# Elusive Difference in Conception of Authentic Identity

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## Abstract

Based on the tradition of Western intellectual history, Charles Taylor draws authenticity as a life good of self-fulfilment linked with the constitution of self-identity. According to Taylor, Authenticity has explicit roots in the moral sources of modernity that he sketches in *Sources of the Self*. The defence of authenticity as a valid moral ideal that Taylor proposes in *The Ethics of Authenticity* is based on the commonality of moral sources in Taylor's description of modernity. Taylor opens a rethinking of authenticity such that it is not self-enclosed and evasive of public articulation to be subjected to critical evaluation. This paper critically engages with Taylor's account of authenticity and its historical sources in his works. The paper argues that Taylor's authenticity is entangled in the notion of identity and its quest for fundamental ontology, which restricts his conception of authenticity both in its own right and in the political experience of deliverance from the modern predicament. The paper contends that any notion of authenticity must be sympathetic to Taylor's criticism of self-determining freedom. However, authenticity must also be compassionate to 'difference' to accommodate uniqueness and plurality adequately.

**Keywords**: authenticity, moral sources, Charles Taylor, identity, difference

## Elusive Difference in Taylor's Conception of Authentic Identity

Authenticity is an ideal closely linked to the rise of individualism and the alienation implied in modern subjectivism. Many philosophers have explored the idea of authenticity to redress the modern predicament of meaningfulness and originality in a world determined by functional and utilitarian norms. Charles Taylor has reimagined modernity and secularism to propose a rethinking of authenticity. He argues that authenticity as an ideal has become a deviant practice due to the subjectivism of contemporary

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culture. Subjectivism renders the ideal of authenticity empty, and therefore, Taylor demands an opening to a "background of intelligibility" or "horizon of significance" based on which some things may be evaluated as more or less worthy. Taylor's central concern is the atomism of the modern individual, whose disenchantment with the world and consequent loss of political control over a highly centralized and bureaucratic public sphere may lead to despotism and the loss of public freedom. By arguing for the inherent background of some indispensable self-transcending element in the ideal of authenticity, he tries to resolve the fragmentation in modernity.

Taylor's reformulation of authenticity conceives it as an ideal of constituting fulfilling self-identity with an openness to the horizon of significance. He argues that "the culture of self-fulfilment has led many people to lose sight of concerns that transcend them" (1991a, p. 15). He sees "the theory of radical choice," oblivious of the essential horizon, as inaugurating "a terrifying experience of disaggregation and loss," causing us to lose "our grip on who we are" (1985, p. 35).

This paper explores the historical sources of the making of modern identity to expose the meaning of the horizon of significance to which authenticity in Taylor demands the necessary opening. He addresses the distinct predicament of the individual who experiences a compelling estrangement from the collective in modern societies. Historical sources in Taylor provide the metaethical reconciliation of the subjective experience and the objective world. By arguing for a significant and self-fulfilling ideal of authenticity, he rescues the predicament of individual estrangement from the collective context. However, his attack on subjectivism and a prescription that interweaves individual and their world in objective moral necessity is unsympathetic to *difference*.

This paper tries to expose some biases of Taylor's philosophy to conclude that authenticity in Taylor is so permissive that no conception of inauthenticity is possible or so restrictive that it cannot sufficiently accommodate uniqueness and plurality. This paper contends that predicating authenticity on the problem of defining one's identity advances universal claims about human nature, which is insufficient to accommodate the existential difference of one authentic individual from the other.

The arguments put forth in this paper take a cue from Mark Redhead (2002), who contends that Taylor's ontological history to trace the moral terrain as a solution to modern fragmentation is restrictive. Redhead sees in Arendt's insight a better reconciliation of accommodating narrow identities into a shared polity. The Arendtian insights become a background to critically engage with the practical consequences of Taylor's account and its philosophical biases beyond the methodological differences between these thinkers and their critique of modernity.

