



AUTHENTICITY & VIRTUE THEORY

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What Is Inauthenticity? (And Why Is It Wrong?)

- Inauthenticity is a form of deception not only to oneself, but also towards others. This means that we can argue that inauthenticity is wrong in and of itself as it is a form of lying and deceiving.
- However, there are more practical issues with inauthenticity.
 - Inauthenticity can lead to us forming relationships on false grounds, or out of false mutual interests.
 - It can cause us to deny what we care about, or sink time, energy, or other resources into what we don't care about.
 - Inauthenticity runs the risk of being exposed, thus causing the loss of any social gain that may have been achieved.



Virtue Theory

- Often viewed as one of the ‘big three’ theories of normative ethics, along with consequentialism and deontology.
- Emphasizes human beings as (imperfect) moral agents capable of **improving**.
 - Further, it emphasizes human flourishing and the cultivation of the virtues.
- Other moral theories focus on what one ought to **do**. Virtue theory focuses on what one ought to **be**.
 - A bad person can sometimes produce good actions, but a good person will **consistently** produce good actions.

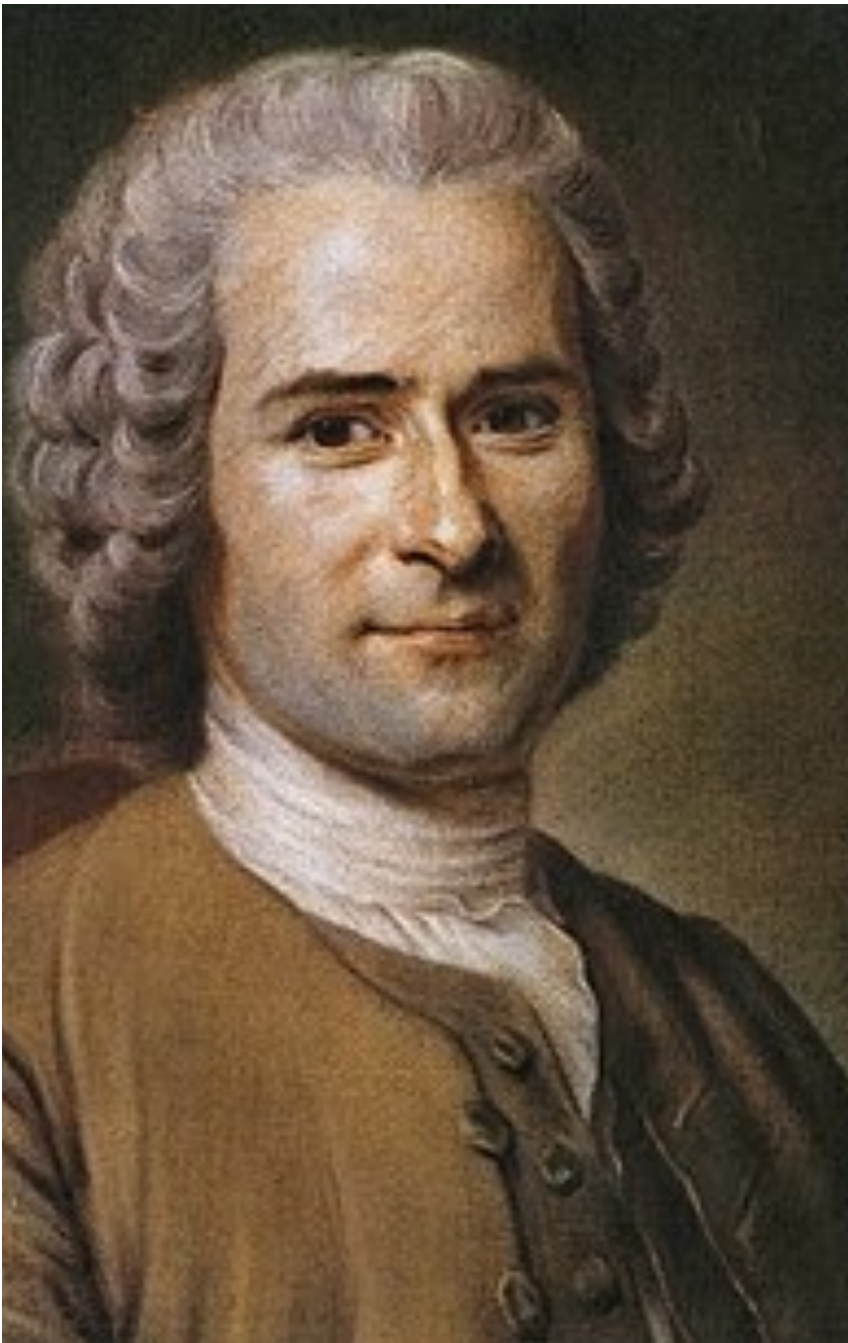
What Is A Virtue?

