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The Pluralist, Volume 4, Number 1, Spring 2009, pp. 33-50 (Article)

Published by University of Illinois Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/plu.0.0011>



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# Authenticity and the Reconciliation of Modernity<sup>1</sup>

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FOR ALL THE FAULTS critics find in today's culture—its narcissism, its moral relativism, its neglect of the political, its obsession with the superficial, its fetish with the shocking—there are positive aspects that may prove to be redeeming. Charles Taylor in *The Ethics of Authenticity* emphasizes the ideal of authenticity as such a redeeming feature (Taylor 15–16). Modernity, Taylor says, has its “boosters” and its “knockers,” but being authentic is one of the few values left unscathed in modern Western liberal culture,<sup>2</sup> and Taylor recognizes that this ideal may provide a way of moving forward through worrisome times to richer discussions about common values and goals. It may be a way out of discussions that terminate too quickly in subjectivist posturing (“that’s just the way I feel, you have your way”) or even intersubjectivist stalemates (“this is *our* way, you keep yours”) and the ensuing power struggles.

In this paper, I continue Taylor’s project of retrieving what is important in this ideal of self-realization and action. I first set the stage by briefly discussing the history of authenticity, its current manifestations, and the implicit ethics Taylor sees in it. I then give the ideal of authenticity a firmer philosophical ground in Aristotle’s philosophy and postcritical epistemology—but a ground which should widen the vision of subjectivist boosters of modernity and soften the harsh stares of moralistic or scientific knockers. The goal here is thus to garner supporting ground that would help people in modern society in their struggle to achieve an authentic expression of authenticity rather than succumb to deviant forms of this ideal engendered by misguided boosters or knockers.

## From Sincerity to Authenticity

In his book *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Lionel Trilling describes the dialectic of a phenomenon that began over four hundred years ago. It is a historic

transformation in our understanding of ourselves marked by the words of Shakespeare when he writes,

This above all: to thine own self be true  
And it doth follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.<sup>3</sup>

The concern with the ideal of *sincerity* and its moral implications intensified with the Enlightenment's emphasis on the individual and his autonomy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The fear arises that the self can be imprisoned in social expectations or lost in a masquerade of parading persona. Trilling sees this worry emerge in the work of Rousseau: in his attack on social politeness, in his indignation at theater, and in the unparalleled sincerity of his *Confessions*, where exposing his own immoral behavior becomes an act of virtue.

The ideal of *authenticity* begins to emerge when it is recognized that a sincere person may be self-deluded and identify himself completely with a socially manufactured self. The authentic person now has a more difficult task: he must find and express his true self, but without the previous roles generated by society to guide him. Trilling notes that Sartre's premier example of inauthenticity is the waiter who fully identifies himself with his role as a waiter (102). He is someone who can be completely sincere and yet is completely inauthentic.

A self that merely conforms to a social role is now seen as inauthentic, but without any role to take up as its own, the self becomes lost. Here Trilling points to Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* and Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* as literary examples of this cultural truth. This alienated self, in search of an authentic way of being, becomes the new cultural hero. Usually this search involves rebellion against society and traditions since, as Rousseau admonished, one cannot allow one's "sentiment of being" to depend on "the opinion of other people" (Trilling 93, on Rousseau).<sup>4</sup> It also involves artistic creation.

Taylor, following Trilling's historical analysis, recognizes that

Artistic creation becomes the paradigm mode in which people can come to self-definition. The artist becomes in some way the paradigm case of the human being, as the agent of original self-definition. Since about 1800, there has been a tendency to heroize the artist, to see in his or her life the essence of the human condition, and to venerate him or her as a seer, the creator of cultural values. (Taylor 62)

The paradigm of the authentic person becomes the artist who remakes himself—or a Nietzschean who can re-create himself and his own values through

the strength of his will. Each person needs to, and should, “do their own thing” to be self-fulfilled. And each person should aim at self-fulfillment.

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 potentiality that is properly my own. This is the background understanding to the modern ideal of authenticity . . . it is what gives sense to the idea of “doing your own thing” or “finding your own fulfillment.” (Taylor 29)

Trilling discusses how Hegel saw the honest, sincere self, whose consciousness was unified in its identification with society, in an opposition with this searching self and its fragmented consciousness. But Hegel, here, was actually a “booster.” He saw in the rebellious, fragmented consciousness a new development of Spirit (Trilling 33–38).<sup>5</sup> Consciousness was now liberated from the imprisonment of its identification with social roles.

A new freedom and responsibility is born from the ashes of burned masks.

