

Chapter 7 – Authenticity

7.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in §4.3.2, this study considers the philosophical discourse of self-realization to be constituted along three quintessential and interwoven threads: autonomy, authenticity and virtue. After having explored the autonomy-thread in chapter 6, sketching its background and suggesting a viable interpretation in light of the intended reframing of the self-realization discourse, I continue with the next step in the argument by exploring the authenticity-thread in a similar way.

This chapter follows broadly the same structure as the previous one. I start with a general introduction of the concept of authenticity (§7.2). Next, four relevant perspectives on authenticity from the history of modern philosophy are sketched. In §7.3.1, the view of Rousseau and his Romantic followers is discussed. Rousseau is often seen as the father of the notion of authenticity in Western thought. In §7.3.2, I continue with a discussion of what could best be called an existentialist view of authenticity. This view was exemplified by Nietzsche and Kierkegaard in the 19th century, with Heidegger, Sartre, Camus and De Beauvoir as their 20th century heirs. In §7.3.3, C. Taylor's (1991) more recent view of authenticity is discussed, which aims to criticize authenticity's late modern perversions and calls attention to its historical roots as a moral ideal. Finally, in §7.3.4 I discuss Meyers' (2000) view connecting authenticity with the intersectionality framework of feminist philosophy.

Having thus introduced different relevant positions in the authenticity debate, in §7.4 I consider how the theme of authenticity has found its way into gerontological thought. Although gerontological authors have been far less explicitly concerned with authenticity than with autonomy, I suggest three perspectives on aging that apply ideas which can be related to the authenticity discourse. These include the spiritual perspectives (§7.4.1), the existential perspectives (§7.4.2) and the art of living perspectives (§7.4.3). To conclude this chapter, in §7.5 I evaluate the different perspectives on authenticity, and suggest an interpretation that is able to accommodate my reframing of self-realization and its underlying view of moral agency (§7.6).

7.2 INTRODUCING AUTHENTICITY

Oscar Wilde made it sound so simple: “Be yourself. Everyone else is already taken”. But being (or becoming) yourself raises a number of complex philosophical questions. These questions have been debated for the past centuries under the banner of authenticity. In its most general sense, authenticity means that something or someone is “faithful to an original” or is “of undisputed origin or authorship” (Varga & Guignon, 2014). As one of the threads weaving the fabric of self-realization discourse, authenticity conceives the best within us that is to be realized in terms of being true to oneself, more particularly to one’s most genuine, real or essential self (Guignon, 2004). Alternatively, becoming who you (truly) are is also often used as a phrase describing what underlies authenticity. Often, it appears to be difficult to give a direct description of what an authentic personality or mode of living amounts to in positive terms. Instead, authenticity is conceptualized as a critique against an inauthentic lifestyle that is perceived as untruthful and false (Golomb, 1995). In contrast to such an inauthentic life, authenticity implies originality, truthfulness, creativity and genuineness. It also assumes the development of an attitude towards life that is personally appropriated, instead of prescribed by one’s social position, tradition or convention. People can be called authentic when they have not only created and appropriated their own “style”, but also proudly carry the responsibility for it (Dohmen, 2014). In this sense, authenticity closely intersects with/depends on autonomy (competence) (Meyers, 1989; see also §6.3.3).

The formulae “being true to yourself” or “becoming who you truly are” seem to carry a commonsensical plausibility for many of us living in an era that promotes living a life of one’s own as a moral ideal (see also §2.3.1 and §2.5.1). Beyond this commonsensical understanding, however, problems quickly arise if we try to fathom what underlies the moral ideal of an authentic life. After all, what should be understood as our “true” or “real” self? What is included and excluded by such a notion? Where is such a self to be found in the first place? Is it an essence to be discovered somewhere, or are we creating it throughout our lives? How can others recognize which appearance of our self is authentic and which is not? How can we even know ourselves? What if our true self turns out to include unpleasant, banal or plain evil characteristics that we don’t want to be associated with? And how does such a true self, if it exists, relate to the outside social world without losing its “essential” quality? What does it mean to be “truthful”, and how does this relate to different interpretations of “truth”? In short, the ideal of authenticity, on closer look, represents a very problematic discourse, and it may rightly be questioned whether it doesn’t raise more problems than it solves (Guignon, 2004).

Several authors connect the rise of authenticity as a moral ideal with modernity and its characteristic “disenchantment” (C. Taylor, 1991; Ferrara, 1993,

1998; see also §2.3.6). The decline of traditional sources of meaning and morality that are associated with this disenchantment, has left a void that authenticity is expected to fill. Although the modern interpretation of authenticity has often been criticized by neo-conservative thinkers as a purely aesthetic, narcissistic ideal, Ferrara (1993) argues that these critiques misconstrue the meaning of authenticity. He thinks that authenticity should instead be perceived as a moral ideal that offers a new reflexive value base for modern lives. During its rise as a characteristic modern moral ideal, authenticity also seems to have acquired a very specific meaning. To clarify the distinctive features of contemporary authenticity discourse, it is helpful to look at Trilling's (1971) distinction between *sincerity* as a typical early modern notion and *authenticity* as a typical late modern notion. Both sincerity and authenticity are concepts that touch upon the necessity of being true to oneself. But importantly, in the case of sincerity this is not perceived as an end in itself, but as a means to enable one's reliability towards others. One cannot be true to one's commitments to others without being true to oneself, i.e., without answering to the social expectation of being sincere. The evolution of the idea of being true to oneself in the modern understanding of authenticity, however, elevates it to an end in itself. It is no longer a necessary condition for one's social functioning, but something to strive for independently, for its own sake. Personal authenticity thereby gains the status of a moral character ideal. From a social virtue in the case of sincerity, being true to oneself becomes a personal virtue in the case of authenticity.

Even if one agrees on the status of authenticity as a personal virtue, many different interpretations remain possible. Ferrara (1998) has made some interesting distinctions that may help to categorize different interpretations of authenticity.

- First, he distinguishes between *substantialist* and *intersubjective* conceptions of authenticity, which depart from contrasting underlying concepts of the self. The substantialist perspectives of authenticity regard the self to possess an essential core which should ideally find expression in one's actions and interactions with other agents. Social institutions and social roles are perceived as forces that make us betray our essential core self, by having us adapt to the expectations and conventions belonging to these roles and institutions. The intersubjective conceptions of authenticity, on the other hand, stress that our identity should not be perceived in terms of an essential core self, but instead as a social practice which depends on different forms of recognition and dialogical, reflexive deliberation.
- Second, Ferrara distinguishes between *antagonistic* and *integrative* conceptions of authenticity. The antagonistic conception associates authenticity with breaking loose from restrictive and inauthenticating social expectations and conventions. The integrative conception stresses that social roles

and institutions are not necessarily restrictive but are also needed, since they provide the building blocks for developing an authentic identity in the first place.

- Third, Ferrara introduces an opposition between a *centered* and a *decentered* perspective on authenticity. The former assumes that it is necessary to be able to express one's life in a coherent life narrative, with a hierarchical order of importance between the core storyline and more peripheral events and experiences. According to the centered conception, one's authenticity depends on the ability to constitute one's self along the lines of a unique life project guiding one's choices and actions. The decentered conception, on the other hand, assumes that any attempt to arrive at such a unifying narrative is in fact an instance of inauthenticity, because it means subjecting one's life to an external artificial ordering principle.
- Fourth, Ferrara distinguishes two different ways in which the notion of authenticity has been applied in political discourse. On the one hand, there is a *nationalist* perspective, which builds upon the Romantic, expressivist emphasis on the importance of a shared culture, history, language and tradition. On the other hand, post-modern thinkers draw upon a radical notion of authenticity to emphasize the importance of recognizing *difference*. Ferrara himself prefers an intermediate account of personal authenticity in reflective terms, emphasizing the way the individual negotiates its difference from others relative to the common and universal aspects of being human that are shared with others.

As is explained in §7.5, when examined using Ferrara's typology, the account of authenticity advanced in this study is both intersubjective and reflective, but takes an intermediate stand between antagonistic and integrative, as well as between centered and decentered views of authenticity.

Given the emphasis on being true to yourself, an authentic life is inextricably connected to an authentic personality. Ferrara (1998) discusses the features of such a personality. He derives these from a rich variety of psychoanalytical authors, who may have different ideas about decisive factors influencing processes of human development, but share some fundamental ideas that point towards four general characteristics of an authentic or fulfilled personality. These are: coherence, vitality, depth and maturity.

