Authenticity and Datafication: a blessing or a curse?

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A conceptual analysis of the impact of datafication on our feelings of personal authenticity

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Abstract

Technological devices continue to play a more important role in our everyday lives. Nowadays, online platforms and applications like Spotify, TripAdvisor, Facebook and dating sites are helping us to make important decisions through the process of datafication, which converts subjective data into quantified data. This thesis questions the relationship between datafication and our feelings of authenticity, especially in personal decision-making. In doing so, it asks two things: what is the relationship between authenticity and datafication, and which conception of authenticity is most suitable to interpret this relationship?

I explicate two conceptions of authenticity: liberal authenticity, based on the ideas of John Christman, and dialogical authenticity, based on Charles Taylor's theory of authenticity. Afterwards, I set out the concept of datafication and how it is related to authenticity. Four expressions are central in this relationship, and they offer the possibility to determine which conception of authenticity succeeds in interpreting the concept of datafication. In comparison with each other, it becomes clear that dialogical authenticity offers a rich understanding of authenticity and allows for positive changes, whereas liberal authenticity fails to grasp the multiple aspects of datafication and gets caught up in a conception focussing solely on manipulation.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Near the end of 2018, I received a notification of what seemed to be a message from Facebook personally. In less than 60 seconds, Facebook showed me 'my year' in a video that included my profile picture, congratulations on my birthday, ice-skating with my mom, a reunion with someone I met in Hong Kong a few years ago and some other pictures that were just me and my friends enjoying each other's company. Every part of the video included the number of likes that was given to that particular picture. That way, Facebook 'measured' the importance of each post, resulting in the determination of the things that have been most significant in the past year of my life.

If I would have made such an overview of last year myself, I am sure I would have selected a very different set of people and events as being more important or meaningful. I helped my little brother move out of the house, flew to several countries for visits, did research during a Summer School in Athens and studied abroad for half a year in Paris at the Sorbonne University; I saw my grandmother and -father grew older and started a relationship with someone who I am still very happy with today. All of these things meant much more to me than the pictures Facebook showed me. In what way did Facebook think that 'my year' could be determined by only taking into account likes and comments? Is this just another way of sketching one's past year, or is there more going on within this determination? And which way is able to give the most reliable interpretation of important events and relations through the year: the subjective way, based on personal memories, or the 'neutral' way with objective algorithms?

For me, the algorithm that Facebook uses does not succeed in describing my own, personal, authentic life-experiences in the past year. In this specific case, technological interpretations of subjective feelings or validations can be considered worthless, or at least inferior to personal experience. However, there are many other ways in which technology can play a role in our subjective and authentic experiences, and even improve them. Take the example of online dating websites. In the last decennium, people find and meet their life-partners more and more through online platforms or dating companies. In the category of 18-24-year-olds living in the Netherlands, 48% of the people have created an

online dating profile, as well as 42% of the 25-34-year-olds.[1] Besides that, more than half of the participants find that online dating is as normal as dating the old fashioned way. On lexa.nl, a Dutch dating site that matches singles according to their online profiles and interests, there is a section dedicated to success stories of people who found their loving significant other through the platform.[2] I would not say that those successful matches, often based on algorithms and data analysis, cannot be authentic or more than a coincidence. There is no objective method to make important and personal decisions, nor is there a certain 'right way' to live your life. We must admit that there is a possibility for technology to improve our personal relations, social network and feelings of recognition and authenticity.

The growing tension and interconnectedness between people and technological devices can be seen as one of the most important contemporary phenomena. There has never been such an advanced type of not-human knowledge, and there has never been such a heavy dependency on it. While there used to be a clear distinction between the technological and 'human' domain concerning objectivity, meaning and importance; the dividing line has become vaguer. The questions posed above imply some underlying problems, that touch at the heart of this relationship even more.

The history of the relationship between technology and the 'human' domain did not start with the establishment of Facebook in 2004. Since the nineteenth and especially the twentieth century, there have been theories and critiques formulated with regards to technological developments and humanity. Master-thinkers like Marx, Nietzsche, Weber, Heidegger and Foucault all described the relationship between a certain human nature and its relationship with the historical - mostly technological - developments that are faced. Often, economic, social and technological changes were seen as a curse rather than a blessing and considered harmful towards humans and their natural condition. This sub-area within the philosophical-anthropological field of research consisted in the first place of different critiques against modernization and societal structures. Different thinkers warned against the impact of bureaucratization and

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[1] According to research from *De Volkskrant*, published on 25 June 2019. See https://www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/internetporno-datingapps-en-dickpics-wat-onze-enquete-uitwijst-over-seks-en-het-internet~bb9c53aa/?referer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nu.nl%2Finternet%2F5952138%2Ftinder-meest-populaire-datingapp-van-nederland.html

[2] See www.lexa.nl/p/verhalen/ for a collection of this success stories.

normalization, in order to become aware of the socio-technological processes that shape us.

But where do we stand today? It seems impossible to imagine our daily lives isolated from any form of technology, despite the criticism of those well-meant and ambitious theories. While personal computers were first sold in the 1970s for high prices to the lucky few, they have now become a common good; and the purchase of tablets and laptops has even been made mandatory in recent years on many schools in the Netherlands. Even surveillance cameras on every corner of the street are no longer a dystopian fear, but a realistic policy already implemented in certain Chinese cities.[3] Hence, total abstinence from technology might not only be extremely inconvenient, but even impossible in our contemporary society. For that reason, I think a more cautious attitude needs to be taken towards modern technology and its consequences for humanity. Often, technology is considered dangerous or unreliable with regards to our personal lives, feelings and human nature in general. In this thesis, I want to step away from this idea. I acknowledge the fact that there are dangers and unwanted consequences connected to modern technology, and that we should be aware of this possible impact. At the same time, I think it is short-sighted to conclude that all technology has this same impact and should be abandoned in order to 'save' humanity as we know it. There must be, as is my opinion, some middle ground through which we can benefit from the perks of technology, while at the same time being aware of the possible consequences. It is my aim not to deem technology either good or bad, but rather to focus on its deeper impact on our everyday life.

But, one might ask, which part of human nature is affected or influenced by technological developments? Since 'human nature' is such a broad concept, we need a concrete anthropological issue to work with. In my opinion, the concept of 'authenticity' fits the image. As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, there seemed to be something wrong with the way Facebook illustrated my past year, which was accompanied by feelings of fakeness, alienation, and inauthenticity. Although the video was clearly about me and my life of the past year, something did not feel right - or at least different from how I experienced

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[3] This controversial topic has become an international conversation topic and has evoked much discussion on privacy and surveillance. See for example: https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/china-surveillance/552203/ (last consulted: 20-06-2019).

or remembered the past year myself. The same goes for the example of the popular dating site Lexa. When we hear someone has met a romantic partner through dating platforms on the internet, we get a bit more suspicious than we do when people meet, let us say, in a local bar. People that start their relationship on the internet often have to defend or 'prove' themselves to be real and authentic lovers, whereas others seem to get the benefit of the doubt. This might seem strange, because there is uncertainty in *any* relationship between people, regardless of where and how they first met. However, I generally perceive more suspicion in the case of online dating than relationships that started face-to-face. People will likely tend to associate personal decisions based on algorithms or technology with feelings of possible manipulation, fakeness, and inauthenticity.

In the case of Facebook, there seems to be a translation error between personal experiences of which the quality is determined by algorithmic processes, and the actual personal feelings. In the example of dating sites, we observe that people are often suspicious of the role technology plays in personal decisions. Both observations express a connection to authenticity, namely either personal feelings of (in)authenticity, or the validation of personal decisions to be authentic or not. Therefore, it appears fruitful to me to further investigate this relationship between technology and authenticity. It is important to notice that there are different uses of the term 'authenticity' and that I will focus on authenticity in the way people live their life and how they make important decisions - i.e. living authentically and making authentic decisions. To carry this out, I use different theories on authenticity, of which Charles Taylor's work *The Ethics of Authenticity* is one of the most important sources.[4] Taylor describes a certain type of authenticity, including requirements and its position of decline within our contemporary world, which are partly due to technological developments. This type of theories might help us understand the impact of technology on authenticity, in order to better interpret the current changes in our society and everyday lives.

Of course, authenticity is not the only human feature that is influenced by technology. For this thesis however, given the available space and the question of contemporary technology, authenticity is a very interesting concept for further

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[4] Originally published as *The Malaise of Modernity* in Canada in 1991, but in later versions translated to *The Ethics of Authenticity.*

investigation. Especially in our modern society wherein technology is so widely accepted and integrated in our everyday life, the question whether this influences our ideas of authenticity, meaning, importance and *ourself*, appears to me as urgent. It is not merely a matter of theoretical knowledge, but all the more important in interpreting our daily lives. If it is philosophers' duty to seek the truth, then maybe philosophical-anthropologists should be concerned with the things that influence us most as human beings. I hope to contribute to this through this thesis, which can be understood as an interpretation as well as a quest, in trying to get a better understanding of the world in which I am living myself.

A brief summary of the previous parts will make the goal of this endeavour clear. In this thesis, I will address the possibility for technology to improve our feelings of authenticity, rather than only focusing on its negative consequences. However, I will keep in mind the requirements that are needed - discussed by Taylor among others - to live an authentic life. Through conceptual analysis of authenticity on the one hand, and defining and understanding datafication on the other, I will eventually aim to reveal the possible influences of datafication on our conception of authenticity. Besides that, I will argue that different concepts of authenticity will lead to a different interpretation of its relationship with datafication and that certain concepts are more successful than others in understanding this relationship. Before we really dive into the subject matter, I will first give a justification for my decision in choosing authenticity and datafication as central concepts within this thesis. After that, the content and structure of this thesis will be set out, as well as the main and secondary questions.

i. Justification and academic framework

The focus of this thesis is on the modern socio-technological phenomenon of datafication on the one hand, and the philosophical-anthropological concept of authenticity on the other. Firstly, I justify my focus on datafication, as it is the starting point for my inquiry. I choose this technological process in particular, as it is used by big companies and organisations and - while being relatively new - praised for its ability to generate sociological insights into great masses of people. Popular platforms like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn all make use of datafication and generate great profit by selling this valuable information to third

parties. However, it is an open question to what extent the datafication of our social lives influences the people concerned and their place within society. This will eventually lead to a justification of the second central concept of this thesis, which is authenticity.

