

AUTHENTICITY IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY: TAYLOR, ARENDT, AND JESUS

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ABSTRACT

"Being authentic" is language that stretches across cultures, nationalities, and religions. It is everywhere used tentatively, especially in uncertain times. Western Christians and academics legitimately worry about possible selfish individualistic orientations that authenticity seems to signify. However, Charles Taylor, from his Massey lecture series "The Ethics of Authenticity", outlines a stronger concept of authenticity which should set aside some of our religiously-oriented discomfort. Hannah Arendt, in "The Life of the Mind", offers us a portrait of individuals as formed in dialogue; and in "The Human Condition", offers us significant hope by interpreting the historical Jesus of Nazareth as a "this-worldly" political and philosophical model. By imagining a Christological character into the moral ideal of authenticity we are offered both a framework for bridging communities of faith and wider society, and an accessible orientation that can offer comfort and security in uncertain times.

KEYWORDS

Authenticity, Charles Taylor, Hannah Arendt, Romanticism, Existentialism

1. INARTICULATE AUTHENTICITY

Thirty-six years ago, Robert Bellah and others, in their seminal book "Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life" identified a problem and prophesied its social consequences - that of political and social polarization. We live in those prophesied consequences today. The problem, as Bellah and his co-authors identified it, was the tendency of us to form into, what they called *lifestyle enclaves*. (Bellah, et al., pp. 71-75) Lifestyle enclaves involve two particular types of alienation: 1) they concern only the private life of the individual - especially her labour and consumption; and 2) lifestyle enclaves segment us socially to include only those with a common lifestyle.

Today, political polarization is one context for our individual lives, where we are either *liberal* or *conservative* which are, in fact, such lifestyle enclaves. They are enclaves because they are governed by the two types of alienation that Bellah identified - they are focused primarily about entrenched consumption and lifestyle habits rather than actual public commitments, and they put us only in the company of those with a common lifestyle - as exemplified in the choices between getting or not getting a vaccine, and wearing or not wearing a mask. Your choice on either of these two examples can barely escape the accusation of "enclave" relativism. If I happen to doubt the legitimacy of a vaccine, and you decide to get a COVID vaccine, the given framework of my enclave, in this case conservative, will lead me to accuse you of conforming to your enclave, in this case liberal, that reinforces a certain lifestyle you

happen to hold. From the opposing lifestyle enclave, if one gets a vaccine, they are conforming. If one doesn't wear a mask, they are selfish. Thus both are labelled as inauthentic. Framed in this way, a choice that conforms to a given social context requires a further justification for it to be called "authentic" - otherwise we are doing what everyone else does, for well-worn reasons that are common to everyone in our enclave. Our inability to get to these types of justifications is now in real jeopardy.

The challenge is that we smuggle a related set of moral presuppositions into our accounts of what is, or what is not, authentic. In the case of accusations of conformity, we couch it in language that one ought to be able to act in counter to a dominant cultural milieu. To accuse someone of selfishness is to place them in a camp of persons who do not properly consider the impact of their actions with a care for diverse others. However, there is little consideration of the person's actual moral reasons in either case. Instead, there is a mode of storytelling about the other that caricatures the other, and prevents us from moral dialogue.

So, it is in an ever-present context of personal choices and social conformity that authenticity gains its importance. I believe that articulating what we mean by being authentic will go a long way to answering these types of moral questions. Further, it will give some deeper understanding of a grounded commitment to the primacy of "individual". In other words, in articulating authenticity we won't simply be justifying our decisions; we will also go a long way to seeing the mechanics of how authentic and free individuals with political responsibilities and moral obligations actually even appear.

Authenticity makes its appearance in other ways as well. In University, we encourage students to write in their own voice, that is, to distinguish what they have to say from the research they have used to provide a background for their opinions. (Robbins, 2018) In terms of career, we have emphasized the idea of *calling* in pushing students to vocation, which is somehow *better* than simply finding a job. (Wilding, 2018) In discipleship, evangelical and mainline Christians emphasize a personal relationship to God that in some sense is unique, as it *ought* to be. (Turnau, 2021) In marriage and life-partnership, the demand for ourselves and our partners to "be ourselves" is commonplace - because love cannot happen unless it is *genuine*. The demand to be authentic is ubiquitous, and exerted without question, as an axiom. But like the endless debate of liberal and conservative, what it means to be authentic is in some sense inarticulate.