## Interpretive-Historical Sources of Authenticity

Understanding authenticity in Taylor's account requires dwelling on the sources from which he traces its demands and currency in contemporary culture. He analyses the moral ideals, the concepts of the self, and the modern subject's moral experience to articulate a picture of modern moral identity and its moral source by interpreting "certain developments in philosophy and religious outlook" over the years (Taylor, 1989, p. 199). He recognizes that ideas cannot be interpreted and understood outside the context of the practices in which they develop and how "ideas can interweave with their practices are various" (Taylor, 1989, p. 205). He affirms that the causal link between ideas and practices "runs in both directions" (Taylor, 1989, p. 206). Taylor articulates modern identity by explaining the "diachronic causation" (1989, p. 202) of ideas such that they are historical "interpretation of given practice" (1989, p. 205) that are "peculiar to Western civilization" (1989, p. 202). Therefore, he is not developing a deterministic historical explanation. He limits his work to interpretive questions without dismissing various other changes in politics, science, economics, and so on that contributed to making the contemporary condition.

The modern worldview emerges from the break in the "older moral horizons" (Taylor, 1991a, p. 3). Max Weber calls the premodern experience of the world an "enchanted garden" (Guignon, 2004, p. 11) where "human beings experience themselves as placeholders in wider totality" (Guignon, 2004, p. 10). The shattering of "the original unity of the theistic horizon" (Taylor, 1989, pp. 495-496) as a source of meaning for a social life is central for Taylor to understand authenticity as a quest for meaning "in our own powers and in nature" (1989, p. 319). At the same time, for Taylor, "religious ideas" are central to the understanding of the self we now share in the modern world" (Guignon, 2004, p. xi).

Taylor draws a "schematic map" (Redhead, 2002, p. 808) of the moral sources of the development of modern identity by dividing it into three "historical movements" (Redhead, 2002, p. 809). These "three domains" are dynamic, "continually borrowing from and influenced by each other" (Taylor, 1989, p. 496). Taylor traces the first facet of modern identity "through Augustine to Descartes" (1989, p. x), forming the "original theistic grounding" (1989, p. 495). The sense that "we are 'selves'", "beings with inner depths" (Taylor, 1989, p. x), is what Mark Redhead (2002) refers to as "the original Christian turn inwards" (p. 808). Descartes radicalized the inwardness into "a reflexive turn, where instead of simply trusting the opinions you have acquired through your upbringing, you examine their foundation, which is to be ultimately found in your own mind" (Taylor, 1995, p. 4). Taylor places the "picture of disengaged" (1989, p. 245) or autonomous reason that takes scientist forms today in this first movement.

The second movement begins "from the Reformation through the Enlightenment to its contemporary forms" that affirmed "the ordinary life" (Taylor, 1989, p. x), which is "those aspects of human life concerned with production and reproduction, that is, labor" (Taylor, 1989, p. 211). The foundation of this new reevaluation of ordinary life had its roots in "Judaeo-Christian affirmation of life" (Taylor, 1989, p. 218), a theme that survived through the Reformation. The movement was responsible for a new conception of the "neutral world of nature" (Taylor, 1994, p. 20) that awaits its purpose imposed on it. Living according to nature did not mean living according to the cosmic order of Being or "(substantive) reason" as understood in ancient times but "living according to the design of things" (Taylor, 1989, p. 279) revealed to us through "(instrumental) reason" telling us "the way that we are intended to play our part in this design" (Taylor, 1989, p. 282). However, this design is not only about "our relation to the whole" but also about the "inclinations and tendencies of our own nature" (Taylor, 1989, p. 282) accessible through "undistorted" sentiments that "reason must take account of" as "the touchstone of the morally good." This second historical movement takes us into the Romantic Movement, where "nature as the source of right impulse or sentiment" becomes "the voice within" (Taylor, 1989, p. 284).

The third source of modern identity originates from the Romantic Movement, "the expressivist notion of nature as an inner moral source" (Taylor, 1989, p. x). Taylor conceives authenticity as a "child of the romantic period, which was critical of disengaged rationality and of an atomism that didn't recognize the ties of community" (1991a, p. 25). Romanticism advances the understanding of the original affective impulse of nature as always good as against culture that distorts the contact with the pristine origin. The voice of nature speaks to us from within. Discovering and articulating this nature that "we find within" (Taylor, 1989, p. 374) is unique to every individual, and one ought to "live up to our originality" (Taylor, 1989, p. 375).

