

Being Authentic

Two Problems with the Idea of a True Self

Bachelor Thesis by Jelle van Merriënboer
Department of Philosophy
Utrecht University, 2016
Supervisor: Dr. J. Vorstenbosch

Contents

Abstract	2
Introduction	2
Corruption of the Ego	4
Freedom and Necessity	6
The Conflict of Willing and Thinking	8
Primacy of Thinking	9
Overcoming Uncertainty	11
Psychoanalysis as Reconciling Will and Necessity	12
The Turn Away from the Social in the Face of Uncertainty	14
Hope and Meaning as Remedy for Uncertainty	15
Disenchantment and Expectation	17
Meaning of the True Self	19
To be Consistent with Oneself	20
Two Problems with the Idea of a True Self	23
Revisiting the Unconscious	24
Denying Freedom	26
The Is–Ought Fallacy	28
The Meaninglessness of Truth	31
Conclusion	34
Reflection	36
Bibliography	38

Abstract

Authenticity has often been interpreted as ‘being true to oneself,’ which implies that there is some true self within that we ought to be guided by. I propose two influences to be the main reasons for why this understanding of authenticity has come to be: the unconscious, which gives us reason to suspect that our actions spring from a deep lying self; and the public sphere, which has been disenchanting and given merely instrumental importance, resulting in a search for meaning within oneself. I consider two problems with the idea of a true self: the first is that it reduces Will to Necessity which ends up reducing our sense of freedom by assuming our actions to necessarily follow from a causal chain instead of our Will planning for a future that is yet entirely uncertain. The second problem is that the true self, if it were to exist, could not act as a guide on how to live one’s life; it could only give us knowledge which cannot motivate action, and is meaningless since truth cannot result from the thinking activity which meaning springs from.

Introduction

Inwardness—“[thinking] of our thoughts, ideas, or feelings as being ‘within’ us”—has left the world seemingly divided into two realms: the world that is *within*, and that which is *without*.¹ And consequently, this has given us the belief that there is some “inside self, an *authentic* appearance, changeless and reliable in its thereness”(italics added).² It is this self, that exists within our ‘inner depths,’ that has come to be seen as the more genuine and ‘truer’ part of ourselves. It is not our ‘(mere) appearance’ that faithfully represents us, but instead we should be looking inside us, for “the *ground* that does not appear over the surface that does.”³ It is in finding this ground inside us that we may *become* authentic. The search for *authentic being* has thus long been a search for the *true self*; some quality that we possess which once discovered will allow us to be wholly authentic. I will however argue, as others such as Charles Guignon have done, that such a self does not exist, and that being authentic has to be understood differently. To do this I will look at the role of the true self, to see why a belief in a true self has become important and whether it is successful, or might ever become successful, in what it is trying to accomplish.

¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 111.

² Hannah Arendt, “Thinking,” in *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1981), 39.

³ Arendt, “Thinking,” 25.

In order for authentic being to exist there must also be some inauthentic being, where we seemingly act not according to our true selves but according to something else. This presupposes that there is something which is capable of stripping us from our authenticity, something which causes us to be inauthentic. Aside from our true self—which we will presume is the source of authenticity for now—what else is there to influence the level of authenticity of our being, and all the acts and expressions that come with it? Put differently, what caused authenticity to become so problematic that a conception of a true self came to be commonly accepted? I believe there are two main influences that function as obstacles for authenticity and led to the idea of a true self, the first of which is the unconscious and the second of which is the public sphere.

Other philosophers have concerned themselves with the question on authenticity—perhaps most famously Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre⁴—and although I am aware of these great efforts I will not concern myself with them directly. My attempt will mostly concern the importance of the true self with regards to authenticity, with a particular interest in Hannah Arendt’s work *The Life of the Mind*. Inspired by the question of authenticity I believe there is an interesting perspective to be found in her work that may exist within the ongoing debate on the subject. And since the scope of this thesis is limited I will focus on an analysis of the true self from this perspective, considering the issues of the unconscious and public self.

First, I will look at how the true self has been related to the unconscious and assumes some duality of the mind. I will look at how the Schopenhauerian Will leads to the reconciliation of Will and Necessity, and how the reconciliation denies the Will in an attempt to find meaning.

Second, I will look at how the turn away from the social sphere has reinforced the idea of a true self, and how this has turned the quest for meaning inward. I will discuss how the idea of ‘being true to oneself’ is supposed to provide us with knowledge which would be able to guide our lives.

⁴ Somogy Varga and Charles Guignon, "Authenticity," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016), ed. Edward N. Zalta: §3, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/authenticity/>.

And lastly I will consider two problems of the true self with which I hope to argue that the question of authenticity will need to look for an alternative solution, possibly continuing along the lines of the preliminary outline given in this thesis.

Corruption of the Ego

Our current understanding of the unconscious is largely based on Freud's concept of the *id*. "The *id* . . . is the 'other' to all conscious thinking and planning. A vast reservoir of energy pushing us to satisfy basic needs and drives, it works 'behind our backs' in the sense that we are not aware of what it is making us do."⁵ Opposing the *id* is the *ego*, which "undertakes to control the heedless energies and intentions of the *id*, going so far as to thrust them out of sight, which is to say, out of consciousness."⁶ The *ego*, which is the conscious part of our minds, manages to repress our uncontrollable desires, whereby their source is, as it were, pushed outside of the part of us which we can still reasonably consider to be 'truly us'. As Jean-Paul Sartre argues, "Freud has cut the psychic whole into two. I *am* the *ego* but I *am not* the *id*."⁷ Lionel Trilling sums up Sartre's position as such:

"The person in psychoanalytic treatment is inducted into a view of the psyche according to which he, the *ego*-he, the subject, is to take cognizance of part of his mental life, [the *id*,] not in its 'conscious reality,' not as an intuition, but as an object. The psychic facts which are made manifest to him, although they are represented as being of decisive importance in their effect upon him, he apprehends as external phenomena, having their existence apart from the consciousness which constitutes his being."⁸

To go along with Sartre and to say that the *id* is seen as 'external phenomena' is starting to show us how the unconscious could give rise to a conception of the true self. If our psychic whole truly is cut in two, one part of which is not considered 'truly ours' but external or outside of us, then what remains 'inside' should be closer to what we truly are. The underlying thought is that what is truly us are those aspects of our being over which we have total control, we are totally free in the sense that the

⁵ Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (London: Routledge, 2004), 98.

⁶ Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 142.

⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2003), 74.

⁸ Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 145.

things we do not have control over are always external to us and therefore not a part of who we truly are. It is too simple to say however that the ego, that of which we are conscious, in its entirety constitutes our true self, which would not correlate with the deep significance often attributed to it. As Charles Taylor claims, Arthur Schopenhauer—which I will discuss later—has left us with “a further enrichment of our sense of the inner depths of a human being, a renewed sense of our link with the whole of nature, but as a great reservoir of unbridled power, which underlies our mental life.”⁹ The ego as a whole, simply understood as the ‘consciousness which constitutes our being’ would hardly be able to connect us to the ‘inner depths underlying our mental life.’

However, I would be getting ahead of myself with this step, as Freud has more to say on the nature of the ego. He elaborated and revised much of his early theory later in his career, and one change is that of the ego being wholly conscious at first whereas Freud would later argue that there is some part of the ego which is also unconscious, and (almost) unknowable even by the conscious part of the ego itself.¹⁰ “Where once the ego . . . was thought of as wholly conscious and bedevilled in its practical purposive existence by the blind instinctual drives which seek to subvert it, now the ego is understood to be in part unavailable to consciousness, no less devious than the id and profoundly implicated with the id’s libidinal energies.”¹¹ This disturbance of the ego proves problematic, as it makes it all the more difficult to ‘get hold of one’s authenticity. If we were to previously conclude that the true self lies within the ego, the ego has now become infected as it were with the inauthentic and uncontrollable motivations of the id. It would become much harder to discern which parts of the ego are authentic—i.e. representative of a true self—and which are not because of the “extreme complication of the topography and dynamics of the ego.”¹² At first there was the easier task of discerning the ego from the id by “objectifying [the id] to gain a disengaged understanding of it and, as a consequence, to liberate us from its obsessions, terrors, compulsions.”¹³ Now bringing the id under the control of the ego has become the even greater challenge of unraveling and understanding the ego and all of its motivations so that we can bring those back into conscious control as well. That part of us which contains our true selves and by

⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 446.

¹⁰ Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 147.

¹¹ Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 148.

¹² Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 149.

¹³ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 446.

extension was to be the source of authenticity turns out to be “a mixed bag of capacities and drives, some of them kind and loving, others dark and cruel,”¹⁴ and shows us why the unconscious seemingly makes it so hard to uncover our true selves and live authentically by it. The unconscious has come to be seen as an integral part of our ego, an integral part of ourselves. We are not merely constituted by conscious, rational thought which can provide the comfort of our “thinking ego’s enduring present”¹⁵—that is to say, the part of our ego that appears to us ‘true’ and ‘authentic’—but also threatened by unconscious desires and the will. This blurs the border of what counts as truly us, and requires deeper investigation in order to establish what might be considered one’s true self.

To clarify I will look further into the Will, first as envisioned by Schopenhauer which Taylor called “the ancestor to the Freudian id,”¹⁶ and then as described by Hannah Arendt in order to hopefully give more insight in how I consider the unconscious to have contributed to shaping the true self.

Freedom and Necessity

What we have seen so far is that an understanding of the unconscious brings with it the idea that there are influences which shape us that we have no control over. The problem this brings for authenticity is that who we are is now almost primarily (as Freud’s understanding goes at least)¹⁷ out of our control, which can make it seem arbitrary and trivial. According to Schopenhauer, what is really controlling us, “the Being behind the appearances,”¹⁸ is the Will; a force that compels us, “a mindless, aimless, non-rational urge at the foundation of our instinctual drives.”¹⁹ The Will is not limited to humans, but underlies all of nature and drives everything with its uncontrollable, limitless and self-serving goals, “devoid of rationality or intellect.”²⁰ Whatever objects we perceive, and anything they do, are ultimately driven by Will; even our own bodies. “The action of the body is nothing but the act of Will

¹⁴ Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, 103.

