Authenticity and the Limits of Philosophy

LAUREN BIALYSTOK *University of Toronto*

ABSTRACT: Almost everyone has had an intuitive experience of authenticity that seems to reveal a glimmer of one's true identity. Yet by positing the existence of a 'true self,' authenticity introduces metaphysical challenges that resist systematic solutions. I argue that authenticity properly analyzed demands an essentialist structure that strains to be applied to personal identity. I then assess the three most influential types of accounts in modern philosophical discussions against this framework: Romanticism and autonomy; late existentialism; and virtue conceptions of authenticity. This analysis casts doubt on the possibility of generating a complete philosophical account of authenticity.

RÉSUMÉ : À peu près tout le monde a déjà fait l'expérience intuitive de l'authenticité, d'un moment qui semble révéler une lueur de sa véritable identité. Pourtant, en posant l'existence d'un «vrai moi», l'idée d'authenticité pose des défis métaphysiques qui mettent en lumière les complexités de l'individualité. J'avance que pour être bien examinée, l'authenticité exige une structure essentialiste qui tend à s'appliquer à l'identité personnelle. J'examine ensuite les trois types d'approches les plus influents dans les discussions philosophiques modernes contre cette position : le romantisme et ses héritiers contemporains, l'existentialisme tardif et les conceptions de la vertu. Cette analyse met en doute la possibilité de générer une conception philosophique complète de l'authenticité.

In the modern Western imagination, to be human is not to follow a formula of human-ness, nor to plod through life as an undifferentiated member of the species; rather, to lead a human life—at least a fulfilling one—is usually thought to require honouring what it means to be human for *me*, as a once-occurring person. This injunction to 'be oneself,' more exigent than the ancient dictate, 'know thyself,' can be summarized as the summons to authenticity.

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The idea of authenticity has a long history in the Western philosophical canon, in addition to popular culture.[1] We are enamoured of all things authentic, and especially of the elusive 'authentic self,' which countless self-help books and daytime talk shows have been developed to help us locate. As philosopher, Charles Guignon, explains (with a nod to the Oprah-influenced authenticity culture), "[t]his real, inner self contains the constellation of feelings, needs, desires, capacities, aptitudes, disposition, and creative abilities that make the person a unique individual".[2] This sounds plausible, in principle, but when it comes to actually distinguishing what makes us who we are from all the extraneous bits, it turns out the self is much less solid than such a definition implies. In this article, I will argue that a philosophical account of how to identify the true self is nearly impossible to get off the ground. I will use as evidence the three broad types of accounts of authenticity in the philosophical literature and show why they all skirt the demand of identifying a 'true self.' But before I get to those accounts, it will be helpful to develop two cases of common experiences in which authenticity is at issue.

I believe most people have had the experience of what I call intuitive authenticity, where, upon doing something or being somewhere or having a revelation about oneself, one has the insuperable sense of homecoming that prompts one to say, '*This* is *me*.' Many philosophers describe their first encounter with philosophy this way. Call this the easy case. At the same time, I believe most people have had the somewhat confusing experience of discovering that something they had previously considered quite indispensable to their character or identity has undergone a change. Call this the hard case. I will develop a stronger version of this situation for clarity.

Imagine that I have strongly held a particular set of convictions for my adult life until now. Not only do I adhere to these beliefs, but in more than one sense they define me: they motivate my life's work, they influence what I see in other people, and they structure my other commitments. Now imagine, as I believe it is plausible to do, that I have a series of experiences that slowly start chipping away at these convictions. Perhaps world events, or conversations with new people, or an unexpected opportunity cause me to view things in a new light and gradually reform my sense of self as a person who was irreplaceably marked by my earlier convictions. Ultimately I am as convinced of, and identified with, the new beliefs as I was with the old. I write the newsletter for people with my new beliefs. Actual examples of such transformations might include religious conversions, political party-hopping, or career changes—but if these examples fail to resonate, more emotional ones, such as divorce or changes in personality, might suffice (substitute 'feelings' or some synonym for 'convictions' in the above description).

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[1] See Trilling (1979); Taylor (1989); Taylor (1991); Seigel (2005); Guignon (2004); Potter (2010).

[2] Guignon (2004), 6.

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This situation clearly puts authenticity in an awkward position. If I was authentic before and inauthentic after, some criterion would have to be supplied to explain why one set of strongly held convictions is expressive of my true self and another set is not, as well as what the transition was all about. If I was inauthentic before and authentic after, a similar account would be required. If both sets of convictions were authentic, it would be very hard to account for the change between them or to justify my assessment that the new set is superior to the old. In fact, if I am authentic whatever I think, then inauthenticity seems impossible and authenticity seems moot. If I was authentic neither before nor after the conversion, then authenticity would seem to be moot as well—for if my strongest and longest-standing convictions don't reveal who I am, what does?

The hardest thing about the hard case, then, is that it shows us we can't trust the easy case. Regardless of what we take to be the content of the 'true self,' we can never know that it is the kind of thing that defines us essentially. The demand to identify a true self, combined with the impossibility of conclusively doing so, spells trouble for all accounts of authenticity.

In the first section of this paper, I offer my own analysis of the concept of authenticity that provides a kind of benchmark for the accounts found in the philosophical literature. In the subsequent sections, I use this analysis to explain the deficiencies in the Romantic, existentialist, and virtue accounts, as well as the autonomy accounts that are a subspecies of the first type. I conclude with a reflection on the status of intuitive authenticity and the limits of philosophy in this domain.

My purpose in this paper is not to offer a novel *account* of authenticity, but to provide a solid *conception* of authenticity that allows us to expose the problems with the main accounts on offer by comparing them with an (admittedly idealized) version of what authenticity promises. The Romantic or essentialist version comes closest to meeting this promise, but remains implausible precisely for its foundationalist approach to identity. These conclusions should make us skeptical about the prospect of a fully satisfying account of authenticity, however convincing individual instances of intuitive authenticity remain.

The Good Turtle Soup or Merely the Mock?

Authenticity has appeared in modern Western philosophy in two main guises: the Romantic version, associated with Rousseau, and the existentialist version, associated with Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre, among others. Following the rise of existentialism and especially the critiques of Heidegger, authenticity lay mostly dormant for several decades. Yet there has been something of a surge in the analysis of authenticity in recent years—or, as it sometimes appears under different labels, wholeheartedness[3], truthfulness[4] or integrity[5]—which

[3] Frankfurt (1988).

[4] Williams (2002).

[5] Cottingham (2010).

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provides a good impetus for reconsidering the concept. These accounts are typically concerned with delineating what Charles Guignon categorizes as a "virtue" or "character ideal"[6] conception of authenticity. On this conception, perhaps most importantly articulated by Charles Taylor, authenticity consists in the virtuous pursuit of self-actualization through commitment to shared causes.[7] Hence what appears at first blush to be a self-regarding, even solipsistic, endeavour becomes enmeshed with other-regarding virtues such as civility and sincerity[8] and, in Taylor's case, "horizons of significance"—common moral endeavours that transcend subjective valuation.[9]

Guignon contrasts this general type of account with what he calls the "ordinary" use of authenticity[10], roughly cognate with the Romantic conception, and the existentialist one.[11] His taxonomy glosses over distinctions that I will later unearth, but this tripartite categorization provides a good starting point for analysis. Guignon clearly favours the virtue/character approach to authenticity, noting its instrumental value:

> To be authentic is to be clear about one's own most basic feelings, desires and convictions, and to openly express one's stance in the public arena. But that capacity is precisely the character trait that is needed in order to be an effective member of a democratic society. And if this is the case, then it would seem that a democratic society should be committed to promoting and cultivating authentic individuals.[12]

The thought that authenticity might be a prerequisite for democracy, or that individual authenticity is bound up more broadly with questions of social justice, would shock earlier proponents of authenticity such as Rousseau, who viewed authenticity precisely as the state of being unpolluted by social requirements and the values of others. What ought we to do with such apparently irreconcilable interpretations of the same concept? Are they even referring to the same idea? To make matters more complicated, authenticity can be applied

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6 Guignon (2008). 277-278.