- *Coherence* stresses the importance of being able to understand the changes and transformations undergone in the course of one's life in terms of a more or less cohesive, continuous and demarcated life narrative. It stands opposed to fragmentation, discontinuity and indistinctness. Although we have already encountered the problems associated with some versions of the

claim to coherence or narrative integration in §5.2.3, it is noteworthy that for authenticity, as well, some amount of coherence is indispensable.

- *Vitality* is described by Ferrara (1998) as the experiential counterpart of authentic self-realization, and defined as “the experience of joyful empowerment which results from the fulfillment of one’s central needs, from a sense of the congruence of one’s present state with the memory of who one has been, and from the sense of progressing toward becoming who one wants to be” (p. 87). Vitality presupposes a genuine involvement and engagement with life, and is opposed to an attitude of apathy and withdrawal.
- *Depth* refers to a person’s capacity to fathom, at least to some extent, one’s own psychic dynamism in a way that is sufficiently reflexive. That is, depth presupposes the ability to put the self-insight one gains to use in the continuous constitution of one’s identity. The quality of depth, though indispensable for an authentic individual, is always a matter of degree, since obviously full transparency to oneself is not within the reach of most people.
- *Maturity*, the final characteristic of an authentic person, describes the quality of being able and willing to come to terms with the natural and social reality as it is. This is achieved in full awareness of the limitations of one’s own control but without thereby disregarding one’s own potentials to act upon oneself and transform unfavorable circumstances to some extent. Maturity presupposes a realistic sense of one’s own strengths and limitations, a flexibility towards contingencies and a healthy sense of self-worth. Another term that is sometimes used to describe what is manifested here is *wisdom*.

To conclude this introductory section, it can be observed that generally speaking, two related issues stand out that continue to plague the authenticity debate:

- *True self*: The first set of problems that keeps returning, addresses the issue of how the “true” self should be conceptualized. Many interpretations of authenticity presuppose an *essentialist* view of the self, in which the true identity of the individual is opposed to the inauthenticity of social self-presentations. This is at odds with the idea that the self is socially constituted. In addition, the *anthropocentric* perspective that typically characterizes contemporary authenticity discourse tends to present the self as separate, self-sufficient and self-reliant (Guignon, 2004). However, as I have noted before (see §4.2.2 and §5.3.2), such an understanding of the self has been criticized as profoundly problematic, which has implications for this study’s perspective on authenticity.
- *Social influence*: The second set of problems is related to the concern that the authenticity discourse is unable to address people’s fundamentally social nature and their need for belonging in a satisfactory way (Larmore,

1996). Critiques have been voiced underscoring that we cannot disregard the social dimension in this manner. It is possible to conceive of authenticity in another manner, however. In fact, some interpretations stress that authenticity in fact relies on our embedding in social practices, because it is this social embedding that enables us to articulate and practice our identity-guiding value orientation in the first place. As Williams (2002) aptly formulates this insight, “We need each other in order to be anybody” (p. 200); and “being anybody”, of course, is conditional to the authenticity ideal of being true to yourself.

The view of authenticity defended in this chapter agrees with authenticity thinkers who contend that neither set of problems needs to be insurmountable, but that authenticity needs to be carefully reformulated to accommodate the issues that are raised by each set (e.g., C. Taylor, 1991; Ferrara, 1998). However, before I can formulate a version of authenticity that matches this study’s conceptualization of self-realization, we should first gain more clarity about what authenticity stands for as a moral ideal and discuss its origins.

7.3 SELECTED PHILOSOPHICAL ACCOUNTS OF AUTHENTICITY

7.3.1 Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his Romantic heirs

Rousseau (1754/1984, 1782/1996, 1762/2003) is often seen as the originator of the modern discourse on authenticity in the Western world. Although he does not use the term authenticity himself, many of the guiding ideas underlying this notion are present in his work (Guignon, 2004). Even though Rousseau’s social and political thought seems rather anachronistic to the late modern mind, in particular due to his boundless faith in restoring the “natural” state of goodness of human beings by excluding social and societal influences, Ferrara (1993, 1998) argues that Rousseau’s philosophy still carries high relevance for contemporary life. Rousseau’s philosophy teaches us that personal authenticity, especially in the reflexive interpretation that Ferrara advances, deserves an equal status in contemporary moral debates, besides more commonly used notions such as freedom, justice and equality. Rousseau’s position on authenticity rests on a distinction between the natural state of man and its socialized version. While the natural state is perceived as inherently good, the socialized state is seen as the cause of most human, societal and moral problems. Instead of following the traditional Christian doctrine of original sin, Rousseau attributed any moral depravation of man to the influences of society. Due to the rise of a social order revolving around artificial and misguided sources of identity such as possession, competition and power inequalities, Rousseau (1754/1984)

believed that as a result of this “social man lives always outside himself; he knows how to live only in the opinion of others” (p. 136). Thus, socialization results in inauthenticity, an irreparable corruption of man’s natural authenticity. Moreover, this inauthenticity seems to coincide with heteronomy and a lack of free agency, because the opinions of others instead of our own convictions and inclinations steer our behavior.

The natural state of man, on the other hand, is pure and true and innocent, and lies at the foundation of the human potential for free agency. This state is often compared with the being of a child, who has not yet undergone the social influences that make many adults so artificial and inauthentic in Rousseau’s eyes. He recommended turning inward and (re)gaining contact with the inner “voice of nature” (as cited in C. Taylor 1989, p. 357). However, although Rousseau claimed to present his own true and authentic self in the *Confessions* (1782/1996), he ran into problems almost immediately, because he noticed that his memory was flawed, his judgment clouded, and his self-insight and means of articulation only limited. Thus, even the father of modern authenticity discourse confronted a problem with the “truthfulness” of his self-account (Williams, 2002), which ultimately renders his view self-effacing. Nevertheless, Rousseau’s account of authenticity as the only reliable road of access to the moral good, and thereby the condition for autonomy and freedom, has been highly influential in our modern self-understanding.

The realization of a flourishing, authentic life by human beings requires a special type of education, which Rousseau describes in his famous treatise *Emile ou l’éducation* (1762/2003). The educator is supposed to let pupils discover their own natural potential of knowledge, morality and character, undisturbed by any direct disciplinary influence of teachers or other adults. If given the chance to flourish properly, the natural state of man supposedly guarantees a healthy human moral agency in which self-love and concern for others, the two basic tendencies of human nature for Rousseau, are perfectly balanced.

As C. Taylor (1989) argues, Rousseau’s work can be placed in the broader evolution of the crucial modern idea that our inner realm is a source of meaning, identity and morality. Following one’s feelings was regarded as a more reliable road of access to the good than cognitive reflection, although Rousseau did not reject the value of reason (Guignon, 2004). C. Taylor (1989) notes that Hume, as well as moral sense philosophers like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson had already introduced the importance of feelings in moral philosophical debates in the 18th century. But C. Taylor claims that Rousseau’s views potentially go further than those of the earlier moral sense philosophers like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. While these thinkers also believed our feelings enabled us to come into contact with the good, they still regarded this good as something universal and God-given. Rousseau, by contrast, provided the basis for the later Romantic view that the inner voice of our nature, our conscience, defines what

is good. This transforms our inner nature to the principal moral source to draw on. This move enabled the rise of a new “ethic of nature” in the 19th century, exemplified in Romantic expressivism (C. Taylor, 1989, p. 362). It is important to note, however, that Rousseau’s Romantic heirs did not necessarily share his optimistic estimation of the natural goodness of humans and their feelings. Romantic thinkers such as Herder, Schelling or Novalis, who advanced this expressivist position, are much indebted to Rousseau. Their claim is that shaping one’s life and identity in an authentic way can be compared to the way an artist creates a work of art. A crucial addition of the Romantic expressivists to the earlier views drawing on moral sentiment is that they assume that the realization of the natural good, to which we gain access through our inner realm, takes place through *expression* of ourselves. This expression implies an articulation in a certain medium, making feelings or thoughts manifest. However, in addition to this, the expression is also a way of creating something new, of bringing something to be that did not exist previously. This combination of expression and creation is the crucial contribution of the Romantic expressivist account of authenticity to the self-realization discourse.

