consideration. Those proffering linguisticism thus argued that they could fill in many of the gaps left behind from foundationalism by offering an account of truth which explicitly refused to ground beliefs in anything besides other beliefs.

Philosophers, be they foundationalist or linguisticist in disposition, can of course always stipulate that truth is a property of sentences, or propositions, or beliefs. The drift of twentieth-century philosophies of truth from Tarski to Davidson suggests that such a stipulation will result not in a philosophically instructive theory of truth, but in a deflationary account according to which truth is not the kind of thing which philosophers can have a theory of. That may be fine, but, stipulations aside, why is it that the only thing we should care about is the truth of our sentences? What about the warmth of our dwellings, the nutrition of our meals, and the effectiveness of our other tools? What is so special about truth if we stipulate in advance that the only tools that it can apply to are sentences? Given that assumption, of course we will end up with a deflationary theory of truth.

Some philosophers will defend the view that truth is a unique form of good pertaining only to sentences by arguing that the truth of sentences is relevant to all other tools in a way that all other tools cannot be relevant to the tool of language. They will argue that we can construct sentences which are either true or false of all our other tools, whilst these tools cannot properly be about sentences. But this defense really just begs the question by returning to the stipulation that there is a unique form of success called truth which applies only to those of our tools called sentences. So what if only sentences can be 'about' other tools? Why is this any more special than that only food can supply us with the nutritive energy to use all other tools? Why is 'aboutness' any more deserving of special philosophical consideration than 'nutritional'? If sentences are understood as one type of tool amongst many other types and language is understood as one kind of experience amongst many other kinds, then it follows that the forms of success relevant to language use are not different in any philosophically significant way from the

forms of success relevant to the use of other tools in other experiential contexts. Successful human practice most often requires the skilful use of a variety of tools at once (sentences, hammers, vitamins, social cooperation). We need not single out any one of these tools as more philosophically worthy than any of the others because they are all, taken together, requisite for practical success.

It is worthwhile at this point to pause and consider what we expect from philosophical work on notions like truth and knowledge. I am urging that we do not need such a thing as a philosophical theory which defines the concept of truth. But this does not rule out a philosophical inquiry into the value of truth. This, as it happens, is the very sensible approach recently explored by Bernard Williams.⁶⁶ An advantage of Williams's account, which I suggest pragmatists should take more seriously, is that he does not focus all of his attention on the kinds of sensible-sounding stipulations which lead to deflationary accounts of truth. This enables Williams to confidently explore the value that truth has in our lives. Pragmatists need not insist on a sharp separation between the definition and the value of truth. Like Williams, and like James before him, we can simply prioritize the project of exploring the value of truth and then go on from there to develop working conceptions of what truth is.

This sort of epistemological perspective can be set in motion by beginning with the temporalized and historicized conception of experience I have been recommending. By taking seriously the idea that truth and knowledge are processes which develop within experience, rather than certain kinds of states either grounded in experience (prima-pragmatist foundationalism) or enabled by consensus (neopragmatist linguisticism), pragmatists can affirm that our most valuable epistemic achievements invoke resources other than those which would be allowed by views which regard truth as a unique form of success which applies only to sentences and sentence-shaped entities. The broader field in which truth, like every other honorific name for practical success, shapes up depends not only on our sentences and our beliefs, but also on our bodies, our skills, our tools, and the realities with which all of these interact. Truth, like every other form of practical success, consists in successful inter-experiential leadings that draw on all these forms of experience and all their corollary kinds of tools. That, after all, is the value that truth has in our lives.

Beyond Foundationalism and Linguisticism

The pragmatism I am urging is *beyond foundationalism* because it enables us to see that we need not ground our practical successes in any foundation of experience. We can, rather, understand successful inquiry as unfolding within experience and not on the basis of experience. Forms of epistemic success do not stand in need of any ground-

ing above and beyond all those ordinary details we employ in our everyday inquiries: lab tables, notebooks, sophisticated technical equipment, peer review mechanisms, research journals, persuasive rhetoric, and, yes, even sentences. Knowledge and truth require no super-temporal support when they can get all the support they need from the temporal connections that tie past and future experiences together.

