

**Ethically authentic:
Escaping egoism through relational authenticity**

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ABSTRACT

Philosophers who show interest in authenticity tend to narrowly focus on its capacity to help people evade conformity and affirm individuality, a simplistic reduction that neglects authenticity's moral potential and gives credence to the many critics who dismiss it as a euphemism for excessive individualism. Yet when conceived ethically, authenticity can also allow for worthy human flourishing without falling prey to conformity's opposite extreme—egoism. This thesis proposes a relational conception of authenticity that can help prevent the often destructive excess of egoism while also offsetting the undesirable deficiency of heteronomy, concertededly moving agents towards socially responsible living. It demonstrates how authenticity necessarily has ethical dimensions when rooted in existentialist and dialogical frameworks. It also defines egoism as a form of self-deception rooted in flawed logic that cannot be considered “authentic” by relational standards. Relational authenticity recognizes the interpersonal relationships and social engagements that imbue meaning into agents' lives, fostering a balance between personal ambitions and social obligations, and enabling more consistently moral lifestyles.

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INTRODUCTION

When it comes to defining the purpose of ethics, philosophers may not agree on the approach or outcome but they do share a crucial common goal—determining how people can best live together. Similarly, though there may not be a precise conception of goodness, perhaps there is a particular way of engaging in our efforts to be good, one that we can generally agree will foster peaceful and constructive relations among us—the authentic way. So far, however, philosophers who have shown interest in authenticity have focused quite narrowly on its capacity to help us evade conformity and affirm individuality, a simplistic reduction that cheapens authenticity’s moral potential and gives credence to the many critics who dismiss it as a euphemism for excessive individualism. If authenticity is only about heeding an inner voice, the notion of social engagement as a path to meaningful self-definition seems incoherent, even absurd. The question becomes: How can authenticity allow for worthy human flourishing without falling prey to conformity’s opposite extreme—egoism? From my perspective, to become ethically worthwhile, authenticity must be conceived as both individually and socially constructive; it must, as Joseph Reiser put it, “not close us off to the moral horizons that make meaningful identity possible”¹—or, in other words, not yield to either extreme of heteronomy or egoism by balancing personal and social considerations. In my thesis, I am interested in determining how this reconciliation is possible through a conception of authenticity rooted in the common intuition that authentic attitudes are important, even morally beneficial, and based on philosophical reasoning that demands more rigour and consistency from the concept.

My fascination with authenticity has two origins. The first is rooted in the contemporary mainstream obsession with authenticity, which tends to spawn distorted theories that transform the concept into an oversimplified ideal preached by self-help books dealing with everything from identity formation and confidence-building to career advancement strategies. On a deeper, more scholarly level, authenticity encapsulates my long-term interest in existentialist theories of freedom, which conceive the concept as that precarious, challenging state attained by agents when they recognize and take ownership of the responsibilities endowed by their freedom, without recoiling in anguish and regressing into disingenuous behaviour. This particular conception of authenticity, espoused most famously by Jean-Paul Sartre, has since inspired—albeit not always directly—important philosophical contributions about

¹ Joseph Reiser, “Authenticity, Justice, and Virtue in Taylor and Rousseau,” *Polity*, 2000, 33 (2): p. 305.

authentic living, notably the ethical positions of Charles Taylor and Charles Guignon. Taken together, these authenticity theorists identify numerous misconceptions that can thwart the authentic ideal, stressing most urgently those individualistic notions that tend to prize the self-realization of the individual person at the expense of the collective whole. While their methods may differ, they are linked by their interest in using authenticity to solve what it is usually blamed for causing: egoism.²

As my main argument, I want to assert that people lead authentically moral lives when they reflect their individuality in their actions while also recognizing their potential and limitations as agents existing in a social context. By redefining authenticity as a relational attitude with both personal and social value, I wish to argue that authenticity can help prevent the often destructive excess of egoism while also offsetting the undesirable deficiency of heteronomy, concertedly moving agents towards socially responsible living. My argument is three-fold: first, I intend to demonstrate how authenticity necessarily has ethical dimensions, drawing from existentialist arguments and kindred theories that have surfaced in the twentieth century. Second, I wish to reveal how authenticity can guide agents away from concepts involving excessive individualism—notably egoism as my prime case study—by putting them in touch with their responsibility. Finally, I wish to propose a model of relational authenticity that recognizes the interpersonal relationships and social engagements that imbue meaning into agents' lives.³ By adopting a relationally authentic attitude, agents can become capable of balancing their personal ambitions and their social obligations, thus enabling them to lead more consistently moral lifestyles. In the end, I hope to emerge with a better understanding of authenticity's ethical potential through a greater appreciation for the thinkers who have examined the concept in detail and inspired me to do the same.

² By endorsing some of the key notions proposed by these three philosophers in specific works (Sartre's "Existentialism is a Humanism," Taylor's *The Ethics of Authenticity* and Guignon's *On Being Authentic*), I do not intend to defend their entire ontological or ethical systems. I concede that there may be serious issues within their overall philosophies but that some of their contributions offer important—albeit imperfect or limited—starting points for viewing authenticity as a relational ideal.

³ I will restrict myself to meaning derived from interpersonal relationships, not from more formal relationships like political affiliations.

CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTUALIZING AUTHENTICITY ETHICALLY: A DIFFICULT UNDERTAKING

In this chapter, I aim to show why authenticity has been mistakenly blamed for promoting egoism. By comparing nonmoral and moral conceptions of authenticity, I will reveal the sources of tension and confusion that have kept many philosophers from appreciating its ethical potential. Ultimately, I will present authenticity as an ideal that may be difficult—if not impossible—to maintain continuously but still has important moral dimensions that are worth upholding.

I. SHORT OVERVIEW OF AUTHENTICITY’S HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

To illustrate authenticity’s often confusing character, I will begin with a short summary of the concept’s historical evolution towards its current “psychologized” incarnation, drawing from the major themes in the historical account provided by Charles Guignon in his book *On Being Authentic*. This survey, while kept very brief, will help demonstrate the tension surrounding authenticity: for many of its most ardent adherents, the demands of careful definition needed to philosophically validate it are precisely what kill its allure. Authenticity’s conceptual background includes a complex assortment of non-moral accounts from various historical periods, which I will first summarize to help underline the possible reasons why authenticity has had trouble gaining credibility as a serious, worthwhile ethical concept.

Throughout Western intellectual history, many philosophers have alluded to authenticity in their work, without explicitly commenting on its ethical dimensions. Generally speaking, authenticity has been understood as an affirmation of a way of existing that is properly one’s own, though this notion of self-ownership has changed drastically as world views have evolved. As early as Ancient Greece, Plato could be seen as presenting a kind of cosmological authentic relation to the world that involved rightly perceiving oneself as a singular part of a greater whole—the universe: “To know yourself, then, is to know above all what your place is in the scheme of things—what you are and what you should be as that has been laid out in advance by the cosmic order.”⁴ It followed that for this antique conception of authenticity, any appeal to self-centredness was considered unacceptable—“you are created for the sake of the whole, and not the whole for the sake of you.”⁵

⁴ Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (New York: Routledge, 2004): p. 13.

⁵ B. Jowitt, ed. *The Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1937): Laws, Book X, p. 645.

Within theological Christian philosophy, authentic relations towards the cosmos were supplanted by a reverential orientation towards God through introspection. In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine promoted a kind of authentic, highly personal faith that consisted of recognizing one's dependence on God as the source of one's creation.⁶ The results of pure authentic being therefore resembled self-effacement. In the early modern period, the Protestant Reformation adapted Augustinian ideas to justify splintering from the Church: salvation through God's grace resulted from a genuine intimate relationship with Jesus, not from the adherence to ritualistic conventions like indulgences or from lip service to religious hierarchy.⁷ This shift engendered a new focus on individual intentions as crucial indicators of religious commitment, encouraging an awareness and near fixation on inner states for their capacity to show true motivations towards God.

With the scientific revolution, authenticity's contextual framework reversed: the focus was not on a divine creator but on the human subject as the centre of all knowledge. The increasingly anthropocentric ideas promulgated by Copernicus, Newton and Galileo began to characterize authentic relations to the world as the empirical knowing of external objects, while Cartesian dualism's mind-versus-matter idea radically transformed conceptions of the self from which future notions of authenticity would develop.⁸ The Enlightenment emphasized the primacy of deductive reason and of the scientific method at the expense of feelings, intuitions and sensibilities, thus redefining authenticity as a kind of loyalty to rigorous logic, rationalistic debate and empiricism.⁹ On this account, humans had the capacity to know and control the objects surrounding them, meaning any reverence to divinity was replaced by "the new aim [of] attaining power and mastery over nature" in order to "make ourselves masters and possessors of nature," as Descartes so famously stated.¹⁰ Notions of duties and social obligations gave way to an unprecedented sense of freedom: in the words of Guignon, "[w]hile the modern view opened doors to previously unimagined possibilities of human activity and self-responsibility, it also tended to undermine the ability to formulate a coherent, viable image of the ends of living."¹¹

⁶ F.J. Sheed, tr. *Augustine's Confessions* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993): p. x, viii.

⁷ Markus Wriedt, *The Cambridge Companion to Luther* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003): p. 88–94.

⁸ Margaret D. Wilson, ed. *The Essential Descartes* (Plume, 1969).

⁹ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, 1979).

¹⁰ René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking Truth in the Field of Science* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964): p. 45.

¹¹ Guignon, p. 48.

In a total backlash against this insistence on objectivity, the Romantic era stressed emotions, awe before nature and human imagination, lauding the artist as quintessentially authentic for his ability to express and connect with inner truths and meaning, while remaining untainted by the “disengaged rationality of an atomism that didn’t recognize the ties of community.”¹² As a precursor to Romantic thinking, Rousseau glorified the natural order as holding the real morals that society had transgressed by overemphasizing inauthentic attitudes of pride and vanity rather than constructive *amour de soi*, which combined self-preservation with a sense of compassion to form real integrity.¹³ With these views came the idea of authenticity as an asocial state, something attained through immersion in nature and through escape from overly constraining social rules, including exceedingly rationalistic approaches to life that were deemed as barbaric and nefarious to human creativity, the ultimate Romantic goal.¹⁴ From this point forward, the concept of authenticity started to be appropriated by other disciplines, most importantly psychology, which endorsed the view of living according to one’s own rules rather than social scripts, a notion that would lead to a culture of self-improvement bordering self-obsession.

By the twentieth century, ideas of a higher power were increasingly losing clout in the Western world: authenticity no longer had to involve something transcendent—whether a form of divinity or an absolute concept like reason—but could be entirely self-referential. As Guignon notes, using binary oppositions—genuine versus fake, deep versus superficial, original versus simulated¹⁵—many psychologists asserted the need for individuals to find their own voices and paths by nurturing their individuality, even if this entailed living on the fringes of society. These interpretations were largely motivated by the rise of early existentialist ideas, starting with Søren Kierkegaard’s claim that “subjectivity is truth”¹⁶ and Martin Heidegger’s notion of authentic possibility rooted in the evasion of public life’s overly instrumental, calculative elements.¹⁷ This focus on the self paved the way for hugely influential psychological theories—most famously Sigmund Freud’s theory of the unconscious mind¹⁸ and Carl Jung’s theory of individuation.¹⁹ On these accounts, however, the self that authenticity unveiled

¹² Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991): p. 25.

¹³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* (1754), *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750), *Les Confessions* (1770).

¹⁴ Guignon, p. 61.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 81.

¹⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

¹⁷ George Pattison, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to the Later Heidegger* (Routledge: 2000).

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1923).

¹⁹ Vivianne Crowley, *Jung: A Journey of Transformation—Exploring His Life and Experiencing His Ideas*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books, 2000).

was not necessarily good: more often than not, it was aggressive and boorish, suggesting that “deep within us there is a mixed bag of capacities and drives, some of them kind and loving, others dark and cruel.”²⁰ Despite these important psychological theories, with the rise of the self-help revolution, pop psychology spawned overly simplistic, often self-serving versions of authenticity, characterized, however vaguely, as the genuine drive to be “true to one’s self.” Guignon insightfully captures the irony of this phenomenon: “Programs that are designed to help people get in touch with their true selves, supposedly motivated by emancipatory ideals, often have the effect of pressuring people into thinking in ways that confirm the ideology of the founders of the program.”²¹ Over time, inauthentic activity became equatable to such contemporary phenomena as advertising (as a manipulative creator of superficial desires), social status (as an arbitrary, often oppressive form of human classification), even political correctness (as a dehumanizing way of basing individual treatment on unrelated differences—gender, race, disability). I will explore these pop psychology theories to a greater extent in my next chapters.

II. BRIEF CONTEXTUALIZATION OF AUTHENTICITY WITHIN EVOLVING THEORIES OF THE SELF

To further contextualize authenticity as it is currently understood, I will cursorily examine contemporary accounts of selfhood that have arisen throughout the twentieth century in light of existentialism and of earlier conceptual shifts engendered by the Romantic era. These accounts rely on a conception of the self as fluid and dynamic, continuously changed and affected by agents’ efforts to freely define their own existences. Before I consider these narrative approaches, however, I want to briefly summarize three competing accounts of the self that evolved before or concurrently, in order to further help contextualize authenticity’s reputation as a confusing, even contradictory concept.

First, the essentialist account of selfhood views the self as a predetermined nature manifested through intrinsic features established before birth. Accordingly, the task of “being oneself” has more to do with getting in touch with a pre-existing, given essence than striving to create an identity based on one’s experiences and preferences. As Guignon puts it: “[what] the older conceptions promised was access to substantive information about who I really am and what sort of person I ought to be, information that was supposed to provide dependable guidelines concerning how I should conduct my

²⁰ Guignon, p. 103.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 9.

life.”²² Second, the asocial account views the human self as a “self-contained, bounded individual, a center of experience and will,”²³ a truly sovereign entity that is in no way affected by or responsible to the society in which it exists and interacts. This account has created a real separation between the public and private realms of life, prioritizing the latter at the expense of any accountability to the former: “From this standpoint, social existence is regarded as utterly alien to the real issues of life, a space of artificial existence and self-loss in comparison to one’s private moments alone or within one’s circle of family or friends.”²⁴ While the consequences of such an outlook can include excessively individualistic stances, as its critics have noted, it can also ensure against what has been viewed as the hypocrisy inherent in the game-playing and pretenses of the social scene.²⁵ Finally, the radical postmodern account views the self as completely fragmented, rendering the project of authenticity at worst inconceivable and at best unclear. Given the existence of so many types of selves to suit different kinds of circumstances, there is no real “I” to discover or mirror, which entails “rethinking humans as polycentric, fluid, contextual subjectivities, selves with limited powers of autonomous choice and multiple centers with diverse perspectives.”²⁶

For the purpose of my argument, however, I will appeal to theories that assume a narrative approach to authenticity, viewing individuals as the creators of their own stories-in-the-making—responsible for the chapters they have already published and also accountable for the unwritten sagas they have yet to record. As I hope to show, I opt for this theory of the self because it is most likely to encourage a sense of individual and social responsibility in people, thus lending authenticity its important ethical dimensions. Indeed, in stark opposition to the essentialist view, the narrative approach does not presuppose some given identity that must be discovered—“the self is something we do, not something we find.”²⁷ Yet because individuals are in a sense the artists creating their existence, they are also by extension responsible for it. To further give ethical dimensions to authenticity, the narrative approach often has a dialogical component, which arises from the recognition of the contributions that social interactions make to individual existences: “The dialogical conception of the self has the advantage of making social interactions absolutely fundamental to our identity. It lets us see that being human is

²² *Ibid*, p. 141.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 108.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 34.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 72.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 109.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 127.

inextricably being part of a ‘We.’”²⁸ By disassociating authenticity from notions like originality, personal autonomy and “inner voice”—which may help characterize the term but do not on their own define it—the narrative accounts of authenticity thus suggest a theory of the self as connected with a social setting in which agents strive to define their existences in relation to historical events that have made their present possible and current developments that will enable their futures. Through these references, authenticity can help make sense of philosophical grails like the “good life,” “happiness” and “self-realization” in ways previously reserved to cosmological, theological and teleological concepts. I will return to this narrative conception in Chapter Three.

III. THE MORAL DIMENSIONS OF AUTHENTICITY FROM AN EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

Having outlined the historical and contextual aspects of authenticity, I will now argue that though the term “authenticity” may not instinctively connote moral undertones—and has figured, as I have shown, as a non-moral notion in many philosophies throughout history—when rooted in the existentialist theory of freedom, it necessarily has ethical dimensions.²⁹ Drawing from Jean-Paul Sartre’s approach, I will explain how an authentic approach to life involves, on a day-to-day basis, acknowledging and embracing personal freedom and, moreover, taking full responsibility for what happens through the exercise of that freedom, both the successes and the failures that result from individual decision-making and actions.

In *Being and Nothingness*, arguably his most renowned text, Sartre presents his complex ontology, notably the structure of consciousness, being and phenomena. Arguing against determinism, he describes the radical freedom to which humans are “enslaved,” a reality that often causes profound anguish resulting in the self-deceiving tactics he calls “bad faith.” Although only mentioned in a footnote, the concept of authenticity permeates his ideas, often described through counterexamples of

²⁸ Guignon, p. 121.

²⁹ To be clear, I do think that there are important nonmoral kinds of authenticity, for instance the notion of an “authentic” painting, where the artwork in question is the undisputed original or an “authentic” ethnic meal where the food is thought to very closely resemble the traditional cooking methods. In these instances, authenticity has to do with the truthfulness of origins or with a sense of sincerity. This essentialist approach to authenticity has been carefully studied by Lionel Trilling in his book *Sincerity and Authenticity*. However, as I will show in this section, when adopting an existentialist rather than essentialist framework, authenticity has added ethical dimensions as it refers to the creative process of constructing our lives and making them meaningful through responsibility for our decisions and actions, rather than the introspective process of recovering some hidden, genuine inner self that was established long before we were born. Further, when I use the term “existentialist,” I refer not to the intellectual movement as a whole but to the specific position that it is our lives that constitute our “essence” (existence precedes essence) rather than some predetermined intrinsic nature that defines our lives (essence precedes existence).

the inauthentic individual who adopts social roles rather than assume ownership of his life. Perhaps the most provocative example comes from his description of vertigo: standing by a cliff, the vertiginous man realizes he is free to either leap or persist, and as such he feels “condemned to be free.”³⁰ If the man caves in to the anguish of his situation by denying his freedom, he forfeits his authenticity and adopts a deceptive approach to his life. Sartre calls this trap “bad faith,” an existential condition of self-deception in which agents assume inauthentic modes of being by equating their identity either exclusively with their static social roles—*facticity*—or with their boundless capacities—*potentiality*.³¹

Sartre further unveils many of his feelings about authenticity through his fiction, portraying in his plays, novels and diaries—notably *Nausea*, *No Exit* and *The War Diaries*—antiheroes who conform to social pressures, obsess over image-consciousness and renege moral responsibility in order to live more comfortable existences as “angels of inauthenticity.” In contrast, authentic individuals exist in a state of self-confrontation, where they are constantly identities-in-the-making. Similar to the narrative conception of the self, this approach involves viewing identity-building as a creative process whereby agents choose and assume their own values in an effort to create an existence that is their own and for which they have complete accountability. So conceived, authenticity can provide agents with a sincerity test to help them ensure they are living by their own personally endorsed values rather than by imposed external norms—that is, avoiding heteronomy. By virtue of this responsibility, authentic people are thus ethically inclined as they genuinely embrace their own moral stances rather than feign caring about them or blindly adhere to ethical principles as necessary “oughts.”

Yet some have wondered whether this truly is a moral conception of authenticity. Is Sartrean authenticity even psychologically achievable? Or, as existentialist scholar Jacob Golomb wonders, is it a romantic ideal?³² In “Existentialism Is A Humanism,” Sartre strives to make a case for an ethical conception of existentialism that would also give authenticity its moral grounding. He argues that individuals are solely capable of defining their lives and, as such, must take responsibility for this enterprise, despite the grave challenges it poses. Although he does not use the term “authenticity,” his concern over the kinds of individuals who live in bad faith by upholding deterministic or contingent

³⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1956).

³¹ Existentialist scholar Linda Bell explains these complex terms well: “One’s facticity includes one’s body and its limitations, one’s birth, education, class, and so on. The individual human being is all of these, yet at the same time, he or she always transcends them by virtue of being able, at least, to interpret them, to take an attitude toward each factor in turn.” Linda Bell, *Sartre’s Ethics of Authenticity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989): p. 32.

³² Jacob Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus* (London: Routledge, 1995): p. 4.

theories about life clearly reveals his thoughts about authenticity's significance. As I have already mentioned, Sartre wants to argue that individuals are fully responsible for themselves as the creators of their own existences. As such, if individuals can sincerely maintain that all of humankind would do well to exist as they themselves have chosen, they cannot legitimately choose an evil course of existence, as this would symbolize the worst form of bad faith: "Thus, the first effect of existentialism is to make every man conscious of what he is, and to make him solely responsible for his own existence. And when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men."³³

Sartre asserts that moral life is a creative process: the responsible—and authentic—individuals take ownership of that process, using their own capacities and judgments as well as personally endorsed social values to create meaningful existences, in the same way that a painter might create a work of art drawing from both his own imagination and his perceptions of the world. Given this creative process, the resulting responsibility is massive, often intimidating, and a sure source of anguish, especially for those who would rather have a divine power or *a priori* morals on which to base—or excuse—their chosen existential path. Yet there is no sense of providence, godliness or luck in which to dissolve—individuals must freely define their existences by their actions: "Man is nothing other than his own project. He exists only to the extent that he realizes himself, therefore he is nothing more than the sum of his actions, nothing more than his life."³⁴ As I will further show in my next chapters, though Sartre's contribution to the "humanizing" of authenticity is invaluable—as is his Kantian point about individuals' life choices representing possible choices for all humankind—some of the steps of his argument are unsubstantiated and aloof, necessitating the more explicit, astute observations of Charles Taylor and Charles Guignon.

IV. LIMITS OF AUTHENTICITY AS AN ETHICAL IDEAL

Having discussed authenticity's moral dimensions from an existential perspective, I will now consider the limitations of this viewpoint. I contend that for the most part, theorists inspired by the freedom and responsibility angles of existentialism have focused too narrowly on what authenticity helps agents overcome: heteronomy. Yet the opposite trap is not as widely discussed, that equally dangerous extreme of egoism that occurs when agents have transcended worries about social acceptance

³³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997): p. 23, p. 24, p. 27.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 37.

but moved too far to the opposite pole of extreme individualism.³⁵ As such, the ethical ideal of authenticity seems like nothing more than an ethics of individualism that endorses a life of freely chosen courses of action in which agents are responsible for maintaining their own established values without interference.

Part of authenticity's limitations, and a prevailing feature of contemporary perspectives on authenticity, is its inherent element of vagueness: authentic living cannot be reduced to a set of prescribed actions or norms since such a prescription would imply conformity and thus inauthenticity. As Golomb notes, "[t]here is no difficulty in understanding the terms 'authentic' and 'authenticity' as they are used in everyday language. Those unsure as to their precise meanings can consult any dictionary."³⁶ And yet, a philosophical conception of authenticity is much more difficult to establish: "Even to speak of 'the nature of its meaning' is misleading, since it implies a kind of essentialism, a perspective of objectivity which is foreign to authenticity. The notion of authenticity, it seems, signifies something beyond the domain of objective language."³⁷ Yet at the same time, most contemporary thinkers concur that the features making authenticity demanding—the necessary capacity for self-awareness and the recognition of moral accountability—are also what make it so ethically significant.

Moreover, even at its best, authenticity is extremely difficult: as even Sartre and his counterparts have conceded that an ongoing, uninterrupted state of authenticity may be highly unrealistic. In Guignon's words, "[b]ecause social pressures pull us toward inauthentic role-playing, becoming authentic takes serious effort; it calls for spiritual exercises comparable to those to which religious initiates were formerly subjected."³⁸ I shall finish this chapter by noting the challenges inherent in authenticity—challenges that can either bolster the resolve to continue on the authentic path or become a source of intimidation and defeat. According to Sartre, on an irregular basis, individuals will experience special occurrences during which they face their freedom more explicitly by envisaging their own death—as epitomized by the vertigo scenario—or less harrowing forms of finitude, like the loss of a loved-one, of a job or of an opportunity. As poignant reminders of their total responsibility, these moments of anguish force agents to choose between a challenging but authentic approach to existence or a more self-

³⁵ As I will later show in my example of inauthenticity in fiction, there are also cases where heteronomy and egoism collapse into each other.

³⁶ Golomb, p. 5.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 7.

³⁸ Guignon, p. 5.

deceptive, inauthentic alternative. While some may rise to the challenge, others will cave under pressure. One particularly dangerous instance of caving is the rejection of moral responsibility in favour of an egoistic attitude cleverly concealed by appeals to individualism—the focus of my next chapter. Can authenticity successfully test whether agents are living for a purpose beyond merely their own self-interested aims? Can authenticity withstand the notion of an authentic egoist? Though I believe that the conception of relational authenticity I will be introducing later has clear ethical dimensions, I also acknowledge that many distorted versions of the concept can lead individuals astray by overemphasizing self-interested aims. Having fleshed out authenticity's historical evolution as a moral and nonmoral concept connected to our sense of identity, I will now examine what I deem as its worst threat: egoism.

CHAPTER TWO

EGOISM: A CRITICAL THREAT TO THE AUTHENTIC IDEAL

In this chapter, I will examine egoism as a critical threat to the authentic ideal, through the lens of authenticity theorists and their critics. My first goal is to conceive egoism as an excess of individualism by illustrating the problems that arise when certain otherwise constructive features of individualism are over-exaggerated. Specifically, while religious independence, personal autonomy and the pursuit of happiness through individuality are usually considered signs of human progress—and I believe they are important components of an authentic life—when they are taken to extremes, they create states of tension that produce excessive levels of self-interest. I hope to show that these states of tension generate imbalances in individuals, resulting in overly self-preoccupied and self-absorbed outlooks and behaviour that can lead to egoistic stances. Since these individualistic features are often associated with authenticity, their excessive forms are also conceptually linked to the authentic ideal, thus the tendency to conflate authenticity with forms of egoism. Though I will argue in my next chapter that egoism tends to reflect a lack of security in dealing with personal responsibility—or what Sartre called anguish in the face of freedom’s burdens—for now, I will analyze the dangerous ways in which egoists use authenticity to justify prioritizing their self-interest at any expense, believing that egoism is not only natural or rational but that it is morally permissible and even desirable. With these excessive individualistic trends outlined, I will move on to explore my main theorists’ reactions to egoistic standpoints as threats to the authentic ideal, and investigate how misconstructions of authenticity have spawned deviated versions with ardent critics. Through a fictional account of the “authentic” egoist, this chapter will more specifically depict the ways authenticity can seem to go awry by allowing for excessive individualism.

I. EGOISM AS AN EXCESS OF INDIVIDUALISM

Both explicitly and implicitly, ideas about individualism now permeate contemporary Western society, whether in the form of formal political debates about self-determination or more casual exchanges emphasizing independence and the “self-made man” notion.³⁹ As Taylor observes, “[w]e live in a world where people have the right to choose for themselves their own pattern of life, to decide in conscience what convictions to espouse, to determine the shape of their lives in a whole host of ways

³⁹ For the purpose of this section’s argument, I am focusing on Western, individualistic societies, not Eastern or collectivistic ones, which I will briefly examine later in this chapter.

that their ancestors couldn't control.⁴⁰ It is no surprise that individualism has such cachet. Its language has tremendous inspirational power: individuals grow up amid a slew of independence-flavoured messages that compel them to treasure their freedom, take initiative, choose their own paths and follow their personal dreams. This narrative has spawned many popular catchphrases that encapsulate the idea of being free to "be yourself" as though such a project is without reasonable limitations. Yet the practical applications of these seemingly liberating maxims remain unstated. Accordingly, people seem able to obtain the desirable aspects and outcomes of individualism without having to engage in the painstaking strivings that would make it ethically worthwhile. In its current popular incarnations, individualism seems like a simple, straightforward, even self-serving objective: the focus remains on rights rather than responsibilities, on liberties rather than duties, on benefits rather than investments. This distorted sense of entitlement has resulted in morally questionable manifestations of self-absorption, which dismiss the ethical commitments associated with authentic living as burdens to be avoided. The resulting egoism creates a dichotomy, a "me-against-them" attitude that pits the individualists against an unnamed "other" who is trying to force them into a social mould and control their aims. Crudely put, the objective becomes less about finding one's inner voice than quenching everyone else's. But what has happened conceptually to turn individualism off course? How has the term become synonymous with egoism?

