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LEVEL: 8

[Chapter 1]

Personas, IROGs, and Authenticity

[URL: Authenticity]

SECTIONS (& perhaps subsections):

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- II The Concept of a Persona
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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

There is as much difference between us and ourselves as between us and others.
— Montaigne (found at <http://www.addall.com>)

At the intrapersonal level, we are authentic – to ourselves, at least, and potentially to others – in the integration of all our personas, each having its own sense of the Good, each having its allotted place and time, each willingly subordinated to the whole (or at least acquiescing in its part in the whole). Our authentic self is that overall sense of the Good.

This sense of the Good is malleable. One's encounters with the world, or even simple self-reflection, may change elements or relations among elements, necessitating a restructuring of the overall organization of one's sense of the Good. This kind of change is necessary; in my

experience, people who don't change spend increasing psychic energy resisting change. As Brad Blanton (personal communication) puts it, "A neurotic is someone for whom the world *must* be other than it is." This adaptive change in one's sense of the Good maintains one's authenticity; it would indeed be a foolish consistency to cling to something not actually held as Good. However, this sort of change differs from the change back and forth between two competing senses of the Good. I cannot say who I am if I can't tell from moment to moment which view of the Good will be dominant. I personally vacillate between believing that I don't work as hard as I should and believing that I'm doing more than any reasonable person should. So if you were to ask me how I viewed myself as a worker, my answer would depend on the mood I was in, subject to change without notice.

Within this overall, authentic sense of the Good, it isn't really meaningful to speak of separate, individual personas; all exist in relation to each other. Each may perform individually, but this performance is still made in recognition of the more general sense of the Good. A basketball team provides an analogy. Even though each of the five players on the court act individually, they nevertheless do so in view of their shared Good of winning the game.¹ A certain persona may even screw up, hampering one's pursuit of the overall sense of the Good, but by itself this does not call that overall sense into question.

¹Or even, more specifically, in view of the specific game plan decided on ahead of time.

I The Problem of Pursuing Multiple Goods

It often occurs – indeed, it seems to be the human condition itself – that not all Goods can be satisfied simultaneously. This is true both interpersonally and intrapersonally. Interpersonally, it often occurs that we can't figure out any way to satisfy both your sense of the Good (or some aspect of it) and mine. You say tomāto and I say tomāto. You want stores closed on your holy day, Sunday, and open on my holy day, Tuesday; I want the reverse. Intrapersonally, it often occurs that a person can't figure out a way to satisfy all her senses of the Good. She wants to climb mountains and swim in the ocean; she wants to keep the Sabbath and to go shopping. As finite, embodied humans we seem fated to spend our lives making such choices. Intrapersonally, we need resolution, choice, focus, self-construction. We need to decide what Good(s) to pursue, given the limits of our circumstances and desires. Interpersonally, we need to coordinate our actions to achieve our disparate Goods. We need to decide how to behave in relation to each other.

Discourse about senses of the Good is a wooing, not an abduction. One may legitimately invite people to share one's sense of the Good, explain one's sense of it, tell of one's experience of it, "testify" to it,² model it in one's life, even exhort or proselytize on behalf of it. However, one cannot meaningfully badger, force, demand, or command others to accept it.³ As with moral discourse, persuasion in this area can come only from "the unforced force of the better argument", to use Habermas's famous characterization. We need not specify here what constitutes "an

²The concept of "testimony" is discussed in Gutmann & Thompson (1997:136-137), using as an example Sen. Carol Moseley Braun's speech on the Confederate flag. Gutmann & Thompson cite hooks (1990:27), as cited in Sanders (1993:27).

³See ["Advertising and Authenticity"](#).

argument” in this domain, because it really doesn’t matter.

II The Concept of a Persona

In general, people pursue many Goods. As I write this, for example, my consciousness flashes back and forth among the desire to write (and hence the behavior of writing this), my awareness of others in this public space (and hence my behavior of pulling the cuffs of my pants down over my socks), the desire to finish other work I have with me, and so on. Taken together, these behaviors feel to me not like the random pursuit of unreconciled Goods but instead like the pursuit of my overall, integrated Good.⁴ For purposes of exposition, however, I am going to use the example of a more elementary Good, namely, my desire to eat the sweet roll lying before me.