7 See Taylor (1991).

8 Varga (2012); Cottingham (2010); Guignon (2008); Williams (2002).

9 Taylor (1991).

10 Guignon (2008), 277.

11 Honneth (2008) calls these approaches "detectivism" and "constructivism" respectively. Varga (2012), following Honneth, calls these the "inner sense" model and the "productionist model", citing Rousseau as the foremost exemplar of the first and Nietzsche of the second. It should be noted that there is more than one version of the existentialist/productionist model, as I will discuss below.

12 Guignon (2008), 288.

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to all sorts of inanimate things, such as objects, institutions, and actions, in each case towing along a set of assumptions about identity and value. Is there any 'authentic' meaning of authenticity?

I will argue that there is. The uses of authenticity outside of personal identity[13] actually provide the clearest clue to what is required for personal authenticity. I distinguish between three uses of the term 'authentic,' but as I shall argue, the fundamental sense remains unaltered in each application, casting suspicion on the stark divisions between philosophical accounts. This appeal to plain language is not intended to supplant a philosophical analysis of the term, but to bolster it; philosophical accounts of authenticity, especially the existentialist ones, have liberally re-imagined authenticity in such a way that assessments of personal authenticity become divorced from familiar features of our world and speech practices. Returning to the three basic senses of authenticity can help ground theoretical discussions by reminding us of the ordinary use of authenticity. As we shall see, the first two senses apply mostly to inanimate objects, but they are still instructive about the meaning of personal authenticity.

In the first sense, 'authentic' is used as a synonym for 'original,' as in being continuous with a historical entity. The fifties-style diner down the street is authentic in this sense if it actually opened in the 1950s and was typical of the era, but continued to exist in a more or less unchanged form to the present day. It is to be distinguished from a diner that was built in 1990 and decorated to look like a fifties diner in an attempt to conjure up images of the authentic one. Entities in this category, in other words, must have the proper kind of history, and it is only with the passage of time that their authenticity comes to matter. No one, upon beholding a restaurant opened in 2013, would ask if it were an 'authentic' 2013 restaurant.

This sense is not usually applied to persons. If a person can be authentic in the sense of 'original,' the authentic behaviour could be thought to converge with some fact about the person's origin or original state. By 'original' I refer to the above definition, i.e., historically original. I do not mean 'unique,' 'one of a kind,' or 'creative,' although these attributes certainly appear to have something in common with authenticity. If authenticity is the same as historical originality, I might be acting authentically if my behaviour is consistent with how I used to behave, or how I behaved at a time when I knew that I was behaving authentically (although this invites a regress). This definition is

[13] Throughout this paper I will use 'personal identity' in a particular sense. I am not referring to what makes one person the same metaphysical entity over time—a topic familiar from Locke, Shoemaker, Parfit, and others—but rather what makes a single person, ordinarily understood, *who* she is. The identity in question is about selfhood, not metaphysical continuity. The latter is a presumed condition of the former (see also note 18, below).

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problematic because, first, it leaves open the important question of what counts as 'original,' and, second, it destroys the intuition that authenticity is an evolved or mature state of being. We tend to frown upon behaviour that reverts to patterns from an earlier stage of development, whereas we tend to laud behaviour that appears to be 'authentic.'

On a slightly more metaphorical understanding of 'origin,' we could interpret the authentic individual on this view as retrieving some primordial or deterministic aspect of her self, which may only come to fruition late in life but existed as a seed from birth (or earlier). This is close to the conception of authenticity implied in fictitious sagas where a character is 'destined,' because of bloodline, prophecy, or divine intervention, to fulfill a certain identity. It also hints at the Protestant Reformation notion of having a vocation, i.e., a 'calling' or a specific purpose in life. Being authentic in this sense could imply following a journey toward the identity that was determined for you, without precluding inauthentic or inconsistent behaviour along the way. This is plausible only if we are prepared to accept destiny as having an effect on personal identity. Like most contemporary philosophers, I would rather not defend such assumptions.

In the second sense, 'authentic' is used as a synonym for 'real,' as opposed to 'fake.' When we refer to things this way, we also imply that they emanate from the source they claim to emanate from, although they need not be numerically the same as a historical entity. Ethnic cuisine, semi-precious stones, and commercial goods are authentic in this sense.[14] Chinese food is authentic if the recipe and the ingredients are actually used in China. Pearls are authentic if they come from oysters. In each of these cases, it is easy to think of inauthentic replicas: American-Chinese food, glass pearls, and imitation Van Goghs. What separates these 'fakes' from their authentic counterparts is their source or their content, not their date of origin. When Cole Porter asks, "Is it the good turtle soup or is it merely the mock?" he is asking if the turtle soup is made of turtle, or if it is made of some cheap alternative. Authentic in this sense is cognate with 'genuine,'

[14] I have been asked whether works of art fit into this category. Is a Van Gogh painting authentic because of its historical vintage (as in the first sense), or because it has the proper source, the hand of Vincent Van Gogh? The two requirements coincide in the case of art work. Like the pearl, the art must come from the source it claims to come from (an oyster/the attributed artist) and would not have the same value if it had come from a difference source, such as an unknown nineteenth century painter, even if it were still 130 years old. Like the diner, however, the artwork must be numerically continuous with a historical entity—and because Van Gogh died over a century ago, there is no way for new authentic Van Goghs to be created in the image of the older ones. Hence, like the diner, the art work must date from the correct period.

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'the real thing,' 'the real McCoy,' and so on. The inauthentic things in this category are usually dismissed as shams, unauthorized copies, or junk. They are accordingly valued much less. Knock-offs of Louis Vuitton handbags can be purchased on Canal St. in New York for twenty dollars; an authentic Vuitton can run in the thousands of dollars.[15]

Authenticity in this sense of the word is difficult to square with our usual intuitions about personal identity. The only way to make sense of the self as 'real' in the way pearls can be real is to assume the existence or at least the possibility of a numerically distinct 'fake' self, like an impostor posing as the real me. This brings to mind cloning or twin-Earth scenarios in which there is more than one person with exactly my DNA (and perhaps memories, desires, etc. as well).[16] In order for authenticity to apply to these examples, one of the clones or worlds must be 'real' in a way that the other is not.[17] If authenticity is applied to personal identity in this way, the problems are two-fold: first, the authenticity and inauthenticity do not reside in the same individual, but rather require multiple instantiations to be borne out; and second, although putatively identical, there must be some feature by which one of these instantiations can be said to be 'authentic' as compared to the other(s), (maybe because, as in the previous definition, it was there first), which creates an explanatory circle. This conception of authenticity does not

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15 There are exceptions to the general equation of truth-telling and value in this category. Some inauthentic things are conspicuously inauthentic and make no attempt to pass themselves off as the real thing. Impossibly large fake pearls are an example. Manufacturing pearl look-alikes that are larger than real pearls could ever be and making them in such a way as to draw attention to the plastic moulding that verifies their fakeness is evidently not an instance of the inauthentic aspiring to authenticity. Genuine fakes do not 'lie' about what they really are. Nonetheless, their own truthfulness only becomes meaningful in virtue of their ironic relation to real pearls. The authentic things set the standard by which genuine fakes achieve their own status as real things of a different kind.