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, “Willing,” in *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1981), 36.

¹⁶ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 446.

¹⁷ Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, 98–9.

¹⁸ Arendt, “Willing,” 20.

¹⁹ Robert Wicks, “Arthur Schopenhauer,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015), ed. Edward N. Zalta: §4,

<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/schopenhauer/>.

²⁰ Wicks, “Arthur Schopenhauer,” §4.

objectified.”²¹ The only thing that makes our actions appear intentional is because aside from perceiving our body like we do other objects—what Schopenhauer calls representation—we perceive our bodies, and only our bodies, also through “immediate awareness,”²² as a being-in-itself. And “as the being-in-itself of our own body . . . the *will* . . . proclaims itself first of all in the voluntary movements of this body.”²³ The Will shows itself to us as a representation by the movements of our body, and simultaneously as an ‘act of will,’ as a subjective voluntary experience. For these acts of will we provide reasons in the form of motives, but because motives only relate to objects and only exist as a specific ‘occasion,’ they are insufficient for explaining “the maxim characterising the whole of my willing,” and only work as explanations for “the *appearance* or *phenomenon* of the will,” i.e. our own movements as representations. The Will however “lies outside the province of the law of motivation” and is *groundless*. “The will strives only to perpetuate itself and its objectifications; and what we think are our desires are in a sense only its unconscious strategies to achieve this end.”²⁴ Instead of our actions being reasoned, intentional and motivated, for Schopenhauer they are as ‘mindless and aimless’ as the Will is. It denies any sense of our acts as being initially our own, it “denies that Will is free.”²⁵

If indeed anything we do is initiated by the Will as envisioned by Schopenhauer, this “necessarily means that everyone can be only one thing.”²⁶ And if it is also true, as Arendt argues, that “the touchstone of a free act is always our awareness that we could also have left undone what we actually did,”²⁷ then not just one’s will but every individual has been denied their freedom. Schopenhauer attempts to solve this by “[reconciling] Freedom and Necessity,”²⁸ arguing that our Will is what constitutes our being, and therefore that who we are is necessarily also what we will to be. It implies that all our acts *are* willed by us and that we therefore always act out of our own free will, even though us willing it is at the same time a necessity. However, this hardly solves the issue of the arbitrariness of who we are. If we are simply the ‘one

²¹ Wicks, “Arthur Schopenhauer,” §4.

²² Wicks, “Arthur Schopenhauer,” §4.

²³ Arthur Schopenhauer, “The Objectification of the Will,” in *The World as Will and Representation*: §20,

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/schopenh.htm>.

²⁴ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 442.

²⁵ Arendt, “Willing,” 24.

²⁶ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §19.

²⁷ Arendt, “Willing,” 5.

²⁸ Arendt, “Willing,” 27.

thing' we happen to be, then who we are loses all significance. As we saw with the unconscious, with which the Will shares its similarities, if who we are is outside of our control it may not seem to be part of who we 'truly' are at all.

The Conflict of Willing and Thinking

In opposition to Schopenhauer, Arendt does not reconcile Freedom and Necessity but focuses on the conflict between the two. Freedom has an "inevitable connection"²⁹ with the faculty of the Will, whereas Necessity is connected to the faculty of Thinking; Willing and Thinking being two of the faculties of our minds. Thinking is a reflective capacity, "[drawing] into its enduring present what either is or at least has been,"³⁰ and therefore relies on memory. In thinking we withdraw from the world of appearances, "we *de-sense* whatever had been given to our senses,"³¹ and once our experiences have been transformed into 'thought objects' we can start the thinking activity. Thus experience always precedes our ability to think about something, and it is only through reproductive imagination that we can "have present *before* (and not just *in*) [our minds] what is physically absent."³² It is only that which we have previously experienced that can feed our imagination, providing us with objects for thought. And it is in considering freedom "in the perspective of memory, that is, looked at retrospectively, [that] a freely performed act loses its air of contingency under the impact of now being an accomplished fact, of having become part and parcel of the reality in which we live."³³ A free act when considered retrospectively may appear to the thinking ego as having been a necessity instead of a *contingency*, where 'we could also have left undone what we actually did.' However, from "the perspective of the willing ego, it is not freedom but necessity that appears as a delusion of consciousness."³⁴ The Will, with its inevitable connection to freedom, can only ever consider a future act as contingent, where it is not a necessity but could also be left undone. After the act has been performed however, it is the thinking ego which looks back on the 'reality in which we live' and considers all of it a necessity, since "the impact of reality is overwhelming to the point that we can't 'think it away.'"³⁵ It may be argued that this 'impact of reality' is what led Schopenhauer to

²⁹ Arendt, "Willing," 5.

³⁰ Arendt, "Willing," 35.

³¹ Arendt, "Thinking," 87.

³² Arendt, "Thinking," 86.

³³ Arendt, "Willing," 30.

³⁴ Arendt, "Willing," 31.

³⁵ Arendt, "Willing," 30.

reconcile Freedom and Necessity, which for Arendt is an impossibility. Schopenhauer's observation that 'everyone can be only one thing' seems true to the thinking ego, when it reflectively considers the way things are. To the Will, however, it is not necessity but contingency which seems true, and these two faculties of the mind therefore cause an endless, irreconcilable conflict between freedom and necessity. The willing ego will always assume freedom, and the thinking ego will do so with necessity. This being true, a reconciliation of Will and Thinking, or Freedom and Necessity, seems fundamentally impossible.

As Schopenhauer shows us however, this hasn't prevented philosophers from trying. Arendt argues that this is because the Will is hard to facilitate in an "environment of factuality which is old by definition and which relentlessly transforms all the spontaneity of its newcomers into the 'has been' of facts."³⁶ In the world of appearances, everything, as we have seen, seems like a necessity in thinking reflection. The factuality of reality, the 'impact of reality,' is more compatible with causality than it is with spontaneity; with spontaneity being central to the faculty of the Will, being the "faculty of being able to bring about something new and hence to 'change the world.'"³⁷ But from the perspective of the thinking ego there's no room for contingency or spontaneity, through its connection to necessity we must conclude that the world is a causality; whereas "the Will's freedom can [only] be assumed on the strength, or, rather, the weakness, of interior experience."³⁸ The causality of reality and the freedom of our will are "utterly incompatible."³⁹ The underlying issue is that we live in a world of appearances, and that our thought relies on previous experiences in order to function. "The implausibility of the assumption or Postulate of Freedom is due to our outward experiences in the world of appearances, where as a matter of fact . . . we seldom start a new series."⁴⁰

Primacy of Thinking

It is not just that freedom and necessity are incompatible which makes the Will problematic, it is that our focus on the past gives a primacy to the faculty of Thinking. The conflict of Freedom and Necessity is made more difficult for the Will

³⁶ Arendt, "Willing," 7.

³⁷ Arendt, "Willing," 7.

³⁸ Arendt, "Willing," 32.

³⁹ Arendt, "Willing," 32.

⁴⁰ Arendt, "Willing," 32.

because we live in an ‘environment of factuality’ given to us by the primacy of appearance. Because in reflection our acts appear as necessity, necessity is more frequently visible to us than new beginnings, as “most of our acts are taken care of by habits.”⁴¹ Unsurprisingly, Arendt suspects that philosophers, or ‘professional thinkers,’ are generally more susceptible to giving Thinking primacy over Willing. She questions: “Could it be that professional thinkers, basing their speculations on the experience of the thinking ego, were less ‘pleased’ with freedom than with necessity?”⁴² It seems that if the thinking ego favors necessity, a focus on Thinking over Willing would subsequently give primacy to necessity over freedom. And if Thinking and Willing are inherently incompatible, such a primacy would seem justified. Willing clashes with Thinking after all, it does not fit in our ‘environment of factuality;’ it wishes to bring about something new. The Will is aimed at the future instead of the past, “the Will’s ability to have present the not-yet is the very opposite of remembrance.”⁴³ However, Thinking can provide us with an ‘enduring present,’ which earlier I mentioned as being considered the ‘true’ part of ourselves. In a world of appearances the Will may be seen as disruptive, it brings to attention the uncertainty of the future and one’s abilities, “the willing ego . . . deals with things which are in our power but whose accomplishment is by no means certain.”⁴⁴ In doing this, the Will does away with the certainty of the past, it “*negates* the given,”⁴⁵ and in its place brings “impatience, disquiet, and worry.”⁴⁶ The Will might therefore seem undesirable in a world we have come to understand as necessary and causal, yet the Will is not something we can get rid of. The Will and its accompanying uncertainty continues to interrupt the quietness of Thinking. Whereas “the predominant mood of the thinking ego is *serenity*, . . . the predominant mood of the Will is *tenseness*, which brings ruin to the ‘mind’s tranquility.’”⁴⁷

Incapable of getting rid of the Will and our sense of freedom, we can see why thinkers such as Schopenhauer have resorted to attempting to reconcile Freedom and Necessity instead. Such reconciliation seems impossible however, and with the predominance of Thinking over Willing such projects have mostly resulted in “[denying] outright the experience of freedom ‘within ourselves’ or to weaken

⁴¹ Arendt, “Willing,” 33.

⁴² Arendt, “Willing,” 33.

⁴³ Arendt, “Willing,” 37.

⁴⁴ Arendt, “Willing,” 37–8.

⁴⁵ Arendt, “Willing,” 36.

⁴⁶ Arendt, “Willing,” 37.

⁴⁷ Arendt, “Willing,” 38.

freedom by reconciling it with necessity by means of dialectical speculations that are entirely 'speculative' in that they cannot appeal to any experience whatsoever."⁴⁸ Instead of a reconciliation where both Thinking and Willing have their respective place and function, it is often Willing which is reduced to necessity or outright denied its existence.

