

# Toward a Communitarian Theory of Aesthetic Value

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**Abstract:** Our paradigms of aesthetic value condition the philosophical questions we pose and hope to answer about it. Theories of aesthetic value are typically individualistic, in the sense that the paradigms they are designed to capture, and the questions to which they are offered as answers, center the individual's engagement with aesthetic value. Here I offer some considerations that suggest that such individualism is a mistake and sketch a communitarian way of posing and answering questions about the nature of aesthetic value.

A theory of aesthetic value answers the question, *What is aesthetic value?*, but the question is ambiguous between a demarcation question 'What makes aesthetic value *aesthetic*?' and a value question 'What makes aesthetic value *good*?' It is not obvious that these questions can be answered separately,<sup>1</sup> but it matters which one we focus on. The natural reading of the demarcation question is as a *contrastive* question that asks what makes aesthetic value *aesthetic* rather than ethical, epistemic, etc. And so it seems to presume, at least as a guiding assumption, that there is a real difference between aesthetic and non-

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<sup>1</sup> See Lopes 2018 pp. 41-48 and Shelley 2021 for discussion.

aesthetic value. But if nothing can be found to demarcate the aesthetic, then it might seem that there is no such thing as *aesthetic* value. And so the answer to a question that seemed so interesting, *What is aesthetic value?*, might just be “Nothing, really.”

The value question does not stumble in this respect. It takes the existence of aesthetic value for granted and asks what makes it good. It might turn out that what makes it good is something it shares with the moral, epistemic, or political good. We can ask the value question as long as we have some clear cases of aesthetic value. It might turn out that the very thing that makes aesthetic value good is also what makes some other kind of thing good, but that should not disappoint or surprise us in the way it might if we were to begin with the demarcation question.

The value question asks for something to fill in the blank:

Something’s being aesthetically good is its being \_\_\_\_\_.

An answer will state what it is to be aesthetically good. Someone inspired by Hume might say it is something’s capacity to win the approval of ‘ideal critics’. A Kantian might say that it is something’s capacity to cause the pleasurable free play of imagination and understanding. But to set out this question independently of a demarcation of the aesthetic we have to settle on some paradigmatic cases. The problem is that nearly everything we encounter has some aesthetic value. Sneakers, sunsets, lamps, landscapes, espresso shots, sculptures, and graffiti can have aesthetic value. A theory focused on the aesthetic value of nature and academic painting might overlook or misconstrue the aesthetic value of sneakers and graffiti.

How to settle on the paradigms, then? We could conduct a survey and set off with the winners, but that would hold theory hostage to what some group of people tend to think is aesthetically good. We could introspect, but why trust our individual sense of the paradigms, idiosyncratic as they must be? The paradigms we settle on should depend

not on an average or personal sense of aesthetic value, but on the philosophical impulse to ask about it in the first place. How and why is anyone moved to think philosophically about aesthetic value? Why wonder about its nature?

Some questions about aesthetic value naturally arise in the midst of aesthetic life. As Dominic McIver Lopes (2018) puts it, following Mary Mothersill, there are ‘primitive’ questions about aesthetic value that ‘preceded theorizing’ and ‘grip those who know nothing of theory.’ (Mothersill 1984, p. 3) These are the questions that shift us out of our aesthetic lives and into philosophy.

What are those questions? Not every pressing question that arises in aesthetic life is philosophical. A central theme in the literature on beauty is its mysteriousness, the way it beckons — To what exactly? Why? — and overwhelms.<sup>2</sup> The experience of beauty seems to supply its own question: *What is that?*, we think, *I have to find out*. Or, in another register, we encounter something so incredible, so astonishing and wonderful that we cannot believe what we are experiencing. *How is this possible when everything else is so unremarkable?* But these questions draw us further into the world of aesthetic value, of songs, styles, artworks, design, people, nature—into the specificities of and connections between things. They are the questions that drive our aesthetic lives forward, drawing us closer to the beautiful thing, binding us to it, to things like it, and to others whose aesthetic lives are bound up with the thing. It would be odd to be struck full force by beauty, but struck dumb, contemplative and unmoved.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Moran writes, ‘...beauty is commonly associated with mystery, as something that beckons but also withdraws and withholds, something whose nature belongs with appearing but that also presents itself as containing in itself more than is apparent. While it belongs to the sensory, to the realm of feeling, and is in that sense fully present to experience, at the same time it partakes of concealment in ways not shared by the rest of sensory life. A familiar trope of beauty is that of something not just pointing beyond itself but as harboring a secret or posing a question to be answered.’ (Moran 2012, 300)

The questions that engagement with aesthetic value often inspires are not especially philosophical, profound though they may be. They are not questions about the nature of this thing's aesthetic value; they are questions about *this thing*. Nor are they questions about the profundity or importance of aesthetic value in general. And so it would seem to be a confusion to think that beauty's mystery and the familiar and strange draw of aesthetic value, motivate a 'primitive' question for philosophy—one that grips us prior to any familiarity with, but which is answered by, philosophical reflection. At most beauty's draw could move us into the forms of thought typical of the critic who takes a special interest in interpretation, artistic motivation, intention, artistic achievement, art historical connections, and so on.

I am unsure whether this is a confusion present in Mothersill's thinking, but it is not easy to see her primitive question as an especially *philosophical* one, or one that should start us down the path to a theory of aesthetic value. Mothersill (1984) phrases her primitive question in different ways:

Why do I find this work of art so moving (oppressive, exhilarating, pretentious, etc.)? (72)

Why does this work of art please me? (*ibid*)

Why does this item please me? Why do I find it affecting, disturbing, exhilarating, melancholy? (172)

Her answer is, in short, that the item is beautiful and (here is the theory, in short) beauty 'is causally linked with pleasure and inspires love.' (271)

Mothersill appears to amplify the chorus of philosophers who endorse a hedonic theory of aesthetic value, according to which there is a constitutive relation between pleasure and aesthetic value:

**Aesthetic Hedonism:** Something's being aesthetically good just is its being able to produce pleasure in an appropriately situated individual.<sup>3</sup>

If the primitive question for a theory of aesthetic value is 'Why does this work of art please me?' then it is easy to see why aesthetic hedonism gains traction: the work pleases because it has aesthetic value, which just is a capacity to please.

But if Mothersill's primitive question is not really a question that spurs philosophical thought, then hedonism looks like it offers a philosophical theory in response to an art critic's question, which is bad criticism. It is bad criticism because the critic already knows that the work has aesthetic value. They want to know why *this work* is aesthetically good not what aesthetic goodness in general consists in.

