

## A CRITIQUE OF MARTIN HEIDEGGER'S AND JEAN PAUL SARTRE'S ACCOUNT OF AUTHENTICITY

**NWUBE SIMEON NNANNA (Ph.D).**  
DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
EBONYI STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION,  
IKWO, NIGERIA

---

### Abstract

It has been widely held for centuries that one ought to “be oneself,” an imperative often referred to as authenticity. But the meaning of authenticity has remained a contested issue among philosophers and largely shapeless in most people's minds. In order to make sense of this compelling idea, one must reconcile authenticity with the metaphysics of selfhood and identity. In all of its applications, 'authenticity' refers to a convergence between how something presents itself and what it actually is. Yet the marriage of authenticity, with its essentialist structure, and personal identity, with its built-in temporal openness, is prima facie dubious. Authenticity appeals to something true and unchanging, but a person's identity evolves throughout his/her life. Furthermore, the ideal of “being oneself” requires that it also be possible to be “not oneself,” but it is difficult to explain how any individual could be other than who he/she is. It is argued in this paper that previous theories of authenticity especially that of Heidegger and Sartre, have not adequately negotiated these structural requirements. This is because of their inability to investigate who one is and how certain choices are more or less essential to our selves. This paper pursues such an investigation by arguing that authenticity must account for change in personal identity as well as the social and interpretive dimensions of selfhood without forfeiting the criterion that there is something true about who we are. The paper therefore, argues that we live authentic life by acting in accordance with our necessary dispositions in a certain situation.

**Key words:** Authenticity, Inauthenticity, Selfhood, Essentialism, Identity.

---

### INTRODUCTION

It has been widely held for several centuries that each person is an individual endowed with unique characteristics and possibilities. To be human is not to follow a formula of humanness, nor to plod through life as an undifferentiated member of the species; rather, to lead a human life – at least a fulfilling one – is usually thought to require honouring what it means to be human for me as a once-occurring person. Despite the centuries-long debate over how we ought to live, one conclusion has remained almost constant: one ought, if nothing else, to be oneself. One ought, in other words, to be authentic. The value of authenticity is so easily accepted as to be invisible: whether the context is personal identity, cuisine, ethnic artifacts, or works of art, authenticity is one of those rare qualities that are considered good without qualification. Conversely, inauthentic things or people are almost universally discredited as “fake,” “unoriginal” or

“shams.” While these aesthetic and moral judgments occur frequently in both academic and non-academic discourse, we have no robust definition of authenticity to justify these assessments. What it means for a person to actually “be authentic” is left suspiciously vague, even as we insist again and again on the importance of authentic living.

The major task of this paper is to subject the possibility of personal authenticity to a careful philosophical analysis and conclude with a constructive account of its actual meaning. The phrase “personal identity” shall be used throughout this paper in a somewhat unconventional sense, referring not to questions of personhood but to the qualitative identity of individual persons.

#### Authenticity from Socrates to Sartre

The relation of the self to itself has been an important topic in philosophy, and specifically ethics, since the origins of the Western tradition. Foucault's analysis of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy reveals a profound concern with “care of the self” from Socrates to Plutarch<sup>1</sup>. Through intricate practices of self-discipline, cultivation, and reflection, the educated men of the ancient world self consciously fashioned themselves according to the virtues of the time: “a whole art of self knowledge developed, with precise recipes, specific forms of examination, and codified exercises”<sup>2</sup>.

The goal of this care for the self was not only to improve oneself in general terms but also to attend to one's individual qualities, establishing a rich relationship to oneself. Seneca “commands a whole vocabulary for designating the different forms that ought to be taken by the care of the self and the haste with which one seeks to reunite with oneself”<sup>3</sup>. Epictetus likewise speaks of a “conversion to oneself”<sup>4</sup>. Yet the emphasis in these formulations of how to relate to oneself remain broadly ethical and prescriptive: the purpose of knowing or returning to oneself is to better discipline oneself and control the type of person one becomes. It is not to discover who one already is. The ancient view of the self did not consider it valuable to simply be who one is for its own sake; “care of the self” means rather to make oneself into who one wants to be, as informed by certain aesthetic and moral ideals. Although the content of the ideal self developed over this period, with varying degrees of emphasis on self-denial or pleasure, the locus of ethics remained establishing the proper relationship to oneself as a means of living more virtuously. This is not quite the same as a concern for authenticity, but it may have laid the groundwork for Western philosophy's preoccupation with self-analysis and self-identity. Significantly, however, the care of the self was limited to those with the education, means, and

social status to indulge in such practices.

