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AUTHENTICITY NATURALIZED

Bruce N. Waller
Youngstown State University

ABSTRACT: Theories of autonomy divide into two conflicting categories: theories that emphasize freedom to choose among alternatives, and theories that focus on personal authenticity. This conflict can be resolved by recognizing the basic function of natural authenticity, and its deep roots in human and animal behavior. Authenticity functions to keep options open that might be too hastily abandoned. Thus forms a natural symbiotic union with autonomy as alternatives. Human authenticity is a special adaptation, but it is not different in kind from the authenticity of many other species. My naturalistic account of authenticity avoids traditional problems concerning willing addicts and happy slaves and reaffirms the traditional link between authenticity and autonomous choices among alternatives.

Theories of autonomy are of two kinds: theories that emphasize freedom to choose among alternatives and theories that focus on personal authenticity. This distinction cuts across many others. Autonomy as alternatives theories may invoke miraculous choices (C. A. Campbell, Roderick Chisholm, and Richard Taylor, for example), or they may reject supernatural powers (as in Robert Kane and G. E. Moore). Autonomy as authenticity theories range from Harry G. Frankfurt's naturalistic reflective commitments, up through Susan Wolf's authentic pursuit of the True and the Good, then soar to religious accounts of saints pulled toward God.

Both sides have appeal. We want the freedom to pursue a variety of open alternatives, but we also admire the steadfast commitment of "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise." Ability to choose otherwise seems a condition of genuine autonomy, but because this ability appears to demand miraculous breaks from the natural causal order we turn instead to reflective authentic commitment. We feel the charm of Susan Wolf's single-path pursuit of the True and the Good, but we are not deaf to the plaint of Dostoyevsky's underground man:

> So one's own free, unrestrained choice, one's own whim, be it the wildest, one's own fancy, sometimes worked up to a frenzy—that is the most advantageous advantage that cannot be fitted into any table or scale and that causes every system and every theory to crumble into dust on contact.(p. 110)

Alternatives wax as authenticity wanes, and then authenticity surges as

alternatives recede. It is not surprising that, after careening between these conflictingmodels, some might adopt Thomas Nagel's desolate View from Nowhere (1986, pp. 110ff.) and conclude that the problem is intractable. Others might accept Richard Double's (1991) conclusion that since our nction of autonomy is governed by inconsistent paradigms there is no reality to free will. But this struggle can be resolved. Autonomy as alternatives and autonomy as authenticity do not conflict. They are different aspects of a unified natural autonomy. They require neither miracles nor mysteries and we can examine them both in their natural setting: writ large in society, writ small in individual histories, and writ deep into biological nature.

To unite alternatives with authenticity, we must be clear about what we are linking. No adhesive will join Dostoyevsky's capricious underground man to Susan Wolf's single narrow path disciple of the True and Good. The bond must be forged between more modest—and more natural—accounts.

Autonomy as alternatives is not caprice, and it does not require miraculous freedom from environmental influences or causal history. To the contrary, it is rooted deep in our natural history and in the behavior of many species. Consider Reynard, the fox of folk song fame. The fox does not pursue the same path every evening. If Farmer John's duck pen has been bountiful this season, Reynard may visit it more often than not; but he will occasionally pursue other paths as well, keeping his options open in case a mouse family moves into the neighborhood. Sometimes he will visit formerly plentiful but now barren hunting grounds. Rigid adherence to the currently optimal "one true path" would fail to inform Reynard of other food sources, and it would leave him no promising options should Farmer John erect a fence. So there are good natural grounds for favoring open possibilities, and our fondness for alternatives runs deep. Not all species pursue autonomy as alternatives, as the "sphexish" behavior of digger wasps (Dennett, 1984, p. 10ff.) reminds us, but species whose evolutionary survival strategy favored contingency-shaped learning above rigid behavioral programming will value autonomy as alternatives.[1]

What happens when Farmer John closes his duck operation and focuses exclusively on wheat farming? Our fox finds the pickings slim at John's duck pen; but if the duck pen has long been a source of delicious ducks for the fox family, Reynard will continue to visit Farmer John long after the ducks have disappeared. Eventually the fox will venture to Farmer John's only occasionally; but if some visit produces a duck, this single positive reinforcement will restore Reynard's former habits to full strength. If ducks are discovered sporadically over a long period of time, Reynard will become dedicated to John's duck pen, and his dedication may persist through a lengthy period of futility. Reynard is committed to visiting Farmer John: His duck pen jaunts are authentically his own.