Together these three sources constitute the ideal of authenticity in contemporary culture. It must be considered that the historical movements Taylor sketched for Western civilization are not merely a cultural construction that is intersubjectively constituted. Instead, these historical sources are moral ontologies that constitute cultural morality. They are also not a purely anthropocentric background of human subjectivity, which though related to humans, are not "mere human constructions" (Laitinen, 2008, p. 272). Michel Meijer (2018) is right to term them as "nonanthropocentric" view of ontology that reveals something about "the world qua world" (p. 64), and yet not alienated from the human realm in the Platonic sense. Ultimately, what these historical sources achieve in Taylor's moral philosophy is an objective realism of cultural morality establishing the "sovereignty of good" (Kerr, 2004, p. 84) and a source of subjective "normative pull" (Varga, 2012,

p. 98) that resonates within a moral subject commanding their "moral awe or allegiance" (Taylor, 1991b, p. 243).

## Taylor's Account of Authenticity

The three historical movements together form the "metaphysical and epistemological ground" (Redhead, 2002, pp. 806-807), from which the conception of authenticity develops in Taylor's account as an ideal of self-fulfillment. He argues that authenticity has deep roots in the moral outlook of modernity. He refutes the critics who characterize "authenticity as a self-serving, morally hollow ideal that represents the curdling of Western culture's cherished individualism into something approaching narcissism" (Rings, 2017, p. 479). However, Taylor also agrees that the ideal of authenticity has degraded in contemporary practice taking "trivialized and self-indulgent forms" (Taylor, 1991a, p. 15).

According to Taylor, the postmodern "epiphanies of modernism" have radicalized romanticism by turning "more inward" in a celebration of subjectivity and "has explored new recesses of feeling, entered the stream of consciousness." At the same time, it also decentered or even displaced the subject by bringing language to the center "or even dissolving the self" into some new ontology. Taylor traces a paradoxical "slide to subjectivism" in the ideas of the twentieth century that have, at the same time, "an anti-subjectivist thrust" (1989, p. 456). The alignment between inner nature and the reason that the Romantics harmonized has broken under the postmodern attack on the notion of the unitary self that has, as Taylor argues, opened us "to the flux which moves beyond the scope of control or integration" (1989, p. 462).

Taylor contends that the postmodern attack on modern subjectivity (unified agency and identity) rather than an alternative to inwardness instead complements it. Postmodern theories, he argues, lead to radical reflexivity "through a heightened awareness of personal experience" (1989, p. 481) in promoting "the subjectivism of self-celebration" (1989, p. 490). The exaltation of creative potential of subjectivity is an aestheticism that advances the logic of unrestrained freedom that is solely self-determined. It is against this contemporary backdrop that authenticity becomes trivialized.

According to Taylor, the postmodern "protest against a world dominated by technology, standardization, the decay of community, mass society and vulgarization" (1989, p. 456) ends in a travesty. The search for "some purer, deeper, or stronger moral source" than the debased and "meaningless world" (Taylor, 1989, p. 458) of disengaged and instrumental reason rests on the ethos of authenticity as a "full flowering of particularity." However, the aporia in which the project finds itself caught is such that the flowering becomes impossible without some "articulation in concepts, in

universals," in turn suppressing "something of the reality of the particular" (Taylor, 1989, p. 478). Therefore, despite promising to move outside the subject "to something 'out there'" (Taylor, 1989, p. 480), the ideas referred to as postmodern ultimately "remains inward" despite being "irreducible in relation to the personal" at a secondary level" (Taylor, 1989, p. 481).

Taylor's historical analysis of moral sources that make up the modern identity successfully salvages the ideal of authenticity from the critics who reject it as a valid moral ideal. However, the very idea of authenticity confronts a dual paradox. The first paradox deals with aligning the "subject's inner states and outer conduct" (Ferrara, 2020, p. 4) to acquire recognition. As an end in itself, the pursuit of aligning subjective motivation to the world's demands would become a form of conformism. In other words, authenticity requires the outside world to manifest, yet it can be achieved only by resisting outside influences. As we shall see, Taylor provides a reasonable but partial resolution to the first paradox.

The second paradox is a widespread postmodern critique of "unified agency" and identity (Ferrara, 2020, p. 9), as discussed before, on which Taylor's account of authenticity is predicated. However, by preempting the postmodern critiques as promoting a debased culture of self-indulgence, he argues for forming an authentic identity accessible through rational-hermeneutic subjectivity. We will return to the problem that Taylor's commitment to the oneness of *identity* poses as an unresolved paradox making the *difference* elusive.