The understanding of authenticity as a strong moral ideal has three significant obstacles to its proper articulation. First, critics of authenticity often see it in some of its most trivialized and self-indulgent forms. They collapse it with moral relativism. (Bloom, 2021; Price, 2008) The critics argue that authenticity pushes people to do whatever they want, and to treat others instrumentally - i.e. as tools for an individual's own development or fulfillment, in other words, toward narcissism or sociopathy. If authenticity meant this utilitarian model of self-fulfillment, then the critics would be right. And certainly there is some warrant for this type of criticism; under the name of authenticity, the pursuit of self-fulfillment has often appeared as trivial and self-indulgent. I won't belittle you (my audience) by enumerating the many examples. But I believe that such modes reflect a very deep confusion of the moral force of authenticity.

Second, proponents of authenticity, likewise, miss the moral force of authenticity. A culture, broadly speaking, of tolerance and self-fulfillment tends to shy away from questions of what would be higher forms of life. Ronald Dworkin and Will Kymlicka, among the proponents, believe that governments should not contribute substantially on matters of what constitutes the good life, in effect pushing conversations about authenticity to the margins. (Dworkin, 2021; and Kymlicka, 1991) To say it more simply, they concentrate on the fairness of procedures

rather than on commitments to actual goods, as in the case of emphasizing equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcomes.

A third factor obscures the importance of authenticity as a moral ideal: normal social science explanation. Social science tends to shy away from invoking moral ideals in favor of supposedly harder and more down-to-earth factors in generating explanations. So, individualism and feelings of “self-responsibility” are explained as by-products of social change such as spin-offs of industrialization or globalization, or greater mobility, or urbanization. And while there are significant causal relations to be explored between these factors and individualism, the accounts that invoke those causes frequently skirt the possibility that changes in culture and outlook owe anything to their own inherent power as moral ideals. Even where individual freedom and the enlargement of instrumental reason might be understood as having intrinsic reasons that help explain their rise, this attraction is often understood in non-moral terms, as in the advantages they bestow on people regardless of their moral outlook. Freedom allows you to do what you want, and instrumental reason gets you more of what you want.

The result is an extraordinary inarticulacy about authenticity; the opponents slight it, and the proponents can’t talk about it, and our investigations can’t consider it.

Does any of this matter? It does because articulating authenticity has a moral point. It doesn’t simply correct wrong views, but it makes the force of an ideal people actually hold more palpable, more vivid, and have a deeper resonance. By doing so, articulating the ideal and how to foster it empowers people to more fully live up to it, and to do so with greater integrity.

2. THE BACKGROUND OF AUTHENTICITY: THE TWO TEAMS

To provide some background, it is helpful to review Charles Taylor’s “The Ethics of Authenticity” (2018). As Taylor explains, the ethic of authenticity is something relatively new and peculiar to contemporary culture. Born at the end of the eighteenth century, it builds on earlier forms of individualism, such as the individualism of disengaged rationality, pioneered by Descartes, where the demand is that each person think self-responsibly, or the political individualism of Locke, which sought to make the person and one’s individual will prior to social obligation. But authenticity also has been in conflict with these earlier forms. It is a child of the Romantic period, which was critical of disengaged rationality and of an atomism that didn’t recognize the ties of community.

One way of describing its development is to see its starting point in the eighteenth century notion that human beings are endowed with a moral sense, i.e. as an intuitive sense of what is right and wrong. This notion was meant to combat a rival view, the utilitarian sense that knowing right and wrong was a matter of calculating consequences. At the origins of authenticity, knowing right and wrong was anchored in our feelings. Morality has, in a sense, a voice within.

