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A sensible experientialism?

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Abstract

Experientialism in aesthetics is the view that the artistic merit or the aesthetic value of something is determined by the final value of certain experiences of it. These are usually specified as experiences of it with understanding and appreciation. Until recently, experientialism was the dominant view. Not anymore. Experientialists are now subject to a barrage of objections, many of which they have not answered. Here I argue that all of these objections fail. I develop a new form of experientialism that is immune to them. It also has an independent rationale. It incorporates an account of the value of art appreciation that is plausible in its own right. And it endorses many of the core insights of anti-experientialists, especially concerning the final value of good art. Those of us unconvinced by experientialism need to take this form of it seriously. I conclude by identifying some genuine problems it faces. Even these aren't clearly insoluble.

KEYWORDS

aesthetics, artistic value, aesthetic value, experientialism, aesthetic empiricism

Experientialism in aesthetics is the view that the artistic merit or aesthetic value of something is determined by the final value of certain experiences of it. These experiences are usually specified as experiences of it with understanding and appreciation. For something to have final value is

for it to be good in itself to some extent, or an end in itself.[1] Experientialism can be about artistic merit, aesthetic value, or both.[2]

Until recently, experientialism was dominant.[3] Not anymore. Experientialists are now subject to a barrage of objections, many of which they have not answered.[4]

I am allergic to experientialism. It seems to me to emerge from the same impulse to psychologize value and other difficult philosophical topics that produced hedonism about welfare and phenomenalism about matter. My gut tells me not to bet on it in aesthetics when the same program has failed so spectacularly throughout philosophy. But allergies are not arguments, and I have come to think that the arguments given against experientialism (including ones I have given) are unconvincing. So this paper defends a view I dislike. I think there is one form of experientialism that can answer all existing objections. Moreover, there are independent reasons in its favor.

This form of experientialism is of interest in its own right. But it is also interesting because its account of the value of experiencing good art might be correct—even if the theory of artistic merit it bases on this account is incorrect. Experientialists are currently under attack from many quarters. If the arguments of this paper succeed, those of us unconvinced by experientialism have a much harder task justifying our unbelief than is commonly recognized.

1 | APPRECIATIVE EXPERIENTIALISM

The form of experientialism I have in mind is about artistic merit.[5] It emerges in response to two objections.

[1] Final value is what many have called "intrinsic value." But many now reserve that expression for the value something has in virtue of its intrinsic properties alone. And they think something can be good in itself (or "as an end") in virtue of non-intrinsic properties. So they prefer to call this kind of value "final value."

[2] Experientialism is sometimes called "empiricism" about artistic merit or aesthetic value. But, confusingly, another view goes by that name: the view that everything aesthetically or artistically valuable in a thing can be detected by experiencing it.

[3] Bradley (1917); Lewis (1946); Ziff (1966); Beardsley (1969, 1970, 1979, 1981: lix-lxiv, sec.28); Slote (1971: sec.4); Budd (1985, 1995, 2007, 2008, 2014); Dickie (1988); Goldman (1990, 1995, 2006); Levinson (1992, 1996, 2002, 2016); Walton (1993); Stecker (1997, 2006, 2019: ch.2); Miller (1998); Railton (1998); Anderson (2000: 69-77); Kieran (2001); Davies (2003: sec.2); Iseminger (2004); Pratt (2012); Stang (2012); Matravers (2013: ch.2); Matthen (2017: sec.9, 2018). Some of these views are close to, but not strictly or not unquestionably examples of, experientialism as defined above. Beardsley (1981: 540-43) appeals to the value, but not the final value, of the experience; Walton (1993: 506) appeals to the propriety, but doesn't say "value," of certain pleasures; Levinson (1996: 671-72) appeals, in addition, to the work's value as an influence on other works (which, however, is grounded in the value of experiences of those works (2016: 47-8)).

[4] Knight (1935-1936: 215-16); Graham (1994); Sharpe (2000); Davies (2004: ch.10.2, 2006); Kieran (2005: ch.1); McGonigal (2010: sec.3); Shelley (2010, 2011, 2017: sec.2.4, 2019); Watkins and Shelley (2012); Wolf (2015); Grant (2015); Hanson (2017: sec.5); Gorodeisky (2017, 2021: sec.4); Lopes (2018: 53-87); Van der Berg (2020).

[5] To have artistic merit is to be good art (good poetry, good music, a good painting, etc.) to some extent. It is attributed in the judgement that the Iliad is as good a poem as the Odyssey, that "Tiny Dancer" is a better song than "Wonderwall," and that Disney films of the 1980s, though formulaic, were not without artistic merit. Things without artistic merit can have aesthetic value: natural phenomena, like sunsets, provide examples. Many anti-experientialists say their objections apply both to experientialism about artistic merit and to experientialism about aesthetic value (e.g. Shelley (2010: 707-08); Watkins and Shelley (2012: 350n1)). Some are silent or unclear on this point. Some of those discussed below might reply that they did not mean their objections to apply to experientialism about artistic merit. To my knowledge, none of experientialism's critics does claim this. But however this may be, my point will be that these objections fail against the form of experientialism I shall outline. That conclusion is of interest even if it does not constitute a criticism of all the arguments I discuss.

1.1 | Explaining the Experience's Value

Michael Watkins and James Shelley (2012: sec.2) raise the following objection.[6] The experientialist says an artwork has the value it has because of the value of the experience it is disposed to afford. But what gives this experience the value it has? There are only two possibilities. The first is that the experience has the value it has because it is of the work. The second is that the experience has the value it has because of something else, such as its phenomenal character.

Suppose the experientialist endorses the first option. Then experientialism says both that the experience has the value it has because it is of the work, and that the work has the value it has because of the experience. This leads to circularity. The natural explanation of why being of the work gives the experience value is that the work has value. But then experientialism must say both that the value of the work derives from the value of the experience, and that the value of the experience derives from the value of the work.

So suppose the experientialist says that the experience has the value it has, not because it is of the work, but because of something else, such as its phenomenal character. There is no apparent reason why an experience that something other than the work, such as a drug, is disposed to bring about could not have the same value-conferring feature. That experience would have the same value as the experience of the work. But then experientialism implies that the drug would have the same value as the work. That is absurd.

Experientialists, then, are caught between circularity and absurdity.

Experientialists can answer this objection. Suppose they say the experience has the value it has because of something other than its being of the work, such as its phenomenal character. And suppose they agree that a drug-induced experience could have this value-conferring feature. It would indeed be absurd to say that the drug has the same aesthetic value or artistic merit as van Gogh's *Starry Night* on the ground that the drug is disposed to bring about a hallucination with the same phenomenal character as seeing *Starry Night*. But experientialists can avoid saying this.

Experientialists should not say that whatever is disposed to bring about an experience has aesthetic value or artistic merit determined by the value of that experience. They should say that something has aesthetic value or artistic merit determined by the value of an experience only if it is the intentional object of that experience. When you hallucinate, the drug is not the intentional object of your experience. What you hallucinate is. So if anything has aesthetic value or artistic merit determined by the value of the experience, it is not the drug. It is the object in your hallucination. And it is not absurd to say that you could have a drug-induced hallucination of an object with the same aesthetic value or artistic merit as *Starry Night*. You could, after all, hallucinate *Starry Night* itself.

On this view, being the intentional object of an experience is a necessary condition of having aesthetic value or artistic merit determined by the value of that experience. This requirement is suggested by the very definition of experientialism, according to which the artistic merit or aesthetic value of something is determined by the final value of certain experiences *of it*. Experientialists can impose other necessary conditions of having aesthetic value or artistic merit.[7] But they needn't say that being disposed to bring about an experience is a sufficient condition of having artistic merit or aesthetic value determined by the value of that experience.

[6] See also Shelley (2010).

[7] They might (e.g.) regard being art as a necessary condition of having artistic merit.

Now suppose the experientialist says the experience has the value it has because it is of the work. Watkins and Shelley argue that this makes experientialism circular. The experientialist must say both of the following:

- The work has value because the experience has value.
- The experience has value because the work has value.

But an experientialist can avoid circularity. An experientialist about artistic merit can say:

- The work has artistic merit because the experience has final value.
- The experience has final value because the work has final value.