### The Ethics of Authenticity

Like Hegel, Taylor sees the possibility of a positive outcome to the travails of modernity. He wants to steer cultural developments “towards their greatest promise and avoid the slide into debased forms” (Taylor 12).<sup>6</sup>

The Enlightenment’s emphasis on the individual and self-determination brought negative as well as positive change.<sup>7</sup> Self-choice became an overriding ideal (Taylor 39). But although individualism has given us democracy and emphasized procedural justice, it has also engendered narcissism and a “facile relativism” (Taylor 13). Taylor says,

The relativism was itself an offshoot of individualism, whose principle is something like this: everyone has a right to develop their own form of life, grounded on their own sense of what is really important or of value. People are called upon to be true to themselves and to seek their own self-fulfillments. What this consists of, each must, in the last instance, determine for him- or herself. No one else can or should try to dictate its content. (14)

Furthermore, a person’s values are seen as coming from feelings that are not open to rational debate, and so reasons don’t matter.<sup>8</sup> No one can make any moral demands on anyone but himself, nor can he let society greatly influence his values.<sup>9</sup> If you are already in agreement with regard to some basic

principles, "You can point out to someone certain consequences of his position he may not have thought about." But even here, "if your interlocutor still feels like holding to his original position, nothing further will gainsay him" (Taylor 18). However self-centered, libertine, or destructive an action may be, it is, in a way, sanctioned by boosters as being morally right for that individual, if it is the result of a free choice and based on genuine feelings.

Taylor's approach to steering away from this debasement is to investigate the conditions for the possibility of authenticity.<sup>10</sup> Taylor wants to show that

the more self-centered and "narcissistic" modes of contemporary culture are manifestly inadequate . . . modes that opt for self-fulfillment without regard (a) to the demands of our ties with others or (b) to the demands of any kind emanating from something more or other than human desires or aspirations are self-defeating, that they destroy the conditions for realizing authenticity itself. (35)

Taylor makes good headway in this project first by noticing how the concept of authenticity involves a notion of self that is in dialogue with things self-transcendent. He argues that "I can define my identity only against a background of things that matter. But to bracket out history, nature, society, the demands of solidarity, everything but what I find in myself, would be to eliminate all candidates for what matters" (40).

Self-identity emerges in dialogue with others (Taylor 47–48). Any idea of the self, or what the self should become, depends on what Taylor calls "horizons of significance." The recognition of these horizons implicitly brings a more interpersonal notion of value back into a person's actions. It also brings back the notion that we can reason about and rank order values. In dialogue, one must provide reasons when determining what is significant. "Your feeling a certain way can never be sufficient grounds for respecting your position, because your feeling can't *determine* what is significant. Soft relativism self-destructs" (Taylor 37).

But can't values gain significance simply because they are freely chosen? Taylor sees that this approach is backward. He argues that

self-choice as an ideal makes sense only because some *issues* are more significant than others. I couldn't claim to be a self-chooser, and deploy a whole Nietzschean vocabulary of self-making, just because I choose steak and fries over poutine for lunch. Which issues are significant, *I* do not determine. If I did, no issue would be significant. But then the very ideal of self-choosing *as a moral ideal* would be impossible. (39)

According to Taylor, values do not gain significance from merely subjective feelings nor from the choices of a person in isolation. Reasons that transcend

the self must be employed in dialogue. But the *feeling* of appropriateness when faced with an authentic action, the feeling that you are discovering standards that define and create your own being, and the sense that this feeling does not always answer to reason, must be dealt with in any investigation of authenticity meant to rescue modernity. One must look more closely into the moral demand of these feelings. In other words, Taylor must work harder to prevent a backslide to a position where defining yourself and doing your own thing again collapses into doing whatever you feel like. He must also safeguard the authority of authenticity itself by dealing with the knockers of modernity and their criticisms.<sup>11</sup> Here is where Taylor can rally the assistance of Aristotle and post-critical epistemology to his cause.

## Two Sorts of Knockers

Taylor points out two sorts of knockers in an uncomfortable alliance against the boosters of modernity: (1) those who want to restore the values of traditions to overcome the decadence, relativism, or nihilism of modernity and (2) those who believe that a scientific outlook destroys *both* traditional *and* modern values and to whom “authenticity” talk is just soft-headed and self-deluding fluff (74,79).

The first sort of knockers, according to Taylor,

are critics who hold that there are standards in reason. They think there is such a thing as human nature, and that an understanding of this will show certain ways of life to be right and others wrong, certain ways are higher and better than others. The philosophical roots for this position are in Aristotle. By contrast modern subjectivist [boosters] tend to be very critical of Aristotle and complain that his “metaphysical biology” is out of date and thoroughly unbelievable today. (19)

Taylor cites Alasdair MacIntyre as a representative of these knockers. But, as I see it, MacIntyre and Aristotle can be allies in retrieving *authenticity* as a positive moral concept. MacIntyre is involved in the same sort of project as Taylor: to restore an objectivity to values and to restore the use of reason in determining values.