Authenticity develops out of a change in the moral accent of “self-responsibility”. In the original view, what will be referred to as “rugged individualism” from here on, the inner voice is important because *it tells one what is the right thing to do*. For the rugged individualist, being in touch with one’s own moral feelings matters *as a means to the end of acting rightly*. The change in the moral accent happens when being in touch with our moral feelings takes on an independent and crucial moral significance. Authenticity comes to be something *we have to attain* to be true and full human beings. Authenticity is thus an aspiration.

To appreciate what is new in this, we need to see the analogy to earlier moral views, where being in touch with some source - God, say, or the Idea of the Good - was considered essential

to full being. Only now the source we have to connect to exists deep within us. This is part of the new subjective turn in contemporary culture, a new form of inwardness in which we come to think of ourselves as beings with inner depths. At first, this idea that the source is within doesn't exclude our being related to God or the Ideas; it can be considered our proper relation to them. It could be seen as a continuation and intensification of a development inaugurated by Augustine, who saw the road to God as passing through our own reflective awareness of ourselves.

The first variants of this new view were theistic, or at least pantheistic. It is illustrated by the most important philosophical writer who helped to bring about this change, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau isn't important because he inaugurated the change; rather, it is probable that his popularity comes in part because of his articulating something already happening in the culture. Rousseau frequently presents the issue of morality as that of following a voice of nature within us. This voice is most often drowned out by the passions induced by our dependence on others, of which the key one is "amour propre" or pride. Our moral salvation comes from recovering genuine moral contact with ourselves. Rousseau names it the source of joy and contentment, "le sentiment de l'existence". In other words, authenticity is this voice within that is often obscured by our desire to "agree" in the sense of "fit in" with others.

Rousseau also articulated a closely related idea in a most influential way. This is the notion of what has been called self-determining freedom: the idea that I am free to decide for myself what concerns me, rather than being shaped by external influences. Self-determining freedom demands that I break the hold of all such external impositions, such as society and its laws of conformity, and decide for myself alone. Rousseau's self-determining freedom holds within it that the individual is *sovereign*, or at least ought to be, if one is to meet the standard.

I mention it here not because self-determining freedom is essential to authenticity - obviously they are distinct. However, they have developed together, often in the work of the same authors. Their relationship has been complex, sometimes at odds, sometimes closely bound together. As a result, they have been confused and this confusion is one of the sources of the deviant form of authenticity, the soft relativism that critics of authenticity target.

Self-determining freedom has been an idea of immense power politically. In Rousseau, it takes the form of a social contract founded on a general will. And because it is the form of our common freedom, it can bear no opposition in the name of freedom. It has been one of the intellectual sources of modern totalitarianism that arguably began with Jacobins in the time of the French Revolution. Even though Immanuel Kant reinterpreted this notion of freedom in purely moral terms, it returns with a vengeance through Hegel and Marx in the political sphere.

Now authenticity becomes crucially important, in contrast to the self-determining freedom of rugged individualism, because of a development that occurs after Rousseau that I associate with Herder, its major early articulator. Herder put forward the idea that each of us has an original way of being human. Each person has their own "measure", is his way of putting it. This idea has entered very deep into contemporary awareness. It is also new. Before the late eighteenth century no one thought that the differences between human beings had this kind of moral significance. There is a certain way of being human that is *my* way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's. But this gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life; I miss what being human is for *me*.

This is the powerful moral ideal that has come down to us. It accords crucial moral importance to a kind of contact with myself, with my own inner nature, which it sees as in

danger of being lost, partly through the pressures of outward conformity, but also because in taking an instrumental stance towards myself, I may have lost the capacity to listen to this inner voice. And then it greatly increases the importance of this self-contact by introducing the principle of originality: each of our voices has something of its own to say. Not only should I not fit my life to the demands of external conformity; I can't even find the model to live by outside myself. I can only find it within.

Authenticity... being true to myself... means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing a potential that is properly my own. This is the background understanding to the contemporary ideal of authenticity and the goals of self-fulfillment or self-realization in which it is usually couched. This is the background that gives moral force to the culture of authenticity, including its most degraded, absurd, or trivialized forms. It is what gives sense to the idea of "doing your own thing" or "finding your own fulfillment."