In this section, I want to show how egoism tends to operate under the veil of individualism. For now, I will bracket my discussion of authenticity to focus on how excessive individualistic traits can produce egoistic mindsets. In theory, the notion of individualism—understood as the principle of being independent and self-reliant, of exercising one's goals without external interference—seems so overwhelmingly compelling that the obvious advantages obscure the possible drawbacks. The term encapsulates a life attitude that emphasizes individual worth and prizes personal freedoms and rights, fostering productive participation in societies designed to "magnify individual liberty, as against external authority, and individual activity, as against associated activity."⁴¹ Indeed, individualism has very noble, seemingly non-threatening beginnings, starting with the Scientific Revolution and the Protestant Reformation, and later Romanticism—movements that have forged the kinds of humanity-affirming traits and pursuits that many deem the exemplars of human achievement and development. Specifically, three of its most notable features—religious independence, personal autonomy and the

⁴⁰ Taylor, p. 2.

⁴¹ John Augustine Ryan, "Individualism," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, 21 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07761a.htm>>.

pursuit of happiness through individuality—are generally viewed as promoters of better government, better societal relations and better personal well-being. But while these spiritual, political and psychological features have generated revolutionary conceptions of selfhood—with crucial individual and social ramifications—when taken to extremes, they have also given rise to states of tension that marry excessive self-interest with an overwhelming imbalance, leading to a sense of self-absorption that is tantamount to egoism.⁴² In the following pages, I will look at these features and their resulting tensions more closely, drawing from various philosophers’ observations—notably those of social theorist Erich Fromm—to support my claims.

Religious independence. Beginning with the spiritual angle of individualism, the sense of religious independence that has grown out of Reformation principles has radically reshaped ideas about personal beliefs and devotion. As I illustrated in my first chapter, the Protestant critique of the Catholic Church’s hierarchical system not only transformed the individual’s relationship with God but also popularized the notion of an introspective, inward-motivated believer. German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder described the Lutheran movement as a quest for personal rights regarding expressions of faith as well as freedom more generally: “The human spirit must have freedom, even if it sometimes misuses freedom,” he wrote. “When Germany broke the claims of papalism, what right did it have to do so? The human right of freedom...Luther reformed because his conscience and conviction drove him to do so.”⁴³ As the appeal of personalized faith grew, the individual became the centre of concern, meaning society and its institutions—including religious ones—started to be redirected to cater to individual freedom. From the rejection of clerical authority to the promotion of personal biblical interpretations, religious independence—or, alternatively, religious nonconformism—led to a breakdown in established religious bodies, and to the sense that anyone could “profess to believe in Christianity without giving their adhesion to any particular denomination.”⁴⁴ Over time, this kind of spiritual individualism resulted in the loss of a sense of godliness, which concerned Sartre considerably:

When God becomes a sort of afterthought, or when the ‘God within’ comes to be thought of simply as God’s being me, then the context of ideas in

⁴² These facets of individualism are very closely linked so their ramifications often overlap. I have separated them for the sake of clarity while recognizing that, in actuality, they operate in tandem with no artificial distinctions.

⁴³ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Against Pure Reason: Writings on Religion, Language, and History*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993): p. 262.

⁴⁴ John Augustine Ryan, “Individualism,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, 21 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07761a.htm>>.

which the practice of inward-turning and expressing the true self originally made sense undergoes a profound change. What is lost, among other things, is the notion of an authoritative source of direction and insight I can turn to in order to learn how I should live my life. For when my guide is understood as nothing other than me, it is hard to see what authority this guidance could or should have.⁴⁵

As religious institutions declined in popularity, humanistic outlooks boomed, highlighting the dignity and potential of individuals, particularly their ability to make reasonable, independent decisions about their lives and their own sources of meaning. Despite the rise of secular ethics, the resulting individualism has implied for some extremists that “the individual conscience...is not merely the decisive subjective rule, but that it is the only rule; that there is no objective authority or standard which it is bound to take into account.”⁴⁶

Nowadays, without external sources of moral authority—religious or otherwise—individuals must decide for themselves what counts as meaningful. But as Fromm has contended, this religious independence has the potential to produce more feelings of isolation and vulnerability than true manifestations of freedom, which can cause individuals to reorient their loyalties towards different sources of authority in an effort to establish the meaning they cannot find themselves, perhaps turning to the laws and hierarchies of secular institutions that protect individual rights.⁴⁷ The underlying state of tension here is one between self-aggrandizement—evidenced by a “playing God” outlook based in hubris—and an overwhelming helplessness from the pressure of extracting meaning from individual reflection rather than spiritual faith.⁴⁸ What results is an imbalance between the individual’s unreasonably high sense of self-respect and the increasingly non-existent sense of deference towards higher powers, whether a divine being or simply a natural phenomenon beyond current human understanding. In a contemporary context, the upshot of religious independence (as a facet of individualism) has included socially constructive developments like freedom of conscience, belief and

⁴⁵ Sartre, 1997, p. xii.

⁴⁶ John Augustine Ryan, “Individualism,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, 21 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07761a.htm>>.

⁴⁷ Erich Fromm, *Société aliénée est société saine: du capitalisme au socialisme humaniste*, (Paris: Le Courrier du libre, 1956): p. 65-66.

⁴⁸ By “spiritual faith” I do not mean only religious worship but any sense of deference to metaphysical, otherworldly or even natural forces—a sense of awe before a kind of divinity, ritualistic or otherwise.

religion, yet with the plethora of different spiritual orientations forced to co-exist, it has also deepened inter-faith conflict due to a profound mistrust of other spiritual practices and overall belief systems. Although inter-faith conflict is hardly new to the post-Reformation era, its contemporary incarnation seems to build on the increased subjectivity involved in self-affirmation, as if each individual has the indisputable right to fight for their beliefs and opinions no matter how questionable the approach or outcome. Despite the fact that religious independence was supposed to give each individual the liberty to derive their own meaning without the onus of some enforced notion of divinity or morality, instead of exhibiting peaceful tolerance of one another's beliefs, individuals seem only to perpetuate conflict by failing to respect their neighbour's freedom to establish a sense of meaning that may be different than their own. In other words, it seems we have not done away with the conflict but merely given it a different colouring—namely self-interest rooted in personalized faith—which can lead to jingoist positions that incite discrimination and war, and overly anthropocentric viewpoints that threaten environmental stability.

English economist John Atkinson Hobson described some early symptoms of this conflict in his 1901 book *The Psychology of Jingoism*, which references Great Britain's attitude during the Boer Wars in southern Africa as an instance of a troublesome twist on the object of faith. In his view, with the rise of modernity, religious and moral "time-honoured dogmas" were traded in for a different kind of authoritative belief system spurred by the press, disseminating "multifarious superstitions, lightly acquired and briefly held, but dangerous for character and conduct while they hold their sway" because of their jingoistic flavour.⁴⁹ He blamed these mentalities for causing a "collapse of standards of thought,"⁵⁰ inducing even the most erudite Englishmen to "abandon themselves to the same passions"⁵¹ with the conviction once reserved for religious devotion. Similarly, in terms of anthropocentrism, the popular stance towards environmental crises reveals a pernicious level of respect for human preservation without concern over the earth's preservation, as though advocating ecological sustainability is akin in preference factor to believing in the existence of God. Despite rising evidence of humanity's impact on global warming in the past decade, individuals continue to doubt their role in the problem, turning climate change into a matter of belief rather than a matter of fact. In a population survey by the British Social Research Institute Ipsos Mori, 56 percent of responders still questioned whether human activity

⁴⁹ John Atkinson Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (London: Elibron, 2005): p. 13.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 14.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 98.

was contributing to climate change and seemed uninterested in changing their habits to help the issue: “The public want to avert climate change and play their part but at the same time they also want to go on holiday, drive to work, own a second (or third or fourth) home and buy the latest electrical products”⁵²— unless the policy benefits them, they choose not to believe in it.

On a more abstract level, Taylor addresses the tension between self-aggrandizement and loss of spiritual meaning at length in his book *A Secular Age*. Whereas pre-modern societies conceived the self as a kind of porous, vulnerable entity that could be influenced by deities and demons, the supernatural and the unexplainable, decline in religious identification has forged what he calls a “buffered self” that is impervious to spiritual influence and prefers a kind of “self-sufficient humanism,” which only pledges allegiance to human flourishing and “sloughs off the transcendent.”⁵³ While Taylor recognizes the great strides that such a humanism has enabled, noting in particular the impressive level of care structures instated to improve human health, when considering the atomistic individualism of the buffered self, he wonders “if it can be made hospitable to a sense of community. The buffered self is essentially the self which is aware of the possibility of disengagement. And disengagement is frequently carried out in relation to one’s whole surroundings, natural and social.”⁵⁴ The buffered self’s invulnerability to spiritual sensibility inevitably generates the kind of imbalance I am proposing between a feeling of great independence and a “feeling of being lost and without a strong sense of purpose that belief can provide.”⁵⁵ Reviewer Vaughan Roberts describes the response to this imbalance as a yearning for meaning that pleads “Is that all there is?” in the hopes of finding more to life than mere personal successes.⁵⁶ In this light, then, it becomes clear that religious independence, while an important facet of individualism, is dangerous when taken to excess, failing in its original intention to promote an equality between personally chosen faiths, instead causing dissonance within the self, between social groups and against non-human life forms.

Personal autonomy. From the political angle of individualism, the public affairs arena has become increasingly important to individual affirmation, allowing citizens to exercise their personal autonomy

⁵² Phil Downing and Joe Ballantyne, *Tipping Point or Turning Point? Social Marketing and Climate Change* (London: Ipsos Mori Social Research Institute, 2007): p. 7, p. 41.

⁵³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard: Belknap Press, 2007): p. 543.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 42.

⁵⁵ Bill Cooke, “Charles Taylor and the Return of Theology-as-History,” *Intellectual History Review*, 19 (1): p. 303.

⁵⁶ Vaughan Roberts, “A Secular Age by Charles Taylor,” *Implicit Religion*, 12 (1): p. 507.

thanks to their recognized capacity to reason.⁵⁷ A prominent artifact of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, the human capacity for rationality has formed the basis of many political justifications for self-determination, defining individuals' relation to the world as one based on private ends, instrumental relationships and individual rights.⁵⁸ To be clear, as I outlined earlier, the scientific and intellectual developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries turned individuals into observers and masters over a natural world that could henceforth be understood mechanically, mathematically and chemically, without resorting to fanciful cosmological ideas. Additionally, Cartesian dualism's firm distinction between mental and physical substances translated into drastic implications for the notion of atomism: in Guignon's words, "because mind is now separate from matter, it is also separate from the cosmos, as the universe of matter...No longer able to situate himself in or feel himself as part of a greater whole, modern man now justifies society in a utilitarian, or instrumentalist, way."⁵⁹ Whereas holism-based societies had viewed people as integral members of collective entities from which they drew their purpose,⁶⁰ the new notion of personal autonomy enabled by atomism re-conceptualized societies as collections of individualists. In *Beyond Individualism*, Jack Crittenden explores how this atomistic approach conceives humans as "monads protected by individual rights, with self-selected ends and interests, whose relationships and group memberships are entered voluntarily for the purpose of attaining these ends and advancing these interests, and whose standards for choice and judgement are rational and abstract and lie within."⁶¹ This new political outlook emerges in other theories as well, such as John Stuart Mill's methodological individualism, which affirms individual action as the sole source of and explanation for social behaviour, diminishing the importance of collective involvement: "men...in a state of society, are still men; their actions and passions are obedient to the laws of individual human nature. Men are not, when brought together, converted into another kind of substance with different properties."⁶²

Together, these atomistic, highly individualistic viewpoints became the drive behind liberal ideas. While Thomas Hobbes sought to liberate individuals from "the way of life centred on ties to kin, church,

⁵⁷ Note here that by political, I mean the status of the individual in society, rather than involvement in political parties or government work per se.

⁵⁸ Jack Crittenden, *Beyond Individualism: Reconstituting the Liberal Self*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): p. 3.

⁵⁹ Guignon, p. 16.

⁶⁰ Alexander Moseley, "Political Philosophy," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2005, 28 Feb. 2010 <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/polphil/>>.

⁶¹ Crittenden, p. 3.

⁶² John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1874): p. VI, vii, 1.

and village⁶³ by instating a political system that protected personal freedoms and ambitions, John Locke upheld that “no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.”⁶⁴ Personal autonomy—understood as the capacity for self-governance through rational decision-making and action—was further refined to support the liberalist system, as it was deemed crucial to ensuring the kind of independently minded citizens necessary for strong political consciousness and constructive participation in democratic society. In exchange, individuals received a guarantee of fundamental civil liberties that would preserve their atomistic position as “the sole proprietor[s] of [their] own person and capacities [who] as such owe nothing to society for them.”⁶⁵ The epitome of this conception was the notion of private property, envisaged as “just an extension, within the framework of a naturalist world view, of the right to one’s own life.”⁶⁶ Yet over time, the notion of personal autonomy seems to have made the political arena enslaved to the needs of individualists rather than directed to the benefits of a wider community—as Victor Cathrein asserts, rather than emphasize combined efforts and collaboration, “the gist of individualism is, then, that everyone must consent to being used by another.”⁶⁷ For Fromm, this “consensual use” (while better than coercive use) remains problematic because it encourages individuals to focus on abstract qualities rather than concrete features, on numerical calculations rather than moral evaluations, meaning that they assess others for their instrumental value, not their intrinsic worth as fellow humans.⁶⁸ Surely a genuine desire to collaborate and band together carries more moral weight than mere consent to trade resources and capitalize on one another’s strengths. Yet by describing cooperative ties so cynically, Cathrein captures the dubious shift away from the social membership angle of autonomous democratic citizenship towards an isolated, exceedingly private style of self-governance. Further, the atomism-inspired inclination towards perpetual abstraction dissociates individuals from a humane experience of the world, making calamities like war and genocide more palatable: “La société moderne est formée d’atomes—petites particules étrangères les unes aux autres mais réunies par des intérêts égoïstes...L’individu est guidé par un intérêt égocentrique, et non pas par un sentiment de solidarité et d’amour envers les autres.”⁶⁹ The underlying tension here is one

⁶³ Guignon, p. 23.

⁶⁴ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, (New York: Hafner, 1966).

⁶⁵ Victor Cathrein, “Property,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 12, 21 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12462a.htm>>.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Fromm, p. 116-118.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 138-139.

between extreme self-regard fostered by the political status of the self-governing citizen (and supporting legislation), and a deep fear of failure regarding autonomy and its material manifestations: private property, privilege, wealth—in short, the self at its most atomistic. What results is an imbalance between the individual's sense of entitlement for social benefits without public involvement, and an unshakable sense of angst over the capacity to compete with others for these very social benefits by constantly proving one's worthiness of them.

In a contemporary context, the upshot of personal autonomy (as a facet of individualism) has included constructive governmental developments like public education, free enterprise and equality of opportunity, as well as a damaging system of meritocracy that encourages individuals to define themselves by certain notions of success and assure this success by whatever means necessary. The repercussions have included twisted instantiations of the “self-made man” whose reaction to the imbalance between self-entitlement and angst is self-serving, even exploitative. A prevalent contemporary example is the sweatshop owner whose quest for the goods associated with personal autonomy—wealth, power, influence—knows no boundaries. His instrumental mindset transforms workers into machines with no inherent value beyond their utility, thus he eludes concerns over fair wages, safe working conditions and employee benefits. Such attitudes defy the Kantian respect for persons rooted in the dignity bestowed by moral capacity, as business ethicists Denis Arnold and Norman Bowie observe: “To fully respect a person one must actively treat his or her humanity as an end” they write. “This is an obligation that holds on every person qua person, whether in the personal realm or in the marketplace...The intentional violation of the legal rights of workers in the interest of economic efficiency is fundamentally incompatible with the duty...to respect workers.”⁷⁰ Of course, individuals at the opposite end of the social scale are also susceptible to the self-serving fallout of excessive entitlement. In the case of welfare fraud, individuals exaggerate their sense of desert by calculating the most fruitful way of maximizing government benefits without having to invest effort, “liv[ing] off the labors of one's fellow citizens when one could develop and exercise one's productive capacities if one so chose.”⁷¹ A well known 1980 case in the United States involved Californian “welfare queen” Dorothy Woods who was imprisoned for collecting \$377,458 in payments by inventing multiple

⁷⁰ Dennis Arnold and Norman Bowie, “Sweatshops and Respect for Persons,” *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 2003, 13 (2): p. 222, p. 228.

⁷¹ Stuart White, “Social Minimum,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 16 Nov. 2004 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-minimum/>>.

aliases and fictitious children, all the while owning luxury cars and a large house.⁷² Though not attributable solely to egoistic individualism, such abuse of employment policies at both ends of the spectrum underlines the dangers of immoderate levels of autonomous action without the counterbalance of well meaning public involvement.

On the other side of the coin, the angst that accompanies personal autonomy—a pernicious concern that philosophy essayist Alain de Botton dubs “status anxiety”—reveals an intense fear of failure regarding the achievement or retainment of a certain spot on the social ladder.⁷³ During pre-modern times, de Botton argues, though aristocratic societies severely lacked equality, the lower classes could accept their respective castes without shame regarding their inability to climb socially as their positions were deemed unchangeable products of their birthrights and family patrimonies. In contrast, in de Botton’s estimation, according to the contemporary meritocratic ideal of equal opportunity, as long as everyone receives the same education and career chances, their future success, wealth and rank—or complete lack thereof—are justified, as though these kinds of successes are completely moldable by well (or poorly) executed self-determination processes.⁷⁴ With this kind of performance pressure, regardless of overall rises in financial security and physical comforts, individuals have developed exorbitant levels of anxiety regarding their achievements, income and reputation, manifested as restlessness, dissatisfaction and envy. After all, as de Botton remarks, if winners do indeed make their own luck, it follows that if the top dogs earn their successes, the “losers” merit their failures as well. Using Aristotle’s golden mean approach, he postulates the virtue of ambition as the median between the deficiency of “status lethargy” and the excess of “status hysteria.”⁷⁵ Here, de Botton points to the crucial issue of excess in depreciating personal autonomy: “the hunger for status, like all appetites, can have its uses: spurring us to do justice to our talents, encouraging excellence, restraining us from harmful eccentricities and cementing members of a society around a common value system. But like all appetites, its excesses can also kill.”⁷⁶ Thus, through an examination of the entitlement-versus-angst tension, it becomes apparent that personal autonomy, while an important facet of individualism, becomes dangerous when taken to excess, promoting self-determination in a way that objectifies others

⁷² Kaaryn Gustafson, “The Criminalization of Poverty,” *The Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*, 99 (3), 2009.

⁷³ Alain De Botton, *Status Anxiety* (London: Penguin, 2004): p. viii.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 62.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 115.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. ix.

and social systems while producing an unshakable anxiety about status as an indicator of accomplishment and personal worth.

Pursuit of happiness through individuality. Finally, from the psychological angle of individualism, the ongoing influence of Romantic tenets, coupled with the development and acceptance of psychology as a scientific discipline, tend to encourage individuals to prioritize the pursuit of happiness through the cultivation of their individuality, especially in the face of homogenizing social forces. Building on Rousseau's idea that "direct self-awareness relies solely on feeling,"⁷⁷ psychologists have stressed the importance of feelings as barometres of truth and expressions of personality—important factors in developing self-understanding and assuring overall happiness. Emphasizing the importance of emotional range, including difficult feelings like anger and envy, they encourage patients to stop trying to please others or comply with social conventions, upholding that "feelings are not right or wrong—they just are...maybe there are certain ways we should not behave, but feelings have no right or wrong value."⁷⁸ In order to foster their individuality, agents have to become aware of their feelings through a process of interiorization that involves introspection and self-reflection. This prescription has led psychologists to believe that patients who exhibit difficulty connecting with their emotions are psychologically unstable, even neurotic.⁷⁹ In stark opposition, building on Romantic thinking, artists are regarded as the embodiments of emotional sensibility and subjectivity, lauded for their ability to nurture individuality by devoting their time to creative projects and rejecting mass opinions—especially fixed ethical stances—that quell self-expression. In his essay "The Soul of Man Under Capitalism," the infamous Oscar Wilde lauds the individuality-affirming role of art in in no uncertain terms: "Art is individualism, and individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. There lies its immense value. For what it seeks is to disturb monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine."⁸⁰ Wilde seems to suggest that, when moderate and well balanced, individualism can help people avoid viewing others merely for their instrumental value, thus dodging the previously discussed excess caused by inflated personal autonomy.

In similar fashion, many psychological theories claim that individuality facilitates the pursuit of happiness by allowing people to fulfill certain criteria of welfare. Roger Montague identified three such

⁷⁷ Guignon, p. 66.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 91.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁸⁰ Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose* (London: Penguin Classics, 2001).

conditions, namely the absence of major dissatisfactions, the achievement of goals judged as personally important and a sense of feeling generally pleased with life. Nowadays, with the rise of pop psychology programs hinged on quick self-improvement tactics, happiness has lost its promising eudaemonic ties with long-term commitments to worthwhile goals or loved-ones and become the simple quest for personal pleasure and satisfaction. By emphasizing the self-regarding motivations to achieve instant gratification and apply band-aid solutions to major problems, hedonistic ideals justify the tendency to assess actions in terms of the amount of pleasure or pain they generate. In *The Pursuit of Happiness*, Howard Mumford Jones describes this phenomenon as a “glittering generality” that separates individuals from their bonds with family and propels them towards banal pleasure-seeking aims.⁸¹ The underlying tension here is one between obsessive self-affirmation through interiorization in an effort to determine a personal conception of happiness, and profound alienation at the realization that this happiness pursuit is too arduous without pleasure as the guiding principle. What results is an imbalance between the cultivation of individuality to assure happiness and a dwindling sense of belongingness caused by the refusal to identify with anything external to the self, including other people. In a contemporary context, the upshot of the pursuit of happiness through individuality (as a facet of individualism) can conceivably be associated with a positive surge in personal growth projects like higher education degrees, physical fitness programs, complex leisure activities and charitable efforts, yet it can also potentially be linked with a disturbing increase in emotional breakdowns and dependencies—manifested in high rates of depression, substance abuse and suicide—because immoderated self-preoccupation can create overly high expectations that generate disappointment and destructive tendencies. In Fromm’s estimation, this overall negativity can be summed up as estrangement: due to the difficulty inherent in self-affirmation, many individuals fail in their attempts, making the idea of happiness through individuality illusory: though one of the points of individualism is to establish an original identity, “seule une minorité parvint à éprouver le ‘Je’ de cette façon. Pour la grande majorité, l’individualisme n’était qu’une façade dissimulant la faillite de cette recherche.”⁸² Instead, most people experience a kind of idolizing of their own quest for individuality and happiness, worshipping the goal rather than the process, inevitably bungling any real attempt at reaching self-awareness.⁸³ Whether the objective is marital bliss or the perfect figure, individuals chase unreasonable standards of happiness at a

⁸¹ Howard Mumford Jones, *The Pursuit of Happiness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966).

⁸² Fromm, p. 70.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 124-125.

feverish pace, seeking ways to sidestep hurdles they should deem as red flags only to arrive at a destination that bellies their expectations. An obvious example is the overprescription of antidepressants like Prozac to expedite the process of happiness-attainment through chemical assistance: in Canada alone, the use of antidepressants has risen considerably. A 2002 study indicates an increase from 3.2 to 14.5 million total prescriptions between 1981 and 2000.⁸⁴

It is this adverse happiness hurry that troubles Mark Kingwell in his book *Better Living: In Pursuit of Happiness from Plato to Prozac*. With irony and humour, he recounts his experiment as a participant in a week-long self-improvement retreat, where clichés paraded as insightful happiness principles and where skepticism was treated as a weakness or penchant for suffering: “I was told that it *didn’t matter* what was making me unhappy, and also that it *didn’t matter* what forms of belief or action, however mendacious, selfish or fanciful, I adopted to stop feeling that way.”⁸⁵ Listing the leading myths that cripple people’s well-being pursuits—that happiness is easy, purchasable, immoral, immediate, expectable and simple—he correlates the appeal of pop psychology traps with the shallowness of most people’s happiness quest, proving that “a little wisdom goes a long way when people have not engaged in deep introspection before.”⁸⁶ Case in point: the marketing techniques behind self-help titles like *Become Happy in Eight Minutes*, which guarantee a revolutionary system for instant joy yet actually pathologize the pursuit of happiness through individuality by transforming it into a desperate adherence to advertising gimmicks: “I can think of no experience in the modern world more unsettling, more vertiginous, than this one of realizing that my carefully constructed individuality is as transparent and manipulable to a savvy advertiser as if I sported a niche-market report on my forehead.”⁸⁷ Kingwell’s assessment of the contemporary addiction to “get happy” schemes encapsulates the tension I have proposed between obsessive self-affirmation and profound alienation, uncovering the widespread foolishness that characterizes many individuals’ quest for happiness through a faux individuality that is imposed from without and demands no real effort. Thus happiness through individuality, while an important facet of individualism, becomes dangerous when taken to excess, promoting a shallow pursuit of instant gratification that severs ties with reality and its challenges, while forestalling true self-knowledge.

⁸⁴ Gideon Koren, “Increased Use of Antidepressants in Canada: 1981-2000,” *The Annals of Pharmacotherapy*, 2002, 36 (10).

⁸⁵ Mark Kingwell, *Better Living: In Pursuit of Happiness from Plato to Prozac* (New York: Penguin, 1998): p. 84.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 88.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 160.

So in the main spheres of life, be they spiritual, political or psychological, individuals are motivated to strive for individualism, a pursuit that can be noble, even morally worthwhile, as I will emphasize further in subsequent sections, but also exerts tremendous amounts of pressure on the agents who prize it, often to detrimental effects. In like ways, religious independence, personal autonomy and happiness through individuality can overwhelm people's self-definition efforts, leading to excessive self-interest and a disturbing lack of balance between their own concerns—displayed through self-aggrandizement, self-regard and self-affirmation—and the ways they come to understand their relation to the external world, notably their fellow humans. At these extremes, I believe that individualism becomes tantamount to egoism. Though I will argue later that this egoism can be seen as a manifestation of insecurity and existential anguish, I want to first consider how the extreme forms of these three main features of individualism are symptoms of various kinds of egoism. While philosophical understandings of egoism differ depending on the ethical perspective in question, the term can be generally understood as a habit of prioritizing self-interest and using it as the principle of individual action. Egoism tends to denote a more morally neutral attitude than concepts like “selfishness” or “egomania,” one that is not deemed *a priori* to be unwarranted or unjustified.⁸⁸ More specifically, the notion of self-interest refers to the inclination to act in ways that promote individual welfare, which can be conceived as happiness, pleasure or personal advantage, and can include both shallow aims (materialism, status, wealth) and more substantial ones (self development, wisdom, spiritual enlightenment). Most theories of egoism presuppose a notion of free will, where individuals have at least some control over their own intentions, actions and destinies.⁸⁹ Most also assume the capacity to evaluate and bring about what maximizes self-interest, through reflection, planning and execution. Classically, egoism comprises three types: the first is a descriptive form that depicts how humans actually operate—psychological egoism—and the second two are normative forms that postulate how humans ought to behave—rational and ethical egoism. I will discuss each type in turn, highlighting their relation with individualism's main features and the associated states of tension.

Psychological egoism contends that individuals naturally and strictly aim to improve their own welfare by satisfying their own desires, even at the expense of others' interests. On this account, if individuals choose to do good, they do so because they have determined that such actions will lead to

⁸⁸ Campbell, p. 3.

⁸⁹ Alexander Moseley, “Egoism,” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2005, 28 Feb. 2010 <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/egoism/>>.

their increased welfare, whether through positive consequences like rewards or social status, or through the avoidance of welfare-negating experiences like punishment and ill repute. Further, they will refrain from performing actions that they judge as damaging to their self-interested aims, and avoid actions if they have no clear opinions about their benefits to themselves.⁹⁰ Proponents of psychological egoism focus on trying to describe the kinds of motivations that they believe individuals have based on their understanding of human nature and instinctual drives. Historically, this descriptive approach of egoism has long played a role in philosophical inquiry. Philosophers as dissimilar in their thoughts as Nietzsche, Mill and Spinoza shared a bleak view of human nature as inherently self-regarding and egoistic.⁹¹ Whereas this raised concern for some thinkers—like Socrates, who worried that humans were overly devoted to the promotion of their own interests—others accepted it matter-of-factly. Hobbes, for instance, upheld that all voluntary actions—even seemingly selfless ones—were intended exclusively for the agent’s sake,⁹² and many defenders of psychological egoism draw on variations of the Hobbesian viewpoint to refute the notion of true benevolent action. In his examination of Hobbes, Gregory Kavka coined the term “predominant egoism”⁹³ to describe individuals’ grim tendency to act selfishly unless they can yield better benefits through small sacrifices or by advancing causes that matter to them, whether loved-ones or a favourite charity. The strong view of psychological egoism draws on empirical psychology findings to argue that humans are innately egoistic and, accordingly, their self-regarding actions are not only natural but justifiable and, in some cases, even desirable. To these advocates, psychological egoism is considered a realistic assessment of human nature because of evidence that people *do* only act in their self-interest. Evolutionary biology provides more than enough data to support such a view: plainly put, egoistic individuals are better equipped to compete for survival and reproduction. Even the kin selection theory shows how humans will help their relatives simply to keep genes alive, which serves their interests as well.⁹⁴

Moreover, psychoanalytic theories have suggested that egoism is not only excusable but somehow more genuine: Freud introduced the notion of the death instinct to explain “why humans tend to be so

⁹⁰ Terrance McConnell, “The Argument From Psychological Egoism to Ethical Egoism,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 56 (1).

