JOHN DEWEY

JOHN DEWEY IS THE MAJOR FIGURE of the classical period of American philosophy, a period that includes William James, George Herbert Mead, and Charles Sanders Peirce. Most of the members of this group have waned in influence and status through the twentieth century, and are largely unknown in Europe and the rest of the world, their work having been supplanted in the United States by language-based forms of analytic philosophy. Part of the decline may have been due to impoverished interpretations of Dewey’s instrumentalism or pragmatism, as if Dewey maintained that knowledge had only practical implications.

An additional factor is that there appears to be lacking in Dewey’s work a systematic metaphysics and epistemology: He was dubious about the possibility of a systematic theory that would capture the force of his central insight—that all human activities, including science and metaphysics, are to be evaluated and tested by their function in human experience. Recent Continental philosophers, particularly Heidegger and Foucault, but including most writers interested in hermeneutic forms of interpretation and epistemology, share Dewey’s conviction that knowledge and thought, science and art, are conditioned by human history and are to be evaluated by a human future.

Dewey may have declined to offer an explicit metaphysical theory, but there is in his writings a systematic theory of experience. For Dewey, experience is not a human state or frame of mind, but is the field of lived human activity. Sometimes he characterizes the dimensions of that field as doing and undergoing, sometimes as means and ends, but he always emphasizes that experience is both relational and consummatory. Inquiry is largely concerned with means-ends relations, but all experience has consummatory qualities. Art is the unification in experience of those means that lead to consummatory ends. Where experience is most thoroughly unified and complete, there we find art. Like Nietzsche, Dewey takes art to be the model for the highest forms of human achievement.
THE LIVE CREATURE

By one of the ironic perversities that often attend the course of affairs, the existence of the works of art upon which formation of an esthetic theory depends has become an obstruction to theory about them. For one reason, these works are products that exist externally and physically. In common conception, the work of art is often identified with the building, book, painting, or statue in its existence apart from human experience. Since the actual work of art is what the product does with and in experience, the result is not favorable to understanding. In addition, the very perfection of some of these products, the prestige they possess because of a long history of unquestioned admiration, creates conventions that get in the way of fresh insight. When an art product once attains classic status, it somehow becomes isolated from the human conditions under which it was brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual life-experience.

When artistic objects are separated from both conditions of origin and operation in experience, a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance, with which esthetic theory deals. Art is remitted to a separate realm, where it is cut off from that association with the materials and aims of every other form of human effort, ongoing, and achievement. A primary task is thus imposed upon one who undertakes to write upon the philosophy of the fine arts. This task is to restore continuity

between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience.

HAVING AN EXPERIENCE

Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living. Under conditions of resistance and conflict, aspects and elements of the self and the world that are implicated in this interaction qualify experience with emotions and ideas so that conscious intent emerges. Oftentimes, however, the experience had is inchoate. Things are experienced but not in such a way that they are composed into an experience. There is distraction and dispersion; what we observe and what we think, what we desire and what we get, are at odds with each other. We put our hands to the plow and turn back; we start and then we stop, not because the experience has reached the end for the sake of which it was initiated but because of extraneous interruptions or of inner lethargy.

In contrast with such experience, we have an experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is an experience.

Philosophers, even empirical philosophers, have spoken for the most part of experience at large. Idiomatic speech, however, refers to experiences each of which is singular, having its own beginning and end. For life is no uniform uninterrupted march or flow. It is a thing of histories, each with its own plot, its own inception and movement toward its close, each having its own particular rhythmic movement; each with its own unrepeated quality pervading it throughout. A flight of stairs, mechanical as it is, proceeds by individualized steps, not by undifferentiated progression, and an inclined plane is at least marked off from other things by abrupt discreteness.

Experience in this vital sense is defined by those situations and episodes that we spontaneously refer to as being "real experiences"; those things of which we say in recalling them, "that was an experience." It may have been something of tremendous importance—a quarrel with one who was once an intimate, a catastrophe finally averted by a hair's breadth. Or it may have been something that in comparison was slight—and which perhaps because of its very slightness illustrates all the better what is to be an experience. There is that meal in a Paris restaurant of which one says "that was an experience." It
stands out as an enduring memorial of what food may be. Then there is that
storm one went through in crossing the Atlantic—the storm that seemed in its
fury, as it was experienced, to sum up in itself all that a storm can be, com-
plete in itself, standing out because marked out from what went before and
what came after.