3. IDENTITY IN DIALOGUE

Now being authentic is about *who we are*. And the split between rugged individualism and authenticity as competing moral standpoints appears through two narratives in the history of modern and postmodern thought, that concern our identity as individuals. The first one is philosophical; the second is historical. And articulating a clear understanding of authenticity may help us get to the root of not only the political polarization I mentioned earlier, but also to offer an account of *how* actual individuals, i.e. concrete persons with the ability to act in and on the world, even exist AND why this ability to act is inherently uncertain.

3.1. The (Philosophical) Existentialist Story

Authenticity as a concept has perhaps become most famous in the work of existentialism, and specifically in the work of Soren Kierkegaard. Without going too deeply into the history of Existentialism we can see that Existentialism reflects the two types of freedom I mentioned above - that of authenticity and rugged individualism. On the side I have labelled Team Authentic, we have Kierkegaard and Heidegger, and interestingly, Camus. On the other side I place Nietzsche and Sartre, who are the stars of Team Rugged Individualist.

For Team Authentic, Kierkegaard believes that authenticity happens in a fully committed "leap of faith" which pushes us past ethical concerns as mere calculations of what is worth living. Kierkegaard urges us to make a subjective commitment to something of absolute value and to do so by faith, as his famous interpretation of the story of Abraham's faith when asked by God to sacrifice Isaac shows. (Kierkegaard, 2021) Heidegger, in concert with Kierkegaard, claims authenticity in combination of existing towards both death and others. For both Heidegger and Kierkegaard the sources of authenticity are external to the control of the individual. One does not determine God, nor does one control whether one dies, nor the presence of others who - for Heidegger - disclose the true self to the individual. Camus believes not that such external determinations to an authentic life are necessarily absent, but rather that they are absurd. And Camus' power as a writer is most notably in his literary works. The reason Camus is on Team Authentic is that in articulating authenticity through the literary figures of Rieux (from *The Plague*, 1991) and Meursault (from *The Stranger*, 2021), Camus shows that authentic self-awareness happens *through* a struggle against extreme circumstances which are, in themselves, meaningless - an epidemic and a murder committed "because of the incessant heat". It is this kind of articulation by which a legitimate exploration of authenticity can be seen as a work of art. I will pick up this theme of life as a work of art momentarily. But the key point to remember is that authenticity is achieved in a forging

through the presence of what is other. For Team Authentic, the appearance of the individual emerges in the context of what is other.

On Team Rugged Individualist, Nietzsche, in both his concepts of the *ubermensch* and in the concept of *the will to power*, believes that all valuations are either original or adopted, but that value can be *created*, by the individual. (Nietzsche, 2017) Sartre believes that individuals are freely spontaneous, and not caused by external objects. The self is completely transparent to our own consciousness according to Sartre (1993). In other words, for Sartre and Nietzsche our true selves are generated from within the individual and that her values are self-created. Rugged individualism, as exemplified by Nietzsche and Sartre, embodies sovereignty in the individual. For Team Rugged Individual, the individual doesn't emerge in the context of what is other; the individual is understood as *placed in the midst* of what is other.

3.2. THE HISTORICAL STORY

In terms of the modern period, a notion of the individual, as presented by both the rationalists and the empiricists of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, led to a kind of utilitarian definition of morality, in which what was morally right could be determined by the desire for what was pleasing to either an individual or to an affected group. In response to this, a dominant view of the individual found its model in one who had to gather herself together, as it were, and decide against all such considerations of inclination and "pleasures" for the sake of the morally right, as articulated by Immanuel Kant. Such a rugged individual had to make a decision about her total commitment. An individual was both the object and subject of an objectifying scientific analysis. The dominant understanding of what it meant to be an individual, what I am calling the rugged individual, ever since the writings of Kant, was largely understood as a fact, and informed most of the science of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