Overcoming Uncertainty

One important theme we have then come to recognize in the search of a true self is the reconciliation of Freedom and Necessity. Whilst there is certainly more to be said on attempted projects to realize this reconciliation, I believe the most important thing is to understand that any such project is doomed to fail from the outset. One important reason for this—as pointed out by Arendt in the above quotation—is that it does not line up with our inner experience. The Will's connection to freedom is such that any attempt to reconcile Freedom and Necessity will, regardless of how convincing the argument is, mean very little for one's experience of everyday life. Even though causality seems true to our thinking ego, at least part of our inner experience gives us a sense of free will. Taylor similarly comments on Schopenhauer's position that although "the notion of a harmony between freedom and nature, of a spontaneous alignment of desire and reason . . . is very heady and inspiring. It is easy to imagine our finding this union unrealizable, even incredible, in our own experience of life."⁴⁹ In a world which we primarily understand as being shaped through causal necessity, the unease and tenseness caused by our Will might seem unwarranted and out of place. Our experience of life is not that of the serenity that we find in the thinking ego, but it is shaped by desires, uncertainty and anticipation springing from the Will. It should be clear by now that the Will and its accompanying tenseness are an essential part of the human mind, that "the restlessness of the living . . . is localized in and engendered by the mind of man."⁵⁰ Our freedom, or at least our sense thereof, is not going away, and a central goal of the idea of a true self then appears to be reconciling this freedom with necessity in order to relieve us of the restlessness we consider to be so antagonistic to the thinking ego's experience.

⁴⁸ Arendt, "Willing," 33.

⁴⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 443.

⁵⁰ Arendt, "Willing," 42.

This reconciliation also gives us a greater understanding of the Schopenhauerian Will as a source for the unconscious. As we have seen, the Will acts much like the id in that it affects our thoughts and actions. However, for Schopenhauer the Will always coincides with our intentions, reconciling Freedom and Necessity. The Will controls us, but whatever it makes us do is at the same time what we want to do out of our own free will. In the Freudian sense, we can become aware of the control the id has on us, and the ego—whether consciously or unconsciously—represses its influence. Instead of letting the id do as it intends it needs to be kept under control, as the id does *not* necessarily reflect what we want out of free will. Instead of reconciling Freedom and Necessity by having them coincide like Schopenhauer, the ego has to conquer the id; what we are unconsciously motivated to do may be, with some effort, halted and redirected or pushed away. “Freud’s is a magnificent attempt to regain our freedom and self-possession . . . in the face of the inner depths.”⁵¹ Essential to this concept is that in order for freedom to be regained, it is apparently capable of being (partially) lost. Our freedom is assumed to be largely overtaken by the id and other external influences, similar to how the Will replaces one’s freedom for Schopenhauer.

Psychoanalysis as Reconciling Will and Necessity

I hope that after the preceding discussion it can be reasonably deduced that this conflict between Freedom and Necessity largely relies on the dissonance between our experience of free will and the thinking ego’s understanding of the world as necessity. Freud’s strong focus on the id might be the result of an equally large focus on necessity in Thinking’s reflection on the world of appearances, where very rarely something entirely new is started. Our capacity to freedom seems very small in comparison, trying to influence and control our necessary condition with great effort, and redirect our inclinations into better alignment with our will. In this sense, the Freudian unconscious continues the effort of reconciling our freedom which we cannot help but experience (“we are *doomed* to be free . . . whether we like freedom or abhor its arbitrariness”)⁵² with the causality we have come to accept as shaping the world of appearances we reside in. But the unconscious does this by giving a *cause* for our will, reducing the *Will* to necessity. And it is Thinking that has the task of reflecting, of understanding the cause of the I-will by searching for its necessary

⁵¹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 446.

⁵² Arendt, “Willing,” 217.

condition in remembrance. We should “look below the structure of rational formulation to discover the *will* that is hidden beneath, and expressed through, its [i.e. reason’s] elaborations.”⁵³

Psychoanalysis depends on the thinking ego in order to come up with a reasonable source for the Will, one that appears to be compatible with necessity, even though by now we should understand that the Will is not ‘reasoned’ for it exists as a faculty other than Thinking. To look for a cause is to look into the past, and this is the domain of Thinking and Necessity. If we reflect on the events leading up to a certain willed act it cannot but look as though that act was necessary in hindsight. But the freedom of the Will is aimed at the future, and all Thinking is capable of is to apprehend the Will, to stop it momentarily by replacing its tense anticipation with the serenity of an enduring present.⁵⁴ And all the thinking ego does is to reflectively come up with good *reasons* for an I-will that is already present; it attempts to give meaning to an already existing I-will, and thereby rid it of its contingency, because it assumes the ground of our Will is merely occluded (because of the inaccessibility of the id and the true self) instead of its being groundless. For the Will, understood as ‘the faculty of being able to bring about something new,’ can of course only be spontaneous and contingent and is irreconcilable with Necessity. Yet what the unconscious has taught us is that whenever I will something there are external forces at play that necessarily make me will one thing and not another; amongst these forces are the unconscious id and, as we shall momentarily see, our social role(s) and relationships. The uncertainty of the Will in whether its project is able to succeed, the uncertainty of the I-can, is now exacerbated by the uncertainty of the Will’s origin, because we look for a cause in our world of causes even when there is none. So in order to see whether the Will’s project is meaningful to us we erroneously send our thinking ego on finding the Will’s origin to check whether it springs from an external or internal source. And when we cannot find (or come up with) external causes for an I-will (which includes the id) we conclude that it must have sprung from a true self, that part deep within us that is capable of giving meaning to acts that are in fact mere contingency.

⁵³ Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 156.

⁵⁴ Arendt, “Willing,” 38.

The Turn Away from the Social in the Face of Uncertainty

I hope to make my arguments a little more clear by considering the second influence to have given rise to the idea of a true self as well: that of the social, or a turn away from the social. Charles Guignon attributes this to the “sense of society as something man-made, as a product of human decision and contractual arrangements rather than as something natural or preordained.”⁵⁵ Whereas “people used to see themselves as part of a larger order”⁵⁶—whether that was a metaphysical, religious or social order—the world became ‘disenchanted’ when “modern freedom came about through the discrediting of such orders.”⁵⁷ That is to say, the modern sense of freedom relies on “breaking loose from older moral horizons;”⁵⁸ we are free when we can disconnect ourselves from social orders, as society “can be seen as something ‘other’ to the real self.”⁵⁹ And as Guignon attributes to Arendt, “[she] has shown how the modern idea of the social led people to abandon the old belief that one is fully human only in the interactions of public life and to adopt the modern belief that one is truly oneself only when ensconced in private life.”⁶⁰ This distinction between the public and the private brings with it a split between one’s public and private existence, “a split between the *Real Me*—the true inner self—and the *persona* (from the Greek word for ‘mask’) that one puts on for the external world.”⁶¹

As we have seen with the unconscious, the move away from social life is another ‘magnificent attempt to regain our freedom and self-possession.’ In the face of the “anti-natural”⁶² social order, our public lives seem permeated with arbitrary rules, customs and norms. This conception of public life seems to contrast with our sense of freedom, especially in a modern individualistic sense. “We live in a world where people have a right to choose for themselves their own pattern of life, . . . to determine the shape of their lives in a whole host of ways.”⁶³ But this shaping of our lives seems to be severely limited in the public sphere, the realm of human affairs, where we are always caught in the ‘web of human relationships’—the “in-between

⁵⁵ Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, 33.

⁵⁶ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 3.

⁵⁷ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 3.

⁵⁸ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 3.

⁵⁹ Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, 34.

⁶⁰ Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, 34.

⁶¹ Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, 35.

⁶² Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, 33.

⁶³ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 2.

which consists of deeds and words,”⁶⁴ where all people disclose themselves as subjects through action and speech. Because we are caught in this web of relationships our personal contributions to the social sphere might not appear to carry the significance we would want them to have, “it is because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions, that action almost never achieves its purpose.”⁶⁵ It is because our actions are competing with the Wills of others that in the public sphere there is a great uncertainty of the I-can, these obstacles make it so that we cannot find the guarantee that my Will will come to its fruition.

The private sphere, in contrast to the public sphere, seems to grant us much more opportunity for achieving the things we ‘will’ and for shaping our lives in accordance with whatever future projects we might have; there are less obstacles in the form of ‘conflicting wills and intentions’ of others that appear to restrict our individual freedom. The public sphere might seem like “a space of artificial existence and self-loss in comparison to one’s private moments alone or within one’s circle of family or friends,”⁶⁶ if only because our private actions more often give us the results we desire. The only external obstacle in the private sphere is our own unconscious, which as we have seen intrudes upon our ego, which therefore necessitates an even deeper lying true self. The unconscious can only be overcome by the thinking ego’s reflective capacity by looking deeper within ourselves, and likewise, the restrictions of public life can (supposedly) only be overcome by withdrawing further into one’s private life.

Hope and Meaning as Remedy for Uncertainty

The disenchantment of the world, the break from seeing the world as having a natural order, not only put more focus on the search for freedom in private life, it also left a gap which these natural orders had previously filled. What a belief in a natural order was capable of was giving one a sense that their actions, free or otherwise, were purposeful, or meaningful regardless of results. Put differently, a natural order was capable of providing *hope* in the midst of uncertainty.⁶⁷ Everything

⁶⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 183.

⁶⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 184.

⁶⁶ Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, 34.

⁶⁷ Arendt, “Willing,” 35.

was there for a reason, “the things that surround us were not just potential raw materials or instruments for our projects,⁶⁸ but they had the significance given them by their place in the chain of being. . . . By the same token, the rituals and norms of society had more than merely instrumental significance.”⁶⁹ By believing in a natural order of things reflected in society, the problem of whether my Will is capable of reaching its end despite the Wills of others, the uncertainty of the I-can, is relieved by the hope that whatever I do will eventually achieve *some* meaningful purpose, even if that purpose is something different than what I had intended. The modern importance of individual freedom however stresses that one has a right to give shape to their life as they desire. The I-will not completing its project is no longer reconcilable with the design of a greater order (we again come across the theme of reconciling Will and Necessity), but a limitation of one’s personal freedom. Instead of drawing meaning from the ‘nature of things,’ meaning has to be found elsewhere; I will argue that the true self has come to be seen as at least one possible source for meaning, after looking further into what ‘meaning’ is.