Certainly MacIntyre is a critic of modern liberal culture. In *After Virtue* MacIntyre opposes his Aristotelianism to what he sees as the only other choice left standing: the self-making will to power of a Nietzschean.<sup>12</sup> He sees modern liberal culture as basically espousing an emotivist position in which moral statements are expressions of subjective feelings. People under the influence of modern liberalism will construct a pastiche of values by choos-

ing freely from a palette of available traditions, but none of them are deeply rooted and any can be jettisoned should one's feelings change. But this sort of choosing is incoherent according to MacIntyre. To think rationally about values one must do it from *within* a coherent tradition. Traditions are built up from practices that connect us to the world and each other. A tradition has its own internal dialogue about what it means to be a human being and the goals to which we should aspire. Using Taylor's language, one might say that for MacIntyre, a person requires the "horizon of significance" provided by an ongoing tradition of inquiry in order to rationally determine what is worthwhile and what actions are authentic.

The second sort of knockers are those with a "disengaged scientific outlook" (Taylor 79).<sup>13</sup> The implication is that these people take the progress of science to entail that we live in a value-free universe. In this view, science reduces higher-order phenomena to their material or biological sources. The only pseudo-objective moral imperative to which such a person might subscribe is the evolutionary imperative to survive as an individual or species.

This perspective, like the perspective of the egoistic subjectivist, eliminates the objectivity of values. But at the same time it enshrines instrumental reason in the form of a particular conception of the scientific method. This perspective thus knocks modernity by knocking its romance with subjectivity. To live by vague feelings rather than the findings of legitimate science is to embrace myth.

This scientific perspective, however, is not based on the best or the latest understanding of how science is done and what its limits are. What have seeped into our culture are mainly misconceptions: either misconceptions of the logical positivists' program to eliminate metaphysics or misconceptions of the Kuhnian program to chart the process of scientific discovery. Either sort of misconception can undermine the objectivity of values. On one side, knockers can attack objective values in the name of science, and, on the other side, boosters can cite science to claim support for their soft relativism.

A better way to look at knowledge in science is provided by Michael Polanyi's postcritical epistemology.<sup>14</sup> In the work of Polanyi one can see kinship with Aristotle, but *this* Aristotelian and scientific alliance is not ill at ease,<sup>15</sup> nor does it knock the cultural ideal of authenticity; instead, it raises it to its rightful eminence. Some of its key ideas are the emergence of entities in nature and the nature of tacit knowing. The central role of the person in the discovery and validation of objective knowledge emphasizes the importance of authenticity; all knowledge of reality is rooted in personal knowing and the standards that it generates.

## Emergence and Tacit Knowing

The notion of *emergence* undermines the reductionist conceptions of the scientific knockers. Polanyi recognizes, along with Aristotle, that entities that come into being later in time can be at least as real as the material substrates that comprise their necessary conditions, even when the entities are less directly identifiable as physical.

Aristotle looked at the material substrate as mere potential that gets actualized and made real with the imposition of forms. As S. H. Butcher notes, Aristotle associates potency with matter and actuality with form: “The true *ousia* [being or essence] or *phusis* [nature] of a thing is found in the attainment of its telos,—that which the thing has become when the process of development is completed from the matter (*hyle*) or mere potential existence (*dynamis*) to form (*eidos*) or actuality (*entelecheia*)” (Butcher 155n1).

Aristotle, in establishing a hierarchy of being, also saw how one form can ride upon another combination of form/matter to create a greater combination of form/matter. A cell may reach its telos and exist as an actual cell, but it may be part of unformed potency in its relation to a developing organ; and an organ, once developed, has achieved its actuality, but it can be part of a greater actuality in the existence of an organism.

In Aristotle’s thought the actual is layered in a hierarchy of being. Similarly, in Polanyi’s thought we find the emergence of different beings at different levels of existence, ranging from the inanimate to the chemical, from the chemical to the biological, from the biological to the individual person, and from the individual person to the responsible person in society.

The notion of emergence brings the possibility that value may indeed be an objective feature of a developing reality. It reforms scientific knockers by knocking a reductionist world view, and one does not have to be an Aristotelian to feel its force. Reduction to necessary conditions has been a successful strategy for explanation, but an *ontological* reduction is not demanded by the scientific method. There really is no call to think that a phenomenon, experienced at a higher level of interaction, is less real than phenomena at a lower level, just as there is no call to say that hydrogen and oxygen atoms are real but water is simply an illusion. If I can drown in it, it’s real enough for me.

In addition to higher-order physical entities, forms or essences are also real for Polanyi, just as they are for C. S. Peirce, and for similar reasons: they have practical effects in the world. For Polanyi, the real is what “may reveal itself to our deepened understanding in an indefinite range of unexpected manifestations” (Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* 133). Forms can retain their



identity through different, or changing, material substrates, and they can manifest themselves in yet unknown ways (viii).<sup>16</sup>

The notion of *tacit knowing* is especially appropriate in a discussion about authenticity, because finding an authentic expression of one's self, a true ethic or vocation, is a calling that we recognize when we see it, and it makes a demand on us, but we cannot always clearly explain in reasons why it suits us so well. We know, but cannot always say how. The problem is that what having tacit knowledge entails is widely misunderstood, and reliance on tacit knowledge can be mistaken as license to be whimsical or dogmatic.