Suppose someone asks: Was the fox really an authentic devotee of Farmer John's duck pen? Wasn't that just a habit shaped by accidental environmental contingencies? Could he have been authentically a gentle vegetarian fox, drawn into duck pilfering against his true nature? Such questions lead into metaphysics and theology, and into a morass of prescribed selves that are "given" by the god whose artifacts we are. The fox has no given nature (other than what is given by long-term

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evolutionary and short-term personal environmental contingencies) against which to mark approximations to or deviations from genuine authenticity. Reynard is an authentic fancier of Farmer John's ducks. He is so because of the various factors that shaped him, and there is no deeper depth to plumb.

This account of authenticity stays snugly within the naturalistic framework, but it is at home in both the gritty-gamey pursuits of the fox and in the sublime pursuits of human beings. Just as the fox does not abandon Farmer John's duck pen when the duck supply runs thin, so the scientist does not abandon a cherished and productive theory when some results prove discouraging. Thomas Kuhn observes that clinging to theories in the face of strong counter evidence and despite "refutation" by crucial experiments (Kuhn, 1962) is not only common but also useful to the scientific enterprise. If scientists lightly relinquished theories when encountering problems, they would prematurely abandon theories that might ultimately prove their worth. Natural authenticity emphasizes that this process is not unique to scientific practice. It can be observed in foxes and pigeons, mice and men, philosophers and scientists. Our commitments are not immediately discarded when contingencies change, new evidence appears, and winds shift. It is in such behavior that we find the substance of authenticity.

When authenticity is fleshed out, the conflict with pursuit of alternatives disappears: The two perform different but complementary functions. Alternatives optimize opportunities in a changing environment. Authenticity preserves options when the immediate conditions would prompt their abandonment. We require alternatives and exploration of alternatives even when one path seems thoroughly satisfactory, but we also require authenticity, because it maintains paths and commitments as viable and usable options when they are unproductive in the short term. Authenticity maintains a richer range of alternatives.

Can this be an adequate account of human authenticity? Isn't Reynard's authenticity too shallow to be placed under the same roof with the authenticity of a reflective, deliberative human being? Human authenticity involves more than desiring to preserve a certain pathway. It also involves the capacity to rank one's desires and considered preferences. Thus, as Frankfurt observes, the authentic human being may desire drugs, reflectively wish to desire drugs, and "metareflectively" will to wish to desire drugs. While there are limits to the human capacity for such hierarchical reflection—anything beyond three levels is more philosophical fancy than psychological reality—those limits still outstrip Reynard's reach. The fox's desire to explore Farmer John's duck pen may eventually weaken and extinguish, or weaken and revive, but Reynard does not reflect on whether he desires to desire such exploration, or on whether he prefers that his desires wither or flourish. Even a shrewd and resourceful fox will lack the capacity for such hierarchical, authenticity establishing reflection. Hierarchical reflection forms the core of contemporary accounts of authenticity, and if that core is absent from natural authenticity, then does this not show that natural authenticity must be different in kind from human authenticity?

The answer is that even the highly intellectualized authenticity of humans has deep affinities with natural authenticity. Human reflective hierarchical authenticity is just a more sophisticated and specially adaptive version of Reynard's authenticity.

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So, to understand human reflective authenticity, we must appreciate the functioning of natural authenticity at the more basic level shared by human beings and foxes.

Reynard's authentic desire to visit Farmer John functions to keep that option open during slack periods. Human hierarchical authenticity serves the same function, but in a more complex manner that yields special advantages. Reynard wants to eat Farmer John's ducks. Regina wants to write philosophy articles. Both hit a slump. Ducks grow fewer in number; journals reject submissions. Frustrations mount, positive reinforcements gutter, Farmer John's duck pen and its article-writing analog appear empty and deserted. But Regina persists, just as Reynard does.

Eventually Reynard's behavior will extinguish and so may Regina's, but Regina has special capacities for keeping that option open, hierarchical capacities that are beyond Reynard. If the desire to write philosophy articles is deeply authentic for Regina, she worries when she recognizes it withering away. She is disturbed when she finds her desire to write philosophy superseded by her desire to vegetate in front of the television set.

That level of reflection is unavailable to Reynard,3 but because it is available to reflective Regina, she can deliberately take steps to sustain and revitalize her philosophy writing—to keep that option open—long beyond the time when it might have otherwise extinguished. Through various strategies Regina will be pushed to write, and then other contingencies—the praise of a colleague, acceptance by a journal, or the satisfying solution to some vexing problem—are likely to revive and sustain her work. Regina's hierarchical authenticity is not functionally different from Reynard's more basic version: They are both natural means of keeping alternatives open when they otherwise would have withered away. The difference is only that Regina's hierarchical authenticity offers greater resources, and it can sustain behavior through deeper duress in more hostile environments.