In this example, all of my attention and activity is oriented to the single end of eating the sweet roll. This state of being I will call a “persona”. Because this term has been used in the academic literature in other ways and with other connotations, I need to clarify it before proceeding with the exposition.⁵ First, a persona is not a personality fragment. In my usage, “persona” denotes a mere focusing of a complete person, not a shard of a shattered whole.

I also distinguish the term from [xx Erving?] Goffman’s (19xx) usage. To Goffman, a “persona” is a mask people present to the world: the public persona as opposed to the real person behind it. The emphasis in that usage is on the *lack* of authenticity. Goffman’s “persona” does not specifically assume that people are hiding their real selves, since their public and private faces

⁴This is an idealization of my experience, naturally. I struggle with many unreconciled Goods, e.g., my desire to play Baldur’s Gate (a video game) instead of doing any of the above.

⁵My thanks to Uwe Stuecher for calling my attention to the possible confusions with this term. I welcome suggestions for better terms.

may be the same, but it highlights the possibility that the two differ, and it carries no connotation that the actor might be distressed over a difference. As used here, persona is not about public vs. private faces; not until Chapter 2 will we take up our relations with others. In the ways of relating perspective, the concept of persona highlights the possibility and concrete nature of conflicts arising from one's pursuit of different Goods – the possibility of conflict within oneself.

I also want to distinguish “persona” from “role”. In role theory, the concept of role highlights the different pressures and social expectations placed on people. The concept is close to “persona” but is more restrictive. Roles arise from social expectations, but personas arise from one's own sense of the Good, which might not be socially sanctioned. Furthermore, role tends to take for granted (or at least focus our attention on) people's agreement with social expectations,⁶ while the concept of persona makes no assumption that people's sense of the Good need not include adherence to any given role. [xx Ouch. I'm sure there's an idea lurking in this last, but I can't now recall it.]

Finally, these other concepts have at least a flavor of highlighting behavior that is not fully human. A role is not a real person. Goffman's “persona” is only a mask, not a real person. In the ways of relating perspective, however, personas are fully human. It is to this important aspect of the concept that we now turn.

⁶This is not a necessary part of role theory, however, and without knowing role theory very well, I still assume that many role theorists do focus on people's degree of adherence to role expectations.

III Personae Are Fully Human

Even though personae are focused on a single Good, there is nothing inhuman or even less-than-fully-human about them. Granted, there would be something less-than-fully-human about someone whose entire life was dedicated to the pursuit of eating sweet rolls, never concerned with companionship, or eating vegetables, or spiritual life, or sleeping, etc. But there is nothing really inhuman about people getting wrapped up in something to such an extent that their whole being is focused upon it.⁷

Let's try a thought experiment. Imagine a sweet roll placed across the room from you. Imagine as you read this that you get hungrier and hungrier, so that you begin to focus on this sweet roll. You can smell its cinnamon and its warm bread. You can see its details: the folds of the dough, the sheen of butter, the bright reflections off the glaze, the chunks of pecans on it. (Or are they walnuts? – look closely!) You imagine getting it: the quickest way to get out of your chair and stride over to it, the danger that others will appear to take it (and how to elbow them aside); where to eat it undisturbed. You imagine how it will feel in your hand: the softness of the roll, the stickiness of the sugar, the slight greasiness of the butter, the crackle as the glaze fractures. You ready your body: your muscles tense and your body shifts, your mouth starts to

⁷A bit of family history or lore: My father told me that when he worked late on a problem, he knew it was time to leave when he could no longer remember his telephone number. Maybe this sounds dreadful, but I don't think it is, and I don't think he experienced it that way. Rather, he enjoyed his work so much that as quitting time came and went, all his waning blood sugar was focused on the problem at hand. "Forgetting his telephone number" was simply his personal marker of when it was time to stop playing. My guess is that anyone who has a passion for anything has this same pattern of focus. Certainly I do.

produce saliva, your stomach starts to produce gastric juices, your intestines start to growl.⁸ For the moment in which your attention is thus fixed on the sweet roll – for the moment in which the one persona has full play – you are still fully human ... just a very, very hungry human.

