

Major Arguments	Notes
<p>The chapter starts by restating the idea that the ideal of authenticity “suffers from a constitutive tension” (71).</p> <p>On one hand the creation of an authentic self demands creativity, originality and, to some extent, opposition to social rules and norms, while on the other it demands openness to horizons of significance and dialogue with others (66-67).</p> <p>This constitutive tension suggests that the metaphor for the modern condition is one of perpetual struggle (la lotta continua) - wherein we must constantly fight to retrieve the ideal of authenticity from the more debased individualistic forms of authenticity that lead to narcissism, subjectivism and atomism.</p> <p>Taylor contrasts the idea of struggle with the trend line thinking of the boosters and knockers. Trend line thinking sees the culture of authenticity as either good or bad - leading inevitably to improvement or debasement. For example, knockers like Bloom, see the trend of modern society as analogous to the fate of ancient Rome where “decadence and a slide into hedonism make us incapable of maintaining our political civilization” (78).</p> <p>The problem with this mode of thinking, according to Taylor, is two fold:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It ignores the fact that the idea of authenticity is intrinsic to modern Western Civilization, “we can practically <i>define</i> the cultural mainstream of modern Western liberal society in terms of those who feel the draw of this and the other main forms of individualism” (75). Thus if trend line thinking is right, and authenticity leads to a downward trend, we are doomed to decline. 2. It dismisses the ethical ideal of authenticity which is that “authenticity points us towards a more self-responsible form of life” (74). <p>Trend line thinking ignores the nature of life in a free society - it presumes an end when freedom implies constant struggle. Taylor argues that “The nature of a free society is that it will always be the locus of a struggle between higher and lower forms of freedom . . . I suggest that in this matter we look not for the Trend, whatever it is, up or down, but that we break with our temptation to see irreversible trends, and see that there is a struggle here, whose outcome is continually up for grabs” (78-9).</p> <p>This may well be the most immediately relevant line of the book, it is also clearly the most suggestive of Sartre. Freedom is what we make it. Trend line thinking is nothing more than excuse not to engage in the struggle over whether our freedom ultimately makes us more or less responsible. To avoid this struggle is ultimately to engage in bad faith.*</p> <p>*Note the comparison to Sartre is mine, made to render Taylor’s argument down to more familiar terms. He makes no explicit reference to Sartre.</p>	