What is the Point of Being Your True Self?

A Functional Genealogy of Essentialist Authenticity.

Abstract

This paper presents a functional genealogy of essentialist authenticity. The essentialist account maintains that authenticity is the result of discovering and realizing one's 'true self'. The genealogy shows that essentialist authenticity can serve the function of supporting continuity in one's individual characteristics. A genealogy of essentialist authenticity is not only methodologically interesting as the first functional genealogy of a contingent concept. It can also deepen the functional understanding of authenticity used in neuroethics, provide a possible explanation for the prevalence of the idea of an essentialist true self and justify the use of the ideal of authenticity. First, essentialist authenticity is defined and explained through the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Second, a general need to have steady characteristics is derived from basic human practices. Third, circumstances that make it more challenging to steady oneself are identified and shown to have become more prevalent in the age of modernity when the ideal of authenticity emerged. Finally, it is shown how essentialist authenticity helps to steady the self.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the genealogical method has been rediscovered as a means for uncovering what concepts are about and what their function is (Craig, 1990, 2007; Geuss, 2013; Kusch & McKenna, 2018; Lightbody, 2010; Queloz, 2020a, 2020b, 2021; Williams, 2002). Genealogies analyze concepts, not by seeking necessary and sufficient conditions, but by considering the needs and predicaments that led to their development. A functional genealogy explains the point of a concept by uncovering its practical origins.[1] So far, such functional genealogies have been applied to anthropologically necessary concepts, concepts deemed necessary for beings like us, such as knowledge and truthfulness. However,

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[1] The functional genealogy differs from other genealogical traditions, such as the ones inspired by Foucault, the post-modernists, or critical theory, in its pragmatic and naturalistic nature (Compare Queloz, 2021, pp. 6–8).

the method should apply to historically local concepts as well (Queloz, 2021, pp. 231–235; Williams, 2002, p. 172).The practical origin of local concepts is rooted in needs and predicaments which arise out of historically contingent circumstances, in contrast to universal ones in the case of anthropologically necessary concepts. This paper construes a functional genealogy of such a local concept – of essentialist authenticity.

The essentialist approach to authenticity maintains that every person has an individual, unchanging core – one's true self. To be authentic means to find the true self and live by it. Essentialist authenticity can be understood as one end of the spectrum of views on authenticity. At the other end of the spectrum, existentialist approaches deny the existence of an essential true self and see the authentic self as freely created. The essentialist view of authenticity has gained renewed interest, particularly in the field of neuroethics (See e.g., Bolt, 2007; de Haan, Rietveld, Stokhof, & Denys, 2017; Hope, Tan, Steward, & Fitzpatrick, 2011; Kramer, 1997; Levy, 2011; The President's Council on Bioethics, 2003). Patients worry their authenticity might be threatened by a mental disorder or by the treatment thereof through psychopharmaceuticals or psychosurgery or they hope to regain it through a treatment. Moreover, the idea that we have a true self we should find and realize is a significant and common belief in ordinary thought (Haslam, Brock, & Bissett, 2004; Strohminger, Newman, & Knobe, 2017). It finds expression in literature, cinema, and popular culture. Despite the prevalence of the idea, it is unclear *why* many people think in terms of essentialist authenticity. There are reasons why people are drawn to this concept and why it evolved in modernity. Uncovering the practical origin of essentialist authenticity can help us to understand why this idea is so widespread, why it developed in that period, and rationalize it to the extent that it is shown to be an apt response to a certain predicament. The genealogy cannot and does not aim to show that the concept is objectively valid but rather that we have pragmatic reasons to think in terms of essentialist authenticity.

While functional genealogies have so far tended to present their object as a solution to a universal problem arising from anthropologically necessary needs (Craig, 1990; Williams, 2002), I will argue that in the case of authenticity, the hurdles preventing the fulfillment of general human needs are historically contingent. The essentialist conception of authenticity is a solution to a problem resulting from a fundamental need – the need for a stable self which can be traced back to basic

human practices – and historically local hurdles impeding the fulfillment of this need. Because essentialist authenticity is a solution to a geographically and temporally local problem, we cannot identify a general proto-concept, which is not bound to the specific predicament (in contrast to Williams' and Craig's genealogies). Essentialist authenticity is a contingent solution to a contingent problem. This paper is methodologically innovative as the first functional genealogy of a historically local concept.[2] A genealogy of authenticity can illustrate and prove the range of applicability of functional genealogies beyond anthropologically necessary concepts. Moreover, it can show how the general argument structure adapts to a contingent concept.