The first paradox is reconciled "by arguing that subjectivity and objectivity are essentially intertwined in the realm of value" (Anderson, 1996, p. 17). As discussed earlier, Taylor's thesis of non-anthropocentric historical moral sources proposes the sovereignty of higher good as constituting objectivity of cultural morality. At the same time, the ontology of moral sources also acts as the background empowering subjective moral impulses. Taylor attempts to reconcile the first paradox of authenticity through this metaethical ontology that entwines selfhood and morality. He gives a context of cultural morality in which individuals can articulate their authenticity without being self-enclosed in meaninglessness.

However, the resolution remains partial as it is hard to comprehend how conformism is resisted in the ontological intertwining of human nature and the world. The ontological grounding of individual and collective morality suggests a necessity in which moral subjects "are constrained by standards" (Anderson, 1996, p. 19) that are objectively necessary to which they must conform. Nevertheless, it can be argued that Taylor's reconciliation addresses the experiential problem of an emptied life of meaning within a disengaged mode of existence in an instrumental society. However, the political crisis

that modern estrangement threatens public freedom and spontaneity remain unmediated unless reasonable evaluative foundations are defined to also account for resistance to conformism.

Taylor addresses the primary paradox of authenticity by predicating an individual's self-identity upon strong evaluation "against a background of intelligibility." He also refers to the background as "a horizon" (Taylor, 1991a, p. 37) that matters in some self-transcending way. In light of this background, individuals reflect and evaluate their lives and the world in which they live. This background is constituted of "the moral sources *outside* the subject through languages which resonate *within* him or her" (Taylor, 1989, p. 510). Taylor here "reformulates Heidegger's notion of thrownness" (Braman, 2000, p. 226) as a "form of agency" that is placed in "a context conferring intelligibility" (Taylor, 2006, p. 210). He argues that this background is the "mode of being" that provides the context in which experiences become intelligible. The mode of being (i.e., the background) shapes the world for the agent where the "(W)orld shaping is a matter of sense making" (Taylor, 2006, p. 213).

Taylor uses sense-making in two ways. The background determines the *sense* world makes for the agent because the agent has some *sense* of this background. The interpretive-historical moral sources (theistic, naturalist, and romanticist) are the images of this background that Taylor articulates for the West. The ontological background shapes or constitutes the objective sense or meaning of the intersubjective world and not *vice versa*. The ontological background can constitute the objective meaning because the subject's agency is conferred intelligibility in the context of this background. Thus, we can infer that this background is neither subjective nor objective (intersubjective) but what constitutes the reality of subjective agency and intersubjective objectivity of morality.

On the one hand, the "disengaged, scientistic philosophy of human life" does not accept the background of intelligibility. Conversely, the "neo Nietzschean theories" (Taylor, 1991a, p. 67) accept the background outlook but reduce it to the celebration of subjective creativity. To rescue authenticity from being self-serving and disengaged, Taylor argues that authenticity requires "(i) openness to horizons of significance (for otherwise the creation loses the background that can save it from insignificance) and (ii) a self-definition in dialogue" (Taylor, 1991a, p. 66).

The horizon of significance implies the ontological background as well as the intersubjective world that demands our moral stand and its articulation. The intersubjective world is constituted of two genres of common goods; "the goods of a culture that make conceivable actions, feelings, valued ways of life" and the "goods that essentially incorporate a common understanding of

their value" (Taylor, 1995, p. 140) shared by members of a given polity. These common goods are "life goods" arising from the ontological background. Because the source of the life goods is the ontological background, the background can also be called "constitutive goods" (Redhead, 2002, p. 806). Openness to the horizon of significance implies both *life* and *constitutive* goods.

Therefore, according to Taylor, authenticity is "discovering (and articulating) my identity" (1991a, p. 47) in reference to the intimate resonance or moral force of the ontological background that is revealed in negotiating with the cultural life goods. What "is properly my own" (Taylor, 1991a, p. 29) is accessing the ontological background that is "really of worth or importance, both in general and for me" (Taylor, 1985, p. 258) through dialogue, "partly overt, partly internalized, with others" (Taylor, 1991a, p. 47). For authentic identity, the negotiation is with the first genre of common goods, and for authentic recognition, it is with the second genre of common goods.