16 See, for example, Parfit (1984, 200-218).

17 Reality is invoked in discussions of personal identity, but not in the way I applied to pearls and turtle soup. We sometimes talk about 'the real me,' referring not to a discrete being but to certain preferences or behaviours that are supposedly more characteristic than others. For instance, a reformed criminal might acknowledge that he used to be a thief, but now insist of his new profession that 'this is the real me.' Ontologically this is quite different from saying that one Van Gogh is a fake and another is real. The 'me' in the latter scenario is not a separate person but a stage of life, which would need to be adjudicated for its authenticity by some further criterion, just like in the hard case.

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look promising if we wish to describe numerically unique individuals as being authentic or inauthentic.[18]

In the third general usage, and the one most obviously associated with personal identity, 'authentic' means 'honest,' 'true to oneself' or 'genuine.' As in the other two uses of the word, 'authentic' here implies a convergence between what something is and what it claims it is. Notice that the original diner is authentic because it is continuous with the diner that was built in the 1950s. And the turtle soup is authentic because it converges with what it claims to be—soup made from turtle meat. When we say that someone is authentic, we mean that her behaviour converges with who she actually is; she does not 'pretend to be someone she's not.'

This sense is closest to the one intended by most philosophical treatments of authenticity, as well as non-academic discourse. Being authentic is generally understood as saying what I really mean, doing what I really believe, or simply 'being myself,' that is, acting in accordance with something fundamental and unique about myself. This is entirely consistent with the cardinal truth-telling function of authentic things. But, then, what is the truth about myself? Whatever it is, it cannot be discovered under a microscope or in a historical archive. Moreover, if being authentic means being true to myself, then being inauthentic must mean missing the truth about myself. But this sounds counter-intuitive. As Berman notes, "[t]here is something strange about [the concern with authenticity]. It seems to violate the most basic principle in logic, the law of identity, that A is A. After all, isn't everyone himself already? How can he help being himself? Who or what else could he be? To pursue authenticity as an ideal, as something that must be achieved, is to be self-consciously paradoxical".[19]

I am not suggesting that personal authenticity is entirely analogous to the authenticity of inanimate things—a point upon which I shall later elaborate—but I have presented them together in order to extrapolate common features that might be indicative of the category as a whole. I contend that although we use 'authentic' to refer to a variety of things, the underlying judgment in each application is the same: the authentic thing is truthful or faithful in a way that an inauthentic thing is not. Authentic things and people are what they claim to be. Depending on the type of thing in question, 'authentic' may be replaced by

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[18] Certainly, it is important to have an account of what makes numerically unique individuals the same over time—something like Locke's relational criterion, for example. But this is the backdrop against which questions of authenticity can be posed at all: what makes a person, as defined by someone with continuous memories, either authentic or inauthentic? Authenticity cannot be simply the fact of having continuous memories, or else very few among us would ever count as inauthentic, and even then it would not be a situation under our control.

[19] Berman (1970), xix.

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different words—'real,' 'original,' 'sincere,' and so on—but because they are held together by this crucial property of truthfulness, there is a strong argument for thinking of authentic things as a category, and all of the replacement words as incomplete synonyms.

From the preceding definitions, some of the characteristics of authenticity have already come to the fore. We have seen that in every intuitive application of the concept of authenticity, there are multiple entities at stake. I designate them as follows: first, the thing that is said to be authentic (a pearl, a painting, an action, a diner, or a person); second, the thing with which the first one converges (such as the diner built in 1950, or the stone found in an oyster); and third, the thing or things which are excluded by the first two, i.e., whatever counts as 'inauthentic.' Authenticity, in short, arises from the convergence between the first and the second entities to the exclusion of the third. I take it as indisputable that, in order for anything to be authentic, there must be some conceivable way in which it could have been inauthentic—hence the third category. If there were no such thing as fake pearls, we wouldn't bother to distinguish the authentic ones. Only to those things that can be somehow inauthentic can the descriptor of authenticity even hypothetically apply. Not everything—indeed, probably very few things—have the ability to be designated as authentic.

Is a person one of those things?[20]

In order for personal authenticity to conform to this account, there must be an independent truth about a person, a truth that is reflected when she is being authentic, and hidden when she is being inauthentic.[21] These are hefty

[20] A conscientious philosopher must acknowledge the thorny question of what constitutes a 'person' before she can attribute any adjectives to it. In defending a definition of personhood, however, one has already made some claim about authenticity—what it is to be a 'real' person—and this circularity threatens to derail the question of authenticity itself. I am not interested here in opening the philosophical debates about personhood, but rather in what makes a person in the ordinary sense authentic or not.

[21] I am using 'truth' language here in a deliberately elastic way. The 'truth' about a person could be interpreted in multiple ways, and indeed part of what makes the authenticity literature difficult to navigate is the variability in the candidates for such a truth—fleeting feelings, enduring beliefs, character or temperament, native abilities, deliberation processes, and other facets of identity have all been invoked in the name of authenticity. What is critical from a conceptual perspective is that there is a least some aspect of personal identity that has greater purchase than the others. More accurately, for whatever aspect of personal identity is used, e.g., feelings, there must be a distinction between the feelings that are truer of me and those that are less so. Throughout this paper, I may use 'true' interchangeably with 'real' or 'essential.'

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requirements. In the first place, they assume that there are different ways (at least two) of being a given individual, and that one is truer than the other. In the second place, they demand a great deal of information about both facets of the individual, lest the whole conception of authenticity collapse because it cannot be distinguished from its counterpart. (Consider the hard case again: what is it about one or the other version of myself that makes it authentic compared with the alternative?) While it is possible (at least in principle) to verify the authenticity of a diner or a pearl—that is to say, we know precisely which facts would settle the matter—there are no empirical facts that could objectively attest to a person's 'true' self. And because there are no objective standards by which to assess an individual's authenticity, it will always come down to a certain degree of self-interpretation.

This is where the distinction between authentic persons and authentic things comes into sharpest focus. An authentic pearl portrays itself accurately to others, and a fake pearl 'lies' (metaphorically) to others; but in no way can any pearl have a truthful or deceitful relationship to itself. Personal authenticity, by contrast, hinges on the truthfulness of the relationship of the authentic or inauthentic entity to *itself*, and hence involves an epistemological as well as a metaphysical mystery.