Polanyi retains a link between genuine knowledge and feelings of appropriateness and beauty, but intuitions and feelings have a rational structure and content. Although a scientist may not have sufficient evidence to commit to a new paradigm—and may do so based on a consideration of its beauty—there are tacit reasons for the choice, many of which can be made explicit with further analysis and research. Talk about being authentic doesn't have to be vague and mushy. A feeling may *validate* tacit knowledge, but this does not surrender the obligation to seek *verification* by engaging in rational debate and searching for evidence. Validation without verification is irresponsible.

Any feeling of validation based on tacit knowledge involves a commitment to a reality that is being disclosed. This reality makes a demand on the person searching, whether he is seeking a scientific fact or his true calling. "The freedom of the subjective person to do as he pleases is overruled by the freedom of the responsible person to act as he must" (Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* 309). A moral standard emerges, and a person is compelled to choose in a way consistent with his being. As Luther said, and Polanyi quotes, "Here I stand, and cannot otherwise" (*Personal Knowledge* 308).

What I plan to do next is to ground the idea of authenticity in some of Aristotle's insights that can be further developed with the insights of post-critical epistemology.<sup>17</sup>

## Aristotle on Authenticity: Self-Actualization in Making as Creation and Discovery

Taylor discusses the artist as the paradigm of the authentic person, and in doing so he paints a picture of art that is meant to *contrast* with Aristotle's conception of artistic making. Instead, however, I believe he retrieves rather than relinquishes Aristotle.

Taylor says that art is "no longer defined by imitation, by *mimesis* of reality, art is understood now more in terms of creation . . . I discover myself

through my work as an artist, through what I create . . . and through this and this alone I become what I have it in me to be. Self-discovery requires *poiesis*, making" (62).<sup>18</sup>

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle asks whether the benefactor or the receiver of the benefit makes out better in the exchange. Aristotle basically determines that it is better to give than to receive, and it is better to love than to be loved;<sup>19</sup> but in the process he makes observations relevant to an understanding of the person as a self-creator and self-discoverer. As well as benefactors, Aristotle looks at craftsmen and fine artists:<sup>20</sup>

Benefactors . . . love and like their beneficiaries even if they are of no present or future use to them. The same is true of craftsmen; for each likes his own product more than it would like him if it acquired a soul. Presumably this is true of poets most of all, since they dearly like their own poems, and are fond of them as though they were their children. (*Nicomachean Ethics* IX 7, 1167b31–1168a3)

Aristotle looks at why this is so, and he relates it to what Rousseau later called the "sentiment of being." Since the product is expressing the *being* of the producer, the product is more choiceworthy and loveable for that producer: ". . . *being* is choiceworthy and lovable for all, and we *are* in so far as we live and act" (*Nicomachean Ethics* IX 7, 1168a6, my italics).<sup>21</sup> But Aristotle goes further; he says the product is the actualization of the producer in that what was potential and perhaps hidden is made real or visible in an action or product. He says, "Now the product is, in a way, the producer in his actualization; hence the producer is fond of the product, because he loves his own being. This is natural since *what he is potentially is what the product indicates in actualization*" (*Nicomachean Ethics* IX 7, 1168a6–9, my italics).<sup>22</sup>

In our makings we make and recognize ourselves. Here in Aristotle we find the heart of Marx's notion of alienation. If we are alienated from what we produce, or if our productions do not actualize our being, we become alienated from ourselves: we cannot fully actualize ourselves, nor recognize ourselves in our products.

Aristotle says that "art partly completes what nature cannot bring to a finish, and partly imitates her" (*Physics* II 8, 199a17).<sup>23</sup> The useful arts, or crafts, create to complete nature by correcting its deficiencies, for instance, in the way making eyeglasses or performing laser surgery can correct vision.<sup>24</sup> Although Aristotle did call the fine arts "imitative arts" (*mimetikai technai*) as was the custom of his day (Butcher 121–22), they too could work toward correcting nature's deficiencies because the artist could "imitate things as they ought to be" (*Poetics* 25, 1460b10; in Butcher 122). Music was the most imita-

tive of the arts, re-presenting character directly,<sup>25</sup> but poetry, the highest art, could make concretely present the ideal form to which one should aspire.

Aristotle did say that “Art imitates nature” (*Physics* II 2, 194a21), but the artist’s production could also bring real entities into existence,<sup>26</sup> and these entities were not just statues or paintings but aspects of human nature or an individual’s character that were not yet actual but still coming into being through the creative effort of both nature and human beings.

In Aristotle’s world view, “Everywhere . . . there is a ceaseless and upward progress, an unfolding of new life in inexhaustible variety. Each individual thing has an ideal form towards which it tends, and in the realization of this form, which is one with the essence (*ousia*) of the object, its end is attained” (Butcher 154–55).<sup>27</sup>

Aristotle prized fine art because it concretely represented universal truths, but art could also lift up and beautify by bringing some *individual thing* up to its completed form.<sup>28</sup> Here Aristotle and Polanyi see subjective feeling,<sup>29</sup> and the experience of beauty,<sup>30</sup> as something that can reveal objective truth about the self and the world. Beauty can give insight into nature.