The first claim is just a statement of experientialism about artistic merit. The second claim is the distinctive one. I shall argue that the conjunction of these claims is non-circular; that the second claim is plausible; and that it is compatible with experientialism.

There is no circularity here if artistic merit and final value aren't the same property. And indeed they are not. If they were the same, then everything with final value (pleasure, freedom, virtue, whatever) would have artistic merit. Therefore, the account is not circular. The work's possession of artistic merit is being explained by the experience's possession of final value, which is being explained by the work's possession of final value, which is distinct from artistic merit. So the work's possession of artistic merit is not ultimately getting explained by its possession of artistic merit.

It is plausible that the appreciative experience of the work has final value because the work has final value. At least, if the work has final value at all, the experience's value can be explained by this. Being an experience of an artwork with understanding and appreciation of it for features that give the work final value (such as beauty, imaginativeness, and expressiveness) gives the experience final value because these features give the work final value. Quite generally, a life is enriched by experiencing what is genuinely good in itself with understanding and appreciation of what is good in itself about it. That is true whether the finally valuable thing is an artwork or something else. Seeing your children happy and healthy, and appreciating this rather than being too busy to be moved by it, is a finally valuable experience if anything is. The final value of what is appreciated explains the final value of appreciating it.

Lastly, it might be thought that, even if art has final value, experientialists cannot claim this. For it might be thought that experientialism entails that artworks are just valuable as means to valuable experiences. But this would be a mistake. Maybe experientialists cannot say that artworks have final value in virtue of affording experiences with final value.[8] But they can certainly say that artworks have final value. And they need not regard it as a coincidence that good art has both final value and artistic merit. They can adopt the following picture. Certain properties of the work (such as its imaginativeness, perceptiveness, and beauty) give it final value. Because the work has final value, the appreciative experience of it has final value. And because this experience has final value, the work has artistic merit. The order of determination goes: work with beauty, imaginativeness, perceptiveness → work with final value → experience with final value → work with artistic merit.

The idea that experientialists cannot allow that good art has final value is a widespread error. Many argue that experientialism is false if good art has final value, or if it has value not possessed

[8] Stecker (1997: 251-58) and Stang (2012: sec.2) think they cannot say this.

in virtue of the value of the experience.[9] This thought is encouraged by the tendency of experientialism's critics to describe it simply as a theory of "the value" of art.[10] If experientialism is a theory of the entire value of art, and if something cannot have final value in virtue of affording a valuable experience, then experientialism is indeed incompatible with the view that art has final value. But experientialism is not a theory of "the value" of art. The form of experientialism I have been describing explains artistic merit, and nothing else, by appeal to the value of experiences. This theory *insists* that art has final value, and that it does not have final value in virtue of affording valuable experiences. That is how the theory explains the value of the experiences afforded.

I can see someone granting that the two claims I have identified are non-circular and compatible with experientialism, but objecting that this doesn't fully exorcise the spectre of circularity. After all, isn't it true that the appreciative experience of works with artistic merit has final value, not just because those works have final value, but because those works have artistic merit? The experience is good because it is an experience of good art. If the experientialist accepts this plain truth, her account is circular. She has to say (because she is an experientialist)

- The work has artistic merit because the experience has final value.

And she has to say (because it is true):

- The experience has final value because the work has artistic merit.

This is a different circularity, which she cannot avoid.

Matters are not so simple, however. The experientialist has two replies.

First, she can argue that the experience has final value because the work is beautiful, skilfully made, perceptive, etc. But the experience does not have final value because the work has artistic merit. Artistic merit is a different property from beauty, perceptiveness, skilfulness, etc. The latter give works artistic merit. These properties are artistic *merits*, not the property of artistic merit itself. They confer artistic merit, and artistic merit is what is conferred by them. This reply claims that the experience has final value because of the work's artistic merits, not because of the work's artistic merit. Moreover, these artistic merits don't give the experience final value because they give the work artistic merit, but because they give the work final value.

In support of this, the experientialist can point out that the experience of such features has final value even when they don't confer artistic merit. Non-art can possess features that, in art, confer artistic merit. Sunsets can be beautiful and theories can be imaginative. But these things don't have artistic merit. Nonetheless, seeing a beautiful sunset or contemplating an imaginative theory can have final value, and it can have it in virtue of the beauty and imaginativeness of what is seen or contemplated. This suggests that, in art, what really explains the final value of the experience is

[9] See Graham (1994: 217-18); Sharpe (2000: 321-22); Kieran (2005: 25, 29, 32, 42, 46); Davies (2006: 27-32); Shelley (2010, 2011); Watkins and Shelley (2012); Gorodeisky (2017: secs.2-3, 2021: sec.4). Some of these authors might reply that they are only talking about one form of experientialism, against which their objection succeeds. If so, the problem is that the form of experientialism outlined here has been overlooked.

[10] See Graham (1994: 218); Kieran (2005: 6); Shelley (2010: 708, 2017: sec.2.4); Gorodeisky (2017: 81). My point is not that those who do this are confused (Shelley, for instance, is explicit that he does this as a shorthand for "artistic or aesthetic value"), but that this practice makes the objection seem more plausible than it is.

just the beauty, imaginativeness, and so forth of the art, not its artistic merit per se. Do we really think the experience of beauty, imaginativeness, skilfulness, etc., is even *more* valuable when these features confer artistic merit? That these features give their bearers final value suffices to explain the final value of experiencing them, whether or not they give their bearers artistic merit.

Alternatively, an experientialist can grant that the experience has a certain degree of final value because the work has artistic merit. But the experience *also* has a certain degree of final value that is not due to the work's artistic merit. Again, it has some final value because of the work's artistic merits—its beauty, imaginativeness, perceptiveness, etc. They give the experience a certain degree of final value because they give the work final value. Maybe they give the experience additional final value because they give the work artistic merit. But they certainly give the experience some final value simply because they give the work final value, as the non-artistic cases show. And the degree of final value they give the experience simply because they give the work final value determines the work's artistic merit.

The critic who wants to sustain the circularity objection therefore faces a challenge. The appreciative experience of the beautiful, the skilful, the imaginative, and the like has final value even when these features don't confer artistic merit. This puts pressure on the idea that the experience of good art does have any final value because of the art's artistic merit. But even if that idea is correct, the experientialist can still say that only the degree of final value these features give the experience in virtue of giving the work final value (and not in virtue of giving the work artistic merit) determines the work's degree of artistic merit.

Both circularity objections make similar mistakes. The first treats experientialism as if it must say that all of the work's value is due to the final value of the experience. The second treats experientialism as if it must say that all of the experience's final value is due to the work's artistic merit. The reply is to distinguish between some and all. Some, but not all, of the work's value (namely, its artistic merit) is due to the final value of the experience. And some of the experience's final value may be due to the work's artistic merit, but not all of it is. The final value the experience has simply because of the work's final value determines the work's artistic merit.

1.2 | Pain

An experientialist who explains the experience's final value by appeal to the work's final value can answer another objection. Some object that experientialism has no plausible account of good art that affords painful experiences.[11] Shelley mentions Picasso's *Guernica*. The experience *Guernica* affords is one of shock, disturbance, and disorientation. The experientialist cannot say the experience is valuable because pleasurable, since it is not pleasurable. And she cannot intelligibly say only that it is valuable because it is dizzying and disorienting. These features don't, by themselves, explain why an experience is valuable. Certainly,

> One can intelligibly say "*Guernica* is good because unsettling, disturbing, disorienting, and despairing," so long as one goes on to offer an explanation linking these properties to others of *Guernica* whose *tout court* attribution does imply value … *Guernica* merits praise for its fiery moral eloquence, for the timelessness of its vision of human suffering, for the power and fearlessness with which it summons up that vision (Shelley 2019: 9).

[11] Sharpe (2000: 328); Shelley (2019: 6-12). Compare Graham (1994: 219).

But now we are explaining *Guernica*'s value by appeal to features of *Guernica*, such as its moral eloquence, not by appeal to features of the experience. And that is to abandon experientialism.