It is the primary role of the *thinking* ego to provide us with meaning, it “does not ask what something is . . . *but what it means for it to be.*”⁷⁰ In our everyday dealings with the world we rely on our ‘common sense,’ which “is a kind of sixth sense needed to keep my five senses together.”⁷¹ The common sense gives us a “‘sensation’ of reality, of sheer thereness;”⁷² it is what gives us the ability to interact with the world of appearances and ensures us of its “*realness.*”⁷³ In our interactions with the world of appearances we do not have time to think, as thinking requires us to withdraw from the world of appearances: “when thinking withdraws from the world of appearances, it withdraws from the sensorily given and hence also from the feeling of realness, given by common sense.”⁷⁴ Common sense does not question reality, it does not question ‘what it means’ for something to be, but simply accepts its realness: “there we are and no questions asked.”⁷⁵ This is why Arendt comes to conclude that “the quest for meaning is ‘meaningless’ to common sense.”⁷⁶ To our common sense

⁶⁸ As is the case with what Taylor calls ‘instrumental reason.’ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 4–5.

⁶⁹ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 3.

⁷⁰ Arendt, “Thinking,” 57.

⁷¹ Arendt, “Thinking,” 50.

⁷² Arendt, “Thinking,” 51.

⁷³ Arendt, “Thinking,” 50.

⁷⁴ Arendt, “Thinking,” 52.

⁷⁵ Arendt, “Thinking,” 59.

⁷⁶ Arendt, “Thinking,” 59.

questions of meaning are “unanswerable”⁷⁷ because our common sense provides us only with truth, i.e. “what we are compelled to admit by the nature either of our senses or of our brain.”⁷⁸ The role of common sense is only to assure us of the realness of the world so that we can interact with it. The full extent of this argument is beyond the scope of this thesis, but in short: “truth is derived from the common-sense experience of irrefutable evidence”⁷⁹ given to us in the world of appearances, and since Thinking requires us to leave the world of appearances it does not deal with truth but “with invisibles, with things not *present* to the senses . . . , remembered and collected in the storehouse of memory.”⁸⁰ In order to question what it means for something to be we have to leave the world in which everything is so readily given to us, meaning can only be created when I retreat from the world of appearances and therefore meaning can only be given in thought.

Disenchantment and Expectation

With the disenchantment of the world there was also a loss of meaning. The uncertainty of the I-can, now more uncertain in a man-made world where conflicting Wills have to compete for the realisation of their own personal projects, causes the feeling of “expectation, whose chief modes are hope and fear.”⁸¹ Expectation is how our ‘soul’—the source of our emotions and feelings—experiences the uncertainty of the future. In our expectations hope and fear constantly ‘shift’ between one another, “every hope carries within itself a fear, and every fear cures itself by turning to the corresponding hope.”⁸² This expectation is the tenseness of the Will felt in emotion and in order for this “uncomfortable situation” to be resolved, the soul “demands of the mind . . . to prove that whatever is or will be ‘was to be.’”⁸³ The expectation felt in the uncertainty of the future can be soothed by the mind in ensuring that everything is or will be as it is ‘supposed’ to be, and will not be otherwise or be left undone. What the natural order of things was able to do was make things significant because it made it seem as though everything was as it should be, “the course of history would no longer be haphazard and the realm of human affairs no longer devoid of

⁷⁷ Arendt, “Thinking,” 58.

⁷⁸ Arendt, “Thinking,” 61.

⁷⁹ Arendt, “Thinking,” 58.

⁸⁰ Arendt, “Thinking,” 51.

⁸¹ Arendt, “Willing,” 35.

⁸² Arendt, “Willing,” 35.

⁸³ Arendt, “Willing,” 35.

meaning.”⁸⁴ Meaning then is established when the uncertainty of the future can be given a reason for why it is the way it is, when things can be believed to be as they were “meant to be.”⁸⁵ But with the disenchantment of the world, where the public realm is nothing but conflicting wills and intentions, our common sense understanding is that “everything that happens to mortals for better or worse is ‘contingent,’ including their own existence.”⁸⁶ Contemporary man can no longer believe in a natural order to soothe our fearful expectation, there is no purposeful⁸⁷ ‘course of history;’ the public realm and the people in it are not always as they were meant to be.

But with a turn towards personal freedom and a remaining need for meaning to soothe our expectations, there comes to be an increasing focus on individual lives, a “centring on the self.”⁸⁸ The prevailing thought seems to be that meaning should be found in the private sphere as opposed to the public, which in a way is quite true since meaning is found in Thinking. Thinking is by virtue of its complete withdrawal from the world of appearances perhaps the ‘most private’ activity one could indulge in. When re-entering the public sphere after thinking has stopped, reality might seem particularly uncertain in contrast; we are unsure about the certainty of things after having just contemplated their meaning, leaving our expectations without the soothing effect of the mind. “The paralysis induced by thinking . . . may have a dazing after-effect, when you come out of it, feeling unsure of what seemed to you beyond doubt while you were unthinkingly engaged in whatever you were doing.”⁸⁹ Perhaps this makes public life seem even more devoid of meaning, more disenchanting, than it was already believed to be. “What was meaningful while you were thinking dissolves the moment you want to apply it to everyday living.”⁹⁰ A natural order might have given meaning to everyday life, but when this order is questioned in thought which “relentlessly dissolves and examines anew all accepted doctrines and rules,” we will find that reality is lacking in meaningfulness in comparison. It might be argued that contemporary individuals think more than they used to do, which contributes to the disenchantment of the world; perhaps due to

⁸⁴ Arendt, “Willing,” 46.

⁸⁵ Arendt, “Thinking,” 61.

⁸⁶ Arendt, “Thinking,” 60.

⁸⁷ Arendt points out that Kant equated ‘meaning’ with ‘purpose,’ further suggesting that meaning might be best understood as having fulfilled some purpose, a being-what-it-ought-to-be. Arendt, “Thinking,” 64.

⁸⁸ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 4.

⁸⁹ Arendt, “Thinking,” 175.

⁹⁰ Arendt, “Thinking,” 176.

more time for thought, Thinking having gained in assumed importance, or the focus on the private sphere which Thinking itself contributes to—which came first of the latter might be impossible to retrace but would require a much greater analysis than I am capable of providing. Either way, Thinking and its quest for meaning seems to go hand-in-hand with a turn away from the public sphere.

Meaning of the True Self

So far we have seen two ‘divides’ which have become important to the understanding of our self: that between the unconscious and conscious self, and between the public and private self. I hope to have demonstrated how these have contributed to a shaping of the true self; the former by creating the belief that there are causes for our unconscious, contingent acts which are uncoverable with enough reflection, and the latter by shifting the domain of meaning to the private realm where thought takes its precedence. These have created a difference, or dissonance in the self; the self that is unconscious or unaware, which goes along with the rules and norms in public life, is uncertain about the I-can and gives no reason for the I-will—i.e. the ‘everyday’ self—is by its very nature incapable of providing us with meaning. To it everything simply appears as it is, everything is a contingent reality. The self that is unfettered, unrelated and not obstructed by unconscious desire or public involvement on the other hand can give us meaning and serenity in a world which would otherwise be meaningless, arbitrary and uncertain. This second self is what we have come to understand as the true self, I argue, and why an inward turn has taken place; because it can give meaning and the assurance that whatever I will and subsequently do was meant to be.

The true self then can supposedly give meaning to, and thereby a reason for, who I am. I am who I am because—or I did these things because—that is who I *truly* am. It was meant to be by virtue of my true self, in absence of the interjection of contingent factors. As mentioned about the id earlier in the section ‘Psychoanalysis as Denying the Will’s Contingency,’ this kind of reasoning for the meaningfulness of who we are seems to occur in the absence of other explanations, mostly those perceived as external such as unconscious acts or social influences. The true self can give meaning in the sense that it can give a reason for, it can make necessary, that which would otherwise have no meaning. This importance of the true self, as the only source for meaning, has in this manner become important merely on its own. Only *I* can give

meaning to my life, and the ‘stuff’ on the outside is just meaningless because it is contingent. In fact, “the pressures towards outward conformity,”⁹¹ which as we have seen threaten a sense of personal freedom, are a danger to me not being what I am meant to be. “One turns inward because it is within the innermost self that one discovers the ordinarily unseen and untapped resources of meaning and purpose.”⁹² Only I myself can show me what I ought to be out of necessity. “Not only should I not fit my life to the demands of external conformity; I can’t even find the model to live by outside myself. I can find it only within.”⁹³ This gives rise to the idea that the true self is also an *original*. “There is a certain way of being human that is *my way*.”⁹⁴ This makes the idea of being ‘original’ important for giving meaning to who one is, for if it is not original to myself then it is likely not part of my true self. “Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover.”⁹⁵

To be Consistent with Oneself

Arendt gives a similar, yet crucially different, answer to the question of being ‘true’ to oneself, which I hope to have shown is at the center of the conception of authentic being as based on the true self. The project of the true self gives meaning by attempting to show that my ‘authentic’ actions necessarily follow from who I truly am. For Arendt however, the “criterion of the mental dialogue is no longer truth, which would compel answers to the questions I raise with myself . . . , [but] agreement, to be consistent with oneself.”⁹⁶ To be in agreement is not a matter of truth for Arendt, and the notion of a true self thereby relies on the fallacy “to interpret meaning on the model of truth.”⁹⁷ Meaning is a response given to questions that are not already given answers in common sense, and any answers given by our thinking apparatus do not pertain to any truth; “its results remain uncertain and unverifiable.”⁹⁸ Put differently, on facts given in common sense there should be no disagreement possible, we are all compelled to admit these facts “by the nature either of our senses or of our brain.”⁹⁹ But questions of meaning do not have any

⁹¹ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 29.