So what is the hedonist's primitive question? Positive feeling alone does not inspire philosophical reflection. The deliciousness of a cake draws us back for more cake; the warmth of a shower absorbs our attention and clears the mind. There must be something about *aesthetic* pleasure in our engagement with aesthetic value. But when we zero in on the aesthetic, the importance of pleasure, or any special power it might have to inspire philosophy, seems to diminish, for so many other things also grip us in our engagement with aesthetic value: love, achievement, meaningfulness, individuality, aesthetic freedom, and community.

Recent work on aesthetic value has found other faults in the hedonist line, opening up space for alternative theories of aesthetic value. The shining example is Dominic McIver Lopes's (2018) 'network theory'. Lopes motivates his theory with a different primitive question. He points out that the hedonist's primitive question leaves open a

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<sup>3</sup> James Shelley (2019) calls this the "default theory" of aesthetic value. A descendent theory goes under the name 'aesthetic empiricism' and replaces pleasure with the more capacious notion of 'rewarding experience'. For various articulations and defenses, see Budd (1995), Goldman (1990), Levinson (2011), Matthen (2007), and Stecker (2006). For a summary of the criticism see Van der Berg (2019).

more primitive one. 'Knowing what it is in an item that moves me leaves it open why my life goes better when it includes these things that move me.' (Lopes 2018, 3) To know why I react in various ways to particulars is not to know *why my reacting that way matters*, or why my reacting that way is *better* than reacting some other way or not at all. If everyone followed suit and reacted exactly the way I do, then I might not question it in an especially philosophical way, strange though it may be. But if I respond to aesthetic value in the familiar way — telling friends about my discoveries, sharing them, showing people what I create in response — then I cannot help but notice two things: Many people *do not react* in the way I do to these things, and they react the way I do *but to different things*. So what makes it the case that my reacting the way I do amounts to an *improvement* of my life compared to some different life I might live?

A philosophical question does arise quite naturally here, a question about whether I should care about reacting in the particular way I do rather than the way they do, and if so why. That's Lopes's primitive question. He asks,

How does beauty deserve the place we have evidently made for it in our lives?

(Lopes 2018, 3, 6, 9, 47)

What is the place of aesthetic value in the good life? (*ibid*, 3, 47)

Or, what do aesthetic goods bring to my life, to make it a life that goes well? (*ibid*)

If I could say what makes my life *go well* when it includes my aesthetic life, i.e. my particular connection to and engagement with aesthetic value, then I will have some defense of my own aesthetic valuing practices. I can say that I have an aesthetic life that is going *well*, that is good, in the face of so much variation.

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<sup>3</sup> Lopes offers various formulations of his primitive question: "Since primitive questions come in advance of philosophy, we should not try to give them such definitive and rigorous statement as would entail their having gone through some philosophy. They serve us best when they are suggestive, so that we always wonder whether our theoretical achievements are true to our primitive instincts." (3)

There are two ways to interpret Lopes's primitive question, but only one interpretation yields a primitive question. Primitive questions in aesthetics are questions that are supposed to arise in aesthetic life in such a way that they spur us to *philosophical* reflection on things like the nature of aesthetic value. There are such questions, and our theories of aesthetic value should be sensitive to them.<sup>6</sup> But, as the discussion of Mothersill's 'primitive' question shows, not all questions that arise in aesthetic life are philosophical. An individualistic reading of Lopes's questions makes them seem easily answerable. Consider the question "What do aesthetic goods bring to my life, to make it a life that goes well?" If that question is interpreted as *exclusively* about my individual aesthetic life, then it has a straightforward answer: The things I aesthetically engage with, in the way that I do, just are the things I value aesthetically engaging with, just as I do. The question of whether I have any *reason* to live my aesthetic life as I do has no philosophical bite, since the reasons are manifest in my living this life, pursuing, creating, and engaging with the aesthetic goods that call to me. If I ask myself that question, thinking of nothing other than my own aesthetic life, then a wholly convincing answer appears to me, almost unreflectively. In this way, the question does not spur philosophical reflection in which I am inclined to doubt, question, or criticize my aesthetic life, or to wonder about its legitimacy, or about how it might improve—in such a way that I might wonder about the very nature of what shapes this significant part of my life. When I think that there might be something unusual, missing, deficient, or questionable about my aesthetic life, then I need something else, some reassurance that

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<sup>6</sup> There is way of thinking about aesthetic value that I suspect would deny this claim. On this view, there is no answer to what makes aesthetic value good other than aesthetic value itself. Aesthetic value *just is* good in the way that things can be aesthetically good. The view is called (ironically?) primitivism about aesthetic value: the goodness of aesthetic value is that which fundamentally explains all the other phenomena in aesthetic life and so is not to be explained in terms of them. Any purported 'primitive' questions that seem to motivate a philosophical theory of aesthetic value are confused or misguided. In this way primitivists are also quietists. Gorodeisky (2021) opts for primitivism about aesthetic value.

philosophy can offer. In other aspects of life, we are forced into such reflection by error, disaster, dysfunction, physical or emotional pain. But in aesthetic life it is aesthetic diversity—the presence of flourishing and different others—that calls my aesthetic life into philosophical question. The appeal to aesthetic difference is thus required to make Lopes’s questions the *primitive* questions he seeks to answer.<sup>7</sup>

With a few conceptual twists, Lopes tweaks these questions to arrive at the ‘normative question,’ which ‘...is what becomes of the primitive question once we get technical.’ (*ibid*, 47)

*The Normative Question:* How do aesthetic values source practical normativity, i.e. give us reason to act?

In other words, how does aesthetic value give me reason to do the things I in fact do in response to it: collect, admire, imitate, preserve, advocate, curate, copy, create, share, dance, praise, and so on? In a few more words: how does aesthetic value supply the reasons I must appeal to, in the face of interpersonal variation, in order to justify my aesthetic practices?

The hedonist has a response to this question, but the dialectic changes now that the primitive questions are different. The hedonist’s primary resource, pleasure, is immediately under pressure. The mere fact that I respond with pleasure is not enough to answer Lopes’s primitive question. The item has to *merit* the response. And that’s where things heat up fast. Something more than pleasure is immediately called for.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lopes takes inspiration for his primitive question from the Socratic question, *How should I live?*, which is typically understood as one that is self-critical and open to options, not as asking whether we have reason to live exactly as we do. Lopes writes, “Socrates asked, how should we live? He did not mean to ask what the moral law permits us and demands of us. Rather, he burned to know what ingredients go into a life lived well.” (p.3) On the following page Lopes says that we must feel the tug of primitive questions, and that “The tug is most firm during episodes of self-reflection.” He clearly has in mind critical self-reflection (given his use of the quote from Beardsley that follows).

