THIRTEEN

AMERICAN LOSS IN CAVELL'S EMERSON

[On Emerson] I am not acquainted with any writer, no matter how assured his position in treatises upon the history of philosophy, whose movement of thought is more compact and unified, nor one who combines more adequately diversity of intellectual attack with concentration of form and effect.

(John Dewey, MW, 3:184)

Against creed and system, convention and institution, Emerson stands for restoring to the common man that which in the name of religion, of philosophy, of art and morality, has been embezzled from the common store and appropriated to sectarian and class use.

(Dewey, MW, 3:190)

Some years ago, in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*, Stanley Cavell rekindled an interest in Emerson as a philosopher.[1] I have already noted Cavell's influence on my thought and my belief that his work fits well with my account of philosophy Americana; his redemption of Emerson has created a new audience for American thought. His project of redeeming Emerson was one he began in *The Senses of Walden* and has been developing since.[2] The project is an important one, and Cavell has indeed illuminated much in Emerson that has been otherwise overlooked or misconstrued. Moreover, Cavell's own work embodies the richness of Emersonian style. Ironically, however, Cavell's recovery of Emerson seems to me centrally flawed just insofar as it fails to also recover Emerson's influence on American thought. My concern is that Cavell's somewhat exclusive focus on language leads him to lose sight of the down-to-earth, experiential side of Emerson's thought—the practical Yankee side. This in turn leads him to lose

sight of how other American thinkers might take up Emerson's experiential way of doing philosophy.

The flaw is perhaps tied to Emerson's concern in "The American Scholar" that we beware thinking in a vein not our own, that we avoid resting in an alien tradition. My concern is that Cavell redeems Emerson by invoking the authority of European thinkers alone: Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger. The irony, of course, is that the American scholar should be accounted for and authorized in such a fashion. My complaint, however, is not that Cavell's reading of Emerson through a set of European lenses is not insightful; rather, I want to claim that his reading is important, but degenerate only insofar as it does not take seriously enough the work of Emerson's American descendants William James and John Dewey in understanding what Emerson means or might mean. It is not merely that Cavell is impolitic, but that his omission of serious examinations of James and Dewey in *Conditions* has two important upshots: (1) it misses the ways in which James and Dewey gave power to Emerson's work in American culture and (2) it reveals Cavell's project as being something like the kind of "professional" philosophy Emerson himself sought to temper. In short, Cavell's work, which exemplifies philosophy Americana in many ways, retains an analytic edge that seems to blind him to the significance of other veins of American thought. To get at this tension in his work in the context of a single chapter, I will limit my discussion to examining the implications of the ways Dewey does and does not play a role in the context of Cavell's *Conditions*.[3]

Cavell's neglect of James and resistance to Dewey seem more peripheral than focal to his purposes. But the neglect and resistance are there, and they stand out to any reader of Emerson who is also schooled in the history of American thought: James simply does not appear, and Dewey is dismissed as inadequate. Cavell does acknowledge the insightfulness of Dewey's own essay on Emerson, but then seems unable, or unwilling, to square this with his other reading of Dewey (C:16, 40).[4] Moreover, Cavell openly states that what interests him about Emerson is not anything to do with American culture. He admits, first, his interest in the connection, an important one, be-

tween Emerson and Nietzsche. He then addresses the forgetfulness with which this connection has been met by philosophers and intellectual historians:

> This interests me almost as much as the connection itself does, since the incredibility [of the relation between Emerson and Nietzsche] must be grounded in a fixed conviction that Emerson is not a philosopher, that he cannot be up to the pitch of reason in European philosophy. (C:40–41)

Cavell's project is thus not to affirm the American scholar as American, but to argue that Emerson is "up to the pitch of reason in European philosophy." It is this project, perhaps together with Cavell's philosophical biography, that seems to account for his move beyond Nietzsche to Wittgenstein and Heidegger in his effort to read Emerson seriously.[5]