In the Christian era the nature of the concern for the self shifted from the ancient “aesthetics of existence” to a much narrower view of ethics. Self-discipline and surveillance were practiced, not as freely undertaken and self-designed exercises in personal growth, but as microcosms of a social order with rigid norms.<sup>5</sup>

The hierarchical society of mediaeval Europe defined each person's role in terms of class, gender, profession, and other social positions, rather than in terms of individual characteristics or aspirations, and the overarching doctrine of the Church determined how it was appropriate for individuals to relate to themselves. In order for authenticity to arise as a concern for Western culture, the pendulum had to swing back from a collectivist notion of identity to a climate in which identity was definable in terms of an atomistic self. This sea change occurred sometime in the early Renaissance, when a combination of religious, social, and intellectual developments made room for the idea of a subject with unique and self-determining importance<sup>6</sup>.

Luther's revolution popularized the idea that each person could have an

unmediated individual relationship to God. Kant formalized the connection between ethics and autonomy by arguing that each person is an end in himself and an independent legislator of the moral law. Fichte, building on Kant's transcendental idealism, described the subject as freely self-positing and metaphysically prior to all social and historical institutions. Now texture was added to the idea of a person who was formerly defined strictly by his status in a cosmic order or social hierarchy; now it was possible to ask how a free person might chart his/her own life according to autonomously chosen principles. It became accepted that there are special ways of being oneself, ones that are not determined by social contingencies. Though still under significant construction, the concept of authenticity as we now know it had made its debut.

Several salient features of the Romantic conception of selfhood and authenticity deserve to be mentioned, as they continue to influence our understanding of authenticity today. First, the development of authenticity in the literature and philosophy of the period was predicated on a relatively recent assumption in Western culture of the uniqueness of persons and the attendant belief that the good life will vary between persons. Whether one's uniqueness was attributed

to God or non-deistic forces such as “Nature,” this assumption made it possible to talk about authenticity as a measure of one's relation to one's own peculiar traits and possibilities, rather than the fulfillment of merely external obligations and ideals. Montesquieu was among the first to make this argument, which is summarized by Marshall Berman as follows: “Nature, which expresses itself through an infinite diversity of forms, endows every man with a personality uniquely his own, which he should express and cultivate”<sup>7</sup>. Johann Gottfried Herder argued that “each person is to be measured by a different yardstick, one which is properly his or her own”<sup>8</sup>. The descriptive fact, embraced in the late eighteenth century, that each individual might have a distinct purpose in life paved the way for the normative ideal of authenticity according to which one ought to fulfill one's own unique promise.

A second feature of the Romantics' breakthrough was the division it implied between inner and outer, self and other. Now that individuals were seen as unique seats of human experience with independent possibilities and aspirations, it made sense to distinguish between the self one experienced and the self as it was experienced by others. Having accepted this simple split, however, new questions

developed concerning the capacity for self-knowledge, sincerity, and knowledge of others. Pascal was skeptical about our ability to access the true self within: “Where is this supposed 'I'?”<sup>9</sup> he asked. Rousseau was concerned with the problem of sincerity, or the match-up between one's inner self and its external presentation: according to him, “[the self's] inner life is hidden from the outward of men”<sup>10</sup>. Questions of sincerity are hard to disentangle from those of authenticity, the Romantics discovered, because both depend upon the knowability of one's own self, which could no longer be established by turning to generic formulas or social conventions. The identity of the self in a social context can be just as confounding for oneself as it is for others. The implied opposition between nature and culture, usually grafted onto the dichotomy of authenticity and inauthenticity, is a third important aspect of the Romantics' conception of selfhood. Nature was typically exalted as the source of personal truth, authentic identity, and the much sought-after “purity” that contrasted with the corrupting influence of civilization. In Emile Rousseau claimed, “there is no original sin in the human heart,” implying that corruption only comes from the “outside,” and this view was echoed in the works of a host of poets and thinkers, including Hölderlin, Schelling, Novalis,