We also use authenticity to refer to the way a person relates to others—i.e., sincerely or insincerely—but this phenomenon is easily interpreted. Authenticity understood as sincerity toward others contrasts with lying, posing, or pretending. The expected convergence here is between what one *says* she wants, believes, etc., and what she *actually* wants, believes, etc. I'm authentic if I'm not pretending to be turtle soup; I actually *am* turtle soup. There is certainly debate to be had over which facts about oneself must be correctly portrayed on this account, as well as how to judge the correctness of the portrayal, but no matter the ruling on these technicalities, the existence of something resembling facts about myself that can be conveyed to others is relatively non-contentious. People have desires and beliefs, and they may act in ways that either inform or betray others as to their content. Consider Moliere's villain Tartuffe, who insinuates himself into the bosom of a wealthy family on the pretext that he is a priest. Tartuffe is clearly insincere, and we might be inclined to call him inauthentic, but this conflation misses the point. The question for authenticity is not whether Tartuffe is an authentic priest—there is no question that he is not—but whether Tartuffe is an authentic *impostor*. His insincerity only extends to his alleged vocation, not necessarily to his internal constitution. The crucial point about sincerity is that only another person may be deceived or ignorant about the relevant facts in this sense.

This is not so in the case of authentic self-relation. What is striking about the problem of authenticity in personal identity is the supposition that, contrary to intuition, I might *not* live up to constitutive facts about myself. I might *not* know what I desire, what I believe, or who I am, and I therefore risk betraying

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or cheating myself unless I discover and embody these things.[22] The entity with which the authentic behaviour here is supposed to converge is not outside the self, nor is it fixed in the past or locked away in an art gallery. Rather, if the truth about myself exists, it is somewhere *within* the very current self in question. Thus the three entities I designated earlier, which can all be teased apart in the case of authentic or inauthentic artifacts, inhere in the case of personal identity within the very same individual. The designator 'I' has taken on triple duty, being the sole referent for a multitude of entities. Just as authenticity proved to be divisive in the case of inanimate things, personal authenticity necessitates a divided self. Such a self is usually imagined in archaeological terms, where the inauthentic part corresponds to superficial external layers, and the authentic essence of the self is buried 'deep' below them,[23] or in hierarchical terms, where the true self rules over the lower parts. This 'truth' may be interpreted in any number of ways, but even if such an essentialist construction of the self is plausible, it introduces a central metaphysical difficulty: if the truth about me is couched within one apparently unified self, how can I ever be *not me*, or even *less me*? How is inauthenticity possible? Moreover, until we know who the authentic self is, why assume it is preferable to be authentic?

A robust account of personal authenticity must provide a way of answering these gnawing questions. The most straightforward definition of authenticity is a convergence between a person's essence and her behaviour, to the exclusion of those properties that are non-essential (specifically, those that are inconsistent with or opposed to the essential ones); a convincing account would have to provide a way of making these distinctions. If this seems like an overly simplistic and implausible account of selfhood, it probably is. I am not defending the essentialist account of identity as such but merely arguing that it is what authenticity requires on the most logical definition. This premise renders the possibility of personal authenticity doubtful *a priori*. In the next three sections I will assess the most influential moments in modern philosophical discussions of authenticity in order to show how they miss the requirements of a complete account.

Romanticism, Autonomy and Wholeheartedness

The Romantic conception of authenticity is a promising version of the kind of essentialism we are looking for. Several features of the literature and thought

[22] Of course one could 'know' such things and still fail to act on them—arguably this would be a paradigm case of inauthenticity. Interpreted ethically, then, inauthenticity resembles akrasia. However, akrasia is not exactly the correct term to describe this situation since it assumes that the known course of action is *de facto* morally superior. There is no reason to believe that authentic behaviour (whatever it turns out to be) is necessarily virtuous.

[23] Hence some philosophers of identity have talked about a "deep" self. See Haji (1997, 262-263).

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of this period reveal its essentialist leanings: the division between inner and outer, self and other; the implied opposition between nature and culture, usually grafted onto the dichotomy of authenticity and inauthenticity; and phrases such as the 'inner voice' that best expresses one's true feelings.[24] The purity of the inner self, the authenticity of nature and emotion, and the corruptive power of society were themes repeatedly intoned by Romantic poets and thinkers such as Hölderlin, Schelling, Novalis, and Goethe. These accounts seem to replicate the structure of authenticity according to which the self has an immutable core that can be identified and liberated through appropriate channels such as art, nature, or poetry. It was indeed through various artistic forms that many Romantics chose to express their philosophy of selfhood, as Herder's poetry illustrates.[25]

Rousseau's *Confessions* was a watershed moment in this tradition and provides a good test case for an essentialist account of authenticity. Unlike Montaigne, whose conception of the self "was separated only very loosely from the world around it," Rousseau distinguished sharply between an inner self that instantiated nature in some sense and the self developed through interactions with others and molded according to the preoccupations of society.[26] The latter he regarded as corrupt and corrupting. This dichotomy lends itself perfectly to the logic of authenticity, for the 'inner' self is clearly the one to which we should aspire to be true, as distinct from our 'inauthentic,' or social, selves. Indeed, Rousseau regarded the return to one's inner self as the key to happiness. In *Émile*, he wrote: "O man, draw your existence up within yourself, and you will no longer be miserable".[27] And in the *Lettres Morales* he claimed: "I think that the one who knows best of what the human self consists is the nearest to wisdom; and that just as the first outline of a drawing is made up of the lines which complete it, man's first idea is to *separate himself from all that is not himself*".[28]

Rousseau also built on previous conceptions of human nature by stressing a further divide that is integral to authenticity, that between my true self and all other individuals' true selves. At the beginning of his *Confessions*, Rousseau proudly proclaimed: "I am not made like anyone I've met; I dare say I am not made like anyone who exists. I may not be better, but at least I am

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24 In drawing out these general features I am not purporting to represent the Romantic movement on the whole. Nor does every Romantic necessarily share the views of all the others. Taylor is reluctant to generalize about Romanticism at all, choosing instead to focus on narrower trends of the period, such as naturalism and expressivism. See Taylor (1989, 355-392).

25 See, e.g., Herder (1957).

26 Berman (1970), 79.

27 Rousseau (1979), 83.

28 Rousseau (2006).

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different".[29] The ethical claim embedded in this view is not the same as the virtue conception of authenticity, according to which authenticity is more or less equivalent to committing myself to various intersubjectively authenticated goods. For Rousseau, there is value in adhering to an inner identity simply because it is mine. The project of being one's own self derives its normativity, not from the fact that we are all equally good people by objective standards, but rather from our obligation to be the once-occurring people that we are. As Taylor explains, for Rousseau, "our ultimate happiness is to live in conformity with this [inner] voice, that is, to be entirely ourselves".[30]

Rousseau thus set the stage for authenticity debates with a daringly individualist, essentialist, account of selfhood. But already here the presumed essentialism is nuanced. The core self is not conceived as a stagnant or enduring entity, as it is with the primitive authenticity of a pearl. It is, rather, a kind of creative project that unfolds throughout our lives. Insofar as authenticity is connected to feelings, for example, the true self is a moving target: feelings change from moment-to-moment, so that "at each moment [a feeling's] authority is absolute; it inaugurates the truth".[31] The true self is not uncovered once and for all, like a scientific discovery whose truth resonates indefinitely into the future. Guignon explains:

> On the conception of the self that we inherit from Rousseau, self-discovery is not a matter of *finding* an entity that has been there all along. It is a matter of *making* the self in the course of the search. What comes to light as authentic truth . . . is *the activity of self-fashioning or self-making itself.* We just *are* what we make of ourselves in the course of our quest for self-definition. The important thing is the creative act itself . . . [32]

Moreover, the process of becoming or making oneself is concomitant with the process of self-expression: whether through confession or other means, we do not keep our identities private, but make them manifest to others.[33]

This description is ironically reminiscent of Nietzsche, the very antithesis of an essentialist, who saw authenticity as the freely undertaken process of aesthetic self-creation and deliberate differentiation from others.[34] How is it that

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29 Rousseau (2000), I, 5.