The absence here of James and Dewey of course, for Cavell, leaves open the question of whether their work is up to pitch—I will turn to this question in a bit. Cavell's authorizing of Emerson in such a fashion is reminiscent of what goes on at large in the "discovery" of American thinking. The work of Charles Peirce has, for example, in part been redeemed by virtue of its acceptance by Anglo–American analytic and, more recently, European philosophers. Dewey's work is now in part authorized by the work of "recovering" analytic thinker Richard Rorty; indeed, Cavell says as much himself but fails to follow Rorty's lead (C:14).[6] What is important here for our purposes, however, is the irony of Cavell's forgetfulness. What is "incredible" here is that in his concern for the forgetfulness of the Emerson–Nietzsche connection, Cavell institutes his own forgetfulness of Emerson's relations to Dewey and James.

While there are some good reasons for Cavell's distancing of Dewey from Emerson, the extreme form it takes in Cavell's work suggests to me that it is wedded to a misreading—or an absence of reading—of Dewey. The claims that Cavell first announces are that Dewey deemphasized Emerson's concern for remaking the self and that he appears to omit an interest in the poetic or romantic dimensions of

experience. The first of these was discussed by John E. Smith in 1965 in *The Spirit of American Philosophy*.[7] Smith's conclusion, despite his criticism of Dewey's treatment of the self, is that Dewey's deemphasis should not be understood as a *loss* of concern for the self's realization. The second question has been addressed recently in two different but complementary ways. On the one hand, as noted in earlier chapters, Thomas Alexander asserts Dewey's fundamental concern for the aesthetic insofar as Dewey pointed to "the artist and the method of artistic thinking as a paradigm for intelligence."[8] On the other hand, Russell Goodman has unveiled the depth to which Romantic influences reside in Dewey's work.[9] At best, it is an oversight to read Dewey away from Emerson in this direction.

A third claim that Cavell brings against Dewey is that Dewey did not, as did Emerson, bring his culture to life in his work:

> I remember, when first beginning to read what other people called philosophy, my growing feeling about Dewey's work, as I went through what seemed countless of his books, that Dewey was remembering something philosophy should be, but that the world he was responding to and responding from missed the worlds I seemed mostly to live in, missing the heights of modernism in the arts, the depths of psychoanalytic discovery, the ravages of the century's politics, the wild intelligence of American popular culture. (C:13)

Cavell rightly points us to Emerson's interest in and poetic instantiation of the culture he lived with and in; indeed, however elitist Emersonian style appears to the twentieth century, we should not forget that "The American Scholar" is meant to resituate the scholar—the thinker—in her culture. "Life," Emerson says, "lies behind us as the quarry from whence we get tiles and copestones for the masonry of to-day. This is the way to learn grammar. Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made."[10] However, to read Dewey out of this tradition seems a profound mistake.

First, Dewey, like Emerson, was a public figure; his work was available in newspapers, magazines, and trade journals as well as in the numerous talks he gave in both academic and nonacademic settings.

Moreover, the topics he addressed in these, as a quick glance through the *Works* discloses, had everything to do with the culture in which he found himself: "View on 'What the War Means to America' " (LW, 17:123), "The Future of Radical Political Action" (LW, 9:66–67), "In Defense of the Mexican Hearings" (LW, 13:347–348), and so on. Second, Dewey's philosophy of experience, following Emerson's lead, sought to open us to the importance of all corners of experience and culture. This is in part the point of Dewey's strenuous denunciations of the "fine" and "useful" art distinction in *Experience and Nature* (LW, 1:282–83 and 290–91) and *Art as Experience* (LW, 10:33–34, 343–44). His thinking not only encourages, in an Emersonian vein, seeking artfulness in all aspects of life but also underwrites the very kind of intellectual reading of popular culture that Cavell wants to enable. There are few writings in recent *philosophy* that engage "the wild intelligence of American popular culture" as do, say, Richard Shusterman's Dewey-influenced "Form and Funk: The Aesthetic Challenge of Popular Art"[11] and John McDermott's "The Aesthetic Drama of the Ordinary."[12]