The pragmatist view is that experience, like language, need not be purified of the contingent historical content which makes it up. There is no primal experiential given-ness floating free of the actual historical stream of experience. Although I have shown that they were not always clear on this point, there are indeed moments in the works of James and Dewey where this decidedly antifoundationalist insight comes into clear view. “There is no *general* stuff of which experience at large is made,” wrote James in 1904, “There are as many stuffs as there are ‘natures’ in the things experienced.”⁶⁷ Dewey made the same point just one year later in writing that we have “no need to search for some aboriginal *that* to which all successive experiences are attached,” since quite simply, “Experience is always of *thats*.”⁶⁸ The stream of experience itself, it was the great insight of the early pragmatists, is what supplies any experience with its coherence. Experiences gain their sense and force through their relations to other experiences. Experiences lean on nothing but one another. Their relations to one another are historical (horizontal, stream-like) rather than foundational (vertical, ground-like). An experience of experience, the kind of thing which a metaphysics of experience would supply to foundationalist epistemology, is therefore not required. Just as the linguistic turn eventually resulted in the realization that we do not need a meta-language that speaks the vocabulary of language itself, a new experiential turn can deliver the insight that we do not need any sort of meta-experiential experience of experience itself. This means that we can revive experience without viewing experience as a foundation for knowledge. The view that knowledge unfolds within experiences can thus be easily distinguished from the foundationalist view that knowledge is grounded on the base of experience.

The pragmatism I am urging is *beyond linguisticism* in that it enables us to understand language as just one part of an account of truth and knowledge. On this view we hash out our agreements and disagreements regarding what is true by employing bridges, intuitions, paintings, sentences and all other little bits of our experience. Yet none of these tools, taken by itself or taken together with others, is determinative of truth. This is because nothing, no thing, including language, is determinative of truth per se. Language, like any other tool we employ in hashing out what is true and what is false, is just one way in which we place ourselves in direct contact with the experiential field in which our lives, and all the successes and failures that make them up, unfold.

Language does not represent experience—it is just one more form of experience. Language is a way of getting in direct touch with reality in order to get something done. Like all tool use, language puts us in direct contact with the experiential reality in which we live. This pragmatist conception of the relation between language and experience is not at all like the foundationalist picture on which language represents reality. Language, so says the pragmatist, is just one form of experience. There is on this view no more problem in our use of language than in our use of any other tool.

There are of course different uses of different tools. But there is nothing in general separating these various tools which a special discipline called epistemology or metaphysics might give us an account of. Separations between different kinds of experience are due to contingent historical accretion rather than metaphysical or epistemological necessity. Why, for example, do we find the use of a hammer more like the use of a screwdriver than like the use of a paintbrush? Whatever the merits of this view, it is obviously the result of centuries of cultural contingencies and not that of the intrinsic properties of hammers, screwdrivers, and paintbrushes. The same, of course, goes for the thought that aesthetic uses of language have more in common with scientific uses of language than the former do with paintbrushes and the latter with microscopes. From another perspective we might regard these different uses of language as less like one another and more like the other tools we use to accomplish the tasks that these uses of language are involved in. Perhaps aesthetic language has more to do with paintbrushes and painters than it does with scientific language, political language, and botanical language. Perhaps, after all, language is not nearly so special as some philosophers have thought.