<sup>8</sup> See Lopes’s reconstruction of the ‘Levinhume deduction’ (Lopes 2018, 3-64).



Or something else. The question arises whether there is another starting point that doesn't boil so fast. Lopes's alternative opts for the notion of *individual achievement*: "What someone aesthetically should do is what the relevant aesthetic expert would do, where the relevant aesthetic expert is an agent who is as good as a kind of aesthetic agent as an aesthetic agent of that kind can be." (Lopes 2018, 153) Lopes's thought is that our aesthetic lives, assuming we run them well enough, are full of aesthetic achievements — successes in aesthetic actions that engage the aesthetic reasons we have to act in the aesthetic practices we have taken up. We act well, when we do, because that is the way to act aesthetically. That is the way to act aesthetically because that is what the relevant aesthetic expert would do, the one who excels in the practice. Doing what an expert would do is an achievement, and whenever we act we have reason to succeed, to act well. Faced with aesthetic diversity, you can appeal to the aesthetic values that engage you. Aesthetic value just is a source of practical reasons that justify acting one way rather than another, your way rather than theirs (and vice versa for them).

As suggested above, Lopes gets technical. His presentation of the 'network theory' of aesthetic value consists in a series of formal definitions. The theory is designed to answer the primitive question in the guise of the normative question, viz., how aesthetic values give us reason to act, and so Lopes formulates it in terms of what makes an aesthetic value reason-giving:

An aesthetic value,  $V$ , is reason-giving = the fact that  $x$  is  $V$  lends weight to the proposition that it would be an aesthetic achievement for some  $A$  to  $\phi$  in  $C$ , where  $x$  is an item in an aesthetic practice,  $K$ , and  $A$ 's competence to  $\phi$  is aligned upon  $K$ 's aesthetic profile. (Lopes 2018, 127)

It takes a moment to spell this out: Aesthetic values are reasons to act in certain ways in the practices one is a part of: the espresso's bitterness is a reason to pull another shot; the

actor's perfect delivery is a reason to call the next scene. An action is an aesthetic achievement if it exhibits a kind of aesthetic excellence—what an aesthetic agent should do in their aesthetic practices is what would be done by an expert in the practice. Aesthetic expertise is a matter of competence for achievement in aesthetic action, and aesthetic acts with respect to an item, *o*, are actions that counterfactually depend on the content of the agent's aesthetic evaluation of *o*. (*ibid*, 92) If the paint color were dustier, you wouldn't have used it in the living room; if the sauce were saltier, you wouldn't have put it on the sandwich. Lopes stipulates that aesthetic evaluations are mental representations of items as having aesthetic value. In other words, aesthetic actions depend on correct attributions of aesthetic merits or demerits. The ability to correctly aesthetically evaluate—the espresso is indeed too bitter; the sauce too salty—forms the 'core competence' of aesthetic expertise in action. But where does correctness come from if not pleasure? Expertise is cheap if practices proliferate: one person is an expert in soggy sandwiches, the other in dry ones, and they both achieve in their respective practices. Either might proudly present you with one of their 'achievements'. Without some constraints on aesthetic practices, then, anything goes. Happily, there is not a practice of soggy or dry sandwich making, as far as I know, and so no norms governing action in those pursuits. But there is an aesthetic practice of delicious sandwich making in which experts set standards, and in light of which we can explain why proudly presenting the sandwiches is aesthetically wrong, but giving the soggy sandwich to the dog, and putting a sauce on the dry one, are aesthetically right. These are the norms that in fact exist and around which an agent must form their core competence if they are to excel in sandwich-

making. These norms are anchored in aesthetic expertise, grip us when we are part of the relevant practice, and give us reason to act one way rather than another.<sup>9</sup>

Filling in our scheme:

**Network Theory:** Something's being aesthetically good is its being a reason for aesthetic action in an aesthetic practice.

Lopes's achievement-based theory denies pleasure the star role that aesthetic hedonists give it. He focuses instead on the way that aesthetic value grounds reasons for action. But it does so only through aesthetic practices, communities of agents engaged in norm-governed aesthetic action, at the apex of which are expert achievers who set standards for success in the practice.

According to the network theory, aesthetic values are reasons to act in the practices you are engaged in. If you are not part of a particular aesthetic practice, then its norms do not affect you and so its aesthetic values have no normative grip on your actions. On this view, one has aesthetic reason to act within a practice *if and only if* one is part of that aesthetic practice, whatever it might be—record collecting, novel writing, gardening, espresso making, cooking, and so on. So why take up any particular aesthetic practice? A question lingers about the *whole* of aesthetic life and the way other individual aesthetic lives and practices—with their particular values, actions, and achievements—bear on one's own. Why should any other aesthetic life concern me and mine, or you and yours? Lopes raises this question in the voice of an 'outsider skeptic' and notes its significance: 'We are all outsider skeptics.' (p. 202) We are all outsider skeptics because we are not the only ones engaged in aesthetic practices, and, as Lopes's primitive question highlights, other people lead rather different aesthetics lives.

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<sup>9</sup> This is a brief summary of some of the core definitions Lopes develops. The further definitions and finer details are worth studying. Lopes summarizes some of them on pp. 235-236.

The outsider skeptic's question sounds a lot like Lopes's primitive question, which, as we saw earlier, is properly translated into the normative question when we get technical (*ibid*, 47). But later Lopes writes that the outsider skeptic's question '...articulates what is left of the primitive question once we have answered the normative question.' (*ibid*, 203) This is a little confusing because by the time we meet the outsider skeptic, Lopes has answered the normative question with the network theory. Given his earlier claim that the normative question is a translation of the primitive question, we might have thought that answering the one was a way of answer the other. Turns out it's not, and looming question remains.

In other places, Lopes says that answers to the normative question get us closer to answering the primitive question, suggesting perhaps that they are different questions.

Answers to the normative question do bring us closer to answering the primitive question. To understand why the façade's grace means I aesthetically should do this [or that] act...helps to understand their place in how we should live. After all, how we should live is the sum total of what we should do. We live by doing. (*ibid*, 47)

But this is compatible with the claim that the normative question just is a version of the primitive one. A natural reading of the passage is that *particular* answers to *particular* normative questions get us closer to answering the *general* normative question, which just is a technical way of asking the general primitive question. Why does *this façade's elegance* mean I should do one thing rather than another? Why does *this song's rhythm* mean I should aesthetically act in some way? Answers to those questions will help us answer the general normative question about why aesthetic value in general sources practical normativity—which is technical way of asking the primitive question.