⁹¹ Stephen M. Downes, “Evolutionary Psychology,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2008, 23 Jan. 2010, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/evolutionary-psychology/>>.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Gregory Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986): p. 64.

⁹⁴ Stephen M. Downes, “Evolutionary Psychology,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2008, 23 Jan. 2010, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/evolutionary-psychology/>>.

aggressive and cruel in their relations with one another and with nature as a whole.”⁹⁵ Like social contract theorists, he viewed society as a regulating force over the human ego, one that discouraged excessive self-interest but, in so doing, left individuals with neuroses and mental instabilities by forcing them to repress their darker impulses.⁹⁶ For his part, Jung advocated psychoanalysis as a way to cut through the suffocating, artificial shell of moral righteousness and recover the individual’s real self: “For the transformed individuals, the moral ideals and teachings of the western tradition will no longer have any binding authority. In fact, they are now seen to be repressive, arbitrary impositions that block us from being all we can be.”⁹⁷ Echoing these sentiments, natural scientists have put forth theories on human aggression that substantiate psychological egoism, including the notion of a killer instinct, which “shows why human beings can feel righteousness even as they commit atrocities.”⁹⁸ Egoism’s more hedonistic slant often takes the form of Jeremy Bentham’s two principles of pleasure: first, that “pleasure is itself a good, nay, setting aside immunity from pain, the only good”⁹⁹ and that “all motives are absolutely good, no man has ever had, can, or could have a motive different from the pursuit of pleasure or shunning of pain.”¹⁰⁰

A weaker version of psychological egoism claims that individuals always do what they want under all circumstances, even if what they want involves benevolent actions. On this account, then, an individual’s efforts to alleviate poverty reflects a personal desire to help and thus satisfies an egoistic motivation. In his essay “An Empirical Basis for Psychological Egoism,” Michael Slote proposes a commonly held variant of egoism that suggests individuals never act unselfishly: “even those with little or no training in psychology believe, however inarticulately...that men who act consistently in a benevolent manner would not be acting benevolently unless their selfish desires and/or interests were usually satisfied by their doing so.”¹⁰¹ To my mind, the empirical arguments behind psychological egoism, however outdated or incomplete, have helped ground the pursuit of happiness through individuality in a shallow search for hedonistic well-being, empowering pop psychologists to encourage enrollment in their self-help programs by promoting a natural (and thus excusable) egoistic stance. As I

⁹⁵ Guignon, p. 100.

⁹⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1923).

⁹⁷ Guignon, p. 97.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 104.

⁹⁹ Jeremy Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2007).

¹⁰⁰ Jeremy Bentham, *Deontology or the Science of Morality* (Boston: Adamant, 2000).

¹⁰¹ Michael Slote, “An Empirical Basis for Psychological Egoism,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1964, 61 (18): p. 537.

have stated, I believe that when taken too far, happiness through individuality creates a tension between obsessive self-affirmation and profound alienation, translating into an imbalance between the cultivation of individuality and a dwindling sense of belongingness. Put another way, the extreme of this feature of individualism is a symptom of psychological egoism as it suggests that individuals will feel personally invigorated if they prioritize their self-interest because this prioritization reveals the strength to recognize the “truth” about human nature and rise to the occasion of fulfilling a natural inclination that society constantly tries to quench. Further, the “killer instinct” angle of psychological egoism can help attenuate the feelings of isolation produced by the extreme of happiness through individuality by transforming external criticisms into expressions of bitterness, jealousy and ineptitude coming from people who have failed to achieve joy through self-affirmation. The implications of this kind of descriptive egoism on the otherwise innocuous pursuit of happiness through individuality can be drastic, as my examples of “authentic” egoists will show later in this chapter. Can the same be said of normative kinds of egoism?

Rational egoism emphasizes what individuals have reason to do, namely act in ways that maximize their self-interest. It derives its strength from instrumental views of rationality that hold “it is necessary and sufficient, for an action to be rational, that it maximize the satisfaction of one’s preferences.”¹⁰² It follows that when individuals promote their self-interest, they are acting rationally and when they do not, they can be deemed irrational. On some accounts, self-interest strictly refers to personal welfare, whereas on others, it extends to the well-being of loved-ones as extensions of the self. In his essay “Rationality, Egoism and Morality,” Richard Brandt puts it this way: “If I really care about my daughter’s welfare, why is it not rational for me to sacrifice some personal pleasure to that end?”¹⁰³ English philosopher Herbert Spencer upholds a weak form of rational egoism, where human happiness depends on the rational exercise of personal freedom. He argues that individuals should, as much as possible, be allowed to pursue their own ends without external interference and engage in contractual relationships with others to help them accomplish their goals. In his view, the one limitation to rational self-interest is the principle of negative freedom—that “every man has freedom to do all that he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man.”¹⁰⁴ Yet Spencer believes humans are

¹⁰² Robert Shaver, “Egoism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2008, 14 Oct. 2009, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/egoism/>>.

¹⁰³ Richard Brandt, “Rationality, Egoism, and Morality,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1972, 69 (20): p. 684-685.

¹⁰⁴ Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics*, (New York: Appleton, 1892): p. 103.

capable of empathy and community life, meaning their pursuit of rational self-interest should not conflict with those of others. His approach has inspired the notion of strategic egoism, where individuals work towards reciprocally beneficial conditions: “the long-term interest of agents [is] to develop, maintain, and act on other-regarding attitudes, because compliance with familiar other-regarding moral norms of restraint, cooperation, and aid is mutually advantageous.”¹⁰⁵

Perhaps the most well-known proponent of a strong view of rational egoism is Ayn Rand, who sets out her argument for objectivist ethics—the theory that individuals must always be the beneficiaries of their rational self-interest—in her book *The Virtue of Selfishness*. Rand condemns altruistic theories for vilifying individualism and for purporting that all self-regarding behaviour is somehow evil, thus restricting the conception of individuals to “sacrificial animals and profiteers-on-sacrifice...victims and parasites...[with] no concept of *justice*.”¹⁰⁶ She argues that the individual has lost moral significance and is no longer eligible to be the beneficiary of value-based actions. Referencing biology, she maintains that humans need rationality as their guiding principle in order to survive: whereas lower life forms depend purely on instinct, humans use their capacity to reason to guide and steer their behaviour.¹⁰⁷ Yet engaging in rationality is a choice—nurturing reason gives individuals purpose that yields productive work and heightens self-esteem; it does not encompass action based on whim or feeling, nor on any kind of mysticism. Thus, in Rand’s view, those who try to subsume their brutish or fraudulent behaviour—their looting, robbing, cheating and enslaving—under rational egoism are mistaken: they do not use rationality as their moral criterion thus their behaviour is dishonourable. She writes, “men who reject the responsibility of thought and reason, can exist only as parasites on the thinking of others. And a parasite is not an individualist.”¹⁰⁸

For Rand, rational human interaction is simply the equal trade that fosters merited exchanges between individuals: “The principle of *trade* is the only rational ethical principle for all human relationships, personal and social, private and public, spiritual and material. It is the principle of *justice*.”¹⁰⁹ However, in her estimation, most contemporary societies do not nurture these kinds of interactions because they are misled by the sacrificial ethics of a Judaic-Christian heritage that makes

¹⁰⁵ Richmond Campbell, *Self-Love and Self-Respect: A Philosophical Study of Egoism* (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Library of Philosophy, 1979): p. 123.

¹⁰⁶ Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, (New York: Signet, 1964): p. ix.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 22, p. 27.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 34, p. 160.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 34.

individuals slaves to others' demands. She states, quite controversially, that a person should not be guilted into altruistic behaviour, especially in dealing with social disadvantages that threaten equal trade: "If a man speculates on what 'society' should do for the poor, he accepts thereby the collectivist premise that men's lives belong to society and that *he*, as a member of society, has the right to dispose of them, to set their goals or to plan the 'distribution' of their efforts." Only through self-interest can rational egoists benefit others by committing themselves to their own projects that, more often than not, advance society as a whole. To my mind, the harsh normative arguments behind rational egoism have helped characterize personal autonomy as an atomistic kind of self-determination that objectifies others and spawns an arrogance that makes demands on the very society it dismisses as overly intrusive. As I have stated, I believe that when taken too far, personal autonomy creates a tension between extreme self-regard and a deep fear of failure, translating into an imbalance between the individual's sense of entitlement and their angst over their capacity to achieve social status. Put another way, the extreme of this feature of individualism is a symptom of rational egoism as it suggests that individuals are only truly self-governing if they dedicate themselves exclusively to the promotion of their personal welfare and if they trust (with monstrous presumption) that the results of their efforts will improve humanity as a whole, even saving it from its pathetic charitable gravitations. Further, the exaltation of rationality in this form of egoism lends its supporters a seemingly higher intellectual status, rendering their personal autonomy projects intelligent and praiseworthy, while those of the "irrational" do-gooders appear unreasoned and pitiable—meritocracy at its scariest. The implications of this kind of rational egoism on otherwise socially constructive personal autonomy can be dismaying: those who succeed in embodying the extreme tend towards nihilism whereas those who try but miscalculate can jeopardize the lives of others. I will return to these possibilities shortly when I consider the protagonists of Rand's novel *The Fountainhead*.

Finally, ethical egoism claims that the moral rightness of actions depends on their capacity to maximize the agent's self-interest. On this view, the interests of others carry no moral weight in themselves; instead, if ethical egoists choose to respect their duties to others, it is purely because they require such cooperative bonds to maximize their own interests. As such, ethical egoists can adopt non-egoist stances "on egoist grounds."¹¹⁰ This form of normative egoism goes a step further than rational egoism by implying a moral obligation: to borrow Brandt's characterization, "the ethical egoist holds

¹¹⁰ Robert Shaver, "Egoism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2008 Edition, 14 Oct. 2009, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/egoism/>>.

that a person *ought* to act so as to maximize his own long-range advantage or welfare—or, more exactly, in view of the fact that the outcomes of one's acts are seldom certain, to maximize his own expectable long-range utility or welfare."¹¹¹ The claim here is not about human nature but about correct moral conduct. The strong view of ethical egoism states that the moral course of action is always the one that most promotes self-interest; the weak view holds that while promoting self-interest is always moral, not promoting it is not necessarily immoral—in other words, individuals can act in their self-interest but are not morally obligated to do so.¹¹² A still weaker version is “conditional egoism,” which only allows for self-interested actions that yield morally acceptable outcomes—the test rests on whether society is improved as a result of an individual's egoistic behaviour.¹¹³

As a moral code, ethical egoism is designed to help individuals choose between a range of possible actions. It assumes that if they can determine what is in their best interest by opting between competing alternatives, that they can also realize that action with some degree of success.¹¹⁴ Since individuals cannot necessarily be trusted to accurately judge what will secure their welfare, ethical egoism encourages them to emphasize eudaemonic rather than hedonistic outcomes, while allowing for some degree of error in their estimations. As Terrance McConnell notes, “The theory cautions people to examine their beliefs about what is in their best interests, warning them not to sacrifice their long-range good for some short-range goal.”¹¹⁵ Interestingly, in terms of social circumstances, many ethical egoists agree that the model that will most serve their interests is a non-egoistic society. They concede, quite problematically, that an egoistic social structure could not facilitate the same degree of self-interested pursuits as one based on collective welfare or, at the very least, negative freedom. In Richard Brandt's words, “one important condition of the egoist's living well is that there be...a moral system that would especially favor him; but realistically the most he can hope to get, through discussion with others (since insofar as they are rational they will be equally concerned with their interests), is a moral system that protects and promotes the interests of everyone equally.”¹¹⁶ To illustrate the tendency towards ethical egoism, theorists allude to the prisoner's dilemma, an oft-used game theory scenario in which police officers arrest two suspects but do not have enough evidence to convict them, thus, in confidence, offer

¹¹¹ Brandt, p. 681.

¹¹² Campbell, p. 15.

¹¹³ Alexander Moseley, “Egoism,” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2005, 28 Feb. 2010 <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/egoism/>>.

¹¹⁴ McConnell, p. 41.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 42.

¹¹⁶ Brandt, p. 694.

each of them a deal: they can either testify against the other and, if the other remains silent, go free while the other gets a long 10-year sentence; they can both testify against each other, meaning both get five-year sentences; or they can both remain silent and get six months. The choice lies between betraying the other for their own interests or staying silent: “Though cooperation could help maximize their interests, playing defect will ultimately be more beneficial, so rationally, it is considered the best option.”¹¹⁷ In this dilemma, the question is whether moral principles rest on self-interest (even if it involves cooperation to achieve it) or more of a Kantian categorical imperative, where cooperating (or treating others as one would like to be treated) is the only morally justifiable course of action. To my mind, the perplexing dogmatic arguments behind strong forms of ethical egoism encourage the “playing God” outlook of religious independence, leading to a dissonance within the self, between social groups and against non-human life forms. As I have stated, I believe that when exaggerated, religious independence creates a tension between self-aggrandizement and helplessness, translating into an imbalance between the individual’s unreasonably high sense of self-respect and an increasingly non-existent sense of deference towards higher powers. Put another way, the extreme of this feature of individualism is a symptom of ethical egoism as it suggests that individuals have an obligation to establish their own sources of meaning and perceive themselves as the arbiters of rightness in any given situation, even if this means imperiling the lives of others or taking advantage of their good graces. Further, the consequentialist angle of this form of egoism causes its supporters to evaluate the morality of an action based on its self-interest-maximizing aspects, meaning that if living beings comprise the consequences, they are judged merely for their power to increase or decrease the egoist’s welfare, an objectifying process that favours a God complex. The implications of this kind of ethical egoism on an otherwise promising sense of religious independence can be far-reaching: a tree morphs into a supply of wood, a person into a blank slate that can be manipulated at will, a deity into an honorific that can be usurped. I will depict a compelling example of playing God in my upcoming review of *The Fountainhead*.

In all, when considering these three types of egoism and the ways they relate to the imbalances associated with excessive degrees of individualism, we see that egoism can be understood as an *excess* of individualism—an extreme of self-interest resulting from noble personal features pushed to unreasonable boundaries. Through historical developments that have prized religious independence,

¹¹⁷ Campbell, p. 69.

personal autonomy and happiness through individuality, individuals have felt an increasing pressure to live up to a wholly individualistic ideal of self-definition, meaning their way of understanding themselves in relation to the external world has become tainted (rather than embellished) by self-aggrandizement, self-regard and self-affirmation that do not balance—and can in fact hinder—other-oriented concerns. Now what does this interpretation have to do with authenticity? How does the authentic ideal get conflated with excessive individualism—or egoism?

II. THE DANGERS AND PERVASIVENESS OF “AUTHENTIC” EGOISM

I have argued that egoism can be considered an excess of individualism. Specifically, I have argued that egoism results from the states of tension that arise when individualism’s main features—notably religious independence, personal autonomy and the pursuit of happiness through individuality—reach extreme heights and cause an imbalance in perspective and objectives. In Chapter One, I explained how authenticity’s necessarily vague definition and the inherent difficulty in upholding it as a guiding principle have caused misunderstandings, misappropriations and general skepticism regarding the term. I also noted that most of authenticity’s supporters tend to focus on its advantageous ability to deter individuals from heteronomy. Now I want to consider the dangers that become apparent when these various observations are taken together. While I believe authenticity does encompass the three features of individualism I have identified—and will further discuss the positive spiritual, political and psychological aspects of authenticity in my next chapter—I also maintain that the excessive exercise of these features leads to nefarious outcomes for individuals and for their conceptions of personal welfare. Further, since authenticity and individualism are often conceptually linked, and since authenticity evades set characterizations and fulfillment criteria, when individualism’s main features are pushed to egoistic extremes, the resulting tensions and imbalances are also subsumed under the common understanding of authenticity. Here the notion of an “authentic” type of egoism begins to take shape—a kind of justified self-interest that reflects the true aspirations and motivations of individuals, grounded in descriptive and normative theories claiming it is natural, rational and even moral. Though I ultimately reject this conceptual connection between authenticity and egoism, for the purpose of this section, I will suppose that “authentic” egoism, as I have defined it, is legitimate. What makes it so dangerous and pervasive?

Egoism, as an excess of individualism, threatens authentic living by disconnecting individuals from their social and relational context, encouraging them to see others as mere pawns in their life projects

and to justify self-interest even at the cost of others' well-being. Though I agree that individualism has crucial and promising components that strengthen authenticity, I am concerned that it has lost the ethical features that preserve its integrity, a problem that its advocates have not straightforwardly tried to resolve. In colloquial terms, authenticity and egoism have become almost inseparable: to be authentic is to think that your way is the only way, that you are a self-made creature, that you should and can decide the outcome of your life without external judgment. Left without proper concretizing, this pop species of authenticity has been wrongly interpreted by some to be tantamount to indulging a “nonmoral desire to do what one wants without interference,”¹¹⁸ as cautioned by Taylor. To flesh out these erroneous interpretations, I will examine the threats to authentic life as characterized by Sartre (bad faith), Taylor (moral relativism) and Guignon (psychologization). Then, to show the universality of these threats to authentic living, I will consider the arguments made by oft-overlooked Eastern theories embedded in buddhist and yogic traditions, which warn against the kind of unbridled egoism that individualistic societies can unknowingly enable.

First, Sartre believes the authentic ideal is routinely threatened by individuals who are too preoccupied with their self-preservation to maintain an honest stance regarding their actions' repercussions on the world. He calls this preoccupation “bad faith,” a way to evade the responsibility involved in human freedom by way of distraction through ambiguous positions about identity and lifestyle. As I have explained, authenticity is a very difficult manner of engaging with the world—a reality that renders bad faith a much more palatable option. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre asserts that the very existence of bad faith as a type of being in the world “tends to perpetuate itself...it can even be the normal aspect of life for a very great number of people.”¹¹⁹ And when that bad faith is accompanied by self-absorption, it leads to an egoism that is hard to shake. David Detmer explores this phenomenon in *Sartre Explained: From Bad Faith to Authenticity*, a comprehensive overview of Sartre's major works that serves as a testament to his lifelong concern over bad faith's dangerous and pervasive features. In trying to grasp this prevalence, Detmer analyzes the techniques employed in advertising, public relations and political propaganda, highlighting how top spin doctors construct misleading statements (rather than flat-out lies) to deceive their audiences, using omissions, emphasis, vagueness and ambiguity to fabricate veneers of reality that are more appealing than the truth. Similarly, sufferers of bad faith condition themselves to diligently avert their gaze from undesirable facets of reality while concentrating

¹¹⁸ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991): p. 21.

¹¹⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1956): p. 113.

on advantageous aspects, thus sidestepping the confrontation between facticity and transcendence that characterizes authentic living and persuading themselves to live by convenient partial truths. Accordingly, if egoists seek a way out of having to change their fate, they simply deny their transcendence (“I can’t help it; that’s just the way I am.”); if they seek absolution for their bad behaviour, they simply deny their facticity (“The evil creep who did that—that’s not really me; I’m a church-goer, I give to charities.”)¹²⁰ Just like Detmer’s smoker who can light up a cigarette guilt-free by detaching himself from a potential future as a lung cancer patient, egoists can also change the object of their thetic awareness in a way that obscures the possible consequences of their actions and focuses squarely on their main objective: egoistic self-preservation. Sartre argues in *Anti-Semite and Jew* that this tendency becomes morally hazardous when linked to other-harming viewpoints like racism.¹²¹

Perhaps the most telling example in Sartre’s writings of egoism threatening the authentic ideal is the trio of antiheroes in his one-act play *No Exit*. Egoists par excellence, the characters are relegated to hell for all manner of selfish, heinous acts from fraud and theft to torture and murder. Yet far from feeling remorse, they actually express vanity and self-satisfaction when referencing their crimes, with Inès remarking, “When I say I’m cruel, I mean I can’t get on without making people suffer.”¹²² Detmer describes the play as a cautionary tale about bad faith escalating to egoistic extremes and culminating in a hellish afterlife sentence: yet unlike Inès, Garcin and Estelle, whose deaths marked the end of their narratives, we the living have power over our engagement in situations and, as such, have “no exit” from our freedom and responsibility.¹²³ When interviewed about the play, Sartre described his intentions in the same vein: “I wanted to show by means of the absurd the importance of freedom to us, that is to say the importance of changing acts by other acts. No matter what circle of hell we are living in, I think we are free to break out of it. And if people do not break out, again, they are staying there of their own free will.”¹²⁴ He goes on to explore the consequences of inaction in *The Devil and the Good Lord*, in which wrongdoer Goetz receives powerful advice from a local priest: “if you want to deserve Hell, you need only remain in bed. The world itself is inequity; if you accept the world, you are equally iniquitous.”¹²⁵ Likewise, in the biographical work *Saint Genet*, Sartre warns against self-identifying with absolutes,

¹²⁰ David Detmer, *Sartre Explained: From Bad Faith to Authenticity* (Chicago: Open Court, 2008): p. 78-79.

¹²¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. G. J. Becker (New York: Schocken, 1965).

¹²² Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage, 1989): p. 27.

¹²³ Detmer, p. 157.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 200.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 160.

revealing how Genet inculcates his youngster role as a thief, believing he has an evil essence rather than realizing he is a being capable of transformation—only when Genet’s identity evolves from “a project of *being* to one of *doing*” does he find success.¹²⁶ In short, throughout his writings, Sartre wrestles with the dangerous pervasiveness of bad faith, fearing the plunge into subjectivism that it could encourage and the egoism that would all too often result. Detmer encapsulates this apprehension well:

To say that there are no simple, absolute, exceptionless moral principles, that situational variables sometimes matter greatly, that they can place different moral duties in conflict with one another, and that we sometimes cannot know what is right and thus must improvise and do the best we can, drawing on all of our resources of understanding and creativity, is not to say that what is right is whatever I (or my ‘culture’) *thinks* is right, or that ‘anything goes,’ or that one opinion is as good as another, or anything even remotely like that.¹²⁷

Albeit in a different way, Taylor is also concerned about the “anything goes” mentality that individualism can engender. Taylor focuses on moral relativism as a critical, multifaceted threat to the authentic ideal, one that promotes the conception of egoism as an expression of authenticity. In his view, three “modern malaises” have given rise to this moral relativism, challenging the complex nature of authenticity by overemphasizing individualism, instrumental reason and social disconnection. Though he believes, as I do, that individualistic ideas represent one of the “finest achievements” of the contemporary age, he argues that overindulgence in them has produced unintelligible principles that continue to increase in popularity despite their lack of meaning: “The individualism of anomie and breakdown of course has no social ethic attached to it; but individualism as a moral principle or ideal must offer some view on how the individual should live with others.”¹²⁸ Instead, it offers incoherent principles that parade as facets of individualism: the principle of self-choice, for instance, states that individuals ought to respect each other’s choice of values simply because they chose them, not because

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 177.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 169.

¹²⁸ Guignon, p. 44-45.

they necessarily reflect some set of worthwhile criteria.¹²⁹ Taylor also laments the weight placed on instrumental reason, convinced the prioritization of rationality as the governing principle in human affairs results in a calculative approach that treats individuals as means rather than ends, applying a cost-output economic strategy to situations that require sensibility and compassion. Rooted in individualistic ideology, these economic principles make it acceptable to overlook unequal social classes, unfair access to opportunities, ecological threats, and the many other multidimensional ramifications of misapplied instrumental calculation. Worse still, because such approaches are so widespread, they make it harder for those who want to engage in empathy-reflecting projects to do so in a way that is considered successful or even rational. Yet as Taylor argues, “[o]ur degrees of freedom are not zero. There is a point to deliberating what ought to be our ends, and whether instrumental reason ought to have a lesser role in our lives than it does.”¹³⁰ Finally, Taylor bemoans the sense of social disconnection that individualistic societies promote: rather than affirm and show gratitude toward interpersonal relationships as important contributors to self-fulfillment, individuals are taught to view their communal ties and love bonds as “purely instrumental.” Consequently, individuals judge as authentic only those projects where they themselves are both the main goal and the source of meaning.

Quite problematically, these three malaises have generated a form of egoism rooted in moral relativism that has caused contemporary society to decline ethically despite its commendable growth in other spheres. The right to individualistic pursuits is so ingrained in contemporary mindsets that people fail to recognize the warning signs and pitfalls of excessive self-interest. Anchored in self-choice, moral relativism implies that individuals cannot challenge others’ chosen values without seeming disrespectful since “everyone has a right to develop their own form of life, grounded on their own sense of what is really important or of value.”¹³¹ As they obsessively pursue their own plans and projects, they lose any sense of responsibility or higher meaning: “the dark side of individualism is a centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society.”¹³² Further, because individualism encourages self-fulfillment, it tends to also excuse

¹²⁹ Interestingly, it may be the case that many people unconsciously espouse self-choice and expect others to respect their preferences and lifestyles, while not necessarily granting them the same consideration. In practice, individuals who feel very strongly about the “immorality” of particular cultural practices (for instance, widespread resistance to genital mutilation) may not articulate these feelings based on a set of worthwhile criteria, as Taylor would encourage, but rather on the mere fact that they themselves would not choose to participate in this practice and thus object to it on the grounds of self-choice not moral reasoning.

¹³⁰ Taylor, 1991, p. 8.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p. 14.

¹³² *Ibid*, p. 4.

indifference to social issues, meaning people detach themselves from their communities and political involvements to simply enjoy and profit from the circumstances that their democratic governments enable: “These [enclosed individuals] will prefer to stay at home and enjoy the satisfactions of private life, as long as the government of the day produces the means to these satisfactions and distributes them widely.”¹³³ Taylor labels this state of affairs as soft despotism, drawing from French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville’s account of individualism as the “moderate selfishness” of democratic America. Whereas a politically committed and involved citizenry would ensure the reasonable exercise of power by democratic governments, the “atomism of the self-absorbed individual mitigates against this.”¹³⁴ And so, individuals “lose sight of concerns that transcend them,”¹³⁵ whether they be political, religious or historical, a seemingly liberating condition that quickly becomes devoid of meaning:

I think the relativism widely espoused today is a profound mistake, even in some respects self-stultifying...It’s not just that people sacrifice their love relationships, and the care of their children, to pursue their careers. Something like this has perhaps always existed. The point is that today many people feel called to do this, feel they ought to do this, feel their lives would be somehow wasted or unfulfilled if they didn’t do it...Thus what gets lost in this critique is the moral force of the ideal of authenticity.¹³⁶

The effects of this moral relativism on the concept of authenticity are extremely damaging. The seemingly innocent idea that “each of us has an original way of being human,” as Herder suggested, results in a deformed type of authenticity. If individuals have their own way of being human and feel they are being kept from finding it, whether by governmental pressures, social standards or ethical obligations, they become convinced that they have “miss[ed] the point of [their] life...of what being human is for [them].”¹³⁷ The resulting moral ideal is nothing more than a call to “be true to oneself,”

¹³³ *Ibid*, p. 9.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 15.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 15.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 29.

however that may materialize, and the relativistic slant permits egoism within the authenticity experiment.¹³⁸

This insistent call to originality through self-absorption that so distresses Taylor has roots in what Guignon calls “psychologization,” a prevalent phenomenon endangering real authenticity by fostering misguided egoistic attitudes. Guignon fears that psychologization—or the “tendency to psychologize the issues of living”¹³⁹ based on the upsurge of psychological theories over the past century—has done away with any useful sense of civility by describing all matters that lie beyond the individual pursuit of personal welfare as inauthentic social demands or pressures. In his view, rather than help individuals understand their behaviour and shape it to better cooperate and deal with others, psychology has promoted a “concentration, persistent, if not feverish, upon one’s thoughts, feelings, wishes, worries—bordering on, if not embracing, solipsism: the self as the only or main form of (existential) reality.”¹⁴⁰ As a result of this psychologization, individuals are led to believe that they can and ought to prioritize their own interests even when that makes them unable or completely unwilling to respond to the outside world’s generally agreed-upon standards of action and mutual concern. In other words, they are encouraged to think that the promotion of their self-interest is authentic, that egoism is an expression of their real, unadulterated authenticity. Yet Guignon wants to demonstrate that this “contemporary picture of authenticity is incoherent”¹⁴¹ by identifying its current deviations and outlining the conceptual history that produced the mishmash of disjointed ideas with which it is now associated. Through his thorough description of authenticity’s historical evolution (outlined in Chapter One), Guignon reveals how psychological theories have cherry-picked past ideas about the authentic ideal, plucking them from the contexts that gave them meaning, only to reframe them in a contemporary characterization that makes little sense and offers little significance. Guignon is especially critical of the self-help movement spawned by pop psychology literature, mocking the ways it lures individuals into expensive, expertly

¹³⁸ Taylor elaborates on the foundations of moral relativism: “This is the powerful moral ideal that has come down to us. It accords crucial moral importance to a kind of contact with myself, with my own inner nature, which it sees as in danger of being lost, partly through the pressures towards outward conformity, but also because in taking an instrumental stance to myself, I may have lost the capacity to listen to his inner voice. And then it greatly increases the importance of this self-contact by introducing the principle of originality: each of our voices has something of its own to say. Not only should I not fit my life to the demands of external conformity; I can’t even find the model to live by outside myself. I can find it only within...Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing a potentiality that is properly my own.” *Ibid*, p. 29.