- A positive trait that is constitutive of one's character.
- Virtues are not present at birth, but rather, must be cultivated.
- The mean in between two vices: one of excess and of deficiency.
 - For instance, bravery is the mean between cowardice and brashness.
- Virtues are context dependent. The actions of the virtuous soldier are different from the virtuous mechanic which are different from the virtuous painter.



SURVEY OF LITERATURE

(Historical Conceptions of Authenticity)



Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

- There exists a true-self, a really you, that your actions can either conform to or betray. In being influenced we are less able to conform to our true-self.
- The advancement of the sciences, media, and human knowledge in general leads to inauthenticity **and** immorality.
- Human beings have become purely rational beings, losing touch of their emotions. As such, we can rationalize away even the most depraved acts.
- One must engage in introspection in order to determine whether actions were central to the self (whether they were authentic).

Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803)

- Socio-cultural centered conception of authenticity, in which a person's culture is acknowledged and appreciated in an honest fashion.
- Children are often pushed to become more mature, whilst older generations attempt to regain youthfulness.
- Herder proposed a variation of cultural relativism, wherein an individual can be authentic even if they heavily identify with their culture.
- Herder is also concerned with human language and learning which, in the earliest stages, is rough, crude, and founded on intuition.
 - As education advances, it produces less-authentic, more-polished thoughts, which leads us to believe that even the most basic human sensations should be polished as well.





Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

- Human nature is to not have a nature, we can always call our existence into question and make decisions as to who we wish to be.
- What we do have is our history, surroundings, and our physical body which compose the givenness we have to work with when making decisions.
- Humans are radically free. We decide how we interpret things and what we value. We can choose how to behave and decide whether to conform to the past or reject it.
- Authenticity, then, is rejecting the notion that human beings are what we are as a matter of fact.

Simone de Beauvoir

(1908-1986)

- Authenticity is heavily intertwined with the social other, as it is necessary for the cultivation of authenticity.
- Radical freedom comes with ethical responsibility, particularly to that of the other. As human beings, we coexist with others suffering from the same human conditions.
- Human beings tend to put on a false mask to hide who we are from ourselves and from others.
 - Authenticity, then, is the removing of the mask and the pursuance of freedom. This requires the rejection of the safety and security that come with inauthenticity.





OTHER ISSUES

Freedom, Autonomy, & Authenticity

- Freedom:
 - People must be free to oppose the social norms and status quo of their time, if authenticity requires it.
 - Further, people must have access to the tools needed to be authentic.
- Autonomy:
 - Freedom (and the ability to take advantage of that freedom).
 - Critical thinking and self reflection
 - The ability to execute actions in line with one's beliefs.
 - Introspection

Selves & Influence


- It is important for this project to have a conception of the self, however, we ought not characterize it as being static.
- Rather, I wish to present the self as being dialogically constructed, in that it exists but is influenced by society and by intimate developmental interactions with others. The self, then, is developed over time and is subject to change.
- Any conception of authenticity must allow for influence to exist, as it is necessary for survival and for education. The issue, then, is discerning between good and bad influences.
 - I would argue that good influences are those that promote the cultivation of the virtues, while bad influences promote immoral behavior, or hamper one's cultivation of virtue.