Yet, when we meet the outsider skeptic, it becomes clear that the normative question is not a translation of the primitive one. It also turns out that even a *general* answer to the normative question does not get us any closer to answering the primitive question. As Lopes construes it, the outsider sceptic is asking why she should care about aesthetic practices outside her own, about expanding her aesthetic horizons, acting in new aesthetic practices. She is engaged in her aesthetic practices, she values what she values. She sees others engaged in different aesthetic practices, which may cast a little doubt on the way she lives her aesthetic life, but so what? People live different lives; people live different aesthetic lives. Why should she care about what others are doing, about cultivating her aesthetic self beyond her current one, or doubt for a moment the goodness of her aesthetic life?

Lopes's network theory boosts the outsider skeptic's confidence by fixing her in her aesthetic practices. Previously, the primitive question had us asking how aesthetic value deserves the place we have evidently made for it in our lives. We liked what we liked, but saw that others liked other things and worried about the legitimacy of our own aesthetic position. The network theory gives me the security I sought. It tells me that, if I'm doing things right, I have aesthetic reason to do as I do in my aesthetic practices, because in doing that I am achieving according to the norms of my practices. Once we answer the general normative question with the network theory, others and their aesthetic practices are even more distant than they were when we asked the primitive question, for now it does not matter that the aesthetic actions and reactions of others differ from mine. With the network theory in hand, it's not even clear that we can pose the primitive question as a worry about how I might justify my aesthetic practices to others. In this light, it seems that the thing to say is not that some question remains or that we

have inched closer to answering the primitive question. It's that the primitive question has disappeared.

Here I worry that the ambiguity in Lopes's primitive question is causing trouble. The network theory gives a wholly satisfying answer to the individualistic question of whether I have reason to aesthetically live as I do, ignoring the fact of aesthetic diversity. But as I argued, it is difficult to see how that is a special question for philosophy, or one that requires a technical answer. Everyday reflection on the richness of my aesthetic life, or even simply putting on my favorite album or cooking a favored meal, provides a satisfying response. But when we pose the question in the light of aesthetic diversity, the network theory provides a partial answer that then obscures the very question that is supposed to motivate it. Either way, it is unclear how the network theory helps.

Lopes addresses the outsider skeptic in two ways. First, he argues that our aesthetic selves connect us to aesthetic practices we do not currently engage in. Our current practices give us 'derived aesthetic reason' to achieve in aesthetic domains that are sufficiently similar to the ones we are already practiced in, for those are the practices we are most likely to succeed in. So we can see beyond our aesthetic selves into nearby practices — from guitar playing to the ukulele; milk-based espresso drinks to espresso-based spritzes and then espresso-based cocktails; tequila appreciation to mezcal; from a love of cooking to an interest in kitchen cutlery design; and so on. Lopes writes:

Suppose a food writer simultaneously receives an invitation to review the new Mani Ratnam film for the Friday paper together with a violin lesson voucher that expires on Friday. She does not have time for both, and she realizes that she has stronger aesthetic reason to write the movie review than to take the violin lessons, because she calculates that she is very likely to write a decent review of the movie and she is very likely to sound terrible playing her first scales on the violin. As it

happens, writing the review sends her down a path where she writes more reviews, builds the relevant competences, and becomes an expert movie critic. Acting solely through deliberation on her aesthetic reasons, she ends up doing what she has more derived aesthetic reason to do. (Lopes 2018, 209)

Lopes's thought is that when we face an aesthetic decision involving what we might call 'external practices' — aesthetic practices we are not currently engaged in — we should ask which of them is most similar to *my* practices. The similar ones are the ones I am more likely to achieve in and so supply the most derived aesthetic reason for me to act. On this view, (1) what matters when considering external aesthetic practices is what one has most aesthetic reason to do and (2) those reasons are generated by some relation to one's own current practices. Let's call this *rationalist individualism about external practices*. I'll return to it.

The second way that Lopes addresses the outsider skeptic is by arguing that an aesthetic life, as a life full of aesthetic achievements, can be a life of integrity, dignity, meaning, and deep happiness (Lopes 2018, 207-213). In that way, one's life can be profoundly admirable, indeed exemplary of a life well lived. And so from the perspective of our own aesthetic lives we can look upon other ones with human approval and admiration.

Do these additional elements answer what remains of the primitive question? The network theory secures my aesthetic position by showing me how my achievements are grounded in socially scaffolded aesthetic practices. My derived aesthetic reasons open me up to other aesthetic practices similar to my own. And the general integrity, dignity, meaning, and happiness of external aesthetic lives make them worthy of admiration.

It seems not, for the networking of aesthetic value is also the segregation of aesthetic practices. Each practice is an aesthetic world unto itself. If your practices do not

overlap with mine then we have, aesthetically speaking, nothing in common, aside from some basic aesthetic competences. The aesthetic values that animate me and my life come cleanly apart from those that animate you and yours and so cannot serve to call my aesthetic life into question. The only people who could call my aesthetic life into question are those who are similar to me, and so don't.

Return to the example of the food critic deciding whether to take up violin or film criticism. According to the network theory, the critic aesthetically ought to take up film criticism. Lopes does not deny that playing the violin has some appeal. External practices have what Lopes calls 'curb appeal'.

Just about any aesthetic practice has some curb appeal. Only a real sourpuss can see absolutely none of the appeal of video games. At the same time, no aesthetic practice draws in more than a fraction of those with aesthetic interests. All are niches. So, one side of the coin is the weak appeal for non-participants of any given aesthetic practice, and its flip side is that the weak appeal of aesthetic practices fuels the diversity of our aesthetic interests. ... Conceding all this leaves open the question of whether [outsider skeptics] have reason to regard as normative for them what experts do in aesthetic practices with mere curb appeal. (Lopes 2018, 202)

But curb appeal does little to connect us to other aesthetic practices and practitioners because it generates weak reasons at best: 'An outsider to a practice will have no (or very weak) aesthetic reason to  $\phi$ , so they have no (or very weak) reason to achieve by  $\phi$ ing.' (Lopes 2018, 205). So while the food critic can see some weak aesthetic appeal at best in the violin lessons, it is nothing compared to the appeal of film criticism. The point generalizes. And given that Lopes attaches far more importance to achievement, curb appeal always loses to competence in a contest that isn't close.