The comparison of life with a work of art suggests that the chosen medium of expression is not solely instrumental to the work of art, or to the way of life, but that “being in the medium they are is integral to them” (C. Taylor, 1989, p. 374). By emphasizing that it is up to each individual to choose their own medium of expression, expressivism also adds the idea of originality: what it implies to be faithful to who you really are cannot be reached by following the model of someone else. In the end, for Rousseau and his heirs the ultimate purpose of self-realization is to arrive at a point of self-revelation (through self-reflection or through artistic expression). The self-revelation thus acquired has an almost spiritual meaning, because it involves recovering a sense of wholeness that was lost before, or creating it all anew. The true self is not perceived as a static entity to be discovered by rational reflection or scientific method, but is associated with a continuous search to unveil or create one’s original, authentic self, thereby transcending base and inauthentic versions of oneself that result from the corrupting, heteronomous influence of others (Guignon, 2004). As the starting point in this study’s exploration of authenticity, the account of Rousseau and his Romantic heirs illustrates both sets of problems associated with the authenticity discourse in general (see §7.2): the problem of the true self, and the problem of social influence. In the next section, I will explore how existentialist thinkers offer an alternative account of authenticity, which in particular challenges the essentialist view of the person.

7.3.2 Existentialist views of authenticity

The existentialist “pathos” of authenticity (Golomb, 1995) cannot be properly understood without taking into account the historical situation in which it arose. Typical of the late 19th century was the growing suspicion towards the optimistic promises of Enlightenment thinkers regarding the moral and scientific progress of mankind. Moreover, traditional sources of moral and spiritual authority were increasingly perceived as being unable to meet the need for guidance and meaning. Nietzsche’s famous proclamation of the “Death of God” was the incisive distillation of a growing sense that no reliable source of morality existed in the outside world (*The gay science*, KGW III, 3, 125). Instead, it was up to the individual to provide life with coherence and meaning – man himself was the only remaining authority that could be acknowledged in the “disenchanted” modern world. Note that in general the existentialist thinkers – in particular Nietzsche and Kierkegaard in the 19th century; Heidegger, Sartre, De Beauvoir and Camus in the 20th century – did not regard this process of developing ownership of oneself and realization of one’s human freedom as an easy task. Instead, human agents were perceived as condemned to freedom, and the only viable way to address this human fate was by trying to live as authentically as possible.

One of the main targets of the existentialist position on authenticity was the assumption, still present in Rousseau’s work, that there is such a thing as an essential self, a clear, unambiguous inner core that speaks to us and guides us towards truth, meaning and value. In fact, existentialism challenges the whole idea of an “objective” truth, which seems to be presupposed by the essentialist conception of the self. According to Golomb (1995), “the heart of the existentialist revolution” consists in “the eclipse of ‘truth’ by ‘truthfulness’, the transition from objective sincerity to personal authenticity” (p. 8). Despite this difference, the existentialist position shares with Rousseau and his Romantic heirs the suspicion towards social convention, which is perceived to lead to self-alienation and an inauthentic way of living. Realizing one’s human potential for freedom requires transcending the restrictions of existing moralities and finding one’s own unique path to self-realization. Thus, Golomb (1995) states that “authenticity is not a ‘moral authority’, for it is contrary to the nature of authenticity to tell others what to do. [...] it is the mastery of one who freely creates the pathos of authenticity and strives to express and live it in the everyday” (p. 10).

Below, I explore a selection of 19th and 20th century existentialist views. Each of these adds its own emphasis, and contributes its own perspective to the authenticity discourse. The selection of thinkers to be discussed opens with the two main 19th century thinkers who addressed authenticity: Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Of the 20th century thinkers, I focus mainly on Heidegger’s

perspective. His view has particular relevance in the context of aging, given his emphasis on the relations between being and time (Baars, 2012a).

Søren Kierkegaard – Fateful choice

In Kierkegaard's (1843/1959) view, the quest for authenticity begins with a moment of existential crisis, particularly a crisis involving a struggle with forces pulling us towards an inauthentic lifestyle. Such struggles make us question ourselves and reflect on who we "really" want to be or become. This represents an often painful process. We become acutely aware of the danger of self-betrayal if we lack the strength to choose an authentic life and instead submerge into an inauthentic limbo. For example, in *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard (1843/1959) focuses on the fateful moment of choice between an inauthentic or aesthetic lifestyle and an authentic lifestyle (the ethical and ultimately religious lifestyle that he advocates).

Kierkegaard's philosophy is exemplary for the quintessential importance of choice, which is characteristic of existentialist philosophy in general. This is not just any choice, however; the choice at stake here is an *identity-constituting choice*: who, out of all the possible selves I could become, do I truly choose to be? Lacking the courage to choose, the young protagonist of *Either/Or* is condemned to a continuous hectic bustle, looking for new experiences to satisfy his hedonic needs, but never finding true fulfillment. His lifestyle is qualified as "aesthetic". This is an existence full of unrest and the threat of dissatisfaction. In stark contrast, his fatherly friend Judge Wilhelm has chosen the "ethical life" of fulfilling his moral duties in the context of work, marriage and family life. However bourgeois this existence may sound, Wilhelm insists that his own choice for this specific life as his fulfillment makes it superior to the directionless wandering of his young protégé. Judge Wilhelm knows who he is and wants to be, and his life is organized accordingly.

Ultimately, however, Kierkegaard argues that the highest and most authentic lifestyle should transcend even this ethical mode of being. His ideal of authenticity eventually requires the self-transcendence of a religious conversion, a paradoxical risking of oneself in order to become oneself most fully. Eventually, for Kierkegaard authenticity assumes a leap into an unknown void, without the certainty of being captured or the guarantee of redemption. Freedom is about the courage to take that existential leap without knowing what to expect. This implies an acute confrontation with the uncontrollable, the dimension of existential vulnerability of human life that has been discussed earlier (see §2.4.6). The existentialist view of authenticity thereby introduces an element that is highly relevant for this study's purposes. Emphasizing the dimension of existential vulnerability as a crucial element of authenticity, suggests that finding a satisfactory attitude towards this dimension can paradoxically be an intrinsic part of self-realization.

Friedrich Nietzsche – Becoming who you are

Nietzsche's view of authenticity can best be exemplified in the expression becoming who or what you are. This paradoxical phrase can be found at several points in Nietzsche's work (for instance in *Schopenhauer as educator (Unfashionable observations 3)*, KGW I, 2, 1; *The gay science*, KGW III, 3, 270, 335; and *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, KGW IV, 1). As Golomb (1995) emphasizes, according to Nietzsche, "To become 'what we are' is not to live according to our so-called 'innate nature', but to create ourselves freely. To that end we have to know ourselves to distinguish what we can change in ourselves and in the external circumstances that have shaped us; we must realize what we have to accept as inevitable, and must do so in the heroic manner of *amor fati* (love of fate)" (p. 69). For Nietzsche, the heroism of authenticity lies in the effort to surmount ourselves, to become masters of our lives. We have to conquer many inclinations in ourselves that make us slaves: narrow-minded creatures full of "ressentiment" towards those that dominate us. We need the courage to follow the will to power that drives us to reign, to strive for domination of weaker souls, as Nietzsche has Zarathustra describe (*Thus spoke Zarathustra*, KGW IV). Ultimately, it is up to us, and *only* us, how we live our lives in a way that satisfies us. Inauthenticity lures us into succumbing to the temptation of following false authorities. As Nietzsche forcefully states in *Schopenhauer as educator*: "No one can build for you the bridge upon which you alone must cross the stream of life, no one but you alone. To be sure, there are countless paths and bridges and demigods that want to carry you through this stream, but only at the price of your self; you would pawn and lose your self. There is one single path in this world on which no one but you can travel. Where does it lead? Do not ask, just take it" (*Schopenhauer as educator (Unfashionable observations 3)*, KGW I, 2, 1).

In the preface to *Human, all too human* (KGW II, 1), Nietzsche sketches a detailed process of several stages in which one may develop what he calls the "great health": a state of authentic freedom and self-mastery. This process of freeing one's spirit can be read as Nietzsche's description of self-realization. At the outset, one's spirit is still firmly bound, by duties, by one's social position and by convention. However, such a bounded soul may suddenly experience a desire to free himself, and feel the urge to go away on a journey to an unknown destination. In the next stage, this soul starts to revolt. He rejects everything familiar, all bonds, values and duties that previously decided his life. This revolting is compared to a disease by Nietzsche, but it is a necessary disease, since it provides the basis for the person to free his will, to start defining his own values as a self-determining agent. Inevitably, this process of freeing oneself results in temporary loneliness and withdrawal from the world. But this loneliness and struggle is conditional for the eventual great health, the ripe freedom of the spirit that for Nietzsche constitutes the purpose of authentic self-realization. Through a stage of gradual return to life, the stage of great health is

eventually acquired. However, reaching this final stage may require years of wandering and healing, and only few people manage to attain the ultimate free and authentic life.