Cultural Advancement

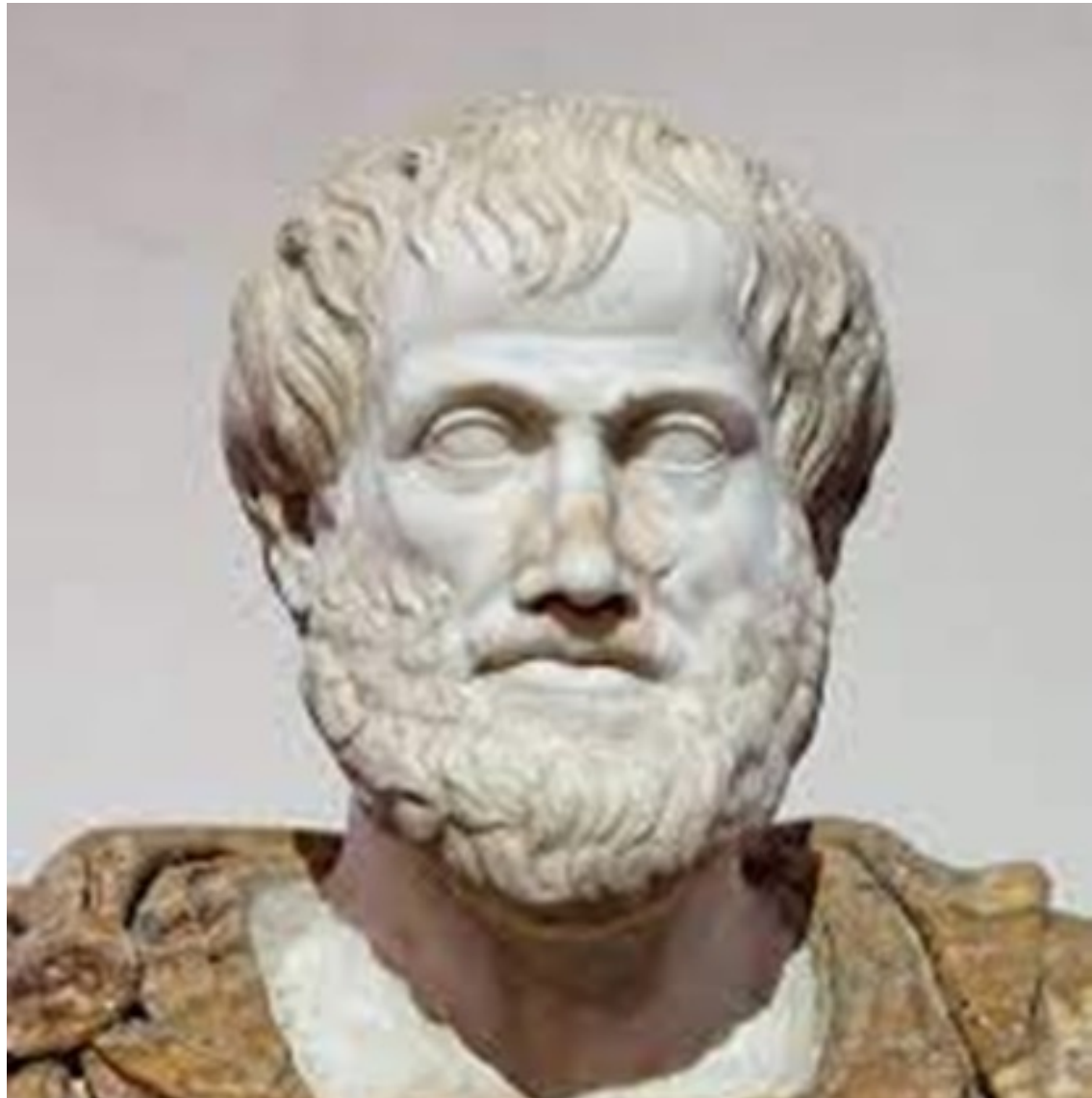
- True-Self philosophers also argue that the advancement of science, religion, and culture leads to us being thinking, but not feeling, things. We lose touch of traits such as empathy because we can, in effect, boil everything down to logical components.
 - However, are we really to choose between the resistance of societal development, or becoming overly-logical and detached monsters?
- Certainly not, but rather, we must advocate for the virtuous progression of society. We must effectively tame the hubris that tends to permeate academia and many career fields.

Cognitive Dissonance

- Cognitive dissonance occurs when a person's actions do not match their beliefs, which causes mental distress and/or confusion. It is resolved when the individual can form the conclusion that either their behavior was in line with their belief, or by the changing of the belief.
- Cognitive dissonance can occur when people are inauthentic without realizing it. In these cases, the individual must either admit that they were inauthentic, or that they do care/not care about the thing they acted towards.
 - This can quickly lead to inauthentically produced authenticity, wherein individuals fully deceive themselves into caring or not caring about something in order to justify their behavior.
- If the self is dialogically constructed, as I have presented it in this project, then what cognitive dissonance leads to a false self, as it leads the mind to make decisions about the self that are not consistent with the self at large.



AUTHENTICITY AS A
VIRTUE



Authenticity As A Virtue

- With everything that we have discussed so far in mind, it is now time to discuss how we ought to conceive of authenticity.
- It is important to note that, societally through pop culture and the media, we often characterize authenticity as indicative of a good character.
- We conceive of authenticity as a good-making trait in everyday life.
- The reason this is important to note is that there, in a sense, an established agreement that authenticity is something to be valued.
- We can then recognize authenticity as something that is not only constitutive of a good character but is also a good in an of itself.