There is nothing in the network theory to make external aesthetic lives call into question my own or to draw me to them in a way that might enrich, expand, or change our aesthetic lives, or draw us toward one another when our practices of aesthetic valuing diverge.<sup>11</sup> The fact that other aesthetic lives enjoy a suite of ethically desirable traits (dignity, integrity, etc.) gives me no inroads into their *aesthetic* worth. And if they are unlike my aesthetic life, then they supply little in the way of derived aesthetic reason for me to engage. If someone acting in an external practice regarding *os* says “*os* are beautiful” I seem to have no aesthetic reason to really listen to them, no resource for finding them and their modes of aesthetic valuing *aesthetically* attractive. Their claim has little grip on me, and so I have little aesthetic reason to engage, or even to disagree. Lopes’s additions to the network theory, in response to the outsider skeptic, supply a kind of *live and let live* policy.<sup>12</sup>

What is it exactly about Lopes’s handing of the primitive question that is causing trouble? Lopes translates the question, How does beauty deserve the place we have evidently made for it in our lives? (3, 6, 9, 47), into the normative question, How do aesthetic values source practical normativity? But in doing so he seems to trade on an ambiguity in the latter. The straight translation of the primitive question is:

How do aesthetic values *in general* source practical normativity *in general*?

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<sup>11</sup> Alex King and Samantha Matherne each raise similar points in their critical discussions of *Being for Beauty*. See King 2020 and Matherne 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Lopes might point out that there are non-aesthetic reasons—moral, epistemic, or prudential ones—that can pull us into new aesthetic practices. Maybe you should get into cooking not because of the profound aesthetic richness of the practice but because your friends will enjoy it, you will learn about other cultures, and you will save some money by not eating out all the time. If they are weighty enough, such non-aesthetic reasons can pull you into new aesthetic practices absent aesthetic considerations. While true, the point seems unflattering to the network theory, for it starts to look even stranger that the only normative realm that lacks any pull in this respect is that of the very practices at issue. For further discussion of this issue see Kubala 2020, who opts for a pluralist account of aesthetic normativity, according to which there are multiple sources of the reasons we have to opt into external practices, achievement might be one, pleasure, morality, or love might be others. The communitarian view I describe below is pluralist in a sense but not in another sense: the ultimate source of aesthetic normativity is the good of aesthetic community, but aesthetic community requires the goods of individuality and aesthetic freedom.

Lopes's network theory answers this variation:

How do *one's* aesthetic values source practical normativity *for one*?

Remember that the primitive question arises in the face of apparently legitimate aesthetic lives other than our own. But, as we have seen, what is "left over" after Lopes transposes his primitive question into the normative question just is the need to account for how other aesthetic lives normatively bear on one's own—i.e. for *our* aesthetic life, or for aesthetic life in general. But the original primitive question does not ask about individual reasons and achievements. When we move to Lopes's normative question, our attention is focused on paradigms of individual action and achievement. And when we have an answer to that question, we seem unable to answer the original one. Lopes imports an individualism into his theory and it seems to cause trouble.

*Individualists* about the aesthetic tend to think that the locus of aesthetic phenomena is the individual human being. For the individualist, what matters most, and what should anchor our theory-building, is *the individual* — her experiences, her special connection to aesthetic objects, her involvement in and contribution to aesthetic practices. The primitive questions that the individualist poses, and the answers she develops, will focus on the individual's connection to aesthetic value. For an illustration of this, return to Mothersill's primitive question and compare it with other questions she might have asked:

- (a) Why does this item move/please me? (Mothersill's question)
- (b) Why does this item move/please *us*?
- (c) Why do *these* items move/please *us*?

Mothersill offers no reason to start with (a) rather than (b) or (c). Her individualism explains why she opts for (a). The individualist tends to think about the core aesthetic

phenomena—aesthetic creation, affect, experience, action, achievement, discourse, etc.—as centering on the individual’s engagement with aesthetic value.

Aesthetic individualism contrasts with *aesthetic communitarianism*, which is the tendency to treat the locus of aesthetic phenomena as something more than the individual: sociality, community, culture, people, humanity. The communitarian is inclined to have collective aesthetic life in view from the start, and so the paradigms of aesthetic value that really impress them are not individual experiences or expert achievements but things like:

- The beauty of eating together
- The joy of laughing together in response to a joke, comment, or story
- The way a person’s style inspires others to engage in aesthetic action
- The value of collective dancing
- The thrill of collective aesthetic creation (e.g. playing in a band, cooking together)
- The happiness of collective singing

Where the individualist thinks of aesthetic life as aimed at developing expertise or connoisseurship, the communitarian thinks of it as aimed at cultivating aesthetic community. Where the individualist might treat an aesthetic claim as a verdict or a demand for agreement (à la Kant), the communitarian sees it as an invitation to joint engagement. In these cases, aesthetic value is not something that accrues to me through my pleasures or achievements; it is something we create together, something we share. When we think about the importance of these the paradigms that impress the communitarian, I think we are inclined to wonder how we can make sure that they happen not just for ourselves but in the world, with and for others, which is another way of asking what any one of us can do, *for us*, to share aesthetic value. That is a question

about how any one of us might be, how we might try to make ourselves or lead our lives, given the significance of aesthetic value as highlighted by the communitarian.<sup>44</sup>

What drives the communitarian is the fact that aesthetic value seems, the world over, to be a force for community without which we would be far less bonded, harmonious, and human. *Why?* What is that? What is aesthetic value such that it cultivates and sustains this good? That's a primitive question in a communitarian register. This question is effectively Lopes's question with a communitarian emphasis: Does aesthetic value deserve the place *we* have made for it in *our lives*?

As we have seen, a deeply animating feature of Lopes's view is the idea that aesthetic expertise is the star good in the theory of aesthetic value. When an individualist thinks about value, they think about the good that accrues to an individual, and Lopes's thinking is party-line here. The expert sets the standard for achievement, which determines competence—an aim of all aesthetic action. We can trace this back to Lopes's individualist question: What do aesthetic goods bring to my life, to make it a life that goes well? The goods are expert achievements; they bring achievements into your aesthetic life, which contributes to your life going well by supplying it with integrity, dignity, meaning, and happiness.