Whatever the advantages of appealing to Wittgenstein and Heidegger, the absence of an appeal to Dewey here leaves us with a truncated Emersonianism. Cavell seems to intimate, in his assertion of Dewey's "inadequate philosophical and literary means," that whereas Emerson and Emersonians play with the idea of the ordinary, Dewey simply *is* ordinary. While there is an element of biographical truth in this intimation, careful reading of Dewey (just as careful reading of Emerson) does not bear out the full import of the claim—that Dewey is un-Emersonian. However inadequate his literary means (and I am not sure how far I would want to go even in granting such an inadequacy), Dewey's philosophical means are neither inadequate nor sub–Emersonian. They are, however, deeply attentive to the culture from which they spring. As McDermott argues:

> Dewey took Emerson's task as his own. Although his prose lacked the rhetorical flights so natural to Emerson, he too wrote out of compassion for the common man and confidence in the "possibility" inherent in every situation. By the time of Dewey's matur-

> ity, the world of New England high culture had passed. Dewey, despite being born in New England, was a child of industrial democracy. He alone of the classic American philosophers was able to convert the genius and language of Emerson to the new setting. John Dewey, proletarian by birth and style, grasped that Emerson's message was ever relevant.[13]

Dewey's persistent articulations and exemplifications of our ability to reach into experience and culture indicate a fundamental commitment to carry on the concern for the "ordinary" and the "common" found in Emersonian thinking. A careful reading thus hints that Cavell's objection is perhaps not so much to Dewey as to the American "industrial democracy" that Dewey inhabited—the very culture that he charges Dewey with ignoring.[14] Such cultural aversion plays out further in Cavell's misreading of Dewey's accounts of knowing and intelligence.

Cavell begins by saying that Dewey is "some sort of perfectionist—though surely not an Emersonian one" (C:15).[15] He then identifies Dewey's "perfectionism" or account of the best "state of the soul" with a simplistic Americanism:

> Tocqueville captures the sense of Deweyan perfectionism (in pt. 1, chap. 18 of *Democracy in America*): "[The Americans] have all a lively faith in the perfectibility of man, they judge that the diffusion of knowledge must necessarily be advantageous, and the consequences of ignorance fatal; they all consider society as a body in a state of improvement, humanity as a changing scene, in which nothing is, or ought to be permanent; and they admit that what appears to them today to be good, may be superseded by something better tomorrow. (C:15)[16]

Initially this description sounds appropriate to Dewey's meliorism. However, the description of superseding—of transformation—forgets Dewey's insistence on the importance of tradition and funded experience (see, for example, LW, 10:268–71). Cavell goes further. He acknowledges a superficial similarity between Emerson and Dewey vis-à-vis the Tocquevillean description, but he then argues for their difference:

> To see how close and far they are to and from one another, consider just the difference in what each will call "knowledge" and "ignorance" and how each pictures the "difference." For Dewey, representing the international view, knowledge is given in science and in the prescientific practices of the everyday, that is, the learning of problem solving. For Emerson, the success of science is as much a problem for thought as, say, the failure of religion is. (C:15)

What Cavell does not tell the reader here is that for Dewey "science" and "problem solving" are not to be understood in some naïve fashion. What science is (as well as its success) *is* problematic for Dewey. Science involves "knowing" and "intelligence" for Dewey, and Cavell seems to take this as a mark of Dewey's thinness. But these terms do more work, and more interesting work, than Cavell seems ready to admit.