It is true that experientialists should not say simply that the experience has final value because the experience is dizzying and disturbing. Rather, they should say the experience has final value because it is an experience of a work with understanding and appreciation of it for features that give it final value, such as its moral eloquence. Being such an experience is a feature of the experience, not a feature of the work, though the features for which the work is appreciated are features of the work. So we have not abandoned experientialism in giving this explanation. That the experience is appreciative of the work for features that give it final value is a perfectly intelligible explanation of why the experience has final value. It attributes a feature whose *tout court* attribution to the experience implies that the experience has value.[12]

One might object that painful experiences still pose a problem for experientialism. Even if these experiences have some final value in virtue of being appreciative of final value, their painfulness gives them negative value. So experientialism implies that a work affording painful experiences is artistically flawed to the extent that the experiences are painful. That is absurd. Sad works are not good in spite of their sadness. *King Lear* was not improved by being given a happy ending.

But the experientialist doesn't have to say this. First, she can say that the work's artistic merit is due *only* to the final value the experience has in virtue of being appreciative of final value. It is not affected by any further final value or disvalue the experience has from any other source. So even if the experience has negative value in virtue of being painful, this does not detract from the work's artistic merit. The degree of final value the experience gets from being appreciative of final value is not less on account of its painfulness. So the work's artistic merit is not less on account of this.

Second, she can argue that the painfulness of these experiences *doesn't* give them negative value. The pain of shock in response to *Guernica* is not like the pain of being clubbed in the face. This depiction of the bombing of Guernica merits various painful responses. The experience is not less worth having on account of being painful in these ways. We don't speak of the pain of shock as something you just need to push through to get the valuable experience of appreciating its fiery moral eloquence. This pain is *part* of appreciating its fiery moral eloquence. It is partly constitutive of appreciating it. It is not a bad feature of the experience.

This doesn't mean the painfulness of actually witnessing the bombing of Guernica wouldn't have given that experience negative value. It matters enormously that what is experienced is a representation that possesses final value, rather than an atrocity that possesses none. The claim is not that painfulness is never a bad feature of an experience when the object of the experience merits the painful response. The claim is that painfulness is not a bad feature of an experience when it is partly constitutive of appreciating final value.

This account of pain suggests a new account of pleasure's relevance to artistic merit. I said that painful experiences can have final value when and because they are appreciative of final value. Clearly, pleasurable experiences, too, can have final value when and because they are appreciative of final value. They need not have final value only because of how pleasurable they are.

This point is crucial to developing a sensible experientialism. It is routinely assumed that experientialists must say that pleasurable experiences have final value because of how pleasurable they are, and that artistic merit derives from the final value the experience has in virtue of its pleasurableness. But a pleasurable experience can be finally valuable for reasons apart from how

[12] To save words, when I attribute this feature I shall say that the experience is "appreciative of final value." This doesn't mean the experience is appreciative of final value instead of the features conferring it.

pleasurable it is. An experientialist can base the artistic merit of the work *only* on the degree of final value that the experience—whether pleasurable or painful—has in virtue of being appreciative of the work for its final value-conferring features. Any additional final value the experience may have (e.g., because of how pleasurable it is) doesn't give the work additional artistic merit.

Adopting this view forestalls another objection. One might object that, although experientialism doesn't imply that works affording painful experiences are flawed, it does imply that works affording pleasurable experiences are better, other things equal. If, in addition to the final value that some pleasurable experiences have in virtue of being appreciative of final value, they have final value in virtue of being pleasurable, that gives works affording them an advantage. The painful experiences afforded by other works don't have additional final value in virtue of being painful. So other things being equal, it's artistically better for a work to afford pleasurable experiences. Absurd.

The experientialist has blocked this objection. Artistic merit derives only from the degree of final value the experience has in virtue of being appreciative of final value. If the experience has additional final value in virtue of being pleasurable, the work accrues no additional artistic merit from this.

Sometimes, people take "appreciate" just to mean "enjoy." This is not how I am using it. Appreciation is normative. It is what is sometimes called "proper appreciation." It involves (at least) responding to the work in ways it merits and for appropriate reasons. So not all enjoyment is appreciative, because not all works that are enjoyed merit enjoyment, or are enjoyed for the right reasons. Moreover, not all appreciation is enjoyment. Properly appreciating a work that merits shock involves being shocked by it. Finally, not all appreciative experiences are valuable. Being bored by features that merit boredom, and give the work no value, is not an experience with final value.[13]

In recent work, experientialists have been called "aesthetic hedonists." This is a caricature. Many experientialists deny that the finally valuable experiences to which they appeal need be pleasurable.[14] This label also renders the theory less plausible. Reading some Holocaust literature with literary merit seems to be a finally valuable experience without being pleasurable even in a broad sense.[15] The hedonism label would misrepresent the experientialism outlined here for another reason. According to this form of experientialism, even when an appreciative experience is pleasurable, the value of it that bears on the work's artistic merit is not due to its pleasurableness per se. This is not hedonistic experientialism. It would be more appropriate to call it "appreciative experientialism."

[13] This answers another objection Shelley raises: "If the value of the experience of a good poem consists, in part, in its being an experience in which the poem is properly understood or accurately represented, the value of a good poem cannot consist, even in part, in its capacity to afford an experience in which it is properly understood or accurately represented, because, all things being equal, a bad poem presumably has these capacities in equal measure" (Shelley 2017: sec.2.4). The view here does not imply that every poem with the capacity to be properly understood, accurately represented, or properly appreciated has artistic merit. The appreciative experience must also have final value in virtue of being appreciative of final value.

[14] See Levinson (1992: 295-96, 300-02); Budd (1995: 118-23, 2008: 45-6); Railton (1998: 91); Anderson (2000: 71-2); Stecker (2005: 50, 2019: 31-4).

[15] Lopes (2018: 54-5) argues that all finally valuable experiences are pleasures on the grounds that "pleasure" can be understood broadly, to include not just experiences with sensory phenomenology, like pleasure in a bath, but also experiences with non-sensory phenomenology, like enjoying figuring out meanings. But this does not address the hard cases, like reading Holocaust literature. You needn't be thinking of pleasure as only sensory to think these experiences are not pleasurable.

1.3 | Taking Stock

Appreciative experientialism expresses a simple idea: artistic merit derives from the value of appreciating final value. Appreciating the finally valuable is finally valuable, whether the thing appreciated is art, your child playing, a scientific achievement, or a kind person. The theory avoids objections by sharply distinguishing some from all. Not all of the work's value derives from the experience's final value. Only its artistic merit does. Not all of the experience's final value determines the work's artistic merit. Only the final value it has in virtue of being appreciative of final value does.

This is the best form of experientialism I can think of. It can withstand a battery of other objections to experientialism. Here are eight.

2 | FURTHER OBJECTIONS

2.1 | So bad it's good (to experience)

In previous work, I raised the following objection.[16] Some artworks are terrible in a hilarious way. They merit amusement: they are risibly bad. The film *The Room* is a famous example. But the experience of such works is hardly a bad one. Experiencing them with understanding and appreciation (e.g., with the amusement they merit) can have substantial final value. So, I objected, experientialism wrongly implies that such works have substantial artistic merit.

An experientialist can reply that even when an experience is valuable and appreciative, it might not be valuable because appreciative. It might, instead, be valuable because pleasurable. The experiences just mentioned are like this. They have final value in virtue of how pleasurable they are, not in virtue of being appreciative of artistic incompetence. Therefore, the final value these experiences have doesn't give the works artistic merit.

2.2 | Overvaluing

Shelley (2011: 215–17) argues that experientialists cannot give a good account of overvaluing art.[17] Experientialism says beauty or artistic goodness is a matter of an artwork's capacity to give aesthetic pleasure when properly apprehended. To overvalue art would be to take greater pleasure in it than you would if you properly apprehended. But what is proper apprehension?

Proper apprehension might be apprehending the work such that it affords the greatest pleasure it can. But this leads to the absurd conclusion that overvaluing art is impossible. You cannot take greater pleasure in a work than you would if it afforded you the greatest pleasure it can.

Proper apprehension might instead be apprehending the work as having all and only the aesthetically relevant properties it actually has. If so, experientialism cannot explain why, in virtue of our aesthetic interests, we ought not overvalue. According to experientialists, an aesthetic interest is an interest in pleasure, because the value of the beautiful reduces to that of pleasure. If so, the aesthetic ideal is to take as much pleasure from every work as it can afford. Overvaluing brings

[16] Grant (2015: 422). Compare Sharpe (2000: 326).

