

AUTENTICITY vs. AUTONOMY: AN AWKWARD RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract: *Most theories either identify autonomy and authenticity or else conceive the one as a core condition of the other. This paper concentrates towards a reconceptualization of authenticity aiming at a clearer distinction between it and autonomy. I argue that authenticity may be irrelevant or even conflicting to autonomy and each of these concepts needs to be understood in its own terms. I develop a novel conception of authenticity and in contrast to the vast majority of prominent thinkers, who base their conceptions of authenticity on rationality and reflection, I base mine on creativity. A contribution that I aim at making in the current debate is that I conceive autonomy and authenticity as wholly distinct moral concepts. I take autonomy to be part of the principle of the right, and authenticity to be part of the theory of the good. This distinction has not, to my knowledge, been previously recognized. I argue that authenticity is a descriptive concept, which ought to be promoted, whereas autonomy is a normative concept, which ought to be respected. I thus explore autonomy as a constraint in the pursuit of authenticity.*

Keywords: *authenticity, autonomy, creativity, Bioethics, rationality, reflection, creativity.*

Introduction

Most thinkers seem to conceive authenticity and autonomy as either more or less the same notion or at least as strongly interrelated. My aim, by contrast, is to pull them apart. I claim that authenticity should not be equated with autonomy and that the former should not operate as a core condition for the latter (as it often does in most theories). Autonomy and authenticity do occasionally come into conflict. One may restrict or constrain the other. Still, based on the conceptions developed here, one can autonomously choose to follow an inauthentic path and while we should respect one's autonomous decision, we should also often seek to promote the authentic one. This said, I consider autonomy to be part of the principle of right, whereas authenticity to be part of the theory of the good.

To understand the notion of autonomy we need to know both what an

autonomous choice is and what it is to respect an autonomous choice. Here I discuss autonomy as competence and I consider the main duty in order for persons to respect the autonomy of others to be the duty of non-paternalism. I then develop a novel conception of authenticity based on an original conception of creativity, in contrast with most prominent thinkers of authenticity who base their conceptions on rational and/or critical reflection.

Following from this, I discuss cases in which authenticity obtains without autonomy and vice versa. A central aim of my theory is to prove that it is possible for a person to be autonomous while inauthentic, as well as to be authentic while non-autonomous. Authenticity may be irrelevant or even in conflict with autonomy and each concept needs to be understood in its own terms. I conceive autonomy and authenticity as embedded in two different normative principles. Autonomy is a moral concept, which relates to what is morally right and is used for regulating permissible and impermissible actions, while authenticity is an ethical concept that picks out part of what is good. I explore autonomy as a constraint in the pursuit of authenticity, while considering some case studies in bioethics. My conclusion entail that in the majority of cases we should respect the autonomous decision even if it goes against the authentic one.

My account, however, also suggests how we should treat people who may not be competent for autonomy, but may be capable of authenticity. I examine, therefore, the notion of authenticity in cases of non-autonomous persons. Despite the fact that in terms of regulation we should mainly respect the autonomous over the authentic attitudes of a person, I am of the opinion that an ideal society would be one in which the autonomous attitudes would be identical to the authentic ones. Thus, we should aim at developing social structures that promote and cultivate authenticity; since for a human life to flourish, it needs to be to some extent authentic.

Autonomy-as-Competence and Authenticity-as-Creativity

By exploring prominent conceptions of authenticity and autonomy, and more precisely the relation that contemporary thinkers propose between the two, one may divide the dominant contemporary theories into three categories: firstly, conceptions that conceive authenticity as both necessary and sufficient for autonomy; secondly, conceptions that conceive authenticity as necessary but insufficient for autonomy; thirdly, conceptions that conceive authenticity as neither necessary nor sufficient for autonomy. I find that Harry Frankfurt's (1988, 1999) and John Christman's (2009) accounts belong to the first category, that Gerald Dworkin's (1988) and Alfred Mele's (1995) accounts belong to the second category,