In such experiences, every successive part flows freely, without seam
and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues. At the same time there is no
sacrifice of the self-identity of the parts. A river, as distinct from a pond,
flows. But its flow gives a definiteness and interest to its successive portions
greater than exist in the homogenous portions of a pond. In an experience,
flow is from something to something. As one part leads into another and as
one part carries on what went before, each gains distinctness in itself. The
enduring whole is diversified by successive phases that are emphases of its var-
ied colors.

Because of continuous merging, there are no holes, mechanical junc-
tions, and dead centers when we have an experience. There are pauses, places
of rest, but they punctuate and define the quality of movement. They sum up
what has been undergone and prevent its dissipation and idle evaporation.
Continued acceleration is breathless and prevents parts from gaining distinc-
tion. In a work of art, different acts, episodes, occurrences melt and fuse into
unity, and yet do not disappear and lose their own character as they do so—
just as in a genial conversation there is a continuous interchange and blend-
ing, and yet each speaker not only retains his own character but manifests it
more clearly than is his wont.

An experience has a unity that gives it its name, that meal, that storm,
that rupture of friendship. The existence of this unity is constituted by a single
quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its con-
stituent parts. This unity is neither emotional, practical, nor intellectual, for
these terms name distinctions that reflection can make within it. In discourse
about an experience, we must make use of these adjectives of interpretation. In
going over an experience in mind after its occurrence, we may find that one
property rather than another was sufficiently dominant so that it characterizes
the experience as a whole. There are absorbing inquiries and speculations
which a scientific man and philosopher will recall as “experiences” in the
emphatic sense. In final import they are intellectual. But in their actual occur-
rence they were emotional as well; they were purposive and volitional. Yet the
experience was not a sum of these different characters; they were lost in it as
distinctive traits. No thinker can ply his occupation save as he is lured and
rewarded by total integral experiences that are intrinsically worth while. With-
out them he would never know what it is really to think and would be com-
pletely at a loss in distinguishing real thought from the spurious article. Think-
ing goes on in trains of ideas, but the ideas form a train only because they are
much more than what an analytic psychology calls ideas. They are phases,
emotionally and practically distinguished, of a developing underlying quality;
they are its moving variations, not separate and independent like Locke’s.
and Hume’s so-called ideas and impressions, but are subtle shadings of a pervading and developing hue. . .

Art denotes a process of doing or making. This is as true of fine as of technological art. Art involves molding of clay, chipping of marble, casting of bronze, laying on of pigments, construction of buildings, singing of songs, playing of instruments, enacting rôles on the stage, going through rhythmic movements in the dance. Every art does something with some physical material, the body or something outside the body, with or without the use of intervening tools, and with a view to production of something visible, audible, or tangible. So marked is the active or “doing” phase of art, that the dictionaries usually define it in terms of skilled action, ability in execution. The Oxford Dictionary illustrates by a quotation from John Stuart Mill: “Art is an endeavor after perfection in execution” while Matthew Arnold calls it “pure and flawless workmanship.”

The word “esthetic” refers, as we have already noted, to experience as appreciative, perceiving, and enjoying. It denotes the consumer’s rather than the producer’s standpoint. It is Gusto, taste; and, as with cooking, overt skillful action is on the side of the cook who prepares, while taste is on the side of the consumer, as in gardening there is a distinction between the gardener who plants and tills and the householder who enjoys the finished product.

These very illustrations, however, as well as the relation that exists in having an experience between doing and undergoing, indicate that the distinction between esthetic and artistic cannot be pressed so far as to become a separation. Perfection in execution cannot be measured or defined in terms of execution; it implies those who perceive and enjoy the product that is executed. The cook prepares food for the consumer and the measure of the value of what is prepared is found in consumption. Mere perfection in execution, judged in its own terms in isolation, can probably be attained better by a machine than by human art. By itself, it is at most technique, and there are great artists who are not in the first ranks as technicians (witness Cézanne), just as there are great performers on the piano who are not great esthetically, and as Sargent is not a great painter.