But there was another strand that developed alongside the dominant one of the rugged individual. Against the rugged individual, Herder is a key figure in the development of an alternate notion of the individual. According to Herder, human life is analogous to a work of art, where every part or aspect finds its proper meaning in relation to all the others. Human life, and culture, unfolds from some centrally guiding theme and inspiration, and if it were not so hindered and obscured, it would do so fully and completely. According to Herder, "[cultural differences] belong not so properly to systematic natural history, as to the physico-geographical history of [human beings]." By characterizing communities as having an inseparable relationship to their environment, Herder conceives of human community life as harmonious. A positivistic science of the Enlightenment, rooted in the aforementioned concept of the rugged individual, is thus a barrier to human self-understanding. To conceive the individual as composed of different elements such as reason *plus* sensibility, or soul *plus* body, is to lose sight of the expressive unity, i.e. the widely diverse and dynamic relationships, of actual individuals. Echoing the one side of the confusion of Rousseau, Herder emphasizes that fragmenting individuals this way suppresses and mutilates the unified self-expression of which a person is capable. (Herder, 2021) The key contribution of Herder is to re-emphasize Rousseau's earlier insight - that expression is key to becoming authentic.

Thus the positivistic science based in the rugged individual cut into the unity of human life, and it tended to isolate, or atomize the individual. Individuals were cut off from nature and each other. Expression is a key concept in Herder's view because it not only brings the unity of human life to the foreground, it also values the expressive realization brought about in one's activity - in one's actions. A fulfilled individual is an expressive unity because she reaches her highest fulfillment in expressive activity. One's actions *express* who one is.

But expressive action, the heart of an authentic individual, requires a social order both because action has social conditions, and as expressed, requires an audience. In Herder's view, culture is sustained and nurtured within a community. On its own, the community has an expressive unity. To see the community and social order as an instrument that is constructed to fulfill individual goals will misunderstand and suppress the life of the community. At the beginning of modern nationalism, Herder thought that each people had its particular guiding theme or manner of expression, unique and irreplaceable, which should never be suppressed and which could never be replaced by the attempt to imitate others.

The key element that Herder provides to the whole conception of authenticity, then, is that to become fully human is to realize our true and unique form and that no other form can replace or substitute for it. Authenticity emerges in discovery of what is unique about an individual *by* the individual. And this concept of what is authentically ours applies to nature as well. The human subject is not some combination of mental and physical substances but an expressive unity that envelops both. As bodily beings, human beings are in an intimate relation with the whole universe. Herder elaborates this relationship in expressive terms:

“And since man is not an independent substance, but is connected with all the elements of nature; living by inspiration of the air, and deriving nutriment from the most opposite productions of the earth, in ... meat and drinks; consuming fire, while he absorbs light, and contaminates the air he breathes; awakes or asleep, in motion or at rest, contributing to the change of the universe; shall he not also be changed by it? It is far too little to compare him to an absorbing sponge, the sparkling tinder: he is a multitudinous harmony, a living self, on whom the harmony of all the powers that surround him operates.”

We recognize here a central theme of Romanticism, that to consider nature as a set of objects for human observation and manipulation in fact alienates ourselves from the natural world. Authenticity, then gains this notion of expressive unity. Analogous to a work of art, life ought to be lived as a harmonious whole. But to be authentic also requires that we need an audience, and relationships that fulfill the need for recognition. Authenticity then, is expressed in action, and requires both recognition and wholeness. And we can see how authenticity is thus markedly different than rugged individualism.

4. HUMAN PLURALITY AND ACTION

It is at this point where Hannah Arendt enters the story and offers us an explicit connection between what we do and who we are. In *The Human Condition*, she explains that while being other is a feature of human plurality, human distinctness is something human individuals *do*; we *distinguish ourselves*. “But only man can express this distinction and distinguish himself, and only he can communicate himself and not merely something—thirst or hunger, affection or hostility or fear. In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, become uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings.”