[17] Compare Lopes (2018: 76-8).

us closer to this ideal than proper apprehension does. So our aesthetic interests give us no reason not to overvalue. Our cognitive interest in accurate apprehension does, but our aesthetic interests don't.

This objection would not work against appreciative experientialism. Appreciative experientialism does not reduce "the value" of the beautiful or of good art to the value of pleasure, or even to the value of experiences. It says good art has final value, and not because it affords valuable experiences. The work's artistic merit is determined by the final value the experience has in virtue of being appreciative of the work's final value. That suggests we have an interest in appreciating what is good in itself. But this is not an interest in pleasure as such. So appreciative experientialism cannot be accused of implying that the aesthetic ideal or the ideal engagement with art would be to derive as much pleasure from every work as it can afford.[18]

Indeed, appreciative experientialism can endorse Shelley's own account of our aesthetic interests.[19] An aesthetic interest in the beautiful, he argues, is an interest in knowing the beautiful in the particular way it demands to be known—namely, perceiving it with pleasure. To have an aesthetic interest is to have an interest in this, not because the pleasure is pleasure, but because the pleasure is in the beautiful. With her insistence on the value of responding to the finally valuable as it merits, an appreciative experientialist who thinks beauty confers final value will agree.

2.3 | Under-articulation

Experientialism has been criticized on the grounds that not every difference in aesthetic value or artistic merit corresponds to an experiential difference that experientialists can appeal to.[20] Novels can be complex, deep, subtle, or insightful. Differences in these respects are relevant to their value. But what differences in experiences do these differences correspond to?

The obvious answer is that experiences of depth differ from experiences of subtlety in that they are experiences of different properties. But the objection says experientialists can't appeal to this. If two experiences differ in value because they are of different properties, this is because each experience's value derives from the value the property gives the work. The difference in value of the works explains the difference in value of the experiences, not the other way around.

It should now be evident how an experientialist about artistic merit can reply. She can say that the relevant difference between these experiences is indeed that they are of different properties. But it is no embarrassment if this means the final value of each experience derives from the final value the property gives the work. The experientialist is not explaining the final or total value of the work by appeal to the final value of the experience. She is explaining its artistic merit by appeal to this.

[18] This reply shows that the appreciative experientialist also doesn't endorse the claim Lopes (2018: 53-87) criticizes in hedonistic experientialism: that aesthetic values give us reason to act only because they make the experience of their bearers pleasurable (to ourselves or ideal judges). The appreciative experientialist doesn't even say that artistic merits give us reason to act only because they make this experience valuable. On her view, artistic merits make their bearers good in themselves. We normally have reason to (for example) conserve or create what is good in itself, and not only because experiencing it is valuable.

[19] Shelley (2011: 221).

[20] See Van der Berg (2020: 7-8), who argues that this objection is at least implicit in Davies (2004: 258-59, 2006: 27-9), Wolf (2015: 76), and Shelley (2019: 8). Compare Shelley (2017: sec.2.4).

Being experiences *of* different properties is not the only experiential difference experientialists can invoke. Some say that not all properties relevant to a work's artistic merit can be experienced. Originality is thought to be the prime example. There is, on this view, no experience of originality. But even if you cannot experience a work's originality, you can still experience it with knowledge of its originality.[21] An experience informed by knowledge of its originality can be appreciative of the work for its originality. An original work can merit certain responses in virtue of its originality. This feature of the experience—being appreciative of the work for its originality—is what contributes to the experience's value. Being appreciative of the work for different properties is the relevant difference between experiences of works with different properties.

2.4 | Indiscernibles

This gives the experientialist a reply to the argument from indiscernibles.[22] According to this argument, works that look exactly the same afford the same experience. So the experiences they afford have the same final value. So experientialism implies that they have the same artistic merit. That is absurd. An original and a perfect copy do not necessarily have the same artistic merit.

The appreciative experientialist has a reply. Works that look the same can differ in final value. An original might have more final value because it is more imaginative. The copy might be merely clever. The appreciative experience of the original will then be one informed by knowledge of the original's imaginativeness, and appreciative of the original for its imaginativeness. The appreciative experience of the copy will be informed by knowledge that the copy is merely clever, and appreciative of the copy for its cleverness. It will not be appreciative of the copy for its imaginativeness, because the copy isn't imaginative. On account of such differences, the appreciative experience of the original can have more final value in virtue of what it is appreciative of than the appreciative experience of the copy has in virtue of what it is appreciative of. So appreciative experientialism does not imply that the two works will have the same artistic merit.[23]

2.5 | Intermediaries

I have objected that experientialism wrongly credits works with artistic merit when experiencing them involves appreciating better works.[24] Seeing a copy of a Rembrandt or watching a documentary about him with understanding and appreciation can involve appreciating his paintings. This can give the experience of the copy or documentary final value. So experientialism implies that this gives the copy or documentary artistic merit—perhaps even as much as the Rembrandts appreciated have.

[21] Compare Budd (2007: 364).

[22] See e.g. Kieran (2005: ch.1).

[23] The orthodox experientialist reply to this objection is to deny that the two works afford the same experience, on the grounds that the experience in question is an experience *of the original*. Even a perfect copy does not afford that (Budd, 1985: 123-24; Levinson, 1992: 304; Davies, 2003: 205). But as Shelley (2010) argues, the premise that the two works afford the same experience is dispensable. What is doing the work is the premise that the experiences they afford have the same value.

[24] Grant (2015: 421).

Appreciative experientialists can answer this objection. The object whose final value you appreciate when you watch the documentary is the Rembrandt, not (or not only) the documentary. Appreciative experientialism says a work's artistic merit is determined by the final value the experience has in virtue of being appreciative of *that work*'s final value. All that these examples show is that an experience of one work can have some final value in virtue of being appreciative of another work's final value. The work experienced does not accrue artistic merit on account of this.

2.6 | Replaceability

Some say that experientialism wrongly implies that a good artwork is replaceable, so far as its artistic merits are concerned, by a perfect copy.[25] Even if a perfect copy does not possess the same merits as the original (for instance, creativity and originality), a perfect copy could enable you to appreciate the original just as well as the original itself does. If you are suitably informed, you could appreciate the *Mona Lisa* just as well by seeing a perfect copy as by seeing the original. So, if experientialism is true, a perfect copy has at least the same value as the original's artistic merits give the original. The value that the original's artistic merits give the original, according to experientialism, derives entirely from the value of appreciating the original. The copy enables you to appreciate the original fully, so the copy has at least the same value as the original's artistic merits give the original. If that's right, then we might as well have the copy as the original, so far as the original's artistic merits are concerned. If the original is irreplaceable, that will be for other reasons, such as its historical significance. But there is no reason, provided by its artistic merits alone, to have the original rather than a perfect copy. That is absurd.

The objection makes a mistake that should be familiar by now. It treats experientialism as if it must say that *the total value* that the original's artistic merits give it derives from the value of the experience. But appreciative experientialism says only that *the artistic merit* that the original's artistic merits give it derives from the value of the experience. Its artistic merits also give it final value, which does not derive from the value of the experience.

This enables appreciative experientialism to avoid the absurd conclusion. The original's artistic merits give it final value. A perfect copy may not have these merits, even if it allows us to appreciate them in the original. So it need not have the same final value as the original's artistic merits give the original. Indeed, the copy needn't have any final value at all. So the copy needn't have at least the same value as the original's artistic merits give the original. So appreciative experientialism does not have to say that, so far as the original's artistic merits are concerned, the original is replaceable by the copy.

2.7 | Instrumentality

One might object that, even if experientialism says good art has final value, it still represents artistic merit itself as a species of instrumental value. If things have artistic merit because experiences of them have value, artistic merit must be a kind of instrumental value. But artistic merit is a kind of final value.

There are several things the appreciative experientialist can say in reply. One of them is: "So what?" So what if her theory represents *artistic merit* as a kind of instrumental value? It does not

[25] Graham (1994: 221); Van der Berg (2020: 6).

represent *art* as merely instrumentally valuable. Which intuitions about the final value of good art has the appreciative experientialist failed to capture? She agrees that good art has final value. She agrees that it has final value in virtue of its artistic merits. She agrees that the degree of artistic merit it has correlates (via the final value of the experience) with the degree of final value it has in virtue of these artistic merits. She agrees that it is irreplaceable by a perfect copy. The only supposed intuition she has failed to capture is that artistic merit itself is a species of final value. But how obvious is that? How obvious is it that this is true in addition to all these other truths? Perhaps people who say artistic merit is a species of final value have really perceived that good art has final value in virtue of its artistic merits.