and that James Stacie Taylor's (2009) account belongs to the third category. Given this, most scholars who construct autonomy conceptions seem to take for granted that authenticity is, if not autonomy itself, at least a core condition of autonomy. I claim that this is the main source of several critical misunderstandings in regard to these two notions. Furthermore, I am of the opinion that even though Frankfurt's and Dworkin's models are widely considered as nearly identical because of their shared hierarchical nature, they are importantly distinct in view of the different ways in which they relate authenticity to autonomy, and that even though Christman seems to distinguish authenticity from competence, he ultimately does not. I maintain that Frankfurt's and Christman's theories of autonomy are best understood simply as theories of autonomy and not of authenticity. Moreover, I treat the theories of Dworkin, Mele, and Taylor as theories of autonomy that misuse the nature and role of authenticity in regard to autonomy.

To begin with, what we need to know is on the one hand what an autonomous choice is and on the other hand, what it is to respect an autonomous choice. As regards the first of these, I construe autonomy as a kind of competence and I explore the competence conditions of several prominent accounts. As regards the second, I take that the main duty in order for persons to respect the autonomy of others is the duty of non-paternalism. The roots of non-paternalism lie in Kant's formula of the end in itself (FEI) (Kant, 1998 [1785]: 41 [4:429]) and Mill's harm principle (Mill, 1991 [1859]): 13-4), based on which I claim that autonomy is a moral concept, which should be used for regulating permissible and impermissible actions and should be respected. On the other hand, having Mill's ideas in regard to individuality as one of my starting points, I argue that authenticity is an ethical concept, which picks out part of the good that should be promoted.

The notion of autonomy-as-competence, that will be referred to here can be synthesised in the idea of a person having the capacity for rational self-reflection, while being free from any external or internal interference that may constrain or bypass this capacity. It should be noted that the capacity for rational self-reflection and the idea of non-interference is conceived in the traditional account of autonomy as rational self-control, which was first introduced by ancient Greek philosophers, re-approached and reinforced by Mill, and reflected, while enriched, in most contemporary conceptions. Thus, the conception of autonomy referred to here is negative, historical/developmental, externalist, individualist, intellectualist, procedural and content-neutral.

Following from this, the contemporary general principle for respecting autonomous choices and actions is negative and can be formulated, in the words of Beauchamp and Childress, as follows: "Autonomous actions are not to be subjected to controlling constraints by others." (Beauchamp and Childress, 1979:

72) However, especially in bioethics, the principle of respecting autonomy also entails a number of positive requirements. For instance, in regard to the relationship between a doctor and a patient, there exists an obligation of the doctor to disclose certain information, ensure clear understanding and foster voluntary decision-making, in order for the autonomy of the patient to be respected. Hence, part of respecting an agent's autonomy is letting the agent decide and act voluntarily.¹ Respecting autonomous attitudes and actions involves not subjecting them to controlling constraints and helping to ensure that they are outcomes of informed and voluntary decision-making based on clear understanding.

The interference with one's autonomy cannot be legitimate or permissible, unless the autonomy of others is at stake. It is my view that hard paternalism should not be allowed in any case. On the other hand, soft paternalism may be allowed in some cases—when the competency for autonomy does not exist—, but it always needs to be highly informed by considerations of authenticity as a component of the good—since the theory of the good includes not simply living a healthier and wealthier life, but also authenticity as one of the goods. When we exercise soft paternalism, we should also take into serious consideration authenticity by taking into account how one could be better or worse off with or without following one's authentic attitudes. Besides, it also depends on how much distress or joy each one may take from creative creation and authenticity. In the following section, I explore what it means for one to be competent for autonomy but not for authenticity and vice versa; and in which cases the principle of non-paternalism is valid in regard to persons who are competent for both, but the one comes into conflict with the other.