For Arendt, action expresses an individual “who”, and actions express the “who” within a context of human plurality. For Arendt, action is a disclosure of an individual, but interestingly, not necessarily the identity which the individual themselves want to project. As Arendt further explains,

“On the contrary, it is more than likely that the "who," which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself, like the daimon in Greek religion which accompanies each man throughout his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters. This revelatory quality of speech and

action comes to the fore where people are with others and neither for nor against them—that is, in sheer human togetherness.” (Arendt, 2018)

And in this, Arendt admits the essential quality of authenticity as distinguished from self-perception - who we really are as distinguished from who we think we are or attempt to project to others - is only disclosed in the presence of the plurality of other people, and a plurality of people who are neither for nor against us. Authentic people, thus, are not possible when completely surrounded by a lifestyle enclave or people of the same opinion. The problem of political polarization is here particularly acute. Yet, distinguished from these enclaves is the space of human plurality where action takes on its other particular importance. The space of human plurality isn't a lifestyle enclave, but instead, a guaranteed *space to be*.

In a guaranteed space to be action not only discloses a “who”, but action also starts something new. Arendt here employs her famous concept of “*natality*”, almost surely derived from her interpretation of glad tidings in the Gospel of Luke in which she actually takes the phrase “Unto us a child is born” from Isaiah. Natality is the entering into the world of something new, about which consequences can never be known in advance. While our action clearly discloses a particular person, our action also begins events which have no predictable end. Our authentic action, thus, is understood as a principle of genuine freedom.

It is in this concept of “natality,” which appears in a guaranteed space to authentically be, that Arendt most persuasively considers Jesus of Nazareth, the historical Jesus, as having the utmost political and philosophical importance. The three essential features of action are: forgiveness, promises, and miracles.

Arendt is at her boldest in absorbing the experience of Jesus into her model of political life. She regards his insights into the faculty of action to be as original and unprecedented as were Socrates's experiences of thought. Her esteem for Jesus is based on the conviction that his “faith was closely related to action” and that the New Testament's portrayals of him have philosophical implications. The most significant of these for Arendt is that freedom is presented as the “power of performing miracles.” “The only activity Jesus of Nazareth recommends in his preaching is action, and the only human capacity he stresses is the capacity ‘to perform miracles’.” The appeal of this form of freedom for her is that it directly confronts the modern fascination with history as a natural process: “the work of faith, actually its product, is what the gospels called ‘miracles’” which are “interruptions of some natural series of events, of some automatic process, in whose context they constitute the wholly unexpected.” As Arendt points out, this power to perform miracles is not rooted in will or in thought, but in *faith*. This faith's most essential effect is the personal acceptance of natality. Specifically differentiated from the classical emphasis on human mortality is the experience of the potential which one's beginning possesses for the world. For her, the very purpose of being is to begin and she never tired of citing Augustine's definition; “that there is a beginning man was created, before whom nobody was.” Natality is the “miracle that saves the world” and its source is faith's discernment, against the background of natural processes, of the “infinite improbability” which every new beginning represents. (Arendt, 2018)

Not only does action, based in natality, contain within it the capacity for miracles, action also has two remedies for its unpredictability: forgiveness and the ability to make and keep promises. Arendt's very religious conceptual schema is exhibited best in her analysis of action. The delineation of that realm allows her to introduce two powers which she sees as essential both to the character of the actor and to the preservation of the realm itself. These are the powers to forgive and to promise. Both are put forward as specifically worldly acts. For Arendt, forgiving is a necessarily interpersonal act. Promising is put in opposition to the “darkness of the human heart” which symbolizes the unreliability of the human being who is

always capable of change from day to day. Forgiving and promising shelter the realm of action for they remedy the two predicaments intrinsic to action. Forgiving is a “redemption” from the predicament of action’s irreversibility, the fact that once an action is done, it cannot be undone. The forgiveness received from others is what allows the actor to recover from deeds which were performed but which are regretted. Without such forgiveness, without release from the consequences of our acts, we would be confined to the first mistaken deed for which we are responsible. Forgiveness allows the continuance of a public life, which always carries the risk of unanticipated, regrettable consequences.