30 Taylor (1989), 362.

31 Starobinski (1988), 180.

32 Guignon (2004), 69. Berman echoes this reading: "The process of confessing, for Rousseau, was a process of unmasking, of differentiating, of integrating, of *bringing his authentic self into being*" (1970, 86).

33 Taylor calls this perspective on selfhood, also new in the eighteenth century, "expressivism" (1989, 374).

34 The Nietzschean view is echoed by Foucault and Rorty, whose unique versions I lack the space to engage with in this paper.

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philosophers from opposite metaphysical poles could land upon such similar insights about personal identity?

What both Rousseau and Nietzsche realized is that, unlike all the other authentic things we have considered, an authentic self is constantly in the process of becoming itself, just as the hard case implies. Persons resist the simplistic essentialism of objects, so that when we speak about a person having an essence we cannot mean that her identity is ready-made and stagnant. Yet authenticity appeals precisely to the notion of an enduring identity.

The Romantic view of authenticity, then, does not entirely conform to the essentialist metaphysics we might expect from this tradition. Although it alludes to a core self that becomes corrupted and obfuscated throughout life, it stops short of describing the self as an object of knowledge waiting to be discovered; it is not a perfect instance of "self-reification," to borrow Honneth's term.[35] This seems right, yet it renders less plausible the corresponding account of authenticity. The need for an explanation of how to identify the true self becomes more pressing the more the lines between it and other selves are blurred. This type of account cannot explain what the authentic self consists in and how to distinguish it from its inauthentic counterpart—at least not in the kind of terms that might be satisfactory to contemporary philosophers. The best account of the means by which we access our true selves in the tradition of Rousseau and the Romantics is an 'inner voice.' What, exactly, does this mean? How does the 'voice' communicate with us? How do we know that what we are hearing is reflective of our true selves, and not some projection of our corrupted selves?[36] The 'inner voice' method of finding the true self quickly devolves into mysticism or uncorroborated intuition and fails to answer the challenging question about why some states are more true of me than others.

There is a modern strain of this quasi-essentialist view that eschews poetic Romanticism and instead provides more analytic tools for isolating the parts of oneself that are uncorrupted or authentic. Philosophers of autonomy often defer to the view that the self contains more and less authentic parts, only the former of which are fit for the task of self-rule. Indeed,

> what matters for the majority of autonomy theorists is not the quality of the ruling part but rather its authenticity: what is necessary for self-rule is that one's ruling part be, in some sense, more oneself than one's other parts. This way of thinking relies on the idea that a person is not to be identified equally with all parts of her mind: the idea that, while some of her attitudes are deeply expressive of who she is, others are

35 Honneth (2008).

36 Interestingly, very similar questions can be asked about Heidegger's "call of conscience," which serves a function that is largely analogous to the "inner voice." See *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1996, 256).

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> simply alien forces at work within her. Hence it is theoretically possible on this view to divide a person up into those parts of himself with which he is identified and those parts of himself from which he is alienated.[37]

The work of arriving at the correct definition of autonomy thus doubles as a search for the conditions of authenticity, according to many analytic philosophers. Gerald Dworkin, for instance, argues that autonomy is the independent rule of higher-order preferences over lower-order ones, since the former are evidence of an agent's identity[38].

The most widely cited account of autonomy as authenticity derives from Harry Frankfurt, for whom authenticity is a function not so much of practical deliberation but rather of wholeheartedness (which assumes a certain level of autonomy).[39] Rather than claiming that one order of desires is more authentic than another, Frankfurt argues that I am wholehearted when I identify with a set of desires that is consistent at every level and repudiate those desires that fall outside the set. If I not only want *x*, but also want to want *x ad infinitum* and want to be governed by that desire, then I identify with my will. Wholeheartedness is a statement of who I am.

What autonomy and wholeheartedness share with the Romantic or essentialist account is the conviction that there is an inner self, or at least practices of a self, that can be distinguished from less authentic variations. My 'inner voice' autonomous choices/wholehearted desires are 'truer' or more indicative of me as a unique person than other things I do and feel. The contemporary philosophers provide a more procedural approach to identifying the true self, in contrast to the spontaneous revelation of Rousseau. However, they are not immune to the challenge of the hard case. For by hypothesis, I could be wholehearted or autonomous both before and after my transition—or, if the transition reveals that I was not, in fact, wholehearted to begin with, then wholeheartedness lacks an epistemological basis.

On a deeper level, the argument that is missing from these accounts, if one indeed takes them as accounts of authenticity (which in fairness they do not entirely purport to be), is a justification for what makes states of autonomy or wholeheartedness *more me* than other states that I experience. Rather than question why we should expect the authentic person to be autonomous or wholehearted, "the deep self view of self-rule is taken simply as an

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37 Garnett (2013), 22.

38 Dworkin (1988).

39 It is not obvious that Frankfurt's account of wholeheartedness may be considered an account of authenticity, but many authenticity theorists, such as Guignon and Varga, count it as such. It is at the very least a theory of autonomy that simultaneously aims to make sense of personal identity, and hence illustrates the authenticity-like undertones of much autonomy discourse.

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uncontroversial starting point".[40] Autonomy is merely one process for locating feelings and beliefs. It cannot explain how, left to my own devices, some feelings and beliefs are more authentic for me to have than others. Autonomy-based approaches to authenticity assume that the kernel of my personal identity is illuminated by shutting out all external influences and conflicting signals, as though there is only one possible 'me' left at the end of the cleansing process. There are compelling reasons to doubt the possibility, much less desirability, of such extreme self-determination or single-mindedness.[41] Why should my authentic self be immune to the tangled interplay between myself and the impact of others around me, or to the vagaries of indecisiveness, akrasia, and confusion? These inescapable human phenomena are implicitly dismissed or denied in the formulation of authenticity that we find in this category. The twentieth century existentialists, by contrast, define authenticity in a way that encompasses all of human experience at the expense of individual identity, thereby moving even farther away from the implicit demands of authenticity.

Late Existentialism

If nineteenth century Romanticism came close to embodying the essentialism at the heart of authenticity, and the recent philosophers of autonomy added substance to it, the late existentialists departed unequivocally from both the structure and substance of authenticity. Heidegger and Sartre simultaneously eviscerate the assumption of a true self and champion authenticity as a way of life that best reflects the free and value-neutral basis of human existence. This results in a conception of authenticity that poses problems for their own existentialism and fails to make sense of common experience.

Heidegger discusses authenticity in *Being and Time* in the context of his analysis of Dasein, the way of being of human beings. Heidegger calls the examination of the being of Dasein "fundamental ontology," as opposed to the ontology of other beings.[42] This context alone condemns his account to a kind of incompleteness. Heidegger limits the scope of his analysis to the existential: he wants to analyze Dasein as such, not 'this or that being.' But authenticity seems to be precisely about 'this or that being,' and specifically what makes this or that being the one that it is.

If the study of being as such is *ontological,* the study of this or that being is what Heidegger calls *ontic.*[43] Without ontic analysis, there can be no discussion of selfhood—a concept that seems to arise from, and concern itself with, the fact of individuation among beings of a certain kind. For example, how can

40 Garnett (2013), 23.

41 Honneth (1995); Velleman (2006).

42 Heidegger (1996).

43 This is roughly the distinction between ontology (the study of Being) and metaphysics (the study of beings) according to Heidegger.