Authenticity As A Virtue (Cont.)

- We want a theory that:
 - emphasizes **introspection**, or awareness.
 - contends with **self**, however, not one that requires us to adhere to a true-self.
 - emphasizes **individual** decision making and personal responsibility.
 - Accounts for influence but does not view it as wholly **corrupting**.

Authenticity As A Virtue (Cont.)

- In the project, I categorize the virtue of authenticity as the virtue of not pretending in order to please others.
- It must also be noted that authenticity would need two corresponding vices:
 - Excessive truth-telling.
 - Pretending with respect to cares.

Criticisms


- Even factoring in the unity of the virtues, authenticity can still be misused by immoral beings. For instance, one can choose to be authentically bigoted.
- This allows authenticity to be a bad thing on occasion. This is contradictory to the task at hand, which is to illustrate authenticity as a good thing in and of itself.
- The second criticism that we might raise against this conception is that it is hard to distinguish from the preexisting virtues of courage and truthfulness. One could argue that in not pretending to please others, one is merely being courageously truthful about their cares.

Authenticity As A Product Of Virtue

- My second conception of authenticity is authenticity a culmination of living according to the virtues of honesty and courage.
 - Authenticity is related to honesty insofar as one does not pretend.
 - It is related to courage insofar as one is willing to be authentic in spite of social pressure.
 - Further, it is related to both in that it takes courage to be honest with oneself and take responsibility for your actions.
- I would argue that in being authentic, one exhibits a kind of courage by standing against the social other. In pursuing authenticity, one is inevitably going to face the dilemma of whether they ought to conform to public ideals or take a stand for their own beliefs. If they choose the latter option, they are choosing to be courageous in the face of social pressure.

Authenticity As A Product Of Virtue (Cont.)

- Further, we can argue that truthfulness, is representing ourselves to others accurately in both our deeds as well as who we are.
 - This second part is more complex, but what we can say is that not only should we be verbally truthful, but that we should also be physically truthful. This means we ought not engage in behaviors contradictory to what we are, as that would be inauthentic, whether it is done knowingly or not.
- In being truthful, a person must be willing to reject the demands of the social arena. They must be willing to abstain from pretending and, in the process, risk making others upset. For instance, if a culture views a certain ritual to be quite important, but an individual does not, it would take courage to be truthful about that in the face of immense social pressure.



Cultivating Authenticity

- Now that we have established a suitable account of authenticity we can proceed with the more practical side of the discussion.
- It ought to be said that all of Aristotle's instructions for developing virtue are still valid and valuable.
- In order to develop virtue, one must act, or practice, virtue.
- One learns about virtue from virtuous persons and should seek to mimic them as context affords.

Promoting Authenticity Through Grace

- Just because someone is inauthentic does not negate their inherent value as a person.
- It would be beneficial to draw upon the Christian conception of grace as exhibited by Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, Christ teaches that we have an obligation to forgive our neighbors *and* our enemies.
 - First, because grace is a good in and of itself and to grant someone grace is a moral action.
 - Second, we show grace and forgiveness because God has forgiven us our sins on Jesus's behalf.
 - Because others *tolerate* us as being inauthentic we ought to have grace towards others that are being inauthentic.
- Further, when someone is punished socially for being inauthentic, what is their course of action? To double down and *prove* their authenticity by devoting themselves to the things they were inauthentic about.





Grace (Cont.)

- Not only should we have grace towards others for being inauthentic, but we should also have grace towards ourselves for being inauthentic as well.
- We are going to be inauthentic at times, however, we must afford ourselves the grace to try again, day after day, and struggle towards virtue.
- If virtues were easy, everyone would be virtuous, but they are not easy. As such, it is critical that we put ourselves in the position to try, make mistakes, and try again.
- When others are forgiving and full of grace, it perpetuates an atmosphere of comfort and lovingness. Such an environment gives us feelings of safety and security and allows us to let our guards down.

Grace (Cont.)

- This environment is an integral part of authenticity. Perhaps, in being virtuous, we have an ethical commitment to fostering such environments so that authenticity can be cultivated.
- It is not enough for me to be authentic in an inauthentic world, as I am a social creature. I need other authentic people to engage with, and I need authenticity to make possible the creation of the things that we love.
- We must be flexible insofar as being able to tolerate others in their pursuit of authenticity, even when their authentic existence contradicts certain things we care about or value.
- While inauthenticity is caused by the presence of the social arena, a major step towards authenticity can be found in the social arena as well.



CONCLUSION

“Any authentic creation is a gift to the future.” (Albert Camus)