While being a relatively new phenomenon, **datafication** has made its way into some interesting studies on its possible applications and consequences for society. A so-called 'data revolution' would irreversibly change the basic functioning of our society and affect our ways of living, thinking, work and economy, wherein data has become "the new oil of the information economy".[5] One of the key concepts in this revolution is the phenomenon of datafication. In short, datafication can be understood as the action of "transforming all things under the sun into a data format and thus quantifying them".[6] Although this would concern everyone and cause major changes in our everyday life, there has not been much conceptual investigation into the presented matter. It might be that the idea of a 'data revolution' is still too abstract, or perhaps only understood in a theoretical way concerning computer science and intelligence. But since new technologies are already implemented by big companies and organisations, there is no denying in its potential impact on our lives and the very basics of our society. Therefore, an exhaustive investigation in these processes and its relationship with society and humanity is in its place.

The second topic of this thesis, **authenticity**, is a broad concept. It can be used in everyday language, for example to describe something that is 'real', or 'true'; but also understood in a more personal way, as something that is 'your own' or that you can 'relate to' or 'identify with'. For this thesis, it is crucial to understand authenticity in this second manner. I will thus not discuss the authenticity of objects or things, but rather the authenticity of people. However, there are still many ways to talk about this personal approach to authenticity. I will not discuss authenticity in a collective understanding, as things being 'authentic' for a certain people group or stereotype. Besides that, I will only treat authenticity in cases of individual and deliberate actions where the individual agent can be considered as a free and rational individual. To frame the subject

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[5] Mirko Tobias Schäfer and Karen van Es (eds.) *The Datafied Society. Studying Culture through Data.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017, p. 11 (Originally from Rob Kitchin. *The Data Revolution: Big Data, Open Data, Data Infrastructures and Their Consequences.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2014).

[6] Schäfer and Van Es, *The Datafied Society*, p. 11.

matter even more, I will limit the concept of authenticity to individual decision-making. To summarize this, this thesis discusses the question of how to live authentically, or, in other words, how to make choices so that someone is true to oneself.

Why is this an interesting research topic? Authenticity can be seen as an ideal for everyone to strive for, since it provides us with meaning and significance in our lives.[7] Besides that, it is seen as a necessary feature for democratic societies.[8] But, first and foremost, it is my hypothesis that the process of datafication touches at the heart of authenticity. I see this relationship as one of the most important developments in our contemporary society, and potentially one with the biggest impact. The personal domain of authenticity is almost constantly exposed to the applications of datafication in our everyday life, and we just seem to be faintly aware of its consequences. I will further discuss this supposed relationship between the constant exposure to datafication and its impact on authenticity in the third chapter (section 3.2 in particular) of this thesis. For now, I hope my choice and demarcation of the central topics discussed has become clear. I am aware of the fact that the character of this research proposal is quite ambitious. There is no such thing as an already existing philosophical discourse or much literature concerning this specific topic. Instead, I would like to put this topic on the map and discover its philosophical potential myself. My personal motivation to obtain more insight into the presented problem is strong and through writing this thesis I would like to get the best out of myself in terms of creativity and determination. Perhaps this thesis does not really fit the image of a straightforward conceptual argumentation, but it can be seen as a philosophical quest, in order to understand the problems that occur in our everyday lives that have not yet been properly interpreted or given meaning to.

Concerning literature, the first part of this thesis is built on two authors: John Christman and Charles Taylor. Both can be seen as leading figures in the discussion of authenticity. While Taylor might have written more integral theories on authenticity and its relation to modern society, Christman is not a random voice in this debate. In his works, he refers to Taylor as an opponent to the more

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[7] Charles Taylor. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. United States of America: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1991, p. 22-23.
[8] John Christman. "Liberalism, Autonomy, and Self-Transformation." *Social Theory and Practice,* Vol. 27, No. 2 (April 2001): 185-206, p. 195.

liberal conceptions of autonomy that Christman aims to maintain.[9] While Christman focuses on individual capacities and rationality, Taylor composes a more holistic approach wherein social and contextual factors play an important role. Besides that, Christman identifies manipulation as the biggest threat to authenticity, whereas Taylor fears a moral impoverishment of authenticity. The most interesting point is the relationship between their trains of thought, resulting in the two different conceptions of authenticity - resp. liberal and dialogical - that are central to this thesis. To clarify the concept of datafication, I use recent publications from different authors and academic disciplines in order to obtain a broad understanding of this topic. How these conceptions of datafication and authenticity eventually develop into an argument on their relationship and consequences will be set out further in the following section.

ii. Contents

As mentioned before, the main question of this thesis focuses on the relationship between datafication and authenticity. To be more specific, it questions how processes of datafication either improve or degrade our feelings of authenticity in making personal decisions. This question has two faces: on the one hand, we want to clarify the relationship between datafication and authenticity; on the other hand, we want to determine which conception of authenticity - since there are many different definitions - is most suitable to answer this question. To give a profound answer to this question, the thesis can be roughly divided into two parts. The first and second chapter serve as a basis for understanding authenticity, whereas the third chapter focuses on a conceptual analysis of the consequences of datafication in relation to authenticity.

In the first chapter, I will explain the concept of liberal authenticity. Built on the ideas of Christman, this conception centralizes the individual agent in making personal decisions, with manipulation being the biggest threat to authenticity. Its point of departure is found in Christmans' reaction to several deficient liberal theories on autonomy. He proposes an understanding of autonomy in terms of authenticity - i.e. not being alienated from the processes that determine your decision. After this, I use Christman's ideas to compose an understanding of authenticity wherein similar conditions are valid, which I will call 'liberal authenticity' (following from the liberal realm in which Christman's

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[9] See footnote 4 in Christman, "Liberalism," p. 186.

theory is most active). I will eventually detect three requirements - transparency, self-knowledge and psycho-archaeological knowledge - in order to make authentic decisions.

In the second chapter, we pick up the idea of dialogical authenticity. This conception is based on Taylor's ideas on authenticity and pays more attention to external factors. In contrast to liberal authenticity, Taylor does not detect manipulation as the biggest threat, but rather an overall impoverishment of morality and, thereby, authenticity. To prevent this, dialogical authenticity sets two requirements: horizons of significance and self-definition in dialogue. After sketching the idea of dialogical authenticity, a comparison will be made between the two types of authenticity - resp. liberal and dialogical - we just nominated. In doing so, the transition towards the third and final chapter will be made possible, wherein both liberal and dialogical authenticity are weighed up against each other, in order to make way for an answer to the main question of this thesis.

In the third chapter, I start by explaining and defining the concept of datafication. After that, I discuss two cases wherein the relationship between datafication and authenticity is made clear: Spotify and TripAdvisor. Besides being a useful illustration, both examples serve as a checkpoint for the theories and definitions we established in the earlier parts of this thesis. This is the place where all insights come together and loose ends are tied up. In the third section of this chapter, I discuss the consequences of datafication in relation to liberal (3.3a) and dialogical (3.3b) authenticity. While conducting this analysis, it is clear that both conceptions of authenticity react differently to the consequences that follow from (expressions of) datafication.

Eventually, it will become clear that there is no definitive or absolute answer to the relationship between datafication and authenticity. However, this does not mean that we fail to understand the problem. It is my claim that the harmfulness of datafication in relation to authenticity heavily depends on the type of authenticity one prefers. This brings up the question of what we expect from a theory of authenticity. Therefore, it is important to reflect upon our conception of what it means to live authentically. Only when we have decided for ourselves what counts as an authentic choice, what the requirements for this decision-making are and which conception really takes into account the different aspects of datafication, we can make a statement on datafication being either harmful or positive concerning our feelings of authenticity. I will argue that

within the context of this thesis, the dialogical conception of authenticity is more likely to be a fair measurement upon which the impact of datafication can be measured. Dialogical authenticity manages to address several possible threats and impacts, whereas liberal authenticity fails to grasp the multiple aspects of datafication.

To summarize my position once more, I argue that the value or danger of datafication in relation to authenticity heavily depends on the concept of the latter; and it is my thesis that dialogical authenticity does a better job in understanding the multiple aspects of datafication and addressing its most crucial impacts and possibilities. In order to get to this answer, we must start by investigating the concept of authenticity, which will be commenced in the next chapter.

1. Liberal authenticity

As stated before, there are many ways to talk about authenticity. For this thesis, however, it is important to understand authenticity within cases that ask for making important, personal decisions, in which one should be able to recognize her- or himself; that is, so that the person's identity, norms and values are reflected in the decision that is made. Thus, important features within this type of authenticity are, among others, recognition, transparency and self-knowledge, but also clearly expressing your beliefs and values by acting upon them. On the one hand, an individual must be able to determine what matters most and is most valuable to him or her; while on the other hand one must be aware of that particular belief-system and acting according to one's values. Besides that, a person must be sure that his or her values are not a product of doctrine or coercion, since there would not be such a thing as 'own' or 'personal' values in that case, but just arbitrarily chosen moral standards whereupon one acts. I think it is clear that these types of values - i.e. those that are imposed through authority or strict education - are not the types we are discussing within this thesis. This raises the question of whether individuals are free to determine their own set of beliefs and values, instead of being obliged to adopt one that is already constructed by others. Therefore, to justify this form of authenticity, the degree of *autonomy* of an individual must be taken into account.

Why is this question of autonomy relevant for our inquiry into authenticity? First, being authentic always demands some sort of autonomy, since there would only be coercion otherwise. Second, the distinction between a liberal view and a more constructivist view on autonomy will provide insight into the importance of authenticity within action and decision-making. This becomes especially relevant in the last chapter of this thesis, when we consider the consequences of datafication in relation to authenticity to either be harmful or enriching. It is, therefore, crucial to first take a look at the concept of autonomy.

In short, liberal authenticity stresses the importance of authenticity through the avoidance of manipulation. In order to be authentic, one must be aware of personal and contextual conditions and must approve that there is no manipulation in any way, albeit conscious or unconscious. Therefore, the emphasis is on (self-)knowledge, transparency and autonomy. When we have a look at datafication, this might cause problems in the form of underlying

algorithms and our personal data being collected. Fundamental problems occur when datafication processes or devices are interfering with people's freedom of choice and influencing their decisions. On the other hand, datafication can improve feelings of authenticity by providing more insight into our subjective decision-making and knowledge of the things that influence our decision. However, the actual aspects and consequences of datafication in relation to authenticity will be discussed in more detail in the third chapter of this thesis. For now, we want to start with a clear idea of liberal authenticity, as will be set out in this chapter.