It is my view that in order for a person to be authentic in respect to an attitude not only rationality and good reasons but also activity, wholeheartedness, mere reflection and unreflective reasons cannot operate as either necessary or sufficient conditions. Harry Frankfurt's (1988, 1999) and Gerald Dworkin's (1988) theories experience critical flaws, since they do not take into account the personal history and development of the individual as well as there is no way of acknowledging and controlling the source of second order desires of the agent. Since manipulation in regard to higher-order desires may take place, one can meet any of the aforementioned conditions, while at the same time being inauthentic in respect to an attitude. Given this, it has been argued that those conditions may not be sufficient for authenticity but that they still are certainly necessary. In contrast to the majority of the prominent autonomy and authenticity scholars, I believe that

¹ Voluntariness has often been equated with autonomy in the sense that many theorists, for instance Joel Feinberg (1986: 48), have referred to it as the presence of adequate knowledge, absence of psychological compulsion, and the absence of external constraints. Beauchamp and Childress, in order to avoid this equation, restrict voluntariness in claiming that: "a person acts voluntarily to the degree he or she wills the action without being under the control of another agent's influence" (Beauchamp and Childress, 1979: 107) and they also add that it can be affected by physical and psychological conditions, for instance compulsion and drug addiction.

they are not necessary either.

On the other hand, theories which incorporate the personal history of the agent, like the ones developed by Alfred Mele (1995), John Christman (2009) and Charles Taylor (1989, 1991), are restricted to conditions founded solely on rationality, rendering them weak, inadequate and unrealistic. Nevertheless, the historical aspect is required for an adequate conception of authenticity and it should be retained, but without the necessity of the rational or any other kind of reflection, since reflection in any form cannot guarantee authenticity.² This said, in short, the historical condition required for authenticity that I propose is based on a novel conception of creativity that I have developed and it is externalist, anti-intellectualist, not necessarily rationalist and content-neutral. In short, my account of creativity can be synopsized in the following conditions based on which a *creative process* is:

- i) a conscious or unconscious process,
- ii) which tends to result in novel ideas that are new in regard to both the person and the person's social environment, i.e. not an outcome of manipulative influence, and that manifest an exploration and/or transformation of a body of knowledge
- iii) while the person is sensitive in regard to the value of its outcome.³

More precisely, the conception of authenticity that I propose entails one condition, which requires the non-bypassing of the creative processes of the person; based on the aforementioned definition of a creative process. Thus, when it comes to understanding authenticity as creativity the question of an attitude's authenticity is a question of that attitude's history. This condition is both necessary and sufficient for *authenticity* and it can be phrased as such:

A person is authentic in respect to an attitude if this attitude either arises from a creative process or arises directly from a prior authentic attitude of the person.

Following from this, an account of inauthenticity should be formulated too. I argue that:

² Higher-order endorsement theories and externalist historical theories are based on our reflective thoughts in regard to our attitudes, they are ways through which we may come to know whether they are authentic or not. In my opinion, the way either to create or to acknowledge authenticity is through the experience of it and not through the reflection on it. Our authentic attitudes exist before our thoughts about them begin to exist. The authentic attitude is an attitude that, when we create it and we experience it, overwhelms, enchants or enraptures us; we know that it is there in the same way we know that we are not yet dead and not in the way we know that one plus one equals two.

³ The limited length of this essay does not allow me to further elaborate on the necessary and sufficient conditions for a creative process to obtain, as I have done elsewhere.

A person is inauthentic in respect to an attitude if either one was caused to have an attitude by another person in a way that bypassed one's creative processes or this attitude aroused from a prior inauthentic attitude.

Attitudes may not only be either authentic or inauthentic, but they may also be non-authentic. Besides, it seems odd to refer to a person as being inauthentic while she is not even able yet to formulate authentic attitudes. For example, a child may not be considered authentic since she may have not yet created any authentic attitudes, but this does not mean that she is inauthentic. She is simply non-authentic. The same may stand for persons with severe mental illnesses, e.g. bipolar disorders. Not being authentic does not necessarily mean that they are inauthentic, but rather non-authentic, since no authentic attitudes may exist in them or they may not be able to further formulate any. Following from this, everything that is not authentic or inauthentic is non-authentic. In this sense, the distinction between an attitude being authentic and inauthentic depends on whether creativity is involved or not and the distinction between an attitude being inauthentic and non-authentic depends on whether it was caused by another person or caused by nature. The addition of the idea of non-authenticity seems crucial in the sense that previous conceptions of thinkers categorized certain persons or attitudes as inauthentic, whereas it is my view that in reality they were non-authentic.