and Goethe<sup>11</sup>. Authenticity, for the Romantics, demands a return to nature: “The original impulse of nature is right, but the effect of a depraved culture is that we lost contact with it”<sup>12</sup>. The source of all “sin,” or inauthenticity, was thought to be modern civilization, which of course is also a product of human nature. This paradox of “nature against something that is also nature” – to borrow a phrase that Nietzsche would coin nearly a century after the Romantics – captures a central concern of the philosophy of authenticity: the “true” or “natural” self stands in opposition to whatever is inauthentic or constructed, but this also derives from human agency. The collection of selves in an ordered society ironically pollutes the selfhood of each of its members. Hence Rousseau viewed modernity “as both the nadir of man's self-alienation, and, simultaneously, the medium for his full self-liberation”<sup>13</sup>.

Fourth, in line with its critique of modernity, Romanticism as a movement reacted to the immediately preceding reign of reason during Europe's Enlightenment. Advocating a return to emotion, some major figures of Romanticism, including Hölderlin and Wordsworth, stressed the natural guidance of feelings in living a fulfilling, ethical life. The “inner voice” that best expressed one's true feelings was

associated with childhood (an uncorrupted state of being) and thought to be discoverable through creativity and art<sup>14</sup>. Authenticity thus became associated with intuition as opposed to reason, spontaneity as opposed to deliberation, and with creativity in all its forms. It is probably for this reason that artists and writers have often been lauded for their supposed authenticity.

All four of these aspects of the Romantic fascination with authenticity have persisted in various forms to the present day, informing – whether consciously or not – our treatment of the subject. Most important to emphasize, however, is that the Romantic view favoured a fundamentally essentialist model of the self, according to which one could be brought into alignment with oneself simply by attending to the proper cues. The ideal promised for each person a state of wholeness and inner harmony that could only be achieved by personal effort, and whose achievement indeed constituted the purpose of life. Prevalent among the reactions to the Romantic view of authenticity was the suspicion that such wholeness was a naïve expectation that was bound to disappoint. Since approximately the late nineteenth century, it has been more common to point out the manifest ways in which the self can be divided, ungrounded, misled, and

misleading. It is not clear, on this less sunny view, what “being true to oneself” requires, or even whether it is possible. Accounts of personal identity from the post-Romantic era tend to stress 'losing oneself' rather than 'finding oneself,' and multiplicity rather than wholeness or oneness. By the time authenticity was dealt with by Heidegger in the 1920s, essentialism, and the prospect of self-discovery, were decidedly out of vogue.

The argument of this paper picks up at this important juncture, beginning with a detailed analysis of Being and Time. The paper focuses on accounts of authenticity provided in the twentieth century alone, and the purpose is not to provide a comprehensive tour of the tradition.<sup>15</sup> Instead, the paper takes the existentialist treatments of authenticity as a springboard and examines the ways in which they are both instructive and deficient, and how they have influenced subsequent thinking on this topic.

The appeal of authenticity has always been that attending to this inner self guarantee a life that strives to express and actualize truth – and not just any truth, but a truth that is unique to me as an individual. It is no wonder that authenticity has served as an ethical ideal for so many centuries and continues to compel us today.

### The Politics and Culture of Authenticity

After Heidegger and Sartre presented their novel accounts, authenticity was not a popular scholarly topic in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet despite its recent unpopularity in academic discourse, authenticity has become a defining value of many cultures, and indeed shaped some of the social institutions and political categories we recognize today. In this line of thought one recalls Kwasi Wiredu's call for Africans to go back to a consensus democracy as something original to them rather than the western type in vogue now. According to Wiredu, the traditional Akan practices of political decision-making (that is, consensus democracy) did reflect an idea of consensus, which was conducive to the securing of an important human right<sup>15</sup>. Employing existentialist language, many scholars in many a time talked about becoming 'real' or 'natural' or 'authentic' and about transcending their generation's 'alienation'<sup>16</sup>. Equally, the influential social movement of the 1960s in America, was formed largely in order to facilitate the individual's quest for authenticity, a project that members connected with greater social equality, improved democratic participation, and the radicalization of universities. Consequently liberal politics adopted the ideal of authenticity as an antidote to the perceived conservatism, materialism, and

alienation of postwar American society.