The politically more relevant aspect of authenticity in Taylor is the notion of recognition closely linked with the notion of identity. Identities are formed "in agreement or struggle with" (Taylor, 1991a, pp. 45-46) the recognition of our identities by others. Both identity and recognition, specifically a "modern preoccupation" (Taylor, 1991a, p. 46), are "shaped by the growing ideal of authenticity" (Taylor, 1991a, p. 49) in contemporary culture. The "politics of identity-recognition requires" (Taylor, 1991a, p. 51) the principle of "equal value of different identities." Taylor treads further to find the common source of equal value on which such a principle of equal value can be grounded. He argues that "recognizing difference requires a horizon of significance." Nevertheless, unlike authentic identity, the horizon in the case of recognition necessarily needs to be "a shared one," which is to say that there needs to be "some substantive agreement on value" (Taylor, 1991a, p. 52). The substantive agreement on value is the second genre of common goods that is, as discussed before, also ultimately grounded in the ontological background of constitutive goods.

## Limitations of Taylor's Account of Authenticity

Taylor requires attending to a background of intelligibility and is critical of the subjectivist stress on suppressing or denying the horizons in defining oneself. He argues that "authenticity can't, shouldn't, go all the way with self-determining freedom" (Taylor, 1991a, p. 68). However, the necessary ontological background that is "a condition of being a functioning self" (Taylor, 1989, p. 99) makes the possibility of any self-interpretation and definition in exclusion of the horizon redundant. In such an essential case for human subjectivity, for all practical purposes, Taylor's prescription of

opening to the horizon of significance appears merely as moral rhetoric. He assumes in his argument that the interpreter can somehow be outside of the hermeneutic circle. Self-choice is already contextualized within a background, which is also re-contextualized by the meaning that the individual imposes on the background.

As an example, Taylor considers history as a horizon of significance. It may be argued that the individual's historical background in which she is defining her identity is fictitious or narrow, but to imagine that there is no historical background to their self-understanding or that her identity is formed in suppression of some background is hermeneutically mistaken.

Unless the background is open to critical scrutiny, which constitutes the cultural context in which the modern self-identity is formed, or it is demonstrable that the ontological background is subject to erroneous interpretation under the influence of subjectivism and instrumental rationality, it is hard to defend Taylor's criticism of "the flattened and trivialized forms of modern culture" (Taylor, 1991a, p. 91). The predicament of Taylor's non-anthropocentric ontological background as the origin(al) source of individual moral experience within a cultural web of meanings constituted by the same ontology advances essential claims about human subjectivity and collective morality. Such essentialism renders the critique of contemporary culture that is "flattened and trivialized" indefensible because the critique implies the incapacity of the ontological moral sources to motivate our evaluative impulses and illicit our moral articulations. We can rescue this predicament if we have a reasonable foundation to argue that a particular manner of opening to the horizon of significance (life and constitutive goods) is problematic. However, since Taylor shows subjective evaluative instinct as a moral demand that emanates from a higher ontological source, there must be some way the higher ontology fails to act as a normative pull. Without addressing these problems, Taylor's account of authenticity falls short of redeeming modern culture from insignificance and offering a valid account of what it means to be inauthentic.

Taylor exposes the background and confers ontological status to the same as the sources of meanings and values that empower us. The question remains what it means to be either shut to the background or the failure of the moral sources to motivate us anymore and how it can be phenomenologically shown. The problem in showing the same is that Taylor's account of strong evaluation, opening to the background of intelligibility (i.e., intersubjectively held life goods and ontological constitutive goods), is a universal feature of human agency. It can be argued that Taylor undermines the grip and bewitchment of modern subjectivism and the instrumental forces of state and economy that advance a mode of self-interested functional behavior.

Taylor's account of authenticity is enmeshed in the ontological sources that constitute both the individual's moral impulses and the shared morality. Hence it apparently fails to fully account for the uniqueness of the individual in its contingency by reducing authenticity to the demands of objective morality. Taylor does not account for some possibility of being true to oneself in any distinctly particular way as different from what is good in general, rendering "the criterion of authenticity" as mere "superfluous" (Bialystok, 2014, p. 293). He argues that "(A)uthenticity is clearly self-referential," but it can be self-referential only in "the *manner* of espousing any end." However, the "*content*" must stand independently of "my desires or aspirations" (Taylor, 1991a, p. 82). That is to say; there is a certain freedom of self-interpretation in deciding what ends matter to me and to what degree. However, it also implies that whether we take a stand in favor, against, or remain neutral on the objective content, in any possible scenario, there is no remaining scope of being inauthentic.