Based on the conditions outlined, an attitude can be authentic either if it is an outcome of the person's creative processes or if it is an outcome of previous authentic attitudes of this person. Given the latter, not all attitudes need to be creative in order to be authentic. A number of attitudes can be authentic if they simply are by-products of other authentic attitudes, while however during their formulation the person's capacity for creativity is not bypassed in any way. Hence, creativity is sufficient, although not always necessary, for authenticity. But what exactly does it mean for an attitude to arise directly from a prior authentic attitude? Authentic love is unique and distinct, there exist so many authentic emotions of love as not only the persons that have created such emotions of love but also the number of times that each person has authentically fallen in love.⁴ Depending on the distinctiveness and uniqueness there exists a certain spectrum of emotions from an imitative inauthentic emotion of love to a completely genuine and creative one. However, a desire that is a by-product of an authentic emotion of love may not be creative, but only a simple basic desire, e.g. to give a hug to the beloved one. This desire is still authentic, since it is a direct product of an authentic attitude, i.e. the love of this person for another person, and the capacity for creativity of this person is not bypassed.

⁴ Think of Anna Karenina's words in the homonym book by Tolstoy, "I think," said Anna, playing with the glove she had taken off, "I think... if so many men, so many minds, certainly so many hearts, so many kinds of love." Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, Œuvres II (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1966), 628.

I have argued that the aspects of creativity that lead to authenticity are novelty and the non-bypassing of one's creative processes by other individuals or social structures. Given this, an attitude or creation may be creative and authentic of a person, even though it may not express this person. In other words, for an attitude or a creation to be creative and in extension authentic it is neither necessary nor sufficient to be an outcome of self-expression of the person. Consider the random composition of avant-garde music through mathematical formulas. Despite the fact of whether the composer expresses his or her self through it, if this musical outcome is directed and amended towards certain creative outcomes, e.g. a number of compositions by Karlheinz Stockhausen and Iannis Xenakis, it can be considered authentic.

Autonomy without Authenticity and vice versa

Let us now concentrate on cases in which autonomy exists without authenticity or in which autonomy restricts authenticity. It seems that most adult people, who in general are competent for autonomy but may be inauthentic, fit this category. We could think of a fashion victim who always follows other people's trends. One may autonomously, after rational deliberation and self-reflection, decide that one wants to blindly follow the dominant latest trends in fashion. This person may be autonomous, but she is not in any sense creative—a fact that renders her inauthentic. She is competent to sign legal papers and make crucial choices in regard to her life, and in terms of these her autonomy is respected, but in terms of owning and being authentic with respect to her attitudes and actions her life goes very badly.

Consider also another case in which a writer has the capacity for authenticity but autonomously decides to restrict it. This writer may have a truly creative idea, and in this sense one that is deeply authentic, to write a uniquely original novel. However, while she is writing it, she autonomously decides to avoid telling what she had intended to by giving all the details in the creative way she desired. She decides to change its form and content resulting in a diminution of her creativity because she does not want to hurt her family and friends to whom she refers throughout the novel. In this sense, the writer autonomously decides to repress her authenticity.

Let us now consider a case in which authenticity obtains without autonomy. Consider the case of Vincent van Gogh. Based on the autonomy conceptions discussed, he probably could not have been competent in terms of being able to give a valid consent to a legal paper. More generally, in many cases mental illness may bypass a person's capacity for reasoning and reflection. However, that does not mean that mental illness necessarily also bypasses the person's capacity for creativity. Hence, even though van Gogh's life was going badly in various ways regarding his everyday moments, there was one way in which it went extremely well: he was able

to be highly creative and thus competent for authenticity.

