

Review of Chapter 3

Taylor's principle goal in this chapter is to define authenticity and identify its historical sources.

Previous conceptions of living a good life (prior to the Enlightenment) involved being in touch with some source - such as God or abstract concepts of the good, that helped us to achieve fullness as people. In the Pre modern period this source was always *external to the self*.

With authenticity, the source we have to connect with is within us - not some thing external to us. This is part of the *massive shift toward the subjective in modern culture*.

Sources of authenticity:

1. The Enlightenment - This period sees the rise of rational individualism, the displacement of religion as the principle way to understand the world, disengaged rationality and power of individual to know truth outside of institutional constraints. The individual is freed to make his own way and in many ways define his own self. Two key figures are mentioned by Taylor:
 - a. Descartes - The idea of disengaged rationality, which is the power of thought to detach itself from the world of the senses and create understanding independent of the external world. "I think, Therefore I am."
 - b. Locke - As we have discussed in class, Locke conceived of the self existing prior to sociality.

Note that both of these ideas suggest, according to Taylor, "that human beings are endowed with a moral sense, an intuitive feeling for what is right and wrong . . . [that] morality was a voice within" (26).

2. The Romantic era - The artistic expression of this period revealed in the self and self exploration and placed high value on inwardness and creativity. Taylor explores two key thinkers from the Romantic tradition:
 - a. Rousseau (Note: Rousseau straddles the intellectual periods of the Enlightenment and the Romantic era much like Beethoven did the musical periods of Classicism and Romanticism) - Rousseau describes morality as arising from "the voice of nature within us . . . Our moral salvation comes from recovering authentic moral contact with ourselves." This authentic contact with the self becomes the source of "joy and contentment" (27).
 - b. Herder - "Each of us has an original way of being human" (28), something that makes us significant and unique, and it is our duty to find what this is. This rises to the level of duty and ideal, because if I fail, "I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for *me*" (29). By and large this is the definition of authenticity that Taylor will use throughout the book. Taylor argues that this is a fundamentally new idea because prior to the 18th century "no one thought that the differences between human beings had this kind of moral significance" (28).

Authenticity is often confounded with Rousseau's self determining freedom -

Self determining freedom is the idea that "I am free when I decide for myself what concerns me, rather than being shaped by external influences." This idea contains no moral ideal - it simply defines freedom. But, as Taylor will argue later, self determining freedom is often confused with authenticity, thus stripping authenticity of its moral dimension and leading to debasement.

Ethical authenticity and debased authenticity

Taylor argues that authenticity can be viewed either as an ideal to which individuals aspire to or an excuse to engage in narcissistic self absorption. The conflict between these two interpretations of authenticity is a major theme of the rest of the book.

Taylor's goal is to rescue the ideal of authenticity from the more common debased form of authenticity.