## The Beautiful and the True

For Aristotle, as with Plato, the experience of beauty and the truths of nature are linked together. The form one should aim toward is beautiful: “the resultant end of her [Nature’s] generations and combinations is a form of the beautiful” (*Parts of Animals* I 5, 645a25; in Butcher 207). And the feeling of pleasure one enjoys in the experience of beautiful art can point one in the direction of that form. As Butcher notes, for Aristotle there is a subjective as well as an objective end to art. The “purely objective end” of Aesthetics is to “realize the *eidos* in concrete form,” but when “dealing with particular arts, such as poetry and music, [Aristotle] assumes a subjective end consisting in a certain pleasurable emotion” (Butcher 207). The emotion stimulated here is indicative of objective reality. “The subjective emotion is deeply grounded in human nature, and thence acquires a kind of objective validity.”<sup>31</sup> Although pleasure in general may come from satisfying natural or deviant desires, the particular sort of pleasure experienced in a beautiful work of art can reveal deeper truths.

The experience of beauty, for Aristotle and for Polanyi, is not merely the free play of the imagination irrespective of intellectual content, as Kant had believed. The feeling of beauty can depend on intellectual content, just as an art is more appreciated by one who is indoctrinated into its concepts and

techniques. It is thus possible for a feeling of beauty to validate knowledge and inspire intellectual commitment. This connection between beauty and truth is explicit in Polanyi, though it comes with a stern warning that boosters should not ignore.

Toward the end of *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi writes, "I believe that by now three things have been established beyond a reasonable doubt: The power of intellectual beauty to reveal truth about nature; the vital importance of distinguishing this beauty from mere formal attractiveness; and the delicacy of the test between them" (149).<sup>32</sup>

Manifestations of ideal truths, be they general and theoretical or individual and embodied, are beautiful. When we actualize ourselves in a manner consistent with our ideal, then we experience the pleasure of existence in self-actualization, together with the feeling of beauty experienced in the perception of one's ideal form made manifest.

The idea that there is an *ideal* form for an individual thing or species may be foreign to the subjectivists and scientists of modernity, but it is intrinsic to the concept of authenticity. If everything I did were an expression of my self, then there would be no way for me to be inauthentic; hence there is some standard—even if it is an evolving standard—against which I measure myself. Just as some things I write are neither choiceworthy nor loved even by me, some things I do or make do not express "what I have it in me to be." Aristotle did not say that *every* action or production gives us this sense of actualizing ourselves. Only in some productions do we catch our being, raise it up to its ideal, and experience it as beautiful. Some actions and productions are more authentic to a person's individual ideal—and so concomitantly give a sense of being—than others.

That there is *one* ideal for all of us as human beings, or even *one* particular ideal that an individual must fulfill, is a restriction that may be softened when the rigidity of Aristotle's metaphysical biology is loosened.<sup>33</sup> This might be done in a way that is authentically Aristotelian and Polanyian. Aristotle's thought is part of an ongoing tradition and, with the import of developments in postcritical epistemology, it seems clear that there is not one predetermined form that one needs to re-present or manifest in order to authentically be oneself. Finding yourself, defining yourself, gathering your past and potential into a joint significance open to the future, is an act of creation and discovery.<sup>34</sup>

The authentic self is not something preexistent, nor is it made *ex nihilo*. It is crafted as a beautiful work of art is crafted and finds its place in the wider context of society and tradition.

## Overcoming Alienation, Finding Reconciliation

In an Aristotelian view, we do find the ideal of being true to your self in the obligation to actualize your individual essence; we also find that this self can be created and discovered in its actions and productions. But, as MacIntyre might point out, a self alienated from a horizon in which it can be a rational inquirer is alienated from itself as a human being. The self-definition expressing the individual essence is nested in wider unities provided by family, community, society, history, and biology, even as it redefines its trajectory into the future. In being true to our natures, we would have more in common with each other than a narcissistic subjectivist would like to think.<sup>35</sup> As Taylor puts it, "If authenticity is being true to ourselves, is recovering our own 'sentiment de l'existence,' then perhaps we can only achieve it integrally if we recognize that this sentiment connects us to a wider whole" (91).

In the last chapters of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre considers the plight of the alienated, fragmented soul—the victim of modernity. How can this lost soul even begin to think rationally about values since he no longer belongs to a tradition in which the discussion of values is coherent? Would it not be inauthentic if he simply jumped into the discussion of an existing tradition? Would not such an act be, at best, *sincere*?<sup>36</sup>

MacIntyre's suggestion to this child of modernity, if he is not already beyond salvation, is for him to sample different traditions until one strikes a chord and he begins to feel some resonance with its ideas. He might then immerse himself in its discussions and authentically find a home in that on-going tradition of inquiry.