¹³⁹ Guignon, p. 93.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 93.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 159.

branded programming designed to connect them with their authentic voice by effectively conforming to the program leaders' maxims. He writes: "It is because of the way they lead to obsessive, almost addictive immersion in ever renewed self-improvement projects that New Age culture and self-help programs have gained a reputation for leading to excessive self-absorption—the 'me, me, me' culture."¹⁴² These approaches produce highly self-absorbed individuals who remain largely heteronomous, yet return to their lives convinced that their renewed commitment to self-interested motives is rooted in a true authentic striving.

In all, while Sartre, Taylor and Guignon use different concepts and vantage points to depict the threats to authentic life posed by egoism, they all agree that extremes of individualism have disastrous effects on the popular understanding and implementation of authenticity. Although none dispute the important contributions of individualistic features, neither are they prepared to turn a blind eye to the alarming and pervasive symptoms of egoism disguised as authentic expression. And they are not alone in this assessment of contemporary ills. I may have zeroed in on the observations of Western thinkers thus far but not because I find the contributions of Eastern thinkers any less valuable. In many ways, the driving forces behind Eastern philosophies like Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and yogic mysticism reveal a grasp of egoism's hazards that far surpasses Western ideas both in scope and longevity. Beyond showing the universality of the concern over excessive individualism, these Eastern concepts lay bare some crucial assumptions under which individualistic societies operate. The following brief overview will uncover some of the parallels between Eastern ideas and my theorists' aforementioned concerns about bad faith, moral relativism and psychologization.

In *Ancient Wisdom, Modern World: Ethics for the New Millennium*, Tenzin Gyatso—known to most as the Dalai Lama—adeptly summarizes the major events that have led to the current post-industrial world and caused the moral relativism behind widespread egoism. While noting individualism's important advances in science, technology and self-determination, he argues that humans have caused their own suffering by misusing their autonomy and exaggerating their self-sufficiency so they "lose touch with the wider reality of human experiences and, in particular, overlook [their] dependence on others."¹⁴³ By focusing on competitiveness and material advancement through personal ambition, individuals start to overestimate the power of empiricism and view their own instrumental reason as the

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p. x.

¹⁴³ Tenzin Gyatso, *Ancient Wisdom, Modern World: Ethics for the New Millennium* (London: Abacus, 2007): p. 11.

authority on everything. As a result, they reach dangerous conclusions about their moral influence: “because there appears to be no final evidence for any spiritual authority, morality itself must be a matter of individual preference.”¹⁴⁴ For Gyatso, the only way out of such self-absorption is through “a radical reorientation away from our habitual preoccupation with self” that recognizes the demands of community and the happiness of others, while building ethical restraint—“We cannot be loving and compassionate unless at the same time we curb our own harmful impulses and desires.”¹⁴⁵ This orientation that Gyatso identifies can be described as authentic because it asks that we regard the freedom of others as equally important to our own, thus expressing empathy for their circumstances and taking responsibility for our impact on their lives, whereas the opposite orientation of self-interest can be clearly deemed as egoistic for its indifference to concerns beyond individual welfare.

Similarly, arguing against extremes of self-interest, in *The World We Have*, Thich Nhat Hanh insists that the “American dream is not possible” for many developing countries yet persistent egoistic cravings for material wealth continue to supplant more meaningful goals that could conserve peaceful relations and, perhaps more pressingly, conserve environmental stability: “We have constructed a system we can’t control. It imposes itself on us, and we become its slaves and victims. For most of us who want to have a house, a car, a refrigerator, a television, and so on, we must sacrifice our time and our lives in exchange.”¹⁴⁶ Hanh blames a misplaced sense of entitlement for generating these cravings, highlighting how individuals claim ownership over ecological resources that are not theirs to dictate, including their very bodies—“In modern life people think their bodies belong to them, and they can do anything they want to themselves. ‘We have the right to live our own lives,’ they say...But according to the teaching of the Buddha, your body is not yours. Your body belongs to your ancestors, your parents, future generations...and to all the other living beings.”¹⁴⁷ Like Guignon, he too exhibits a distrust of psychologization, noting that “many therapists seem to think they themselves have no mental problems” and are unsusceptible to the fears and anxieties that afflict individuals obsessed with self-advancement.¹⁴⁸ Egoistic standpoints cause individuals to view themselves as separate from others and therefore dissociated from their suffering, yet ironically, these same individuals jump at the chance to

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The World We Have: A Buddhist Approach to Peace and Ecology* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2008): p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 19.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 38.

blame others for their own hardships and renege their responsibility to them. Meanwhile, the impulse towards “accumulating wealth and owning excessive portions of the world’s natural resources deprives fellow humans of the chance to live.”¹⁴⁹

In terms of bad faith, drawing from Buddhist philosophy, Pema Chödrön makes a case against a contemporary kind of self-deception based on the quest to master aspects of life that are beyond human control. In her estimation, egoism takes root in a desire to protect our sense of self and defend our self-regarding ways so that we can maintain our fixation with improvement, which she dubs as a “subtle aggression against who we really are.”¹⁵⁰ Comparably to Sartre, she suggests we deny that our experiences are in constant flux and instead “string our thoughts together into a story that tricks us into believing that our identity, our happiness, our pain, and our problems are all solid and separate entities.”¹⁵¹ Engrossed in this addiction to “me-ness,” we take ourselves too seriously, making the cultivation of our individuality more important than the resolution of social problems. Chödrön proposes the Eastern notion of *bodhichitta*—a sense of unconditional openness—as an answer to this egoism because it reveals a “path that gradually leads us out of our cramped world of self-preoccupation into the greater world of fellowship with all human beings.”¹⁵²

The benefits of mindfulness against bad faith are also the focus of Chögyam Trungpa’s book *The Myth of Freedom*, which explores the entrapping nature of ego-driven strategies that give the illusion of freedom at the expense of true awareness. He outlines the many ways that individuals self-deceive in order to defend their self-absorbed positions, justify the steadfast advancement of their goals and deny suffering as a part of life. For similar reasons as Guignon’s, he is extremely critical of the self-improvement movement perpetuated by psychologization as it fosters a destructive form of ambition that inflates self-righteousness while deflating other-oriented concern. Moreover, egoistic drives guarantee pain by insisting on accomplishment, making it more difficult for individuals to accept their limitations, finitude and minuteness, and thus more difficult for them to deal with disappointment.¹⁵³ Consequently, egoists become a dangerous threat because they cling to coping strategies that fuel their paranoia and pride, like indifference (numbing), passion (holding on), aggression (threaten those that

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 35.

¹⁵⁰ Pema Chödrön, *Comfortable with Uncertainty* (Boston: Shambhala, 2002): p. 11.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 17.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p. xiv.

¹⁵³ Chögyam Trungpa, *The Myth of Freedom* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001), p. 8-9.

pose a threat to you). They train themselves to distrust and snub others because “everyone is regarded as the enemy.”¹⁵⁴ In contrast, those who practice mindfulness “expose and undo [their] neurotic games, [their] self-deceptions”¹⁵⁵ and develop a “panoramic awareness”¹⁵⁶ that retains critical intelligence while heightening compassion, enabling a sense of humour about the absurdity of situations “without blinders, without barriers, without excuses.”¹⁵⁷ Only by trading in their goal-oriented mentalities for a simpler humility can people avoid the perils of excessive individualism and encourage a more honest self-assessment grounded in a “willing[ness] to be completely ordinary people, which means accepting ourselves as we are without trying to become greater, purer, more spiritual, more insightful.”¹⁵⁸

Now, whereas these and many other Eastern thinkers are wary of individualism as a whole, suggesting possible avenues away from personal development towards a meditation-based mindfulness, I do not want to give up individualistic features altogether but rather consider tempering them with relational traits that I will explore in more detail in Chapter Three. Still, their disapproval of egoism’s dangers and pervasiveness, notably the prevalence of bad faith, moral relativism and psychologization in contemporary culture, proves that concerns over extreme self-interest are universal. Further, there is wide consensus between Western and Eastern thinkers, including those theorists I am considering, that when excessive individualism is indulged rather than controlled, it weakens the elements of union between various forms of life. Yet for those individuals who embody a justified self-interest that they feel truly reflects their aspirations and motivations, the ends justify the means since in their view, they are acting naturally, rationally, ethically—in short, authentically.

III. THE “AUTHENTIC” EGOIST: AN EXEMPLAR IN FICTION

Presuming that “authentic”—or justified—egoism is possible, what would the authentic egoist look like? Whether historical figures or literary heroes, examples abound of extreme individualists whose moral stances are evil at worst and indifferent at best. Guignon notes how these darker impulses of egoism are “evident in the horrors of the Holocaust, in the atrocities of dictators such as Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Idi Ami or Sadam Hussein, and in actions, reported in the newspapers on a daily basis, of

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 38.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 45.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 64.

‘ordinary folks’ who starve and beat and shame their children.”¹⁵⁹ And the evidence exists in spheres of activity generally considered socially constructive, as Peter Rost explores in his article “Wolf Pack.” Corporations, the mainstay of North American economics, have come under attack partly because their members tend to behave more like predator animals than civilized businessmen, prioritizing personal goals as if spurred only by genuine instinctual drives: “each wolf cares only about himself and will do anything to survive. Compassion, loyalty, caring, ‘best management behaviours’—these are all buzzwords invented to control the masses. If the ship goes down, the CEO leaves first on the biggest lifeboat with gold in his pockets, and his crew can fight over the remaining vessels and the weak perish.”¹⁶⁰ The every-man-for-himself outlook reappears time and again in fiction, from William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*,¹⁶¹ which challenges the human concern for common welfare by pitting young boys against each other on a deserted island, to the German legend of Faustus, which uncovers the human urge to give up moral integrity in exchange for personal pleasure.¹⁶² When this egoism operates under the veil of authenticity, however, the outcome is less conspicuous and thus less obviously objectionable. In these cases, agents tend to rely on arguments rooted in the psychological, rational and ethical egoism theories I described earlier to justify their perspective: if only their needs and ambitions matter, it follows that only their individualism matters.¹⁶³ To specify the ways that contemporary egoism-tinged trends threaten the authentic ideal, I will devote some time to analyzing what I will call the “authentic” egoist—an agent whose projects are necessarily characterized by attitudes of excessive individualism which are deemed as fundamental and thus acceptable features of authenticity. Various degrees of this anomaly are quintessentially captured in Ayn Rand’s 1943 novel, *The Fountainhead*.

Rand designed *The Fountainhead* as a parable through which to communicate her Objectivistic ideals—it represents a deliberate, blatant defense of an authentic kind of egoism as not only rational but morally advisable. The novel tells the story of Howard Roark, an architect who begins at an early age to rebuke the conventional ways of building a life—career, family, social status—choosing to define his success on his own terms, even when that means putting his objectives on hold until the right

¹⁵⁹ Guignon, p. 101.

¹⁶⁰ *Adbusters*, May/June 2009, 83, p. 65.

¹⁶¹ William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1954).

¹⁶² Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (New York: Signet, 1969).

¹⁶³ Of course, I am not suggesting that all egoists try to justify their stances or even that all egoists are conscious of their stances but that those who do use the label of authenticity to excuse their behaviour tend to borrow, whether knowingly or not, from the “natural,” “reasonable” and “moral” descriptors of psychological, rational and ethical egoism to bolster their justifications.

opportunity for fully independent work presents itself. Roark is the paragon of Rand’s “self-sufficient ego,” one who perseveres in spite of constant opposition, adversity and criticism, gaining a few loyal devotees in the process though never seeking their support outright as he needs no external assistance to survive and thrive. Rand portrays the Roarks of the world as the fountainheads of true humanity as they create genuinely and independently, whereas their rivals remain mere “second-handers,” living off the merits of others’ creations without shame and indulging in complete heteronomy. At the book’s outset, Roark abandons his architecture studies, informing his school’s dean that he has learnt as much as he could from his professors’ “sacred tradition” and can only continue to learn by practicing his craft in New York: “I don’t give a damn what any of them think about architecture—or about anything else, for that matter. Why should I consider what their grandfathers thought of it?”¹⁶⁴ From this point forward, Roark is depicted as an individualist who will not compromise, whether the object of the concession is his functional, modern architectural standards, his austere, solitary lifestyle or his cherished values of self-reliance. Hard and enduring like the granite he uses in his constructions, he abides by reason alone, supplanting all weak emotional sentiments with strong logical arguments anchored in objective reality, even in his romantic relationship, which he assesses strictly for its potential to advance his calculated ambition. His dogged commitment to this “authentic” way of life wins him the mentorship of Henry Cameron, the one architect he admires, who encourages him to soldier on against a society that rejects his kind of independence and vilifies its advocates. True to his mentor’s words, Roark is exceedingly selective when choosing clients, dismissing most as sheep¹⁶⁵ and mesmerizing the rest with his extreme social indifference: “You’re a self-centered monster, Howard,” one of them exclaims with odd reverence. “The more monstrous because you’re utterly innocent about it.”¹⁶⁶

Roark’s egoism is distinctive because it not only embraces selfishness but also unequivocally condemns selflessness—an idiosyncrasy that disarms the people around him. When Dominique Francon, the daughter of a well-to-do architect, first notices Roark from afar she is spellbound by his “cold, pure brilliance”¹⁶⁷ to such an extent that it unsettles her and she resolves to hate him, criticizing his buildings in her newspaper column as “wound[s] on the face of our city” and emblematic of the

¹⁶⁴ Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (New York: Penguin, 1994): p. 11.

¹⁶⁵ Roark has a very low opinion of most of his clients, viewing them as image-conscious and convention-driven: “There was no such person as Mrs. Wayne Wilmot; there was only a shell containing the opinions of her friends, the picture postcards she had seen, the novels of country squires she had read; it was this that he had to address, this immateriality which could not hear him or answer, deaf and impersonal like a wad of cotton.” *Ibid*, p. 160.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 158.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 207.

“immense audacity of Mr. Roark’s conceit.”¹⁶⁸ For months, at social events and in writing she decries his persona and career, labeling him a phony not worthy of attention, all the while feeling completely consumed by him.¹⁶⁹ When they finally come together, he essentially rapes her, later describing his love as instrumental and selfish, the only worthwhile kind of love because it neither erases nor exploits the individual:

I love you, Dominique. As selfishly as the fact that I exist. As selfishly as my lungs breathe air. I breathe for my own necessity, for the fuel of my body, for my survival. I’ve given you, not my sacrifice or my pity, but my ego and my naked need. This is the only way you can wish to be loved. This is the only way I can want you to love me...To say ‘I love you’ one must know first how to say the ‘I.’...I want you whole, as I am, as you’ll remain in the battle you’ve chosen. A battle is never selfless.¹⁷⁰

He uses similar albeit less fervent language when explaining his reasons for employing a young sculptor in whom he sees many of his own ego-driven traits: “You don’t have to insult me. It’s not altruism. But I’ll tell you this: most people say they’re concerned with the suffering of others. I’m not.”¹⁷¹ In the final pages of the novel, during his court defense, Roark delivers a prototypically Objectivist speech in the hopes of absolving himself from an allegation of arson on a low-income housing building he designed. Discrediting the notion of collective thought, he describes the mind as a wholly individualistic entity that can only reason on its own, much like other human organs can only perform their functions alone. As such, self-sufficient egoism is the only rational, moral, *authentic* approach to life as only it can reflect the independence of the human mind and spirit:

No man can use his lungs to breathe for another man...We inherit the products of the thought of other men...But all through the process what we receive from others is only the end product of their thinking...No man can live for another. He cannot share his spirit just as he cannot share his body.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 272.

¹⁶⁹ Francon propagates a bad view of Roark to try to diminish the inexplicable effect he has on her: “No, Mr. Inskip, not Howard Roark, you don’t want Howard Roark...a phony? Of course, he’s a phony—it takes your sensitive honesty to evaluate the integrity of a man...Howard Roark is nothing much.” *Ibid*, p. 288.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 388.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 399.

But the second-hander has used altruism as a weapon of exploitation and reversed the base of mankind's moral principles...Men have been taught dependence as a virtue. Men have been taught that the ego is the synonym of evil, and selflessness the ideal of virtue. But the creator is an egoist in the absolute sense, and the selfless man is the one who does not think, feel, judge or act.¹⁷²

In his originality, strong yet cavalier, Roark stands in stark contrast to Peter Keating, his former classmate whose story unravels in a more foreseeable way, first with his appointment at an established architecture firm and subsequently with his constant status-seeking through public approval. Keating's "second-hander" personality varies with the trends, ever chasing the admiration of the social elite. Perpetually in bad faith, he willingly surrenders to the shackles of conformity, defining himself by his facticity (his architect's role) and wallowing in self-pity when his duplicitous lifestyle fails to cash in the lifelong success to which he feels entitled. In his relationship with Roark, he feels intimidated and "naked,"¹⁷³ but masks his discomfort through condescension: "You're brilliant in some respects, Howard, I've always said that—and terribly stupid in others,"¹⁷⁴ he declares, when Roark declines his advice to feign being what people want of him to get ahead. When Roark's indifference becomes unbearable, Keating implores him to drop "the pose. Oh, the ideals, if you prefer. Why don't you come down to earth? Why don't you start working like everybody else? Why don't you stop being a damn fool?"¹⁷⁵ Keating goes to disturbing lengths to attain the social rank he covets, killing his firm's senior partner to seize his position and justifying his act with the belief that selfishness is inevitable: "everybody was selfish; it was not a pretty thing, to be selfish, but he was not alone in it; he had merely been luckier than most; he had been, because he was better than most; he felt fine...every man for himself, he muttered, falling asleep on the table."¹⁷⁶ Yet compared to Roark, Keating's selfishness seems cowardly and vengeful, even pitiable, because it is driven by a need to conform to conventional conceptions of success rather than by a genuine commitment to independence. Rand portrays Keating as being unable to achieve self-sufficiency because his sense of worth is inextricably tied to his social

¹⁷² *Ibid*, p. 711-714.

¹⁷³ Keating wishes Roark would give him the approval he receives from others: "Others gave Keating a feeling of his own value. Roark gave him nothing." *Ibid*, p. 64.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 267.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 190.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 185.

masquerade: even his loveless wife comments on his addiction to pretense, insisting “You never wanted me to be real. You never wanted anyone to be. But you didn’t want me to show it. You wanted an act to help your act—a beautiful, complicated act, all twists, trimmings and words...You wanted a mirror.”¹⁷⁷ Near the novel’s end, when his exhausted pose has left him with nothing, Keating confesses to an ex-girlfriend that striving for authentic desires is life’s hardest test: “Katie, why do they always teach us that it’s easy and evil to do what we want and that we need discipline to restrain ourselves? It’s the hardest thing in the world—to do what we want. And it takes the greatest kind of courage. I mean, what we really want.”¹⁷⁸ In short, Keating may be selfish but his egoism is not authentic because he lacks self-sufficiency.

To further ingrain the importance of the “self-sufficient ego,” Rand uses the character of Ellsworth Toohey who represents the threatening influence of less actualized egoistic leeches who profess altruism to manipulate people into blindly following them and feeling guilty about their individualistic longings. At first, Toohey comes across as a cultural treasure, espousing wise art criticisms through his newspaper column and nobly encouraging the collective creative capacities that have shaped humanity’s greatest accomplishments: “When we gaze at the magnificence of an ancient monument and ascribe its achievement to one man, we are guilty of spiritual embezzlement...A great building is not the private invention of some genius or other. It is merely a condensation of the spirit of a people.”¹⁷⁹ Yet as the plot progresses, Toohey begins to unveil his agenda as a manipulator of the masses, one whose success relies on the dim wits, low confidence and status mania of society’s Keatings. He preaches altruism, kindness, universal equality, peace of brotherhood and humility, asserting that “a totally selfless interest in one’s fellow men *is* possible in this world”¹⁸⁰ and that “you will never be more than a dilettante of the intellect, unless you submerge yourself in some cause greater than yourself.”¹⁸¹ Labeling the ego as evil and loveless, he criticizes individualism for promoting a sense of ambition that denies the cruciality of living for the well-being of others—“Men are important only in relation to other men, in their usefulness, in the service they render.”¹⁸² With his clique of “second-hander” admirers, he seeks out to crush Roark whom he deems the epitome of the worst kind of selfishness. Yet Rand finally makes

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 442.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 626.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 70.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 236.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 261.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, p. 375.

Toohey's opportunistic intentions clear in a pivotal scene where he horrifies his long devotee Keating with a disclosure about killing the self-respect in people to ensure their dependence and self-sacrifice:

Don't allow men to be happy. Happiness is self-contained and self-sufficient. Happy men have no time and no use for you. Happy men are free men. So kill their joy in living. Take away from them whatever is dear or important to them...Make them feel that the mere fact of a personal desire is evil...Altruism is of great help in this. Unhappy men will come to you. They'll need you. They'll come for consolation, for support, for escape...Look at any great system in ethics, from the Orient up. Didn't they all preach the sacrifice of personal joy?...The farce has been going on for centuries and men still fall for it. Yet the test should be so simple: just listen to any prophet and if you hear him speak of sacrifice—run. Run faster than from a plague. It stands to reason that where there's sacrifice, there's someone collecting sacrificial offerings...Do you know the proper antonym for Ego? Bromide, Peter. The rule of the bromide.¹⁸³

Ironically, while Toohey aptly grasps the sly techniques necessary to secure disciples, because he too relies on them for his power, his version of egoism is as inauthentic as Keating's and significantly more dangerous due to its social influence.

As a philosophical novel, *The Fountainhead's* greatest strength lies in its persuasive portrayal of the self-sufficient ego as an ideal mind frame attained by reason that enables true freedom and happiness while removing direct responsibility to others. For Rand, Howard Roark is noble because he is tenaciously independent, he never exploits others in the pursuit of his aims and he creates original art that will stand the test of time and serve humanity well. She describes her book as “the story of Howard Roark's triumph,” of his overcoming “every conceivable hardship and obstacle” in order to glorify the “I,” man's spirit.¹⁸⁴ In contrast, Keating is “an empty, bitter wreck,” a true second-hander who experiences no real meaning or satisfaction because he never learns to live for himself, while Toohey is the “worst of all possible rats,” an encyclopedic mind with no creative capacity, only the ability to

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 665-668.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 733.

regurgitate knowledge and spew platitudes to exaggerate his saintly genius image.¹⁸⁵ As an “authentic” egoist, Howard Roark boasts many prized individualistic features associated with authenticity, including those on which I am focusing: religious independence (expressed as a form of atheism), personal autonomy (expressed as self-governance without recourse to public assistance) and the pursuit of happiness through individuality (expressed through unwavering principles and disinterest in external opinion). Through Roark’s self-sufficient ego, Rand reflects many components of descriptive and normative theories of egoism, including a strong implication that egoism is natural, a clear indication that it is a logical course of action for survival and fulfillment, and a concluding affirmation that it is the only morally genuine option amidst a host of other-oriented alternatives that prey on human potential. In short, Howard Roark is meant to convince us that an “authentic”—or justified—egoism is not only possible, but desirable.

IV. INCONSISTENCIES AND SHORTCOMINGS WITHIN POPULAR THEORIES OF AUTHENTICITY

Many morally questionable individuals have used the language of authenticity to justify and excuse their excessively individualistic attitudes, leading to the impression that “authentic” egoists are a genuine threat to the authentic ideal. This misconstrued authenticity has inherited both its supporters and its critics—whom Taylor dubs “boosters” and “knockers,” respectively—who define authenticity as a facet of the kind of self-determination fostered and encouraged by individualistic contemporary societies. Many of these popular theories of authenticity have undermined their philosophical roots, pushing a patina of originality that has little to do with genuine identity-building. As Guignon remarks, ambiguity has prompted the ridicule and defamation of the authentic ideal since, “unlike happiness, authenticity is not a condition that is obviously good in itself.”¹⁸⁶ It is therefore unsurprising that critics have attacked Sartre and Taylor’s systems of authenticity for their vagueness, believing them more likely to lead to the egoistic drives described above than a worthwhile moral lifestyle. Clearly, if “authentic”—or justified—egoism is a possibility, then the authentic theories that allow for it are open to critique for their shortcomings and inconsistencies. I will now briefly turn to two such critiques, one that focuses on superficial status-seeking, the other on moral ambiguity.

In the recently published *The Authenticity Hoax*, Andrew Potter pulls no punches in his assault against the popular obsession with authenticity. He describes the authentic ideal as a kind of holy grail

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 730.

¹⁸⁶ Guignon, p. 148.

meant to oppose the isolation, shallowness and alienation of contemporary life, through a “language of...lost unity, wholeness, and harmony” that promotes a nostalgia for a kind of lifestyle that has been destroyed.¹⁸⁷ Yet in his estimation, while trying to be authentic, individuals only exacerbate the societal problems they are trying to escape, heeding the call of marketing strategies designed to make them define their humanity through pursuits that are at once unduly self-serving and conformity-driven. Potter deems authenticity a contrastive concept that fosters a privileged status competition among the upwardly mobile, resulting in a cult of superficiality with no concern for integrity of character:

What makes the quest for authenticity a socially destructive form of status-seeking is the way it takes the misguided critique of mass society that has motivated the quest for ‘cool’ for the past forty years and blows it up into a sweeping and even more wrong-headed critique of the entire modern world...Some engage in a relatively inert nostalgia for a nonexistent past, others fetishize the exotic, still others find hope in collective struggles like nationalism or even jihad...we are caught in the grip of a false ideology about what it means to have authentic experiences, to be an authentic self, to lead an authentic life.¹⁸⁸

By equating a genuine good life with banal personal choices, the authenticity hoax traps people in a state of suspicion against the modern era, convincing them that only personally endorsed life approaches are valuable—a position that resembles Taylor’s critique of the self-choice paradox. For Potter, this attitude betrays modernity’s impressive benchmarks of human progress—scientific, technological, political and psychological—that have afforded a quality of life standard through which a luxurious quest for authenticity is even possible. He thus concludes that “when it comes to the modern search for authenticity, the irony is that the only way to find what we’re really after might be to stop looking.”¹⁸⁹ Yet while Potter’s remarks concerning status competition and superficiality are insightful and correct, they have little to do with the moral authenticity that interests Sartre, Taylor and Guignon, among others. He treats authenticity as the misguided layperson does, seeing it as a search for certain choices rather than a way of engaging with the world that shapes identities-in-the-making and imbues them with moral

¹⁸⁷ Andrew Potter, *The Authenticity Hoax: How We Get Lost Finding Ourselves* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2010): p. 12.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 266 and 268.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 271.

flavour. Pop psychologists, marketers and self-proclaimed gurus may use the authenticity label to lend credibility to their agendas but that does not make the designation accurate. Still, positions like Potter's only further emphasize the need to rescue authenticity from misconstructions that amount to little more than self-serving egoism traps.