⁹² Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, 82–3.

⁹³ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 29.

⁹⁴ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 28–9.

⁹⁵ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 29.

⁹⁶ Arendt, “Thinking,” 185–6.

⁹⁷ Arendt, “Thinking,” 15.

⁹⁸ Arendt, “Thinking,” 88.

⁹⁹ Arendt, “Thinking,” 61.

basis in truth with which to compel us as such, they are always susceptible to doubt, and the best we can do is to reasonably agree that something was meant to be. “To expect truth to come from thinking signifies that we mistake the need to think with the urge to know.”¹⁰⁰ Meaning cannot readily be given, through our senses or consciousness, but is given by the thinking ego which “does not think something but *about* something, and this act is dialectical.”¹⁰¹ Meaning does not result from any truth, but it is agreed upon through dialogue. Since Arendt sees thinking as the source of meaning, thinking would have to occur as a “silent dialogue”¹⁰² between me and myself, made possible only by our “consciousness in the sense of self-awareness.”¹⁰³ But although consciousness makes thinking possible, since it makes me aware of myself and thereby allows for an internal dialogue, the thinking dialogue doesn’t start with self-awareness. It starts with “friendship and not selfhood; I first talk with others before I talk with myself, examining whatever the joint talk may have been about, and then discover that I can conduct a dialogue not only with others but with myself as well.”¹⁰⁴

Dialogue then relies on ‘friendship,’ or perhaps one may loosely interpret it as civil, agreeable discourse. At the least, dialogue is not made easier or more enjoyable by rivalry or unfriendliness, and one might see that reflected in the observation that people more easily befriend those they most often (or most easily) agree with. In thinking then—in the internal dialogue—agreement or friendship between me and myself is demanded by a form of internal consistency. “If you want to think, you must see to it that the two [me and myself] who carry on the dialogue be in good shape, that the partners be *friends*. The partner who comes to life when you are alert and alone [in thinking] is the only one from whom you can never get away—except by ceasing to think.”¹⁰⁵ This kind of internal consistency might not seem all that different from being true to oneself; perhaps one might equally as well interpret it as an agreeing with, or befriending of, one’s ‘true’ self. Yet the fact that for Arendt there is no truth to meaning does result in some differences. Because unlike the assumption of the true self that there “is a substantial self lying deep within each of us, a self with attributes that are both distinctively our own and profoundly

¹⁰⁰ Arendt, “Thinking,” 61.

¹⁰¹ Arendt, “Thinking,” 187.

¹⁰² Arendt, “Thinking,” 187.

¹⁰³ Arendt, “Thinking,” 187.

¹⁰⁴ Arendt, “Thinking,” 189.

¹⁰⁵ Arendt, “Thinking,” 187–8.

important as guides for how we ought to live,”¹⁰⁶ agreement with oneself in the Arendtian sense does not provide a clear guide on how one ought to live. “[Thinking] does not create values; it will not find out, once and for all, what ‘the good’ is; it does not confirm but, rather, dissolves accepted rules of conduct.”¹⁰⁷ Agreement with oneself is not like finding a manual or guide on how to confront life’s challenges, it is not the discovery of some *truth* but merely the acceptance of reasonably agreeable answers when “our mind is not capable of certain and verifiable knowledge regarding matters and questions that it nevertheless cannot help thinking about.”¹⁰⁸

Arendt’s separation between truth and meaning means that the thinking activity is never able to produce truth or a truthful answer. Thinking produces meaning instead of knowledge, and meaning is established by a dialogue instead of given in common sense. To say that there is a true self that would be able to provide us with knowledge about ourselves, and some truth on how we ought to live, would be to imply that the true self were part of *reality*. All truths are derived from our common sense experience of reality, and thus the idea that we could derive truths from a true self would imply that the true self can appear to us in common sense as all ‘real’¹⁰⁹ things do. But with the separation of truth and meaning Arendt also separates common sense from thinking. Thinking reflects on de-sensed objects, thought trains; the thinking activity removes itself from the world of appearances and relies on memory instead of reality. “It is precisely reality as given to common sense, in its sheer thereness, that remains forever beyond [thinking’s] grasp, indissoluble into thought-trains.”¹¹⁰ In other words, Thinking can de-sense objects and question their meaning, but “truth is located in the evidence of the senses.”¹¹¹ The thinking activity cannot result in truth, since it cannot produce any common sense appearances that are able to compel us by their ‘sheer thereness’—or as Arendt concisely puts it: “reality cannot be derived [from thought].”¹¹² This inability of thinking to produce

¹⁰⁶ Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, 146.

¹⁰⁷ Arendt, “Thinking,” 192.

¹⁰⁸ Arendt, “Thinking,” 14.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Real’ is here in quotes because Arendt distinguishes *realness* from (common sense) *reality*. The former includes all subjective experience (which is greatly oversimplified), whereas reality relies (amongst other things) on our common sense, the sense that brings all 5 bodily senses together and guarantees their pertaining to the same singular object. Reality thus does not include the ‘invisibles’ of the mind, but the truths pertaining to bodily sensations.

¹¹⁰ Arendt, “Thinking,” 51–2.

¹¹¹ Arendt, “Thinking,” 57.

¹¹² Arendt, “Thinking,” 49.

any “solid results or specific thoughts”¹¹³ (except in ‘boundary situations’ perhaps)¹¹⁴ means “that I know of my mind’s faculties only so long as the activity lasts.”¹¹⁵ The dialogue between me and myself is an activity, a process that only exists as it is going on; when the thinking activity ends there is nothing that it leaves behind, “the thinking ego . . . will disappear as though it were a mere mirage when the real world asserts itself again.”¹¹⁶

Two Problems with the Idea of a True Self

Nearing the end of this thesis I would like to conclude by articulating the two problems that the idea of a true self faces. So far I have mostly attempted to give an account of how the idea of a true self came to be, primarily drawing from Arendt’s *The Life of the Mind*. In doing this, I have roughly distinguished two influences contributing to the conception of a true self: the separation of the conscious and unconscious self, and that of the private and public self. On the basis of this account I will now discuss two problems that make the idea of a true self fail to address the issues I have argued it was supposed to mitigate: by reducing Will to Necessity, the true self does not actually allow someone to regain their freedom, and any notion of being true to oneself cannot provide an ultimately helpful guide on how one ought to live. Although one might see these as reflective of the two issues (i.e. the issues of the unconscious and private self) discussed so far, these two problems are also interrelated and the separation is not a strict one. Like much of my thesis these are perhaps better seen as guidelines with which to address the issue of the true self than as formal categorizations. The issue of reducing Will to Necessity might be considered to have closer ties to the unconscious however, where our free will ends up being tied to a pre-existing, objective and unchangeable part of the self, by trying to justify all one’s actions as a meant to be because of a cause lying deeper within ourselves. And whilst no free act—in the sense that it has no cause—can find its origin in necessity, the inability of the true self to guide our actions might be more closely tied to the fleeting nature of the mind and its subsequent inability to provide any truths that persist beyond the thinking activity, let alone in public life where all of our actions ultimately find their place and we rarely have time to think. I find it hard not to feel that these two issues are quite similar and intimately related, and

¹¹³ Arendt, “Thinking,” 191.

¹¹⁴ Arendt, “Thinking,” 192.

¹¹⁵ Arendt, “Thinking,” 88.

¹¹⁶ Arendt, “Thinking,” 75.

one might consider whether these two problems, as well as the issues of the private and unconscious self, are not largely co-constitutive.

Revisiting the Unconscious

The first problem with the idea of a true self is that it reduces Will to Necessity, and thereby lets the future be informed by the past. I have illustrated in ‘The Conflict of Willing and Thinking’ how the thinking ego focuses on the past, and how it interprets the world as causal continuity which is based in necessity. The willing ego on the other hand views the future as contingent, where one might also leave undone whatever one might do; “future’s main characteristic is its basic uncertainty. . . . We are dealing with matters that never were, that are not yet, and that may well never be.”¹¹⁷ The true self offers a method for reconciliation however; one may presuppose some factual truth in the self with which to give meaning to any future act. In the face of an uncertain future one may soothe their expectations by supposing that whatever one might do was meant to be. The true self can hereby provide a form of certainty by giving a source, or a cause, for contingent acts “performed by the agent in full possession of his physical and mental strength.”¹¹⁸ These kinds of acts, where one is fully conscious and in control of their own behaviour, at some point run into trouble of being explainable as being the result of some unconscious self,¹¹⁹ unless one wishes to deny (or reconcile) freedom in its entirety despite its contrariness to our everyday experiences. So in order to explain these ‘willed’ acts, and give them a certain cause, the true self may become the ‘ground’ upon which one may found an act’s necessity. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the true self might be (and likely usually is) considered to lie even deeper within us than the ‘regular’ notions of our inner life such as desire, emotion and the unconscious. And in a sense, I think it plausible to suggest that the acceptance of the existence of a deeper unconscious may have opened up the possibility of a belief in even greater depths than that; the idea of a true self may in part be made possible by considering our self through a certain

¹¹⁷ Arendt, “Willing,” 14.

¹¹⁸ Arendt, “Willing,” 16.

¹¹⁹ There is, of course, the corresponding idea of the public self which might be able to provide explanations where the unconscious might not be able to, without immediately having to refer to the true self. Think of coercion, manipulation, implicit biases or any sort of ‘social brainwashing’ that might be used as arguments for why an act was not ‘authentic,’ despite a person having full control in a given situation. Therefore to explain one’s behaviour as authentic is even more problematic in public, and seen as hindering one’s ability of staying true to oneself.

(psychoanalytic) lens that allows for varying degrees of ‘depth’ within ourselves, the deepest level of which may provide us with meaning.