This idea can be a little frightening, bringing insanity to mind. We fear and reject the compulsions and fixations of serial killers, drug addicts, child molesters, and so on. Even when such compulsions and fixations do not threaten others, we still reject this image of humanness. But notice that the inhumanness comes from not from the Good involved or our involvement with it; rather, it comes from a sense that there is something strange about someone living their life so totally focused on something. And then recall that the ways of relating perspective does not advocate living one's entire life as this one persona; rather, the persona is just something that flashes by as one of many.⁹

⁸Lest this be taken as merely a recital of my own psychopathology, I note that the same technique is used in advertising. Here's what I find on my Shredded Wheat box (ellipses as in the original):

When you sit down to a bowl of POST Shredded Wheat it's more than a great way to start your day, it's an experience. Breaking each crunchy biscuit...maybe adding some fruit...pouring the milk...taking your first delicious bite. Knowing that what you're doing is so good, so right.

Notice how this text tries to evoke and bring to awareness as many personas as possible that are positively attached to the product. "Starting your day well"; the tactile and kinesthetic feel of crunchiness; the child-like pleasure of playing with food ("breaking it up"); the love of fruit and/or of the basic cereal & milk formula; the taste; health; morality. All of this in a mere fifty words.

⁹Note somewhere in here that actors are said to lose themselves in their roles. This has a double meaning: first, their ability to focus their whole being on the role as they play it, and second, the risk they take in bringing in this new persona into their psyche. The latter can cause them great stress, since the new persona can bring yet another sense of the Good to the bargaining table, so to speak. And yet there is really something both courageous and noble in this enterprise of acting: courageous, in their willingness to put their very personality structure at risk,

IV What Sort of Reality Do Personas Have?

In what sense, if any, are personas real? My only claim here is that they are a useful metaphor for how I behave and see others behaving. Perhaps neurophysiology will some day show the organic basis of this metaphor – or disprove it altogether, perhaps. But recall that the purpose of this work is only to provide an account of our experience of authenticity, morality, and social justice; that account can only be tested on the basis of whether it makes sense to oneself. Obviously these do make sense for me. I see my personas speaking in the different figures in my dreams. I see them in the sorts of conflicts I experience and the alternatives between which I'm forced to choose. I experience them when I am taken over by one of them – like when I fly into a rage at someone. I experience them when I am able to reenact their weird behavior during a counseling session – in slow motion, so to speak.

I am not opposed to other understandings of the dynamics of self. Every counselor and personality psychologist has such an understanding. All I can do is offer my own understanding in the belief that it will advance or maybe even displace those other accounts.

and noble, in their refusal to ignore the experience of another human. But these qualities do not pertain to actors who simply “play themselves” (or who have developed a single stage persona and only play that persona – which, having been made a part of themselves, is now the same as playing oneself).

V The Problems of Having a Multiplicity of Goods and Personas

Xx [The point of this section is simply to point out that it is inevitable and ordinary that wanting many things creates problem.]

[Note in passing that this is a more complex problem than the economist's paradigmatic problem of the interrelationship among limited inputs, limited outputs, and unlimited wants. In the ways of relating perspective, Goods are not seen as of infinite extent, and are not reduced to purely consumption goods, and are limited by the arbitrary, variable, contingent complexities of human life and desires.]

[Repression is not really an option, or at least I view it as not a healthy one. Maybe this is where I should go into the issue about how empathy (in the intrapersonal sense) is automatic? And does this tie into the issue of the important thing being where one focuses one's attention?]

[But recall, as I said earlier (in "The Sense of the Good", last §) that this conflict doesn't make one Good good and the other bad. The issue isn't that the two Goods are in conflict but just that we can't figure out a way to reconcile them. No moral judgment yet; no others considered here.]

VI Reconciling Conflicting Goods through IROGs [Internal Reconciliations of the Good]

[THIS NEEDS ELABORATION.]

[Nevertheless, must resolve in the here and now. Embodiedness; thrownness; contingency. Or maybe I've already said this – or *need to* say this – in Section IV.]