The second common critique of popular authenticity theories focuses on the term's moral ambiguity. Here, the authentic ideal faces one of its toughest judges: Theodor Adorno. In *The Jargon of Authenticity*, Adorno takes issue with the imprecise language of authenticity, stating it provides a cushion of ambiguity through which egoists can justify their behaviour under a guise of genuine action.¹⁹⁰ Like a cultist blindly following an ideology, he who is "versed in the jargon does not have to say what he thinks, does not even have to think it properly. The jargon takes over this task and devaluates thought."¹⁹¹ Adorno uses the term "aura" to capture the subjectivism of authenticity vocabulary, which feigns "deep human emotion" to attract its supporters, meaning "any self-interested jargon can give itself the air of public interest, of service to Man."¹⁹² In the end, the most authentic become the most egoistic, their self-righteousness translating into a feeling of "being blessed simply by virtue of being what they are."¹⁹³ When generalized to a wider population, this individual inclination becomes a societal tendency to pursue "an idealized form that is devoid of content"¹⁹⁴—a freedom that has no direction or meaning. The authenticity jargon has become particularly effective in the world of advertising, where the mysterious ideal of authenticity is matched with products meant to liberate people from something unnamed but nonetheless unwanted. The resulting self-absorption coupled with the cushion of ambiguity leads to moral passivity and an atomism that is antithetic to real freedom. As Robert Witkin writes in *Adorno on Popular Culture*, "it is in and through relations with others that the individual develops a substance, a solidity or plenitude. The individual in the sense of an isolated and dissociated monad lacks all substance, all power of self-determination and self-understanding, and can only be conceived of as a kind of emptiness."¹⁹⁵ Jargon users may claim to be socially involved but this "false sociality" amounts to nothing more than conformity—they suffer from a disease that fosters egoism through the equation of truth to personal choice all the while rendering people dependent on a

¹⁹⁰ Though Adorno's critique centres mainly on Heidegger and German existentialist philosophy, his observations regarding authenticity's shortcomings are still relevant to underlining the need for a redefinition of authenticity.

¹⁹¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973): p. 9.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, p. 67.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 75.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. xiv.

¹⁹⁵ Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2003): p. 7.

toxic popular culture: “Despite the ideology of individualism that motivates much consumption in advertising and popular culture, the basic tendency of the culture industry is to eliminate all vestiges of individuality in favour of a predictable and calculable standardization and uniformity.”¹⁹⁶ This peculiar character—the conforming egoist—puts the idea of authentic world engagement at risk: as more individuals lose touch with their social consciousness in favour of overinflated individualistic concepts, their morality becomes ever more ambiguous. Thus, authenticity needs to sever ties not only from associations with excessive individualism but also from ambiguity, without turning it into a substantive or normative concept, which would render it meaningless. The challenge of authentic living involves eschewing egoism while not collapsing into a deficiency of heteronomy. But how can authenticity intervene to discredit the egoism it seems to be (and is often blamed for) fostering? How can it respond to the strength of egoistic threats that result in lack of concern for others, for non-human life forms and for the wider world? I believe that when conceived as a relational attitude, authenticity can unveil the logical inconsistencies of these threats and, in so doing, discredit egoism while salvaging a kind of genuine self-realization that includes within it the acceptance of moral responsibilities as well as the pursuit of individual flourishing.

¹⁹⁶ Deborah Cook, *Theodor Adorno: Key Concepts* (Stocksfield, UK: Acumen, 2008): p. 122.

CHAPTER THREE

AUTHENTICITY AS A RELATIONAL ATTITUDE: A RETRIEVAL

The purpose of this chapter is to respond to the threats previously outlined by introducing a relational approach to understanding authenticity based on the interpersonal features of the concept. My first goal will be to show that, while powerful and sadly pervasive, the misguided ideal of egoism (as excessive individualism) can easily be debunked, as Sartre, Taylor and Guignon persuasively demonstrate, since it fails to seriously capture the moral underpinnings on which authenticity must rely to be socially constructive. Drawing on the arguments of various thinkers, I will invalidate the rationale behind egoistic standpoints and depict egoism as a form of self-deception rooted in tensions and imbalances between healthy and excessive levels of individualism. I will then present my model of relational authenticity, culminating out of the layering of Sartre's notion of freedom-as-responsibility, Taylor's notions of horizons of significance and dialogical interactions, and Guignon's notions of enownment and releasement.

I. THE MAINSTREAM FASCINATION WITH AUTHENTIC LIVING

In this section, I would like to highlight, as Guignon has, the mainstream fascination with authentic living, expressed through a widespread concern over the presence of inauthentic agents in contemporary societies. As I have mentioned, Guignon views the distorted type of authenticity described in Chapter Two as incoherent, in part because it does not reflect how people generally feel about the social benefits of authentic attitudes and, conversely, the hazards inherent in inauthentic ones. I believe that the root of this feeling stems from a sense of suspicion regarding the detrimental effects that inauthentic agents tend to have on social institutions, notably on democracy (political), on family (social) and on self-worth (individual). In individualistic societies, people tend to feel that inauthenticity weakens the democratic process—if individuals are not genuinely concerned about their civic duties and political participation, they are less likely to care about government actions or invest time in community efforts. Inauthentic agents may even feel fewer moral qualms when they hear about fraudulent conduct or engage it in themselves. Yet the general consensus is that disingenuous political activities are worthy of suspicion: for instance, when most people hear about charity directors committing fraud by stealing from donated funds, they feel disgusted, labeling them as “crooks” for misrepresenting their charitable intentions for their personal gain. Though they may not articulate this response in philosophical or ethical terms, they express worry, repulsion, even outrage towards duplicitous commitments that are disguised as well

intentioned. As Guignon observes, they tend to consider inauthentic agents “shallow, empty, gutless,” and guilty of a kind of social treachery:

It seems that the person who is inauthentic is not just betraying herself, but is betraying something we regard as essential to all of us. We feel that the inauthentic person is letting us all down. This sense of betrayal arises because we understand that a society of the type we have—a democratic society—is able to thrive only if it is made up of people who use their best judgment and discernment to identify what to them is truly worth pursuing and are willing to stand for what they believe in.¹⁹⁷

Further, most people distrust the self-interest that tends to accompany inauthenticity because they perceive it as damaging to the family institution and, by extension, to community cohesion. An oft-cited example is the story of Paul Gauguin, who deserts his family to pursue his art in solitude, mimicking Romantic models of the artist. In his work on moral luck, Bernard Williams uses a fictionalized account of Gauguin’s life to explore the conception of integrity, suggesting that Gauguin’s artistic success somehow colours our moral assessment of him: if he does well, his choice to leave his family to satisfy his artistic integrity seems more palatable than if he fails.¹⁹⁸ Though it may be true that he operates under the guise of “authentic” artistry, from a societal standpoint, most would argue that he is in fact lacking authenticity by denying the needs of his family while favouring his own, and that he could have struck a balance that would have been personally fulfilling but not neglectful of his responsibilities as a father and husband. In short, he could have opted against egoism. Yet is that all it takes? At first glance, we might think that it is sufficient for egoists to act well, regardless of their dubious motivations. However, if we imagine ourselves at the receiving end of egoistic behaviour, we feel ill at ease. Not unlike Marcia Baron’s hospital visit example,¹⁹⁹ there is something non-intuitive and unsettling about having egoists as loved-ones since, by definition, it necessitates a degree of manipulation and fakery that contradicts the very notion of lovingness, care and empathy. Similarly, most people frown on the

¹⁹⁷ Guignon, p. 159.

¹⁹⁸ Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): p. 22.

¹⁹⁹ Marcia Baron describes a situation in which a person visits a friend in the hospital because he is impelled by a sense of duty rather than moved by a sense of friendship: “the idea might be that, by definition, acts of friendship lose their status as acts of friendship if done from duty; that insofar as one does something for a friend from duty, one isn’t acting as a friend—again, by definition” (261) Maria Baron, “The Alleged Moral Repugnance of Acting From Duty,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1984, 81 (4): p. 215.

Freudian-type characters who focus only on their own drives and needs, using social relations parasitically for their own advancement. The widespread tendency is to perceive their behaviour as dishonest, whereby “the neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him.”²⁰⁰ Increasingly, the mainstream reaction would be to label such agents as pathological. For Taylor, it is egoism that makes these inauthentic agents impossible to deal with: “Can you talk in reason to people who are deeply into soft relativism, or who seem to accept no allegiance higher than their own development—say, those who seem ready to throw away love, children, democratic solidarity, for the sake of some career advancement?”

This profound self-regard sits uncomfortably with most people because they feel it threatens our sense of self-worth. They tend to assert, as Guignon does, that what matters is not just the level of commitment but its nature. Commitments to trivial or other-compromising projects have no intrinsic worth, regardless of the strength of their motivation. No matter how loyal or courageous, Nazis face scrutiny because their projects betray a sense of dignity that is widely encouraged in human interaction. As Guignon puts it, “The fact that we hesitate to apply the term ‘authentic’ in these cases indicates that what is crucial about authenticity is not just the intensity of the commitment and fervour of the expression it carries with it, but the nature of the content of the commitment as well.”²⁰¹ Guignon’s type of authentic commitments makes it impossible for individuals to authentically prioritize themselves at the expense of others as their authentic stance demands that the content of their commitments be something beyond personal gain or benefit—it demands that they preserve a sense of self-worth that correlates to the way they behave in the world and how this behaviour impacts the world.²⁰²

It becomes clear, then, that the mainstream sense of mistrust regarding inauthentic agents reveals an important facet of authenticity: most people intuitively deem it as both personally and socially valuable. Whereas truly personal virtues like perseverance can exist in near solipsistic circumstances—as often epitomized by lone moral heroes like Robinson Crusoe—authenticity cannot. Despite its important role

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 100.

²⁰¹ Guignon, p. 158.

²⁰² Robin S. Dillon describes this kind of worth as follows: “basal self-valuing is our most fundamental sense of ourselves as mattering and our primordial interpretation of self and self-worth.” Robin Dillon, “Respect,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8 Nov. 2010 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/respect/>>.

in self-development, authenticity also equips individuals with the characteristics necessary for constructive relationships, not only with other people but with the natural world, as I will highlight later in this chapter. Thus, the intuition that inauthenticity is socially—or relationally—threatening is highly revelatory. For Guignon, it allows for a re-conception of authenticity as a personal and social virtue, that can address “the charge that people who strive to be authentic are inevitably self-absorbed and self-centred. For if authenticity is essentially a social virtue, then the authentic person must have a valuable role to play in society.”²⁰³ Indeed, the relational angle implies that actions speak as loudly as words: relationally authentic citizens recognize the type of world that will be most beneficial then set out to fulfill projects that will engender the changes necessary to create and sustain this type of world. Fyodor Dostoyevsky referred to this attitude as *kenosis*, meaning “belongingness” or “togetherness”—being part of a “wider flow of life” rather than in competition for self-promotion.²⁰⁴ Here we get to the root of the mainstream fascination with authenticity: most cherish it because of the relational benefits it helps to generate. As I hope to show, truly relationally authentic individuals can constructively participate in the world by following their personal drives and interests, all the while preserving self-worth in their relational perspective.

II. SELF-DECEPTION AND THE MOVE TOWARDS AUTHENTIC LIFE

My initial step in conceiving authenticity relationally is to debunk the idea of an “authentic” kind of egoism by labeling it as self-deception rooted in flawed logic. I will first present philosophical critiques of the types of egoism described in Chapter Two—psychological, rational, ethical, respectively—then argue that egoists become guilty of self-deception when they attempt to ground their approach in moral argumentation. Using Sartre’s existential humanism approach, I will re-conceive egoism as a form of bad faith. Borrowing from Taylor’s notions of “pre-existing horizons of significance,” I will prove that egoism self-destructs by negating its social context. Finally, while acknowledging egoism’s dangerous pervasiveness, I will examine how individuals can overcome self-deception and move towards an authentic life.

²⁰³ Guignon, p. 161.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 7.

A. THE FLAWED LOGIC OF EGOISM

Despite the ardent arguments of its proponents, egoism faces a battery of critiques when placed under the scrutiny of moral philosophers. To begin, psychological egoism suffers from various logical errors as well as empirical shortcomings. Most obviously, it can be regarded as tautological for claiming that humans are motivated to do what they are motivated to do. More distressingly, psychological egoism offers no provable claims: it cannot accurately assess the motivations of individuals since it has no way of penetrating their psyches. Because motivations tend to be highly personal, they are rarely accessible to empirical observation by others, making the theory more about assumptions regarding human nature than about empirically established facts.²⁰⁵ Further, to maintain consistency, psychological egoism must rely heavily on certain biological theories while disregarding others, notably recent discoveries in neuropsychology. While there is scientific evidence that babies live in a state of egoism—a normal stage of development called “primary narcissism”²⁰⁶—the same evidence indicates that, unless afflicted with a mental or psychological disorder, they outgrow this self-interested phase as they mature and become socialized. The same is true of other mammal species like dogs, who evolve from self-preoccupied puppies to purposeful pack members thanks to the guidance of their mothers and litter mates.²⁰⁷ Moreover, through experimental research on human suffering, social psychologist Daniel Batson has identified a strong tendency towards commiseration, “an other-oriented emotional reaction to seeing someone suffer” resulting in feelings of sympathy, compassion, warmth and tenderness.²⁰⁸ Rousseau describes this tendency as an innate feeling that “inspires in us a natural repugnance to seeing any sentient being, especially our fellow-man, perish or suffer.”²⁰⁹ Hume echoes this sentiment through his “selfish hypothesis” in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, arguing that psychological egoism does not account for moral sentiments like love, friendship and compassion.²¹⁰ He believes in a kind of “fellow feeling” that “depends on some internal sense which nature has made universal in the

²⁰⁵ Alexander Moseley, “Political Philosophy,” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2005, 28 Feb. 2010 <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/polphil/>>.

²⁰⁶ Fromm, p. 47.

²⁰⁷ Patricia McConnell, *The Other End of the Leash* (New York: Ballantine, 2003).

²⁰⁸ Batson devised a series of experiments to gauge his subjects’ emotional reactions to stories told by the victims of painful accidents. He concluded that the distress experienced through the storytelling helped the subjects identify with the victims, thus developing empathetic responses. Daniel Batson, *The Altruism Question: Toward a Social-Psychological Answer* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991): p. 86.

²⁰⁹ Rousseau, p. 57.

²¹⁰ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): Appendix II—Of Self Love.

whole species.”²¹¹ Psychological egoism cannot account for instances of selflessness, like when soldiers risk their lives out of a sense of duty or compassion, with no regard for their own interests (in this case, basic survival). Campbell argues that psychological egoism defeats itself by posing a quest for happiness that denies the importance of the very features that most people associate with a happy life—unselfish love, togetherness, benevolence, teamwork and the like.²¹² To suggest that individuals help others merely to make themselves happy degrades human nature by reducing all motivations to selfish calculation—“it outrages our liveliest moral feelings by resolving the highest and noblest impulses into a base pursuit of personal pleasure.”²¹³

Similarly, rational egoism faces criticism from philosophers for lacking consistency in its criteria. Many have argued that self-interest—rational egoism’s guiding principle—is not always the reasonable way to approach a situation, meaning rational egoists would have to opt for other-valuing actions or else risk being labelled irrational. Returning to the prisoner’s dilemma, if the prisoners deny evidence that cooperation will yield better results for both of them, their position can hardly be called rational as they are “defeat[ing] their own ends.”²¹⁴ Campbell’s principle of coherent integration further suggests that a rational person cannot ignore the values of others since “we integrate our aims with those of others, even when such integration requires us to compromise in our efforts to achieve our own goals for ourselves or humanity.”²¹⁵ If they do ignore them, they may be egoistical but they are no longer rational. Michael Stocker calls this reaction moral schizophrenia, arguing that individuals who are not moved to act by their values reveal a “malady of the spirit.”²¹⁶ Rational egoists are unable to have real loving relationships with others because they are overly concerned with their own pleasure and interests. They enter relationships not out of love but out of greed, revealing a keen albeit manipulative ability to do the bare minimum to keep another’s affections and derive pleasure from them:

They can do the various things calculated to bring about such pleasure: having absorbing talks, make love, eat delicious meals, see interesting films, and so on, and so on. Nonetheless, there is something necessarily

²¹¹ Owen Flanagan *Varieties of Moral Personality* (London: Harvard University Press, 1991): p. 50.

²¹² Campbell, p. 43.

²¹³ James Fox, “Egoism,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5, 21 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05328a.htm>>.

²¹⁴ Campbell, p. 89.

²¹⁵ Campbell, p. 10.

²¹⁶ Michael Stocker, “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1976, 73 (14).

lacking in such a life: love. For it is essential to the very concept of love that one care for the beloved, that one be prepared to act for the sake of the beloved. More strongly, one must care for the beloved and act for that person's sake as a final goal... To the extent that my consideration for you—or even my trying to make you happy—comes from my desire to lead an untroubled life, a life that is personally pleasing for me, I do not act for your sake.²¹⁷

Stocker finds this egoistic approach intolerable as it dehumanizes people by reducing them to mere instruments in the fulfillment of personal interests—it lacks consideration for the person.²¹⁸ For egoists, a person is but the sum of their effects—any other person or thing that can yield the same benefits can be substituted without affecting self-advancement. But as Stocker rightly asks, what sort of life do we lead if we “care” only about others to the extent that they can serve our interests?²¹⁹ Though valuing people for their own sake may be a taxing endeavour, he rightly wonders what would happen on a small and large scale if we “treated others externally, as essentially replaceable, as mere instruments or repositories of general and non-specific values.”²²⁰

Finally, ethical egoism does not meet the most basic criterion for an ethical system, namely the provision of a guide for action that can be generalized to a wider whole. For many thinkers, even calling this form of egoism an ethical system is illogical, considering it lacks universalizability and accompanying rules and principles. As Campbell writes, “An egoism that amounts to saying, simply, all is permissible, fails to provide a principle for deciding what to do.”²²¹ Supporters of ethical egoism cannot in good faith posit the universality of their theory as it only flourishes if a minority of people practice it. They know all too well that the best context in which agents can promote their self-interested aims is in a non-egoistic society—after all, if ethical egoism were universalized, egoists would have a much harder time securing their welfare. In “Ethical Egoism Reconsidered,” George Carlson discusses this problem: “the ethical egoist who genuinely believes that others ought to do as he does must in fact be both favourably disposed to their doing so, and willing under the appropriate circumstances (for

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 456.

²¹⁸ “The person—not merely the person's general values nor even the person-qua-producer-or-possessor-of-general-values—must be valued.” *Ibid*, p. 459.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 457.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 460

²²¹ Campbell, p. 120.

example, the giving of ‘moral’ advice) to advocate their doing so...[yet this recommendation will] seriously diminish the range of satisfactions available to him...and he will therefore fail to achieve the maximally advantageous amalgam, the realization of which was the *raison d’être* for his egoism.”²²² Campbell calls ethical egoism a personal morality because “it ignores, in a fundamental way, the interpersonal point of view that is presupposed in other moral systems.”²²³ Further, ethical egoism does not make room for selfless acts. Intuitively speaking, many philosophers feel uneasiness when faced with a moral theory that never requires, and may even belittle, uncompensated sacrifices.²²⁴ What kind of moral theory constantly excuses sustained weakness of will, dismisses the payoff of good actions and, at best, advocates a tit-for-tat approach to human interaction? If egoism were inescapable, why would philosophers bother with morality at all? Ethical egoists sometimes claim that selfless acts are allowed if they are ultimately self-promotional, yet they cannot convincingly use a need for cooperation to justify these kinds of life-saving actions: clearly, many soldiers choose to save civilians without knowing nor caring whether the victims will be able to perform some similar feat in return. The reality remains that, however rarely and disparately, people do nice things for others under circumstances that will in no way advance their own agendas. And so, we see that both descriptive and normative theories of egoism suffer from logical flaws and empirical inconsistencies that make them untenable from a moral standpoint.

B. AUTHENTIC EGOISM AS SELF-DECEPTION

If egoism cannot hold as a psychological, rational or ethical theory, the notion of an “authentic” egoism capsizes as well. To my mind, “authentic” egoism is a form of self-deception that trains its victims to willingly believe as true an idea or situation that is false or for which there is opposing evidence. Through denial or unjustified rationalizations, they convince themselves that their egoistic behaviour is an authentic representation of their selves, becoming simultaneously the “deceivers” and the “deceived” in any given circumstances. Authentic egoism is tantamount to a refusal to confront facts, choices and personal responsibility, consequently accepting a lie and living by it. It is, as Sartre

²²² George Carlson, “Ethical Egoism Reconsidered,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1973, 10 (1): p. 26.

²²³ Campbell, p. 63.

²²⁴ Flanagan, for instance, discusses the importance of “recogniz[ing] our deficiencies and [feeling] sorry for them.” Yet egoists are not only unapologetic about their moral failings, they proudly stand by them. Flanagan, p. 29.

and existentialist scholars have described, a dangerous form of bad faith.²²⁵ I will now examine Sartre's take on self-deception from the perspective of existential humanism, starting with the nature of bad faith, its moral repercussions and ways to surmount it.

As we have seen, Sartre defines self-deception—or bad faith—as an existential condition in which agents assume inauthentic modes of being by equating their identity exclusively with either their static social roles or their boundless capacities, rather than exist in a state of self-confrontation, where they are constantly identities-in-the-making. They fail to maintain the constant interaction between facticity (facts about themselves) and transcendence (possibilities for themselves).²²⁶ In Sartre's view, this failure represents an inappropriate response to freedom. For some, confronting freedom is a humbling experience at best: they shy away from the pressure of responsibility and give in to their feelings of anguish, taking refuge in fanciful excuses. Sartre dubs these types of inauthentic agents “cowards” for letting themselves be horrified by their experience of freedom: “they often have no other way of putting up with their misery than to think: ‘Circumstances have been against me, I deserve a much better life than the one I have.’”²²⁷ Yet the anguish inherent in the recognition of freedom can motivate a second inappropriate response, one that I deem much more dangerous: the bad faith of “bastards,” a self-deception that attempts to ground egoistic motives in moral argumentation. Sartre argues that “bastards” (“les salauds”) try to cope with existential anguish by convincing themselves they have a very special role to play in the world—that their lives are somehow more significant than those of others: they “try to prove their existence is necessary, when man's appearance on earth is merely contingent.”²²⁸ Existentialist scholar Norman Greene describes torturers as the epitome of this form of bad faith because they “appeal to objective moral standards or necessity to justify their aggressive self-assertion...They seek to hide from themselves the fundamental ambiguity of human reality, which is a

²²⁵ Despite criticisms of Sartre's existential humanism theory, many Sartrean scholars believe it is relevant and useful. For instance, Peter McNerney states: “Sartre's existential philosophy continues to be relevant to contemporary thinkers because of its ethical or life-guiding characteristics...Although few contemporary philosophers accept his basic ontological principles, many people are intrigued by his ethical (in the broad sense) claims that people should take responsibility for their goals and world views, should take a more active role in determining their goals and world views, and should struggle against the widespread human tendency to evade freedom and responsibility by various types of self-deception.” Peter K. McNerney, “Review of *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early Philosophy* by Ronald E. Santoni,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1998, 58 (4): p. 985.

²²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 984.

²²⁷ Sartre, 1997, p. 37.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 49.

paradoxical combination of being-in-itself and being-for-itself.”²²⁹ He concludes, as Sartre does, that “sadism is possible only because of the possibility of bad faith.”²³⁰ Realizing one’s authenticity involves coming to terms with one’s freedom and with the responsibilities of being a free individual whose actions affect the wider social context. Thus, to take credit for one’s entire existence but deny the facts, people and systems who helped shape it or who are affected by it is to act grossly inconsistently. Sartre sees grave errors with the self-made man notion, stating unequivocally: “man is not an island unto himself but always present in a human universe.”²³¹

Accordingly, Sartre would argue that egoism is a dangerous form of bad faith because it negatively affects personal morality and, by extension, social harmony. Though Sartre characterizes morality as a creative process that each individual must undertake for themselves, he asserts that authenticity lends moral validity to choices and actions without having to prescribe particular norms or standards. He writes, “although the content of morality may vary, a certain form of that morality is universal.”²³² People can be judged for their level of authenticity, meaning self-deceivers can be judged for their bad faith, which in the case of “bastards” is a kind of “careless greed.”²³³ He explains:

We may judge a man when we assert that he is acting in bad faith. If we define man’s situation as one of free choice, in which he has no recourse to excuses or outside aid, then any man who takes refuge behind his passions, any man who fabricates some deterministic theory, is operating in bad faith...My answer is that I do not pass moral judgment against him, but I call his bad faith an error. Here we cannot avoid making a judgment of truth. Bad faith is obviously a lie because it is a dissimulation of man’s full freedom of commitment.²³⁴

Further, the relational take that Sartre adopts for his freedom-as-responsibility notion in “Existentialism is a Humanism” demonstrates the threat egoism poses to social harmony. As I have mentioned, for Sartre, individual responsibility entails collective responsibility because the act of choosing affirms the

²²⁹ Norman N. Greene, *Jean-Paul Sartre: The Existentialist Ethic* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan, 1960): p. 46.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 54.

²³¹ Sartre, 1997, p. 53.

²³² *Ibid*, p. 49.

²³³ *Ibid*, p. 50-51.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 48.

value of the choice: “Choosing to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose, because we can never choose evil...Our responsibility is thus much greater than we might have supposed, because it concerns all mankind.”²³⁵ Thus, in thinking that they matter more than others, egoists make choices that affirm the value of extreme self-interest, yet this valuing cannot be generalized to all of mankind as it inevitably involves negative relational impacts. As Sartre says, “Certainly, many believe that their actions involve no one but themselves, and were we to ask them, ‘But what if everyone acted that way?’ they would shrug their shoulders and reply, ‘But everyone does not act that way.’ In truth, however, one should always ask oneself, ‘What would happen if everyone did what I am doing?’”²³⁶ Clearly, egoists cannot make a convincing case that their “way” has no effect on overall welfare so by maintaining their stance, they live a lie and remain in bad faith.²³⁷ They avoid what Sartre might have called the moral validity test of their life choices by dodging the question (or authenticity assessment), “‘Am I really a man who is entitled to act in such a way that the entire human race should be measuring itself by my actions?’”²³⁸ Egoists, as self-deceivers, cannot reliably maintain that their actions are morally right if they must resort to bad faith to uphold them—hence, authenticity provides the standard for personal morality. In Greene’s words:

Sartre contends that authenticity requires that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us. He argues in effect that while there are no universal and objective norms, once we adopt a norm for ourselves we must will it to be of universal validity...his view appears to be that the authentic man will know that norms are not merely general principles governing desirable personal behaviour, but commitments to a given state of the world.²³⁹

Thus, Sartrean humanism would categorize egoism as a dangerous form of self-deception. Yet hazardous as it may be, this self-deception is completely surmountable—there is always an exit strategy for individuals caught in “bastardly” bad faith. Ian Deweese-Boyd discusses the paradox of self-deception, whereby the agents must be both the deceivers (who are conscious of their deceiving tactics)

²³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 24.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 25.

²³⁷ Franz Adler sums this up with the statement: “Action is at the same time valuation.” Franz Adler, “The Social Thought of Jean-Paul Sartre,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, 1949, 55 (3): p. 287.

²³⁸ Sartre, 1997, p. 27.

²³⁹ Greene, p. 55.

and the deceived (who are unaware of the deceiving tactics): “How could I be taken in by your efforts to get me to believe something false, if I know what you’re up to?”²⁴⁰ Clearly, self-deceivers play an active, knowing role in their deception, meaning their bad faith is avoidable and, by extension, their lack of accountability is unjustifiable.²⁴¹ In Sartre’s words, “[w]hat the existentialist says is that the coward makes himself cowardly and the hero makes himself heroic...What matters is the total commitment, but there is no one particular situation or action that fully commits you, one way or another.”²⁴² Individuals who have truly experienced the recognition of their freedom cannot help but acknowledge their responsibility—as existentialist scholar Ralph Harper phrases it, “it is undeniable that some people are never the same again after experiencing momentary flares of self-realization.”²⁴³ Once responsibility is acknowledged, the regression to bad faith is harder to facilitate without suffering from existential “nausea” at this willed deception.²⁴⁴ Hence, to overcome their self-deception, egoists must honestly face situations that challenge their deceiving convictions and engage them with the world.²⁴⁵ After all, they exist within a relational context where certain possibilities are available and others are limited by the facts of the circumstances.²⁴⁶ Like the boy who must choose between enlisting in the military or caring for his sick mother, authentic individuals repeatedly face moments of anguish at the realization that there is no “right” course of action yet the choice they make will nevertheless imbue value into their moral decision-making.²⁴⁷ In *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre offers a more direct definition of this kind of morally authentic attitude: “Authenticity consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves, in accepting it in pride or

²⁴⁰ Ian Deweese-Boyd, “Self-Deception,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 13 August 2010 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-deception/>>.

²⁴¹ Linda Bell explains how Sartre conceives bad faith as a lie to oneself: “The problem in understanding bad faith is that in bad faith no duality exists between the liar and the one to be duped. Because bad faith is a lie to oneself, one in bad faith must play both parts—deceiver and deceived. It follows that the same individual as deceived must know the truth to be hidden from herself or himself as the deceived. As Sartre points out, ‘I must know the truth very exactly *in order* to conceal it more carefully.’” Linda Bell, *Sartre’s Ethics of Authenticity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989): p. 33.