A second thing she might say is that it is a category mistake to regard artistic merit as a form of *either* instrumental value *or* final value. Instrumental goodness and final goodness are not the only varieties of goodness. Things can also be good of their kind. Being good art is a form of goodness of a kind.[26] Other things good of their kind are good grammar, good arguments, good friends, good knives, and good spies. In each case, there are standards or norms attached to the kind, often relating to the functions of those kinds of thing. A thing's goodness of its kind is a matter of how it satisfies those standards or norms.

The experientialist might argue that no form of goodness of a kind is a form of either instrumental or final value. For something to be good of its kind is just for it to be the way it is supposed to be according to the norms of that kind. But having final or instrumental value is partly a matter of it being good that the thing is the way it is. This is why some things can be good of their kind but lack final or instrumental value. Good torture devices are neither finally nor instrumentally good. It is bad that a good torture device is the way it is supposed to be according to the norms of its kind. This is also why a thing's instrumental value can be different at different times even if its goodness of its kind remains the same. A good sabre-toothed tiger repellent would once have had great instrumental value. It would have much less today. But it could be just as good a sabre-toothed tiger repellent today as it was then. It is not as good today that it satisfies the norms of its kind as well as it does, though it satisfies them as well as it ever did. The distinction holds even if, for some kinds, things good of their kind are necessarily finally or instrumentally good, and in virtue of the same properties, and to the same extent, as they are good of their kind. That they *are* good of their kind is still just a matter of their being the way they are supposed to be by the standards of the kind. But that they are finally or instrumentally good is partly a matter of its being good that they are this way. So goodness of a kind is irreducible to instrumental or final goodness. So artistic merit, too, is not a form of instrumental or final value. If anti-experientialists want to press the objection that artistic merit is a form of final value, they will need to argue for a reductionism about goodness of a kind that is far from obvious.

2.8 | Unavailable experiences

Watkins and Shelley (2012: 341–43) attack the experientialist claim that something has aesthetic value iff it would bring about the appropriate response for appropriate observers under appropriate conditions.[27] On this view, a work that cannot bring about any response for appropriate observers under appropriate conditions would have no aesthetic value. Imagine that Leonardo completed a masterpiece with a stroke of paint that interacted with the canvas to emit a ray of

[26] See Hanson (2017) for the best discussion of this fact; compare Knight (1935-1936: sec.1).

[27] Compare Sharpe (2000: 325); Kieran (2005: 23-4); McGonigal (2010: 552).

light that killed Leonardo before he saw the finished painting, and would kill any other observer before they saw it. Such a work could have great aesthetic value. But it does not bring about an appropriate response for appropriate observers under appropriate conditions.

An experientialist needn't endorse a biconditional like the above. The appreciative experientialist says that a work has artistic merit because an experience appreciative of its final value would have final value in virtue of being appreciative of the work's final value. That it would kill you to try to have such an experience doesn't mean there is no fact of the matter about the final value that such an experience would have. There is no general problem talking of the final value of experiences we cannot have. Wouldn't it be a better experience in itself to find sweet food pleasant for a bit longer than is humanly possible?

3 | WHY EXPERIENTIALISM?

Appreciative experientialism can avoid all ten of these objections to experientialism. This in itself is a significant result. Let us now consider why one might be an experientialist in the first place.

Some might be drawn to experientialism because they think the value of anything non-mental, like art, derives from the value of something mental, like an experience. Many philosophers, especially hedonists, have held this view. Since experientialism is often presented as a kind of hedonism, you might think this must be the motivation for it. If, like me, you see no appeal in this psychologizing picture of the valuable, you might regard experientialism as a non-starter.

This is not, however, the only possible motivation for experientialism. Several experientialists argue from the claim that art is created to provide, or has the function of providing, certain kinds of experience (e.g., aesthetic experiences).[28] Unfortunately, such arguments often make contentious claims about functions or about the specific kinds of experience art is created to provide. However, I think there is a less controversial premise that a similar argument can be based on. And I suspect this less controversial thought explains the appeal of experientialism for many people.

The thought is simply this: art is made to be experienced. Paintings are made to be looked at. Music is composed to be listened to. Plays are produced to be watched. Literature is written to be read. And so on. And if paintings, for instance, are made to be looked at, good paintings will be good because looking at them is a good experience. Quite generally, what things of a certain kind are made for tells you what makes them good of their kind. That knives are made to cut with tells you what makes something a good knife. That cars are made to be driven tells you what makes something a good car. And for something to be good art (good poetry, a good painting, good theatre, etc.) is for it to be good of its kind. Therefore, art's artistic merit—its goodness of its kind—must derive from the value of the experience it affords.

Let us call this "the telic argument" for experientialism about artistic merit. It does not depend on the idea that the value of the non-mental always derives from the value of the mental. It is based only on a claim about what art is made for and a claim about goodness of a kind. Note also that it does not support experientialism about aesthetic value. Things with aesthetic value, which include crystals, birds, equations, galaxies, and the sound of running water, are not members of a kind of thing that is made to be experienced.

[28] Beardsley (1981: 524-35); Budd (1995: 14-16); Stecker (1997: chs.12-13); compare Iseminger (2004). Ancestors of this sort of claim include Batteux's (1746: 3-4) claim that the fine arts differ from other arts in having pleasure for their end, and Kant's remark that aesthetic art "has the feeling of pleasure as its immediate aim" (1790: 5:305).

With a few exceptions discussed below, existing critiques of experientialism do not suggest what might be wrong with this line of thought. Do we really want to deny that paintings are made to be looked at? That novels are written to be read? That music is composed to be listened to? Or do we want to say that these facts tell us nothing about what makes art good of its kind? Maybe the fact that art is made to be experienced doesn't tell us what gives it aesthetic value. But do we really want to say that what art is made for—unlike in many (all?) other cases—does not determine its goodness of its kind?

I suspect that many find experientialism obvious because they think it obvious that art is made to be experienced. But whether or not this suspicion is correct, the thought that art is made to be experienced provides a natural route to the view. We will fail to undermine experientialism's appeal if we don't address it.

I have now outlined the best form of experientialism, and the best argument for experientialism, that I can think of. These are what we need to undermine if we want to vindicate our anti-experientialist intuitions. Let's now consider how we might do so.

4 | OBJECTIONS TO APPRECIATIVE EXPERIENTIALISM

4.1 | But is it experientialism?

One might object that appreciative experientialism is not a form of experientialism at all.[29] Experientialists in the literature surely endorse:

> **All-Value**: *Whatever* value the work has in virtue of its artistic merits is value it has in virtue of the experience it affords.

But appreciative "experientialism" says that some of the value a work has in virtue of its artistic merits is final value that it doesn't have in virtue of the experience it affords. So it is not a form of experientialism.

Maybe experientialists in the literature do think experientialism carries this commitment. If so, they are mistaken, and experientialism's reputation has suffered for their mistake. I said above that experientialism is the view that the artistic merit or the aesthetic value of something is determined by the final value of certain experiences of it. This is a completely uncontroversial definition of experientialism. If a theory satisfies this definition, it is a form of experientialism. And experientialism thus defined does not commit you to All-Value.

It would commit you to this if it were a theory of the entire value an artwork has. But it is not. It is a theory of artistic merit or of aesthetic value. When it is a theory of artistic merit, it commits you to:

> **All-Merit**: Whatever *artistic merit* a work has in virtue of its artistic merits is possessed in virtue of the experience it affords.

Maybe experientialists and their opponents assume that All-Merit commits you to All-Value. But they have not given any argument for this. It is far from obviously true. Value and artistic merit aren't the same property. So it can't be because they are identical that All-Merit would commit you to All-Value.

[29] I thank a referee for this objection.

One might reply that artistic merit just is the value a thing has in virtue of its artistic merits. Since experientialism must say that whatever artistic merit a work has is possessed in virtue of the experience, it must say that whatever value it has in virtue of its artistic merits is possessed in virtue of the experience.