Recognition that Reynard's natural authenticity is cut from the same functional cloth as human reflective hierarchical authenticity offers the solution to some basic problems. I want X, and I am pleased that I want X, and I reflectively approve of being pleased that I want X; but where does it end? Must I metareflectively approve of reflectively approving my pleasure in wanting X? To stop the regress, Frankfurt posits a high level "resounding commitment" that is disquietingly similar to the miraculous choice of some free willists. But natural authenticity requires no such miracles. There is a naturally explicable wish to keep a formerly beneficial path open, and the enigmatic "final resounding commitment" is replaced by a natural limit on the reflective authenticity resources available for this task.

Natural authenticity ranges easily over both Reynard's duck-seeking and Regina's higher order will to write, and it demystifies problems of "highest level resounding commitments." Furthermore, natural authenticity can resolve the most vexing challenge to traditional compatibilist accounts of authenticity: The happy slave or—in Frankfurt's dramatic case—the willing addict. So long as the addict longs to be free of addiction, the hierarchical account works well: The addict is not free and does not act authentically because his higher order reflective willing rejects his desire for drugs. But when the addict reflectively affirms addiction, then the hierarchical theory counts him a free and authentic addict. In one of Gerald Dworkin's examples (1976, p.25) the person who longs to become a great skier due to envy—but who

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despises his obsessive envy—is not free and authentic; but should he recognize and approve his envious motive, he is transformed into a free and authentic puppet of his envy.

For a more ordinary case, consider the factory worker who chafes in an environment of mindless repetitive labor while longing to choose goals, consider options, and make decisions. Such a laborer is an unfortunate and unfree victim, who (as Frankfurt and Dworkin correctly emphasize) is deprived of authenticity. But when the laborer's desire to think and plan and choose is finally killed by exhausting, mind numbing drudgery, then he has achieved authenticity in his regimented role. The woman who struggles against a culturally-defined subservient role is not free, but the woman whose subjugation has been so thorough as to extinguish any wish of independence is free and authentic.

It is possible to cling to the hierarchical analysis when faced with such examples. Frankfurt presents the willing addict not as an embarrassment, but as an interesting though paradoxical result of his hierarchical theory. And Gerald Dworkin is also willing to bite hard on this unpalatable bullet:

> . . . a person who wishes to be restricted in various ways, whether by the discipline of the monastery, regimentation of the army, or even by coercion, is not, on that account alone, less autonomous. . . . In my conception, the autonomous person can be a tyrant or a slave, a saint or sinner, a rugged individualist or champion of fraternity, a leader or follower. (Dworkin, 1988, pages 18, 29)

But there are good reasons to be disturbed when profoundly regimented followers—who affirm their subservience—are counted as free and authentic. After all, claims to authenticity have served more often as fetters than liberators. This individual has no opportunities or alternatives. But no matter: As it happens, he is authentically suited for such a blinkered existence, since he is satisfied with his narrow world. This laborer's situation offers no control, no decisions; but fortunately, she prefers and approves such drudgery, and does not wish to make decisions and face choices. This woman is wedged tightly between the demands of an intolerant society and a domineering husband; but no changes are warranted, since she wills her role as helpmate and is authentically subservient. Of course contemporary champions of hierarchical authenticity do not defend such abuses[2], but the point is how easily—and how often—"authenticity" is put to such repressive uses.

So how do we deal with the problem of the authentically happy slave? One way is by requiring procedural sophistication in selecting authentic higher order preferences: One must evaluate rationally and without being under deception. That is the direction that Dworkin travels in his recently revised views on autonomy:

> I now believe that . . . it is not the identification or lack of identification that is crucial to being autonomous, but the capacity to raise the question of whether I will identify with or reject the reasons for which I now act. (1988, p. 15)

But there are limits to that tack. Unless one is willing to posit Susan Wolf's True and Good, there remains the possibility of someone reflectively recognizing and approving a stifling and subservient role (perhaps because of such a strong and

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pervasive acculturation process that reflection only affirms the narrow role). The "authentically subservient" wife may know the process that stifled her larger hopes and interests and be grateful for—and approve of and identify with—that process, as essential for renunciation of her now despised willfulness and independence. Her reason for her commitment is simply that it is right for husbands to have complete authority over wives, and she now identifies with that reason.