The genealogical argument of the paper is the following: We have a fundamental need to be reasonably steady in our basic characteristics because some general human practices, in particular long-term cooperation and prediction of behavior, only work if we are steady (part 3). The developments of modernity facilitated changing oneself and made it harder to remain steady. This leads to a predicament given the need for continuity (part 4). The ideal of essentialist authenticity can support the steadiness of the self and thereby be a helpful tool to deal with this predicament (part 5). This genealogy indicates that the practical origin of essentialist authenticity can be found in the function of supporting the continuity of the self. It thereby shows what needs and predicaments contributed to the development of essentialist authenticity, what draws people to it, and in which situations it becomes particularly attractive. First, however, I will define essentialist authenticity with reference to the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of the first advocates of authenticity, if not its originator.

2. Essentialist authenticity

The concept of authenticity combines ideas from different traditions. Most saliently, we can distinguish between accounts in an essentialist and existentialist tradition. The concept of authenticity contains a component concerning the nature of the self and a normative part, describing a certain way of being oneself as necessary for a fulfilled life. According to the essentialist account, every human has an

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[2] A discussion of pragmatic reconstructions of local concepts that are applying the method of functional

individual true self. To be authentic one has to discover one's true self and live by it (See e.g., Elliott, 2004; Ferrara, 1993; Herder, 1914). In contrast, existentialist accounts deny the existence of an essential true self (See e.g., DeGrazia, 2000; Rorty, 1989; Sartre, 1956). Instead of self-discovery, authenticity demands a free creation of the self. Those two views can be understood as two ends of a spectrum, which leaves room for dual-basis views, combining elements of both (See e.g., Leuenberger, 2020; Nyholm & O'Neill, 2016; Pugh, Maslen, & Savulescu, 2017). Dual-basis views have gained popularity because both existentialist and essentialist accounts seem to capture some of our intuitions about the nature and malleability of the self and the concept of authenticity. The tensions within the concept of authenticity resulting from the two opposing traditions are fertile and reflect the complexity of human psychology (Parens, 2005).

Recently, essentialist notions of authenticity found support in debates on neuroethics (Elliott, 2004; Erler & Hope, 2014; Hope et al., 2011; Kramer, 1997; Levy, 2011; Nyholm & O'Neill, 2016; Singh, 2013; The President's Council on Bioethics, 2003): Essentialist authenticity is referred to as something to be considered in neuroethical assessments (e.g., if a psychopharmaceutical threatens authenticity we have a reason to choose a different form of treatment); patients often seem to refer to essentialist authenticity – it is an important issue for them and whether or not they feel authentic may influence how they assess the success of the treatment; and it has been argued that in particular individuals with mental disorders refer to essentialist authenticity to provide a form of guidance which cannot be provided by existentialist accounts. In the neuroethical debate, essentialist authenticity is usually only briefly characterized. It is understood as a matter of self-discovery with the goal of being true to oneself or one's essence. Besides providing a starting-point for the genealogy the following definition of essentialist authenticity can further clarify the concept used in neuroethics.

Commentators on the history of authenticity agree that the concept developed in 18th-century European thought (Guignon, 2004; Janssen, 2010; Taylor, 1989, 2003; Trilling, 1972; Varga, 2012). One of the first and most prominent advocates of essentialist authenticity was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who inspired Herder and the Romantics, although he never used the expressions 'authentic' or 'authenticity'. Only in the 20th century was this term introduced for persons in the sense of just,

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genealogy more loosely can be found in (Queloz, 2021).

natural, genuine, non-affected, or true (Knaller, 2007). Nevertheless, Rousseau was clearly preoccupied with aspects of the self and ways of being oneself we would now cover by the concept of authenticity. The ideal of living in accordance with one's true self is evident throughout his novels, autobiographies as well as his theoretical works. In his period, being in touch with one's inner voice 'takes on independent and crucial moral significance' (Taylor, 2003, p. 26). The idea that one's inner voice, instead of dry calculations of principles and consequences, can indicate what is the morally right thing to do, was already prevalent before. What is new with the establishment of the concept of authenticity is that it becomes morally significant to listen to this voice independently of acting rightly or being sincere. We should acknowledge it to live a true and full human life. So, authenticity became an ideal, a precondition for fulfillment, based on an essentialist self-conception. Starting from Rousseau, essentialist authenticity found its way into contemporary popular culture as well as academic debates.