This at first seems as soft-headed as the booster's talk about "finding yourself" and "doing your own thing," but, as we have seen, there is a basis for this sort of self-recognition in both Aristotle and in postcritical epistemology. The recognition of an objective truth comes with a subjective feeling that may unveil reality or the truth of a work of art in progress.

The creative force that is nature, the creative force that is humanly, and the creative force that is the individual can go astray from its ideal, but when its true form is displayed, it is perceived as beautiful, as choiceworthy, and as noble.<sup>37</sup>

Recognizing the ideal of the authentic self in Aristotle's terms may also work to put more moral meat on the bare bones of the concept of authenticity than Taylor has sketched thus far. As well as constituting the dispositions of one who is fully actualized, the virtues may be qualities that one needs to develop in order to fully be that person that one has it in one to be.<sup>38</sup> The virtues of

courage and commitment would certainly come in high on this list, but we also briefly saw how giving and loving can add to the sentiment of being.

No one in modern Western culture is unaffected by the call to authenticity, but what being authentic means is different for boosters and both forms of knockers. For the narcissistic boosters being authentic means facing the peril of your own freedom and doing your own thing in spite of social pressures; it means creating and finding yourself in what feels right. For the moralistic knockers it means living in a tradition in which values are objective and engaging in rational discussion about those values and the goals of society. For the scientific knockers, being authentic means having the courage to give up illusions fostered by religious and cultural myths, and living bravely with only the truths of biology. But what truly feels right is not always comfortable or easy, rational discussions must guard against becoming dogmatic and closed, and the truths of biology do not negate human truths.

The ubiquity of the ideal of authenticity shows that Taylor is pointing us in the right direction for a major cultural reconciliation. Analyzing the concept of authenticity unveils common ground that will not only affect the boosters' conception of themselves, but it will also benefit and guide traditionalists and scientists to more authentic ways of understanding themselves, what they are doing, and what they should then do to become the people they have it in them to be.

## NOTES

1. This paper was developed from a paper titled "The Authentic Self as a Beautiful Work of Art," presented at the Ninth International Conference on Persons held in Asheville, NC, August 2007. I wish to thank Joe Velazquez of Stonehill College and the participants of the conference for comments and discussions.

2. We live in what Christopher Lasch calls the culture of narcissism (Taylor 14). But, as Taylor points out, the culture of narcissism is also the culture of authenticity. All we have to do is look around to see the fascination with, and thirst for, authenticity in American culture. It is evident in the way the press invades the private lives of public figures. With glimpses into their daily routines and breaches of decorum, we feel we know them better—as they really are—and are not just seeing their roles on the public stage. We can see this ideal in the way the Olympic Games are covered. Networks turn the life of the athletes into stories of struggle that we can participate in by watching their success or failure in the next event. And we can see this ideal in the current popularity of "Reality TV." America wants to look behind the veil of scripted and acted stories to see a *real* story with *real* people; America wants to see real tears of sorrow or joy and real laughter or elation, not just emotions acted, however well. (At least America wants what *appears* to be more real; the "authentic person" has become its own mask.) The ideal of authenticity is especially apparent in mega-shows like *American Idol*. Paula will constantly advise contestants to "be yourself." Randy will use phrases like, "Do your *own* thing . . .

when you hit it, it works for you." Simon, on the other hand, will imply that such talk is made of nothing more than vague and useless idioms: "What does *that* mean? What were you want is *good* singing . . . You've got to do *better!*" Here Paula and Randy represent boosters and Simon represents knockers.

3. Polonius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; quoted in Trilling 3.

4. The rebellious stage of teenagers in their search for identity might bring one to consider the thesis that biography recapitulates cultural history in the way ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.

5. Trilling summarizes Hegel's view of this dialectical movement in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "Alienation of the self is really self-preservation" (Trilling 38).

6. In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor expresses three main worries surrounding Western culture and its trajectory: (1) individualism, (2) instrumental reason, and (3) political atomization. Each worry has a bright as well as a dark side. (1) Individualism is dealt with here below and in the bulk of Taylor's book. Aside from the obvious political benefits, it has engendered the aggrandizement of the ego and encouraged a shift towards subjectivism in values. (2) The quest for efficiency and the growth of technology has swept away old arbitrary orders and allowed for the sustenance of large populations at a high standard of living; but at the same time, instrumental reason has infected our thinking. At the personal level, it encourages the individual to see others as a means to his own self-fulfillment rather than as ends in themselves; at the political level, it can be identified in bureaucratic systems that run on their own agendas. (3) Taylor notes that while intimate love relationships are now seen as a major source of personal identity, the bonds within larger groups become attenuated. Citizens are atomized and no longer see themselves as having any political power as a people. What's worse is that they also lose interest in maintaining any political control and would be just as content to have everything run for them by a paternalistic system.

7. Kant, with his emphasis on autonomy, is of course a key figure here along with Rousseau.

8. On this moral subjectivism, see Taylor 18. I would go further and say that some boosters see reasons serving merely as rhetorical devices deployed for the sake of manipulation. As a result they believe that it is unethical to *try* to change other people's feelings with reasons. Doing so is perceived as interfering with another person's freedom to be true to himself and to find his own self-fulfillment.