Nehamas (1985) notes that according to Nietzsche, our selves should not be interpreted as stable entities. Instead, they are in a continuous process of change and development. Nietzsche (as cited in Nehamas, 1985) does not assume the existence of one essential or core self, ready to be authentically expressed. Instead, his view presupposes a multiplicity of selves, in which different selves may occupy the dominant position governing our choices and actions, depending on the situation. This position makes the expression becoming who/what you are even more problematic and paradoxical, for “if there is no such thing as the self, there seems to be nothing that one can in any way become” (Nehamas, 1985, p. 172). It also raises the seemingly unsolvable question which of these selves is “in charge” when it comes to self-realization. Nevertheless, Nietzsche insists that it is possible and indeed desirable to shape the contingent variety of actual and possible selves into a coherent identity that can be qualified as expressing authenticity, a process he describes as giving style to our character. Giving style implies imprinting our personal stamp on the contingent and chaotic bundle of character features, thoughts, feelings and experiences making up our lives. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche urges his readers as follows: “One thing is needful. – To ‘give style’ to one’s character – a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. [...] In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraints of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste!” (KGW III, 3, 290) .

Nietzsche is well aware that giving our character style and living authentically is by no means easy. As a result, in his philosophy “authenticity is a kind of regulative and corrective ideal rather than a manifestly viable norm” (Golomb, 1995, p. 81). As a regulative moral ideal, becoming who we are is a process without an end. As long as we live we will always encounter new situations that necessitate revisiting our image of ourselves and possibly adjusting our strivings. What is of crucial importance, however, is that we learn to accept responsibility for all that we have become as a result of the mixture of choices, actions and contingent events that constitute our lives. This expresses Nietzsche’s famous doctrine of “eternal recurrence” and life-affirmation, which Nehamas (1985) summarizes as follows: “To become what one is, we can see, is not to reach a specific new state and to stop becoming [...] It is to identify oneself with all of one’s actions, to see that everything one does (what one becomes) is what one is. In the ideal case it is also to fit all this into a coherent whole and *to want to be*

everything that one is" (p. 191; emphasis added). As with Kierkegaard, this view adds a welcome element to my reflection on self-realization, since it assumes that aspects of purposive choice connect with aspects of contingency in the life reality. It is crucial that we appropriate both in order to optimally realize our potential for moral agency.

Although some Nietzsche-interpreters qualify his view as aesthetic, it is important to note that authenticity has a strong moral importance for him. The way in which Nietzsche's views could be called aesthetic can in no way be compared with the meaning of that term in the philosophy of Kierkegaard, for instance. The way of life that expresses a unique and authentic individual style is promoted by Nietzsche not for its aesthetic value, but because he strongly believes that it constitutes a better life, more worthy of the best human potential. Although Nehamas (1985) is right to observe that a "stylish life" in Nietzsche's sense need not accord with what is promoted by existing moralities and may even contradict their rules and restrictions, it does not negate the moral significance of this ideal from Nietzsche's perspective.

Martin Heidegger – Being-onto-death

Heidegger's account of authenticity is located in the context of his sophisticated philosophical analysis of the ontological conditions of being, which he elaborates in his magnum opus *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1927/1996). He frequently uses the word authentic (*eigentlich*) throughout his work. For Heidegger, there is a fundamental relation between authenticity and death. Humans are essentially creatures with an awareness of their own finitude; *Dasein* (Heidegger's term for human being or individuality that is difficult to translate) represents "being-onto-death" (Carman, 2005). It is by virtue of the awareness that we cannot escape our own death, and cannot "objectify" it as we can do with the death of others, that we become fundamentally aware of our existential vulnerability. The awareness of the finitude of one's being provokes a profound existential anxiety which one is inclined to flee from. The typical mode of escape is to merge into the anonymous, impersonal sphere of social convention, or what Heidegger terms the "They" (*das "Man"*). The result of this immersion is inauthenticity and self-loss, the inability to live up to our responsibility for our own being in the face of death.

By contrast, authentic being for Heidegger implies the courage to face this inescapable human condition. Only in the face of our own death can we investigate what it means to be. As Golomb (1995) puts it, "If authenticity is the sense of one's Being, in death one reaches the culmination of one's potential for authentic Being [...] Death enters life to conclude it, making possible its adequate explication. Each time we entertain the possibility of dying we undertake an assessment of our Being. In our anticipation we define our existence" (p. 106-107). It is through this process of self-definition and gaining understanding

about the ontological conditions of being in time that we acquire the ability to fully accept our responsibility for ourselves, i.e., attain authenticity. By associating authenticity with one's relation to one's own finitude, Dasein as being-on-to-death, Heidegger fails to satisfactorily acknowledge that it can also be a *social* mode of being. Although other people certainly play a role in his view, they are mainly introduced as part of the inauthenticating "They". This stands for slavishly subjecting oneself to conventions instead of authentically appropriating one's own life in the face of one's temporal and limited human condition.

A characteristic of Heidegger's account of authenticity particularly relevant in the context of aging is its emphasis on the *temporal* dimension of human existence (Baars, 2012b). Authenticity is a continuous struggle to create and secure a sense of "own-ness" by countering the threat of alienation induced by existential anxiety. This struggle is a process that inevitably takes place in time. It requires appropriating one's past history, embracing one's present self, and carrying one's potential for authentic being into the future. If there are aspects of our past that we feel alienated from, that are shameful or that we would rather repress, this threatens our authentic being in the present as well as its realization in envisioned possibilities for the future.

Ultimately, it is the future that counts in Heidegger's account of authenticity, the realm of unrealized but aspired possibilities for more authentic selfhood. This can be compared to the discussion of Nietzsche's notion of becoming who you are, that also stresses the importance of realizing the potentiality for greater health that is intuitively sensed but not yet actualized. As Golomb (1995) puts it, "Authenticity reigns in the realm of possibilities not yet realized. The roots of authentic Being are in the future, because possibilities are never in the actual present. In other words, to Be is to be in time and history; it is to comport one's self to one's own Being in a time-consuming process of realizing one's potential for authenticity" (p. 118).

We may conclude that the existentialist position offers an account of authenticity that enables us to oppose the problematic essentialist assumptions about the authentic true self that plagued the views of Rousseau and his Romantic heirs. In this sense, the existentialist interpretation helps us to arrive at an interpretation of authenticity that is more in sync with the view of the self as constituted in narrative and social dynamic processes. However, with regard to the second set of problems haunting the authenticity discourse, which relates to the role of social influences, the existentialist account fails to offer a viable solution. The influence of others is still mainly presented as a source of inauthenticity that needs to be overcome. In the next section, I explore whether C. Taylor's (1991) interpretation of authenticity is able to address the issue of social influence in a more satisfactory manner for the purposes of this study.

7.3.3 Charles Taylor's ethics of authenticity

Of the contemporary thinkers on authenticity, C. Taylor (1991) is no doubt one of the most influential, erudite and nuanced voices in the choir. C. Taylor acknowledges the moral value of the authentic mode of living according to one's own value orientation. He pleads for an interpretation of authenticity that acknowledges our dependence on an intersubjectively constituted horizon of social and cultural sources of meaning. Importantly, he argues that contemporary appearances of the culture of authenticity that are criticized for their egocentrism and narcissism are themselves at odds with the original meaning of authenticity as a moral ideal. In *Ethics of authenticity* C. Taylor (1991) starts by analyzing three “malaises” that haunt modernity:

1. The first malaise pertains to the worrisome effects of *individualism*. While individualism has enabled many of the great accomplishments of modernity, liberating people from the burdens of a life defined by the restrictions of traditions and community, C. Taylor argues that it has also resulted in a loss of self-evident access to shared sources of identity, meaning and morality. Individualism has created an ethics of self-realization that perceives individuals as atomistic, narcissistic and self-directed creatures, destined to create their own meaning in a context of value pluralism.
2. The second malaise of modernity is described as the “primacy of *instrumental reason*” (C. Taylor, 1991, p. 5). This primacy implies that everything tends to be calculated in economic terms like efficiency, cost-benefit ratio or maximization of gain. The problem C. Taylor discusses is that the typical logic of instrumental reason does not remain restricted to the economic domain, but also pervades other areas of human life, including politics, health care, social science and human relationships. The primacy of instrumental reason results in a problematic neglect of the value dimension intrinsic to these domains.
3. The third malaise of modernity discusses the implications of the first two malaises in the political domain, where it leads to a lack of engagement and a *diminishing freedom*. C. Taylor argues that the excesses of individualism and the primacy of instrumental reason have eroded people's sense of engagement with an individual-transcending whole. As a result, their political activity, their willingness to participate in the governing processes necessary for a healthy, resilient democratic society, is diminished. People become absorbed in their private lives, where it becomes increasingly difficult to feel connected to larger frameworks providing meaning. This development leads to a sense of moral uneasiness, and a loss of positive freedom.