Cavell does not seem to acknowledge, for example, that for Dewey "knowing" is only one dimension of experience. To repeat what has been said in earlier chapters, in *Experience and Nature* Dewey maintains that a rich and genuine empiricism "indicates that *being* and *having* things in ways other than knowing them, in ways never identical with knowing them, exist, and are preconditions of reflection and knowledge" (LW, 1:377). This is the same kind of broadening of empiricism and locating of knowing (in both the technical sense of understanding and the richer sense of intellect) effected by Emerson in "Experience." Indeed, Emerson said in "The American Scholar," "Thinking is a partial act."[17] For Dewey, knowing is thoroughly environed by "havings" and "valuings." To suggest, therefore, that Dewey sees scientific knowing, in a straightforward positivistic sense, as by itself a panacea for self and social ills is a misrepresentation. As Dewey himself put it:

> Without esthetic appreciation we miss the most characteristic as well as the most precious thing in the real world. The same is true of "practical" matters, that is, of activity limited to effecting technical changes, changes which do not affect our enjoyable realizations of things in their individualities. Modern preoccupation

> with science and with industry based on science has been disastrous; our education has followed the model which they have set. It has been concerned with intellectual analysis and formularized information, and with technical training for this or that field of professionalized activity, a statement as true, upon the whole, of the scholar in classics or in literature or in the fine arts themselves as of specialists in other branches. (LW, 2:112)

One cannot read this without recalling Emerson's talk of "so many walking monsters,—a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man."[18]

Cavell's picturing of Dewey's notion of "intelligence" is equally skewed from its Emersonian ancestry. He says:

> Dewey's picture of thinking as moving in action from a problematic situation to its solution, as by the removal of an obstacle, more or less difficult to recognize as such, by the least costly means, is, of course, one picture of intelligence. (C:21)

He again suggests that Dewey's view is reducible to a kind of technologism—a reduction warranted only if one limits one's reading in Dewey. There is a kinship between Dewey's "intelligence" and Emerson's "intellect" that Cavell does not seem to see. As Cornel West maintains, both Emerson and Dewey see intellect "as a distinctive function of and inseparable from the doings, sufferings, and strivings of everyday people."[19] Both terms are meant to underwrite the Deweyan *phronesis* I alluded to in chapter 4 as well as a genuine human empowerment in the world. Emerson, on the one hand, makes intellect (as intellect receptive) rest on an influx from the Soul and then turns it loose (as intellect constructive) as a producer of experience and "truth." Dewey, on the other hand, while rejecting any supernatural version of the Over-Soul, identifies intelligence in thinking with the presence of artfulness and aesthetic meaning: "It would then [when we properly put art and creation first] be seen that science is an art, that art is practice, and that the only distinction is not between practice and theory, but between the modes of practice that are not intelligent, not inherently and immediately enjoyable, and those

which are full of enjoyed meanings'' (LW, 1:268–269). The aesthetic control of meaning—intelligence—is a pervasive requirement for Dewey, and it grounds his attacks on the distinction between fine and useful arts.[20] More important, it places him directly in Emerson's wake: ''Beauty,'' Emerson said, ''must come back to the useful arts, and the distinction between the fine and useful arts be forgotten'' (CW, 2:218).

The technologism Cavell wants to find in Dewey must be read in line with these Emersonian constraints that Dewey has placed on his notions of knowing and intelligence. Moreover, following these constraints we can see Dewey developing Emerson's thinking in the direction of a science infused with wisdom and a democracy infused with ''character.'' Dewey's project is to look for the experiential detail that might move us toward Emerson's assertion at the close of ''Art'': ''When science is learned in love, and its powers are wielded by love, they will appear the supplements and continuations of the material creation'' (CW, 2:218). At the same time, the appeal to intelligence is an appeal to the funded experience and to the aesthetic dimension that can impart character to us as beings in culture. This is why Dewey can so outrightly appreciate Emerson's identification of Being with Character. When read carefully, Dewey seems to provide both ''the urgency of the need for transformative social change and the resistance to internal change'' that Cavell applauds in Emerson (C:16).