We may despise such reasoning, and the acculturation that shaped it. But short of granting autonomy exclusively to those who hold their beliefs and commitments for all the right reasons—and that will not only require a True and Good but will also leave the class of autonomous individuals very exclusive indeed—it is difficult for even the most sophisticated hierarchical view to avoid attributing autonomy and authenticity to the willing addict and satisfied subservient wife.

On the natural authenticity model, the paradox of the happy slave is eliminated, and without appeal to obscure or extraordinary standards. Natural authenticity involves commitments that function to keep paths and options open that might otherwise be abandoned and lost during periods when they yield no immediate advantages. But the happy slave's devotion to servitude is not like that. Rather than enhancing opportunity by keeping a favorite option open, it stifles the slave's range of opportunity by blocking attempts at escape into new pathways.

When that is recognized, then there is no temptation to claim that the "happy slave" (whose brutal situation has snuffed out any dream of escape) and the enervated factory worker (who has lost the will to wish for other opportunities) and the subjugated wife (whose stifling environment has killed all dreams of richer options) are authentically docile and subservient and unimaginative. It is true that they now embrace the terrible necessity that drained their capacity to will other opportunities; but they are no more "authentic" drudges and slaves than is the dog whose "learned helplessness" has made attempts to escape electric shock impossible.[3] The stifling environment that compelled them to doggedly follow a single narrow path has corrupted the authenticity function, since their single minded devotion stifles and constricts—rather than enlarges—alternatives and opportunities.

The addiction of the willing addict constricts rather than enlarges options; but in the absence of positive reinforcers along alternative paths, it is not surprising that other options are effectively extinguished as the individual develops an obsessive attachment to the single path (or theory, or religious enthusiasm, or role) that has on occasion proved positively reinforcing. Indeed, if this path delivers benefits only occasionally, that fact will not temper the devotion. To the contrary, such a variable interval pattern of reinforcement is more likely to entrench the obsessive attachment. In such cases, we have a willing drug addict, a true believer, or a committed cultist. That such perversion of authenticity is possible does not imply that more typical option-enhancing authenticity is less important, or—in its normal functioning—less useful.

It might be objected that the natural authenticity model lumps dedicated scientists with obsessive cultists—that anyone who makes a deep commitment slides from authenticity into pseudo-authenticity. But in fact the natural authenticity model has no problem distinguishing the obsessed cultist from the committed scientist. The scientist is authentically committed when she favors one theoretical line and pursues

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it even when it seems less immediately promising than some other. If it becomes an obsession and blinds her to any other possibilities, then her distorted pseudo-authenticity is counterproductive. When commitment is joined with awareness of other open possibilities—possibilities that might be better than the one pursued—it is a beneficial natural authenticity; and one may pursue such a commitment—whether fox, philosopher, or scientist—without it becoming a blinding, numbing, option-eliminating obsession.

The strongest point in favor of the natural authenticity account is that it eliminates the conflict and restores the symbiotic link between authenticity and alternatives: an important linkage that other accounts have attempted to sever. Frankfurt claims that authenticity renders alternatives superfluous. The willing addict—with no open alternatives—nonetheless acts autonomously through his authentic willing. On Frankfurt's view, authenticity can flourish while alternatives wither.

Frankfurt's policy makes sense in conditions of triage: Mysterious free willist accounts of autonomy and choice are endangered in our nonmiraculous contemporary naturalistic world, and so we must save what we can (authenticity) and abandon what we must (alternatives), lest we lose all. But the natural authenticity account preserves both authenticity and alternatives, and affirms their close and mutually supportive connection.

Autonomous pursuit of alternatives requires no powers of miraculous choice. Instead, it offers precisely what our moving natural world has shaped us to prefer: alternatives available as our environment and conditions change. Natural authenticity is not in opposition to such seeking of alternatives; to the contrary, it maintains beneficial paths and theories that might otherwise be lost. Thus the natural authenticity account fits both alternatives and commitments under the same explanatory principle, and makes authenticity an alternative enhancing partner to alternative-seeking autonomy.

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NOTES

1. This alternative path-taking behavior has been studied by Kavanau (1967), and its application to human autonomy is discussed by Waller (1993).

2. Gerald Dworkin, for example, has written a powerful appeal for protecting the freedom and integrity of mental patients (Dworkin, 1976).

3. For more details on the "willful" submissiveness of the dog that has learned helplessness in response to inescapable shock (and now refuses to attempt escape even when the shock is avoidable), see (Seligman, 1975).