Moreover, whereas a person's attitude may be externally generated and still be autonomous, it cannot be externally generated and still be authentic. In other words, a person after rational self-reflection may autonomously incorporate, adopt and then follow an externally generated attitude. Nevertheless, this person cannot be authentic with respect to this attitude since the condition for creativity is not met and this attitude is entirely externally generated, while also it cannot be a direct by-product of a previous authentic attitude of this person either. Whereas externally generated attitudes that have been endorsed by the agent and have been retained in their primary form may be autonomous, they can never be authentic.

Respect towards autonomy derives from our fundamental duty to not only not harm others—as philosophers from Mill (1991 [1859]) to Ross (1930: 21-22) have pointed out—, but also to not intervene in their lives. These two duties are basic moral requirements, which cannot be reduced to a more fundamental principle. What we morally ought to do is what is morally preferable and respecting the autonomy of a person is a duty. I consider, therefore, autonomy to be a fundamental right.⁵ If authenticity, nevertheless, is part of what constitutes the good and autonomy is part of what constitutes the right, the crucial unavoidable question is which of the two are we to prioritize over the other?

I do not argue that autonomy is the only right, but that it is a very important duty among others; and I do not claim that authenticity is the only good, but that it is an important aspect of the good. Based on cases of everydayness and especially ones relevant to bioethics, while also following the liberal tradition, the duty to promote the good seems to come after the duty to avoid harm and interference, meaning that we should primarily respect the autonomy of persons. Beside this, however, what we should aim at in general is to autonomously [through following what is right] desire to be also authentic [aiming at what is good].

Nonetheless, what should happen when a person is not competent for autonomy but is capable of authenticity? Turning, for instance, to Bioethics, the answer is that the doctor should also take into serious consideration the person's authentic attitudes, insofar as they are knowable, despite the fact that the person may be non-autonomous. In this way, the account proposed here suggests how to help and to treat people who are not competent for autonomy. Based on the conceptions of autonomy and authenticity that I have proposed, irrational persons may not be competent for autonomy, but can nevertheless be authentic. As mentioned, authenticity is part of the good and thus one's best interests always

⁵ According to the deontological approach, an action is justified on the basis of a quality or characteristic of the act itself, regardless of its consequences. For instance, the core moral rule with respect to autonomy is the following: It is wrong to intervene manipulatively to the decision or an attitude of another person.

include an interest in authenticity. That is, following an authentic life is part of the good and it promotes by itself one's best interests. Besides, it is through authenticity that each of us can develop his or her full potentiality. Depriving irrational persons of the opportunity to lead their lives authentically equals with depriving them of the opportunity to develop their full potentiality. Doctors should respect what is better for their patients and aim at securing their best interests; they should, therefore, promote one's authentic attitudes. However, they should also aim at promoting their patients' best interests insofar as this is consistent with their patients' autonomy.

Authenticity may make aspects of one's life better or it may make it worse. Whichever way, the important fact is that the life that follows after an authentic choice is one's own creation and thus overall is good for one nevertheless. Whether the authentic choices of a person lead to a better condition or to a worse may be of a lower importance in comparison to the fact that these choices were one's own. The ability of one to follow the life plan one wants constitutes by itself a definition of well-being. In this sense, authenticity may operate as an ethical ideal⁶, insofar as it provides the means to significantly improve the quality of one's life and provide meaning to it. In regard to persons that are not able to formulate autonomous decisions but are able to formulate authentic ones, the latter need to be cultivated and promoted, in accordance of course with their other interests, and as long as their own authenticity and the authenticity and/or autonomy of other persons are not diminished.