Today authenticity is used as a benchmark of character, a virtue perhaps more important than intelligence or compassion, in our assessment of leaders and politicians. In the 2008 Republican primaries, for example, Mitt Romney's unpopularity was attributed to his supposed "inauthenticity," whereas the come-from-behind winner Barack Obama was continually praised for his authenticity.

Although not many scholars may have read Rousseau or Herder, the Romantic ideal, stripped of some of its naturalistic emphasis, continues to hold an impressive amount of currency today. This might be partly as a result of the popularity of Sartre and Camus in the 1960s, but, as Charles Taylor points out, the culture of authenticity has also coincided with a general rise in individualism and the softening of ethical norms<sup>17</sup>. Each of these influences stresses the average individual's ability to create or discover truth from strictly personal resources. It seems that everyone is trying to achieve the elusive ideal of being authentic, however poorly delimited the concept.

#### Authenticity in Being and Time

In Being and Time, Heidegger attempts to

theorize fundamental ontology as a prerequisite to all further metaphysics. He believes that metaphysics has always missed a fundamental antecedent question, the absence of which amounts to a detrimental oversight. The ontological difference – the proper focus of ontology – is not this or that being, but the difference between beings and being, the difference that allows us to label anything as a being at all. Beings are familiar enough, but philosophy has never (to his mind) adequately tackled the question of being as such. Heidegger notes, "the being of beings 'is' itself not a being"<sup>18</sup>. He focuses on one particular type of being – the being of human beings, or Dasein – because of its unique capacity to "disclose" or "clear" the being of being in general. Dasein is the only being whose being is to be concerned with its own being. Dasein is analyzed phenomenologically to illuminate its relationship to the world, to other beings, to itself, and ultimately, to its possibilities for being, the kind of being that it is. Authenticity is the particular term that Heidegger chooses to label one of Dasein's ways of being. His discussion of authenticity occurs mostly in the second division of Being and Time, and is embedded in his complex account of being in general. Here, Heidegger uses the metaphor of "lost and found" to describe Dasein's status with respect to its potential

for authenticity. When Dasein is “lost” in the they-self, it is in some sense “not itself,” whereas when Dasein is authentic, it has “found itself”<sup>19</sup>. In both cases, it is Dasein that is lost or found, and also Dasein that does the losing or finding. The experience of Angst that leads into authentic being-toward-death is prompted by another ontological phenomenon, called “the call of conscience.” Fallen Dasein, lost in the they-self, needs a mechanism to “find” itself again. The call of conscience can be understood as the messenger that retrieves Dasein from the who of the they-self and brings it back to the I-self by reminding Dasein of the uncanniness of its existence<sup>20</sup>. Dasein is “called up” or “summoned” out of its superficial existence in idle chatter, scribbling, and the other activities of the they, and is guided back to its ownmost potentiality-of-being. When the call is effective, “the self is unequivocally and unmistakably reached”<sup>21</sup>. He has said more about Dasein than this, but not in such a way that the meaning of Dasein's “essence” or “being itself” can be clarified. For instance, Dasein is always in a mood; Dasein is always entangled with others; and Dasein has the potential for both inauthenticity and authenticity. But none of this information explains wherein “being itself,” as opposed to not being itself, is contained for Dasein. The assertion that inauthenticity is Dasein not

being itself and authenticity is Dasein being itself merely relocates the metaphysical problem through semantics. Furthermore, Heidegger maintains that only when Dasein assumes the appropriate orientation toward its death – which he calls authentic being-toward-death, or resolute anticipation – can authenticity go from a theoretical possibility to a full-fledged way of being<sup>22</sup>.

One cannot therefore, successfully critique Heidegger's account of authenticity without rehearsing his analysis of Dasein, and the way Heidegger idiosyncratically explains his account via the notions of anticipation, Mitsein, disclosedness, and others. In fact, authenticity for Heidegger almost amounts to fundamental ontology itself, as the pursuit of the question of the meaning of being for Dasein is correlative to the pursuit of authenticity. The ontological framework of Heidegger's account of authenticity means that it diverges from other views, in which authenticity is treated in connection with questions of selfhood and personal identity. Indeed, as a phenomenological-ontological account, Heidegger's description explicitly eschews the kinds of “ontic” details (properties belonging to particular beings) that might make his