In this chapter, we will first have a look at the relationship between autonomy and authenticity. I use Christman's central ideas on authenticity to compose the framework for a liberal conception of authenticity, which will be explained further in the second section. Finally, we will point out the most important requirements for living authentically according to these liberal theories. By doing so, we are able to contrast them with dialogical authenticity in measuring their opportunism and vulnerability towards datafication.

1.1. Autonomy as authenticity

For a liberal view on autonomy, the most important and crucial requirement for someone to act autonomously is the ability to critically reflect upon the processes and circumstances that produce certain values or desires. That being said, one should not only be able to recognize direct influences, but also underlying - maybe even unconscious - processes that manipulate their decision-making. Of course, this evokes problematic cases and examples. Let us have a look at this basic liberal conception, as well as discussing some critiques and counterexamples along the way.

The most basic liberal conception of autonomy is based on the ability of humans to rationally revise their norms, values and identity from an external viewpoint. This point of view should be detached and should operate independently from all other aspects of one's life, as it could be manipulated by that same aspect. In his work, Christman refers to John Rawls as being one of the advocates of such a theory.[10] However, these theories are often considered

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[10] Christman, "Liberalism," p. 187. These strong liberal ideas try to determine certain conditions that must be protected to benefit the social and political structure of society - like the two basic principles of justice in case of Rawls' Original Position.

to be too simplified when compared to the real world. While they can be used as an illustration or idealization of autonomous agents, they do not succeed in describing such events in reality. Even when an individual should be able to revise certain beliefs and values *one at a time*, this cannot be realised in many other cases: "it is clear that even if some specific values and beliefs might be open to reflective consideration, many other aspects of our identity and selfhood that fundamentally orient and shape those values and beliefs are not." [11]

Christman stresses that some of these values or beliefs are considered psychologically unalterable, as they are more often seen as part of one's identity than as a deliberate choice that is open for reflection. This is perfectly illustrated by the example he gives of sexual orientation.[12] Many people who struggle with their sexual orientation will very likely state that they have 'found' or 'discovered' it eventually. Sexual preferences are not so much seen as a biopsychological choice or direction that an individual chooses to follow, but rather as something biologically fixed or determined, which makes the process of reflective consideration problematic. Imagine a teenage girl confronting her parents with her new discovered sexual preference. Her parents would show love and respect by accepting their daughter's choice and maybe even praising her for her courage to tell them. However, if we emphasize the liberal notion that *every* aspect of one's identity is available for radical revision, her parents could suggest that she might reconsider her decision, or even reject her decision altogether. I think I am not alone in stating that such a response is highly undesirable. It is thus plausible that humans are capable of reflecting on certain beliefs and values, but also very likely that there are certain aspects of one's identity which cannot be rationally revised - e.g. parts that are psychologically constructed.

If we take a look at this division between aspects of one's identity that are open for reflection and those who are not, something stands out. In the context of this paper, I have argued that datafication - and technology in general - plays a huge role in our everyday lives by helping us out in different situations, giving advice, and guiding us in making (difficult) decisions. According to the liberal theory of autonomy, a person is autonomous if one is capable of reflecting upon

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[11] Christman, "Liberalism," p. 190.
[12] See Christman, "Liberalism," p. 191-195. I am aware of the fact that this example may be provocative in certain social groups. However, for the power of the argument and its perfect illustration, I choose to follow this train of thought, as freedom of sexual orientation is an accepted right and value in most of the developed countries - or, at least, should be.

values and beliefs unless they are considered unalterable. However, within the process of datafication, there is no distinction between alterable and unalterable parts of people's identity. If we express a certain feeling or perform a specific action, datafication devices cannot determine whether those feelings and actions are arising from alterable parts of our identity, or if they are a product of unalterable parts of our identity. Therefore, when we use these devices in our everyday lives, they might guide us in directions that are in conflict with the unalterable parts of our identity. This might lead to the conclusion that datafication is problematic in determining people's authentic decision-making, since the distinction between alterable and unalterable identity parts is impossible. I do not want to discuss the possibilities and threats of datafication in detail for now, as I will save this discussion for the third chapter of this thesis.

Besides the fact that datafication fails to help us perform autonomously, there is a more fundamental problem with datafication in light of this theory of autonomy. If one needs to be able to reflect and revise all factors that influence a certain action, the concept of autonomy strands with the use of datafication. As I will explain later in this thesis - again in chapter three - datafication processes are quite complex and intransparent. Moreover, their outcome is undisputed: there are no longer subjective viewpoints that are weighed-off against each other, but merely a sum of quantitative data. With datafication providing an undisputed outcome, radical revision becomes less important and harder to achieve. Thus, for the aim of this thesis and its focus on datafication, it is clear that an alternative conception of autonomy - one that leaves room for datafication processes - is desirable.

We have seen that the traditional liberal view on autonomy has its flaws and has become problematic. While Christman acknowledges the problematic cases, he does not want to abandon the liberal theory altogether. Rather, he suggests that we should reject the idea that *every* aspect of one's beliefs, values and identity *can* and *should* be open for radical consideration. The reasons to act a certain way are derived from all different sorts of biological, psychological, social and rational processes that constitute the considerations of a person. Not far into his book *Politics of Persons*, Christman states that "autonomy should be seen as a historically structured aspect of persons, or more precisely, a

dimension of persons conceived as socio-historical entities."[13] It is clear that this alternative focuses more on the historical and socially constructed aspects of one's identity. To make an autonomous decision does not demand full control over all parts of your identity, but rather awareness and acceptance of their existence. If we apply datafication to this criterion, it is much more likely to be compatible with autonomy than in the traditional liberal view. It is impossible to have full control over all the factors that play a part in the process of datafication and influence or guide our actions. However, if we are aware of their existence and impact, and agree on this, datafication should not necessarily be harmful to our autonomy. Christman offers a different conception of autonomy: to be autonomous does not demand the ability to radically *alter* oneself, but rather "to *be* truly yourself."[14] This means that autonomous individuals should not aim to radically revise one's beliefs, values or identity, but rather to understand the way in which they are shaped.

To obtain such an understanding, two important capacities are required. First, an individual should possess a capacity for radical self-reflection, to be able to reconsider and evaluate one's values and opinions. Second, an individual should be able to reflect on current events in light of their history and origin.[15] It is important to notice that Christman uses a negative form for his definition of autonomy, that is: to be A (autonomous) is *not* to be B. As a counterpart for autonomy, Christman chooses the concept of 'alienation'. This is understandable, given his earlier definition of autonomy as "to *be* truly yourself". Autonomy is thus defined negatively through the presence or absence of alienation. These principles combined eventually form the core of Christman's definition of autonomy: "the person is autonomous (relative to some factor) if [...] she would not feel deeply alienated from the characteristic in question. To be alienated from some aspect of oneself is to experience negative affect relative to it, to experience diluted or conflicted motivation stemming from it, and to feel constricted by it, as though by an external force."[16] In other words, Christman states that being autonomous demands not-being-alienated. This has to be understood broadly: one should not only be non-alienated from the values and

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[13] John Christman. *The Politics of Persons. Individual Autonomy and Socio-historical Selves.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 11.
[14] Christman, "Liberalism," p. 200.
[15] Ibid., p. 201.
[16] Ibid., p. 202.

beliefs one has, but also from the processes that caused these desires to develop - i.e. the history or origin of these values and beliefs. The other way around, if a person is feeling alienated from certain desires, for example in cases of involuntary addiction, the person cannot be considered autonomous in making decisions stemming from that addiction.[17] Individuals can only be regarded as autonomous once they (a) accept the fact that their reasons to act are formed socio-historically and (b) are capable of evaluating and reflecting on those reasons. As a consequence, rather than focussing on controlling our beliefs and values, we should reflect on how they are constituted and where they come from.

We are now left with an image of Christman's theory on autonomy. However, since the focus here is on authenticity rather than autonomy, we will return to the core of this thesis. What can we learn from this concept of autonomy in relation to our questions on authenticity? In the following section, we will have a closer look at how to live authentically, according to the theories we just discussed above.

1.2. How to live authentically: conceptions and requirements

For the aim of this thesis, I would like to adopt Christman's viewpoint and elaborate more on the conception of authenticity that follows from this theory. In the following section, I will make this more plausible by creating a theory of liberal authenticity understood as not-being-alienated from the processes that constitute certain personal beliefs or values. In this section, I sketch the idea of liberal authenticity, including a basic definition and three requirements - transparency, self-knowledge and psycho-archaeological knowledge - that are needed to live authentically. To support this, I will discuss some examples of particular cases wherein this conception of authenticity will become more clear.

The key concept for our theory of liberal authenticity is similar to Christman's theory on autonomy: alienation. To make authentic decisions, therefore, is to not be alienated from the things that are related to this decision-making process. This has to be understood in a similar way as Christman proposed in regard to autonomy - it is wrong to expect a complete insight in the processes that shape you and your decisions, but in order to act authentically you need to not be alienated from them. We only need a certain degree of

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[17] Christman, "Liberalism," p. 203.

transparency in the underlying processes of our choices to consider them alien or not. But besides that, we must decide for ourselves what the things are we feel alienated from: the things that scare us or those we heavily disapprove. This calls for some self-reflexiveness and knowledge about the norms and values one lives by and identifies with. Not in a strict manner, but again to a certain degree, to at least determine whether we can identify ourselves with that choice or not. Finally, since many processes have an important sociohistorical component, we must have some knowledge of their origin. By learning their nature and how they came to play a role in our decision-making, it will be easier for us to determine whether we feel alienated from these processes or not. We thus eventually end up with three requirements for living authentically: transparency (I), self-knowledge (II) and psycho-archaeological knowledge (III), which I will set out further below.