If, however, certain authentic attitudes seem to compromise the ability of the person to continue being authentic, i.e. the capacity for creativity, then the doctors should interfere with her authenticity. For instance, consider a mentally ill girl who creatively formulated an authentic desire to compose and play an extremely obscure and odd melody. The doctors constantly inform her and her family that playing and listening to this melody worsen her situation. However, this melody does not harm anybody else, contrariwise to some it may even be pleasurable. This girl is not competent to decide autonomously whether she wants to be restricted from playing

⁶ Authenticity's ethical reflection, which "focused on the relation between acting ethically and 'being oneself'" and was "inaugurated by Rousseau and enriched by the contributions of, among others, Herder, Schiller, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, is the seed-bed where the contemporary normative notion of authenticity was shaped." (Ferrara, 1998: 8) Existentialist ethics was developed around the notions of disalienation and authenticity. Besides, Sartre's (1992 [1943]) concept of authenticity is often referred to as the sole existentialist "virtue", although it is criticized as expressing more a style than content, as his predecessor, Heidegger (1962 [1927]), is as well, meaning that their theories focus more on how one may live and not what one may do. For the existentialists, we live in a society of oppression, which is primary and personal, and exploitation, which is structural and impersonal; within an otherwise absurd universe, the acquisition of authenticity makes life meaningful. It is precisely this insistence on being authentic which involves the aspect of value in their thought. Taylor (1991) implies that existentialists were criticised unfairly as having an aesthetic approach on authenticity. Since for them it is authenticity that provides all the necessary means for one to significantly improve one's life, it cannot but be an ethical ideal.

this melody, but she is competent to formulate authentic attitudes. She authentically decides, as a by-product of her prior authentic attitude, to continue playing the melody no matter what. The pleasure and peace she finds in it help her, at least in her view, more than any other treatment. Doctors should also take into account her authenticity, since it is part of the good and thus one's best interests always include an interest in authenticity. They should thus consider the possibility of letting her play the melody, despite the fact that doing so might be against her other interests, since her authentic desire to do so may outweigh them. Besides, nothing ensures us that doctors have always the ability to know what the best interests and the good reasons of each person are in order to make a decision on behalf her. As Anderson writes, "Judges, doctors, and psychiatrists have neither privileged access to good reasons nor any guaranteed ability to recognize good reasons. The possibility that one is operating under conditions that are not actually those of procedural independence applies symmetrically to the person whose autonomy is in question and those who are trying to assess her autonomy." (Anderson, 2008: 21)

The conception proposed here does not suggest that some moral outlooks are superior to others, i.e. it is not concerned with either values or meta-values. Social approvals and conformities are irrelevant to its presence and essence. If, however, one's creativity is directed towards immoral attitudes and works creating a life awfully unethical, then we could evaluate it based on certain ethical grounds, but not on grounds of whether is authentic or not. If we are to deprive one of the opportunity to live one's own life created in the way one desires, then this can be done only on the basis of principles like the harm principle and its derivatives, and not on the widely accepted misconception that since one cannot be autonomous, one cannot be authentic either.

Conclusion

A principal aim of this paper has been to renew our understanding of authenticity and its relation to autonomy. As argued, most thinkers either identify authenticity with autonomy or else take the one to be a core condition of the other. My intention, by contrast, has been to distinguish the two notions in regard to their very essence, function and role in our political and moral thought. While liberating authenticity from the necessity of reflective rationality and of a substantial theory of the self, as well as illuminating its role as a crucial aspect of the theory of the good, I have proposed a novel conception of it based on *creativity*. If my arguments have succeeded, I hope that they have given us a better comprehension of the nature of creativity, authenticity, and autonomy, as well as their interrelation in our everyday life.

By recognizing the above, our self-understanding, hopefully, becomes more illuminated constituting us more aware of the weight each attitude and each decision about our attitudes has. Understanding that an attitude being authentic

is different from an attitude being autonomous allows us to acknowledge the difference between creating and developing our attitudes and works authentically, i.e. creatively, and doing so autonomously, i.e. rationally. Nevertheless, an ideal life in an ideal society would be one in which the autonomous attitudes were identified with the authentic ones. Therefore, while respecting autonomy, we should primarily aim at developing social structures that promote and cultivate authenticity, since a human life worth living is one that is at least to some extent authentic—e. e. cumming's following verses shed some light on the reasons why: "To be nobody-but-yourself — in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else — means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting...Does this sound dismal? It isn't. It's the most wonderful life on earth. Or so I feel" (e. e. cummings, 1958: 13).

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