

Experientialism claims truth must be experienced. Experientialists would state their view something like this. Experience is the consciousness or awareness that individuals have. So there is nothing bigger than experience. Everything we know, we know by experience. Even reasoning is an intellectual experience. Since everything involves a consciousness or awareness by someone about someone or something, experience is the only all-inclusive test for truth. One's consciousness of something is more basic than one's concept about it. For example, if we had no consciousness of God, we could have no valid concepts about God. Experience is the stuff out of which all truth must be built. There are no meaningful expressions except those rooted in experience. For example, in Christianity we sing of Jesus Christ, "You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart."

Experientialism says God is actually indescribable. Words cannot capture religious consciousness. God can be felt, i.e., experienced, but not expressed. Limited words cannot express ultimate truth. Ultimate truth can only be experienced, not expressed.

Problems with Experientialism

Experience is neither true nor false. Experiences are not self-interpreting. They do not come with meaning labels on them. They are neutral and may be interpreted in a variety of ways. They are stuff, not structure. Meaning must be brought to the experiences, and experiences are capable of different interpretations. For example, consider the conversion experience. A Christian sees it as the work of the Holy Spirit of God on the heart of the person to bring him or her to a realization of sin and need for salvation. However, a naturalistic psychologist recently described the conversion experience as that which comes when the human mind is dedicated to something. He said that as we make a conscious case for our belief, our subconscious stores up the opposite case. When the conscious faith fails, the opposite one leaps from our subconscious, and we are "converted." So, you see, the truth of Christianity cannot be based on the experience of conversion to it but whether it is a true thing to be converted to.

It is a categorical mistake to speak of a "true experience." It's like talking about the taste of blue. Truth and experience are in different categories.

Truth is: True or false What we express A proposition by someone An affirmation	Experience is: Neither true or false What we have A condition of someone An awareness
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An experience cannot be used to prove the truth of that experience. That's circular reasoning and begs the question. You cannot use the thing you wish to prove as the basis of your proof. As to the argument that everything (including reasoning) is an experience, this is unhelpful in testing truth. If one simply calls everything an experience, then the word "experience" has no meaning at all. It's like adding "x" to everything. To say, "**My experience** of reason leads to **my experience** of God," is the same as saying, "Reason leads to God." But that's rationalism, not experientialism.

It is self-defeating for experientialists to speak of an experience (such as experiencing God) as being indescribable. If we speak beyond our ability to express, we are only stuttering. If an experientialist expresses an inexpressible experience, he has made no expression at all. For example, any statement that says, "No logical statement can be made about God," is self-defeating since the statement itself claims to be a logical statement about God.

Therefore: **Experientialism is either meaningless, circular, or self-defeating.**