The dismissals of Dewey by Cavell in the early parts of *Conditions* enable him to effect a striking exclusion of Dewey's thought from later parts of the text.[21] In particular, in a chapter titled ''Aversive Thinking'' Cavell speaks of Emersonian perfectionism as standing behind the possibility of a democracy worth living. ''I might put it this way,'' he says, ''the particular disdain for official culture taken in Emerson and in Nietzsche . . . is itself an expression of democracy'' (C:50; see also 124–25). In noting the disdain (for ''art and culture that disgust'') and the ''exclusiveness'' that he thinks it engenders, Cavell seems to be trying to find a place for his sort of intellectual in an American–like democracy. The perfectionism he endorses is presented in distinction from the Rawlsian notion of perfectionism as

the maximizing of some chosen feature or features of a culture. Dewey is nowhere to be found in this discussion that includes Rawls, Nietzsche, and Emerson, despite the fact that he is the foremost American writer on democracy in the twentieth century. Cavell's aversion to Dewey here cannot rest on his aversion to Rawls's maximization principles, for these are not part of Dewey's thinking. It rather seems to rest on his earlier misconstrual of the "intelligence" that for Dewey should accompany human action. This misreading allows him to suppose Deweyan democracy to be civic problem solving that takes place without awareness of the "disgusting" nature of much of our culture. This reading is wrong on both counts. Dewey not only displays deep misgivings about American culture, but also sees, as does the Emerson of "Politics," democracy's responses as at best ameliorative; he recognizes the need for persons to be prepared for the failures of democracy in a precarious world, a need Cavell cites as important to Emerson's thinking.

Cavell sees Emerson's emphases on education, character, and friendship "as part of the training for democracy" (C:56). But "Not the part that must internalize the principles of justice and practice the role of the democratic citizen—that is clearly required, so obviously that the Emersonian may take offense at the idea that this aspect of things is even difficult" (C:56). Whatever else Cavell has in mind as a target of this aside, he probably has in mind a simplistic interpretation of Dewey's democracy. It is Dewey, after all, who takes the internalizing of democracy seriously. Unfortunately, for all the truth in Cavell's appreciation of Emerson's perfectionism, his failure to read Dewey closely again constitutes a partial failure in reading Emerson.

For Dewey, democracy does need to be in some way "internalized" since democracy is "a *personal* way of individual life" (LW, 14:226). This, however, is not reducible to some formal or mechanical internalization of "the principles of justice." Dewey's idea of democracy as a way of life is considerably richer and seems to me to complement, not reject or escape, Emersonian perfectionism understood as an ongoing attentiveness to the state of the soul. The heart of democracy, Dewey says, is "the possession and continual use of certain attitudes,

forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life. Instead of thinking of our own dispositions and habits as accommodated to certain institutions we have to learn to think of the latter as expressions, projections and extensions of habitually dominant personal attitudes'' (LW, 14:226). As with Emerson, the faith is not in what we have done and are doing, but in what we might do—what we can envision ourselves doing. Dewey has no autocratic vision of liberalist leveling in mind; like Emerson he requires individual growth—what Emerson often described as moving to ''higher platforms''—through creative intelligence, valuing, and imagination. These are the forces that ought to drive democracy and to prepare us to live with the failures that constitute democracy. Democracy is a belief ''in the Common Man,'' but only insofar as there is faith in the common person's potential for a ''charactered'' life.

What Dewey does is extend Emersonian perfectionism in a particular direction—the direction of making the renovation of self and community a transactional affair. Cavell's writing Dewey out of the picture at this point severely limits our reading of the possibilities in Emerson. Emerson says in ''Politics'': ''But the wise know that foolish legislation is a rope of sand, which perishes in the twisting; that State must follow, and not lead the character and progress of the citizen'' (CW, 3:117).[22] Dewey, in his communitarian fashion, not only echoes Emerson but also leads us to see beyond the caricature of Emerson as Romantic libertarian:[23]

> This faith [in the possibilities of human nature] may be enacted in statutes, but it is only on paper [Emerson's ''memorandum''] unless it is put in force in the attitudes which human beings display to one another in all the incidents and relations of daily life. (LW, 14:226)

