“Plans, Takes, and Mis-takes”: A Commentary

Jim Garrison
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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 foregoing remarks to human development:

“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.

RÉFÉRENCES