[IROGs then become Goods – but higher-order Goods – in themselves.]

The usual means of resolution is to create a hierarchical system: choice *among* goals; subordination of one goal to another: tolerance of uncertainty of choice. Result: a higher-order

system that is quasi-stable.¹⁰ Even if at one moment I'm preoccupied with one Good, that isn't all of who I am.

[Somewhere in here note the usefulness of talking to oneself – putting one persona's out there where other personas can take a look at it. The same with writing one's thoughts down. *The written is a way to overcome dissociation.*]

VII IROGs are Non-rational and Contingent

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VIII The Concept of Authenticity

The reconciliation among personas enables one to be authentic within oneself and sincere / truthful to others. Authenticity within oneself means a recognition of, acceptance of, and reconciliation among all one's personas, so that actions one takes are actions of an undivided, coherent¹¹ self, not temporary victories of different warring personas. I distinguish this from what Habermas terms "truthfulness" [*Wahrhaftigkeit*], because authenticity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for truthfulness. To tell the truth about one's knowledge, understandings, beliefs, sense of the Good, intentions, etc. – in short, to faithfully report one's internal experience – requires that one know them in the first place. If I have no self but only warring

¹⁰In other words, it can change, but not like a ping-pong match in either speed or structure. I've changed my views on abortion several times in my life, but as a result of deeper consideration, not just reversing field, and the changes took place over a matter of months or years, not days or minutes.

¹¹My thanks to Don Kurtz for suggesting this characterization.

personas, then each of those personas will have its own tale to tell and can make promises only for itself. To be truthful requires one knows the truth of oneself. However, truthfulness also requires that the authentic self choose to reveal itself to the other. To use Habermas's terms, even in my authenticity I might choose strategic action over communicative action.

Let me note that use of THE TERM "authenticity" implies the existence of some knowable, absolute "AUTHENTIC self", reached at the end of the process of reconciliation among personas. The term thus subordinates the process of *coming to coherence* to the end state sought, while in fact the only thing we can know is the FORMER. While a moment of apparent stability may occur in the midst of that process, it may be only a way-station on a longer trip. We can never know whether we have reached the end.

My use of the term "authenticity" may lead you to believe that I am proposing a "fascism of reconciliation", that is, the dominance of the way-station and the subordination of the process.¹² Every sense of self is contingent. We have no alternative but to live our lives as if it were an absolute truth, but the potential always exists that conflicts will arise that require a new, more stable sense of self.

[xx I'm not sure that I need to include any of the rest of this section. But here is what I had previously:] For me to be "authentic" means for me to have a clear Sense of the Good, so that my pursuit of my various specific Goods fit together. Lacking authenticity, I'm unable to say what I'm doing at any particular point: sometimes I act to pursue a Good, sometimes I act against it – and I have no idea how to reconcile these various behaviors.

Authenticity has two faces: internal and external; these are each described below.

¹²I appreciate Don Kurtz for pointing out this problem.

A. Internal authenticity

Internal authenticity means one experiences oneself as a unity. Different Goods come and go; different opportunities; but all handled. Not all Goods *achieved*, but agreement among the personas on how they are to be *pursued*.

The opposite here is the “childish” conflict; inability to choose a path. Different personas can’t agree, and get into fights; who wins is contingent, accidental, not experience as under one’s control, not one’s choice. The experience of cognitive dissonance. Piaget’s genetic epistemology and the drive for equilibration. Also repression of one persona by an other or others.

The solution is the hierarchy of Goods. That’s what was latent in my earlier remarks.

B. External authenticity

Again, two meanings, depending on whether we take strategic action into account.

One meaning is “strategic external authenticity”. I might be deceptive in communicating to you my sense of the Good. This gets into the issue of interpersonal morality, so I’ll delay it until the next chapter. The other meaning is what I call “simple external authenticity”. This is a reflection of internal authenticity. You can know who I am, because I know who I am. A mass of battling personas vs. an overall presentation. You may not understand how I reconcile the various parts, but I do, and if I think long enough, I can probably explain how.