But that can't be right either. Artistic merit is not just the value a thing has in virtue of its artistic merits. A work's artistic merits can give it kinds of value that are not identical to artistic merit. I've mentioned final value as an example. Other kinds of value also prove the point. A sculpture that commands a high price because it is beautiful and skilfully made has monetary value in virtue of two of its artistic merits. Monetary value is not artistic merit, or even a form of it like literary merit. A sculpture with monetary value is not thereby better art or a better sculpture. So some of the value a work can have in virtue of its artistic merits is not artistic merit or a form of it. Similarly, an old painting might be valuable evidence, in virtue of its dynamism and intensity, of what qualities in painting appealed to its original viewers. Dynamism and intensity might be artistic merits in it. But its evidential value is not artistic merit or a form of it. Examples could be multiplied. Artistic merits can give their bearers many kinds of value distinct from artistic merit and its forms. So artistic merit ≠ whatever value a work has in virtue of its artistic merits.

The objector might try a different approach. She might argue that experientialists and anti-experientialists are defined by their embrace of different sides of a certain Euthyphro contrast:

> Experientialist: The work is valuable because it affords a valuable experience.
>
> Anti-experientialist: The work affords a valuable experience because it is valuable.

Appreciative "experientialism" embraces the second claim. So it is a form of anti-experientialism.

This isn't the right way to characterize the debate. First, it again suggests that the debate is about why works are *valuable*. It isn't. It is about why they have aesthetic value or artistic merit. It is not about why works are valuable, but about why they have certain kinds of value (if these are kinds of value[30]). You could agree that works affording valuable experiences are valuable because of that, but deny that they have aesthetic value or artistic merit because of that. That would not make you an experientialist. Indeed, few people would deny that a work that affords a valuable experience is *valuable* because of that (i.e. that this is one reason why it is valuable). Virtually everybody is an experientialist if that is all it takes to be one.

Second, experientialism does not claim that the work has artistic merit or aesthetic value because the experience is "valuable." It claims that the work has such properties because the experience has *final* value. If the experience were valuable, but only instrumentally valuable, the work would have no artistic merit or aesthetic value, according to experientialism about these properties.

The objection claims that what appreciative experientialism says about the experience's value is incompatible with what experientialism says about the work's value. But experientialism about artistic merit just says this about the work's value:

> Some of the work's value (namely, all of its artistic merit) is due to some of the experience's value (namely, some or all of its final value[31]).

[30] Hanson (2017: 418-19) denies that artistic merit is a kind of value.

[31] Experientialists have a choice whether to attribute the work's artistic merit to all of the experience's final value, or only to some of it, as appreciative experientialism does.

Appreciative experientialism says this about the experience's value:

> Some of the experience's value (namely, some of its final value) is due to some of the work's value other than its artistic merit (namely, some of the work's final value).

These claims are compatible. It isn't circular to embrace both, as it is to embrace both sides of the Euthyphro contrast above. This chain of explanation starts with artistic merit and terminates in final value distinct from artistic merit.

4.2 | But is it interesting?

One might object that appreciative experientialism isn't an interesting alternative to anti-experientialism.[32] It concedes to anti-experientialists virtually every point of interest, notably their claim that artistic merits confer final value.

I have been keen to emphasize that appreciative experientialism agrees with anti-experientialists on many points. The fact that a form of experientialism can do this is itself of interest. It shows that any argument for anti-experientialism based on these points alone is a non sequitur.

And appreciative experientialism does not agree with anti-experientialists on literally every point of interest. It would be interesting to know whether artistic merit derives from the value of the experience. The idea that *something* central to the value of art is due to the value of experiencing it is one of those philosophical intuitions that won't go away. So is the idea that art has a value detected in experience but not derived from the value of the experience. If appreciative experientialism is true, we have an account of the truth in both intuitions. Art has final value detected in experience and not derived from the value of the experience. Art has artistic merit derived from the value of the experience. A successful reconciliation of these experientialist and anti-experientialist tendencies in our thinking would be of interest.

4.3 | Insufficiency

As we saw, some object to experientialism that some features of a work can enhance the experience's final value without enhancing the work's artistic merit (e.g., features that make the work risibly bad). Appreciative experientialism can deal with many cases that pose this problem for other forms of experientialism. But other cases pose the same problem for it. Some features can enhance a work's final value, and thereby enhance the final value the experience has in virtue of being appreciative of the work's final value, but without enhancing the work's artistic merit.

Some aesthetic merits can enhance a work's final value without enhancing its artistic merit. A bad novelist who is a gifted mathematician could increase the final value of her novel by writing in an extremely elegant geometrical proof. This might not increase the artistic merit of the novel, or of the part containing the proof. It might slow down the plot needlessly. But if the novel is sufficiently poor in final value without the proof, the proof's elegance might increase the novel's final value. That would increase the final value the experience has in virtue of being appreciative of the novel's final value. But it doesn't increase the novel's artistic merit.

[32] I thank a referee for this objection.

It seems, then, that the appreciative experientialist must say that artistic merit is determined by the final value the experience has in virtue of being appreciative of certain final value-conferring features, but not others. She must then tell us which features these are. Until she does, there is a lacuna in her theory.

This is a real problem. But it is important not to overstate it. For one thing, many existing theories of artistic merit face variations on the same problem. The novelist example itself is a problem for other theories. *Anyone* who thinks artistic merit is even partly determined by aesthetic merits faces the problem of saying when aesthetic merits confer artistic merit and when they don't. Appreciative experientialism isn't obviously worse off in this respect than its rivals.

For another, even with the lacuna, appreciative experientialism might be true and informative as far as it goes. There are two questions a theory of artistic merit might answer. One is: which features of a thing are its artistic merits? The other is: why do these features give a thing artistic merit? We might expect an answer to one of these questions to make the answer to the other obvious. But there is no guarantee of this. If all and only aesthetic merits were artistic merits, it would be a further question whether they give their bearers artistic merit because they afford valuable experiences or for some other reason. The objection shows that appreciative experientialism doesn't give a complete answer to the question of which features are the artistic merits. But it does not show that appreciative experientialism is wrong about why a thing's artistic merits give it artistic merit.

5 | THE TELIC ARGUMENT REVISITED

What about the telic argument? According to it, art is made to be experienced. What things of a certain kind are made for tells you what makes something good of that kind. So artistic merit—art's goodness of its kind—derives from the value of the experience the art affords. Here are four objections to this.

5.1 | Exceptions

Nick Zangwill (1999: 316) and Matthew Kieran (2005: 34–7) argue that not all art is made to be experienced. Sculptures made for burial, private poetry, and working sketches are not. So, one might conclude, it's not true that art is made to be experienced.

The conclusion doesn't follow. Some daggers, such as ceremonial daggers, are not made for stabbing with. But it's still true that daggers are made for stabbing with. The claim that art is made to be experienced is (or is comparable to) a so-called "generic" generalization, like "birds lay eggs," and "dogs have four legs." These are true even though male birds and some unfortunate dogs are exceptions. And in other cases where such generalizations tell us what things of a certain kind are made for, they tell us what makes something good of that kind. The fact that daggers are made for stabbing with tells us what makes something (even a ceremonial dagger) a good dagger.

5.2 | Meriting appreciation

One might object that art is not only made to be experienced. It is also made to be *worth* experiencing, that is, to merit being appreciated. And that suggests that art's value lies in those of its

features that render it worthy of appreciation. Experience may be needed to access the work's value. But the value itself lies in the features that make it worthy of appreciation.[33]

The objection mistakenly implies that we must choose between experientialism and the view that artistic merit lies in the features of the work that make it worthy of appreciation. But experientialism agrees that features that make a work worthy of appreciation (such as its imaginativeness, eloquence, or profundity) give it artistic merit. The issue is *why* such features give it artistic merit, not whether they do.[34] The experientialist says these features give the work artistic merit because they give the appreciative experience of the work final value.

What the objection needs to establish is not that artistic merit lies in features that make the work worthy of appreciation. It needs to establish that these features do not give it artistic merit because they give the appreciative experience final value. Here is one argument for this.