C. Taylor (1991) notes how influential neo-conservative thinkers like Lasch (1979), Sennett (1992) and Bellah et al. (1996) have deplored these malaises of modernity. They blame the typical modern culture of authenticity, which they regard as narcissistic and self-contained, for ruining communal engagement and moral values. C. Taylor shares their concerns, but he still maintains that we should acknowledge the ethical force that hides behind the contemporary authenticity culture. Instead of pleading to abnegate the ideal of authenticity, we should return to its sources and restore its original moral force. In fact, C. Taylor argues that authenticity is actually “unrepudiable by moderns” (C. Taylor, 1991, p. 23). Importantly, C. Taylor’s position seems to be that nothing in the idea of authenticity as such necessitates its modern degeneration. On the contrary, he argues that the genealogy of our modern self-understanding shows authenticity to be a powerful source of identity, morality and meaning for modern individuals. For many people, the ultimate purpose of human life is no longer located beyond our earthly existence in some transcendent realm, but consists in authentic living in the present. However, as a result of moral relativism and subjectivism, modernity is uneasy when it comes to claiming the superior value of any mode of living over another. This also complicates acknowledging authentic living as a moral ideal.

The most important point stressed repeatedly by C. Taylor is that the typically modern localization of the source of morality in our inner realm, that we already found in Rousseau’s work, does not necessitate moral subjectivism and relativism or an atomistic, essentialist conception of the human agent. Instead, C. Taylor argues that authenticity can only be a viable ideal against a broader horizon of meaning that precedes the individual life and extends beyond its duration. As C. Taylor (1991) puts it, “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” (p. 40-41). Moreover, only human beings intersubjectively related to others, in social bonds and communities enabling recognition and participation, can successfully realize an authentic life. We constitute our identities in dialogical relations with other people, in narrative processes of hermeneutic deliberation about the worthiness of the ideals we appropriate. Therefore, although authenticity is a facet of modern individualism, this does not mean that it cannot be accompanied by a social ethics of recognition, intersubjectivity and solidarity. It is a profound misunderstanding that the inward turn and the focus on either self-discovery or self-creation that lies at the bottom of the modern culture of authenticity precludes social constitution of identity. As C. Taylor (1991) observes, “My discovering my identity doesn’t mean that I work it out in isolation but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internalized, with

others. That is why the development of an ideal of inwardly generated identity gives a new and crucial importance to recognition. My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others” (p. 47-48).

Although C. Taylor’s view seems a promising candidate for a satisfactory solution to both sets of problems that plague authenticity discourse in general (see §7.2), his account fails to explicitly address the fact that people’s positioning in society (belonging to a dominant or a subordinate social group, for instance) strongly influences their chances for self-realization, as well as for their recognition as moral agents with a valid claim to authenticity and freedom. The possibility that authenticity may also require standing up to and distancing oneself from existing cultural horizons of meaning and morality is insufficiently covered by C. Taylor’s view. In the next section, I discuss Meyers’ (2000) view of authenticity, which addresses these topics.

7.3.4 Diana Meyers – Authenticity and intersectional identity

Meyers (2000) discusses the theme of authenticity in the context of her view of autonomy, for which she regards the possession of an authentic self to be a crucial condition. Meyers’ position regarding authenticity is characterized by a feminist sensitivity for the role of societal systems of domination and subordination, of power structures, and of social inequality, that we also encountered in her view of autonomy (see §6.3.3). Oftentimes, critiques on oppressive social structures are associated with a worldview that denies the viability of autonomy and authenticity as moral ideals, and even doubts the plausibility of their existence. By contrast, Meyers argues that the fact that who we are is significantly influenced by social structures does not necessarily make it impossible to uphold an authentic self or to practice autonomy. In fact, she claims that it is quintessential for human agents to form an authentic self in order to navigate the abundance of social influences that affect their lives in a satisfactory way. Thus, she defends the value of authenticity (which she regards as conditional for autonomy), but suggests that we should “redirect our attention – away from the internal structure of the authentic self and toward the process of constituting an authentic self” (Meyers, 2000, p. 154).

Meyers situates her view of authenticity against the background of the framework of *intersectionality*. This term has been introduced by feminist scholars who wanted to sensitize the identity debate to the fact that different categories of diversity, such as gender, ethnicity, class and age, work together in determining people’s identities. These influences cannot be studied in isolation from each other. Thus, one’s opportunities to practice moral agency do not simply depend on whether one is a man or woman, or young or old. Instead, they depend on the intersection of these multiple sources of identity. The intersectionality framework emphasizes that being a young black man with

a low socio-economic status is very different from being an older, well-to-do, white woman. It enables more fine-grained distinctions and raises awareness of the interconnections between these categories of difference, though it also complicates the analysis. Meyers argues that this intersectional positioning can be made a part of an authentic personality despite the fact that we do not choose this position freely ourselves. By successfully exercising our autonomy competencies (self-discovery, self-definition and self-direction) in our social interactions in the world, we are engaged in an ongoing and open-ended process of constructing an authentic identity for ourselves. Ferrara (1998) seems to express the same insight when he states: "All identities, in fact, authentic and inauthentic, are equally rooted in interaction. What distinguishes the authentic ones is something else, namely, the capacity to express a uniqueness which has been socially constituted through the interplay of the singularity of the formative contexts and the singularity of our responses to them" (p. 54).

For both Meyers (2000) and C. Taylor (1991) then, authenticity is not attained by overcoming the impact of external influences on the self. But Meyers emphasizes that these external influences are also not something we should uncritically accept at face value. Instead, authenticity in the intersectional view requires an active, agential attitude towards the socio-cultural forces that co-constitute who we are. As Meyers (2000) puts it, "accepting intersectional identity as a feature of one's authentic self does not entail clinging to a community of origin or capitulating to stereotypical group norms. Rather, it entails analyzing the social significance of one's community of origin, disclosing to oneself the ways in which associated norms have become embedded in one's own cognitive and motivational structure, appreciating how entrenched they are, and assuming responsibility for the ways in which one may enact them" (p. 159).

As C. Taylor's (1991) view suggests, we should for sure acknowledge the constitutive importance of our social and cultural horizon in our identity-constitution. But qualifying as authentic and autonomous means that we should also be able to criticize and possibly transform these constitutive horizons at points where they may impede our own or other people's moral agency. This is the point that Meyers (2000) adds. According to Meyers' view, authenticity and autonomy are intrinsically connected. We develop both in the context of our daily social practices. They will emerge easier and sooner in circumstances that stimulate people's moral agency. But as Meyers argues, this is not a necessity; both autonomy and authenticity can also be realized in unfavorable social situations. However, realizing "a good life, with and for others, in just institutions" which Ricoeur (1992, see also §5.4) formulates as the ethical aim guiding our moral lives, does seem to request of us to make an ongoing effort to ensure the actualization of a society that gives more people the opportunity to exercise their potential for moral agency in freedom. In Meyers' (2000) formulation,

such an endeavor “would counteract moral anesthesia and motivate people to overcome cooptation and anomie. Apprehending one’s intersectional identity – that is, knowing who one is – may prompt resistance to unjust treatment – that is, moral and political autonomy” (p. 161).