Promising is a liberation from the predicament of the actor’s chaotic unpredictability. When people come together and pledge themselves to a course of action, they make mutual freedom and a common political achievement possible. The superiority of those capable of promising over “those who are unbound by any promises and unkept by any purpose” is that they have the capacity to “dispose of the future as though it were the present, that is, the enormous and truly miraculous enlargement of the very dimension in which power can be effective.” Deprived of the ability to make promises, we would be without a stable individuality and would lack the ability to join with others in contributing to the world, an achievement worthy of future remembrance.

The human abilities of the miraculous, of unpredictability, of forgiving, and of making and keeping promises are built into her concept of action - taught and lived by Jesus - and they truly are the mechanisms by which the world and individual humans can be saved. What is vital about this, for our purposes though, is that these powers are located in individuals, and are constitutive of genuine human action. Genuine human action can only occur if it is offered a stable place to be.

For Arendt, this stable “place to be” was guaranteed in a kind of model of civic republicanism - small governmental spaces of the kind of a rural township model of Thomas Jefferson. It was the political realm of freedom. And she worried that the oligarchic influence, (and by that I mean the particularly powerful relationship between economic and political elites), of mass society would indeed eradicate such a possible place - and thereby destroy the possibility of human freedom. In such oligarchic conditions, where human beings were thrown back into the activities of work (with its characteristic understanding of activity having a definite beginning but also a definite end), and of labor and consumption (with its characteristic understanding of the endless cycle of meeting the needs of us as biological organisms), human freedom would disappear.

The fear that the public world, specifically *mass society*, will force us into mere laboring and working animals, is more likely to come true now than it was in the 1960’s when she was writing. Envisioning the space for human freedom to appear, and to show how concrete authentic individuals are actually formed, needs to be articulated.

5. THE ROLE OF SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

If Arendt is right, we have some significant reasons for rejecting the rugged individualist account of human individuality. If human action is based on faith and requires the ability to forgive and make promises, then what makes action possible is not grounded in the will - not even Kant’s good will. It needs other people. If Arendt’s fear of the oligarchic forces of mass society has come to fruition, we need to understand a social space which guarantees “a space to be”. And we now have reasons for siding with Team Authentic in the existentialist story, including Kierkegaard and Heidegger, and the Romantic side in Enlightenment history as grounded by Herder.

To be authentic is to belong to a social space that, in contrast to the rugged individual, provides a space to be who we are. Authentic individuals cannot develop in isolation. The testimonies to the related phenomena of rising addictions, suicides, mental health problems, and loneliness could be thus symptomatic of us having fallen under the very deep spell of the model of the rugged individualist.

Charles Taylor mentions in *The Ethics of Authenticity*, and explains thoroughly in *The Politics of Recognition* that there is a possible remedy. Significant others, a group of people who have constituted our identity, offer us this space to be. Bellah, et al. point to something like this when they emphasize communities of care - and the caring is essential, on my take, for their effectiveness in generating authentic individuals. This sharply contrasts rugged individuality which gained a kind of ground in the concept of dignity and the associated language of inalienable rights. Individual identity, as in the original confusion between rugged individuals and the early articulators of authenticity, had to be inwardly generated.

Along with Taylor, I would like to argue that there is no such thing as inward generation, monologically understood. In order to understand the close connection between identity, Arendt's explication of human plurality, and the importance of recognition, we need to take into the crucial insight that who we are is its fundamentally dialogical character - as Taylor calls it - or rather, our identity in relationship with significant others. We become a full human being with the capability of acting and understanding ourselves (in the Arendtian understanding of action) through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. Here I mean language in a very broad sense to include languages of art, gesture, and love. We learn these modes of expression through exchanges with others - specifically interaction with others who matter to us - what G.H. Mead called "significant others". The generation of authentic individuals is not something which one accomplishes in isolation, but *through* important other people.

This is not merely a fact about the genesis of identity, which can be ignored later on. We don't simply learn the languages in conversation and use them for our own purposes later on. Of course, we must develop our own opinions and outlooks to a considerable degree through solitary reflection. But this isn't how things work with such an issue as our identity. We define ourselves always in dialogue with, *sometimes in struggle against*, the things our significant others want to see in us. Even if we outgrow some of these others - our parents for instance - and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues as long as we live.