²⁴² Sartre, 1997, p. 39.

²⁴³ Ralph Harper, *Existentialism: A Theory of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948): p. 33.

²⁴⁴ Greene, p. 59.

²⁴⁵ Many existentialist scholars agree with this reading of Sartre: Ronald Santoni, for instance, states that Sartre “clearly deems the bad faith of regular citizens a correctable condition, and regards ‘authentic’ existence as a possibility.” Ronald E. Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith and Authenticity in Sartre’s Early Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

²⁴⁶ Adler writes, “The individual chooses himself, not in vacuo but in the world. The world of the choice is a world of facts, among them the facts that the individual is born, that he finds himself in a certain spatial position with regard to other facts, that he finds himself located somewhere in history as to time, and that he will die. He also finds that this world is inhabited by other human beings. He chooses himself in face of these facts, but the facts do not determine his choice. It is the choice which gives meaning to the facts.” Adler, p. 288.

²⁴⁷ Sartre, 1997, p. 32 and 46.

humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate.”²⁴⁸ The act of escaping into bad faith to avoid accepting the reality of a situation is, as Golomb argues, “an acceptance, nevertheless, because one cannot flee what one does not acknowledge.”²⁴⁹ While it is by no means easy to maintain ongoing states of authenticity, neither is it impossible. Self-deception can always be curtailed through authentic efforts, whether defined as “a willed ‘conversion’ from one’s ‘natural’ attitude of trying to flee one’s freedom,”²⁵⁰ as McNerney put it or, to borrow from Marjorie Grene, “a kind of honesty or a kind of courage; the authentic individual faces something which the unauthentic individual is afraid to face.”²⁵¹

I view this Sartrean understanding of the move from self-deception towards authentic life as a highly relational perspective. Norman Greene clearly echoes this sentiment, viewing Sartre’s humanism as a kind of social ethic: “A man cannot become the person he wants to be merely by thinking about himself, but only by doing something with himself. This requires involving himself in the affairs of others, in adapting himself to social pressures, in transforming his environment...The individual must assume responsibility for his society and has a duty to work for its improvement...There are no purely self-regarding acts.”²⁵² Such a social ethic depends on a relational conception of the self, a view that Jennifer McMahon also advocates: “In order to have a self, Sartre asserts that the individual needs others. He contends that corporeal and linguistic interactions with others ‘[are] the necessary condition of all thought which I would attempt to form concerning myself.’...Sartre asserts that selves are created from the internalization of information that social relations provide...our interactions with others are the living mirrors that keep us continually informed of our selves.”²⁵³ Greene, McMahon and I are not alone in this assessment of Sartre’s freedom-as-responsibility and its connection to authenticity. In the movie *Waking Life*, Robert Solomon, a philosophy professor at the University of Texas, shares a similar view:

Existentialism is often discussed as if it’s a philosophy of despair. But I think the truth is just the opposite...when Sartre talks about responsibility, he’s not talking about something abstract...It’s something very concrete. It’s you and me talking. Making decisions. Doing things and taking the

²⁴⁸ Sartre, 1965, p. 90.

²⁴⁹ Golomb, p. 12.

²⁵⁰ McNerney, p. 111.

²⁵¹ Marjorie Grene, “Authenticity: An Existentialist Virtue,” *Ethics*, 1952, 62 (4): p. 267.

²⁵² Greene, p. 51, p. 56.

²⁵³ William Irvin, ed., *Seinfeld and Philosophy: A Book About Everything and Nothing* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000): p. 97-98.

consequences. It might be true that there are six billion people in the world and counting. Nevertheless, what you do makes a difference. It makes a difference, first of all, in material terms. It makes a difference to other people and it sets an example...It's always our decision who we are."²⁵⁴

T. Storm Heter proposes an even stronger relational view of existential authenticity in his book *Sartre's Ethics of Engagement: Authenticity and Civic Virtue*. He defines bad faith as a "vice...a harmful character trait of an individual agent" and authenticity as an "important moral virtue...a valuable disposition of an individual agent."²⁵⁵ In his estimation, since ethical subjectivism has been wrongly conflated with authentic expression—largely because people have misconstrued Sartre's focus on individualism in his earlier works—authenticity has been blamed for allowing "authentic" murderers, torturers, sadists and dominators to thrive unhindered.²⁵⁶ Yet as Heter observes, "We must recall that in addition to asserting the importance of individual freedom, Sartre also hoped to show the strong interconnection between self and other, between my freedom and your freedom."²⁵⁷ Recalling the Sartrean emphasis on the recognition of others, he explains how individual personalities, values and projects are necessarily connected to the people we encounter in our lives, meaning that authenticity "is a deeply social project that requires, in addition to transcending bad faith, *respecting others*...Since the self is essentially social, that is intersubjectively constituted...to be authentic, I must respect others because others make me who I am. I need the recognition of others for my selfhood and for my freedom. So, my reasons for respecting others are simultaneously self- and other-regarding."²⁵⁸ The self-awareness involved in authenticity is not synonymous to introspection carried out in a vacuum but to an understanding of oneself as existing in a relational context. Over and above self-awareness, Heter argues that authentic agents must engage in their situation by accepting both the benefits and burdens of citizenship, the latter entailing "the equal and just treatment of *obligations of civic respect*...the responsibility to do what we can, as Sartre says, to reduce the systematic social harms that cause sufferings to others."²⁵⁹ Accordingly, any subjectivistic stance that dominates or coerces another

²⁵⁴ Richard Linklater, dir, *Waking Life*, Fox Searchlight Picture, 2001.

²⁵⁵ Heter further describes bad faith as a "lived misrecognition of one's own freedom...in the sense that it is expressed through actions, as well as beliefs and attitudes." T. Storm Heter, *Sartre's Ethics of Engagement: Authenticity and Civic Virtue* (London: Continuum, 2006): p. 2, p. 5, p. 63.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 77.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 4.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 74.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 103.

(sadism, murder, oppression, and the like) is an egoistic form of bad faith based on an attempt to understand the self as isolated and independent from others.²⁶⁰ Such self-deceivers are unengaged and lack “the basic disposition to care about the liberty of others.”²⁶¹ Linda Bell encapsulates this idea well in *Sartre’s Ethics of Authenticity* through her account of sadism and inaction: “Manifested in the violence of the sadist is the impossible ideal of all violence...‘that of constraining the freedom of the other to will freely that which I will’” yet at the same time, “For Sartre, inaction is action; if by action I could prevent such oppression, I am, at least to that extent, actively involved in the oppression. Surely this is the lesson from the Nazi occupation of France that Sartre tries to draw for us.”²⁶²

C. TAYLOR’S HORIZONS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Sartre’s self-deceiving “bastards” are precisely the types of egoists that Taylor would blame for promoting a distorted type of authenticity based on moral relativism and excessive individualism. To highlight the potential of authenticity as a concept with a moral mission, Taylor thus wants to restore its merits through careful redefinition—a project he calls a “retrieval.” For Taylor, the project of retrieving authenticity reveals a long historical struggle between rationality and moral concern, individual pursuit and social good, individualism and collectivism. As I have shown, in *The Ethics of Authenticity*, he identifies three malaises of modernity that have resulted from this struggle, namely an impoverished sense of meaning caused by “the fading of moral horizons,” an “eclipse of ends” resulting from excessively used instrumental reason, and a “loss of freedom” generated by extreme self-interest.²⁶³ To alleviate these malaises and salvage authenticity from fallacious characterizations, he seeks to demonstrate the inextricable link between authentic living and social relations. Though authenticity requires exercises in self-discovery that may counteract social conventions, it also necessarily involves the recognition of “horizons of significance” that give the self-discovery value and direction.²⁶⁴ Plainly put, there is no sense discussing authentic living without a relational perspective to give it meaning. I will examine this position through Taylor’s notions of self-creation, social context and dialogical relations.

²⁶⁰ “The dominator thinks that he is independent of others, but in reality he is dependent upon them. He needs the recognition of his victim, though he dishonestly and inauthentically pretends he does not...He thinks his domination proves his superiority and hence his independence from the other, but to be superior to the other is to need him.” *Ibid*, p. 78-79.

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

²⁶² Bell, p. 66, p. 81.

²⁶³ Taylor, 1991, p. 10.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 66.

Taylor proposes a kind of authenticity that advocates self-creation without moral relativism. He feels that contemporary thinkers have weakened the ethical potential of individualism by confusing its meaning with moral relativism rather than demonstrating how it can engender authentic, morally appropriate interactions with others.²⁶⁵ Authenticity has become tied up with moral relativism because the paradoxical notion of self-choice (discussed in Chapter Two) has portrayed individualism as an egoistic standpoint. Over the years, this trend has reached detrimental levels of anthropocentrism, with individuals perceiving themselves as the sole creators of their sources of meaning and thus allowed to freely exercise their power over their fellow humans and their environment with no moral culpability. In Taylor's view, this moral relativism "denies the existence of a pre-existing horizon of significance, whereby some things are worthwhile and others less so, and still others not at all, quite anterior to choice."²⁶⁶ Self-creation is a worthwhile project *because* there already exists sources of meaning in the world that have culminated from centuries of human evolution and diverse contributions from past civilizations.²⁶⁷ Authenticity encourages a self-creation that recognizes these rich sources of meaning and helps foster a relational identity that is embedded in and embellished by them. The result is a kind of commitment whose focus and purpose lies beyond the self: "I can find fulfillment in God, or a political cause, or tending the earth. Indeed...we will find genuine fulfillment only in something like this, which has significance independent of us or our desires."²⁶⁸ Although egoists may claim that they act authentically when they do as they please, this argument is but "a rather thinly disguised appeal to self-indulgence,"²⁶⁹ as they fail to connect their self-creation to pre-existing horizons of significance beyond themselves. Taylor suggests that the propagation of the "self-determining freedom"²⁷⁰ ideal is largely to blame for the morally relativistic slant of self-creation projects. Though authenticity can rightly be understood as a move away from "copping out, going with the flow, conforming with the masses,"²⁷¹—or the avoidance of heteronomy—this move should not lead so far in the opposite direction as to facilitate and nurture egoism, or "a social atomism."²⁷² The authenticity in self-creation lies in

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 44-45.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 37-38.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 39-40.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 83.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 56.

²⁷⁰ Taylor writes, "authenticity can't, shouldn't, go all the way with self-determining freedom...Modern freedom and autonomy centres us on ourselves, and the ideal of authenticity requires that we discover and articulate our own identity. *Ibid*, p. 68 and p. 82.

²⁷¹ Guignon, p. 39.

²⁷² Taylor, 1991, p. 58.

discovering an original way of living that expresses personal values measured against horizons of significance. This approach avoids moral relativism while increasing moral accountability: “authenticity points us toward a more self-responsible form of life. It allows us to live (potentially) a fuller and more differentiated life, because more fully appropriated as our own...at its best authenticity allows a richer mode of existence.”²⁷³

When self-creation is not morally relativistic nor mixed up with self-determining freedom, it becomes an authentic project grounded in a social context. Taylor argues that it is this context that enriches our sense of meaning and enables true innovation and creativity: “I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter. But to bracket out history, nature, society, the demands of solidarity, everything but what I find in myself, would be to eliminate all candidates for what matters...Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands.”²⁷⁴ Egoists flatten their lives by positing themselves as independent of society and thus unaccountable to it, producing an existence that is trivial in its disconnection.²⁷⁵ Jack Crittenden confirms the importance of community commitments in Taylor’s authentic self-creation by highlighting the ways they represent a recognition of the “social matrix”²⁷⁶ that enables their individuality while granting access to a “vocabulary of worth”²⁷⁷ with which to evaluate their life choices. In Guignon’s view, only when individuals adopt this attitude toward their social context are they able to be authentically themselves:

To have an identity—to be able to answer the question, ‘Who are you?’—you must have an understanding of what is of crucial importance to you, and that means knowing where you stand within a context of questions about what is truly worth pursuing in life. In other words, to have an identity is to have the same orientation in what Taylor calls ‘moral space,’ where the term ‘moral’ refers to whatever gives meaning and direction to a life. This ability to give an answer, to be answerable or responsible in our

²⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 74.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 40-41.

²⁷⁵ Taylor writes, “To shut out demands emanating beyond the self is precisely to suppress the conditions of significance, and hence to court trivialization.” *Ibid*, p. 40.

²⁷⁶ Jack Crittenden, *Beyond Individualism: Reconstituting the Liberal Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): p. 14.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 17.

interchanges with others, is crucial to having an identity. It should be obvious that responsibility in this sense requires an understanding of where you stand on the fundamental issues of concern in your community.²⁷⁸

Within this social context, authentic individuals engage in self-creation by referencing not only pre-existing horizons of significance but also dialogical relations with others. Though authenticity necessitates a certain amount of independence, it is not a solitary pursuit. Authentic identities are the product of our personally endorsed sources of significance as well as intimate dialogue with the cast of characters in our lives: “We define [our identity] always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the identities our significant others want to recognize in us. And even when we outgrow some of the latter—our parents, for instance—and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues within us as long as we live.”²⁷⁹ Taylor is not claiming that this dialogue defines us absolutely—such an absolute would almost inevitably lead to heteronomy—but that it necessarily enriches our sense of self. Our loved-ones are especially integral to our self-creation as they mirror our values and help shape our aspirations: “We will need relationships to fulfill but not to define ourselves...it would take a great deal of effort, and probably many wrenching break-ups, to prevent our identity from being formed by the people we love.”²⁸⁰ When egoists fail to acknowledge this dialogical component of their identities, they end up viewing relationships as expendable, resulting in relational rifts as varied as divorce, war and ecological maltreatment. Conversely, through this dialogical lens, authenticity can be disentangled from egoism: “If authenticity is being true to ourselves, is recovering our own ‘sentiment de l’existence,’ then perhaps we can only achieve it integrally if we recognize that this sentiment connects us to a wider whole.”²⁸¹

D. EGOISM AS A STATE OF TENSION AND IMBALANCE

Through an examination of egoism’s inconsistencies, Sartre’s account of bad faith and Taylor’s horizons of significance, I have argued that egoism is nothing more than a form of self-deception rooted in flawed logic. Since bad faith is inauthentic and egoism denies pre-existing horizons of significance, it follows that “authentic” egoism is not a viable concept nor a defensible moral position. Though the

²⁷⁸ Guignon, p. 136.

²⁷⁹ Taylor, 1991, p. 33.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 34.

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 91.

present-day culture of self-fulfillment has led people to embrace individualism in various ways to improve their lives, the excesses of individualism that amount to egoism are unjustifiable no matter how liberating they may seem. Nevertheless, the problem remains that self-deception runs rampant in contemporary societies, and the egoistic stances that result threaten the possibility of authentic living by giving individuals an easy escape from moral responsibility and relational perspectives. After all, as Demosthenes wrote, “Nothing is easier than self-deceit. For what each man wishes, he also believes to be true.”²⁸² Still, I want to argue that this kind of egoism has more to do with insecurity and anguish, as well as states of tension, than a genuine desire to prioritize the self above all else.

First, egoism tends to result from a lack of security in dealing with personal responsibility—or what Sartre calls anguish in the face of freedom’s burdens. It is an undesirable, self-preoccupied reaction that is not only philosophically unsound (and thus untenable) but very inauthentic. In *Why It’s Hard To Be Good*, Al Gini associates this insecurity with the clinical term “narcissistic personality,” designating a person who is “self-absorbed, exaggerates their own worth, shows no empathy, feels entitled, seeks attention, can’t take criticism, loves flattery, expects special treatment, tries to control God, exempts himself or herself from rules, manipulates others, lacks gratitude.”²⁸³ Though some of the symptoms of narcissism are crucial to survival in various animal species, they hinder the social success of humans by distancing them from their relations to others and fostering a deceiving—and inauthentic—sense of personal value: “Narcissists create for themselves a self-defined, self-contained, self-serving world view, which rationalizes anything done on their behalf and which does not require justification on any grounds outside themselves.”²⁸⁴ According to Joseph Butler, this excessive self-regard only worsens the key tendencies of self-deceivers: a partiality towards themselves, a set of more demanding expectations for others and an absence of “doubt or distrust as to their moral character and behaviour” that is commensurate with self-ignorance.²⁸⁵ Butler views this inflated importance as hypocritical and false: “For if it was not for that partial and fond regard to ourselves, it would certainly be no great difficulty to know our own character, what passes within the bent and bias of our mind; much less would there be any difficulty in judging rightly of our own actions.”²⁸⁶ In *How We Get Along*, David Velleman goes so far as to call this self-deception irrational as it fails to promote a relational self-understanding whereby

²⁸² E. I. McQueen, ed., *Demosthenes: Olynthiacs* (London: Duckworth Publishing, 2003).

²⁸³ Al Gini, *Why It’s Hard To Be Good* (New York: Routledge, 2008): p. 34.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁸⁵ Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (Cambridge: Hilliard and Brown, 1827).

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

agents are interpersonally shaped: “In bad faith, or any other form of inauthenticity, the agent ends up acting on a false conception of what he is doing, and so he fails at practical reasoning, as I conceive it. For as I conceive it, practical reasoning aims at self-understanding, which the agent can attain by enacting a conception of what he is doing, but only if that conception will be true of its own enactment.”²⁸⁷

Taylor fears that this false self-indulgence only exacerbates feelings of insecurity since individuals experience a constant pressure to live up to their projected image and, when they fail to discover anything about themselves worth flaunting, they resort to the types of psychological band-aids so feared by Guignon. In Sartre’s *No Exit*, Garcin exhibits such an insecurity, his egoism masking an even more pernicious concern about himself—that of being a coward. More distressingly, the self-deception necessary to mask egoistic-turned-evil intentions can reveal an insecurity that is suspicious of everyone else’s motives, as Heter shows in his treatment of Nazism: “One serious ethical implication of bad faith concerns moral responsibility. Agents in bad faith have a distorted portrait of their moral responsibilities; they have a systematic tendency to place blame in the wrong place.”²⁸⁸ He describes the ethnocentrism of Nazis as a dehumanizing process that inauthentically lauds the German ideal while degrading other ethnic groups to the point of grotesque caricature—as evidenced in a mission statement delivered by Nazi secret police chief Heinrich Himmler:

We Germans, the only people in the world who have a decent attitude toward animals, will also take a decent attitude towards these human animals. But it is a crime against our own blood to worry about them and to give them ideals that will make it still harder for our sons and grandsons to cope with them. Our concern, our duty, is to our own people and our blood...Toward anything else we can be indifferent...I wish the SS to take this attitude in confronting the problem of all alien, non-Germanic peoples, especially the Russians. All else is just soap bubbles.²⁸⁹

Moreover, egoism is a manifestation of the states of tension that arise when individualism’s features reach excessive heights. As I have argued in Chapter Two, the otherwise positive roles of religious

²⁸⁷ David Velleman, *How We Get Along* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009): p. 26.

²⁸⁸ Heter, p. 70.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 45.

independence, personal autonomy and the pursuit of happiness through individuality can become dangerous when taken to extremes, resulting in conflicting demands within the self: self-aggrandizement versus helplessness; high self-regard versus fear of failure; obsessive self-affirmation versus alienation. Though the notion of an “authentic” egoism can be debunked theoretically, when it comes to the real world, the states of tension that drive egoistic stances persist and the resulting imbalances continue to wreak havoc on egoists’ relational connections with their surroundings. Even if egoists are morally at fault for denying their relational responsibilities through self-deception, the fact remains that they continue to exist no matter what ethical theory (or related law, social protocol, ritual) is imposed on them. And like ethicist Margaret Somerville fears, as globalization pushes on, the imbalances within the self escalate: “Because the vastness of the connection that globalization represents can make us feel so small, insignificant and anonymous, we seek refuge for our ego—reassurance that we exist and, perhaps, matter, in intense individualism, tribalism or both...[that represents] an attempt to fulfill a need to take control in a situation in which we feel abandoned and afraid because we have an overwhelming sense that indeed we are only an individual—we are alone.”²⁹⁰ Indeed, the imbalances I have explored—between unreasonably high self-respect and a non-existent sense of deference, between an exaggerated sense of entitlement and profound angst about status anxiety, between the cultivation of individuality and a dwindling sense of belongingness—express themselves in myriad ways and repeatedly reflect a disconnection between self and other. The controversial magazine *Adbusters* describes this self-absorption as toxic pollution in the mental environment, ever perpetuated by mass media messages: “If you boiled this stew down to its basic ingredient, this is what you found, repeated ad infinitum: You are the most important thing on Earth, the heaviest object in the universe...[people] may turn violent to get what they want now, but it’s the what-they-want-now that lies nearer the heart of the problem.”²⁹¹

Yet as Bernard Williams sensibly observes, no matter how passionately we would like everyone to be moral—or, in my view, capable of relational authenticity—certain individuals do not have the necessary psychological makeup or, worse, the desire and willingness to strive towards the kind of human flourishing that includes a morally authentic character.²⁹² Perhaps egoists lack the attributes that

²⁹⁰ Margaret Somerville, *The Ethical Canary: Science, Society and the Human Spirit* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004): p. 8.

²⁹¹ *Adbusters*, #90, Summer 2010.

²⁹² As Williams puts it: “There are people with various weaknesses or vices, people who are malicious, selfish, brutal, inconsiderate, self-indulgent, lazy, greedy. No ethical world has ever been free of those with such vices.” Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, eds, *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): p. 62.

allow them to adopt a relationally authentic attitude, notably the capacity for empathy. (I will return to these attributes in my next section.) If egoists are unable to show empathy for loved-ones, it is reasonable to question whether they will have any empathetic capacity more generally. There is an alarming disharmony between their values (or complete lack thereof) and their motives to act, yet the persuasive façade with which they set out to fulfill their interests can completely—and quite nefariously—delude and mislead those at the receiving end of their behaviour. As *Adbusters* writers maintain, “We have a right, in the cult of the self, to get whatever we desire. We can do anything, even belittle and destroy those around us, including our friends, to make money, to be happy and to become famous. Once fame and wealth are achieved, they become their own justification, their own morality. How one gets there is irrelevant.”²⁹³ Though relationships help ensure mental health, perhaps egoists attempt to secure these unions incorrectly through dominance, exerting power over others or rendering them submissive in some way. They may exhibit symptoms of psychopathy or sociopathy, making their imbalances much harder to shake. This prompts the question, what purpose, if any, do egoists serve? Are they mere cautionary tales? What kind of world do we create by allowing such egoistic theories to propagate?

I contend that though egoists will never disappear completely, their nefarious effects can be controlled and reduced by adopting a morality that, as Owen Flanagan puts it, has both “interpersonal and intrapersonal components.”²⁹⁴ The prescription is not altruism: no moral theory can reasonably expect people to help others all the time, but it can demand that they consider others and avoid harm to them most of the time—in short, it can demand relational authenticity. Egoism may indeed be a threat to authenticity inasmuch as the ideology permeates contemporary society but not insofar as it is constitutive of authenticity as a concept. Having disentangled egoism from the authentic ideal, I can now suggest a re-characterization of authenticity as a privileged state (rather than a right) that individuals must earn through sustained effort. All agents may have the capacity to earn it, but they should not be able to acquire its gains without investing moral efforts, as I will further explain below.

III. THE STRENGTH OF “RELATIONAL” AUTHENTICITY

By highlighting the ways in which authenticity and responsibility are inextricably linked, notably through Sartre’s treatment of bad faith, I have underscored the ethical dimensions of authentic living: No

²⁹³ *Adbusters*, #90, Summer 2010.

²⁹⁴ Flanagan, p. 17.

agent can justifiably claim to behave authentically if their intentions and resulting actions are purely self-interested as they are guilty of denying their existential impact on others' lives while also negating the human developments that have made their current reality possible—they are not morally responsible and thus inauthentic. In this section, I will introduce my model of relational authenticity and consider how my three main theorists inform the model.

A. ENOWNMENT AND RELEASEMENT

Guignon believes that fruitful authenticity achieves a balance between the cultivation of personal virtues (the qualities that enable individuals to improve their own characters and capacities) and social virtues (the qualities that enable individuals to constructively participate in the world). He calls the personal cultivation “enownment”—an effort towards self-possession that demands introspection and self-reflection so that individuals can identify the specific aspects about themselves that make them unique as well as the ways in which these idiosyncratic talents and aptitudes can be used for the common good. He calls the social cultivation “releasement”—a self-loss that pulls individuals out of their self-reflective states and encourages them to embrace their higher responsibilities as citizens of the world: “it envisions a way of letting go of our own personal agendas and experiencing ourselves as participants in a shared event that is greater than ourselves.”²⁹⁵ Authenticity so conceived dodges the problem of egoism by requiring a balance between the personally valuable and the socially valuable.²⁹⁶

I believe these twin concepts offer a crucial starting point for conceiving authenticity relationally. After all, Guignon is not arguing against self-cultivation nor advocating a kind of altruism. Rather, he seeks an authenticity conception that deems as equally significant self-oriented and other-oriented pursuits: “being authentic is not just a matter of concentrating on one’s own self, but also involves deliberating about how one’s commitments make a contribution to the good of the public world in which one’s a part.”²⁹⁷ The personal angle of enownment fosters integrity and individual responsibility, while the social angle of releasement emphasizes belongingness and indebtedness for the contributions that others make to our lives and our social context. He believes the measure of authenticity lies in cherishing both orientations as evenly as possible: “Though there are people who become obsessed with

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 166-167.

²⁹⁶ Guignon, p. 151.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 163.

one or the other of these two paths, most of us strive to realize both dimensions of our lives.”²⁹⁸ In his estimation, problems arise when individuals focus too squarely on self-possession, which distances them from their moral agency: ”The model of self-loss directs you to turn your back on self-preoccupation and self-inspection...The highest goal in living, on this view, is to become a new person by becoming responsive to the call of something greater than yourself...The suggestion here is that we should seek release from the bondage to ego, not ever greater involvement in the ‘I.’”²⁹⁹ In releasing ourselves from our ego-driven tendencies, we actually further affirm our personal cultivation by enriching it with relational features: “Commitments to family, friends and the wider society are not just afterthoughts tacked on to a project that otherwise requires total self-preoccupation. They are integral to the very idea of authenticity as a way of life.”³⁰⁰ On this view, “authentic” egoism is misled because egoistic commitments do not reflect the delicate interplay between enownment and releasement:

This sort of releasement means no longer putting ourselves at the center of the picture, no longer letting our egos get in the way in every situation...it envisions a way of letting go of our own personal agendas and experiencing ourselves as participants in a shared event that is greater than ourselves. In this orientation to life, we focus not on what we can get out of a situation, but rather on what we can contribute to the situation...In place of the emphasis on calculation and insistence on one’s own ends, there is the kind of situational awareness of what should be done that comes readily to those who have cultivated in themselves a sense of decency and compassion.”³⁰¹

Though many different outlooks and vocations can aptly exemplify Guignon’s twin concepts, for the purpose of illustration, I will focus on one: the doctor. If we imagine a young adult who grows up loving scientific experiments and succeeding in his biology and chemistry classes at school, it seems a natural choice for him to consider furthering his science studies through a university degree. During these undergraduate classes, he may come to realize that his passion for science can translate into countless career opportunities, motivating him to join science-focused clubs and attend various conferences through which he further comes to identify himself as a person who is curious, driven, research-oriented,

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 79.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 8.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 163-164.

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 166-167.

passionate about discovery and analysis, fond of collaborative work, and determined to make an impact on the world through his scientific acumen. As he further strives to define himself, he may decide to become a doctor, increasingly appreciating how this profession can satisfy many of his personal aspirations while also assisting others. To ensure his future patients benefit from a real commitment to scientific innovation, he may choose to pursue research in a relatively new area of medicine that will allow him to seek out cures for currently life-threatening diseases. In doing so, he will come to understand himself as an individual with personal virtues (like diligence, discernment and conscientiousness) and social virtues (like kindness, generosity and trustworthiness), and regularly oscillate between efforts to further cultivate his own abilities and to reach out to patients in need. Beyond his actual choice of career, the young doctor may also convey his relational authenticity through the ways he engages in his duties: though his profession promises status, wealth and security, his motivation extends far beyond these material satisfactions to the personal fulfillment he derives from making a contribution to people's well-being through work that enralls him. Even if he is offered more lucrative positions through, say, pharmaceutical partnerships, he prefers assignments with more tangible relational benefits, opting to enroll in Doctors Without Borders initiatives to broaden his horizons and offer aid to high-risk populations. In short, the doctor's dedication is genuine yet he has not given up a personal dream—his success is clearly coloured by his balance between enownment and releasement.³⁰² And this, I argue, is a strong basis for a relationally authentic life.