A final important element of Meyers’ view is the fact that she underscores that both autonomy competence and authenticity are lifelong learning processes situated in the context of concrete human practices. The result will never be complete or perfect, for, as Meyers (2000) emphasizes, “Piecemeal authenticity, I would urge, is the best that we murky, fallible human beings can hope for” (p. 174). Despite Meyers’ acknowledgment of the complex and evolving character of authentic selves however, she maintains that selves should have a certain amount of unity or coherence. Personalities that lack this unification, that are, for instance, fragmented or compartmentalized, cannot exercise autonomy; nor can they qualify as authentic (Meyers, 1989). In this sense, her view matches the view that was found in Ricoeur and Atkins (see §5.2.3, §5.3.3, §5.4), that unified selfhood is conditional for moral agency.

7.4 AUTHENTICITY IN THE CONTEXT OF AGING

As a guiding concept for aging well, authenticity is less explicitly present in mainstream gerontological discourse than autonomy. However, there do exist some perspectives that merit attention here, since they are concerned with authenticity-related notions like (spiritual) growth, ego-integrity, self-acceptance, et cetera. The fact that the term authenticity is not often used in these works does not mean that the underlying ideas do not cohere with the spirit of the authenticity discourse. I therefore present below some gerontological views which, in my opinion, defend a position related to the theme of authenticity. Three examples stand out in particular: 1) spiritual perspectives on aging, 2) existential perspectives on aging, and 3) art of living perspectives on aging.

7.4.1 Spiritual perspectives on aging

The most frequently occurring perspectives in gerontology that draw on the language of authenticity can be described as spiritual perspectives on aging. Examples can be found, for instance, in the works of Atchley (2009), Tornstam (1989, 2005), and Moody and Carroll (1999). An important similarity between spiritual perspectives on aging and the authenticity discourse is their emphasis on an (inner) development towards a truer, more fulfilled self. For instance, Atchley (2009) draws on several spiritual traditions that claim the existence of a pure core self that can be actualized by engaging in spiritual exercises such

as meditation. This spiritual self is regarded as more genuine, more pure, and more true to one's nature, than the self we tend to show to the external world.

Spiritual perspectives understand an authentic attitude towards oneself to include the ability to relate to one's own finitude and existential vulnerability in a meaningful way. They suggest ways in which later life can be perceived as a period of growth and flourishing despite, or maybe even because of, the confrontation with vulnerability (Laceulle, 2013). This makes the spiritual understanding of authenticity relevant in our search for a new frame for self-realization that enables a meaningful integration of existential vulnerability. A good example of a spiritual gerontological perspective congenial to authenticity discourse can be found in the theory of *gerotranscendence* (Tornstam, 1989, 2005). Gerotranscendence is conceptualized as a shift in the metaperspective accompanying aging, which may pertain to one's self, one's social relations or the broader cosmic reality. Although empirical evidence for the claim that these forms of transcendence are exclusive to older people is rather thin (Tornstam, 1994, 1997; Braam et al., 2006), the merit of Tornstam's gerotranscendence theory is that it draws attention to the possibility that later life may also have a potential for growth and development, which is often neglected in Western culture (Laceulle, 2011). Gerotranscendence theory claims that later life harbors a specific potential for spiritual self-development. Importantly, one of the features of this development is that people turn away from the hustle of everyday life and the pressures of social expectations. The assumption that one connects with a more true or authentic self by loosening oneself from social conventions shows interesting similarities with the classical perspective on authenticity, in particular with Rousseau's views.

Moody and Carroll's work *The five stages of the soul* (1999), which also describes a process of spiritual development typical of people beyond midlife, introduces an element that shows similarities with the authenticity discourse as well. Moody and Carroll argue that it is crucial to spiritual development that at some point in life one hears "the Call"; standing at a crossroad, one feels the awakening of a sense of urgency to change things, to re-evaluate one's orientation in life. Hearing this call is followed by the desire to answer it and go on a search, a journey of self-discovery with an unknown outcome. The way this process of hearing and answering the call is sketched shows interesting parallels with the experience of crisis or "disease", that existentialist thinkers like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche saw as the quintessential starting point of realizing a more authentic existence. Interestingly, the way Moody and Carroll (1999) describe the characteristics of the searching soul also shows striking similarities with the features Ferrara (1998) distinguished as characterizing an authentic personality: coherence, vitality, depth and maturity.

7.4.2 Existential perspectives on aging

The second example of the application of authenticity-related vocabulary in the context of aging studies is best described as existential gerontology. This term is not very prevalent, but it is used by some to accentuate their focus on matters of meaning related to later life (De Lange, 2007, 2008; Baars, 2012a). The term existential here solely indicates the focus on human existence and its meaning; its sources of inspiration are not restricted to existentialist philosophers. By using this terminology, existential gerontologists distinguish their own approach from predominantly biomedical or social-scientific discourses on aging that generally attract a lot more attention in the world of aging studies. They argue that aging should not just be regarded as a matter of biological senescence or as a demographical issue, but that more attention needs to be drawn to the existential dimension, i.e., the way people experience and give meaning to their own aging (Baars, 2012a; Baars & Phillipson, 2013; Kruse, 2013).

A first relevant example of the existential view can be found in De Lange (2007). He aims to develop an existential gerontological perspective that transcends the consumerist, activist cultural paradigm of self-invention which has been qualified as an age-defying narrative (see §3.3.3) in this study. Following Kierkegaard (1843/1959), De Lange (2007) argues that the existential reality of aging requires deeper and richer conceptualizations of the idea of personal growth or self-realization. These should be able to account for vulnerability, and be based on integrating and transcending limitations instead of conquering them. De Lange advocates a reading of self-realization as the “ethical engagement with one’s own life course”. He concretizes this aim by developing a model of five fundamental conditions that are needed in order to age well. These conditions include meeting one’s natural needs, being a valued member of social communities, accepting moral responsibility for one’s life, having the possibility to infuse one’s life with meaning by connecting it to some higher dimension, and finding a satisfactory balance between all these conditions. The fourth condition implying a process of self-transcendence in particular, shows similarities with the accounts of authenticity that have been discussed above, with the view of Kierkegaard (1843/1959) in particular, but also that of C. Taylor (1991). The fact that De Lange’s (2007) view is at odds with the classical essentialist, anti-social perspective of Rousseau (1754/1984, 1762/2003) and the Romanticists, makes his perspective all the more interesting for this study’s purposes.

A second relevant example of the existential perspective comes from Kruse (2013). He suggests an “anthropology of aging” that highlights seven themes, some of which are very congenial to the idea of authenticity as an aspect of self-realization. For instance, Kruse focuses strongly on the theme of “*Selbstgestaltung* [self-design, or self-realization]”, a term describing the motivation

to consciously shape one's life and identity according to one's own values, purposes and desires. This theme is highly congenial to the underlying ideas of authenticity discourse such as becoming who you truly are. But Kruse adds important considerations that suggest that this process of authentic self-realization should include finding a satisfactory relation to the dimension of existential vulnerability and the finitude of human life. This suggests a strong resemblance with the perspective defended in the current study, which is even further enforced by the fact that Kruse also emphasizes the social embedding of human beings, and the necessity of taking moral responsibility for one's life.

A third relevant example from the category of existential gerontological perspectives can be found in the work of Rentsch (2013). According to Rentsch, the typical late modern ideology of self-constitution (becoming who we are) requires an ongoing process of maturation and deepening self-knowledge. In later life, this task gains in importance because of the more acute confrontation with finitude. We should be careful, however, not to assume that aging – reaching a higher age – in itself provides a guarantee for such character-development. However, the life experience one has generated throughout a long(er) life does in principle offer chances for growth and development not always open to younger people. These potentials are easily overlooked by dominant cultural discourses about later life.

In its emphasis on becoming who you are and the confrontation with finitude, Rentsch's view seems a close match with the existentialist perspective on authenticity discussed above, in particular with the views of Nietzsche and Heidegger. However, interestingly, Rentsch's interpretation is different and more in sync with ancient Greco-Roman views about self-realization, which may provide an interesting bridge to the third thread of self-realization – virtue – which has its roots there (see chapter 8).