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I discern what is unique, important, essential, or true of myself while only discussing human being in general? In *Being and Time*, authenticity must be grasped without the expected help afforded by received ideas of the self or the specific factical choices it encounters.

Nonetheless, Heidegger finds that ontic questions about individual beings never entirely disappear. For unlike in the case of other beings, in the case of Dasein, the ontic and the ontological are intertwined in a peculiar way: "[t]he ontic distinction of Dasein lies in the fact that it *is* ontological".[44] On the one hand, beings "reveal" themselves (to use his terminology) *in their being*—not in their arbitrary individual characteristics, which are apt to lead phenomenologists astray. On the other hand, these "*existentiell*" qualities are the very avenue to understanding being more generally:

> the roots of the existential analysis, for their part, are ultimately *existentiell*—they are *ontic*. Only when the philosophical research and inquiry themselves are grasped in an *existentiell* way—as a possibility of being of each existing Dasein—does it become possible at all to disclose the existentiality of existence and therewith to get hold of a sufficiently grounded set of ontological problems.[45]

This circular give-and-take between individual beings and being in general is at its most visible in Heidegger's discussion of authenticity. Because of his focus on fundamental ontology, authenticity is described as a meta-possibility—a possibility not of individual beings but of a way of being (Dasein), which orients that type of being to its other possibilities. Rather than living up to what is essential to *me*, authenticity for Heidegger is about living up to what is essential to *Dasein*.

What characterizes human being in general, in addition to its concern for its own being, is its finitude: the knowledge of an endpoint[46] that reverberates through its life and conditions Dasein's response to its own possibilities. According to Heidegger, Dasein is authentic insofar as it faces up to its death and seizes its possibilities for itself.[47] Inauthenticity is Dasein's state of fleeing its "own-most possibilities" (*eigenste Möglichkeiten*) and taking refuge in the way of being of others (who, incidentally, are also Dasein).[48] So authenticity requires a kind of individual consultation with oneself, but the only bar against which

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44 Heidegger (1996), 10.

45 Heidegger (1996), 11.

46 Heidegger does not mean the exact moment of death as such, but rather "the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein" ("*die Möglichkeit der schlechthinnigen Daseinunmöglichkeit*") (1996: 232; 1927: 250).

47 "Dasein always understands itself in terms of…its possibility to be itself or not to be itself" (Heidegger 1996:10).

48 Heidegger (1996).

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to measure certain possibilities for their authenticity is one that is shared by all human beings.

Heidegger thus appeals to a notion of a true self but refuses to differentiate it, in ontic terms, from other potential selves. Dasein is exhorted to choose its own possibilities 'itself,' but the 'self' whence these options should derive, as well as the identity of the agent making the choice, have been left deliberately vacant. For Heidegger, the truth to which authentic human beings adhere is simply the ontological nature of human being, not particular facts about their individual identities. As Guignon explains, "Heidegger's conception of authenticity shares with the ordinary view the idea that there is an underlying 'origin' we can and should be true to—for Heidegger, this is the temporal structure of human existence in general".[49] It is the essentialist model extrapolated to all of human being.

Heidegger's existential orientation thus produces a peculiar version of authenticity, one that subverts the deep nagging questions about selfhood that I have argued are endemic to authenticity. To a certain extent he is essentialist about human being as such, but locating authenticity in the relationship between a person and her ontological identity does little to explain what authenticity means for her as a unique individual.

Sartre expands on Heidegger's existentialist account of human being, taking the anti-essentialism to even greater lengths. Whereas Heidegger discusses human being generically when he speaks of Dasein, Sartre refers to human being as being-for-itself, as distinct from being-in-itself. Being-for-itself is in the unique position of being a continual work in progress, unconfined by its past and radically free in its self-projection toward the future. This results in the seeming paradox that human being "is not what it is and is what it is not": we are perennially distanced from our selves by the nothingness that keeps our being incomplete. We transcend this nothingness by exercising our freedom, moment-to-moment, until our deaths, effectively creating ourselves through the record of our actions.[50] Much like Heidegger, Sartre explains authenticity as a measure of one's acceptance—in fact, willing—of this ontological situation. We must welcome the radical freedom that comes with our ontological constitution and resist cleaving to the simple way of being of objects (being-in-itself). To be authentic is to be unflinchingly human, not to be 'myself.' The common tendency to deny the reality of the human situation is what Sartre calls "bad faith," or inauthenticity.[51]

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49 Guignon (2004), 285.

50 This conception of self-creation is certainly an echo of, yet distinct from, the aestheticism of Nietzsche. Whereas the earlier existentialist encouraged "[giving] style to one's character"(1974: section 290), Sartre gives no instructions whatsoever, since the idea is to confront the angst-inducing condition of being radical free.

51 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (1984).

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As with Heidegger, too, Sartre's account suffers from a logical dependence on individual identity while trying to supersede any need for it. In order for me to not be what I am (and to be what I am not), there must yet be some fact about what (or who) I am—otherwise, why differentiate at all between what I am and what I am not? However, 'what I am' for Sartre is no more than my facticity, which is merely the sum of facts about myself until this point in time. This history provides an inadequate basis on which to create my future self. If I am to transcend what I am without simply re-creating myself in the same image, I need new motivation, new inspiration, or new values to act upon. Unlike in essentialist versions of selfhood, these sought-after guidelines are precisely not to be furnished by who I am. Authenticity in Sartre requires me instead to choose on the basis of what I am not: on the basis of my nothingness, or my not-yet. But what I am not is necessarily silent, waiting to become something through my free action. Nor are there external values or practical rules available to me for deliberation: the future me that I am condemned to create must issue forth only from some elusive, internal freedom, which, moreover, does not speak once and for all but must be accessed in every situation, in every moment. Hence Sartre acknowledges the "extreme difficulty of achieving authenticity".[52]

On a worldview in which there is no 'human nature' but only the "human condition"[53] or "the being of human beings,"[54] where identity is constituted by choosing and doing, and where nearly all contingencies can be 'transcended' if not controlled, it is curious to find the implicit message that one ought to 'be oneself.' One might suppose that the existentialist notion of authenticity is simply categorically different from the concept we have been treating thus far, and therefore immune to the conditions I have set out. But many clues in Heidegger and Sartre suggest that, in fact, they are talking about the same concept as is implied by authenticity in other contexts. Both Heidegger and Sartre portray authenticity in familiar ways: as a mirror of one's true being, however that is cashed out[55]; as distinct from conformism, superficiality, and self-deception[56];

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52 Sartre, *The War Diaries* (1984), 52.

53 Sartre (1970).

54 Heidegger (1996).

55 For example, despite excluding ontic facts about particular beings, Heidegger speaks of Dasein's "self" and describes authenticity as an alignment between Dasein and its self, whereas authenticity is when Dasein is governed by the "they-self." Through the call of conscience, which awakens authenticity, "the self is unequivocally and unmistakably reached" and is brought back to its "ownmost" possibilities of being (Heidegger 1996: 253).

56 In Heidegger, authenticity is contrasted with "fallenness in the they" and flight from one's ownmost possibilities. In Sartre, it contrasts with bad faith (a form of self-deception) and the complacent acceptance of one's circumstances.