Craftsmanship to be artistic in the final sense must be “loving”; it must care deeply for the subject matter upon which skill is exercised. A sculptor comes to mind whose busts are marvelously exact. It might be difficult to tell in the presence of a photograph of one of them and of a photograph of the original which was of the person himself. For virtuosity they are remarkable. But one doubts whether the maker of the busts had an experience of his own that he was concerned to have those share who look at his products. To be truly artistic, a work must also be esthetic—that is, framed for enjoyed receptive perception. Constant observation is, of course, necessary for the maker while he is producing. But if his perception is not also esthetic in nature, it is a colorless and cold recognition of what has been done, used as a stimulus to the next step in a process that is essentially mechanical.
In short, art, in its form, unites the very same relation of doing and undergoing, outgoing and incoming energy, that makes an experience to be an experience. Because of elimination of all that does not contribute to mutual organization of the factors of both action and reception into one another, and because of selection of just the aspects and traits that contribute to their interpenetration of each other, the product is a work of esthetic art. Man whistles, carves, sings, dances, gestures, molds, draws and paints. The doing or making is artistic when the perceived result is of such a nature that its qualities as perceived have controlled the question of production. The act of producing that is directed by intent to produce something that is enjoyed in the immediate experience of perceiving has qualities that a spontaneous or uncontrolled activity does not have. The artist embodies in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works.

**The Expressive Object**

Expression, like construction, signifies both an action and its result. The last chapter considered it as an act. We are now concerned with the product, the object that is expressive, that says something to us. If the two meanings are separated, the object is viewed in isolation from the operation which produced it, and therefore apart from individuality of vision, since the act proceeds from an individual live creature. Theories which seize upon "expression," as if it denoted simply the object, always insist to the uttermost that the object of art is purely representative of other objects already in existence. They ignore the individual contribution which makes the object something new. They dwell upon its "universal" character, and upon its meaning—an ambiguous term, as we shall see. On the other hand, isolation of the act of expressing from the expressiveness possessed by the object leads to the notion that expression is merely a process of discharging personal emotion—the conception criticized in the last chapter.

The juice expressed by the wine press is what it is because of a prior act, and it is something new and distinctive. It does not merely represent other things. Yet it has something in common with other objects and it is made to appeal to other persons than the one who produced it. A poem and picture present material passed through the alembic of personal experience. They have no precedents in existence or in universal being. But, nonetheless, their material came from the public world and so has qualities in common with the material of other experiences, while the product awakens in other persons new perceptions of the meanings of the common world. The oppositions of individual and universal, of subjective and objective, of freedom and order, in which philosophers have reveled, have no place in the work of art. Expression as personal act and as objective result are organically connected with each other.

It is not necessary, therefore, to go into these metaphysical questions. We may approach the matter directly. What does it mean to say that a work of
art is representative, since it must be representative in some sense if it is expressive? To say in general that a work of art is or is not representative is meaningless. For the word has many meanings. An affirmation of representative quality may be false in one sense and true in another. If literal reproduction is signified by "representative" then the work of art is not of that nature, for such a view ignores the uniqueness of the work due to the personal medium through which scenes and events have passed. Matisse said that the camera was a great boon to painters, since it relieved them from any apparent necessity of copying objects. But representation may also mean that the work of art tells something to those who enjoy it about the nature of their own experience of the world: that it presents the world in a new experience which they undergo.

A similar ambiguity attends the question of meaning in a work of art. Words are symbols which represent objects and actions in the sense of standing for them; in that sense they have meaning. A signboard has meaning when it says so many miles to such and such a place, with an arrow pointing the direction. But meaning in these two cases has a purely external reference; it stands for something by pointing to it. Meaning does not belong to the word and signboard of its own intrinsic right. They have meaning in the sense in which an algebraic formula or a cipher code has it. But there are other meanings that present themselves directly as possessions of objects which are experienced. Here there is no need for a code or convention of interpretation; the meaning is as inherent in immediate experience as is that of a flower garden. Denial of meaning to a work of art thus has two radically different significations. It may signify that a work of art has not the kind of meaning that belongs to signs and symbols in mathematics—a contention that is just. Or it may signify that the work of art is without meaning as nonsense is without it. The work of art certainly does not have that which is had by flags when used to signal another ship. But it does have that possessed by flags when they are used to decorate the deck of a ship for a dance.

Since there are presumably none who intend to assert that works of art are without meaning in the sense of being senseless, it might seem as if they simply intended to exclude external meaning, meaning that resides outside the work of art itself. Unfortunately, however, the case is not so simple. The denial of meaning to art usually rests upon the assumption that the kind of value (and meaning) that a work of art possesses is so unique that it is without community or connection with the contents of other modes of experience than the esthetic. It is, in short, another way of upholding what I have called the esoteric idea of fine art. The conception implied in the treatment of esthetic experience set forth in the previous chapters is, indeed, that the work of art has a unique quality, but that it is that of clarifying and concentrating meanings contained in scattered and weakened ways in the material of other experiences.