account more accessible to individual selves. He is not interested in beings, except insofar as they participate in and remain distinct from Being, which renders his discussion of even the most intimate details of Dasein surprisingly impersonal. Far from providing a recipe in the way that many self-help books profess to give specific directives for leading a more authentic life, *Being and Time* does not even engage with questions of one's particular being. Authenticity is a formal existential structure rather than – or at least prior to being – an individual experience. Heidegger's account of authenticity is therefore a far cry from any concrete, normative accounts of what authenticity is and how to achieve it. It is not an independent theory that one can easily apprehend and compare to rival accounts. Because of its dependency on a much larger, highly abstract project – which had only been one third completed when Heidegger abandoned it, it is neither very precise nor very complete. Heidegger has set the reader on a journey without a road map and only vague descriptions of landmarks he might encounter along the way. Readers who are profoundly concerned with the meaning of their own existence and the pursuit of more authentic living will therefore be disappointed.

#### Sartre's Conception of Authenticity

While Sartre's phenomenological-

ontological work is clearly inspired by Heidegger, as well as their shared mentor, Husserl, it is perhaps most instructive to introduce the parts of Sartre's thought with which we are concerned by way of Hegel<sup>23</sup>. Just as the latter's notion of determinate negation posits the existence of everything that A is not as soon as it posits A, the being of human beings for Sartre includes everything that it is not in addition to everything that it is<sup>24</sup>. The dyadic relationship between being and non-being courses through all of Sartre's thought on existence and identity. In his estimation, being cannot be grasped without simultaneously acknowledging nothingness, which is like the backdrop against which being is. Hence whereas for Heidegger, temporality (specifically finitude) proved to be the 'horizon' of being, for Sartre, nothingness is the constant companion of being. The particular nature of human being especially depends upon the relationship between being and nothingness. Sartre divides being into two types: being-in-itself and being-for-itself. The latter is both unique to, and characteristic of all, human beings. As such, it would appear to be coextensive with Heidegger's Dasein. However, Sartre eschews the language of Dasein and substitutes for it the notion of consciousness, which likewise refers to undifferentiated human being. Cohen explains: "The Sartrean self is not a

concrete self-in-the-world but rather the reflective consciousness of that self-in-the-world as a meaning projected by its own reflective consciousness”<sup>25</sup>. Although the term 'consciousness' implies a privileging of the mental over the physical, human being critically encompasses both aspects of our reality for Sartre.

Our physical characteristics, however, like our environment, are not privy to the radical freedom that he will attribute to consciousness: they are part of our facticity, (or the factors affecting our being that are beyond our control). Being-in-itself is the type of being that contains nothing but facticity<sup>26</sup>. These non-human (even non-living) beings lack consciousness; they do not make choices; they are what Sartre calls “pure being” or solid. Although they exist in time, their being is not temporal, since they do not have possibilities for future existence that must be navigated through free choice. Being-for-itself is a combination of the being of being-in-itself and what Sartre calls “nothingness,” such that it can be said of human beings that our being involves simultaneously being and not-being. We can “be” (in the sense of being-in-itself) to the extent that our lives are determined by facticity – conditions such as our age, our physical limitations, the family into which we were thrown – but

our being is equally (if not overwhelmingly) characterized by not-being, that is, the lack of all determination<sup>27</sup>.

By self surpassing or transcending ourselves, we convert future openness into past facticity. It is the nothingness in our being that not only enables, but requires, this conversion, keeping us always at a distance from ourselves. We coincide with ourselves (that is, achieve complete being) only at the moment of death, when no future awaits us. So long as we live, the process of transcendence occurs constantly and inescapably, for we must forge our own route into the future from moment to moment whether or not we embrace the freedom which is the vehicle of that movement<sup>28</sup>. That embracement is integral to what Sartre will call “authenticity.”

Sartre's belief in the interplay of transcendence and facticity in human being results in apparent paradoxes. When Sartre asserts that consciousness “is what it is not and is not what it is,” he is playing on the meaning of the word “is,” which has been left purposely ambiguous in his ontology. Being-for-itself is what it is not in the sense that its composite being includes the nothingness (“what it is not”) that differentiates it from its factual being (“what it is”). My being includes all the

things that I am not but could be, since it contains the freedom to define myself. Hence I am lack, or nothingness (“what it is not”) – I am what I am not. Likewise I am not what I am (factically) because to fully coincide with my factual self would reduce me to being-in-itself. So while I am a lecturer (factically), I am also a being that is not any of the contingent things that it is, because lecturer does not come in the form of unfree, pure being. Sartre explains this by imagining that he is a waiter: “there is no doubt that I am in a sense a café waiter – otherwise could I not just as well call myself a diplomat or a reporter? But if I am one, this cannot be in the mode of being in-itself. I am a waiter in the mode of being what I am not”<sup>29</sup>. The equivocation in the meaning of “what I am” gives the for-itself this seemingly contradictory constitution. This results in difficulties in Sartre's thought since it effectively takes the force out of any identity labels or personal attributes.