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and as a desirable, fulfilling, and particularly original way of living.[57] So while existentialism's focus on ontology seems to preclude the beliefs that most obviously underwrite the possibility of authenticity, other aspects of the tradition point decisively toward features of authenticity that we would expect in any compelling account.

Heidegger and Sartre each articulate a conception of authenticity that in its very structure defies the parameters of this concept. If there is no true self or given fact about who I am, on what grounds can these philosophers insist that I am either authentic or inauthentic? The recourse to anti-essentialist language does not dispel the urgency of this justification. Regardless of how it is described, the authentic self must be differentiable from some inauthentic counterpart, and in order to do so it must make some claim about who a particular person 'really' is. More so than any other prominent philosophers of authenticity, Heidegger and Sartre decline that challenge.

The Virtue Conception

This challenge is also declined to various degrees by another, very different set of philosophers. In recent literature, the appeal of authenticity has once again been taken up with a view to avoiding the putatively amoral, alienating consequences of existentialism. Guignon categorizes these conceptions as "virtue" or "character ideal"[58] accounts, but there are important differences between them. On the one hand, there are accounts such as those of Bernard Williams and Harry Frankfurt, whom Guignon groups under the virtue conception but are actually more concerned with the value of autonomy.[59] On the other hand, there are accounts like those of Charles Taylor, Somogy Varga, and John Cottingham, which describe authenticity (or cognate terms) as a character ideal that appeals to objective values. The former attempt to engage with the task of locating a pure or undistorted self because being authentic is already a better way of living, whereas the latter eschew most of the challenges of selfhood by defining authenticity in terms of other goods. Having considered the former accounts already, however briefly, I will focus here on the latter type of argument.

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57 Sartre is transparent about his endorsement of authenticity, even as he denies the existence of objective values. Bad faith may not be a moral failure but he claims it is at least an epistemic one: "One may object: 'But why should he not choose to deceive himself?' I reply that it is not for me to judge him morally, but I define his self-deception as an error. Here one cannot avoid pronouncing a judgment of truth" (Sartre 1970: 51). Heidegger continually denies that he has any ethical investment in fundamental ontology, but describes authenticity in positive terms ("resolute," "conscience," "certain of itself") and inauthenticity in negative terms ("lost," "fallen," "idle chatter," "scribbling").

58 Guignon (2008), 277-278.

59 Guignon (2008), 277.

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Charles Taylor's influential account of the ethics of authenticity proceeds from the premise that authenticity, correctly defined, is a virtue, rather than first asking what authenticity is. His endeavour requires the reader to accept that "authenticity is a valid ideal," "unrepudiable by moderns" and that "you can argue in reason about ideals and the conformity of practices to these ideals".[60] Current practices fail to live up to the ideal, according to Taylor, because of a culture of individualism that prioritizes personal whimsy over ethical obligations to others. Hence:

> [w]hat we need to explain is what is peculiar to our time. It's not just that people sacrifice their love relationships, and the care of their children, to pursue their careers. Something like this has perhaps always existed. The point is that today many people feel called to do this, feel they ought to do this, feel their lives would be somehow wasted or unfulfilled if they didn't do it.[61]

The value of discovering what being human is for me has thus been supplanted by the putative value of pursuing my own ends at any cost. This ill-conceived interpretation dilutes the value of genuine authenticity and occasions what Taylor calls a "slide to subjectivism".[62] The culture of authenticity promotes an overly tolerant brand of relativism that justifies unethical behaviour by exalting individual self-determination.

In critiquing this culture, however, Taylor goes to the other extreme: he exalts authenticity as ethics at the expense of authenticity as individual identity. In order to rescue authenticity from subjectivism, he invokes "horizons of significance": projects or values that transcend the self, but nonetheless contribute to self-fulfillment and actualization.[63] They need not be the same for everyone, but for everyone there must be something that establishes a connection between individual fulfillment and something of significance in the world:

> Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order matters crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial. Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands.[64]

This establishes a marked contrast to almost all other views of authenticity, including the autonomy-based virtue accounts, wherein there is something

60 Taylor (1991), 23.
61 Taylor (1991), 17.
62 Taylor (1991), 55.
63 Taylor (1991).
64 Taylor (1991), 40-41.

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good about being myself, whoever that it, irrespective of what others demand of me. It particularly chafes against the Sartrean contention that our free action brings meaning and value into the world. Taylor lambastes the view that "things have significance not of themselves but because people deem them to have it—as though people could determine what is significant, either by decision, or perhaps unwittingly and unwillingly by just feeling that way. This is crazy".[65]

This debate about moral realism is actually tangential to questions of authenticity, however. The moral relativist view of authenticity—that doing whatever I think is good makes me authentic—is flawed not because it is relativist, necessarily, but because it conflates personal identity with virtue. The authenticity question for the people who sacrifice their love relationships is not, 'What is the right thing to do?' but rather, 'Who are you? Have you really acted in a way that is most true of yourself? How do you know?' The hard case may be invoked here to sharpen the problem. Unless we can know that one set of convictions reveals something essential about who I am, debates about whether my authentic convictions are virtuous, on some conception of the term, are pre-emptive. Accounts of authenticity need to provide a justification for regarding some possibilities of mine as more true of myself than others. Taylor basically sidesteps this task.[66]

An account that closely resembles Taylor's strategy is found in Cottingham's recent work on integrity. Like Taylor, Cottingham is concerned with embedding the individual's project of becoming authentic in wider norms of virtue and obligation. He uses integrity where most philosophers would use 'authenticity,' meaning "[t]he idea that I have a 'true identity,' a unified, integrated self, the self I am meant to be, the self that expresses all that is best and most distinctive about me—and that the goal of my life should be, as it were, to grow into that unified self...".[67] Cottingham wants the phrase "a person of integrity" to include, but not be limited to, the notion of a "decent person".[68] He considers Frankfurt's wholeheartedness to be structurally consistent with integrity (requiring as it does a degree of consistency within the self), but rejects Frankfurt's location of value in the choices made by the will.

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65 Taylor (1991), 36.

66 There are variations on Taylor's virtue account, including blended accounts that attempt to protect the relationship between authenticity and objective values while enhancing the account of personal identity. Guignon (2004; 2008) seems to fall in this category, and Varga's (2012) recent book defends a hybrid of Taylorian and Frankfurtian authenticity, with a nod to Honneth. I lack the space in this paper to address these more nuanced arguments, although I think that ultimately the same criticisms hold.