The first requirement for living authentically according to this liberal conception is transparency. In making authentic choices, there are many factors that play a role in this process. To consider a decision 'authentic' means to have a clear view of those factors and their function in the actual decision-making. For example, one could consider an action to be authentic if they could afterwards interpret it in light of a certain authentic motive. In reality, however, this process of decision-making could have taken different forms. Take for example the phenomenon of nudging. Nudging is aimed to subtly stimulate people into doing certain things or behaving a certain way. It is nowadays implemented by governments as well, in order to gently push the behaviour of their people in the right direction. A nation could, for example, want their people to have a more healthy diet, and by applying nudging techniques (such as placing fruit and vegetables at the entrance of a supermarket or at eye level on the shelves) they hope to positively alter their behaviour. This may lead to people eating healthier and eventually adopting a healthier lifestyle. The question, however, is the degree of deliberate choice of people to whom nudging techniques are applied. One could argue that he or she has deliberately chosen to eat healthier and consider this as a personal and authentic decision. On the other hand, the role of unconscious yet effective influences such as nudging must not be underestimated. After all, it is imaginable that the person in question would not have been able to change his lifestyle without these nudging techniques, causing them to be the decisive 'push' in his decision-making. If this is the case, the

authenticness of his decision is called into question. The person might reconsider one's decision-making if it was accompanied by such an unconscious - if you want, 'alien' - crucial factor. While nudging might seem a specific example, the same goes for datafication. If people are using technological devices that use datafication to make recommendations and give advice, there is always a certain degree of (in)transparency. Some apps or platforms are relatively transparent in the personal data they collect and the algorithms they use. Others might use more opaque strategies to generate and process their information. If a person finds out that the newsfeed on one's smartphone is an intransparent product of online tracking, personal preferences and data-analysis, one might consider the customized influx of news unauthentic. In order to make authentic choices in the type of news one wants to follow, there has to be an awareness of the factors that make the preselection. For this reason, to consider a decision to be authentic, one has to have some degree of transparency concerning the processes that caused this decision. Only when one has an understanding of the crucial factors within the process of decision-making, a person can consider these factors - and thereby their decision - to be authentic or not.

Self-knowledge is a second requirement for living authentically. In order to make authentic decisions, one must be able to determine the things one stands for. This might seem ambiguous: is it possible to *determine* the things one *stands for*? I tend to answer this question positively. On the one hand, the things one stands for are a given, an intuition, already existent in people's minds and yet to be discovered. This way, people can try to understand themselves better in finding and exposing their underlying identity. On the other hand, the individual plays an active role in the process of identity-forming through giving preference to certain character traits or viewpoints, whether they stem from intuition or not. By suppressing the tendencies that are undesirable and giving preference to others, the individual finds a way to alter the already made up part of his identity. Therefore, I would argue that one's identity is a product of already existent features that can be *discovered* and the classification of tendencies that is to be *determined*.

For this paper, it is crucial to understand that identification and self-knowledge are two separate concepts, although they are heavily connected in this second requirement. Self-knowledge can lead to different types of personal information, such as good and bad tendencies, talent or predisposition to a

certain addiction, and a person does not need to identify oneself with everything there is to know about them. However, in order to speak of authentic decisions, there is a need for self-knowledge as well as identification. A true consideration on the authenticness of your decisions is problematic when one is not able to determine whether one self-identifies with the decision and processes that caused it. To identify yourself with something demands a conception of your own identity; otherwise, there would be nothing to identify and the identification would make no sense. For example, if a person chooses to follow a political movement one day but prefers to join the complete opposite the other, it would be hard to say that the person identifies completely with both ideologies at the same time. We would rather say that the person does not know where one stands or that there has been a change of heart. The second option can be seen as an authentic and deliberate decision, whereas the first can barely be seen as a well-considered choice. If the person does not have a clear conception of one's values and beliefs, it is hard to point out the things one identifies with. We can intuitively understand this ourselves: if there is an important situation wherein we do not have a clear opinion, we tend to postpone the decision; to think about it in relation towards our beliefs and values. As long as we do not have such an understanding of our own identity in relation to the decision, we cannot identify ourselves with it and therefore we cannot call it an authentic decision. While this identification is not necessary for every choice one makes, I think it is fair to say that it is a necessary condition for a deliberate decision to be considered authentic. Thus, within the context of this thesis, identification is seen as an important process within authentic decision-making; and to do so, one must have knowledge of their personal beliefs and values. The example of Facebook in the main introduction is a good illustration of this. Although Facebook sent me a video of 'my year', I did not at all identify myself with the overview that was made. Such a statement is possible if and only if I am aware of my personal beliefs and values. It would be impossible to consider the video to be 'incomplete' or 'inauthentic' without a certain degree of self-knowledge and identification. In short, the second requirement of self-knowledge can be interpreted as the ability to determine the things one identifies with, and the things one does not.

The third requirement for living authentically can be understood as psycho-archaeological knowledge. In the context of this thesis, I choose this

term to describe knowledge of the origin and evolution of the processes that determine our decision-making and identity. Let me illustrate this with an example. One could have a strong religious motive in making certain choices, which the person in case conceives as authentic. After all, it is clear that this motive plays a role in his decision-making (requirement I) and that he or she can personally identify with that process (requirement II). However, one might not be aware of the fact that this religious belief has been imposed by their parents or through religious education. The person could consider his religious beliefs 'alien' since they were not deliberately or intuitively chosen by him to become part of his identity. If that is the case, the person would step off from this belief and consider all his decisions that were based on this belief unauthentic, for they relied on an alien process. Of course, many of our beliefs and desires are implicitly founded in our childhood through education and the environment we grew up in. This does not have to be a problem for authenticity, given that the person agrees upon these beliefs and the way they are formed. What is critical is the question of whether the person is *aware* of the sociohistorical origins of their beliefs. It is imaginable that the person in question would have doubts on the authenticity of this belief if he or she would know that it has been formed through external forces during their childhood. If this is the case, the first two requirements are not sufficient to generate true feelings of authenticity, for one is not aware of the origin of their beliefs. Only when a person is aware of the background wherein his beliefs and desires have originated, one is able to consider them alien or not.

We now end up with a liberal conception of authenticity that has to meet three requirements in order to function properly. To be authentic means to not feel alienated from the decision or the processes that caused it. To support this practice of authentic decision-making, one must have a transparent view on the crucial factors that caused the decision (I), have self-knowledge concerning personal values, beliefs and opinions (II) and have psycho-archaeological knowledge of the origin and evolution of the processes that caused the decision (III). It is important to notice that these requirements focus on the individual person's abilities, while also taking external and environmental factors into account. Concerning this particular type of authenticity, its nucleus is found within the agent's own consciousness, knowledge and rational capacity. Whether

a decision is authentic or not solely depends on the individual's personal consideration and reflection.

That being said, there seem to be other aspects within the relationship between datafication and authenticity that are not yet discussed. For example, since every individual determines one's own feelings of authenticity, could there be a consensus on what it means to be alienated from something? And if such a shared conception is not actually there, is it even possible to value general statements on 'authenticity'; or does liberal authenticity fall into subjectivism, in which every individual creates one's own conception of authenticity? Moreover, it is a question to what extent liberal authenticity succeeds in interpreting the impact of datafication on authentic decision-making. While a certain degree of transparency and psycho-archaeological knowledge is set as a requirement, there is not much attention given to the scale and speed in which such factors operate through datafication. The current datafication processes that influence our decision-making might extend the limits of our individual cognitive capacity - both in volume and complexity - which leaves the liberal requirements sidelined. Datafication is more than a single influential factor amongst others in the process of decision-making: it is fundamentally changing the way in which we make important choices and consider them authentic or not. It is clear that something is lacking in the liberal conception of authenticity. Therefore, we must find a richer approach, to better understand the profound relationship between datafication and authenticity and its impact. Taylor might provide such a conception; one that focuses on different aspects of personal authenticity. After setting out the idea of liberal authenticity in this first chapter, it is now time to look at another conception of authenticity, that is the *dialogical* one.

2. Dialogical authenticity

In this chapter, we will have a look at a richer understanding of authenticity than that of liberal authenticity as set out in the previous chapter. Many of the things that have been pointed out in the first part of the previous chapter apply to the idea of dialogical authenticity as well. However, for the aim of this paper, I now focus on the parts in which they differ to make way for a useful comparison at the end of this chapter. In contrast to the liberal conception, dialogical authenticity can be understood as not particularly situated within the agent's own consciousness, but rather existing in *dialogue* with a background of meaning, values and significance, as well as in dialogue with other people. We use Taylor's theory on authenticity to support this and to further develop the concept of dialogical authenticity. Similar to the first chapter of this thesis, I will point out two requirements that must be met in order to live authentically according to this conception of dialogical authenticity: the existence of horizons of significance (I) and the facilitating of self-definition in dialogue (II). In the second part of this chapter, a comparison will be made between the general idea and requirements for liberal authenticity and those for its dialogical counterpart, in order to make way for a successful comparison in relation to datafication in the third chapter.

2.1. The idea of dialogical authenticity

Let me explain my choice in calling this type of authenticity 'rich', in contrast to its liberal counterpart. When we have a look at Taylor's ideas in *Ethics of Authenticity,* it becomes clear that this concept of authenticity is quite demanding:

> "Briefly, we can say that authenticity (A) involves (i) creation and construction as well as discovery, (ii) originality, and frequently (iii) opposition to the rules of society and even potentially to what we recognize as morality. But it is also true, as we saw, that it (B) requires (i) openness to horizons of significance (for otherwise the creation loses the background that can save it from insignificance) and (ii) a self-definition in dialogue." [18]

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[18] Taylor, *Ethics*, p. 66.

I am especially interested in the second part (B) of this quote. According to Taylor, for something to be authentic, it does not merely require an agent declaring it 'authentic'. Feelings of authenticity can only exist in relation to a background that has meaning in itself, albeit implicit or explicit. This idea not only presupposes a conscious agent that has certain values or beliefs, but an environment that has meaning and importance in itself. If this is the case, it seems as if there would be things considered 'important' or 'valuable' even before an individual has determined them to be so. This is exactly what Taylor means with horizons of significance: "Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order *matters* crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial. Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands."[19] Without the recognition of these demands, life would be considered trivial and meaningless after all, since nothing could be considered 'important' without referencing to other things that matter. It is thus necessary for authenticity to presuppose a certain horizon of significance that serves as a scale for things that matter, or meaning in general; hence my choice to call this type of authenticity 'richer' than its liberal counterpart, since a certain background of significance is necessarily included in its conception. This counts as the first requirement for living authentically according to this dialogical theory, that is the existence of horizons of significance.