9. Yet many current boosters seem to believe in a *right* to self-fulfillment at the expense of society. This sense of entitlement does put a moral demand on others.

10. It may also be the case that by finding a principle that it is right for all of us (i.e., we should all be authentic) a booster concomitantly affirms a belief in universal values, since they universalize at least this one value; but Taylor doesn't take that route. Perhaps this is because the relativism is "soft," and Taylor's interlocutors already recognize the existence of values with their attachment to authenticity. Also, that one value is universalized does not at its face entail that any others should be. Maybe what needs to be done here is to more carefully separate the objectivity of values, and their universal intent, from their universalizability.

11. Or, more precisely, he must safeguard *conceptions* of the concept authenticity that bring out the truth behind boosters' beliefs. Knockers of modernity don't really knock the value of authenticity; they knock conceptions that surround it.

12. See the chapter entitled "Nietzsche or Aristotle?" in MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.

13. Taylor doesn't mention any contemporary representatives here, but I imagine that if pressed he would mention someone like E. O. Wilson or Richard Dawkins. I would



add that, as with MacIntyre, these representatives are usually less guilty of misconception than the caricatures of them that are commonly promoted.

14. Polanyi brings forward the tacit dimension of knowing that takes place in the hard sciences, the social sciences, and the arts. He gives a picture of knowing in science, which restores values without returning to dogmatisms of the past. His work has been actively combating misconceptions in understanding about science since the 1950s. Post-critical epistemology acts as a bulwark against a reductionism that might invalidate moral knowledge, reduce love to sex, and reduce religion to superstition. In the process, it also validates aesthetic knowledge in that the paradigm in science is affirmed in much the same way as the exemplar in art. The great masterworks set the standard and give the rules in a way that cannot fully be reduced to explicit techniques of verification.

15. See, for instance, Marjorie Green's "Aristotle and Modern Biology."

16. Similarly, memes can be real for Daniel Dennett. (See *Breaking the Spell, Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*.)

17. The overlap of Aristotle with Polanyi regarding *emergence* would require a discussion about biology, potency and actuality, the notion of form, conceptions of telos, and a hierarchy of being. This is briefly touched upon above. The overlap of Aristotle with Polanyi regarding *tacit knowledge* would require a discussion about *phronesis*—i.e., practical wisdom and how a person rather than a doctrine is the authority for Aristotle.

18. "The notion that self-revelation comes through expression is what I want to capture by speaking of the 'expressivism' of the modern notion of the individual" (Taylor 61). Trilling notes how the conception of the artist as a discoverer and revealer of moral truth that existed in modern art now suffers a setback in postmodern conceptions of art. "At the present moment, art cannot be said to make exigent demands upon the audience . . . the faculty of taste has reestablished itself at the centre of the experience of art" (Trilling 98n1).

19. "Moreover, loving is like production, while being loved is like being acted on" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1168a20).

20. "The distinction between fine and useful art was first brought out fully by Aristotle" (Butcher 115).

21. Here Aristotle can also be seen as breaking down any dualism between a metaphysical self and the world. We *are* our life and actions in the world; otherwise we would be the mere unactualized potential of what we might become.

22. Aristotle goes on to discuss self-love and determines that self-love is good, but only if you are a good person. This limits the application of the narcissistic call to love yourself first—or perhaps one loves himself best by becoming good.

23. Also: "the deficiencies of nature are what art and education seek to fill up" (*Politics* VII 17, 1337a2).

24. Or the way politics was invented to supplement the goal of man as a social animal (Butcher's example).

25. "Music is the express image and reflection of moral character" (Butcher 129). "Even dancing . . . imitates character, emotion, action" (Butcher 136).

26. ". . . nature, in Aristotle, is not the outward world of created things; it is the creative force, the productive principle of the universe" (Butcher 116).

27. This ideal form or essence in Aristotle can be related to what Polanyi calls a "joint comprehension." See Polanyi, "Logic" and Lowney.

28. Butcher discusses two senses of how things can be idealized in art for Aristotle. First, an idealization can be "the representation of an object in its permanent and essential



aspects, in a form that answers to its true idea; disengaged from the passing accidents that cling to individuality, and from disturbing influences that obscure the type.” But idealization can also mean that “the object is seized in some happy and characteristic moment, its lines of grace or strength are more firmly drawn, its beauty is heightened and the object ennobled, while the likeness to the original is retained. The two senses of the word coincide in the higher regions of art” (Butcher 359, 360).

29. The terms “subjective” and “objective” already stack the deck. A feeling is subjective in that it belongs to a person but is not merely subjective to the extent that it reflects the recognition of real beauty and truth in nature; to that extent it might be considered a perception. Instead of calling tacit knowing “subjective,” Polanyi calls it “personal.” He says, “. . . the personal comes into existence by asserting universal intent, and the universal is constituted by being accepted as the impersonal term of this personal commitment” (Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* 308). The “feeling of beauty” discussed here might therefore be more like a perception, but more work needs to be done to distinguish and relate different sorts of experience that may reveal different sorts of truths; for example, the experience of the beautiful, of the sublime, of existence, of resonance, of appropriateness, of satisfaction, of catharsis, of pleasure, and of completeness.