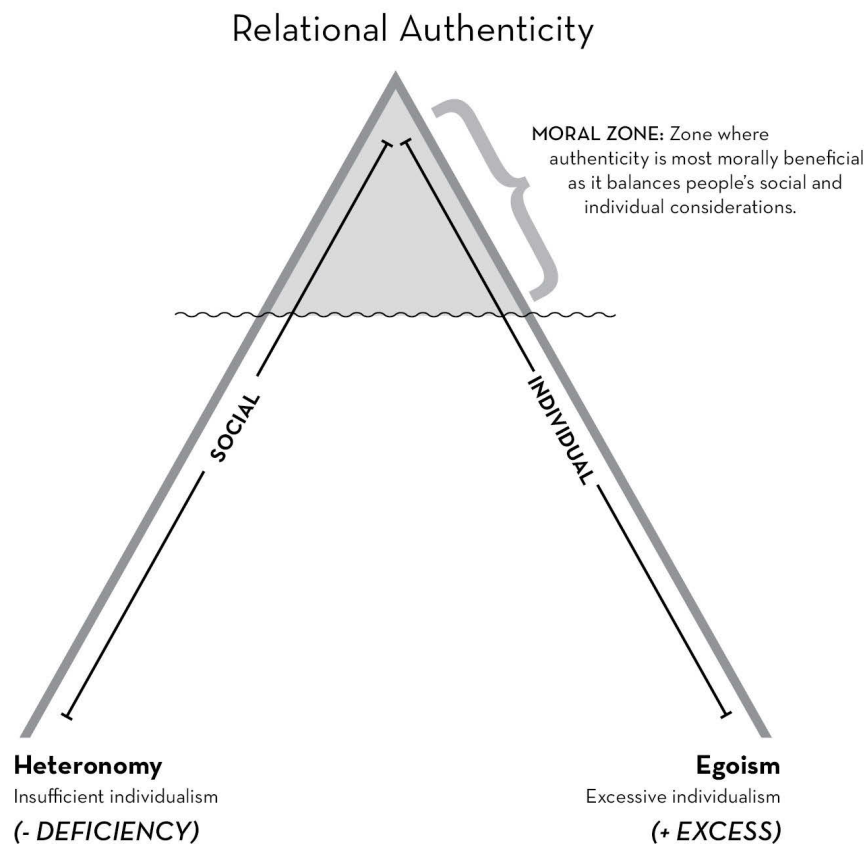
B. FEATURES OF RELATIONAL AUTHENTICITY

I wish to propose a model of relational authenticity as the ideal intermediate between the excess of egoism and the deficiency of heteronomy, drawing loosely on Aristotle's "golden mean" approach. By relational, I mean authenticity that recognizes the interpersonal relationships and worldly engagements that imbue meaning into agents' lives.³⁰³ As illustrated in the diagram below, relational authenticity exists in a morally acceptable "zone" designated by the grey triangle, the top point representing the perfect balance between an agent's social and individual considerations. Morally worthwhile authenticity is threatened when one of its defining attributes—individualism—becomes overinflated and leads to an excessive extreme: egoism. To prevent this excess, while also evading the undesirable deficiency of heteronomy, the concept of relational authenticity offers a happy medium where

³⁰² I will consider other relationally authentic projects in a later section.

³⁰³ I use the term "worldly" rather than "socially" in my account as I want to include the natural world in my relational perspective, not just human beings.

connections to others matter to flourishing. Aware that their social relationships and interactions help define their identities, relationally authentic agents create life projects that simultaneously support their individuality while complementing, if not supporting, others' projects—personal efforts never matter more than anyone else's. Like Sartre, Taylor and Guignon have argued in their own way, I believe that with the right characterization, authenticity can be considered as a moral value with both personal and social benefits. People lead authentically moral lives when they reflect their individuality in their actions while also recognizing their potential and their limitations as agents existing in a relational context.



The motivation to devise a relational type of authenticity stems from my interest in what makes individuals moral. I agree with the stance many ethicists hold that morality is essential not only to coexistence between life forms but also to meaningful identity-building. Philosophers have proposed many internal and external factors that influence our capacity to “be moral,” from personal characteristics to favourable circumstances. I believe many of these same factors affect our capacity to be authentic in a meaningful (that is, morally desirable) way. As I explored in Chapter One, whereas

former world views referenced an outside concept when discussing authenticity—whether the cosmos, god, reason or nature—as per what mattered most to individuals at the time, in our contemporary, highly anthropocentric thinking, we reference the self—ourselves—which can be very dangerous. Starting very broadly from the question, “How can individuals lead meaningful, moral lives within these new world views?” I want to identify internal factors (or psychological traits) as well as external factors (or environmental conditions) that foster relational authenticity and help to ensure socially constructive modes of being rather than egoistic ones. As I have shown, without characterization, authenticity falls prey to the common criticism of providing a “cushion of ambiguity” through which to excuse immoral behaviour. As such, I seek to attribute intelligible, somewhat precise features to relational authenticity without giving it the specific content that would contradict its very purpose of affirming each person’s individuality.

To my mind, relational authenticity is a moral attitude that captures the genuine way that individual selves connect with the world around them—people, other living things, nature. Colloquially, it is the idea that we can “be” ourselves while also “getting over” ourselves. It suggests that what is “true” about ourselves and our lives does not stop at our personality traits but includes our manner of engaging with the world. In feminist ethics, a relational angle has been used to better understand autonomy as it “stress [es] the ineliminable role that relatedness plays in persons’ self-conceptions.”³⁰⁴ Similarly, relationally authentic individuals may be independent in an important sense—as epitomized by Guignon’s “enownment” notion—but they are never disconnected, constantly striving to identify what matters to them while contributing to a worldly context. Relational authenticity can thus successfully test whether agents are living for a purpose beyond their self-interested aims by guiding them away from lifestyles that prize excessive individualism and toward lifestyles that put them in touch with their moral responsibility. By adopting a relationally authentic attitude, people become capable of balancing their personal ambitions *and* their social obligations, thus enabling them to lead more consistently moral lifestyles. The following criteria for relational authenticity comprise psychological traits and environmental conditions that favour a healthy balance between individual and social considerations. The list is by no means exhaustive but it helps paint a picture of the relationally authentic person who eschews bad faith, embraces horizons of significance and dialogical relations, and finds the balance between enownment and releasement.

³⁰⁴ John, Christman. “Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 11 August 2009 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/autonomy-moral/>>.

Relationally authentic people are capable of self-reflection. Bernard Williams prizes self-reflective activities for the authentic expression they help achieve, capturing “the idea that some things are in some real sense really you, or express what you are, and others aren’t.”³⁰⁵ By reserving enough time in their lives for introspection, relationally authentic people rarely lose sight of their values and conscience in the flurry of everyday pressures. They have become capable, as Heidegger would say, of *eigentlich* (the German for “authentic”) by owning up to what they are becoming.³⁰⁶ They consciously avoid getting overwhelmed by conformity-oriented outside pressures, since they want, in Golomb’s words, to “attain authenticity by being faithful to scripts they have written for themselves.”³⁰⁷ Still, if they consider existing customs or outlooks appropriate and meaningful, they can endorse these without being heteronomous since they are aware of how these particular norms align with their own values and identifications. Thus through reflection, relationally authentic people come to understand themselves in an honest, lucid way: to borrow from Guignon, “Only if we candidly appraise ourselves and achieve genuine self-knowledge can we begin to realize our capacity for authentic existence.”³⁰⁸

Relationally authentic people recognize the impact of human history. While their existences are theirs to create, they acknowledge, even celebrate, belonging to a rich history that influences their choices and gives these choices meaning. This history includes particular cultural pasts—both those that elicit pride and shame—as well as the broader human evolution since prehistoric times. Herder touches on this kind of historical recognition in his thoughts about cultural inheritance: “Our noblest possessions do not come from ourselves; our understanding along with its powers, the way in which we think, act, and exist, is, as it were, inherited...The passage of such contributions into the whole eternal treasure of humanity requires a rejection of our own ego, that is, a renunciation of self and of the prejudices that cling to the self.”³⁰⁹ From this historical awareness, relationally authentic people come to understand that they are not the origins of their full identities though they can originally express these identities. Michael Sandel describes this self-understanding as intersubjectivity: “Because I am partly constituted by the shared practices, traditions and ends of my community; because my individuality is a social product developed through interactions and relationships with others, participation in joint practices, and

³⁰⁵ Stuart Jeffries, “Bernard Williams: The Quest for Truth,” *The Guardian* (30 Nov. 2002), p. 4.

³⁰⁶ Charles Guignon, “Authenticity,” *Philosophy Compass*, 2008, 3, (2).

³⁰⁷ Golomb, p. 3.

³⁰⁸ Guignon, 2004, p. 6.

³⁰⁹ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Against Pure Reason: Writings on Religion, Language, and History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993): p. 59-61.

‘a common vocabulary of discourse,’ then my identity is not an isolate but a conjunction, not a subjectivity but an intersubjectivity.”³¹⁰

Relationally authentic people are responsible for their choices and the resulting outcomes. Building on Sartre’s points, this responsibility represents a recognition of personal freedom and, by extension, of others’ freedom. It also involves accepting that all the actions in our life repertoire—from the noblest to the most terrible—become part of the ongoing narrative of our identities. Alexander Nehamas dubs this stance as “a willingness to accept responsibility for everything that one has done, and to admit...that everything that one has done actually constitutes who one is.”³¹¹ The ensuing implication for the enownment phase is that self-creation be a responsible process. Moreover, to my mind, especially successful relationally authentic people not only accept responsibility for their choices and resulting outcomes, but also take up roles in the world that reflect and ingrain this acceptance. Taylor describes this move as dualistic: “First, we are able to give a response to the question of where we stand in relation to shared concerns of our community. And second, we can be counted on by others to take part in confronting the issues facing our community.”³¹² Moreover, this active engagement is sincere in its implementation, reflecting John Dewey’s take on ethical conduct: “It is never enough simply to do the right thing. We must do the right thing for the right reason, purposefully. In other words, true ethical acts necessitate the unity of theory and action or the integration of self in a deliberately chosen act.”³¹³

Relationally authentic people foster personal integrity by avoiding self-deception. Relational authenticity requires people to strive for as much honesty as possible in their self-assessments and their actions. If they fall into self-deception and experience lapses of bad faith (which will happen in trying moments), they must avoid dwelling in these inauthentic states by forgiving themselves, rectifying their lapse and moving on. As such, their personal integrity does not result from perfectionism but from grace in the face of human error: in Fromm’s words, “L’homme sain s’est détaché des idées de grandeur propres à l’enfance, et il s’est établi dans la confiance en sa propre force, réelle bien que limitée...Il supporte bien la solitude, mais il peut se sentir étroitement uni à une personne aimée, à chacun de ses frères dans le monde, à tous les êtres vivants. Il...respecte la vie, la sienne et celle des autres.”³¹⁴ For

³¹⁰ Crittenden, p. 21.

³¹¹ Alexander Nehamas, “How to Become What One Is,” *The Philosophical Review*, 1983, 92: p. 411.

³¹² Guignon, 2004, p. 137.

³¹³ Gini, p. 26.

³¹⁴ Fromm, p. 196.

relationally authentic people, integrity also involves unity—as opposed to duplicity—in their sense of selfhood. Sartre argues that this integrity arises simply from viewing others’ authentic identity-building as equally valid to our own and, consequently, refraining from undermining it through oppression or exploitation. To re-emphasize, then, domination of any kind does not count as authentic, since, as Heter writes, “in addition to having a lucid self-awareness and a disposition to accept one’s personal responsibilities, an existentially authentic person must have a basic disposition to respect and care about other people. Authenticity is, therefore, incompatible with behaviours like murder, torture and domination, which are all paradigm instances of disrespectful, dehumanizing treatment of others.”³¹⁵

Relationally authentic people strive to develop the discernment necessary to use reason, emotion and intuition at the right times. While aware that there may be multiple ways of dealing with given circumstances, they attempt to establish the appropriate use of their faculties in order to remain faithful to their relational perspective. They do not, for instance, venerate reason to the point of mechanizing human existence, nor do they strictly advocate emotion in moments of weakness that could spiral into dependence or addiction. Specifically, as Kingwell underlines, in the “the pervasive scientism of our culture,” they recognize the limitations of science, thus avoiding the “shameless creation of awe before the trappings of ‘the scientific’” and the accompanying naive belief that science can solve and improve every issue of human life.³¹⁶ They trust their intuition to guide them away from extremes of conformity or egoism, eliminating “toxic” ideas as if removing weeds from a healthy garden. Of course, the ability to judge well demands a great deal of concentration, which becomes difficult in an atmosphere of constant distractions. With enough focus, however, this discernment can effectively create links between life experiences to unveil when reason, emotion and intuition have their role to play. As a result, relationally authentic people are able to harmonize their life projects with the rest of the world, something that Eastern thinkers like Gyatso would certainly encourage: he uses the Tibetan term *shen-pen kyi-sem* to capture the idea of acting out one’s concern for others by becoming helpful to them.³¹⁷

Relationally authentic people have a sense of adventure. By adventure, I am not referring to exotic travels or daredevil antics, but to a general openness to unfamiliarity and innovation. The authenticity

³¹⁵ Heter, p. 85. Note: While there may be exceptional cases when domination of an individual ensures the safety and well-being of thousands, as can be argued in a consequentialist framework, these isolated instances represent extenuating circumstances and thus should not be generalized as excusable. Overall, those who dominate others through torture or other harmful acts tend to lack recognition for their victims’ freedoms and thus, by Sartre’s standards, are guilty of bad faith.

³¹⁶ Kingwell, p. 90.

³¹⁷ Gyatso, p. 23.

muscle cannot flex if constantly confined to the routine and the predictable. By placing themselves in unusual, new or foreign situations, relationally authentic people draw on the capacities described above to help adapt and thrive. The experience strengthens their ability to cope with uncharted territory, meaning they will be more resilient and optimistic in moments of difficulty or adversity. When confronted with the world's problems and associated moral dangers, relationally authentic people feel strong enough to risk taking them on. Somerville characterizes this sense of adventure as "an openness to all ways of knowing, a comfort with uncertainty, ambiguity and paradox, and the courage to admit that one does not know and to change one's mind."³¹⁸ Additionally, this sense of adventure feeds the moral imagination of relationally authentic people, enabling what Gini calls "a dramatic virtual rehearsal that allows us to examine and appraise different courses of action in order to determine the morally best thing to do."³¹⁹

Relationally authentic people feel empathy. Though the common tendency in evolutionary biology is to distinguish humans from other species by their capacity for rationality, current theories focus equally on the role of empathy in making higher primates worthy of the label "more evolved." Activist Frances Moore Lappé's analysis of mirror neurons in primates and humans illustrates how individuals can take part in another's experience simply by observing it, revealing the true power of empathy: "We do walk in another's shoes, whether we want to or not...We therefore co-create one another, moment to moment. For me, our 'imprintability' is itself a source of hope. Our actions, and perhaps our mental states, register in others, so that we change anyone observing us."³²⁰ Once again, Taylor's dialogical argument is helpful here: since relationally authentic people are aware of the impact of others in their self-creation, this recognition facilitates a profound sympathy. To borrow from Williams, "We need each other in order to be anybody."³²¹ Yet this empathy does not stop at fellow human beings. Relationally authentic people strive to curtail anthropocentric viewpoints by recognizing that they are never wholly self-sufficient. They may exercise a great deal of autonomy in the human realm, but they are forever indebted to nature for satisfying their basic needs. This holistic perspective may translate into a spirit of conservation, not only in the form of ecological preservation but in the form of pacifism, opposing wars

³¹⁸ Somerville, p. 15, p. 20.

³¹⁹ Gini, p. 38.

³²⁰ *YES Magazine*, Summer 2010, 54: p. 56.

³²¹ Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002): p. 200.

and military activity not only because of the violence, debt and anxiety they cause but also because of their destructive power over nature.

Relationally authentic people are determined and persevering. With a healthy dosage of humility, they can refrain from letting their ego interfere in their choices and actions, allowing them to learn from mistakes and press on. Eventually, this determination and perseverance result in self-mastery, which in turn contributes to their moral potential. They can adopt what Gini calls a “disengaged view from somewhere” as “dispassionate, reasonable [people] who [are] not wholly absorbed with the self.”³²²

In summary, relationally authentic people are reflective, discerning and determined individuals who foster a sense of integrity, historical awareness and adventure that bolsters their responsibility and empathy, all the while maintaining humility and perspective. If especially successful, they can thrive regardless of their surroundings, though a certain set of environmental conditions can certainly help support their endeavours. Since contemporary, democratic societies form the context for my interest in authenticity, I grant that social institutions promoting individual freedoms—like freedom of thought, speech and association—will be integral to the lives of relationally authentic people and that, relatedly, human flourishing will be a paramount concern. That said, in an effort to restrict these environmental conditions to reasonable, constructive levels, I will briefly return to the main features of individualism examined earlier to underline how individualistic traits can be encouraged without leading to the excess of egoism or, for that matter, the deficiency of heteronomy. Again, the coverage of environmental conditions is not exhaustive but it does help illuminate under what circumstances the previously discussed psychological traits can thrive.

A relationally authentic setting allows room for spiritual awakening and the “secular sacred.” Starting with religious independence, the environmental conditions enabled by the rise of personalized spirituality have instated a policy of equality between chosen faiths whereby individuals can shape their own ideas about belief and divinity without recourse to organized religion. This particular facet of individualism, when well-balanced, enriches the lives of relationally authentic people by encouraging a setting of contemplation, whether achieved through formal religious prayer, meditation practice or simply moments of silent reflection. Accordingly, they can steer clear of the rushed auto-pilot mode of contemporary life, making it easier to attain enownment, avoid bad faith and appreciate dialogical

³²² Gini, p. 39.

impacts. The resulting awareness of the self within the world can help relationally authentic people become more perceptive participants in society, as they are in a better position to question the status-quo rather than follow the herd or become brainwashed by authoritarian thinking. This setting of peacefulness also deters superficial or trivial concerns by facilitating the kind of wholehearted commitments that Harry Frankfurt discusses in *The Importance of What We Care About*, through which people give meaning to their desires and endorse those that have real value to them.³²³ Concurrently, they can quiet the greedy child within them, thus dampening the materialism, competitiveness and aggression that weaken the elements of union among life forms. Through a rediscovery of nature, relationally authentic people can learn not to adulate technology to the point of numbness, realizing that virtual reality addictions are unhealthy, as Jaron Lanier argues in *You Are Not A Gadget: A Manifesto*,³²⁴ and that overexposure to images of violence, suffering, smut, despair and injustice through mass media produces disturbing levels of desensitization.³²⁵ Last but not least, this setting of spiritual awakening can prevent the aforementioned “playing God” outlook, instead nurturing a sense of wonder about the world and its mysteries that expresses deference to what Somerville calls the “secular sacred.” As she writes, “For people who are not religious in the orthodox sense, the authentically sacred, in the form of the secular sacred, can be found in the essence of being human—the search for morality, exercising the power to become fully oneself, undertaking the search for meaning in life. The authentically sacred might also be experienced, and as a result identified in a sense of wonder and awe.”³²⁶ In turn, as Gyatso emphasizes, regardless of their religious orientation or belief in a higher power, relationally authentic people can develop ethical consciousness and restraint.

A relationally authentic setting promotes communal goals and positive leadership. Moving on to personal autonomy, the environmental conditions enabled by a liberal political climate of self-determination have included constructive governmental developments like public education, free enterprise and equality of opportunity, whereby individuals fulfill a host of societal obligations in exchange for the freedom to shape their own ends through rational decision-making with little to no state interference. This particular facet of individualism, when well-balanced, enriches the lives of

³²³ Guignon, 2004, p. 137-139.

³²⁴ Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not A Gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Knopf, 2010).

³²⁵ *Adbusters* writers comment on the erosion of empathy: “Growing up in a violent, erotically charged media environment alters our psyches at a bedrock level...And the constant flow of commercially scripted, violence-laced, pseudo-sex makes us more voyeuristic, insatiable and aggressive. Then, somewhere along the line, nothing—not even rape, torture, genocide, or warn porn—shocks us anymore.” *Adbusters*, #90, Summer 2010: p. 19.

³²⁶ Margaret Somerville, *The Ethical Imagination: Journeys of the Human Spirit* (Toronto: Anansi, 2006): p. 55.

relationally authentic people by encouraging a setting of public involvement and civic duty that connects to their own aims and aspirations. Accordingly, they exhibit a greater respect for the cultural and political heritage that has enabled their authenticity projects and has given them the language and tools with which to explore the possibilities and implications of these projects. As Guignon notes, “Even introspection and truthfulness are made possible by social practices, as is our very idea of ourselves as individuals.”³²⁷ The resulting sense of solidarity inspires relationally authentic people to share their best ideas with one another, enabling “a vital, ongoing conversation about how things count and about what is really important for a community.”³²⁸ Meanwhile, they are motivated to work towards shared goals that bind and strengthen their community, based on a genuine desire to see it grow and prosper. Heidegger referred to this process as a matter of “identify[ing] what really matters in the historical situation in which you find yourself and [taking] a resolute stand on pursuing those ends.”³²⁹ In this setting of communitarian stances, relationally authentic people can better resist getting caught up in the rat race of meritocratic folly that so worries de Tocqueville, thus stifling that inauthentic, envy-driven and restless atmosphere where “in the confusion of all ranks, everyone hopes to appear as he is not.”³³⁰ Instead of an angst-ridden obsession with material manifestations of autonomy—from personal property to status symbols—the inclination is to relish in Rousseau-type wealth rooted in a satisfaction relative to the blessings currently within reach, not to relentless, unappeasable cravings. Through a rediscovery of community and mutual concern, relationally authentic people can wield a new kind of power that transcends the negative connotations of deceit and coercion to embrace genuine leadership through intelligent cooperation and community mobilization. As Moore Lappé puts it, “if we understand that power is simply our capacity to act, we’re free to be its co-creators...From there, power becomes something we human beings develop together—relational power...Once we set up and face the uncomfortable truth about our nature—embracing the good, the bad, and the very ugly—we can focus on what really matters: together creating the social rules and normals that bring out the best, while dissolving the conditions that elicit the worst. From there, we can rethink power itself, so that we fully realize our own and inhabit a world of possibility.”³³¹

³²⁷ Guignon, 2004, p. 155.

³²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 135.

³²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 134.

³³⁰ De Botton, p. 38.

³³¹ *YES Magazine*, Summer 2010, 54: p. 56.

A relationally authentic setting encourages a eudaemonic conception of human flourishing. Finally, in the case of the pursuit of happiness through individuality, the environmental conditions enabled by the cultivation of self-fulfillment have included positive surges in personal growth projects whereby individuals can shape their potential and expand their well-being through higher education, elaborate hobbies and volunteer initiatives that reflect their own interests and passions. This particular facet of individualism, when well-balanced, enriches the lives of relationally authentic people by encouraging a setting of concerted self-improvement expressed through both personal and other-oriented pursuits. Accordingly, they confront challenges head-on rather than seek solace in strategies of instant gratification with no lasting or worthwhile benefits. They realize, as Camus illustrates in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, that “the struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”³³² The resulting sense of striving motivates relationally authentic people to live an examined life geared towards developing a virtuous character and achieving satisfaction from the journey rather than the destination—“a reflective rationality that looks back on a life and—always in a provisional way of course, for things may change, luck may turn—pronounces it worth living.”³³³ This entails a suspicion of pop psychology and its quick fixes that make restrictive claims about human nature and individual success: as Kingwell puts it, “we cannot accept too easily the notion that whatever is, is right—even if vouchsafed by psychological or physiological theory. Within any natural box of limitations there is much freedom to choose, both individually and socially...There are no shortcuts—no twelve-step programs, no courses of therapy or drugs, no purchasing plans or career strategies...It is not a place to get to, it is a state of mind and character to cultivate.”³³⁴ Through a rediscovery of eudaemonism—the virtuous activities that will bring joy and well-being—relationally authentic people can reintegrate goodness into their understanding of happiness thus viewing others as crucial to their flourishing and giving substance back to a term too often conflated with self-indulgence and egomania.

And so, within relationally authentic settings, individualism can maintain reasonable, constructive levels such that its main features—notably religious independence, personal autonomy and the pursuit of happiness through individuality—remain beneficial to individuals as morally-minded agents rather than cater to their possible weakness for egoism or heteronomy. By allowing room for spiritual awakening, for communal goals and positive leadership, and for a eudaemonic conception of human flourishing,

³³² Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage, 1955): p. 3, p. 91.

³³³ Kingwell, p. 105.

³³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 26, p. 92.

these settings empower relationally authentic people to lead more consistently moral lives by balancing their personal ambitions *and* their social obligations. Jack Crittenden used the term “compound individuality” to express a similar notion of individuals developing through stages via personal decision-making and constitutive relationships.³³⁵

C. THE SELF IN RELATIONAL AUTHENTICITY

I have been arguing that relational authenticity should help avoid the excess of egoism. Yet I do not mean to suggest it should be the path towards absolute altruism or self-effacement. Relational authenticity is not tantamount to selflessness—the self is very important to my conception. It is investment in the development and flourishing of the self as a fluid, evolving entity that allows people to grow and contribute to humanity’s prospering. I would never want to call such self-cultivation egoistic or inauthentic. Like Guignon, I believe that a strong sense of selfhood is crucial in establishing individual purpose and related courses of action. After all, we need the awareness and drive made possible through enownment in order to move on to a purposeful releasement stage. Further, empathy, a vital criterion of relational authenticity, cannot exist without a firm sense of self. To empathize is to be capable of relating to the plight of another, to commiserate, to put ourselves in their shoes. With no clear sense of self, we are far more likely to become inauthentic as we have not dedicated the time required to discover and nurture our values, capacities and aspirations. Plainly put, we cannot be genuinely ourselves if we have no self to which we can be true. Selflessness is not the opposite of selfishness, nor is self-effacement the opposite of self-absorption. I do not advocate either set of extremes as they generate a toxic relationship to the self, as overly important or unimportant. Generally speaking, we do not encourage inflating or denying the “self” of others so we have no reason to treat ourselves in these ways either.

Yet how can we achieve a self that is neither effacing nor aggrandizing? In answering this question, I would like to briefly return to Rand’s *The Fountainhead*. During a yacht trip, Howard Roark—the epitome of Rand’s espoused egoism—and Gail Wynand, a newspaper tycoon whom he befriends through an architecture project, discuss the concept they deem responsible for ruining contemporary society: selflessness. In their view, people have become so indoctrinated by altruism that they wind up existing for the approval and recognition of others, never fully achieving a sense of self nor a personal

³³⁵ Crittenden, p. 3.

set of standards with which to evaluate their actions and accomplishments. “Isn’t that the root of every despicable action?” Roark asks. “Not selfishness, but precisely the absence of a self. Look at them. The man who cheats and lies, but preserves a respectable front. He knows himself to be dishonest but others think he’s honest and he derives his self-respect from that, second-hand. The man who takes credit for an achievement which is not his own. He knows himself to be mediocre, but he’s great in the eyes of others. The frustrated wretch who professes love for the inferior and clings to those less endowed, in order to establish his own superiority by comparison...What they want is ostentation: to show, to stun, to entertain, to impress others. They’re second-handers.”³³⁶ While I would agree with the critique of selflessness conceived in this way, and wholeheartedly believe the Elsworth Tooheys and Peter Keatings of the world are morally repugnant, where Rand and I break away is in our stance toward the “self-sufficient ego.” Whereas she extols it as the absolute achievement of human existence, the only true source of self-respect,³³⁷ I see it as a delusion. I have argued that no individual is completely self-reliant—even autonomy is relational in that it derives meaning from connections with others. To believe in a self-sufficient ego is to deceive ourselves into thinking our sense of self alone can provide everything we need for a meaningful life. Yet we need others, not in the way Rand describes, not in terms of approval or awe—representing either pathetic neediness or self-absorbed promotion—but simply to give our self-conception and ensuing actions depth and substance.

In a typical human life, there are phases of vulnerability when that need is more literal—infancy, illness, old age—and other phases when that need is more figurative, when others provide a backdrop against which we come to understand what matters to us and aspire to act accordingly. Taylor calls this backdrop “pre-existing horizons of significance,” Sartre calls it “being-in-the-world” and Guignon calls it “the wider social context”—though each concept differs in name, they all point to a relational perspective that enables a sense of self appropriately balanced between the extremes of effacement and aggrandizement. From this viewpoint, even the most solitary man wishing to live alone in his own forest cabin can be relationally authentic, if he recognizes that his preference for a life of solitude has meaning because of a backdrop of possible life choices and that in buying the lumber for his cabin or applying carpentry skills to build it, he is tapping into a rich human history and showing indebtedness to nature. His authenticity project—his way of contributing to the world, his releasement—is to be peaceful and

³³⁶ Rand, 1994, p. 633-634.