It is important to notice that such horizons can never be fully independent or non-judgemental. In another text, Taylor gives the example of the linguistic dependence of value claims, which is also applicable for labelling something 'authentic'. Imagine a neolithic farmer that is madly in love with a beautiful, *sophisticated* lady that lives next door. This may sound strange: there seems to be something wrong in calling neolithic farmers 'sophisticated'. Of course, even in the final era of the Stone Age there might have been events or people that we would nowadays call 'sophisticated', but it is highly improbable that the neolithic farmer himself had this vocabulary at his disposal. This addresses the problem of making such statements: it is not that nothing in the neolithic era *was* 'sophisticated', but rather that "Nothing that these people could say could ever *count* as describing something as [...] "sophisticated," as long as they had their

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[19] Taylor, *Ethics*, p. 40-41.

particular linguistic background."[20] Value claims, or meaningful statements in general, can thus only exist - or, if you like, only have value or meaning - within a linguistic framework that supports such statements. When we add this to the first requirement, we end up with horizons of significance that provide not only meaning and importance, but also linguistic tools and descriptions. This raises the question of how these conceptions of value and meaning are included in the horizons of significance, and if they are universally valid.

It seems problematic to assume the existence of a language that already contains all notions of value and importance in order to make meaningful statements. Given our current conception of language as an evolving ethnohistorical phenomenon, such assumptions become problematic. Besides, if meaning would already exist in language and through language only, then what significance can be given to datafication, which first and foremost expresses its results through numbers? If we want to further develop our theory of dialogical authenticity, we must come up with an answer to the question of how horizons of significance can contain the important concepts that are needed for authenticity and how its linguistic meaningful background is formed.

Perhaps we can presume that meaningful concepts are created, to a greater or lesser extent, by members inside the linguistic system. This would mean that meaning is not existent *an sich*, isolated from any form of a linguistic community. However, there is still something that meaningful statements refer to, namely the linguistic community and its members. If we recall our conception of liberal authenticity, such a referent outside of the agent is missing. One could argue that without a decent frame of reference, the concept of 'authenticity' becomes less meaningful and slides into the domain of subjectivism, as I did at the end of the first chapter, in the case of liberal authenticity.[21] This is not the only way in which dialogical authenticity can be seen as rich in comparison to liberal authenticity, but I will take up this discussion in the second section of this chapter. For now, the question remains as to how these subjective concepts are constructed. If we ourselves construct these concepts and ascribe meaning to them, what is the role of horizons of significance then?

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[20] Charles Taylor. *Philosophical arguments.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 132.
[21] See page 22 of this thesis.

This relation between agent and horizon results in the second requirement for authenticity, namely self-definition in dialogue. For an individual, the definition of him- or herself has to be understood as a dialogical action, which are actions "effected by an integrated, nonindividual agent."[22] A dialogical action thus always acts from the viewpoint of a 'we' and depends on the sharing of the agency. In the case of horizons of significance, the construction of important values and meaning can be understood in this same dialogical principle. The central idea is that all personal judgements or validations are constituted in dialogue with other people against a background of meaning, which is at the same time subject to those individual validations. But what does it mean for a person's feelings of authenticity, when his actions are understood as deriving from a nonindividual ('we') viewpoint? For Taylor, authentic self-realisation requires self-articulation on the basis of self-interpretation and self-evaluation.[23] Since every form of validation is subject to individual judgement and recognition, and even constituted by those same claims, it is impossible to interpret yourself in isolated form. Dialogue is thus not only a side issue, but a necessary condition for authenticity, since self-articulation can never be a solipsistic activity.[24] While this claim is also made for horizons of significance, it is now important to stress the dialogical and thereby fluid, reflexive and feedback-responsive character of this meaningful background. This background is best understood as a product of different individuals that share a certain set of beliefs and meaning, while at the same time confirming or disapproving (and thereby changing) this belief-system in conversation with each other - hence 'dialogical'.

Briefly, these two requirements form the blueprint for what I have labelled dialogical authenticity. On the one hand, authenticity is weighed off and determined against a certain meaningful background and validated in dialogue with certain horizons of significance. On the other hand, in interpreting and evaluating oneself, individuals are constantly in dialogue with the other members of their specific belief-system, creating meaning and importance jointly.

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[22] Charles Taylor. "The Dialogical Self." In: *The Interpretive Turn. Philosophy, Science Culture,* edited by David R. Hiley and James F. Bohman, 304-314. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 63.
[23] Stefaan Cuypers, "Taylors conceptie van persoonlijke autonomie in de morele psychologie", p. 78 in: Stefaan Cuypers and Willem Lemmers (eds.). *Charles Taylor: Een mozaïek van zijn denken.* Kapellen: Pelckmans, 1997.
[24] Ibid.

2.2. Differences between liberal and dialogical authenticity

After discussing the concepts of liberal and dialogical authenticity, it is now time to draw up the balance. Not only should we weigh up liberal and dialogical authenticity against each other, but also consider their possible interpretive capacity regarding datafication. As stated in the general introduction of this thesis, I do not only claim that there is an important relationship between authenticity and datafication, but also that dialogical authenticity is better able to interpret different aspects of datafication compared to liberal authenticity. It is still too early to sufficiently substantiate this statement, but the previous two chapters did raise some questions already. Why is the distinction between liberal and dialogical authenticity important in our discussion of datafication? What are their fundamental breaking points? And how are both types of authenticity realizable? To answer these questions, I will take the general differences between both theories as my point of departure - most of the time through Taylor's critics. After that, we will focus on more specific differences between their requirements for making authentic choices.

First, it is important to understand that Taylor has a strong opinion on the contemporary status of authenticity. Due to modern developments within our society, of which datafication is just one amongst many, the task for us to live authentically has become more and more difficult. Most of it is caused by societal changes that disadvantage the possibilities and requirements for living an authentic life. For example, the horizons of significance in traditional societies were way more vivid and clearly defined in comparison to our society nowadays.[25] Strict belief-systems that incorporated hierarchies of importance and explicit ideas on morality and 'the good' provided a clear idea on how one should live his or her life. Being authentic against such a vivid and unalterable background is straightforward: one can be for or against the belief-system that is provided by their traditional society, and to act upon this individual viewpoint means to act authentically. The norm was set: either the Church or King (in medieval Europe) or Islamic authorities (in parts of the Arab world) determined a series of norms and values for the people to follow. To be an authentic citizen meant to simply determine whether you identified yourself with that certain belief-system or not, and to act in accordance with that identification thereafter.

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[25] Cuypers, "Taylors conceptie van persoonlijke autonomie in de morele psychologie", p. 79 in: Cuypers and Lemmers (eds.) *Charles Taylor*.

In contrast, contemporary technological, economic and social forces have pushed humankind towards a slender conception of authenticity that is centred around the individual agent and prioritizes self-determination. To regain parts of the rich, romantic and dialogical idea of authenticity, a work of retrieval must be done. Instead of dismissing pre-modern culture altogether or clinging to the postmodern condition, we should have a look at the underlying ideas of pre-modern conceptions of authenticity and have a second look at their importance and motivation.[26] In contrast to this view, liberal authenticity does not follow the idea of a loss of authenticity. It is more abstracted from actual societal conditions, and focuses more on the individual agent in defining authenticity. History and social context are taken into account, but it is eventually up to the individual to evaluate his feelings of authenticity. This sets both theories apart, with liberal authenticity being the one focused predominantly on the individual agent, whereas dialogical authenticity favours a more holistic approach regarding authenticity.

Taylor has his reasons for disagreeing with the liberal conception. He states that horizons of significance - which count as a necessary requirement for authenticity - can never flourish in a social environment of subjectivism.[27] When every individual in a certain community makes up his own values and standards, the essential rich moral background turns into a blur and will eventually disappear. Liberal authenticity makes the same mistake as for example social-liberalist theories that focus merely on the individual and are centred around the self. Such an individualistic understanding "flattens and narrows our lives", reduces meaning and distances us from relationships with others.[28] It follows from a focus on formal self-determination, rather than on authenticity. The problem is that both are very often confused. On a formal level, self-determination and authenticity might seem synonyms for the same act of living one's life in accordance with personal orientations. This means no restrictions in conceptions of the good life and the possibility for everyone to live their life in freedom.[29] Taylor agrees with this on a formal level, but states that authenticity differs critically in content. Social atomism is accompanied by the

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[26] Taylor, *Ethics*, p. 72.
[27] Ibid., p. 58.
[28] Ibid., p. 4.
[29] Guido Vanheeswijck, "De ambivalentie van het moderne subject bij René Girard en Charles Taylor", p. 117-118 in: Cuypers and Lemmers (eds.) *Charles Taylor*.

impoverishment of horizons of significance, which are required to express oneself and live authentically. Liberal authenticity might thus have a point concerning the formal status of self-determination: it falls short in really understanding authenticity in the dialogical sense. Taylor continues his attack on individualist theories by stating that they do not only fail in understanding authenticity, but human life in general. As explained before, Taylor uses the idea of dialogical actions to describe certain human behaviour. He argues that a big part of our social life must be understood this way, e.g. public actions, our identity and even language itself. Monological descriptions of these actions are simply inadequate in describing these actions: "We can't understand human life merely in terms of individual subjects, who frame representations about and respond to others, because a great deal of human action only happens insofar as the agent understands and constitutes himself as integrally part of a "we." "[30] This non-individualistic perspective of a 'we' is crucial in understanding these actions, which also applies to the case of dialogical authenticity as I mentioned earlier. However, such a perspective is not present in our conception of liberal authenticity.