IX IROGs are Non-rational and Contingent

[xx I need to note that I'm not advocating the fascism of pseudo-authenticity. Problems remain around the issue of what happens when the personas don't agree. I will not address that until Chapter 4, because the issue is better-understood as a conflict between people. But the solution applies to personas as well.] [I appreciate Don Kurtz for calling this issue to my attention.]

[xx From earlier, somewhat confused notes: "Sometimes I eat carrots, sometimes sweet rolls; and I'm not compulsive either way. The important thing, however, is that I *acknowledge* them. We will return to this in xx essay."]

X Case Study: Why Be Authentic? The Good of Authenticity

Why be authentic? This is a slippery question, one worth clarifying.

A. Two ways to understand the question

To begin with, even though the question is directed at you, asks an answer of you, it does not make clear who the speaker is or what kind of answer is sought. Is this (i) a question one can ask only of oneself, or is it (ii) a question others can ask of you? In the first case, the question contemplates a situation in which one is choosing whether to pursue a path leading to authenticity or to some other good. In the second case, the question contemplates a situation in which others want you to justify to them your pursuit of authenticity.

These two cases also contemplate two different sorts of answers. In the first case, the question asks you to assess for yourself alone the merits of choosing authenticity. One simply asks oneself whether, in one's own estimation, authenticity is one of one's Goods and of what its

Good consists. Is it an absolute Good, sufficient unto itself? Is it an IROG, deriving its Goodness from its facilitation of more primary Goods? In the second case, the question asks you to provide a reason why the questioner(s) *should* be authentic. The questioner isn't asking you to assist her in thinking out her response to the issue of authenticity, i.e., helping her answer the question in its first sense, but rather is asking you to provide an interpersonally valid argument, one that will force her (even if that force is only Habermas's "unforced force of the better argument") to choose authenticity – or at least to feel morally would to do so, whatever her actual choice in the event.

The two views of the question we can term the "intrapersonal" and the "interpersonal" / "moral", whether we are considering who the speaker is or what sort of answer is contemplated. Now, there are certainly ways in which one's internal authenticity affects other people, e.g., in one's ability to make binding commitments. If I have no authenticity, then any agreement between us I make is really only between you and one of my personas and thus may be abrogated when any other persona takes command. You can't depend on my word. However, such issues of interpersonal morality are not raised until the next chapter, where the question then becomes not "why be authentic?" but rather "Why be moral?" In this chapter we are dealing with the intrapersonal only, and we are concerned only with the first view of the question: one's asking oneself in what way authenticity is part of one's Good.

Given that one's Good is individual, there seems little more to be said here. One could suggest general considerations for making personal decisions, but in the end those are pretty banal: "Consider the consequences of choosing authenticity and the consequences of not choosing it." Duh. "Ask yourself how you would feel if you chose ..." etc. – things that a

nondirective therapist might ask. For that matter, let the therapist be directive, presenting one the issue as she sees it, as long as it is always recognized that here views are simply to stimulate thought, not to impose her perspective.¹³ In the end, or so is implicit in the question, one figures out the extent to which authenticity is part of one's Good, chooses accordingly, and that's that.

B. An unsatisfactory answer; a different question

I find that answer unsatisfactory, and I hope you do as well. It leaves me with a sense of having missed something, as if I were playing with empty formalities rather than real people. In particular, the idea of “choosing” between authenticity and inauthenticity seems false. Let me make an analogy to Piaget's conservation experiments – say, the “pouring water” experiment. Could one meaningfully ask the child to choose between the recognition that the amounts of water are the same and the conviction that they are different? To my mind, the question answers itself. If the choice is to be meaningful, then the child must fully understand both possibilities. But once having recognized that (and why) the water is conserved, she cannot then will herself to be ignorant of it. Some external force may be able to force her to deny her knowledge, as Smedslund (19xx) famously showed, or to dissociate (one persona knowing the water is conserved and other personas failing to recognize it). But such denials and dissociations are necessarily a response to externally applied force – or at least I can't think of any other reason for her to ignore what is plain to her. So if we return to the original issue of authenticity, it seems to me that the question assumes an impossibility: that authenticity is something to be chosen. As

¹³I'm not recommending this as a standard therapeutic practice. It is useful and in the end necessary, I believe, but careful groundwork has to be laid to ensure that both parties are clear about the purpose of such suggestions.

with the conservation experiment, external forces may force one into inauthenticity (or at least to behave so), but intrapersonally, at least, one cannot choose it.

