

# Taylor Chapter 2

The Inarticulate Debate

# Taylor's thesis and the purpose of the book (pp. 22-3)

Taylor views authenticity as a moral ideal. He explain what this means on p.16:

“What do I mean by a moral ideal? I mean a picture of what a better or higher mode of life would be, where “better” and “higher are defined not in terms of what we happen to desire for need, but offer a standard for what we ought to desire” (Taylor 16).

His argument is that authenticity is a concept that has moral content and can help guide us to a better life.

But the ideal of authenticity “has degraded” (Taylor 23) to the extent that many condemn it as meaningless at best and destructive at worst.

Taylor proposes to re-discover the ideal, “What we need is a work of retrieval” to recover the ideal of authenticity from its debased forms that are so widespread today (Taylor 23).

# Taylor's thesis and the purpose of the book (pp. 22-3)

For this to be successful requires that we accept three things:

1. That authenticity is a valid ideal
2. That you can argue in reason about ideals and conformity of practices to these ideals. This is essentially a dismissal of radical subjectivism in which no arguments can take place nor values weighed as everything is simply a matter of perspective.
3. That these arguments can make a difference (Taylor 23)

Taylor believes the answer to all three questions is yes and his book is written with this assumption in mind.

What stands in the way of this retrieval is the nature of contemporary conversation regarding authenticity - Taylor terms this the “inarticulate debate”

# Taylor argues that discussions of authenticity as a moral ideal are muddled and inarticulate for several reasons:

- Knockers see authenticity as nothing more than an excuse to justify modern narcissism and hedonism. Thus knockers like Alan Bloom tend to dismiss authenticity as an idea that could possess any moral weight whatsoever.
- On the other hand, boosters tend to accept the idea of soft relativism - the idea that one cannot judge the choices made by others as right or wrong. Taylor calls this the “liberalism of neutrality” - the idea that society must be “neutral on questions of what constitutes a good life” (17-18).

# Taylor argues that discussions of authenticity as a moral ideal are muddled and inarticulate for several reasons:

- The belief in “moral subjectivism” which is the idea that moral positions are not grounded in reason but simply because people are “drawn to them.” The implication of this belief is that reasonable debates about moral positions cannot occur. The mentality that drives this is that all positions are opinions, all are equally valid and thus rational discussion involving evidence or argumentation is invalid.
- The modern trend toward social scientific explanations has led thinkers to explain authenticity purely in terms of historical, sociological and other social scientific terms. This has led thinkers to ignore the possibility that the shift towards a culture of authenticity might have occurred do to the “inherent value” of authenticity as “a moral ideal.”

# Taylor argues that discussions of authenticity as a moral ideal are muddled and inarticulate for several reasons:

- Taylor recognizes that authenticity can lead to deviant and debased forms.
- However, he claims that to dismiss authenticity as a moral ideal because of these forms is to dismiss an element of modern culture that is simply not going to go away.
- The purpose of this book is to retrieve the conversation over authenticity from the current “inarticulate debate.”