The problem in hand may be approached by drawing a distinction between expression and statement. Science states meanings; art expresses
them. It is possible that this remark will itself illustrate the difference I have in mind better than will any amount of explanatory comment. Yet I venture upon some degree of amplification. The instance of a signboard may help. It directs one's course to a place, say a city. It does not in any way supply experience of that city even in a vicarious way. What it does do is to set forth some of the conditions that must be fulfilled in order to procure that experience. What holds in this instance may be generalized. Statement sets forth the conditions under which an experience of an object or situation may be had. It is a good, that is, effective, statement in the degree in which these conditions are stated in such a way that they can be used as directions by which one may arrive at the experience. It is a bad statement, confused and false, if it sets forth these conditions in such a way that when they are used as directions, they mislead or take one to the object in a wasteful way.

"Science" signifies just that mode of statement that is most helpful as direction. To take the old standard case—which science today seems bent upon modifying—the statement that water is H₂O is primarily a statement of the conditions under which water comes into existence. But it is also for those who understand it a direction for producing pure water and for testing anything that is likely to be taken for water. It is a "better" statement than popular and pre-scientific ones just because in stating the conditions for the existence of water comprehensively and exactly, it sets them forth in a way that gives direction concerning generation of water. Such, however, is the newness of scientific statement and its present prestige (due ultimately to its directive efficacy) that scientific statement is often thought to possess more than a signboard function and to disclose or be "expressive" of the inner nature of things. If it did, it would come into competition with art, and we should have to take sides and decide which of the two promulgates the more genuine revelation.

The poetic as distinct from the prosaic, esthetic art as distinct from scientific, expression as distinct from statement, does something different from leading to an experience. It constitutes one. A traveler who follows the statement or direction of a signboard finds himself in the city that has been pointed towards. He then may have in his own experience some of the meaning which the city possesses. We may have it to such an extent that the city has expressed itself to him—as Tintern Abbey expressed itself to Wordsworth in and through his poem. The city might, indeed, be trying to express itself in a celebration attended with pageantry and all other resources that would render its history and spirit perceptible. Then there is, if the visitor has himself the experience that permits him to participate, an expressive object, as different from the statements of a gazetteer, however full and correct they might be, as Wordsworth's poem is different from the account of Tintern Abbey given by an antiquarian. The poem, or painting, does not operate in the dimension of correct descriptive statement but in that of experience itself. Poetry and prose, literal photograph and painting, operate in different media to distinct ends. Prose is set forth in propositions. The
logic of poetry is superpropositional even when it uses what are, grammatically speaking, propositions. The latter have intent; art is an immediate realization of intent. . . .

**SUBSTANCE AND FORM**

Because objects of art are expressive, they are a language. Rather they are many languages. For each art has its own medium and that medium is especially fitted for one kind of communication. Each medium says something that cannot be uttered as well or as completely in any other tongue. The needs of daily life have given superior practical importance to one mode of communication, that of speech. This fact has unfortunately given rise to a popular impression that the meanings expressed in architecture, sculpture, painting, and music can be translated into words with little if any loss. In fact, each art speaks an idiom that conveys what cannot be said in another language and yet remains the same.

Language exists only when it is listened to as well as spoken. The hearer is an indispensable partner. The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created it. Thus language involves what logicians call a triadic relation. There is the speaker, the thing said, and the one spoken to. The external object, the product of art, is the connecting link between artist and audience. Even when the artist works in solitude all three terms are present. The work is there in progress, and the artist has to become vicariously the receiving audience. He can speak only as his work appeals to him as one spoken to through what he perceives. He observes and understands as a third person might note and interpret. Matisse is reported to have said: "When a painting is finished, it is like a new-born child. The artist himself must have time for understanding it." It must be lived with as a child is lived with, if we are to grasp the meaning of his being.

All language, whatever its medium, involves what is said and how it is said, or substance and form. The great question concerning substance and form is: Does matter come first ready-made, and search for a discovery of form in which to embody it come afterwards? Or is the whole creative effort of the artist an endeavor to form material so that it will be in actuality the authentic substance of a work of art? The question goes far and deep. The answer given it determines the issue of many controverted points in esthetic criticism. Is there one esthetic value belonging to sense materials and another to a form that renders them expressive? Are all subjects fit for esthetic treatment or only a few which are set aside for that end by their intrinsically superior character? Is "beauty" another name for form descending from without, as a transcendent essence, upon material, or is it a name for the esthetic quality that appears whenever material is formed in a way that renders it adequately expressive? Is form, in its esthetic sense, something that uniquely marks off as esthetic from the beginning a certain realm of objects,