I will characterize essentialist authenticity via five assumptions as they can be found in the work of Rousseau: a distinction between a core and peripheral self, the innateness of the true self, access to the true self through self-examination, the possibility of alienation, and its normative scope. Those five assumptions are meant to represent the core ideas of essentialist authenticity. This characterization is a model and as many models, it is something of an idealization. The view is rarely anymore fully adopted in this stark form, but the idealized version nevertheless exercises a pull. Essentialist authenticity serves as a crucial building-block for dual-basis views, it provides a pivotal contrast to existentialist views, it is still a commonly found element in popular culture, and, as I will argue, it has pragmatic utility. I do not want to suggest that essentialist authenticity offers an empirically plausible view of the self. The idea of an unchanging, innate, core self is empirically flawed (compare e.g., Caspi & Roberts, 2001) but it is nevertheless useful in fulfilling its function of steadying the (in fact malleable) self.

1) Core and periphery: Everyone has an individual true self which consists of core views, dispositions, values, interests, goals, and traits. Other aspects of the self are less central and not part of the individual essence. For instance, in the *Confessions* Rousseau calls himself naturally gentle, timid, bashful, and without vanity, just to name a few (Rousseau, 1995, pp. 12–15, 40, 44). He repeatedly

identifies characteristics, actions, or feelings as making up his true self. But there are other actions and aspects of his personality which he rejects. He takes them as resulting from social pressure and a weakness to stand by his true convictions. The latter are merely circumstantial deviations, peripheral and incidental aspects of his self, whereas the former depict his true, natural disposition, stable and central to who he truly is. These most central aspects of the self cannot be abandoned without leading to self-loss.

Ferrara offered a reading of *Julie or the new Héloïse* according to which this is the main theme of the novel. Julie is portrayed as a case of a tragic self-loss because she suppressed her love, a feeling most fundamental to who she is, in favor of her ethical principles. The suppression of her feelings meant that she had 'nothing left deserving regard' (Rousseau, 1997, Part 2, Letter 3). Rousseau seems to suggest in his novel that if there is an inner conflict, it has to be acknowledged and the more peripheral side should be worked on or ignored. The central aspects of the self have to be protected to avoid self-loss and inauthenticity.

Another, developmental aspect of the core-periphery distinction can be found in *Emile, or On Education*. Rousseau defended the view that children were already endowed with individual natural dispositions, a contentious issue of his time. Those core dispositions should be preserved and protected from corruption through education and society. In contrast, the less central impulses or inclinations ought to be disciplined (Parry, 2001, p. 254). To think in terms of essentialist authenticity means to cherish and protect the naturally given.

2) Innateness: The true self is overall unchanging and not up for us to define. This idea is exemplarily present in Rousseau's autobiographical works. Throughout the *Confessions*, he ascribes many of his traits to natural dispositions. The core self is understood as innate. In some passages, Rousseau talks explicitly of his innate timidity or his innate benevolence (Rousseau, 1995, p. 299; 2000, IV). The goal of his negative education is to bring those innate tendencies to flourish without trying to directly form the child or to foster certain moral views or character traits. The formative childhood experiences Rousseau described in the *Confessions* often only had the effect of leading him astray, away from his true nature to which he eventually found back again. 'As soon as I had made my resolution I became another man, or rather I became again the one I had been before whom this

moment of intoxication had made disappear' (Rousseau, 1995, p. 218). In the *Confessions* and the *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* Rousseau repeatedly dramatized such moments of self-loss. But this does not mean that his true self changed – he just lost contact with it, due to his own weakness and social pressure. After a time of self-loss, he was 'restored to nature', back to his given and immutable essence. In his very last work, Rousseau claims to have remained the same despite those episodes of self-loss: 'I, the very same man who I was then and am still today' (Rousseau, 2000, I).