The communitarian launches a different question—What makes *our lives*, what makes *humanity*, go better?—and lands in another place. Expertise and achievement are good, but they are not the highest aesthetic good. For the communitarian, aesthetic community just is the highest aesthetic good and aesthetic value cultivates and sustains

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<sup>44</sup> Of course, philosophers might exhibit each tendency to some extent and in different ways depending on their aims. Although there is a strong individualist vein in Lopes 2018, his practice-based conception of aesthetic agency is communitarian. On the network theory, there is no such thing as a lone aesthetic agent.

aesthetic community. Expertise is one among many things that can contribute to it, but it is not everything.

The communitarian insists that I ought to live *my* aesthetic life in certain ways because and only because there is something *we are doing* in *our* aesthetic life, or because there is something *our aesthetic life* is doing *for us*. In one way or another, the communitarian stresses that we should not see aesthetic life as something individuals primarily have or that fundamentally benefits individuals. As a result, the aesthetic lives of others are not foreign lives with which we have little to no reason to engage. Aesthetic life is something *we* have but also something we have to continually create and sustain by exercising aesthetic sensibility in our judgments, our creative activities, and in our invitations to joint activity and appreciation. For the aesthetic communitarian, aesthetic life is deeply other-regarding and other-concerning.

And if we can see the aesthetic lives of others that way, as implicated in our aesthetic claims, activities, and practices, then we can see our own aesthetic lives that way, too. In that case, we have to think about how our practices of aesthetic valuing and our modes of self-expression and self-presentation invite others to into our aesthetic valuing practices, contribute to or join them, and engage with our aesthetic claims. We might think about whether and how our claims about aesthetic value implicate others or whether our aesthetic actions appeal to others in a way that spurs them to aesthetic activity. That is, we might think about how there might be no such thing as *one's own* aesthetic life, how aesthetic life must be tuned for aesthetic community, able and apt to create and take up opportunities for joint aesthetic engagement.

So from the communitarian perspective, it would not be enough, or even especially desirable, to be really good at a lot of aesthetic practices. Not that there's anything wrong with achievement. But one point of highlighting the communitarian

approach is to make us wonder whether we should center, in a theory of aesthetic value, the achievements of certain impressive individuals. As impressive and important as they can be, they tend to crowd out what the communitarian takes to heart, namely, that aesthetic value brings us together in a way that no other good does.

Distinguishing between individualism and communitarianism helps us see ways to give the network theory a communitarian heart. On Lopes's view, achievements are anchored in the achievements of individual experts. A communitarian approach would find another way to give achievement normative power. Is there anything, in general, that makes an aesthetic practice worth achieving in? Or maybe there is a family of things that do so? The communitarian is ready with answers: The way those achievements relate to social goods, goods of community, culture, humanity, and so on. Understanding the realization of such goods in terms of *collective achievement* — the achievement of flourishing culture, of humanity, of community — suggests ways of developing communitarian achievement-based theories of aesthetic value.<sup>15</sup>

Lopes's network theory will need adjustment. First, we might have to accept objective comparisons between aesthetic practices. In rejecting aesthetic hedonism, Lopes rejects such rankings (203-207). But even if we reject the idea of an objective *pleasure*-based ranking of practices, we might accept other rankings. Pushpin might be full of pleasure but worse than poetry at sourcing whatever collective achievements matter. Second, and as a result, external practices would have more than mere curb appeal. While we might admit of a plurality of practices at the top, the ones closest to the communitarian aesthetic good, would be the best, the most worth joining. In that case too, there would be no room for Lopes's rationalist individualism about external practices. If your aesthetic practices

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<sup>15</sup> For a reading of Nietzsche along such lines, see Huddleston 2014.

are ranked low on the communitarian achievement scale, then you should change your aesthetic life.

But an achievement-oriented communitarianism has to secure an independent place for the value of achievement. What paradigms of aesthetic value could motivate the primitive questions that are answered by an achievement-oriented communitarianism? And what are those questions? It is not obvious, and when we look at communal or collective aesthetic goods, achievement seems a strange lens through which to view them. And notice that here Lopes's primitive question gains little traction, for that question was sparked by the *differences* we notice between our aesthetic valuing practices and those of others in our midst. But that striking contrast is lost when we look at achievement-oriented communitarian paradigms, which will elide those differences to highlight shared, communal, national, or cultural achievement.

A more promising aesthetic communitarianism focuses not on achievement but on the higher goods realized by our shared practice of aesthetic valuing. Start with the thought that aesthetic life is something *we* live. Everyone has an aesthetic life. Just as your moral life is your life of engaging with moral worth or your political life is your life of engaging with justice and power, your aesthetic life is your life of engaging with aesthetic value. To live an aesthetic life is to have a sense of humor, to be able to play, move to rhythm, attend to flavor and visual nuance, creatively arrange your interior space, dress well, hear the theme, grasp the plot, make art, or interpret it. It is to have a sense of style, an eye for design, a taste for literature, scent, and sound. Your life of engaging with aesthetic value is your practice of aesthetic valuing.

Our aesthetic lives are interdependent. The goods we seek when we live our aesthetic lives are goods that we rely on each other to make, share, present, highlight, and value. These goods are there when we dine together, dance together, laugh, create, share,

and play music, design homes together, sing together, and openly explore—in the way a person’s style inspires another, whose style inspires others in turn; the way a DJ lifts up and orchestrates a crowd of dancers, whose organic movements amplify the DJ; the way a band’s live performance enlivens the audience, and whose energy is returned in kind to the band; the way a cook’s beautiful meal brings everyone together to be themselves in free and friendly exchange.

Why do we engage in our practices of aesthetic valuing? When we ask that question, in light of these aesthetic goods, the notions of pleasure and achievement seem acutely unhelpful. The problem is not that achievement and pleasure never feature in aesthetic valuing. They obviously do. It is that they feature in so many non-aesthetic practices that they give us only a loose grip on the practice of *aesthetic* valuing. We would need to know what is special about *aesthetic* achievement or (again) *aesthetic* pleasure for these notions to help. But figuring that out would show us what the aesthetic adds to each, and whatever that is would take pride of place. And, furthermore, so many other goods figure in our aesthetic lives, ones that, given the communitarian primitive question, have a more immediate claim on our philosophical attention: how dancing together makes us feel more free and more open to each other; the special connection between improvising musicians, and between them and their audience; the way our aesthetic creations—our poems, fashion styles, films—seem to capture something about ourselves and the peculiar impact and influence this can have on others.