67 Cottingham (2010), 3.

68 Cottingham (2010), 4.

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For Cottingham, as for Taylor, values are external and the self is responsive to them rather than vice versa. His choice of "integrity" as the name for a virtue is apparently a deliberate rejection of authenticity's usual ethical stance: "[b]ecoming what I am meant to be can never be a matter of autonomy and authenticity alone, but requires me, whether I like it or not, to bring my life into line with true and enduring objective values that I did not create, and which I cannot alter."[69]

The virtue conception, then, works like this: it is good to be authentic, not because my authentic self is good, but rather because being authentic is synonymous with being good in some self-transcending way. This is counter-intuitive. As Williams asks, "If there is such a thing as a 'real self' of an individual, what reason is there to think that it must coincide with an underlying character of honour, considerateness, and compassion?"[70] The virtue hypothesis is tantamount to saying that nobody is 'really' vicious. Yet there is no reason to believe that a person might not be authentically evil.[71]

Moreover, the crucial component of a person's individuality is lost in these accounts. If authenticity consists in devotion to a shared objective, how am I different from other authentic individuals with the same values? Taylor's pluralism with respect to eligible horizons of significance (e.g., "God, or a political cause, or tending the earth"[72]) defers but does not diffuse this concern. I must not value exactly the same things that everyone else values, but presumably something about what I value must nonetheless be expressive of *me*, and must further my own pursuit of authentic selfhood. Why do I choose to be virtuous in *this* manner and not in any number of others? One wonders whether Taylor and Cottingham, rather than suggesting the convergence point of ethics and authenticity, are not merely reducing the latter to the former. If the sign of and path to an authentic life are found in pre-existing virtues or shared ethical norms, the criterion of authenticity appears to be superfluous. Why not merely exhort people to become 'decent' or pursue 'horizons of significance' for their own sakes, and leave aside the talk of authenticity?

The virtue conception is unsatisfying, then, not because authenticity is *not* a virtue—perhaps it is—but because it doesn't say enough about what else authenticity is. Along with the Romantic and existentialist versions of authenticity, it stumbles on the task of locating the elusive 'true self' that authenticity promises.

We are now in a position to re-cap the analysis and clarify the differences between my breakdown of the authenticity literature and Guignon's breakdown, raised at the beginning of this paper. His list includes the ordinary

69 Cottingham (2010), 13.

70 Williams (2002), 182.

71 Bialystok (2011).

72 Taylor (1991), 82.

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conception, the existentialist conception, and virtue or character accounts. I have argued that the ordinary one is conceptually correct, and that the Romantic conception comes closest to providing a philosophical instantiation of it, but also exposes the limits of such an attempt. I included autonomy-based accounts and wholeheartedness in this category, whereas Guignon considers them to be more concerned with virtue. I drew distinctions between the existentialist accounts (Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre), showing why they are all incompatible with the metaphysics of authenticity, even if they are correct to describe human being in terms of freedom and temporality. And finally I critiqued what I take to be the virtue or character accounts, exemplified by Taylor and Cottingham.

Guignon's *prima facie* definition of authenticity reminds us that what we are looking for is some kernel of a true self—my cardinal feelings, desires, or whatever it is that makes me who I am. Nonetheless, Guignon favours the virtue conception, arguing that it is at least instrumentally valuable for a society to consist of authentic individuals.[73] Even if this is true, Guignon's preferred accounts are unable to stipulate *how* one comes to be authentic according to the type of metaphysical structure I have laid out. In reversing the order of inquiry, Guignon fails to make sense of his own ordinary conception and the philosophical challenges it entails.

Conclusion

The purpose of this analysis has been to unravel the concept of authenticity and assess some of the main arguments that have been erected in its name. I have shown that authenticity is divisive: it creates boundaries that separate certain aspects of personal identity from others, and, without being clear about these boundaries, it deteriorates. Authentic objects are distinguishable from numerically distinct 'fake' ones, but an authentic self must be distinguishable from some conceivable way in which that same self might have been inauthentic. At the same time, authenticity implies a convergence between two entities or ideas. Being authentic means embodying or being faithful to something 'true' about who I am.

This admittedly reductive interpretation of authenticity squares with the ordinary conception and all of the main colloquial usages of the term, whether applied to persons or not. This is evident in the easy case, wherein I find that one of my options coheres with something I take to be essential about myself.

Philosophically, however, this type of intuition is nearly impossible to theorize. We speak of having a 'true self' but when pressed are unable to pinpoint the location or nature of such an entity. This is confirmed by the hard case and others like it, in which the supposedly essential traits prove to be less identity-defining than we thought as time moves on. And it is not just temporality that

[73] Guignon (2008), 288.

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poses the threat here: even in a given moment, we can never be sure of which parts of ourselves are more real, true, or essential than others. For example, even if we are fully autonomous, there will probably be multiple choices open to us that must be described in some sense as our own. What, then, separates those that are autonomously authentic from those that are autonomously inauthentic?

What would be needed to resolve these cases is a fuller account of the self that can make sense of the felt distinction between authentic and inauthentic modes of being without succumbing to circularity or simple exhortations to virtue. We could then discuss the merits of the authentic mode of being without expecting that the true self should be recognizable in more familiar normative terms. Yet I am skeptical that such a full-fledged account could be provided. An account, as I understand it, seeks to provide some universal or near-universal conditions under which authenticity can be said to occur, or, to put it another way, it provides a way of corroborating personal experience by reference to some philosophical standard. It need not apply to all facets of personal identity or to every type of human experience; it is very plausible that the majority of human life is immune to questions of authenticity. But it ought to be able to say something confident about when and how we can reliably distinguish between authentic and inauthentic parts of ourselves. Whether the 'true self' is understood in terms of feelings, convictions, dispositions, or something else, there seems to be very few elements of selfhood that are remotely susceptible to such judgments.[74] Moreover, there is no reason to suppose that the elements that somehow constitute my true self are the same ones that constitute yours.

Consequently, I have resisted offering an account and have instead focused on the concept, which yields a standard against which potential accounts can be assessed. In laying out desiderata for a robust account of authenticity, I am not suggesting that it be reduced to something analytically simplistic. On the contrary: the simplicity of the analysis combined with the irreducible complexity of selfhood shows us precisely why philosophy is unable to harness authenticity in a fully satisfying way.

The three most prominent approaches to authenticity in the philosophical literature have expanded our thinking about selfhood and morality, particularly on the topics of freedom, autonomy, and social critique. But they have done little to assist the everyday philosopher in addressing the thorny problems arising from her intuitive concept. It seems that they are either talking about something other than authenticity (sincerity, virtue, originality, or other qualities); or they are defining authenticity in a way that defies the very demand of finding a true self (existentialism, constructivism); or they are stipulating that

[74] Elsewhere I have argued that gender identity, perhaps uniquely, seems to be an element of selfhood for which it is possible to make pronouncements about authenticity (Bialystok 2013).

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another concept is equivalent to authenticity without asking why (autonomy, wholeheartedness); or they are attempting to describe authenticity as such but in so doing inevitably run into the non-essentialism of personal identity (Rousseau).

Where does this leave the easy case, and our ordinary, intuitive applications of authenticity talk?

The frustrated search for a complete philosophical account of authenticity does not necessarily imply that such talk has no referent or no significance. It does have a referent, but the referent is, I would argue, more psychological (or perhaps phenomenological) than metaphysical. We clearly have experiences that compel us to make claims about authenticity, but in doing so we are not committing ourselves to an essentialist interpretation of identity. We are merely reporting our perceptions and our manner of organizing them—perceptions such as 'this feels right to me' or 'these things seem more essential to me (at this point in time) than those things.' We are thereby simultaneously reporting what is important to us. To the extent that authenticity is bound up with perceptions of truth and reality, it should come as no surprise that things we perceive to be authentic are important or valuable to us in a way that inauthentic things are not. And of course, because our identities are more important to us than just about anything, we are primed to look for evidence of authenticity within ourselves. But this does not guarantee that the truthfulness or reality of our selves can be attested to in any systematic way. Philosophers can continue to work on lining up selfhood with the conceptual demands of authenticity, but as for maximizing those pleasurable moments of '*This* is *me*,' perhaps Oprah is a better guide.

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