C. The lived experience of authenticity and inauthenticity

I consider the above a satisfactory formal resolution of the problem of dealing with the question, “Why be authentic?” But I don’t want to leave it there, because formalism risks distorting actual experience. I will therefore end this section and chapter by talking about the lived experience of authenticity and inauthenticity. This will reveal something of why the issue is so important to me. I want to caution you against the so-called “genetic fallacy” – believing that because one understands the origins of an idea, the idea itself can be discounted. I may have *come to* my understandings through experiences different from yours, but that doesn’t make the understandings wrong. Nor does it make them right, of course. As I said in the [Introduction](#) to this work, I cannot force you into agreement. All I can do is describe things so clearly that you recognize them within yourself. Perhaps at first blush you recognize them, but not in any immediate way: “Well, yes, I can see that one might think that way and how, given your experience, Steve, you might find it important to believe that way. But I just don’t find it as important. Even if your analysis is true in some sense, describing well something inside me, I have other truths I also need to consider, truths leading in directions contrary to your larger project.” All I can assert is that in the end, due to the understandings presented here and elsewhere in this work, you will come to accept this perspective as the only one making sense to you. And in best dialectical fashion, if you do not arrive at this perspective, then discourse will help us correct our perspectives to whatever respective extent seems necessary. Until then,

however, I must claim, even recognizing that I have no lock on the Truth and inviting discourse, that you will in the end agree with me. As Habermas says, we are always already in the position of making assertions absolutely from what is only a contingent position.

O.k. – on to the human experience. Just two days ago from writing this I received a documentary film, “Treading Water” (Lee & Mikkelson 2001), produced by a former student of mine – Dawn Mikkelson – about what it is like to be queer in Northern Minnesota. One striking part of the film was the paired grief and joy expressed by several of the people interviewed – joy from the liberation they are experiencing after coming out as queer, and grief at the years of being closeted, of hiding their sexuality, of having to sneak around, of constant fear of exposure, of confusion and unhappiness from their denial of their real selves. I was particularly struck by the portrayal of “xx”, who had turned from a shy, uncertain man to a man emotionally secure, self-possessed, articulate, on the march – literally on the march too, since the film showed him organizing and participating in a gay pride march.

Also striking were people’s descriptions of what the Main Club meant to them. (The Main Club was a gay & lesbian bar in Duluth-Superior, and a political and social hub of the gay community in the region.) “Meant” as in the past tense, since it had been destroyed seven years earlier by a fire of undetermined origin. What the interviewees spoke of, and what brought tears to their eyes, was the sense of safety they experienced there. Everyone needs a place of safety to take off their armor and scratch; the Main Club was one such place – for many of them the only place, it appears. I got a renewed understanding from those tears of what heavy armor they had to wear – not from their complaints about the Evils of Gay Oppression but simply from how much that place of safety meant to them, that place where they could be themselves, that place of

authenticity.

My own experience ... well, let me situate what I say before I say it. To begin with, whatever I recount about my hard time as a child is a statement of my experience, not an attack. No one has the parents or the childhood that all children should have: not me, not you, not my ex-wives, not my parents, not my daughter, not her daughter. And no parent intends to be a bad parent; we are all doing the best we can while in the midst of the conflicts among our personas. So I'm not whining about this; I am at peace with my childhood and my family.

Nor am I claiming a uniquely difficult childhood. I never went hungry, always had clothes, had parents who loved me (within the above-noted limits imposed by their distresses, of course). All I'm saying, I suppose, is that this *was* my experience, and as such is the human testimony I have as much right as anyone to give. Some aspects are specific to me, obviously, but I write in the belief that you will recognize the nature of the underlying struggle within yourself.