It is hard to see why this would be though; if the true self is a ‘real’ part of us that lies deep within, why would *this* part and not, for example, the unconscious provide us with meaning? If the unconscious part of the self is to be objectified and kept under control by the ego; why should the true self be ‘freed’ instead and be encouraged to make its effects felt on us? It is not immediately clear how a true self, as a source of truth, is any less ‘external’ than any other aspect of reality that influences, directs and obstructs us. The only solution would be to argue that the true self is different because of the reconciliation of Will and Necessity: that despite the true self being a source of knowledge and an objective part of ourselves, *this* part happens to necessarily coincide with our Will. Unlike the unconscious part of ourselves, which is mere *desire* and has no relation to the Will, the truth that we might gain from the true self is always representative of the Will. Although, unlike the Schopenhauerian Will which is universal, whereby *everything* is Will, the true self is an original, particular part in each of us. And if we start from the idea that there are forces deep within us that need uncovering, it would not only need explanation of how the true self reflects our will, but also how we could possibly know which parts count as ‘true’ and are willed, and which are not willed but mere desire. It seems strange that the forces of the unconscious deep within us are ‘inauthentic’—mere external forces not reflective of our Will—but if we go *even deeper* there is some meaningful truth for us to find. The idea that most of our actions have unconscious or social causes, combined with the primacy of Thinking that tells us the world is nothing but a causality, has possibly made the reconciliation of Will and Necessity the most probable explanation. Unable to accept that meaning might be found in contingency, agreement, or ‘on the surface,’ we cling on to the certainty provided to us by truth. The discovery of the unconscious life seems to oddly compel some of us to look even beyond the unconscious for meaning, to go ever deeper in the belief that at *some* point you will reach a Will that can somehow be founded in Necessity. In the face of the unconscious, inauthentic, inner life perhaps we should concede with Arendt that “since we live in an *appearing* world, is it not much more plausible that the relevant and the meaningful in this world of ours should be located precisely on the surface?”¹²⁰ For many this concession might not (yet) be possible, the reconciliation of Will and Necessity and the idea of a true self might actually be the more (if not most)

¹²⁰ Arendt, “Thinking,” 27.

plausible solution for the problem of authenticity as long as one does not properly separate truth from meaning.

Denying Freedom

One need only to be reminded that meaning springs from Thinking, and truth is given to us in common sense by reality. The true self, as something perceivable and knowable, must by this categorization be a part of common sense reality and be given to us in truth. As I have pointed out in the section ‘To be Consistent with Oneself,’ the thinking process is incapable of providing us with any truth or knowledge, as it may only provide us with meaning. And even if one could obtain knowledge from their true self, which the idea of the true self presupposes, Thinking would still need to give meaning, show us that we not just are but were also meant to be, since “no experience yields any meaning or even coherence without undergoing the operations of imagining and thinking.”¹²¹ The idea that truth may result in meaning is not merely a fallacy of the true self, it is ultimately a result of not making the distinction between truth and meaning that Arendt does. Whereas throughout this thesis I have argued that the true self attempts to give meaning by showing that an act resulted from necessity, this reasoning turns out to *principally rely on the reconciliation of Will and Necessity*. Only by assuming that any freely willed act¹²² “was potentially contained in [a] ‘preceding series,’”¹²³ or that the act does *in fact* have a cause that coincides with the act necessarily being willed, can one “escape the dilemma inherent in the simple fact that man is at the same time a thinking and a willing being.”¹²⁴ But as I have discussed before, this does not *solve* the dilemma, and thinking and willing remain irreconcilable. It is only after one separates truth and meaning, and sees meaning as constituted by agreement instead of fact, that one might give meaning to things that are contingent without a need for certainty.

The certainty of the past in the perspective of memory lies in any past act having become accomplished fact, “the act appears to us now in the guise of necessity.”¹²⁵

¹²¹ Arendt, “Thinking,” 87.

¹²² I have just pointed out the difficulty with the true self of being able to determine whether an act is a willed act or not, but I don’t think it necessary to pay much more attention to this fact. If an act is grounded in the true self it is considered to be necessarily willed as well, and thus I take a willed act to be any act that is ‘true to oneself,’ ignoring the difficulty (or impossibility) of determining this.

¹²³ Arendt, “Willing,” 30.

¹²⁴ Arendt, “Willing,” 27.

¹²⁵ Arendt, “Willing,” 30.

Likewise the uncertainty of any future act lies in it not yet having become fact and Willing “[looking] forward to its own end, when willing-something will have changed into doing-it.”¹²⁶ Yet in a contingent reality as given in common sense “the will’s project presupposes an I-can that is by no means guaranteed.”¹²⁷ The reconciliation of Will and Necessity in the true self attempts to soothe one’s expectation by guaranteeing that “the future is nothing but a consequence of the past,”¹²⁸ and that the past as seen as necessary causality from the perspective of remembrance “rolls on relentlessly”¹²⁹ well into the future. This fatalism, “the view that we are powerless to do anything other than what we actually do”¹³⁰ despite a reconciliation of one’s Will with this Necessity, only “succeeds in totally abolishing the future tense by assimilating it to the past.”¹³¹ Through the reconciliation of Will and Necessity and the withdrawal from the world of appearances the thinking ego can deny any possibility of future projects that do not result from necessity, and deny the contingency as given in common sense in order to withdraw into the thinking ego’s enduring present, where “it looks as though past and future could be united under a common denominator;”¹³² i.e. they are linked by the (thinking’s eternal) present to form a continuous whole.

The idea of the true self as providing meaning in the face of uncertainty might only end in denying one’s freedom, because instead of answering the will’s disquiet in *affirmation*—“by doing, that is, by giving up the mental activity altogether”¹³³—the true self can reconcile any act with the alleged necessity of its being willed. In other words, whatever one does may be attributed to the deep lying potentiality of who one truly is, so that any act might be seen as meaningful by virtue of its necessarily being willed, whatever this act might be. The reconciliation of Will and Necessity eventually ends up considering any willed act meaningful *for its own sake*, the act takes meaning from its necessarily being willed alone. The only thing of concern is a previously mentioned notion of originality, “a glorification of intensity and ‘mineness’ as goods in themselves, no matter what their content might be.”¹³⁴ The

¹²⁶ Arendt, “Willing,” 37.

¹²⁷ Arendt, “Willing,” 37.

¹²⁸ Arendt, “Willing,” 15.

¹²⁹ Arendt, “Willing,” 13.

¹³⁰ Hugh Rice, “Fatalism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015), ed. Edward N. Zalta: introduction, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/fatalism/>.

¹³¹ Arendt, “Willing,” 36.

¹³² Arendt, “Willing,” 36.

¹³³ Arendt, “Willing,” 38.

¹³⁴ Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, 159.

soothing of expectation through this reconciliation is not an affirmation of the will however, but “a switch from willing to thinking [which] produces no more than a temporary paralysis of the will.”¹³⁵ Whereas Thinking can affirm itself, which might well be why it can be a source for meaning at all, “in flagrant contrast to thinking, no willing is ever done for its own sake or finds its fulfillment in the act itself.”¹³⁶ The Will is only concerned with its projects for the future being *realized*, “the will’s worrying disquiet can be stilled only by the I-can-and-I-do.”¹³⁷ Unless one’s acts are for the sake of realizing a project, of which the I-can is entirely uncertain before the I-do has become fact, an act is not freely willed at all. The Will cannot be affirmed by an act having been willed, but by acting for the sake of realizing “things which are in our power but whose accomplishment is by no means certain;”¹³⁸ freedom lies in acting for the sake of an uncertain future, not in considering the future project as being certain on the basis of Necessity, which “transforms the future into an anticipated past.”¹³⁹ To put it concisely: to reconcile the Will with Necessity is to see the future as an unavoidable singular path. The thinking ego’s perspective extends causal necessity into the future, in a sense looking back from an imagined future and considering future acts from the perspective of them eventually becoming fact; it *anticipates* the moment when an act has already become part of the past, instead of working towards an uncertain future. The will is only free in creating its projects from the perspective that anything within one’s power is a possibility but nothing is yet certain, to anticipate the future and soothe one’s expectation by hoping that everything will be as it was meant to be merely reduces one’s freedom since it does not compel us to act; from the perspective of the willing ego the future is still entirely uncertain and requires us to act and not to think.

The Is–Ought Fallacy

Without getting too caught up in an analysis of past and future, and inevitably in the importance of action in Arendt’s philosophy, I would like to turn to the second problem of the true self. The second underlying issue of the true self is that it is believed to be, by virtue of its providing us with knowledge, able to guide us in living

¹³⁵ Arendt, “Willing,” 38.

¹³⁶ Arendt, “Willing,” 37.

¹³⁷ Arendt, “Willing,” 37.

¹³⁸ Arendt, “Willing,” 37–8.

¹³⁹ Arendt, “Willing,” 44.

a better life. As Charles Guignon comes to conclude towards the end of his book *On Being Authentic*:

“The assumption underlying the first component of the project of being authentic is that there is a substantial self lying deep within each of us, a self with attributes that are both distinctively our own and *profoundly important as guides for how we ought to live*. The second component of the project of authenticity involves living in such a way that in all your actions you *express the true self you discovered* through the process of inward-turning. . . . It is crucially important to know who you are and *be the person you are in all you do*.”(italics added)¹⁴⁰

The second component, to ‘express the true self you discovered,’ is where the idea of a true self faces its second problem. The assumption here is that knowledge obtained (discovered) from the true self can be ‘expressed’ and acted upon, that a meaningless truth might tell us how to live; it presents us with an is–ought problem of sorts. I will briefly explain and then consider how some of the concepts treated above play into this.