A more technical difference can be made between liberal and dialogical authenticity in their conceptions of personal autonomy. As stated before in the previous chapter, autonomy plays a crucial role in understanding authenticity. While we put the question of autonomy aside a while ago, it now arises from a difference between both theories on authenticity. In mapping different positions on personal autonomy, Stefaan Cuypers distinguishes two parameters. A position can be descriptive (A) or normative (B), as well as based on internalism (I) or externalism (II) regarding moral responsibility, hence widening or narrowing the scope of autonomy. This brings us to four positions: descriptive internalism (Ia), descriptive externalism (IIa), normative internalism (Ib) and normative externalism (IIb).[31] For this thesis, we are interested in both descriptive and normative externalism, as those can be seen as the positions defended by Christman and Taylor respectively.[32] Both of their theories defend externalism:

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[30] Taylor, "Dialogical Self," p. 63.
[31] Cuypers, "Taylors conceptie van persoonlijke autonomie in de morele psychologie", p. 68 in: Cuypers and Lemmers (eds.) *Charles Taylor*.
[32] I deliberately choose to not include the other two positions - descriptive internalism and normative internalism - in this discussion, as they would only complicate the matter and are of no added value to this thesis. For an extensive explanation of all four positions please see Cuypers,

the notion that external factors - such as social environment, history and education - influence personal autonomy. I already described Christman's idea of autonomy as not being alienated from the processes that cause certain beliefs and desires. This position is descriptive, since it requires the individual agent to determine his relation to the causal processes that influence his decision-making, and thereby demanding the agent to have a certain degree of transparency, self-knowledge and psycho-archaeological knowledge.[33] This concept of autonomy faces a problem concerning distinction: an individual agent must be capable of determining whether the causal history of his or her beliefs are just or wrong ('alien'), regardless of whether they are conscious or unconscious.[34] This is quite a task for each individual, especially given the fact that Christman allows external and unconscious processes within his definition of autonomy. In order to make sense of it all, the person must be able to distinguish the main and side issues that influence his autonomy and understand their mutual causality, before one can determine whether they feel alienated from those factors or not. With a main focus on the individual agent thus comes great responsibility, and questions arise to which extent rationality and cognitive capacities are necessary requirements for a person to be considered autonomous. We could even go as far as saying that the people we consider irrational can not be acting autonomously. Although it is hard to imagine that Christman would support such a statement, it is undeniable that his conception of autonomy implies a certain degree of rational capacity.

In contrast, Taylor tries not to focus on this type of capacity in order to live autonomously, but rather on interpretation and evaluation. This position is normative because it does not demand to produce an objectified description, but rather a subjective first-person understanding in relation to a rich moral background and social context.[35] For this position, the emphasis thus shifts from rational capacity and consciousness towards the acknowledgement of your position in a certain context and evaluating this against an already existent moral background of meaning. Again, this does presuppose some degree of cognitive capacity, but different than in Christman's position. Whereas Christman focuses

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"Taylors conceptie van persoonlijke autonomie in de morele psychologie", p. 68-74 in: Cuypers and Lemmers (eds.) *Charles Taylor*.
[33] See section 1.2 of this thesis.
[34] Cuypers, "Taylors conceptie van persoonlijke autonomie in de morele psychologie", p. 71 in: Cuypers and Lemmers (eds.) *Charles Taylor*.
[35] Ibid., p. 75.

more on the agent gaining knowledge about his situation and understanding the underlying processes, Taylor argues that it is crucial to interpret and evaluate one's particular position in a given context. This brings us to a similarity between the two theories as well a disagreement. Both liberal and dialogical authenticity defend externalism, that is, they recognize the importance of external factors in the autonomy of an agent. They differ, however, in their conception of a person's capabilities in determining their autonomy; for Christman, it is necessary to suppose some degree of rational capacity to determine causal processes and identification with them, whereas Taylor's position demands awareness and evaluation of one's condition within a social context.

In line with this are the differences found in requirements for both conceptions of authenticity. We have seen that liberal authenticity requires transparency, self-knowledge and psycho-archaeological knowledge; and that dialogical authenticity requires horizons of significance and self-definition in dialogue. What is perhaps most striking is the source of these requirements. As mentioned before, liberal authenticity focuses on the individual agent's rational capacity and consciousness, whereas dialogical authenticity places its requirements mostly in the contextual realm. This might not be a surprise, given that dialogical authenticity requires some form of dialogue between the person and something else. It is however important to notice that this source of requirements is crucial in relation to contextual factors. We have seen that the idea of dialogical authenticity is accompanied by feelings of impoverishment and loss of meaning, due to societal developments. This is caused by the very notion that the requirements for dialogical authenticity are situated (partly) in the outside world: in a social context. The source of these requirements being in the outside world can be seen as a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, it offers many opportunities to improve our feelings of authenticity through sources that can be found in our social context. For example, since meaning is found in the outside world through horizons of significance, it might be easier for an individual to regain parts of his authentic life than the alternative of solipsistic consideration, as proposed by liberal authenticity. If we speculate on the possibilities that datafication might provide to this social enrichment in the forms of increasing communication, knowledge and interconnectedness, there seem to be many ways to do so. On the other hand, negative developments concerning the impoverishment of our social culture and morality - which is dialogical

authenticity's most severe threat - are reflected directly in our feelings of authenticity. It is a question to which extent datafication is contributing to this impoverishment, or if it can offer a way out instead.

The fact that liberal authenticity does not follow this same idea of social pauperization is caused by its focus on the individual agent. While dialogical authenticity treats external factors as a resource, or even as a necessary requirement for authenticity (in the case of horizons of significance), liberal authenticity considers external factors to be a possible threat, for example in the form of (unconscious) manipulation, which is its biggest concern. Yes, external factors, history and social context are taken into account, but the requirements - i.e. transparency, self-knowledge and psycho-archaeological knowledge - are still to be obtained by the individual agent. One could argue that this type of requirements is easier met (or at least easier obtained) than those for dialogical authenticity, since the latter would require the alteration of our social context, values and morality. For liberal authenticity, our social context and history could change in any way possible, while not directly making authenticity untenable. The source of requirements is and will be found in the individual's cognitive capacities and consideration, disregarding direct influences from societal developments. Here it seems that while liberal authenticity may give a more 'flat and narrow' - to use Taylor's words - view of our lives, it might also be more applicable on different types of society. The question whether requirements for liberal authenticity are indeed easier met in our contemporary society than requirements for dialogical authenticity, and the role datafication plays within this process, is something we will further discuss in the next chapter of this thesis.

3. Datafication and its relation with authenticity

After discussing both types of authenticity in much detail, it is now time to turn towards the case that is central in this thesis: datafication. First, to obtain a better understanding of the subject, I will give a short introduction to the concept of datafication. Subsequently, to make this relationship between datafication and authenticity even more plausible, two examples are discussed: Spotify music and TripAdvisor. After that, in the third section of this chapter, we will have a look at the possible implications and consequences of datafication in relation to authenticity. I will further elaborate on these consequences and see whether it causes problems with regards to authenticity or not. In doing so, the differences between liberal and dialogical authenticity are clearly set out - in section 3.3a and 3.3b respectively - to eventually give an answer to the main question of this thesis.

3.1 The concept of datafication

As we have seen in the introduction of this thesis, datafication is a contemporary but complex phenomenon, as it is expressed in different ways and in different domains. We have adopted the idea that datafication is responsible for "transforming all things under the sun into a data format and thus quantifying them".[36] This implies certain aspects of human life to become quantified, whereas we did (or still *do*) not understand these aspects that way. One could think for example of important life events and our relationship with others - as we saw in the example of Facebook. We have also seen that, since datafication is such a contemporary phenomenon, it has not yet received much philosophical criticism. Research on datafication rather takes place in other fields of science and it is therefore difficult to determine a sound philosophical definition for the concept of datafication. However, I will now compose a general idea of what is meant by 'datafication' in the rest of this thesis:

> **Datafication** is the process of *subjective 'matter' becoming quantified*. That is, things that were considered merely subjective - like relationships, opinions and motivation - are now interpreted as quantitative data. Usually, the process of datafication is carried out by

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[36] Schäfer and Van Es, *The Datafied Society*, p. 11.

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companies or big organisations through technological devices, such as smartphones or personal computers. For the purpose of this paper, I only focus on cases wherein individuals are voluntarily using these devices and thereby participating in datafication.

This tentative definition consists of a number of different parts, which are the *process* of datafication (A), the *way* in which it is carried out (B) and the *choice* of using these devices (C). Of course, the process of datafication (A) is the most important characteristic in this definition, but the other two parts must not be underestimated. After all, to obtain the necessary subjective matter, a certain agreement must be met with the individual (C) who is the producer of data; while at the same time gathering enough data to make way for a useful analysis (B). Therefore, I think it is a good idea to include these parts in our provisional understanding of datafication. Moreover, it makes way for a more extensive analysis of the concept of datafication in a broader context and immediately indicates its relation to society and individual agents. We could thus say that datafication is a process (A) and a choice (C) that operates in a certain way (B). In relation to authenticity, the way in which datafication is carried out (B), or the fact that it is a deliberate choice (C) might be crucial in determining whether we can speak of authentic decision-making or not.

3.2 Two examples: Spotify music and TripAdvisor

To obtain a better understanding of the relationship between authenticity and the concept of datafication, I will now give two examples of the phenomena one can encounter in everyday life. In doing so, it will become clear how subjective aspects of human life are quantified and translated into data sets. Both examples can be seen as a literal interpretation of the definition given in the previous subsection. Please note that it is not my aim to use this as an extensive case study, but rather as an illustration of the phenomenon detected above - i.e. datafication. I will thus not go into much detail about the operation or logarithmic outline of both devices, but speak more of their relationship towards us and our feelings of authenticity instead. It is not unthinkable that one might disagree with me on these views of both devices in relation to authenticity, but I think these examples showcase a major change in the way we validate and appreciate

things, which is likely to change our conception of authenticity. As stated before in the introduction of this thesis, the question concerning datafication does not arise from literature studies or academic discourse: it appeals to me as striking and urgent in our everyday life, yet extremely interesting conceptually and as important as the more common topics within philosophy. Besides that, I think most of my peers and contemporaries are able to identify themselves with the positions displayed here below, which makes it a suitable example for the aim of this thesis.

First, we discuss the rating-system and validation-system of Spotify, a very popular contemporary device for streaming and downloading music in a legal way. While currently available in almost 80 countries, it was founded in Sweden in 2008.[37] In a recent interview, Amarjit Batra, Managing Director of Spotify India, gives an explanation of Spotify's functions: "We're able to give users a distinct music experience, right from day one, that builds on the demand for genres of music across moods and moments. They can tap into over three billion playlists, and even have ones created specifically for India with the most popular local languages. Spotify will also enable them to discover new and local artists as they continue to break into the music scene."[38] A few things Batra mentions are interesting. For example, in the first sentence, the characteristics of an underlying algorithm "that builds on the demands ..." are displayed. Though a 'demand' might usually be understood as a personal and subjective desire, it is now transformed into a quantified and calculative phenomenon. Besides that, customers are able to "discover" music through the music platform. Given that musical taste and preference are seen as quantified - i.e. *datafied* - within the application, Spotify is able to determine which songs you will like and which you will not. All these functions are based on individual and personal preferences, or in other words, they interpret the particular data that each individual produces together with the grand total of all users of the platform.