Dewey takes Emerson's faith into the realm of practical and community concern, not in a trivial, mechanistic fashion, but as a way of at once empowering Emersonian character in the community and of investing the democratic community with its proper power instead of reducing it to a hollow bureaucratic shell. This seems to me not a

reduction of Emersonianism to Deweyism, as Cavell might suggest (C:16), but an expansion of Emersonianism along a certain line of thinking—the thinking of self-reliance.[24] As West argues: "The grand breakthrough of Dewey is not only that he considers these larger structures, systems, and institutions, but also that he puts them at the center of his pragmatic thought without surrendering his allegiance to Emersonian and Jamesian concerns with individuality and personality."[25]

As Dewey sees it, the most serious enemies of community are the "[e]motional habituations and intellectual habitudes on the part of the mass of men" (LW, 2:341). This is reminiscent of Emerson's attacks on conformity not only among "the masses" but also among the self-styled social reformers of his day. What we want, he asserted, are "men and women who shall renovate life and our social state, but we see that most natures are insolvent" (CW, 2:43). Dewey recognizes the promise of self-reliance but also argues that its promise hinges on the self's transaction with an environment, something Emerson seldom stated but everywhere indicated.[26] As Dewey puts it in the concluding lines of *The Public and Its Problems*: "We lie, as Emerson said, in the lap of an immense intelligence. But the intelligence is dormant and its communications are broken, inarticulate and faint until it possesses the local community as its medium" (LW, 2:372). Thus, to bring Emerson, as Cavell does, to the brink of the possibility of democracy *and* its disappointments, and then not to call on Dewey, seems to me an important loss in the project of redeeming Emerson.

That Cavell misses Dewey's import for the democracy Emerson's work underwrites not only effects a kind of closure on the reading of Emerson, but also indicates something more about the nature of Cavell's own way of doing philosophy. It is this indication that suggests to me that in a certain respect Cavell works in opposition to the Emersonian and American philosophical traditions.

Early in *Conditions* Cavell chastises Dewey for a blindness in his philosophy: "Above all, [Dewey was] missing the question, and the irony in philosophy's questioning, whether philosophy, however reconstructed, was any longer possible, and necessary, in this world"

(C: 13). It is true that Dewey's writing, for the most part, lacks Emersonian irony. But, then, as Cavell well knows, many have misread Emerson's style as trivial romance; to mistake Dewey's absence of pervasive irony as an indication of his lack of philosophical depth is simply to promote a similar mistake. Moreover, the difference in style should not blind us to the importance of the similarities. As we argued in chapter 12, Emerson, in "Plato; or the Philosopher," reconceives philosophy in the image of the exemplar case of *his* Plato. Recall, Plato is a poet-not-a-poet and a philosopher-more-than-a-philosopher (CW, 4:25). It is in the direction of seeing this in Emerson's essays that Cavell's writing rings true. Yet, Emerson did not leave the philosopher—or the scholar—in endless conversations on the question (or the question of the question) of philosophy. A central irony of "The Over-Soul," of "Self-Reliance," and of "Nature" is that the divine is to be found only *in* lived experience. Left to conversations, ironic or otherwise, on the question of philosophy—as important and compelling as these conversations are—philosophers will no doubt avoid, be averse to, the problems of persons. Cavell seems, in his beckoning Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger, to lead philosophy again (or still) in the direction of a narrowing intellectualism. This was not Emerson's aim. As McDermott says in examining Emerson's "American Scholar":

> He makes it apparent that he does not accept the traditional superiority of the contemplative over the active life. Emerson tells us further that "Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it he is not yet man. Without it thought can never ripen into truth." It is noteworthy that accompanying Emerson's superb intellectual mastery of the great literature of the past and his commitment to the reflective life is his affirmation that "Character is higher than intellect."[27]

With Cavell, I acknowledge Emerson's insistence on thinking as receptive, but deny that Emerson accepts Cavell's implicit claim that "receiving" and "acting" are exclusive. As we saw, for Emerson the intellect itself is both receptive and constructive; it "must have the like perfection in its apprehension and in its works" (CW, 2:201).