The contribution of significant others often gets stifled into our childhood development, so that who our significant others are is primarily seen as our birth families and the good friends we made throughout our childhood and adolescence. If we fall prey to that confusion we tend to forget that our understandings of the good things in life can be transformed by our enjoying them in common with the people we love. Due to this very fact, it would take a great deal of effort, and probably many wrenching breakups, *to prevent* our identity from being formed by the people we love. Consider what we mean by identity - it is who we are, "where we are coming from". As such, it is the background against which our tastes and desires make sense. If some of the things I value the most are accessible to me only in relation to a person I love, then he becomes part of my identity.

But it doesn't have to be only isolated to our childhood development. Who belongs to an authentic individual's group of significant others may change substantially throughout one's lifetime. And so we are confronted with Arendt's basic description of human plurality - which we encounter as a matter of course in our everyday lives - the University being a microcosm of such a brute fact.

The encountering of human plurality, beyond our lifestyle enclaves, where our authentic identities play themselves out in action, with unpredictable consequences and with built-in remedies of forgiveness and making and keeping promises gives way to the realization that to be truly authentic, to be truly ourselves, diversity plays a role.

We need to remember that our significant others will not provide stances and outlooks that will always wholly agree with who we think we are. There will be conflict, not only in opinions and beliefs, but also in the diversity of identities and this necessarily so if we believe Arendt's assertions concerning the mechanics of forgiveness. It is built-in. And our moral life and development is pulled forward by a demand for authenticity that runs right through these facts. And this authenticity and its inherent conflict addresses our most spiritual and vulnerable selves where "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

The composition of our university testifies to diversity; the sustained use of violence in historical Palestine testifies to coming to terms with the related problem of diversity and identity; and the widespread emergence of mental health problems testifies to the need for authenticity and its associated structure of significant others. Beyond these ready-at hand examples, the applications for this understanding could go on at length.

And so we are left with understanding authenticity as a powerful moral ideal which acts in a causal way and as having a potential ability to regulate our trivial and self-indulgent behavior and attitudes.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can take away two positives, at least: 1) to address those factors that seemed to block us from articulation of authenticity, and 2) to highlight why authenticity both contributes to our present experience of instability, and offers us a way through it.

Let me take up the three obstacles to talking about authenticity that I mentioned at the beginning. The critics of authenticity should now understand that it is an incredibly powerful moral ideal that can be strongly considered once the deviant form of moral relativism can be treated as clutter and thus disposed of. The proponents of authenticity ought to be able to introduce it into conversations of the good life, a type of substantial commitment that has so far evaded the political world of secular society. And lastly, to a type of social science explanation which shies away from conversations about the causal nature of moral ideals, we should now be able to see how these types of considerations can be admitted as causal factors to our understandings of our unique human conditions.

We should also understand, based in Arendt's seminal awareness of the ambiguity in human action - and the space of plurality that it occupies - that when we act in the world, we will never completely know what we are doing. We would never know that by flying commercially, we would start in motion a process that would indeed spread a virus that has killed more than 5 million people, by even modest estimates. This only exemplifies what we have intuitively (but inarticulately) known for a long time, that the type of forgiveness taught and brought by Jesus is a political principle of the first order, and that we know as an operative principle of our relationship with our significant others. When we act in the world, we will truly feel ambiguity, and we couldn't otherwise - because it is in the very nature of action itself. However, with significant others, i.e. communities of care, we will rest in the sovereignty of God who created this self/significant other dynamic necessarily into the human condition. It gives us some conscious awareness of Jesus's seemingly mystical statement, "For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them." (Matthew 18:20)

In other words, unlike a commitment to rugged individualism, a commitment to authenticity will, as the other side of the coin, restore structures of significant others - like strong families - that not only constitute strong individuals, but also constitute a world in which God, not humankind, can *be experienced* as sovereign and thus, as the measure of all things.

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