When we return to our composed definition of datafication, we clearly recognize each individual part within this example. The process of datafication consists of collecting data regarding the individual and personal preferences of

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[37] As found on Spotify's official website: https://newsroom.spotify.com/company-info/ (last consulted on 22-05-2019).
[38] "4 Questions (And Answers) with Amarjit Batra, Managing Director, Spotify India", (February 26, 2019) as found on https://newsroom.spotify.com/2019-02-26/4-questions-and-answers-with-amarjit-batra-managing-director-spotify-india/.

listeners (A) and is carried out by Spotify (B). Each individual listener agrees to their data being used by the device (C), given that they could find music and even listen to music that is composed of their personal preferences. The consequence of this relation between Spotify and authenticity expresses itself as follows: the ability and determination of your own personal values and beliefs might be overshadowed by counting on Spotify's algorithm in meeting your demands and desires. We no longer consciously determine which music we want to listen to, but simply select the playlist "Evening Relax | Weekend Chill"[39] when it's the right time, to accompany our objective circumstances - e.g. the time of day we are listening to music. The algorithm used in Spotify combines personal preferences, such as votes or ratings of specific songs, together with popularity trends and contextual information, like the time of the day or the weather. The question is whether all these influential factors leave room for authentic decision-making, or that authenticity is overshadowed by this algorithmic determination. Of course, this consideration is not always important when we are listening to music, but it illustrates how datafication can alter our authentic decision-making. I do not want to label this development as either good or bad just yet. Instead, I want to think about it for a while and come back to it when we discuss the relation between datafication and authenticity in more detail.

Second, we have a look at TripAdvisor, which displays reviews from tourists around the world in an aim to give useful suggestions on where to eat, sleep and go when you are on vacation or simply looking for suggestions. TripAdvisor was founded in 2000 and the platform currently has a collection of more than 730 million reviews and opinions on travel experiences.[40] Its main function is to inform people about where to go or what to do. By visiting their website, one has access to a huge amount of reviews, opinions and experiences from other people. Besides that, TripAdvisor composes certain lists or charts responding to your search terms. For example, if you type in 'Paris' and look at 'Things to do' you get an overview of different lists of activities, sorted out by category, price or 'Traveler favorites'.[41] It is especially this last kind of list - which is given the name 'Top Attractions in Paris' - that I am interested in. TripAdvisor composes such a list for every major travel destination, and usually

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[39] As found on http://playlists.net/charts - consulted on 12-03-2019.
[40] As found on https://tripadvisor.mediaroom.com/us-about-us (last consulted on 22-05-2019).
[41] As found on the following webpage https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g187147-Activities-Paris_Ile_de_France.html (last consulted 22-05-2019).

ranks ten local 'attractions' in order of popularity. This popularity is based - similar to what we saw at Spotify - on the reviews and ratings of individual users of the platform. By scrolling through such a list, one can easily determine the attractions that are worth visiting.

Of course, TripAdvisor does a great job at providing information from and to different people around the world. It is a great tool in finding potential activities to do when you travel, or check some reviews before you put effort in visiting certain places. Besides that, it perfectly follows our definition of datafication: the experiences of individual people are quantified through a systematic review and rating system (A) that takes place on the platform of TripAdvisor (B). People agree with this quantification of their subjective experiences, since they simply post the reviews and ratings themselves (C). The result of this is a well-arranged and applicable platform on which people can find useful information for their travels. However, the platform might alter our authentic decision-making at the same time. By creating lists of 'Top Attractions', accompanied by many ratings and reviews, a person might be pushed in a certain direction. This can lead to the person in question making other choices during their visit than they originally would have made. The authentic decision-making makes way for a more objective view in choosing a certain place you want to visit - through quantitative data (ratings and composed lists) of the subjective experiences from other people. In an ideal situation, people can indicate their preferences and create an individual profile in order to create the best possible tourist experience. Let us have a look at the example of Paris again. Through datafication, this idealized algorithm should be able to tailor a specific advice for each and every individual, taking into account personal preferences and interests together with the data collected from other individuals. So, if I would go on a two-day city trip to Paris, the algorithm uses the information I provide - such as nationality, age, gender, pattern of expenditure, education, work and hobbies - to find the best activities and sights according to my personal profile. However, in reality, many rankings and 'must-visit' lists are based on general popularity, accessibility and commercial interests. Again, as with Spotify, I do not want to say that this phenomenon is harmful or in fact preferable. Rather, I would like to make plausible the impact that dataficition, in the form of TripAdvisor in this example, can have on our concept of authenticity.

What do both examples have in common? They are relatively new, widespread and widely accessible, extremely successful and a very important device in determining our validations and feelings of authenticity, as is my claim. To make the transition from these examples towards the general phenomenon of datafication however, we must dive in deeper towards a conceptual analysis of the relation between datafication and authenticity. To do so, understanding the phenomenon of datafication *an sich* is not enough to understand its relationship with authenticity. To really investigate every part of datafication, we must have a look at some of its most important consequences.

3.3 Consequences, improvements and threats concerning authenticity

It is now time to turn towards a more conceptual analysis of the relationship datafication has with authenticity. To do this, I will first describe some academic positions regarding the subject, through arguments from Morozov and Bunz.[42] After that, I will compose a list of four expressions of datafication in relation to authenticity. I use the term 'expression' because all four are different in character (they can be either cause or effect) and stem from different aspects of datafication. Finally, I will compare both liberal and dialogical authenticity and weigh them up against these four expressions to eventually formulate an answer to the main question of this thesis. Let us start with an analysis of the possible impact datafication has on our society.

Evgeny Morozov is an outspoken critic of the popular claim that modern datafication and technology make way for a completely different type of society. He argues that the principle of algorithmic datafication is not time-specific or unique at all. In fact, it has not become more important to generate, collect and analyze data, but simply much easier. Nowadays, decision-making based on data-analysis might seem to be the easy way out, whereas authentic decisions seem to lay at the end of a narrow road full of meanders and personal obstacles. This is a very modern view on making decisions, as there is no inferiority in using data to support your decision. The crucial difference is that datafication has been heavily promoted and growing over the last few centuries. The underlying

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[42] Mercedes Bunz. "The Need for a Dialogue with Technology," in: *The Datafied Society* (2017) p. 249-254; and Evgeny Morozov. "Opposing the Exceptionalism of the Algorithm", in: *The Datafied Society* (2017) p. 245-248.

ideology that fuels the demand of researching data is capitalism, which has not drastically changed since the implementation of this socio-economic system. The most important shift in the last few decades is, according to Morozov, the fact that the algorithms used for collecting data have become more and more opaque, due to the fact that they are often privately owned by companies (and, therefore, we have little knowledge of them).[43] We recognize this in the examples of Spotify and TripAdvisor, since we are aware of the existence of the underlying algorithms to which we grant data, but we have no idea of their real function or use. Also, it is clear that both companies have an economic interest in collecting subjective data from their users. The question now remains if this is really a problem for our authentic decision-making. I tend to answer this question positively, for we have seen in our conception of liberal authenticity that the origin and history of a certain influential process can be crucial in determining one's position towards it.[44] I will further discuss this problem in section 3.3a, but for now it is interesting to postulate it at a plausible factor that might have an impact on our conception of authenticity. Even though Morozov does not ascribe as many societal consequences to datafication as others do, he observes a change in the process of collecting data, which might be useful in our analysis later.

In contrast to Morozov, Mercedes Bunz argues that datafication is in fact much more influential in our societal structures and public discourses than we might think. The political aspect of technological development should always be considered and put in perspective. For datafication, this means that it can heavily contribute to democracy, given its power to collect different types of information and making them available to the public. In the first place, individuals are taking advantage of this by finding their own information and reasons to act, instead of being manipulated by a government or a doctrine; and in the second place it helps alternative voices to be heard and recognized instead of a mainstream unilateral information flow.[45] However, the increasing process of datafication in our society has a downside too: "What once was opinion forming has now been taken over by decision-making machines that have become an inherent part of our social organization."[46] This predicts the deskilling of humankind in making

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[43] Morozov, "Opposing the Exceptionalism of the Algorithm," p. 247.
[44] See section 1.2 of this thesis, p. 21 in particular.
[45] Bunz, "The Need for a Dialogue with Technology," p. 252.
[46] Ibid., p. 249.

authentic decisions, since people's choices are based more and more on rational decision-making rather than opinion forming. Thus, our current dependency on datafication can have severe consequences for the human capacity of decision-making. But avoiding datafication as a society seems unlikely to happen, and moreover, pointless, according to Bunz; she suggests that we should shape our critique in dialogue with technology, rather than being for or against it. The new developments in technology have its ups and downs, but we should be aware of how they can change our social environment, labour and politics.

To consolidate this discussion, I would like to set out four different ways in which datafication might influence our authentic decision-making. First, there are the underlying algorithmic processes that constitute dataficational devices such as Spotify and TripAdvisor. The very purpose of these processes is to make money - albeit direct (from subscriptions) or indirect (through advertising or generating data) - and thus dataficational devices are seen first and foremost as economical products. Second, the devices discussed facilitate an enormous free space for opinions and validations, as well as access to huge quantities of information. This creates room for alternative voices to exist, to be considered and to be appreciated. Each individual now has a more extensive frame of reference in validating and evaluating their authentic choices. Third, authentic choices are made *for* people, not *by* people. TripAdvisors' slogan is a perfect example of this: "know better - book better - go better".[47] It is important to notice that the process of having personal opinions on something and evaluating others' is beginning to change towards a more rationalized character of decision-making. By doing so, the concept of reflection and evaluation has been removed from the process and exchanged for a more instrumentalized consideration. Fourth, the dependency on these dataficational devices makes people less skilled in making authentic choices by themselves. The constant display of subjective experiences becoming quantified makes people believe that objective views are necessary for their choices. Deep reflection and evaluation on the things one really identifies with are exchanged for a more objective view, and old ways of making authentic decisions are put to bed. Datafication thus has four major expressions that might cause changes in relation to authenticity, in the briefest way I can condense it:

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[47] As found at the bottom of each individual webpage, see www.tripadvisor.com.

1. The underlying algorithmic system is an economic-capitalist product.
2. Democratizing effects: more information and alternative views are available.
3. Choices are made for people and not by people.
4. People are getting less skilled in making choices for themselves.