One might argue, on the grounds that art is made to merit appreciation, that for a work to have artistic merit *just is* for it to merit appreciation.[35] Having artistic merit and meriting appreciation are one and the same property. So what is true of the property of meriting appreciation must be true of the property of having artistic merit. But art does not merit appreciation in virtue of the value of the appreciation it merits. An imaginative story might merit appreciation (e.g., enjoyment) in virtue of its imaginativeness. But the story does not merit appreciation even partly in virtue of the *value* of appreciating it. The story's imaginativeness does not make the story merit appreciation because it makes appreciating the story a finally valuable experience. Therefore, its imaginativeness does not give it artistic merit because it makes appreciating the story a finally valuable experience.

This objection targets genuine experientialist claims. But having artistic merit and meriting appreciation are not one and the same property.

First, many things that merit appreciation do not have artistic merit. Aesthetically valuable natural objects, morally good people, and strokes of good fortune can all merit appreciation without having artistic merit.

Second, some features of a work that make it merit appreciation do not give it artistic merit. Aesthetic merits that do not give a work artist merit (such as the elegance of the geometrical proof in the novel mentioned in Section 4.3) can make it merit appreciation.

Third, artistic merit comes in degrees. One work can have more of it than another. If having artistic merit and meriting appreciation are the same property, what is it to have different degrees of artistic merit?

Perhaps meriting comes in degrees, and having more artistic merit is meriting appreciation more. This is doubtful. Imagine two good paintings, one better than the other. Both merit appreciation. The specific appreciative responses they merit are different. The better painting might merit greater pleasure. But it does not merit the greater pleasure more than the other painting merits the lesser pleasure. They are, so to speak, equally deserving of the appreciation appropriate to each.

Perhaps, then, appreciation comes in degrees, and having more artistic merit is meriting more appreciation. This might seem plausible if we confine our attention to pleasure. For it might seem that, of two works that merit pleasure, the better work will merit greater pleasure.

However, as Shelley's argument from painful art emphasized, the appreciative responses good works merit are diverse, and not always pleasurable. This greatly complicates the project of

[33] I thank a referee for this objection.

[34] See Section 4.3.

[35] Compare Gorodeisky's (2021) discussion of the view that an object is aesthetically valuable iff it merits aesthetic pleasure.

identifying degrees of artistic merit with degrees of appreciation merited. First, one and the same good artwork might merit some degree of shock, delight, unease, amusement, and enchantment. Is its degree of artistic merit to be understood as the sum of the degrees of these different responses? This isn't obviously intelligible. Second, even if it is true that the more pleasure a work merits, the more artistic merit it has, it is doubtful that there is this correlation between degrees of artistic merit and degrees of other appreciative responses. It seems untrue, for instance, that the more shock a work merits, the more artistic merit it has. Third, it's not even true that the more pleasure a work merits, the more artistic merit it has. A generally painful masterpiece can merit a little pleasure. But it might merit less pleasure than a more cheerful inferior work.

The claim that art is made to be worth experiencing might, instead, be presented as debunking the very idea that art is made to be experienced. This would be unconvincing. First, these two claims are compatible. That novels are written to be worth reading is perfectly compatible with the claim that they are written to be read. Worse, this makes it *more* plausible that art is made to be experienced. It would be strange if art were made to be worth experiencing, but not made to be experienced. Why are novels written to be worth reading if they are not written to be read?[36]

A different thought lies in the vicinity. One might hold that art is made to have various properties, which (in fact) make it worth experiencing. But it is not made to have this property: *being worth experiencing*. It *will* have this property if it has the properties it is made to have. But experience doesn't figure in the correct specification of what art is made for. So art is not made to be worth experiencing *or* to be experienced.

This would support a robust anti-experientialism. I am drawn to this view. But here is my problem. It appears patently true that paintings are made to be looked at, novels are written to be read, and music is composed to be listened to. So I need evidence against the appearances. This view denies the appearances. But it doesn't provide much by way of evidence against them. The thesis that experience doesn't figure in the correct specification of what art is made for just seems to meet a counterexample in the reality that paintings are made to be looked at. The point that art is made to have properties that make it worth experiencing doesn't help either. If art is made to provide worthwhile experiences, we'd expect it also to be made to have properties that make it worth experiencing.

If we are wrong to think that art is made to be experienced, the claim that art is made to be worth experiencing, or that it is made to have certain other properties (which in fact make it worth experiencing), might explain our mistake. We might be mistaking one connection between art and experience for another. But these claims don't themselves demonstrate that we are making a mistake.

5.3 | Particularism

One might object that anti-experientialists can accommodate the thought that art is made to be experienced. They can appeal to particularism. They might hold that when an artist creates an artwork, her making is not governed by any determinate rule or standard, as a knife-maker's making

[36] I don't mean that it is impossible for something to be made to be worth experiencing without being made to be experienced. Perhaps you can make a sketch just to test your ability to make something worth looking at, without making it to be looked at. But it calls for explanation if something is made to be worth experiencing (i.e. to have the property *being worth experiencing*), but not to be experienced. Absent such an explanation, we'd expect that something made to be worth experiencing was made to be experienced.

is governed by the determinate standard for goodness in a knife (cutting well). Equally, when we assess artistic merit, we cannot employ any pre-existing standard, including the pre-existing standard of affording a valuable experience, as we can when we assess the value of a knife as such. Rather, we can only assess this through direct experience of the work. It is in this sense that art is made to be experienced. It is made to bear a kind of value that can be appreciated and understood only through experience. But we reach this conclusion from a plausible anti-experientialist premise, namely, particularism about artistic merit. So the fact that art is made to be experienced does not favor experientialism over a particularist anti-experientialism.[37]

There are two questions here. One is whether particularism implies that there is a sense in which art is made to be experienced. The other is whether experientialism and particularism are compatible. The objection suggests they are not. That is an independent argument against experientialism. So an experientialist will need to address both questions.

5.3.1 | Appreciability via experience

The first argument is that particularism implies that art is made to bear a kind of value that can only be understood and appreciated via experience of the work. Therefore it implies that art is made to be experienced. But this isn't right. If art is made to bear a kind of value that can only be understood and appreciated via experience, it doesn't follow that art is made to be experienced.

Many things that are made to bear a certain kind of value are not made to be engaged with in the ways necessary to appreciate that kind of value. The mechanism inside a clock is made to be good at marking time. It's possible to appreciate how well the mechanism does this. You can appreciate this by observing its motions, studying the interactions of its parts, taking measurements, and so on. But it's not true that a clock's internal mechanism is made to be engaged with in any of these ways.

In general, that something is made to possess a kind of value appreciable only by engaging with it in certain ways does not imply that it is made to be engaged with in those ways. So even if particularism implies that art is made to have a kind of value appreciable only via experience, it doesn't follow from that claim that art is made to be experienced. If art *is* made to be experienced, that is a further fact about it, one not guaranteed by its being made to have value appreciable only via experience.

Alternatively, one might argue that anti-experientialists can hold that artworks are made to have a kind of value that *should* be appreciated and understood by experiencing them.[38] That is a sense in which art is made to be experienced.[39]

But this isn't a sense in which art is made to be experienced either. If something is made to have a kind of value that should be understood and appreciated by engaging with it in certain ways, it does not follow that it is made to be engaged with in those ways. A good person's life can have a moral value that should be understood and appreciated. If so, her life should be engaged with—researched, written about, read about, reflected upon, etc.—in ways that enable its moral goodness to be understood and appreciated. But if she lived her life so that it would be morally good, it does not follow that she lived her life so that its moral goodness would be understood and appreciated, or engaged with in any way that enables its moral goodness to be understood and appreciated.

[37] I thank a referee for this objection.

[38] Compare Shelley (2011: 221) and Gorodeisky (2021).

[39] I thank a referee for this objection.

These claims identify non-contingent connections between artistic merit and experience. It's an important fact about anti-experientialism that it can accommodate such non-contingent connections between artistic merit and experience.[40] Anti-experientialists can agree that, unlike other kinds of value, artistic merit is non-contingently related to experience, in that it can only be appreciated, and should be appreciated, by experiencing the work. But accommodating these two connections is not enough to accommodate the idea that art is made to be experienced.