### **Evaluation**

Like Heidegger's ideal, Sartre's requirement for authenticity hinges on an unwavering commitment to his ontology. The authentic individual must renounce the normal urge to define himself in one way or another, or to view certain traits as enduring, possibly essential, features of his identity. He must constantly access a freedom that is all too willing to be

crowded out by habit, expectation, laziness, or fear. The strength of resolve required to accomplish this could be what Sartre has in mind when he talks about the “extreme difficulty of achieving authenticity”<sup>30</sup>.

Achieving authenticity is also difficult according to these scholars' account because, its existence is tenuous; in a given moment and even Sartre accepted this. One either is or is not authentic, says Sartre “but that doesn't . . . mean that one acquires authenticity once and for good”<sup>31</sup>. Instead, because authenticity can only exist in a situation, and the situation is always changing, authenticity has to be re-calibrated all the time.

However, authenticity is not an undifferentiated attitude that can apply equally to all situations, as Sartre explains: “The instant that arrives is novel, the situation is novel: a new authenticity has to be invented”<sup>32</sup>.

So Heidegger's and Sartre's authenticity is difficult to achieve and impossible to maintain. Sartre himself wrote in his diary: “I haven't felt Nausea, I'm not authentic, I have halted on the threshold of the promised lands” (Diaries 62). Authenticity would therefore strain to fit into Heidegger's and Sartre's way of life given their overt rejection of the usual

ways of understanding selfhood and identity. In their line of thought, authenticity becomes a surprising notion to come across in a philosophy according to which a person can never be who he/she is. At least, it is at odds with the a priori understanding of authenticity as correspondence between identity and behaviour. If I am by definition not who I am, how can I behave in a manner consistent with that identity which I am not? Sartre creatively re-defines authenticity to incorporate (and, indeed, depend upon) the willing of that non-identity relation. Instead of correspondence between behavior and identity, authenticity for Sartre (in particular), requires correspondence between behaviour and the ontological structure of being-for-itself – which is precisely to not be itself.

Similarly, for its emphasis on freedom and rejection of deterministic identity, Sartre's account is a refreshing answer to stale secular and religious variations on “finding out who you really are,” which have just as much difficulty articulating who one really is as any existentialist account. But in his upheaval of the traditional metaphysics of selfhood, Sartre raises new, perhaps more intractable challenges. In order for me to not be what I am (and to be what I am not), there must yet be some fact about what (or

who) I am – otherwise, why differentiate at all between what I am and what I am not? We have discovered, however, that “what I am” for Sartre is no more than my facticity, which provides an inadequate basis on which to create my future self. If I am to transcend what I am (understood as what I have done) without simply re-creating myself in the same image, I need new motivation, new inspiration, or new values to act upon. Unlike in essentialist authenticity, these sought-after guidelines are precisely not to be furnished by who I am. Authenticity in Sartre requires me instead to choose on the basis of what I am not: on the basis of my nothingness, or my not yet. But what I am not is necessarily silent, waiting to become itself through my free action. Nor are there external values or practical rules available to me for deliberation: the future me that I am condemned to create must issue forth only from some elusive, internal freedom, which, moreover, does not speak once and for all but must be accessed in every situation, in every moment. How, then, could Sartre – much less anyone else – reasonably expect himself to achieve authenticity and to assure himself that what he becomes has not been contaminated with what he (already) is?

It goes without saying therefore, that Heidegger and Sartre ended up in presenting impersonal person (or being),

whose authenticity does not escape the burden of providing an account of who one is as well as some theory about how to behave in order to realize authenticity. This paper therefore, maintains that authenticity can be given a more robust description than this; a description that would require revisiting a version of selfhood that holds out the possibility of fundamental character traits and legitimate continuity between past and future.