30. But can’t there be an ugly truth? And can’t someone recognize himself in the ugly? Or redefine himself as ugly? For Aristotle the ugly can, in a sense, be redeemed in artistic production. As Butcher tells us, “A character universalized may, if regarded alone, be ‘ugly,’ and yet contribute to the beauty of the whole.” In art, the ugly “ceases to be ugly; it is an element in a fact which is beautiful” (Butcher 344). Even the ugly can have a sublime elegance that is beautiful.

31. This is true for the good person, who has practical wisdom and good taste: “As in ethics Aristotle assumes a man of moral insight (*ho phronimos*) to whose trained judgment the appreciation of ethical questions is submitted, and who, in the last resort, becomes the ‘standard and the law’ of right [Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III 3, 1113a33], so too in fine art a man of sound aesthetic instincts (*ho charieis*) is assumed, who is the standard of taste and to him the final appeal is made. He is no mere expert, for Aristotle distrusts the verdict of specialists in the arts [Aristotle, *Politics* III 11 1282a1–21] and prefers the popular judgment,—but it must be the judgment of a cultivated public” (Butcher 209).

32. In Platonic terminology, the difference between genuine forms of the Good and good form—rhetoric, for example—must not be conflated.

33. There are interpretations of Aristotle that advocate the notion of individual form and those that do not. Aristotle might be saying that there is one ideal form that *every* human being should aspire to and *this* is the form of the “individual thing”; in other words, there is one form of person we should all try to be. For Aristotle, as Aquinas believed, the *thisness* of a thing might be due to its matter as opposed to its form. But Butcher seems to be at least suggesting that there are different and individual ways for a person to fulfill the ideal of a human being. With the progression of Aristotelianism into the Christian tradition, the conception of an individual form should gain more credence, since each person has an individual soul. Aquinas, however, believed that matter is the source of differentiation, and so bodily resurrection was imperative in retaining our individual distinctions within our species-form.

34. A definition, a paradigm, or a poem can display what Aristotle calls an essence, what Polanyi calls a joint comprehension of meaning, and what Dewey calls a consummatory experience. According to Dewey, a general error in Greek thought was to take an achievement, a consummatory production, reify it, or project it backward in time

and upwards in dimension as a cause. For Polanyi, a focal goal can gather the resources required to provide for its manifestation, and so the notion of essence as a cause and the notion of telos still has a certain plausibility. As a self-actualizer I may have some elbow room to actualize myself in a manner consistent with my history and its 'joint significance' into an ideal form or essence. This elbow room in becoming can be related to Aristotle's notion of habituation.

35. Of course, linking authenticity to an Aristotelian individual form is not going to make individualists any happier. I can't pick and choose *anything* and be authentic in doing so. But "in the end, authenticity can't, shouldn't, go all the way with self-determining freedom. It undercuts itself. Yet the temptation is understandably there" (Taylor 68). And the rebellious teen grows to genuinely appropriate some aspects of tradition, reject others, and introduce the new and novel.

36. The main indictment of views such as MacIntyre's is that they look *back* to traditions rather than forward, and so they seem to avoid inevitable dilemmas brought by social, political and economic changes. Recourse to tradition seems reactionary and one must work *through* Western liberal culture to find more creative solutions. Jurgen Habermas, for instance, believes that homes in traditions are no longer available nor desirable; they tend to be dogmatic or they throw out the goods of liberalism with its ills. Habermas instead tries to reestablish the authority of reasoning and save liberal values by exploring the conditions for the possibility of authentic communication. For MacIntyre, on the other hand, the solutions to the ills of modernity are only genuinely worked through from within an evolving tradition of inquiry.

37. But if there is an authentic part of me that I despise, would I not then see *it* as ugly? Perhaps, but then it might be a *distortion* of my own ideal. It may be an insult to my nature that I have not yet overcome and not an authentic part of it. But even if it is a malformation that I cannot ever overcome, and so it claims to be an authentic part of who I am, I can hold out the hope that it may still be an aspect redeemed in the art of self-making; it might be beautified in the grander scheme. And if that hope is Pollyannaish, a more realistic connection between ideal beauty and ugly truth might be found in the realization that even in the ugly fact one might feel an appreciation of sorts in the sentiment of being it manifests. Is this sentiment, then, the source of the self-engrossed obsession some artists have with transforming their *bête noir* into art? Or is the redemption found in art the source of the obsession?

38. The more traditionally expounded Aristotelian virtues can be what Joe Velazquez calls "performance parameters" for achieving an authentic expression of the self. A meaty moral payoff for the exploration of authenticity that does not require a lot of metaphysical basting may be at hand.

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