Taylor argues that an individual's authentic identity formation requires opening to the demands emanating from a self-transcending horizon. Any identity thus formed conforms to a general communal identity. However, what gives authentic identity significance is promoting the demands of the common cultural goods that hold a diverse polity in a shared horizon. Therefore, if one is open to what is valued in a culture and the goods on which there is an agreement of value, then in Taylor's view, she is an authentic individual.

To ask what inauthenticity is for Taylor, we may imagine a ticklish political scenario where the consensus on the shared horizon is broken. Consider a diverse but dysfunctional democracy whose dominant political sense of a shared collective purpose (the second genre of common goods) devolves into alienating, annihilating, or homogenizing all forms of differences not commonly conceived as cultural goods (the first genre of common goods). Indeed, these common goods must also derive legitimacy from some historical-interpretive ontology of constitutive goods that form the shared horizon of such political common sense. Will participation, resistance, or indifference to such a horizon of significance all lay claim to authenticity? If not, what is it to account for the divergence and difference in Taylor's essentialism of the world and human nature?

Therefore, Nick Smith argues that Taylor's moral philosophy is formally appealing within rational intercourse. However, under what conditions such a "properly articulated ideal of authenticity may become a *political* (practical) reality" (Smith, 1994, p. 24) is not clearly expressed. Taylor's attempt to reconcile the fragmentation between subject and object through historically articulated moral ontology falls back on the Hegelian security, arguing that authenticity is an insight into the necessity of objective morality.

Taylor shows little sympathy for the background of the existential tradition in which the quest for authenticity prominently develops. Jacob Golomb, who traces the meaning of authenticity in the "unusual heroes" of the existential tradition, poses authenticity as the "central dilemmas of the postmodern world" (Golomb, 1995, p. 13). Taylor's ontology neglects the "hero's gesture" that became "the *pose* of (Existenz) philosophy since Nietzsche" (Arendt, 1946, p. 41) by preemptively closing "the questions that Nietzsche's genealogy opens up, such as: why *these* meanings? Why *these* languages? Why *this* morality?" (Meijer, 2017, p. 383).

Hannah Arendt argues that "Nietzsche's *amor fati*, Heidegger's Resoluteness, Camus' Defiance which would risk living despite the absurdity" (1946, p. 41) are nothing but a protest against the old security of necessity that restricts freedom as it fails to account for "the pure factual character of…existing in all its contingency (that, precisely, I am *I* and no one else)" (Arendt, 1946, p. 43). The tension between individual moral motivations and general morality, as reconciled by Taylor in arguing for a metaethical ontology of historical goods that is the constitutive source of both the individual and the cultural morality, leaves little room for the contingency of individual existence and her difference. Joel Anderson brings out the irreconcilable "tension between Taylor's ontological account of value" and "what individuates me as the unique individual I am" (1996, p. 18). Further, we have seen that inauthenticity, too, becomes ambiguous in Taylor's conception of authenticity.

Taylor's account of authentic identity thus breeds trouble for the notion of political freedom that Arendt conceives as the "spontaneity of beginning something new" (1978b, p. 203). The oneness of identity as one of the paradoxes of authenticity discussed above requires an essential grounding. The universality of such ontological assumption is antithetical to the particularity of will that the notion of authenticity hints at. Taylor's theoretical prejudice militates against "(C)ontingency as the price to be paid for freedom" (Arendt, 1978b, p. 134). Arendt, in agreement with Karl Jaspers, argues that "I cannot resolve the real to the object of thought" and that "the triumph of possible freedom" requires suspending "the question concerning the meaning of Being" such that "'(M)an as possibility of his spontaneity turns against his mere Being-a-result'" (Arendt, 1946, p. 53).

Conversely, Taylor seeks reconciliation from the modern predicament in the security of *Being*. However, he has not established his ontology as a metaphysical theory. The non-anthropocentric ontology in Taylor is a phenomenological background over and above the cultural forms of life, but it cannot be established by the phenomenological method, which is only limited to experience. The conception of authenticity in terms of identification (discovery and articulation) with the moral ontology necessarily refers to

oneself, where any sense of particularity of attitude is to look for a symbolic commonality in the community, distorting the plurality of the world. The idea that a defensible authenticity "*for me* is necessarily a matter of moving closer" (Anderson, 1996, p. 24) to general moral ontology casts a shadow on Taylor's professed commitment to existential uniqueness and phenomenal plurality.

