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PLANS, TAKES, AND MIS-TAKES: A COMMENTARY

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The following is one “take” on a magnificent and multifaceted paper. I will strive to both state and express some of what the paper means to me.

My fifth grade music teacher’s chuckle when he announced I was tone deaf and what it meant for my musical future resonates within me. Meanings emerge and develop temporally and notes sounded later re-signify those preceding. My commentary is a moment in my working out the meaning of my teacher’s diagnosis.

My commentary is a Deweyan riff on temporality. Dewey distinguishes between metaphysical existence and the logical essences we analytically make from it. For Dewey, “there is a natural bridge that joins the gap between existence and essence: namely communication” (EN 133). “Science states meanings,” he says, “art expresses them” (AE 90). On this occasion, we are considering expressive meanings (i.e., jazz piano), which are the “only media of complete and unhindered communication” (AE 110). However, since “science is an art” also, the art of creating warranted assertions, the difference is not large.

The following helps us understand the temporal aspect of all existence: “That even the solid earth mountains... disappear like the clouds is an old theme of moralists and poets... Every existence is an event” (EN 62). Dewey distinguishes between existential “temporal quality” (e.g., lived experience), which “is direct, immediate and indefinable” and “temporal order” (e.g., Klemp *et. al.*, figures 2 and 3) which “is a matter of relation, of definition, dating, placing and desiring” (EN 92). Temporal order is a product of scientific or expressive inquiry “discovered in reflection” (EN 92). Of itself, the occurrence of a musical note is a meaningless, immediate, and indefinable event. Existentially, there are no right or wrong notes; they are just “something that happened.”

In the same paragraph, Dewey connects the forgoing remarks to human development:

“Every event as such is passing into other things, in such a way that a later occurrence is an integral part of the *character* or *nature* of present existence. An ‘affair,’ *Res*, is always at issue whether it concerns chemical change, the emergence of life, language, mind or the episodes that compose human history. Each comes from something else and each when it comes has its own initial, unpredictable, immediate qualities, and its own similar terminal qualities. The later is never just

resolved into the earlier. What we call such resolution is merely a statement of the [temporal] order by means of which we regulate the passage of an earlier into the later. We may explain the traits of maturity by better knowledge of childhood, but maturity is never just infancy plus.” (EN 92)

What Monk creatively makes from his take on his possible “mis-take” and what I creatively make from my take on my fifth grade music teacher’s remarks on my tone deafness as a cognitive “mis-take” or at least a flaw in my musical being are much the same, and much more than what is known to most developmental psychologists, although T. S. Eliot (1943/1971) understands:

- we had the experience but missed the meaning;
- and approach to the meaning restores the experience;
- in a different form...

There is a great deal more to say about Dewey and temporality, including the rhythms of need, demand, satisfaction and harmony, disharmony, the restoration of harmony and equilibrium, disequilibrium, restoration of equilibrium and life itself involving homeostasis, homeostatic disruption, restoration of homeostasis. The rhythm of inquiry is from knowing how to act (whether repairing a pipe or completing a logical proof), to doubt (ignorance about how to act) accompanied by inquiry, to knowing how to continue. All these rhythms are dynamic and open not static and sealed. Nothing ever repeats itself exactly; identity is an essence not an existence. These rhythms are all instances of Dewey’s rhythm of growth (see Garrison, 1997). Growth is the only aim of education in Dewey post-metaphysical philosophy of education.

Similar to breathing in and out, lived experience is a rhythmic tide of doing and undergoing:

“The nature of experience can be understood only by noting that it includes an active and a passive element peculiarly combined. On the active hand, experience is *trying* — a meaning which is made explicit in the connected term *experiment*. On the passive, it is *undergoing*.” (DE 146)

Learning from living is necessarily rhythmic:

“To ‘learn from experience’ is to make a backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence.” (DE 147).

Of course, failure, forgetting decay, and death, also arise within life’s rhythms.

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