7.4.3 Art of living perspectives on aging

A third relevant line of gerontological thinking that draws upon ideas acquainted with the authenticity discourse is affiliated with the recent revival in moral philosophy of Greco-Roman views about “art of living” or self-care. The later works of Foucault that focus on how we act upon ourselves through the appropriation and application of “techniques of the self” have been highly influential in this development (Foucault, 1984/1992; Kekes, 2002; Nehamas, 1998; Dohmen, 2002, 2008, 2014; Schmid, 1998). Hadot (1995) argues that in the Greco-Roman world, philosophy was perceived as a practice, a way of living centered around concrete sets of spiritual exercises. One of the important purposes of these practices was learning how to die, or developing a satisfactory attitude towards the contingencies, vulnerability and finitude of life.

Lately, there have been some interesting attempts to connect these art of living perspectives to the field of aging studies. One of the most extensive and erudite recent works in this category is *Aging and the art of living* by Baars (2012a). Baars argues that late modernity is in need of a contemporary “art of aging”, that perceives aging as a social-existential process of living in time. This art of aging should be perceived as an ‘extended art of life’ (Baars, 2012a, p. 201). Two themes stand out in such an art of living/aging: finding a satisfactory attitude towards the fundamental vulnerability of the human condition, and realizing one’s unique potential as an individual human being. The art of living/aging perspective suggests that there is dignity and meaning to be found in an attitude of gracious and conscious acceptance of our existential vulnerability and our finitude, which we share with all other people. Importantly, our attitude towards finitude need not just pertain to (our own) death, even though thinkers like Heidegger (1927/1996) made a close connection between authenticity and consciousness of death. Baars states, by contrast, that finitude is at stake during our entire lifetime, a reality he describes by the term *finitization*. In fact, being aware of this may deepen the intensity with which we experience the events of our lives.

Baars (2012a) interprets Heidegger’s account of authenticity as one that opens *Dasein* for its own authentic possibilities. This assumes a dynamic relationship to all dimensions of time: past, present and future. In this sense, Baars underscores that there is a deep connection between our finitude and the second theme in the art of aging: the realization of our individual uniqueness, which is a fundamental assumption of the authenticity discourse as well (Baars, in press). Regarding the latter, Baars underscores that aging can be accompanied by creativity and deepening individuality. Cohen (2005, 2000) makes an equally convincing empirical case for the creative potentials of later life based on his practice as a geriatrician. On this point, arguments from the art of living/aging perspective show important similarities with ideas from the authenticity discourse. Realizing one’s potential for creativity and wisdom is seen as quintessential in the search for a good life. Ultimately, an art of aging should acknowledge both the vulnerability and the uniqueness and diversity of aging, ideally resulting in “a growing sensitivity for the unique qualities of vulnerable life” (Baars, 2012a, p. 201).

As a second example of the art of living perspective, Dohmen’s (2013) sketch for a “moral lifestyle for later life” can also be interpreted as an authenticity perspective applied to the context of aging. To him, the term moral lifestyle assumes that people equip themselves with the relevant attitudes to engage in a “practice of freedom”. Dohmen aims to give guidelines for such a practice that he believes are crucial in light of the life experiences of aging individuals. The dimensions of the moral lifestyle for later life that Dohmen suggests are the following:

- *Reflective distance*: this dimension pertains to the capability to critically distance oneself from the diversity of expectations, images and directives about aging circulating in our socio-cultural context.
- *Expropriation*: this dimension pertains to the capability to recognize the ways in which our upbringing and socialization have disciplined us, and to discover and to a certain degree learn to oppose the expropriating forces characteristic of our particular lives.
- *Appropriation*: this dimension entails acquiring autonomy (as positive freedom) by identifying with certain values and goals in our lives.
- *Orientation*: this dimension pertains to the qualitative evaluation of our goals and purposes, relating them to the value horizon of the culture and tradition we form a part of.
- *Engagement*: this dimension suggests that, since people are not isolated, autonomous self-realizers but fundamentally socially embedded, we should engage ourselves with the web of relationships and responsibilities we form a part of.
- *Integration and time*: this dimension assumes that our moral identity, expressed in our moral lifestyle, is inherently bound to time. To connect the dimensions of past, present and future, a moral lifestyle requires a certain amount of coherence or integration.
- *Serenity*: this dimension suggests that a moral lifestyle for later life encompasses the acquisition of an attitude of resignation and serenity towards tragic aspects of life that are inevitably beyond our control.
- *Finitude*: this last dimension requires asking ourselves what sort of person we have been, what kind of life we have lived, what our value and contribution has been in light of the inevitable finitude of human life.

In sum, I conclude that although authenticity is not a common term in gerontological discourse, ideas associated with it have nevertheless found their way into gerontological reflections on how to age well. This fact provides welcome support for the ambition of this study to apply the self-realization discourse to the context of aging in a meaningful way.

7.5 EVALUATION OF THE DISCUSSED AUTHENTICITY ACCOUNTS

This chapter has discussed a selection of authenticity accounts. The understanding of authenticity for the purposes of this study should cohere with the insights on narrative identity and moral agency that support this study's reframing of self-realization. At the beginning of this chapter, I identified two sets of problems with the authenticity discourse: assumptions regarding true selves that underlie many interpretations, and the disregarding or rejection of

social influences. A viable understanding of authenticity in the context of this study needs to provide a credible remedy for both problems. I will now evaluate the interpretations of authenticity discussed in this chapter for their ability to confront these issues.

- As we have seen, the views of Rousseau (1754/1984, 1762/2003) and his Romantic followers are problematically essentialist. The authentic self is perceived as a natural potential hidden deep inside a person, while the social context is exclusively presented as a source of grave trouble, obstructing the realization of authentic selfhood. The way I have conceptualized self-realization, narrative identity and moral agency does not match well with this interpretation. After all, I have repeatedly claimed that selves are best understood as socially embedded and narratively constituted, rather than essentialist. This view also implies that the influence of others is not perceived as inauthenticating, but as constitutive of who we are. Still, a valuable element to be retained from Rousseau for this study's view is his sensitivity to the fact that authenticity requires that we find a satisfactory relationship with inauthenticating influences, and that (moral) education plays a crucial role here. From the Romantics, on the other hand, we can learn that our identity need not be seen as a given entity, but that it can be perceived as a creation that evolves dynamically. Although the heroic Romantic ideal of making an artistic creation of oneself is not how I would prefer to see authenticity, the idea of self-creation is also present in a different form in the view that we narratively constitute ourselves.
- The existentialist view challenges the problematically essentialist assumptions underlying Rousseau's account. This makes it relevant to this study. Another advantage of the existentialist view is its strong awareness of the intrinsic connection of authenticity with a dimension of finitude and existential vulnerability. From the perspective of this study, it is highly valuable that the existentialists emphasize how authentic self-realization presupposes finding a viable attitude towards this dimension. Moreover, the Nietzschean idea of becoming who/what you are is very congenial to our purpose of developing a perspective on self-realization that permits us to see moral self-development as a lifelong process. However, when it comes to the social embedding of human beings, the existential views remain unsatisfactory. Existentialist thinkers – with the possible exception of De Beauvoir (1947) – generally assume an antagonistic perspective that opposes the self and the other. They present the individual moral agent as an atomistic, sometimes even solipsistic being. The individual is principally opposed to others, who are mainly perceived in negative terms as a cause of inauthenticity. Furthermore, though Heidegger's (1927/1996) phenomenological account seems congenial to our view of identity, his perspective ultimately leads us in a dif-

ferent direction. Instead of focusing on the importance of intersubjectivity, Heidegger moves towards a view of authentic existence that seems highly self-contained, and excludes the possibility of relationships with others that are advantageous, indeed indispensable, for leading a good life.