Pragmatists who want to focus philosophical attention on the experiential field in which human action unfolds, hangs together, and then falls apart again, would do good to remember that experience is a transition more complex than linguisticism could acknowledge and more flexible than foundationalism would allow.⁶⁹

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NOTES

1. Kloppenberg (1996), Westbrook (2005), and Jay (2005).

2. I employ "primapragmatism" to refer to that strand of pragmatism that began with the standard trio of classical pragmatists (Peirce, James, Dewey), was carried forward in the mid-century pragmatists whose work proceeded largely under the influence of Dewey, and is currently sustained by contemporary philosophers working primarily on themes and issues raised in classical pragmatism. I avoid "classical pragmatist" as a name for this complete strand because that term is best reserved for the canonical trio of original pragmatists and because it can sound quite awkward to refer to contemporaries in this tradition as "classical"

pragmatists. I avoid “paleopragmatism” as an alternative because of its negative connotations. I find that “primapragmatism” catches the meaning quite exactly (“first pragmatism”) but with the disadvantage of not being immediately perspicuous to all readers.

3. For summaries of these debates in historical scholarship see Toews (1987) and Scott (1991); for summaries in political theory see Bohman (1998) and Talisse (2004).

4. For just one example, see Axtell (2006) for a recent attempt to employ pragmatism towards a resolution of the debates between externalist and internalist epistemologies.

5. Sellars (1956)

6. Rorty (1979) most convincingly drew the connections between Sellars’s work and antifoundationalism.

7. James 1904a, 175 and 1905, 215

8. Dewey 1925, 36, 298, 401

9. The metaphor of scheme and content is borrowed from Davidson (1974).

10. Dewey 1925, 86, 264

11. Dewey 1925, 4–5

12. Dewey 1930, 261

13. Santayana (1925), Rorty (1977a), and Brandom (2004).

14. Sleeper 1985, 12, 13

15. Sleeper 1986, 6, 201; Sleeper’s position exemplifies one side in an ongoing debate in pragmatist scholarship over “metaphysics of existence” versus “metaphysics of experience” interpretations of Dewey.

16. Rorty (1985)

17. Alexander (1987), Bernstein (1966), Gouinlock (1972)

18. Gouinlock 1995, 86

19. Gouinlock 1972, 2

20. Seigfried (2001 and 1990, 347–50)

21. Seigfried 1990, 2, 300. Hilary Putnam’s slightly different view is that James’s theory of experience affirms givenism but denies foundationalism: “James wants to say that we perceive external things immediately, and we don’t perceive them incorrigibly” (Putnam 1990, 242).

22. Haack’s (1993, 1996) work is among the most persuasive, but see also Forest (2007) for the most recent contribution to these debates.

23. Hildebrand 2003, 107

24. Shook 2000, 121

25. Pappas 1997, 524, 527; cf. Pappas forthcoming, ch. 1, 1. Pappas explicitly attempts to distinguish his conception from the doctrine of the given, but it is not clear that he can successfully do so within the confines of his interpretation of Dewey.

26. See Aikin, forthcoming

27. Miller 2005, 367

28. Rorty 1993, 337

29. Rorty 1993, 340

30. Rorty (1979). For a briefer version of Rorty’s argument as I have described it see Rorty (1977b). Note that while Donovan (1995) describes Rorty similarly, he does not tie his interpretation of Rorty into many of the broader themes in the intellectual history of pragmatism which I here discuss.