When we foreground the practice of aesthetic valuing, we can start to see how to construct communitarian theories of aesthetic value. Schematically, aesthetic life is worth living because it brings us *communal goods* that we cannot get without it. We can define *the practice of aesthetic valuing* teleologically, as a practice aimed at these goods. Aesthetic value is then defined as whatever plays a certain role in the practice of aesthetic valuing—



it is whatever is *worthy* of the practice of aesthetic valuing. To fill this in is to offer specific communitarian theories of aesthetic value, focused on specific goods.

To fill it in, then, we have to specify some goods. In the communitarian paradigms of aesthetic engagement, people commune in a special way, one that depends on and amplifies their practices of aesthetic valuing. Through the creation and valuing of aesthetic goods, people express themselves, cultivate their individuality, and engage with each other creatively and openly. When we focus on communitarian paradigms of aesthetic value, then, these three goods stand out: individuality, aesthetic freedom, and aesthetic community. The practice of aesthetic valuing just is the practice focused on the realization of these goods:

**The Practice of Aesthetic Valuing** is the practice of creating objects and engaging with others with the aim of cultivating individuality and promoting aesthetic freedom in ways that realize aesthetic community.

To be *worthy* of this practice, then, is to positively contribute to the practice of aesthetic valuing—to be a source of individuality, aesthetic freedom, or aesthetic community in such a way that engaging with it makes the practice of aesthetic valuing go well.

**Aesthetic Communitarianism:** Something's being aesthetically good is its being *worthy of the practice of aesthetic valuing*.

The difficulty for any theory that has this structure is to define the teleological goods non-circularly. We cannot make progress by defining aesthetic value in terms of the practice of aesthetic valuing while in turn defining that practice in terms of aesthetic goods. And while proving this in detail requires more space than I have here, there is a decent *prima facie* case that each of individuality, aesthetic freedom, and aesthetic community can be defined without reference to aesthetic value.

*Individuality:* Those features of a person that result from their exercise of choice in their valuing practices. We can distinguish between aspects of valuing that are compulsory and those that are discretionary. Much of our valuing is compulsory. Whether it is good to make a living, be in good health, love and be loved; whether it is bad to murder, cheat, steal. Whether these things are to be valued or disvalued is outside our control. We might be confused or misguided about them, but these are things we must value or disvalue. Our will is constrained by, and answerable to, their goodness or badness. With other things, our will is not so constrained—we have freedom of choice among goods. It is up to us whether to value hip hop, modernist literature, postmodern dance, dark comedy, graphic design, culinary art. In general these aesthetic practices and their products form an array of options among which we may choose freely. Individuality is what results when a person exercises such choice. By exercising choice in the realm of dress, we develop a way of dressing; in comedy, a sense of humor; in sonic art, a taste for music; in movement, a sense of rhythm; and so on.

*Aesthetic Freedom:* The practice of aesthetic valuing involves the exercise of a distinctive form of freedom. I call it ‘aesthetic freedom’, but it need not be defined in relation to aesthetic value. It is a capacity to act in a *volitionally open* way. This is the freedom we typically exercise when we engage in discretionary valuing. It is also the kind of openness we experience and act from when we dance to music, explore a museum or city, work on a writing or painting project, or even dress. Aesthetic freedom is best defined as non-dispositional or ‘indeterminate’ freedom.<sup>16</sup> Our autonomous actions are typically ‘determinate’ in that they are governed by our commitments, responsibilities,

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<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Schiller calls aesthetic freedom ‘play’ and defines it in terms of the ‘harmony’ of the sense and form drives. But harmony is an aesthetic notion. In other places Schiller emphasizes a kind of mutual support of the drives, where neither dominates the other and they are both fully active. For further details of Schiller’s theory of freedom and aesthetic value see Matherne & Riggle 2020, 2021.

and values—i.e. by self-constituting dispositions that we cultivate over time to carve out a way of life, a profession, a suite of relationships, a range of preferences, habits, and interests. Aesthetically free action, in contrast, is not determined by our self-constituting dispositions (though it is typically conditioned by them). It is action that is openly responsive to, and guided by, one's immediate experience. We explore and cultivate our individuality by being volitionally open, and actively responsive, to experience.<sup>17</sup>

*Aesthetic Community:* Two or more people form an aesthetic community when and only when and because they are engaged in mutually supportive discretionary valuing practices. Aesthetic community thus depends on the other two goods, individuality and aesthetic freedom. I express my individuality, you are receptive and express yours in turn. You tell a joke, and I laugh; I read you my poem and you smile; we watch a film and riff on each other's interpretation of it; together we make music. Some people's aesthetic valuing practices 'fit together' or 'harmonize'—i.e. they are mutually supportive. Often, they pursue the same or similar aesthetic values, or if they don't, then their sensibilities productively mesh in a way that promotes joint aesthetic engagement, in valuing, creation, or discourse. The 'mutual support' is open-ended: each other might be a source of aesthetic pleasure or inspiration, a spur to aesthetic freedom, or together they might aesthetically achieve or just have fun. Aesthetic community typically requires skill in balancing our expression of individuality and our engaging in aesthetic freedom. We succeed in creating and sustaining aesthetic community when we express ourselves in ways that encourage the individuality and volitional openness of others and they do the same in turn.

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<sup>17</sup> I believe Gingerich (ms) has something very similar in mind, which he calls 'spontaneous freedom' and details its phenomenology in terms of openness, non-alienation, non-obligatoriness, intentionality, 'approach-orientation' (a state of value-seeking or disvalue-avoidance), and scalarity (it varies in scope, intensity, and duration).

According to *aesthetic communitarianism*, when we ask whether or claim that something has aesthetic value we are asking whether or claiming that it is worthy of aesthetic valuing. This is ambiguous. Is it worth *one's own* aesthetic valuing, or is it worthy of aesthetic valuing *at all*? Consider an analogy: when we ask whether something is food, we might be wondering whether it is something we ourselves would eat or whether it is food *at all*, i.e. a food item in some foodway or culinary practice, something worthy of some eating practice or other. Just as something can be food but not a valuable part of one's own foodways, so something can have aesthetic value—can be worthy of aesthetic valuing—even though it is not a worthy part of one's own aesthetic valuing practices.<sup>18</sup> What makes something aesthetically valuable in general is whether valuing it can source individuality, aesthetic freedom, and aesthetic community. What makes something aesthetically valuable *given one's own aesthetic valuing practices*, is whether *one's own* valuing of it can source individuality, aesthetic freedom, and aesthetic community. These are different questions. At the individual level, the real engines of one's aesthetic life will be the things that are more central to one's individuality, a trusty source of aesthetic freedom, or an anchor of aesthetic community.