Any conceptualization of authenticity must satisfactorily consider one's relation to oneself and others. This is to say that "everything that exists among a plurality of things is not simply what it is in its identity, but is also different from others" (Arendt, 1978a, p. 183). Identity "reveals no difference, no otherness," which the notion of authenticity cannot overlook. Authenticity needs a clear exposition of the experience of difference of an individual, "something it is *not*" (Arendt, 1978a, p. 184), or of what it is *for* itself. Taylor seems to reason that both in-itself and for-itself are reconciled in the discovery and articulation of his constitutive moral ontology rendering uniqueness irredeemable. Therefore, the paradox of unified agency and identity remains completely unresolved in Taylor. Instead, by dismissing difference as a trivial self-indulgence or an ineluctable predicament, he predicates the notion of authenticity on identity that necessarily requires a strong ontological grounding, suppressing the meaning of authenticity itself.

Taylor attempts to liberate authenticity from the disengaged identity of *I-am* into a more significant intersubjective identity, where *I-am* is placed in the purposive totality of values. However, the central problem that the analysis of Taylor's account reveals is that he never breaks free from the assumption of the oneness of identity and thus leaves the second paradox of authenticity unresolved. The second paradox of authenticity that critiques unified identity as essentialism, unsympathetic to difference, is an Achilles' heel for Taylor's account. There is nothing in Taylor's conception of authenticity that precludes a probable "falling over each other" as a feature of the "mass society" (Arendt, 1958, p. 52). What we end up with as authenticity is an individual with no significant way of being unique and a world of plurality and politics perpetually anxious and perplexed about differences in its quest for broadly sufficient commonalities. Equivalently, no conception of inauthenticity is possible in Taylor's reconciliation of subjectivity and objective morality.

## Conclusion

The debate around authenticity that Taylor inaugurates to rescue the contemporary culture is well-meaning. However, sententious rhetoric in which he conceptualizes authenticity deconstructs itself. The modern moral sources that Taylor alludes to in validating authenticity as an ethical ideal of identity formation restrict him to a confining understanding of authenticity.

Taylor remains inclined to the traditional philosophical paradigm in conceptualizing his romanticist authenticity, which requires discovering essential human nature and the objective normativity of a culture that intertwines in a non-anthropocentric ontology of intelligibility. Without a firm metaphysical ground, such essentialism has no compelling nature and is beyond proper comprehension. As we have seen, the ontological predicament in Taylor renders defending the critique of contemporary culture as also the conception of inauthenticity inaccessible. Such ambiguous and superfluous ontology may justify various forms of conformism in mass society, illegitimate consensus, or populist and authoritarian political movements.

The conception of authenticity in its own right only partially resolves the primary paradox of aligning the individual to the world. On the one side, it remains unclear how Taylor's account of authenticity allows for resistance to conformism in the manifest operation of authentic identity. On the other hand, the theoretical commitment to the oneness of identity and "yearning for the ontic logos" (Rosen, 1991, p. 194) compromises the contingency and uniqueness. Furthermore, the stress on commonality leads him to construct a restrictive public sphere.

Authenticity in Taylor does not fully allow for the world's otherness, difference, and plurality to appear. In his commitment to tradition, Taylor falls for identity in conceptualizing authenticity. He offers a hermeneutic reinterpretation of disregarded metaphysical identity as intersubjective identity situated in the meaning contextualized within a culture. However, to fully account for authenticity, the reflexivity of openness and resonance implied in the project deconstructs itself into either an inwardness of discovering a slippery original ontological source of one's moral impulses or conforming to contextualized objective morality. We confront two possibilities implied in two meanings of rationalization. Either the quest for authenticity in Taylor refers to a consistent and coherent identity grounded in the security of an ontology that resurrects the inwardness of modern subjectivism. Alternatively, authenticity refers to another meaning of rationalization implied in the post facto justification for one's self-serving choices resurrecting self-indulgence.

Authenticity deserves to be rethought, and the horizon that Taylor opens needs to be taken seriously. The dual paradox of authenticity concerning the demand for the uniqueness of the individual without falling for the conundrum of a unified identity that reveals no difference is a challenge. However, the ideal of authenticity must recognize uniqueness as the primary content of the ideal while ensuring that it is not tied to the self-defeating logic of radical choice.

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