Finally, as is argued by so many contributors to Queen & Schimel's (1997) *PoMoSexuals*, including Carol Queen (1997) herself, and as is conveyed by the very structure of this kaleidoscopic book, sexual categories are meaningless, at least when they serve only as Procrustean beds for our understandings of each other, categories that obstruct our understanding of each other rather than facilitate it. So both to maintain my own privacy and to emphasize that categorizations aren't the point here, I'm not going to discuss the specifics of how my authentic self coped (or didn't cope) with childhood.¹⁴ What's important to understand is that in my family's culture, certain things were simply not accepted – and determinedly not spoken of, so

¹⁴Bizarre sexuality? Politically incorrect politics? Unacceptable emotions? Drugs? Choice of friends? A secret marriage? Religious conversion? Preferring Bach to Brahms? Kleptomania? Bank robbery? All of the above? Something else? Heh heh heh.

that I could not even conceive of certain issues *as* issues, i.e., as sites of reasonable contention. Ours was a “liberal” family, or so the story went, and in fact many areas were open to free debate, areas where children’s opinions and choices had some weight. But that very openness contributed in its own way to repression, much as Marcuse (1965) described it in his essay, “Repressive Tolerance”. The openness in some areas made it hard for me, at least, and at least as a child, to understand that there was repression going on. After all, if my parents weren’t willing to confront who I was, even though they were Very Tolerant, that must mean that I was truly awful for doing / thinking / being who I was. So, like the people in “Treading Water”, I spent a lot of my life with an important part of me convinced I was a bad person: hiding; lying; being sneaky and mean; and unable to have real friends, since being a friend means both interest in the other as s/he really is and willingness to be real oneself. I spent much of my life living out “the philosophy of the subject”: calculating, individualistic, strategic, alienated from others. Only since, say, 1998 – to pick the year of an important event, albeit one with its own history – have I come to recover myself. I could not have written this work before now, because my basic justification – that my real task is simply to present something that *you* come to recognize and agree with, not an argument to force you into agreement – would have been inconceivable to me, since I believed I had no worth and therefore only impersonal logic made me worth listening to. That’s why authenticity means so much to me, because inauthenticity was hell. Not logic alone, but most centrally my lived experience, have led me to this perspective.

My sense is that my experience is a common one, although you will have had a different specific experience. Metaphorically, each of us is queer. Many people fear to be discovered – often with reason, given the narrowness of our society’s tolerance – and flee to the security of an

outward conformity. Many people make their compromises so early that they forget why (or even that) they made them, so that their hidden personas reveal themselves only in dreams and other sub/unconscious behavior. Many people are thus threatened by difference not because they fear the difference *per se* but rather because they fear the hidden personas that respond to it. These personas were frightened into hiding by some external repression, and it is understandable that when those personas are recalled to themselves by the calling of the other, it feels enormously threatening. Thus the adage that the most homophobic people are those with the strongest (and thus most repressed) homosexual feelings.

While *my* experience, *my* family, *my* fears and repressions are unique to me, having them is common to us all. It takes some bravery to face these repressions. It can be terrifying to see issues as one's own conflicts instead of other people's Evil. But in the end, both ways are hard. One can live the terror of confronting one's own fossilized fears, or one can live the terror of existing in a world filled not with other humans but with demons. Which is more terrifying? I'm not sure there's any difference really; one is the mirror image of the other. Which is a more accurate picture of the world? Which, in the end, allows one to live better? I have my answer to that, and I am writing this because I believe that once all the issues and their internal relationships are clear, it will be yours as well.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:¹⁵

Q: My colleague Vera L. Erickson asks about the possibility of authenticity being the memory of a preexisting “God self”. The ways of relating perspective sees authenticity as the contingent working out of several conflicting personas. Upon reflection, which of these interpretations is to be preferred? It is possibility that these are merely two isomorphic ways of thinking about the same thing; if so, what exactly is the isomorphism? Or it might be that the former interpretation is simply unknowable, untestable. If so, is the latter interpretation any stronger? And even if the former interpretation is weaker logically, might there not be an advantage in thinking of things in that way?

A: xx

¹⁵As always, good questions are more important than good answers, because the questions are harder to come by. I appreciate Vera Erickson, xx, and xx for pressing me on these issues.