In the last part of this thesis, we will see how both of our conceptions of authenticity respond to these four expressions of datafication. It is now time to finally turn towards the main question of this thesis, to obtain a profound understanding of the relationship between datafication and authenticity. Besides that, it is time to defend my thesis that dialogical authenticity does a better job in interpreting this relationship and understanding the multiple aspects of datafication. However, to respect the general chronology of this thesis, I will start off by discussing liberal authenticity in relation to our current understanding of datafication.

3.3a Datafication and liberal authenticity

As we have seen in the first chapter of this thesis, the main risk for authentic decisions in the liberal view is manipulation. To prevent this, one must meet a set of requirements: transparency (I), self-knowledge (II) and psycho-archaeological knowledge (III). In the previous subsection 3.3, we have identified four major expressions of datafication that might improve our feelings of authenticity on the one hand, or increase the risk of manipulation on the other. Let us first have a look at the requirements for liberal authenticity in relation to the four expressions discussed above.

The first expression - the underlying algorithmic system being an economic-capitalist product - could form a problem for liberal authenticity, since transparency (I) and psycho-archaeological knowledge (III) are required. One could feel alienated from the economic purposes of the underlying algorithmic process that shapes their beliefs and desires, in which case their final decision could be deemed unauthentic.

The second expression tends to be a positive one, as the accessibility of more information and alternative opinions will reduce the change of (unconscious) manipulation. If individuals become more and more aware of the information that determines their choices and are able to contemplate over

alternative viewpoints, their decision-making will be more conscious and authentic than without this sort of information provided by datafication.

The third expression - the fact that choices are made for people and not by people - does not necessarily have to be a problem. Provided that the individual is aware of their choices being made for them, hence still respecting the first requirement (transparency), the person is not alienated from the process of decision making. Liberal authenticity does not stress the importance of the agency of the individual, but focuses on one's permission or consent.

The fourth expression evokes a similar kind of response, namely that as long as one is still capable of rationally determining the things he or she identifies with, and as long as self-knowledge (II) is still possible, the deskilling of people in making authentic decisions is not a substantial problem. Again, provided that the person is not alienated from the processes that influence his decisions, because this would mean that the third requirement, psycho-archaeological knowledge, is problematic.

What do these insights mean for the aim of this paper? First, it is clear that datafication is a bilateral phenomenon. On the one hand, it promotes transparency and accessibility of more information. Deskilling and a loss of agency do not seem to be substantial problems, and might even provide more transparency and a more efficient way of decision-making. On the other hand, there is a danger in the underlying systems and algorithms that execute the process of datafication. For liberal authenticity, it is necessary to not feel alienated from the processes that shape and determine our decisions. Therefore, the economic interests that fuel processes of datafication could be seen as a problematic factor.

Moreover, the central problem of manipulation remains a potential hazard for liberal authenticity. In fact, I would argue that it remains the only real concern within this concept. This illustrates the limited understanding liberal authenticity can provide with regard to datafication. In trying to define authenticity, liberal authenticity focuses especially on the individual and its cognitive capacities, which results in a conception that considers manipulation to be the central threat to authenticity. If we bring the concepts of authenticity and datafication together, the liberal theory gets caught up in this conception that is purely focused on and centred around the danger of manipulation. Liberal authenticity has a point in stressing the risks of manipulation that come with

datafication, but it overshadows all other aspects of the phenomenon. In interpreting the four expressions of datafication, it becomes clear that liberal authenticity does not have a solid answer to the different aspects that might improve or threaten our feelings of authenticity. Most of the responses strand with a notion of some requirements on the condition that 'the individual does not feel alienated from the process of decision-making.' These responses only give us limited insights into the relationship between datafication and authenticity. In the end, it is still up to the individual to decide whether the changing processes of decision-making through datafication are either improving or decreasing one's feelings of authenticity. I would say that this is a somewhat disappointing outcome of a theory that is intended to clarify the relationship between datafication and authenticity. Although Christman ambitiously tries to come up with a better alternative to the classic liberal theory, we have to admit that it is still too narrow to fully understand the main problem of this thesis. Let us now have a look at how the theory of dialogical authenticity responds to this problem.

3.3b Datafication and dialogical authenticity

After discussing the potential effects of our four expressions of datafication on liberal authenticity, we will now be doing the exact same thing for dialogical authenticity. In contrast to manipulation, dialogical authenticity focuses more on sources of richness, meaning and purpose. Therefore, the impoverishment of these values is seen as the greatest risk for authenticity. We have established two different requirements to prevent this pauperization from happening, which are the existence of horizons of significance (I) and self-definition in dialogue (II). If we start, again, by looking at the four expressions of datafication, we can determine whether they would be considered positive or harmful in line with the dialogical view on authenticity.

The first expression of datafication - the economic interests that underlie processes of datafication - might cause a problem for dialogical authenticity. The algorithms that perform the task of datafication do not provide a rich moral background with horizons of significance (I), but rather produce an artificial-objective outcome, focused solely on collecting as much data as possible for economic purposes. There is no value or meaning already existent in this

economic background, and it is, therefore, a source of impoverishment for the rich moral background in which authenticity can flourish.

The second expression will clearly cause problems for this dialogical conception of authenticity. As a consequence of datafication, horizons of significance will turn into a blur, since there are too many different opinions and atomist views. There will be a lack of coherence, which is crucial for the rich moral background to properly function (I). Moreover, an abundance of opinions and values is a threat to horizons of significance (I). However, self-definition in dialogue with other people is still possible.

The third expression, the fact that choices are made *for* people rather than *by* people, might be the most fundamental of all four. If people no longer make their own, authentic choices, there is not much of a dialogue or evaluation possible. Datafication contributes to this by providing more and more tools for people to determine their choices. Popular technological devices, like TripAdvisor, aim to make choices for people rather than people making authentic choices for themselves. This is crucial for our theory of dialogical authenticity, since the second requirement, self-definition in dialogue (II), will become impossible.

To further build on this last requirement, we encounter another problem in the fourth expression of datafication. We assume that authentic choices are made and evaluated in dialogue (II). If people can no longer make authentic choices, and fail to participate in the important dialogue between people about identity, value and meaning, this will cause a major problem. Not only will self-definition in dialogue become impossible, but the reflexive horizons of significance will stiffen too.

What does this leave us with, considering the main question of this thesis? If we compare the responses given by dialogical authenticity to those given by liberal authenticity, it is clear that the dialogical variant is much more critical in its attitude towards datafication. In three out of the four expressions, there is a strong negative impact on the requirements for authenticity, whereas liberal authenticity often leaves the choice open for the individual to decide. This supports the suggestion made at the end of chapter 2, that the necessary requirements for liberal authenticity might indeed be easier met than those for dialogical authenticity. However, this does not mean that a liberal conception of authenticity is favourable in understanding datafication. As stated before, liberal authenticity can only offer us a limited and incomplete understanding of the

phenomenon of datafication. Dialogical authenticity does a much better job in interpreting the impact on social relations, meaning and the ability to make decisions. This conception transcends the individual's feelings and validation of authenticity and tries to conceptually understand its relationship with datafication through a holistic approach, whereas liberal authenticity cannot really break free from its predominant focus on manipulation. Dialogical authenticity might give us a gloomy picture of the impact datafication can have; it also provides us with more ways to improve these impoverished conditions. The individual's responsibility to improve one's personal feelings of authenticity is partly relieved and replaced by a collective need to nourish our meaningful background through horizons of significance. I will not say that this is an easy task, far from that, but it is at least one possible way to counteract the impoverishment of authenticity.

Conclusion

This thesis has intended to clarify the relationship between the contemporary process of datafication and our feelings of authenticity in making important decisions. First, we analysed the concept of authenticity through two different theories, i.e. liberal authenticity and dialogical authenticity. In the first two chapters, necessary requirements have been established for both conceptions of authenticity in guaranteeing an authentic decision-making process. For liberal authenticity, those were transparency, self-knowledge and psycho-archaeological knowledge. For dialogical authenticity, those were horizons of significance and self-definition in dialogue. I have argued that, although the requirements for liberal authenticity are easier met in our contemporary society, those for dialogical authenticity offer the opportunity to nourish the sources that improve our feelings of authenticity. After constructing both conceptions of authenticity, it was time to head back to the main question of this paper, which demanded a clear understanding of datafication.

In trying to define datafication, three important factors were the actual process of datafication, the way in which it was done and the choice of using datafication devices. We tested this definition by applying it to two popular platforms that many people use nowadays: Spotify and TripAdvisor. After obtaining a better understanding of the use and function of datafication processes, it was time to focus on the relationship between datafication and authenticity. In doing so, it has become evident that there are four different expressions through which datafication has an impact on authenticity, namely the underlying economic interests, the accessibility to more and alternative information, the fact that choices are made for people and not by people and the deskilling of people in making important choices. We put both liberal and dialogical authenticity to the test, and let them respond to these four different expressions. In their responses, it became clear that liberal authenticity could not say too much about the different expressions and got caught up in the answer that they were not harmful, provided that the person in question did not feel alienated from them. Dialogical authenticity, on the other hand, is much more straightforward. Its responses were rather gloomy, but the theory provided sufficient material to successfully understand the different aspects of datafication in relation to authenticity. This confirmed my thesis that dialogical authenticity

does a better job at interpreting the possible impact of datafication with regard to authenticity since it addresses multiple aspects of datafication, within the decision-making process and beyond, whereas liberal authenticity finds itself focusing, overshadowing the other aspects.

Why was this question important? As stated in the introduction, the problem of datafication in relation to authenticity appears to me as urgent. Besides that, this thesis has not only provided insight into the concept of datafication, but all the more in that of authenticity. Considering the potential growth of datafication, it is necessary to take a certain position from where we can successfully interpret its impact, like the changing process of our authentic decision-making. I admit that there are possible counter-arguments from the liberal position within this debate on datafication and authenticity, but there is no place for that in this thesis. Besides that, the whole problem of datafication is one with an open end. We do not know at all in which ways technology will develop and continue to have a growing impact on our lives. Perhaps we will look back, a decade from now, and see that manipulation was indeed the greatest threat of datafication after all and liberal authenticity was right all along. For now, we must work with the information that is available, which is certainly not exhaustive. The writing of this thesis really was a choice of which path to follow and which to leave untouched. Along the way, I encountered numerous interesting research topics to lose yourself in, and I would definitely encourage people to do so in further research on this topic. I am certain that there are many more promising ideas and concepts to further be discovered. The future will learn which important steps are yet to be taken in order to really understand the ever-changing impact of technology on our feelings of authenticity and our everyday lives.

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