In theory, there is an array of goods that could play the valuing-practice-orienting role played here by individuality, freedom, and community, and different communitarian theories can center their goods in different ways. But any such theory faces the specter of arbitrariness. Why *these* things rather than some others? The answer here is that these are *connected* and *historically significant* goods of the practice of aesthetic valuing. Individuality and freedom are the essential ingredients of aesthetic community, which is the highest organizing good of aesthetic life. Aesthetic life would be

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<sup>18</sup> I spell out the many details of the analogy between food and aesthetic value in *Aesthetic Life and Why It Matters*. See Lopes, Nanay, and Riggle (forthcoming).

unrecognizable if everyone only cared about dancing and dining alone, absent aesthetic community. And these goods are historically unified and anchored in the ur-aesthetic phenomenon, *beauty*. When construed in this way, we can recognize the practice of aesthetic valuing as the sole descendant of an older formative practice, the practice of *beauty* valuing. Beauty is the original home of aesthetic freedom, individuality, and community, the central elements that inform some of the earliest and most influential theories of beauty.<sup>19</sup> We have since found sources of individuality, freedom, and community in many other things, and so the practice of beauty valuing has been enriched and expanded to the practice of aesthetic valuing.

When we understand aesthetic value in this way we are able to answer the primitive questions that motivate this kind of theory in the first place. So why does aesthetic value seem, the world over, to be a force for community without which we would be far less bonded, harmonious, human? What is aesthetic value such that it cultivates and sustains this good? The communitarian answers: aesthetic value is what is worthy of aesthetic valuing, which is a practice teleologically oriented toward aesthetic community, which requires aesthetically free individuals to cultivate their sensibilities and express themselves in free, open, expressive exchange. Why are good dinner parties or cookouts so beautiful? Why do we want them in our lives? What is so aesthetically good about playing in a band, dancing together, or developing a style in dress and décor? There are pleasures and achievements in there for sure, but fundamentally, they are all

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<sup>19</sup> Kant himself, though often associated with hedonism and certainly an influence on individualist tendencies in aesthetics, puts a premium on freedom and community in the theory of beauty (see Lopes 2021 and Matherne 2019). Kant emphasizes individuality far less (see Nehamas 2007 for discussion). Kant's contemporary, Friedrich Schiller, criticized his lack of emphasis on individuality and built an alternative theory of beauty that centers it along with aesthetic freedom and community. See Matherne & Riggle (2020, 2021) for discussion of Schiller's communitarianism. One might read Tolstoy's view in *What is Art?* as kind of moral-aesthetic communitarianism, where art's value consists in its capacity to promote mutual understanding through the communication of emotion.

so good at opening us up to each other and to ourselves, at facilitating the free expression and cultivation of individuality in a way that promotes aesthetic community.

In this way we can ask about the aesthetic value of general aesthetic practices and explain why some are better than others in our aesthetic lives: What is the aesthetic value of style? Of street art? Of music? Why does literature have aesthetic value? The communitarian has a straightforward answer: They define us, set us free, bring us together. Their aesthetic value consists in their being profound sources of individual expression, aesthetic freedom, and aesthetic community. And we can compare the aesthetic value of e.g. literature to that of fashion, gardening, or tennis in an attempt to enrich or improve our aesthetic lives without relying on our 'derived aesthetic reasons'—rationalist individualism about aesthetic life falls away.<sup>20</sup> The network theory, with its live and let live policy, struggles when asking about the aesthetic value of practices themselves: literature in general sources no aesthetic reasons for action—only particular works do and only for those who are engaged in literary practice. The aesthetic hedonist can compare aesthetic practices as sources of pleasure, but what can they say about the general aesthetic value of literature or fashion? Their being sources of pleasure is not an informative answer; it generates little insight into the distinctive aesthetic value of these practices.

Communitarianism needs to be further developed and explored—there is much to challenge here and to discuss. For one thing, it effects a dramatic shift in our thinking about the locus of aesthetic value. Traditionally, the locus of aesthetic value is the aesthetic object, its primary or focal source, the proudest bearer of aesthetic properties—

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<sup>20</sup> One of the communitarian's tasks will be to develop communitarian accounts of various aesthetic practices. For a communitarian account of the aesthetic practice of listening to music, see Polite 2019, who argues persuasively against Zangwill's 2012 individualistic account.

the painting, the cocktail, the musical work, the outfit. This ‘object orientation’ is shared by every other theory of aesthetic value and is even leveraged against views that seem not to fully respect it.<sup>21</sup> But the communitarian thinks of the object orientation as individualism’s original sin. If the communitarian is right, then we must absolve ourselves of guilt by abandoning its source. The communitarian emphasizes the social values of aesthetic engagement and the ways in which aesthetic objects facilitate that engagement. The value lies in the communal engagement. Aesthetic objects are therefore secondary to and in service of these higher goods. In some cases, one aesthetic object will be as good as another in sourcing aesthetic value, i.e. as useful in, or worthy of, the practice of aesthetic valuing (perhaps sneakers, pop songs, fall colors, or creamy sauces fit the bill); other aesthetic objects will be unique in their ability to source the communitarian aesthetic goods. They might be especially potent or reliable sources of aesthetic community, special engines of aesthetic freedom, or unprecedented ways of expressing individuality. Whether this is a flaw or a feature of the view requires further discussion.<sup>22</sup>

I have motivated, defined, and offered a minimal defense of *aesthetic communitarianism*. But this amounts to a sketch of one version of the view. There are many more details to develop and alternatives to explore. But my goal here is not to present and defend a detailed theory. I hope, instead, to have opened a path to such work by making explicit an overlooked alternative to the individualist tendency in aesthetics. There are certain primitive questions that arise in aesthetic life, and productive ways of

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<sup>21</sup> The ‘instrumental’ or ‘fungibility’ objection to aesthetic empiricism charges the view with making the aesthetic object instrumental to experience or easily replaceable with anything else that can produce a similar experience. Aesthetic empiricists try to avoid the objection by recommitting to the object orientation and making the aesthetic object essential to the experience of it (e.g. Stang 2012). For discussion of the objection and assessment of various responses to it see Shelley 2010, Shelley and Watkins 2012, and Van der Berg 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Thanks to the anonymous referee who encouraged me to make this point explicit.

developing philosophical answers to those questions, that elude the individualist but that may better capture why we, even as individuals, should care about the aesthetic in the first place. In making this orientation more explicit, we can start to move more definitively toward a communitarian theory of aesthetic value.<sup>23</sup>

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