The is–ought distinction is attributed to David Hume and seen as an important factor in moral philosophy. His argument is that an *is* on its own can never result in an *ought*, “no ought-judgment may be correctly inferred from a set of premises expressed only in terms of ‘is.’”¹⁴¹ An ought-judgement is a judgement telling us what we ought to do, i.e. what we should be doing, generally in a more stringent moral sense of being in accordance with the Good. The parallel to the current subject might be clear already, as I have already discussed how any truth is meaningless. Even if the true self could provide us with any knowledge, on its own this is meaningless; it would first have to go through the operations of thinking. But the argument goes further than this, and we might even ask: even if the true self can provide us with truth, why would we even have to act on this principle at all? We might even derive meaning from whatever truth the true self provides us with and still ask ourselves this question; it might be true, and even meaningful, but why should this motivate us to act on it as well? Again, the default response seems to be the reconciliation of Will and Necessity; we act on the truths of the true self because we also necessarily will them, it is principally motivational.

¹⁴⁰ Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, 146.

¹⁴¹ Rachel Cohon, "Hume's Moral Philosophy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2010), ed. Edward N. Zalta: 5, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/hume-moral/>.

I won't repeat the arguments I have given in the previous section, on how this reconciliation conflicts with the idea of freedom, but instead argue that the reconciliation leads to an is-ought fallacy. The is-ought distinction was made by Hume to argue "against moral rationalism,"¹⁴² which he accused of making the fallacy of drawing 'ought' conclusions from 'is' premises. His argument is that no factual premise, no knowledge on what 'is' the case, could lead to a conclusion prescribing what 'ought' to be the case, "no ethical or indeed evaluative conclusion whatsoever may be validly inferred from any set of purely factual premises."¹⁴³ The same, or at least a similar, fallacy seems to be true of the true self in so far as it is supposed to guide our actions. The true self is supposed to guide our actions in showing us who we are, and that we ought to act in accordance with our true self because of having gained that knowledge. Based on knowing who we *are*, we *ought* to act a certain way. The fallacy of this line of reasoning is pretty clear so far; just because we know we are a certain way does not mean we have any reason to necessarily act in accordance with that, the true self can not motivate us just because that is who we are. But once we include the reconciliation of Will and Necessity it gets more complicated.

The idea of the true self might be motivational not through an is-ought fallacy, but because whatever truth the true self shows to us is also necessarily willed by us; we may not be motivated by the true self just by knowing who we are, but also because we *will* it at the same time. The motivation to act, however, does not thereby spring from the true self either, the Will seems to be the motivation here that would compel us to act in accordance with the true self. The true self and the knowledge it might give us can't motivate on the basis of its truth, but through the reconciliation of Will and Necessity the idea of the true self argues instead that what motivates action is the action being willed. However, I have discussed in 'Denying Freedom' how the Will's uncertainty may be answered in the affirmative only by *doing*, an act's being willed in itself is not meaningful (which turns out might be of importance), and an act is merely willed for the realization of a future project. The motivation to act seems only to be moved over one more level: what really motivates us, then, is not will itself, but the will's disquiet. It is expectation, or rather our desire to soothe our expectation, that motivates our actions to realize projects for the future. One might

¹⁴² Cohon, "Hume's Moral Philosophy," 5.

¹⁴³ Cohon, "Hume's Moral Philosophy," 5.

argue that for Arendt the principal motivator for action is expectation, whose modes are *hope* and *fear*; the hope and fear we have for the future constitutes the I-will for the realization of future projects. The real question here is, however, how we then determine these projects. I will merely suggest that this is very likely to be closely correlated with Thinking's quest for meaning and the third faculty of the mind: Judgment. What ultimately determines how we will act is perhaps the complex interrelation of the mind's faculties with one another—what is meaningful, our projects for the future, and “the ability to tell right from wrong,”¹⁴⁴—and in turn the mind's relation to the world of appearances; which would be a rather substantial topic on its own.

In light of these considerations however, one might still argue that the true self is not enough to motivate on its own, but that it can surely provide knowledge and insight that compels, and might contribute to making better decisions. Perhaps the true self can be given special importance because the knowledge it can provide us with is substantial enough, in quality and/or quantity, to be more important than other external truths. For the last time I would like to consider the distinction between truth and meaning.

The Meaninglessness of Truth

Let us then imagine that the true self is able to provide us with some valuable knowledge, truths that are not meaningful in their own right, but perhaps in one way or another become important to the shaping of our lives after having gone through the procedures of the thinking activity. This would imply that a truth may be ‘reshaped’ by the thinking activity, that it could be ‘repurposed.’ Because truth itself can never motivate us or be meaningful, replacing one truth with another one would not get us anywhere, if this were even possible; as we have seen already, the thinking activity can produce no truths, because truths are compelling, “truth is derived from the common-sense experience of irrefutable evidence.”¹⁴⁵ Thinking produces nothing accessible to common sense experience, and evidence can only be refuted or proven false by another piece of more compelling evidence. The mistake of thinking that any truth might be repurposed into something meaningful, thus deriving meaning from an original truth, is twofold. Firstly, if a truth could compel with its evidence that we

¹⁴⁴ Arendt, “Thinking,” 193.

¹⁴⁵ Arendt, “Thinking,” 58.

should accept a corresponding meaning, this would result in another truth. The ‘meaning’ this truth would create would be irrefutable, it is a *necessary* consequence of the original evidence; this would not be meaning at all, but a rational truth, logically derived from a factual premise; not compelling to us because of common sense experience, but “self-evident to everyone endowed with the same brain power.”^{146,147} Since meaning is obtained through agreement, it can not be a necessary result of compelling evidence; or to turn it around, nothing solely derived from evidence has meaning. Secondly, thinking does not question truth, any truth is simply accepted and de-sensed for Thinking to use for its activity at a later time. The thinking activity is concerned with questions which are “all unanswerable by common sense;”¹⁴⁸ a question answerable by common sense would rely on evidence, making it irrefutable unless by providing more compelling evidence to override it, which the thinking activity cannot do. Evidence would after all rely on common sense experience, and although “all thought arises out of experience”¹⁴⁹ it does not create new, competing experiences to count as evidence, but merely de-senses previous experiences “by repeating in imagination”¹⁵⁰ and storing them in memory. Since “seen from the perspective of thinking, life in its sheer there-ness is meaningless,”¹⁵¹ none of these memories by themselves carry any meaning, nor are they capable of inferring it. This leads to the peculiar notion that memories and all ‘thought-things’ derived from experience may be used by the thinking activity in an attempt to give meaningful answers, but the memories themselves remain untouched and produce no actual results. No truth can be generated by the thinking activity, and no meaning could ever be proven beyond any doubt; for now it seems that the quest for meaning “is good for nothing in the ordinary course of human affairs.”¹⁵²

From the perspective of the true self this kind of conclusion must seem unhelpful, if not downright frustrating. In the world of appearances everything is meaningless contingency, something we have come to accept in so far as it is obvious with regard to the unconscious powers within us and the disenchanting public life. The true self

¹⁴⁶ On ‘brain power’ Arendt writes the following: “*Brain power* is no less natural, no less equipped to guide us through an appearing world, than our senses plus common sense and the extension of it that Kant called intellect.” Arendt, “Thinking,” 60.

¹⁴⁷ Arendt, “Thinking,” 59.

¹⁴⁸ Arendt, “Thinking,” 58.

¹⁴⁹ Arendt, “Thinking,” 87.

¹⁵⁰ Arendt, “Thinking,” 87.

¹⁵¹ Arendt, “Thinking,” 87.

¹⁵² Arendt, “Thinking,” 88.

was exactly trying to respond to this fact by looking for *some* part of the world which could still be meaningful, which was not beyond our control, and was not contingent uncertainty. The thinking ego's interpretation of the past as necessity and the reconciliation of Will and Necessity seemingly provides a solution, or perhaps makes only one solution seem plausible: we can look into ourselves to know who we 'truly' are and consider any 'willed' future act its necessary consequence. I have discussed the first problem—that of the reduction in freedom—but if thinking can not draw any reliable, persistent, or certain meaning from truth then any supposed knowledge the true self might have given us is seemingly of no real use to us. To distinguish meaning almost entirely from truth leads to the weird notion that “thinking is out of order because the quest for meaning produces no end result that will survive the activity, that will make sense after the activity has come to its end.”¹⁵³ The thinking ego de-senses what we experience in the world of appearances, only to subsequently withdraw from it entirely; i.e. to not concern itself with the senses, bodily experience, or any evidence whatsoever. It only uses what is available to it in memory and turns it over and over in one's mind for as long as the activity lasts; thought is an unceasing, circular motion, “the only movement . . . that never reaches an end or results in an end product.”¹⁵⁴ Thinking is a pure activity, in the sense that it is only done for its own sake; it never reaches a truth which would make the thinking activity obsolete. “The need to think can never be stilled by allegedly definite insights of ‘wise men;’ it can be satisfied only through thinking, and the thoughts I had yesterday will satisfy this need today only to the extent that I want and am able to think them anew.”¹⁵⁵

Because thinking is an activity, the true self can never be found within it. Arendt speaks of a *life* of the mind to contrast it with the “passive inwardness of the soul.”¹⁵⁶ The thinking activity should not be understood as an inward *space*, it is not a “place of inwardness for mental acts”¹⁵⁷ in which anything can be found. Instead it is a temporary moment of withdrawal from the world of appearances, in which the thinking activity relies on and needs “nothing but itself for its exercise.”¹⁵⁸ This would mean that any meaning springing from the thinking activity is a result of just the activity itself, it does not look *into* (or at) anything—such as a true self—that

¹⁵³ Arendt, “Thinking,” 123.

¹⁵⁴ Arendt, “Thinking,” 124.

¹⁵⁵ Arendt, “Thinking,” 88.

¹⁵⁶ Arendt, “Thinking,” 75.

¹⁵⁷ Arendt, “Thinking,” 75.