### **Conclusion**

We have seen that the strictly essentialist model of selfhood demanded by authenticity breaks down under scrutiny. To speak of a “true self” that subsists beneath a veneer of contingency and conformity depends on, first, a rigorous separation between internal and external that supposes a pre-existing, asocial self, and second, consistency in the self over time. Both of these assumptions have been shown to be flawed. Our identities are formed in unpredictable ways by myriad different forces and they evolve over the course of our lives. But this does not mean that the entirety of our identity as individuals is up for grabs – that we can be absolutely anyone, as Sartre and (to a lesser extent) Heidegger argue. We can still believe that there are certain relatively imperturbable truths about ourselves and that some things are simply

foreign to our selves no matter where or how long we live. The true self is not that collection of traits or beliefs that remains consistent over time, but that set that would persist across different iterations of an individual's situation at a given moment. The repetition or multiplicity that needs consistency is not temporal; it is not a question of comparing one's reaction to the same situation now, in two years, in five years, and so on. Rather, it is a process of reflecting on different possibilities in the same moment. We can imagine ourselves feeling or acting differently with respect to something, yet still being the same person. We can accommodate these hypothetical changes in our selfhood without relinquishing our sense of self. That which holds the self together across these imaginary iterations is the only sense we can make of the idea of the true self, in relation to which we can in principle be authentic.

An attribute that changes over time is not part of one's essential identity if that is judged from the standpoint of temporal extension. The true self is therefore not recognizable through consistency over a lifetime; this is unrealistic as well as probably undesirable. But it is still the case that our desires, beliefs, convictions, habits, and dispositions are indicative in some way of who we are and how we ought to behave if we strive to be

authentic. Thus, while these might be subject to change over time, the relevant question is whether they are subject to change within the set of possibilities that characterize one's identity in a given situation. Such possibilities cannot be accessed empirically but only through a conscious act of self-reflection and imaginative identification.

### End Notes

Foucault, Michel. *Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984, Vol. 1: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: New Press, 1997. 299

*Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984, Vol. 2: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. Ed. James D. Faubion. New York: New Press, 1998.

*Technologies of the Self*. Ed. Luther Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick Hutton. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1988.

*The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1988.

Foucault argues this throughout his works, especially in *Discipline and Punish; Madness and Civilization, and the History of Sexuality vol.1: An Introduction*.

Guignon, Charles. "Becoming a Self: The Role of Authenticity in Being and Time." *The Existentialists: Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche,*

*Heidegger, and Sartre*. Ed. Charles Guignon. Lanham, Md.: Rowman, 2004. 119-132.

Berman, Marshall. *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society*. New York: Atheneum, 1970.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989.

*Ibid.*, p. 357.

Berman, Marshall. *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society*. New York: Atheneum, 1970. P. 80.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989. P. 357.

*Ibid.*

Berman, Marshall. *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society*. New York: Atheneum, 1970. P. 11..

Wright, Karen. "In Search of the Real You." *Psych. Today*. 41.3 (May-June 2008): 70-77.

K. Wiredu. *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*. (Indianapolis: Indian University Press), 1996, P.158.

Rossinow, Doug. *The Politics of*

- Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America. New York: Columbia UP, 1998.
- Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. 1927. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. 1927. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper, 1962.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Contributions to Philosophy: From Enowning*. Trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly. Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 1999.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Letter on Humanism." Trans. Frank A. Capuzzi. *Pathmarks*. Ed. William
- Ibid.
- One of the only mentions of it in *Being and Nothingness* exists only to signal that the concept is not (yet) at issue: "If it is indifferent whether one is in good or in bad faith, . . . that does not mean that we cannot radically escape bad faith. But this supposes a self-recovery of being which was previously corrupted. This self-recovery we shall call authenticity, the description of which has no place here" (*Being and*
- Nothingness* p. 116
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. 1943. Trans. Hazel Barnes. New York: Washington Square, 1984.
- Cohen, Richard A. Introduction. *Humanism of the Other*. By Emmanuel Levinas. Trans. Nidra Poller. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2003. vii-xliv.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. 1943. Trans. Hazel Barnes. New York: Washington Square, 1984.
- Ibid.
- Ibid.
- Ibid., 103.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *The War Diaries*. Trans. Quintin Hoare. New York: Pantheon, 1984. P. 52.
- Ibid., P. 219.
- Ibid.