31. Nagel 1979, xiii and Nagel 1991, 6
32. See Gross (forthcoming)
33. Rorty 2007, 160
34. Rorty 1993, 351
35. Rorty 2000, 29
36. Brandom (1994)
37. Brandom 2004, 15
38. Rorty 1980, 165
39. McDowell 2000, 115
40. McDowell 1994, 5
41. Among Rorty's best critics on these points are Richard Bernstein (1992), Joseph Margolis (2002), Hilary Putnam (1988), and Richard Shusterman (2001).
42. Rorty 2001, 156–7; worth noting is that Rorty has at times seemed inclined to the stronger view that all awareness is a linguistic affair (1979, 182).
43. See Allen (2000a, 2000b, 2004)
44. Allen 2000b, 142
45. Allen 2000a, 233
46. See Koopman (2004) where I argue that a purely linguistic account of politics fails to engage with elements of political practice which are of decisive importance. How, for example, can a linguistic perspective engage with non-linguistic political acts such as hunger striking and physical violence? Certainly such non-linguistic political acts can be connected to linguistic political claims. But my point is simply that it is obviously wrong to *reduce* these acts to these claims. Claiming that women deserve suffrage is not equivalent to women hunger striking in support of this claim. If it were, then politics would be far less complicated than it is. While argumentation is an essential element in political practice, it is neither the only nor the final element. As Martin Jay puts the point to Habermas's linguistic account of communicative rationality, “[nonlinguistic] empirical phenomena are often far more powerful motors of political and social practice than those immediately accessible to discursive adjudication” (1992, 37). Contemporary deliberative democrats would do well to take these concerns very seriously indeed.
47. Allen (2004)
48. James 1904, 212. Joseph Margolis (1986, 2002) takes a somewhat similar approach when he argues that historicism is the key to a pragmatist course between realism and relativism. The pragmatism I sketch here could thus be described as following up on leads initially laid down by Margolis. Important differences remain, however, insofar as Margolis thinks he can use pragmatism to historicize transcendental argumentation while I agree with Rorty that historicism and transcendentalism are radically different ways of approaching philosophy. For further suggestions on the importance of historicity and temporality for the pragmatist tradition see Randall (1958), Smith (1980), and Helm (1985). I am currently working on a book-length account of the centrality of these “transitionalist” themes in various pragmatisms.
49. James 1904c, 54
50. The phrase is from John Boodin's (1916) description of James's view.
51. James (1890)
52. John McDermott (1977, xlv) notes that James, in unpublished notes, once described experience as a “field”. McDermott wishes, as do I, that James had more

fully developed this metaphor. This is more than just a minor point because, as McDermott has often stressed, metaphor choice is of crucial importance in philosophy.

53. See Dewey (1906, 1929, 1949)

54. See Jay (2005, 9–39) on pre-modern experience as experimental process versus modern experience as atemporal state.

55. James 1904b, 201

56. James 1904b, 212–3

57. Dewey 1903, 296; Dewey 1933, 201–2; and Dewey 1925, 282.

58. Rorty 2000, 24

59. Rorty 1992, 294ff.

60. Gadamer 1960, 474

61. This is not to deny crucial differences between the two discussed by Wachterhauser (2002).

62. Heidegger anticipated both Gadamer and Rorty in arguing that foundationalist epistemology could be avoided only by temporalizing the basic structures of human knowledge. On the hermeneutic turn in both Heidegger and Gadamer see Grondin (1999, 123ff), Hoy (1993, 1997), and Madison (2003).

63. On Habermas's criticisms of Gadamer in such terms see accounts by Jay (1982) and Madison (1997).

64. Gadamer 1960, 547. Gadamer's critics often misunderstand this point, but his best commentators agree that the linguisticity thesis was that all experience can potentially be brought to understanding. Madison explicates him thus: "All [Gadamer] is affirming is that there is nothing in human experience that is meaningful. . . which cannot, in principle, be brought to expression (and be interpreted) in and by means of language" (1997, 352; cf. Grondin 2002, 42 and Grondin 1999, 128).

65. Pragmatist connections between semioticity and temporality have been drawn by, among others, Sandra Rosenthal (2000) and Vincent Colapietro (2004, 2005).

66. Williams (2002)

67. James 1904a, 179

68. Dewey 1905, 165

69. For their helpful comments on this paper or conversations concerning its themes I would like to thank Scott Aikin, Barry Allen, Peter Hare, Larry Hickman, David Hoy, David Rondel, Panagiota Spyarakos, and two anonymous reviewers for this journal. A Postdoctoral Fellowship from Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council provided me with the resources to undertake this work. I would like to dedicate this piece to Richard Rorty. I discussed these matters with Professor Rorty on only one occasion, but his views on these topics are well known owing to his generous engagements with others. While I quite naturally wish that I could have completed this piece before his passing, I shall be content with an expression of gratitude for his conversational generosity, philosophical courage, and intellectual achievement.