It is difficult to bring the charge of "intellectualism" against Cavell because he does acknowledge, though he does not develop, the Emersonian role of character—its ironic role of aversion—in constructing community (C:27–29). However, even where he acknowledges this role, Cavell tends to return the discussion to his own program—the program that reads Dewey away from Emerson. This program, and I leave it to other readers to affirm this, focuses on an intellectualist realm of language: words, voice, sign, conversation, reason, sentences, and so on. The program descends from Cavell's reading of Thoreau's *Walden* as *essentially* about reading and writing. This same focus is revealed in Cavell's other writings on Emerson that equate Emerson's quest for the ordinary with ordinary language philosophy.[28] Indeed, this equation opens another route for Cavell to dismiss Dewey: "For Dewey the philosophical appeal of the ordinary," Cavell argues, "is present but intermittent, as when he relates esteeming to estimating or relates objects to what it is that objects, or mind to minding" (C:23). For Cavell, wordplay seems to be the measure of the ordinary. This reduces Emerson's interest in the ordinary—in gifts, prudence, manners, friendship, love, and politics—to the play of ordinary language. This line of thinking cannot help but miss the fundamental and continuous role the ordinary plays in Dewey's thinking. It cannot help but miss the fact that Dewey has taken up threads of Emerson's work: that, as Goodman puts it, Dewey's determination "to recover and maintain its [philosophy's] engagement with contemporary life" provides "the sense in which Dewey comes to embody in his own career the Emersonian thinker"[29]

This narrowness of Cavell's reading of Emerson is even more openly expressed in "Hope Against Hope," near the close of *Conditions*:

> My insistence that Emerson's achievement is essentially a philosophical one concentrates on a number of claims. (1) His *language* has that accuracy, that commitment to subject every *word* of itself to criticism. . . . (2) "Self-Reliance" in particular constitutes a theory of *writing* and *reading* whose evidence its own writing fully provides. . . . (3) The relation of Emerson's *writing* . . . to his soci-

> ety. . . . (4) His *prose* not alone takes sides in this aversive *conversation*, but it also enacts the conversation. (C: 132–138; italics added)

Even (3), which addresses "society," devolves into the claim "that Emerson's writing and his society are in an unending argument with one another" (C:138). As true as these claims may be—and I believe they are true—they are incomplete if meant to reveal Emerson fully as an American philosopher. Ironically, this display of linguisticism places Cavell not in the trajectory of Emerson but in the company of, say, Richard Rorty, for whom experience is reducible to language. It is precisely this reduction that Dewey attacks throughout his career. Cavell's own "philosophical" background thus seems to encircle his reading of Emerson, marking a circumference beyond which lies the importance of Dewey's own relation to Emerson.

I side with McDermott when he says, "Dewey's project is Emersonian, for the affairs of time and the activities of nature are the ground of inquiry, rather than the hidden and transcendent meaning of Being."[30] Cavell says, "For an Emersonian, the Deweyan is apt to seem an enlightened child, toying with the means of destruction, stinting the means of instruction, of provoking the self to work; for the Deweyan the Emersonian is apt to look, at best, like a Deweyan" (C:16). Were Deweyanism marked merely by educational theorists, this claim might stand a chance; but the work of McDermott, Ralph Sleeper, Alexander, Kestenbaum, and numerous others exemplifies its falsity. The claim follows only from a narrow reading of Dewey—the very *kind* of narrow reading Cavell wants to prevent in readers of Emerson. Cavell's misreading of Dewey and his absenting of William James seem in the end more like moves of a late twentieth-century professional philosopher than those of an Emersonian American scholar. We cannot begrudge Cavell his *own* project, which is in so many ways worthy and insightful, and has inspired another generation to rethink philosophy in America; my quarrel, in the end, is something of an in-house quarrel. But we may consider how much stronger a project it might be if it were to include a more thorough reading of the Emersonian inheritance in the work of later American philosophers.