¹⁵⁸ Arendt, “Thinking,” 162.

could inform it of something otherwise hidden. It is a dialogue with oneself in which one “[gives] account . . . of whatever there may be or may have occurred.”¹⁵⁹ In a sense, I feel the thinking activity may be considered as a form of *reassurance*, “to come to terms with whatever may be given to our senses”¹⁶⁰ by talking oneself into trusting that the world is as it was meant to be; perhaps this allows one to have hope and faith, which Arendt called “those two essential characteristics of human existence.”¹⁶¹ Either way, thinking results in a soothing quiet that may be much desired in a disenchanted world where even our own (unconscious) mental lives are perceived to be barriers for authenticity. And “isn’t trust in necessity, the conviction that everything is as ‘it was to be,’ infinitely preferable to freedom bought at the price of contingency?”¹⁶² Perhaps it is, but the crucial mistake is to consider this trust, agreement, or internal consistency to pertain to any permanent truth, as though it can be “confirmed by some piece of self-evidence beheld in speechless contemplation.”¹⁶³ The idea of some persistent true self that we can find within us, and that can provide us with meaningful truths on how we ought to live, relies on the fallacy that meaning could result from necessity. The true self is seemingly incompatible with the kind of meaning constituted by the silent dialogue between me and myself; in the end, “meaning, which can be said and spoken about, is slippery; if the philosopher wants to *see* and *grasp* it, it ‘slips away.’”¹⁶⁴

Conclusion

I have argued that the idea of a true self fails on two accounts, but the question that remains is of course what, if not the true self, would allow one to lead a free, meaningful, and authentic life. Central to my argument is that at the very least, meaning and possibly authenticity as well need not rely on truth. To look at the issue of the true self more generally, explaining a large part of our world through social and mental causes with unavoidable consequences has possibly led to the belief that this is the only acceptable mode of explanation. But this kind of understanding comes with the sacrifice of limiting one’s scope of vision for the future and being guided by meaningless facts. What then ought to guide our actions is still somewhat unclear, but what the true self did get right, I think, is that we ought to look at our

¹⁵⁹ Arendt, “Thinking,” 100.

¹⁶⁰ Arendt, “Thinking,” 100.

¹⁶¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 247.

¹⁶² Arendt, “Willing,” 196.

¹⁶³ Arendt, “Thinking,” 121.

¹⁶⁴ Arendt, “Thinking,” 122.

internal life. To be able to find meaning in life, to live in agreement with oneself, to act on our freely willed projects for the future, and to be able to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly. All this, and possibly more, might play into the complex conundrum of authenticity, and this thesis hardly scratches the surface of the issue.

One last remark I would like to make is on the private nature of the true self. Whilst the internal life is arguably central to authenticity, it alone could not possibly lead to anything. Like the I-will cannot exist for its own sake but wills to act, and meaning cannot simply be found (like truth) but requires a dialogue, the mind's activity always starts and ends in the world of appearances in either speech or action. Thus the idea that the true self can be entirely private—in that it lies within and shows us truths only accessible to oneself, and that this knowledge can be turned into an ought that does not aim toward the realization of a future project—seemingly undermines the importance of one's public life in initiating or facilitating any notion of authenticity in the first place. Guignon draws a very similar conclusion, saying that “although it is natural to think of authenticity as a very private and personal undertaking, a closer examination of the role of this idea in our current cultural context reveals that it makes sense only in terms of very specific social commitments.”¹⁶⁵ A further analysis of the concept of authenticity might reveal more about its essentially social character, but that would have to be a topic for another time.

I started my thesis by discussing the unconscious, and how a reconciliation of Will and Necessity takes place by having the true self offer a source for the will beyond the unconscious. Then I discussed the turn away from the social, and how the true self has been considered a source for meaning as well, which might guide our actions. I discussed two problems, that of the denial of freedom and the meaninglessness of truth, to show that the idea of a true self ultimately fails to accomplish its goals of increased freedom and guiding one's life in a meaningful way. The true self is an answer to fear and uncertainty, but one that carries with it problems that I hope are clearly not desirable. Despite lacking an alternative account on how to solve the issue of authenticity, and other critiques of the true self having been provided by more accomplished scholars than myself, what I hope to have done at the very least is to have provided a new perspective on the basis of Arendt's philosophy. Perhaps in the future this might serve as a preliminary analysis with

¹⁶⁵ Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, 163.

which to explore the issue of authenticity much more in-depth and more rigorously than I have been able to do here.

Reflection

Ever since I became familiar with Hannah Arendt I had drawn a lot from The Human Condition, her work on the vita activa that more or less kickstarted my interest in social and political philosophy. Yet what always interested me most was not politics, or history, or society as such, but the interplay and relationship these things have with the individual. The idea of 'self' in all its forms still seems like one of the more mysterious qualities of human existence, not least because of the myriad approaches one might take to explore the concept. In part, this might be because the concept seemingly exists right on the border of the personal and the public; one could approach the concept from the inside, from the mind, or from the outside, society. The latter approach I know mostly from a minor in gender studies, which emphasizes the social construction of even the most personal aspects of one's identity such as gender, race, and sexuality. I wished to consider the other side however, and moving from the personal to the public I was most familiar with Charles Taylor's take on authenticity. If society really does influence our identity so much, and often in destructive ways, then the question of what is worth holding onto and essential to one's sense of self is not only deeply unsettling (since many easily discredited parts of the self seem of such crucial importance to us) but also greatly important for anyone to answer. And if authenticity is to be the answer, then Taylor's suggestion that our current notion of authenticity is a misguided one is definitely worth consideration. The (impossible) challenge I set myself then was to find out what being authentic really is, which turned out to vastly exceed the scope of my thesis.

I think this initial challenge was the right way to go however, since it put me on a trajectory of wanting to eventually be able to provide an answer. Now I still feel like I am nowhere close to reaching an eventual conclusion, if one may ever be reached, but starting the project gradually led to the realization that there was (and still is) a lot of preparatory work necessary for perhaps eventually tackling the challenge head-on. What started as a project of finding out what being authentic was became a project of understanding the historical conception of 'authenticity,' and then the concept of 'the self,' and eventually the workings of the human mind which led me back to Arendt and, this time, The Life of the Mind. Now

The Life of the Mind is a fairly dense work, and by no means could I have covered every aspect of it. But it did provide some of what I think are good starting points for the preparatory work, mainly a critique of the tradition from which the idea of a true self originates. Arendt is highly critical of the primacy of reason and its wrongly assumed connection with truth, which has been the default assumption of most philosophers and scientists since, she argues, ancient Greece. Interestingly, feminist theory is also inclined to critique the primacy of reason, but then largely of being a particularly masculine concept which disregards the traditionally feminine perspective of emotion; a similarly long-standing assumption. And like Taylor, Arendt provides a reversal, critiquing the primacy of reason not from a societal perspective (or at least not directly) but from the 'inside perspective' of the mind. This then lead, in a sort of roundabout way, to the combination of authenticity and a critique of the philosophical tradition. I think at first I did not fully realize how the true self came to be at the centre of these two concepts, both relying on the primacy of reason to be justified and underlying the contemporary conception of authenticity that Taylor rejects. The unconscious and public self reflect Taylor's critique somewhat, but the idea of a true self eventually hinges on the reconciliation of Will and Necessity and the absence of truth in meaning; although the former did provide a starting ground on which to build Arendt's, arguably radical, separation of truth and meaning. The importance of this separation should not be understated however, I feel as though the primacy of reason might belie more than just the idea of a true self, and philosophy might actually be its greatest victim. What this thesis has perhaps taught me most is that in attempting to understand a concept, such as authenticity or the true self, what is most important is understanding the theoretical basis upon which it is founded. It seems foolish to employ a concept without a solid theoretical foundation, hence why preparatory work was needed; before coming to a conclusion on authenticity I would have to formulate a more fundamental understanding of the workings of the mind and a critique of the current conception of authenticity.

Problems I ran into were not of a strange kind to me, and as the initial challenge I set myself betrays I often want to do too much at once. With everything I write there are countless new connections and subjects I want to touch on that come to mind. What usually works for a shorter essay, for me to grasp and be aware of the whole project at once and the line of argument I should focus on, does not work for a longer work like this. It is crucial for me to limit myself to smaller pieces at any one time, and decide earlier on what the full extent of the argument will be. Not

doing this led to me to having to greatly alter the latter part of my thesis, which could have been avoided had I been able to decide beforehand what the conclusion would be that I ought to have been working towards. There were many interesting things I tried to include at first, but those ultimately turned out to be unnecessary or incomplete elaborations for the most part. In the future I will have to better consider what is essential, and what is unnecessary for the work at hand. That being said, I think the separation of truth and meaning, the reconciliation of Will and Necessity, and a critique of the primacy of reason are important things to take away from this, and I am sure that these themes will be important for me in future projects as well. The obsession with truth is not limited to philosophy it seems, and the project of authenticity as well as other things might require the 'reclaiming' of meaning and freedom; an exciting future prospect that I look forward to continue to draw inspiration from.

Bibliography

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Second Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

———. *The Life of the Mind*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1981.

Cohon, Rachel. "Hume's Moral Philosophy." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2010), edited by Edward N. Zalta.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/hume-moral/>.

Guignon, Charles. *On Being Authentic*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Linsenbard, Gail Evelyn. *An Investigation of Jean-Paul Sartre's Posthumously Published Notebooks for an Ethics*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000.

Lucas, Peter. *Ethics and Self-Knowledge: Respect for Self-Interpreting Agents*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2011.

Rice, Hugh. "Fatalism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015), edited by Edward N. Zalta.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/fatalism/>.

Santoni, Ronald E. *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early Philosophy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. London: Routledge, 2003.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. "The Objectification of the Will," in *The World as Will and Representation*, §17–21.
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/schopenh.htm>.
Originally published in Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969).

Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.
———. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Trilling, Lionel. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Varga, Somogy. *Authenticity as an Ethical Ideal*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Varga, Somogy and Charles Guignon. "Authenticity." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016), edited by Edward N. Zalta.
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/authenticity/>.

Wicks, Robert. "Arthur Schopenhauer." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015), edited by Edward N. Zalta.
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/schopenhauer/>.