³³⁷ Rand voices this opinion through Roark, who exclaims: “Every form of happiness is private. Our greatest moments are personal, self-motivated, not to be touched...We haven’t even got a word for the quality I mean—for the self-sufficiency of man’s spirit...A self-sufficient ego. Nothing else matters.” *Ibid*, p. 634.

joyful by living in harmony with his environment, finding through it a setting of spiritual awakening (feeling awe before nature), communal goals (achieving an outdoorsy lifestyle that is respectful of his natural surroundings), and eudaemonic flourishing (striving for long-term ecologically sustainable principles). Although atypical, he fulfills the criteria for relational authenticity—being reflective, discerning and determined, fostering a sense of integrity, historical awareness and adventure that bolsters responsibility and empathy, all the while maintaining humility and perspective—and the world is made better because of his genuine, moral pursuits. Most people may not choose this life of solitude yet they can be just as genuine and moral, and in their case, the dialogical component of relational authenticity extends to the people with whom they interact. (I shall return to such examples in my next section.)

Yet the same cannot be said of Howard Roark. Though he seems to successfully complete Guignon's enownment phase and dodge Sartre's cowardly bad faith, his self-deception becomes apparent through his use of self-choice, his flouting of horizons of significance and dialogical relations, and his lack of recognition for others. Granted, with his fierce independent stance, he does not exploit people through fraud, plagiarism, condescension or cruelty, as do second-handers, but he does not recognize nor respect them either—he is aloof, disengaged, unappreciative, ahistorical and unsympathetic. In short, he utterly fails at the releasement phase because he lacks any relational perspective—he does not see his "self" as interconnected with other humans, with nature, with the world. His individualism crosses over from constructive to extreme, exhibiting the excessively egoistic angles of the imbalances I have been cautioning against—an unreasonably high sense of self-respect (a "playing God" outlook), an intense sense of entitlement for individual freedoms (an atomistic standpoint), an obsessive sense of self-affirmation (made worse by self-imposed alienation). He is the moral relativist that Taylor loathes, who uses instrumental reason at the exclusion of emotion, empathy and engagement. He is the bastardly self-deceiver that Sartre blames for propagating an aggressive self-assertion that denies freedom-as-responsibility and fails to assess the universalizability of moral behaviour. Further, Roark's illusion of self-sufficiency is made possible solely because of the isolated nature of the work style he has chosen. But what if Rand had given Roark a less independent profession? If he had elected to become a schoolteacher, certainly he could have stood up for his educational techniques in the face of criticisms from his superiors, but ultimately his job would not have been his own to evaluate. After all, the test of successful educators includes the improvement, enthusiasm and growth of their pupils. Similarly, what if

Wynand had wanted to found a newspaper with more integrity? While his vision would have still been instrumental in guiding the direction of the paper, he could not have established a media empire on his own. To preserve the dignity of freedom of speech, he would have had to acknowledge the role of his staff as writers, editors, typesetters, photographers, pressmen and the like. He would not have shared his faculty of creativity in the literal sense but he could have inspired the creativity of others by setting the standard and giving them room to grow.

To sum up, the notion of a “self-sufficient ego” is ill-founded, and relational authenticity recognizes the impossibility of this kind of radical independence. Cultivation of the self is crucial to my conception of the authentic ideal but is not equivalent to the disconnected pursuit of personal interests. Rand’s account of selflessness as a “second-hander” mentality is insightful and I accept that relational authenticity would not permit this kind of heteronomous stance, nor the morally questionable agents it seems to generate. On the other side of the coin, selflessness as pure self-effacement is problematic as well for it dispenses with the important phase of enownment, making its releasement efforts less purposeful and suggesting that our own self is not as worthy of moral concern as the self of others. The key to a relational take on individualism that avoids both its excesses and its deficiencies is the ability to determine and expand our aptitudes and aspirations, then “forget ourselves on purpose”³³⁸ whenever necessary by cultivating a strong awareness of our capacity to respond to the world’s needs through these idiosyncratic capabilities.

D. ACHIEVABILITY FACTOR OF RELATIONAL AUTHENTICITY

Many theorists who are interested in authenticity remain dismissive of it because they believe it is unattainable—no one can be expected to maintain an authentic stance at all times. I believe that my relational conception presents an achievable kind of authenticity that recognizes the stresses and distractions of everyday life and, as such, allows individuals to err and fumble in their efforts to lead moral lives. By holding a relationally authentic attitude, individuals understand and accept they will inevitably sway towards the extremes of heteronomy or egoism during moments of weakness but that if they generally balance their individual and social commitments, they will succeed in achieving a lifestyle that reflects their individuality *as well as* their concern for their worldly context.

³³⁸ Gini, p. 4.

As Guignon demonstrates, the dance between enownment and releasement is not an easy one to master. Honing the capacities for this kind of authenticity requires the right amount of self-control to orient personal awareness towards a greater good, “in such a way that in all your actions you express the true self you discovered through the process of inward-turning.”³³⁹ Because this balance is difficult, there is always a risk of “slipping into a life so prone to self-absorption...that one becomes isolated.”³⁴⁰ Yet the relational perspective encourages people to confront the challenge because the goal is a morally praiseworthy flourishing that transcends immediate gratification: “Most people would agree, I think, that becoming and being authentic is an arduous process, and that authentic people are not necessarily the happiest people in the sense of having pleasurable feelings most of the time. The ideal of authenticity makes a very heavy demand on you, one that outweighs concerns about sustaining good feelings in all situations.”³⁴¹ Indeed, my main theorists would concur that the features that make relational authenticity demanding are exactly what make it so ethically significant.³⁴²

As an achievable ethical conception, relational authenticity aims at improving ties among people—and between people and the natural world—while helping them become the best versions of themselves. As Flanagan explains through his analogy to track and field, a tough but achievable moral conception pushes people to perform better and, ultimately, helps the whole community advance to a new level: “It may be that trying to meet impossible demands, or at least recognizing that such demands exist, helps agents to be better than they would otherwise be were they left without such goals.”³⁴³ Some individuals may not be currently able to adopt a relationally authentic attitude, but a denial of their future possibility as relationally authentic people is not only demeaning, it is self-deceiving. Sartre wisely notes that individuals who restrict their self-identity to certain currently relevant roles and characterizations vastly, and quite tragically, undermine their freedom to become something else, thereby divulging their inauthenticity and their bad faith. I too remain unconvinced that any existing traits are strong enough to completely overwhelm our potential to transcend them. As Flanagan puts it, “our natures are too plastic and our potentialities too vast for that.”³⁴⁴ Even if scientific studies can claim with some degree of

³³⁹ Guignon, 2004, p. 146.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 147.

³⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 148.

³⁴² Heter summarizes this position well: “Authenticity is, I admit, a demanding virtue, for it requires lucid awareness, a disposition of basic respect, and a disposition to accept causal liabilities and role obligations. But authenticity is not such a demanding virtue that it is fit only for gods. Authenticity is a moral virtue that is both possible and important to embrace in contemporary contexts.” Heter, p. 97-98.

³⁴³ Flanagan, p. 29.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 51.

certainty that human nature is inherently egoistic—which they have yet to do even remotely—there is ample evidence that humans have the potential for non-egoistic behaviour. An ethical conception should cater to this potential since, as David Schroeder argues, “the function of ethics is to combat the egoism or selfishness of individuals.”³⁴⁵

Thus, as a moral conception, relational authenticity takes issue with any ethical theory that enables or condones egoism since, in doing so, it blatantly discourages individuals from striving to become better versions of themselves and, accordingly, undermines their human flourishing project. Gilbert Harman says it best: “Even though there are people who do not care enough about others...they ought to care, and there is something wrong with them that they do not care. If they do not care about others, they will not flourish. To be sure, they may have healthy, pleasurable lives, full of a rich sense of accomplishment, but flourishing involves more than that; it involves having a good character and acting rightly.”³⁴⁶ In order to promote human flourishing, relational authenticity places high but still reachable expectations on people to entice them away from egoism and heteronomy—its psychological traits and environmental conditions are challenging while also being forgiving. Far from demanding altruism, relational authenticity focuses on the role of empathy in fortifying moral responsibility. As such, there exists an attainable balance between self- and other-oriented behaviour, one that acknowledges natural inclinations while promoting human possibilities: it is relational authenticity. By encouraging us to treat other living things as valuable in their own right, relational authenticity colours our interactions with everything, proving that we can engage in our own self-cultivation without precluding caring: the world’s welfare can be part of our personal agendas.

IV. THE INDIVIDUAL & SOCIAL BENEFITS OF A “RELATIONALLY AUTHENTIC” ATTITUDE

With my notion of relational authenticity fleshed out, I will paint a more specific portrait of what a “relationally authentic” attitude might look like practically. On my account, agents are deemed to successfully hold a relationally authentic attitude if they generally, for the most part, strive to conscientiously balance their individual goals with their social responsibilities and, wherever possible, carry out personally endorsed life projects that connect individuals to each other (and to nature) rather than separate them. In other words, to be relationally authentic is to acknowledge the worldly circumstances in which individual actions occur and to thereby deliberate and behave in ways that show

³⁴⁵ David Schroeder, *The Psychology of Helping and Altruism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995): p. 396.

³⁴⁶ Gilbert Harman, “Human Flourishing, Ethics, and Liberty” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1983, 12 (4): p. 320.

both appreciation for the contributions of fellow living beings and accountability for the impact that personal projects may have on them. To show that relational authenticity can be seen as paving the way for moral action through authentic life projects, I will reference two contemporary applications of a relationally authentic attitude, namely deep ecology and deep economy. I will then briefly show how these cases can yield important social benefits as instances of enlightened loyalty.

A. RELATIONAL AUTHENTICITY IN ACTION

Deep ecology represents a relational approach to understanding the environment as a comprehensive, interdependent ecosystem that regards all living beings as having the same inherent worth and redefines the human-nature relationship to emphasize conservation rather than exploitation. This approach opposes the popular stance on ecology that supports sustainability efforts merely because they are deemed key to human survival, rather than simply the morally right thing to do. As Taylor writes, this anthropocentric view values nature for its potential to benefit humankind, not for its inherent worth: “Restraint is shown as necessary for human welfare. This is true and important enough, but it is not the whole story. Nor does it capture the full extent of our intuitions here, which often point us to a sense that nature and our world make a claim on us.”³⁴⁷ According to many Buddhist conceptions, deep ecology captures this intuition by positing that “nothing exists as an isolated self, because it is dependent upon and connected to everything else.”³⁴⁸ And so, engagement in deep ecology activities constitutes a relationally authentic project as it emphasizes the relational aspects of life while offering a host of ways of partaking in sustainability initiatives, depending on individual interest and aptitude, whether in theory or application, through scientific disciplines, environmental studies, education, ethics or law, to name but a few. For instance, in her book *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water*, Maude Barlow focuses on one particular aspect—water conservation—through the approach of awareness-building. As a result of her journalistic profession, Barlow has developed a personal interest in sustainability topics, notably the many ways they reveal injustice and ignorance within human societies, and has responded by putting her writing and mobilizing skills to use for the world—a project that reveals a mastery of Guignon’s enownment and releasement stages.

A provocative, controversial yet civic-minded journalist, Barlow attacks large corporations for abusing their autonomy in ways that end up depleting the self-determination capacities of the developing

³⁴⁷ Taylor, 1991, p. 90.

³⁴⁸ Nhat Hanh, p. xiv.

world's populations by negatively affecting their access to water, a vital necessity. She writes, "For these forces, water is a commodity to be sold and traded on the open market...On the other side is a large global water justice movement...[that] believes water is the common heritage of all humans and other species, as well as a public trust that must not be appropriated for personal profit or denied to anyone because of inability to pay."³⁴⁹ Barlow argues that water should be recognized as a human right, yet the commodification of water sources has spawned a "water apartheid" whereby millions of people face water scarcity and suffer from preventable waterborne disease—"Simply put: life requires access to clean water; to deny the right to water is to deny the right to life."³⁵⁰ To stir her readers into action, Barlow boldly criticizes the common tendency to turn a blind eye to the water problem, which she feels is at the heart of its misuse. She bemoans the attitude of political leaders who try to keep the issue under wraps in public debate and media outlets: "in many countries, denial is the political response to the global water crisis...with rare exceptions, average people do not know that the world is facing a comet called the global water crisis."³⁵¹ Yet she also shifts her awareness-building from theory to practice by offering actionable strategies for counteracting this crisis, discussing the merits of vegetarianism, local food movements and equitable fashion in an effort to help individuals make informed choices as consumers. She emphasizes little known facts about "indirect" water use—the water used to produce food, sustain fields, manufacture packaging, and the like—paying special attention to the destructive effects of the water bottle industry.³⁵² Her message is tough but hopeful and revolves around the concepts of water conservation, water justice and water democracy: "If we loved our great water heritage, we would take better care of it...Humanity still has a chance to head off these scenarios of conflict and war...We could start with a global covenant on water."³⁵³

Though I do not know Barlow personally, without having to focus on her biographical details or agree with all her viewpoints, I feel her role as a deep ecology advocate can be generalized as a useful example of a relationally authentic attitude. What I will call the "deep ecologist prototype" is an apt example of relational authenticity put to constructive use for widespread welfare as well as for the cultivation of a personal passion. The deep ecologist makes it her mission to raise awareness about

³⁴⁹ Maude Barlow, *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2007): p. xiv.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. xiv, p. 5.

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 29, p. 83.

³⁵² *Ibid*, p. 16

³⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 156.

issues relating to environmental conservation in order to kick off a crusade that aims to protect invaluable resources in sustainable, fair ways. A non-conformist, she does not succumb to external pressures from large corporations nor tolerate popular indifference—she is comfortable in her own skin, even if her role often entails going against the grain and knocking down ignorantly held opinions. With an appreciation for history, she examines anthropological findings from previous eras when humans were more caring about the planet and fostered a more respectful relation with it, focusing on Aboriginal cultures whose deference to nature has been hugely constitutive of their sense of self and community. Believing that every choice matters, in her awareness-building work, she highlights the small, seemingly inconsequential daily alterations—“Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth!”—that, taken together, radically transform an individual’s ecological footprint and, when adopted by a whole population, radically transform a nation’s use of natural resources. She has identified the role she can play to improve her community—encouraging people to take responsibility for their lifestyles through educational initiatives—and sticks to it resolutely. Constantly confronted by tough, bleak realities about humanity’s impact on the earth, she does not flee in anguish but remains committed to her work in a time where recurring large-scale crises make cynicism almost understandable. She achieves a balance between reason, emotion and intuition, seeing the merits of scientific studies while also understanding the emotional impact of natural disasters. She has the sense of adventure necessary to fulfill her work commitments in foreign places and feels true empathy when thinking about the kind of planet that future generations will inherit. Though she is humbled by her daily work, she perseveres by finding time to contemplate the very natural resources she is striving to protect and by teaming up with other committed experts who appreciate that their tenacity matters, even if they do not see the results of their efforts during their lifetime. For these and many other reasons, the deep ecologist prototype is a strong example of relational authenticity in action.

Similarly, deep economy represents a relational approach to understanding the health and wealth of communities, emphasizing general well-being through sustainable production rather than through supply-and-demand theories geared solely towards profit. By asking profound questions about the ways that people conceive true worth, deep economy advocates challenge the validity and hegemony of the “more-more-more” outlook that characterizes individualistic societies. As economist David Korten argues, given the recent economic climate, people are slowly beginning to recognize “the distinction between real wealth and ‘phantom wealth.’ Phantom wealth is money that is created from nothing,

unrelated to making anything of real value. The Wall Street game is about generating financial claims on the real wealth of society, while doing nothing to contribute to the pool of real wealth—food, shelter, entertainment, transportation, education, health care—on which those claims are made.”³⁵⁴ Rooted in communitarian and environmentalist ideologies, many of these emerging “real wealth” economies are deeply critical of capitalism’s unjust and unsustainable practices, seeking to redefine human needs relationally instead of materialistically. Engagement in deep economy activities thus constitutes a relationally authentic project as it too emphasizes the relational aspects of life while introducing many new ways of understanding worth and wealth through more sustainable, inclusive and community-binding economic partnerships. For instance, in his book, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*, Bill McKibben puts forth an innovative approach to conceiving economics that opposes the modern-day fixation with an “endless More,” which he dubs a dangerous and ultimately unfulfilling fantasy.³⁵⁵ As a result of his writing career and environmental studies, McKibben has developed a personal interest in economics and its effects on ecological resources, striving in his current work to relink the notion of economic production with environmental preservation. Like Barlow, his enownment has led to a fruitful releasement stage that has helped shape a wider movement towards a fairer, more sustainable world.

An ecological economist, McKibben cautions against the notion of efficiency as the guiding capitalistic principle, arguing that it can generate blinding greed and result in ongoing financial crises that focus more on egos than on viable economic change. He contends that principles surrounding utility maximization have caused problems because “people’s brains don’t work quite as rationally as the model might imply.”³⁵⁶ When examining the threefold expansion of American consumption from the 1950s to the 1990s, he highlights the lack of increased human satisfaction relative to material progress —“What does richer mean? Even if I am getting richer, am I getting happier?...Growth is producing more inequality than prosperity, more insecurity than progress.”³⁵⁷ He notes the upsurge of new research suggesting that rising wealth does not equate improved happiness and that, on the contrary, humans need only a consistent but modest amount to feel content: “As poor countries experience economic growth,

³⁵⁴ Doug Pibel, “Get Free From Wall Street: How to Avoid Money Games and Create Real Wealth—An Interview with David Korten,” *YES Magazine*, Fall 2010, 55: p. 13-14.

³⁵⁵ Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (New York: Times Books, 2007): p. 4.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 31.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 30.

there is some evidence that their average happiness has risen...But past the \$10,000 point, there's a complete scattering."³⁵⁸ Concerned about the example that the United States has set, he stresses the dangerous repercussions of unrestrained consumption on natural resources, notably as developing countries aspire to the level of materialism that North Americans have enjoyed: "Even before we run out of oil, we're running out of planet."³⁵⁹ Maintaining a realistic but positive stance, McKibben argues that "community" must replace "efficiency" as our new economic aim, which must entail a decline in excessive individualism and a shift in our ideas about worth and goodness. This new community-oriented mentality will ask individuals to assess whether they feel involved, loved and peaceful rather than merely financially satisfied—"Is your life good?" not "What did you buy?"³⁶⁰—in an effort to produce human satisfaction rather than mere surplus.

As with my deep ecology prototype, I can turn McKibben's role as a deep economy advocate into a useful example of a relationally authentic attitude without having to know him personally or endorse all his ideas. What I will call the "deep economist prototype" is also an apt example of relational authenticity because it focuses on overall world improvement through relational commitments rooted in individual talents. The deep economist is committed to redefining economics to benefit entire populations and help them participate in "real wealth" production in ways that reflect their interests and aptitudes. He is at ease fighting against the status quo and labeling the rich elite's egoism a social failure, knowing full well that contemporary issues relating to economic activity—from oil sand disputes to climate change—are not hypothetical problems as some business magnates may suggest, but real and pressing ones. Though he may operate in a highly consumeristic country, he is determined to wake people from their apathy by making them aware of their materialistic addictions and encouraging them to cherish past ideals about local production and neighbourly exchanges while incorporating useful and promising contemporary innovations like the Internet's ability to unite likeminded individuals. With clear examples and tools, he highlights his audience's responsibility as consumers in order to reveal how they can shut down unethical businesses and support those with more caring and reliable philosophies. Though he empathizes with the countless individuals and families who have lost their homes and jobs during financial crises, he strives to transform their feelings of insecurity and anxiety into a drive for change and community involvement. He does not harbour illusions that his battle will be easy, knowing

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 35.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 18.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 17.

that current financiers will aggressively defend everything they stand to lose, yet he does not succumb to their intimidation tactics, respecting his feelings and intuitions that change is needed and following his reason to elaborate a sensible, maintainable alternative. Like the deep ecology prototype, he is humbled by his work but believes in the potential of local movements and the collaborative efforts of committed experts, making him another relevant example of a relationally authentic attitude.

These cases of deep ecology and deep economy illustrate how individual flourishing can become a genuinely moral lifelong pursuit when conditioned by relational authenticity. Sartre, Taylor and Guignon are rightly concerned about the number of inauthentic people who promote extremes of egoism and conformity, either way failing to have a meaningful life by never showing accountability for their choices and their roles in the world. But there are people who do maintain the type of relationally authentic attitude I am advocating by truly committing themselves to causes in their communities that reflect their own interests as well as their personally identified capacities to make a positive impact on their current context. In line with the achievability angle I argued earlier, their projects are pursuable because the demands are reasonable: relational authenticity makes allowances for the sort of shortcomings and lapses of judgment that occur in the moments of stress and confusion typical of contemporary life. Individuals who embark on projects like those I have proposed counteract the egoists depicted in Chapter Two by fostering the psychological traits that favour relational authenticity and by benefitting from settings that encourage such traits.

B. ENLIGHTENED LOYALTY IN RELATIONALLY AUTHENTIC PROJECTS

I have argued that relational authenticity can be deemed as morally significant as it enables honest identity-building while recognizing the many shades of grey that constitute human nature and contemporary realities. I have noted that good people and their good deeds appear all the more moral when they reflect authentic, transparent motives. To my mind, one of the reasons is that in learning to be true to themselves, relationally authentic people discover and assume their moral responsibility, resulting in a sense of enlightened loyalty that connects and commits them to meaningful causes beyond themselves. This idea echoes the thoughts of Josiah Royce in his book *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, which provides an important criterion for judging the degree of relational authenticity in chosen projects. For Royce, individuals do not become moral merely by adhering to established ethical rules, they must express their morality through freely chosen life plans that allow them to willfully devote themselves to

meaningful social causes. These social causes are unified by a common aim: universal loyalty—the respect, support and advancement of relationally constructive projects in morally minded people. This enlightened “loyalty to loyalty” excludes from worthy causes any kind of predatory loyalty that seeks to inhibit or destroy the loyal causes of others, as would be the case in many instances of egoism. Instead, in Royce’s estimation, enlightened loyalty can unite humanity through a “spirit of universal peace.”³⁶¹

Relationally authentic projects become instances of enlightened loyalty—and thus more morally noteworthy—when they reflect its six main principles. First, enlightened loyalty is an inherently valuable moral quality that is worth experiencing as it fosters a “certain state of mind which has its own value,”³⁶² one that promotes action over hesitancy, restrains self-involvement and raises social awareness. Further, as an accessible and practical quality, enlightened loyalty has the potential to help all walks of life—no matter their social status—address the classic existential questions: why am I here and for what do I live?³⁶³ Second, enlightened loyalty serves a cause that unifies rather than separates people. As Royce puts it: “loyalty is a service of causes. A cause, if it really is what our definition requires, links various human lives into the unity of one life”³⁶⁴ and it “secure[s] thereby the greatest possible increase of loyalty amongst men.”³⁶⁵ Third, enlightened loyalty requires both rational scrutiny and emotional sensibility. In order to willfully devote themselves to causes, individuals must transcend their impulses and their sensitivities in favour of rational examination: “We are to use our reason as best we can; for philosophy is an effort to think out the reasons for our opinions. We are not to praise blindly, nor to condemn according to our moods.”³⁶⁶ Concurrently, they must opt for causes that enrich their sensibility: “If I am to be loyal, my cause must from moment to moment fascinate me, awaken my muscular vigour, stir me with some eagerness for work.”³⁶⁷ Fourth, enlightened loyalty supports autonomy by requiring that individuals choose their own causes, independently of external authorities. As Royce pleads, “Be an individual; seek your own individual good; seek that good thoroughly,

³⁶¹ Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (New York: Macmillan, 1908): p. 214.

³⁶² *Ibid*, p. 22.

³⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 57.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 307.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 121. For Royce, if a cause fails to unify—that is, if it only serves the subject at the expense of others—it is not worthy of enlightened loyalty. Acts of malice like lying, extortion and murder, are therefore prime examples of disloyalty since they destroy others’ loyalty capacity and efforts: “Loyalty in itself is never an evil. The arbitrary interference with other men’s loyalties, the disloyalty to the universal cause of loyalty, is what does the mischief here in question.” p. 231.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 14.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 130.

unswervingly, unsparingly, with all your heart and soul.”³⁶⁸ Through their loyal commitments, individuals can express their originality and their freedom by way of rational self-direction,³⁶⁹ provided their purpose transcends self-involvement. Fifth, enlightened loyalty represents a unity of selves that gives individuals a sense of belonging “by showing us outside of ourselves the cause which is to be served, and inside of ourselves the will which delights to do this service.”³⁷⁰ Last but not least, enlightened loyalty reflects conscience—the mental possession that helps individuals examine moral questions to better shape their ideals and life direction.³⁷¹ Conscience evolves along with the individuals’ chosen cause, blending self-sacrifice and self-assertion until it becomes “a consciousness of our genuine relations to a higher social unity of consciousness in which we all have our being.”³⁷²

Practically speaking, relationally authentic projects reveal increasing degrees of enlightened loyalty the more they reflect the natural commitments embedded in family ties, friendships and communal duties.³⁷³ To ensure the success and moral worth of their relationally authentic projects, individuals must therefore place specific limitations on them. They must select a limited, reasonable framework for their chosen cause. Once their cause is specified, they must nurture their self-cultivation by bolstering the traits, habits or aptitudes that will help them better engage in their project. For Royce, this may include seemingly futile activities like relaxation and recreation because they help individuals “be whatever [their] loyalty requires [them] to be.”³⁷⁴ Additionally, individuals must use their projects to inspire and be inspired. Though their choice of causes may differ, by sharing their enthusiasm and success stories with one another, the will only strengthen their own commitment. In Royce’s words: “Loyalty is a good that spreads. Live it and you thereby cultivate it in other men.”³⁷⁵ Finally, individuals must be realistic about their success and recognize in their setbacks a possibility for growth and a test of their resolve. For Royce, so long as their projects are faithful to universal loyalty and they are decisive about their cause, they are succeeding. And so, when relationally authentic projects reflect enlightened loyalty, individuals can connect and commit themselves to causes beyond themselves that have genuine meaning for them and maintain a moral attitude with diverse personal and worldly benefits. Their personalities

³⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 80.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 27.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 42.

³⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 175.

³⁷² *Ibid*, p. 311.

³⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 206.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 210.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 137-138.

and chosen projects will vary but they will share three important stances: a belief in personal responsibility as a vital part of authenticity, a belief in the importance of their social context (particularly their close relationships) in shaping their choices and lifestyles, and a belief in ongoing commitments to goals that lie beyond self-interested fulfillment. They will live up to Sartre's conviction that "it is not by turning inward, but by constantly seeking a goal outside of himself in the form of liberation, or of some special achievement, that man will realize himself as truly human."³⁷⁶

³⁷⁶ Sartre, 1997, p. 53.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have strived to emphasize the moral potential of authenticity through a relational conception that balances personal aspirations and worldly concern. I have argued that people lead authentically moral lives when they reflect their individuality in their actions while also recognizing their potential and limitations as agents existing in a social context. By defining authenticity ethically through existentialist, dialogical and community-oriented perspectives, I have asserted that a relationally authentic attitude can guide individuals away from egoism by putting them in touch with their responsibility and helping them recognize the interpersonal relationships and social engagements that imbue meaning into their lives. Despite distorted accounts of authenticity that wrongly promote excessive individualism, I believe that people value authentic attitudes because, on some level, they appreciate the relationally constructive dispositions, projects and commitments that genuine identity-building can help foster. They recognize, as my main theorists Sartre, Taylor and Guignon have, that authenticity can move agents towards socially responsible living and a more holistic perspective on ethics. As Gini writes,

Ethics begins with the recognition that we are not alone or the centre of the universe. We are not herd animals, but we are communal creatures. We are dependent on one another...For Jean-Paul Sartre, like it or not, we are by definition moral creatures because we are 'condemned' by the fact of our collective existence to continually make choices about what we ought to do in regard to others. Ethics is the endeavour to achieve the good life on both the individual and social levels...Ethics is something we live out with others. And in this 'living out' we are constantly asking ourselves three fundamental questions: Whom am I? What do I owe others? What ought I to do?³⁷⁷

To my mind, successful moral theories should protect authenticity, though they must be careful to admit only those conceptions that depict flourishing relationally to ensure the proper balance between individual and social considerations. In future research, I look forward to examining how relational authenticity can be cultivated through educational initiatives that emphasize critical thinking, creative expression and moral responsibility.

³⁷⁷ Gini, p. 20, 22, 29.

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