- C. Taylor's (1991) view of authenticity is promising when it comes to tackling both the problem of an essentialist self and the problem of a negative evaluation of social influence for authenticity. His view of moral agents as embedded in a socio-cultural context that is constitutive of their moral identity shows close affiliation with this study's suggested account of identity. Moreover, his insistence upon the need to relate to individual-transcending horizons of meaning and moral value matches my view that the self manifested in self-realization is not a solely individual construction, but is formed in social practices with a background of cultural norms and values that cannot be ignored. However, C. Taylor's account may be questioned for its lack of sensitivity for the dangers of conformism to the status quo of a given socio-cultural horizon. Some situations may require standing up to existing value-frameworks and the practices that flow from them. Such situations call for moral agents who have the ability to resist their own social and cultural background. Importantly, this resistance presupposes that to some extent one separates oneself from one's embedding in socio-cultural practices. This is not to occupy the independent atomistic position presupposed by the neoliberalist inspired philosophical perspectives which this study has repeatedly rejected. Instead, it is to take a critical position against the status quo and engage in a search for alternative practices. The importance of such strong moral agency is in danger of getting lost from sight if our account of authenticity focuses too strongly on the intersubjective constitution and socio-cultural embedding of human life, as seems to be the case in C. Taylor's work.
- Finally, a merit of Meyers' (2000) view of authenticity is that she seems to remedy precisely this objection raised against C. Taylor's (1991) view. Contrary to C. Taylor, Meyers shows a great sensitivity to the fact that people are not just positioned against the background of a cultural horizon of meaning and morality as a given reality, but that their positioning strongly depends on the social categories they belong to, and is highly influenced by power structures. In turn, Meyers' view shows us that our socio-cultural positioning strongly impacts our opportunities to be recognized and to function as self-realizing, authentic and autonomous moral agents. The greatest merit of Meyers' view, however, is that her awareness of the influence of social structures does not cause her to reject authenticity and autonomy as viable moral ideals. Instead, she suggests that we should conceptualize them in a different manner, and focus on the competencies that we need to develop

ourselves as authentic selves in the social and moral practices of everyday life.

7.6 CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AUTHENTICITY AS A SOCIAL AND MORAL PRACTICE

In this final section, I attempt to provide a tentative sketch of the view of authenticity advanced in this study. It is my contention that, in order to match this study's developing reframed understanding of self-realization, authenticity is best conceptualized as a *social and moral practice*, a qualification that will be clarified below.

Let me begin by returning to Ferrara's (1998) typology of authenticity views (see §7.2). I stated that my perspective on self-realization calls for an intersubjective interpretation of authenticity instead of a substantialist interpretation. Given all that has been discussed about this study's understanding of the person/moral agent in chapters 4 and 5, this choice should not be surprising. The same obviousness applies to the fact that the authenticity account this study advances should be seen as reflective in Ferrara's typology. However, regarding the opposition between an integrative and an antagonistic conception, as well as a centered and a decentered notion of the self, I take an intermediate position that merits some further clarification.

First, although this study shares the insight that our socio-cultural embedding is constitutive of who we are (as in the integrative conception), a satisfactory conception of authenticity should also accommodate the possibility that we stand up to this background (as suggested by the antagonistic conception). Second, as argued in §5.2.3, although the decentered view is right that narratives need to be flexible and open enough to accommodate unanticipated experiences, it does not mean that we can live with narratives that are totally fragmented and have no center. While a centered view of the self neglects the reality of things that escape the coherence of the narrative framework, a fully decentered view of the self may ultimately be no more than an academic abstraction (Guignon, 2004). Hence my contention that we should opt for an intermediate position between a centered and a decentered view of authenticity.

When analyzed in terms of Ferrara's (1998) typology, Meyers' (2000) view seems to be the closest match with the account of authenticity suggested in this study. Her view is intersubjective, reflective, and takes an intermediate position in the centered-decentered and the integrative-antagonistic dichotomies. However, the perspective of the current study suggests that there is still an element that needs to be added to my conceptualization of authenticity. This is not satisfactorily addressed in any of the discussed views so far, although C. Taylor (1991) does provide some leads. This additional element pertains to the

dialogical moral relationship between our self and others, which is fueled by our identification with an ethical aim, a value orientation to which we want to remain true. In previous chapters, Ricoeur's (1992) term *self-constancy* was used to describe this dimension of our (aspired) identity (see §5.4, §6.6).

Drawing on the notion of self-constancy may, I believe, also be helpful to clarify my conceptualization of authenticity as a social and moral practice. Let me start with how the interpretation of narrative identity and moral agency based on Ricoeur's (1992) notion of self-constancy relates to the idea of being true to oneself which is quintessential to the discourse on authenticity. This can be clarified by recalling the difference made by Trilling (1971) between sincerity and authenticity (see §7.2). As previously mentioned, Trilling presents sincerity as the early modern predecessor of authenticity. Both concepts address the topic of being true to yourself, but importantly, in the case of sincerity this trueness has an instrumental social function: it is a means to assure that one is also regarded as reliable by others, which is important for one's social position in the community. By contrast, authenticity approaches trueness as an end in itself, with a moral value independent from one's relation to others. Our analysis of fundamental concepts of the self-realization discourse so far – discussing identity, (moral) agency and autonomy – strongly tends towards an account that emphasizes the equal and interconnected importance of the relation of agents to themselves (manifested in Trilling's idea of authenticity) and the relation of agents to other people (manifested in Trilling's idea of sincerity).

The advantage of Ricoeur's (1992) notion of self-constancy is that it addresses the relationship between the two forms of being true to oneself which Trilling (1971) discusses under the headings of sincerity and authenticity. In Trilling's analysis, it is theoretically possible to be authentic but to fall short of being reliable to other people. It is also possible to practice sincerity and still be perceived as inauthentic, as Trilling (1971) and Ferrara (1998) both admit. From the perspective of self-constancy, however, both situations would be experienced as problematic because they raise conflicts regarding people's moral identity. Self-constancy acknowledges that the self and other are engaged in a social and moral practice of holding each other in their mutual identities (cf. Lindemann, 2014, see also §5.3.2).

The distinction between trueness as a means and trueness as an end in itself evaporates here; in self-constancy trueness to oneself is both means and end at the same time, because the self and other are seen as standing in a dialogical relationship to each other. The notion of self-constancy acknowledges our intersubjective connectedness with others, while remaining aware of the importance of our status as individual moral agents: *I* am the one making commitments and *I* am the one ultimately responsible for answering them. Acknowledging the constitutive importance of other people and of existing horizons of meaning, as C. Taylor (1991) advocates, does not diminish this moral

responsibility for our selfhood. Introducing the notion of self-constancy to the authenticity discourse therefore enables conceptualizing authenticity as a social and moral practice in which we strive, together with others, towards a good life. This view has the following implications and advantages:

- By choosing the term *practice*, it is underscored that authenticity is *enacted* in concrete life situations. Although authenticity remains a quality of persons and not of actions, this quality is necessarily expressed through actions in concrete practices. For example, I assure a friend that I will give her my honest opinion on an important decision that she is about to make. I feel confident about making this promise because honesty is an important part of the ideal self I aspire to be or become. To qualify as authentic in this situation would require that I actually do tell my friend the truth when she asks me. Only then would I be true to the value orientation that makes me commit to honesty. Following Meyers (2000), this account thus focuses on the process of realizing the truthfulness that is traditionally implied by the authenticity discourse, instead of on the state in which one has supposedly realized it. This has the added advantage of escaping the essentialism-objection raised against authenticity discourse.
- By qualifying the practice of authenticity as *social*, I stress that qualifying as an authentic self depends on whether others *recognize* my authenticity. It makes no sense to make a promise to be honest if there is no one who cares that I will keep it. In the previous case this other is my friend, whose presence in my life makes me want to hold my word instead of betray my authentic self. This presumes that the claim to authenticity can only be made and honored in the context of what I have previously described, drawing on Lindemann (2014), as the social practice of identity (see §5.3.2).
- The conceptualization of authenticity as a social practice results in a perception of the other that seeks to avoid the instrumental and antagonistic perception of others in traditional accounts of authenticity like the views of Rousseau (1754/1984) or of the existentialists. Although the suggested view of authenticity certainly acknowledges the possibility of conflict between the self and other (for instance, my honesty may result in tension between my friend and me if the opinion I expressed is not what she thought I would say), it has the fundamental advantage of recognizing that the self and other need each other, for they are engaged in authenticity as a practice *together*.
- By presenting authenticity as a practice that is not only social but also *moral*, I underscore that being an authentic self inherently touches upon the *ethical* dimension of human existence (which conveniently precludes the charge of aestheticism sometimes raised against views of authenticity). The intention to live up to my word - actually being honest in the example sketched above - presupposes a fundamental moral engagement with the

good of both myself and the other. As any interpretation of authenticity, this interpretation too presupposes an expression of who I truly am, as well as an ideal self that I strive to become. Authenticity is a moral practice because the ideal self I want to become assumes an identification with an ethical dimension (in this case the value attached to honesty) that I hope to realize or embody. What Ricoeur (1992) teaches us, however, is that my identification with what constitutes the good for me (the ethical dimension mentioned above) cannot be isolated from my engagement with the good of others. This underscores that in my view of authenticity, the social and moral dimensions are intrinsically connected.