5.3.2 | Pre-existing standards

The second argument directly attacks experientialism from particularist premises. If works had artistic merit in virtue of the experience's value, we could employ a pre-existing standard, namely, the experience's value, to assess a work's artistic merit. But we can't. We can only assess artistic merit by experiencing the work.

The experientialist can agree that we can only assess artistic merit by experiencing the work. First, she might hold that experiencing the work is needed to appreciate the final value of experiencing the work, on which its artistic merit depends. Second, the appreciative experientialist might hold that experiencing the work is needed to appreciate the final value that the work's artistic merits give the work. In general, she might hold, we can't appreciate the final value that properties like elegance and dynamism give their bearers without experiencing their bearers (even when they don't give their bearers artistic merit). Artistic merit depends on the final value that the work's artistic merits give the work. So, again, we cannot assess artistic merit without experiencing the work.

Not good enough, the anti-experientialist might reply. Particularists don't just say that artistic merit can only be assessed via experience. They also say we cannot employ a pre-existing standard, such as the experience's final value, to assess artistic merit. But the experientialist must hold that, once we've assessed the experience's final value, we could assess the work's artistic merit on that basis. We could attribute artistic merit by appeal to the principle that, if the appreciative experience has final value, the work has artistic merit. That is anathema to particularists.

However, the experientialist is not committed to the claim that, if the appreciative experience has final value, the work has artistic merit. She is committed to the claim that, if the work has artistic merit, the appreciative experience has final value. She is committed to the latter, but not the former, because she is providing an explanation, not a test for the presence of artistic merit. She holds that every work with artistic merit has artistic merit because of the final value of its appreciative experience. That implies that the appreciative experience of every work with artistic merit has final value. It doesn't imply that every work whose appreciative experience has final value has artistic merit. "Everything that is F is F because it is G," doesn't imply that everything that is G is F. If every match that catches fire does so because it is struck, it doesn't follow that every match that is struck catches fire. Some matches might be struck underwater and not catch fire. But it could still be true that every match that does catch fire does so because it is struck.

It's fortunate for the experientialist that she isn't committed to the principle that, if the appreciative experience has final value, the work has artistic merit. We already know that that principle is false, whether or not particularism is true. The objection in Section 4.3 showed that. Aesthetic merits can give the appreciative experience final value without giving the work artistic merit. Experientialists do owe us an explanation of why these features don't confer artistic merit, despite

[40] As Gorodeisky (2021) has emphasized about aesthetic value.

giving the experience final value.[41] But the mere existence of such cases doesn't disprove the claim that every work that *does* have artistic merit has it because of the experience's final value.[42]

A final try. The objection said we cannot assess artistic merit with a pre-existing standard. I replied that experientialism is in the business of explaining, not assessing, artistic merit. But one might object that we cannot *explain* artistic merit with a pre-existing standard either, and experientialists imply we can. If we know experientialism is true, we can know, in advance of experiencing any given work, that *if* it has artistic merit, it has artistic merit because of the experience's final value. Analogously, we can know, in advance of experiencing any given knife, that *if* it is a good knife, it is a good knife because of how well it cuts. But we cannot know anything whatsoever, in advance of experiencing a work, about why it has artistic merit if it has it.

The objection loses much of its sting when we note that experientialism doesn't suggest we could know in advance which features of the work give the experience final value and thereby give the work artistic merit if it has any. It doesn't suggest we can know in advance that, if a work has artistic merit, it has it because (say) it displays uniformity amidst variety. Plausibly, properties like these can't be known, in advance, to give a work artistic merit if it has any. But experientialists can agree.

The main problem, however, is that it isn't enough just to assert that we can't know anything in advance about why a work has artistic merit if it has any. The telic argument supplies an argument against this very claim. The experientialist can say: we know that art is made to be experienced, and that what things of a certain kind are made for tells us what makes them good of their kind. So apparently, we *can* know in advance that, if a work has artistic merit, it has it because of the value of the experience. Without identifying the mistake in this argument, the assertion that no such claim is knowable in advance will not carry conviction. The next objection to the argument does a better job.

5.4 | Neglected alternatives

The telic argument falls short of establishing experientialism. The fact that art is made to be experienced does not prove that its goodness of its kind is determined by the value—final or non-final—of the experience. Goodness of a kind is not always determined by the value of the end associated with the kind. How good it is to be immune to a certain disease has no bearing on how good a vaccine something is. Goodness of a kind is often just determined by a thing's fitness for achieving the end associated with the kind, as the vaccine example shows. Therefore, if art is made to be experienced, artistic merit might only be determined by the work's fitness for affording the experiences it was made to afford—not by their value. Perhaps the artistic merit of a work made to afford frightening experiences, for example, is determined by how effectively it affords these frightening experiences, not by the value of these experiences.

[41] As noted in Section 4.3, *everyone* who thinks aesthetic merits confer artistic merit owes us an explanation of why they don't in these cases.

[42] Some might hold that every explanation of why something is so commits you to a universal generalization of a kind to which particularists would object in the case of artistic merit. Maybe the claim that the match caught fire because it was struck does commit you to the generalization that every match struck, or struck in the right conditions, catches fire. Fine. But *particularists* should not hold that every explanation commits you to a generalization of a kind to which they would object in the case of artistic merit. They would then have to hold that we can never explain why a work has artistic merit. Any such explanation would commit us to an objectionable generalization about artistic merit.

I think the experientialist must concede this. The idea that art is made to be experienced is not enough to yield full-blown experientialism. It does not rule out alternative accounts of how artistic merit relates to experience. Other considerations would be needed to establish that it is, specifically, the experience's final value that determines artistic merit.[43]

But this is cold comfort for the anti-experientialist. Anti-experientialists deny that artistic merit derives from any of the experience's value, or from the work's fitness for affording a certain experience.[44] The objection leaves untouched the idea that, if art is made to be experienced, artistic merit is determined by something about the experience. It leaves unanswered the charge that someone who grants that art is made to be experienced, but denies that anything about the experience determines artistic merit, is like someone who grants that knives are made to cut, but denies that anything about how a knife cuts determines how good a knife it is. For all the present objection shows, the telic argument proves that the only remaining debate about artistic merit is an intra-mural dispute between experientialists, strictly so-called, and those who think artistic merit derives from something about the experience other than its final value. That is far more than experientialism's critics want to concede.

The best strategy for the anti-experientialist may be to grant that art is made to be experienced, but to argue that the teleological relation between art and experience is not of the right kind for it to follow that anything about the experience determines art's goodness of its kind. Establishing this will require more general reflection on goodness of a kind, and what sorts of teleological relations do and don't affect it. This is beyond the scope of this paper. But it may be a task that anti-experientialists cannot avoid.

6 | CONCLUSION

Appreciative experientialism bends over backwards to respect the intuitions of anti-experientialists, above all regarding the final value of art. More would need to be said to establish its truth. Notably, the view that artistic merits give the work final value, which anti-experientialists tend to share, requires scrutiny. If some artistic merits don't give the work final value, it is unclear how an appreciative experientialist could explain how they give the work artistic merit.

However, I hope the above demonstrates that experientialism has many more resources for responding to objections than is commonly recognized. Even the remaining problems I have identified aren't clearly fatal.

Some will take the moral of the above to be that it is really experientialism about *aesthetic value* that is the problem, not experientialism about artistic merit. The existing objections all apply to, and teleological considerations give no support to, experientialism about aesthetic value. I wish to remain neutral about this here. But the idea that we should combine experientialism about artistic merit with anti-experientialism about aesthetic value merits further consideration.

Finally, whatever the fate of appreciative experientialism, its non-hedonistic account of the value of appreciating good art deserves further examination. It suggests that the value of art

[43] Some objections to experientialism from Sections 1 and 2 might be re-deployed to eliminate these alternatives. The "unavailable experiences" objection of Section 2.8, for instance, seems to undermine the fitness theory. Some experientialists have also given arguments for appealing to final rather than instrumental value (e.g. Budd (1995: 5-8)).

[44] See e.g. Shelley's "object theory" (2010: sec.4); see also Section 2.8 above.

appreciation is like the value of appreciation unrelated to art or the aesthetic, such as appreciating friends or acts of kindness.

Despite everything I have said in its defense, I find it hard to believe that experientialism about artistic merit could be true. But my anti-experientialist faith is wavering. I would welcome someone setting me straight.[45]

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