This innateness condition does not claim that, for instance, a person was already timid as a baby or already had the goal of becoming a judge. The idea Rousseau presents in *Emile* is that a child has natural dispositions that will develop through autonomous discovery into authentic values, goals, interests, and traits if they are protected from the corrupting influence of society and the domineering wills of others. Similar to how a seed has the potential to become a willow tree, if allowed to grow under good conditions, humans have innate dispositions that will develop with the right upbringing.

3) Self-examination: We can get to know this true self and distinguish core aspects of the self from peripheral ones through self-examination. To get to know your essence warrants a thorough, rational self-examination like the one Rousseau undertook to write the *Confessions* and the *Reveries*: 'what am I? This is what remains for me to seek.' (Rousseau, 2000, p. 3, I) or 'I again take up the sequel to the severe and sincere examination I formerly called my Confessions. I consecrate my last days to studying myself and to preparing in advance the account I will give of myself before long. Let me give myself up entirely to the sweetness of conversing with my soul.' (Rousseau, 2000, p. 6, I). According to Rousseau, to access the true self we must look inside and meditate on our beliefs and dispositions. In this respect, Rousseau's project of self-examination differs from Augustine's and those following his lead. They did not claim to find *themselves* by looking inside but God (Guignon, 2004, pp. 8–9). Rousseau introduced the look inside as a path to one's individual essence.

The rational, discursive self-analysis is complemented and supported by intuitive access to aspects of the true self through one's emotions. The *Confessions* are a report of the feelings and emotional states Rousseau experienced rather than his reasoning about the episodes of his life. He claims to have a unique, intuitive knowledge of his emotions and himself in general. However, this form of self-awareness is often corrupted through the distracting effects of society. Once we know our

true emotions, we should endorse them rather than attempt to keep them under control – again a central theme of *Julie*.

4) Alienation: Sometimes we abandon our true self because in some situations it can be beneficial, because it would require strength to stand by one's true self or because other people or society in general pressure us to conformity. A failure to live according to one's essence leads to alienation and self-loss. Rousseau gives examples of episodes in which he abandoned his true self: 'Recall those short moments of my life in which I became someone else, and ceased to be me; […] it lasted almost six years, and would perhaps still be lasting, if it were not for the particular circumstances that made it cease, and returned me to nature above which I had wanted to raise myself.' (Rousseau, 1995, p. 350). He describes himself in this period of lost contact with his true self not only as appearing to be different but as being someone else. While for him such states are rare episodes, he claims that for most people they are very common: 'It has been noticed that in the course of their life the majority of men are often unlike themselves and seem to be transformed into entirely different men.' (Rousseau, 1995, p. 343). The reason why we deviate from our true self according to essentialist accounts of authenticity can be found in the corrupting effects of society and the weakness of human beings. Society encourages us to suppress or control our deepest feelings, thoughts, and dispositions. Thereby it leads us astray from who we really are. This is a central topic of the *Second Discourse* (Rousseau, 1992). In the *Confessions,* Rousseau mentions a few instances when he was not able to express his true thoughts or feelings because of the social norms he felt pressed to follow. But this self-loss can also occur in privacy or in the circle of close friends and family. If a person has been thoroughly corrupted by society, she is no longer guided by her inner voice and natural dispositions, even in the absence of others.

5) Normative scope: to be your true self is an ideal we should strive for. This ideal does not necessarily lead to the morally good or to what makes us happy. Instead, to be authentic means to have a fulfilled life.[3] We can understand a fulfilled life broadly as a life deemed meaningful. Fulfillment goes beyond hedonistic pleasures and comfort. A person can be unhappy and still consider her life meaningful, for instance, because she is following a purpose she believes in. Each one of us has his or

her own original and individual way to fulfillment that cannot be found through imitation of anyone else's. The answer to the question how I should live a fulfilled life is to be found within. If I don't live according to my true self, I miss the point of my life (Taylor, 1989). Rousseau and many after him connected the idea of being authentic with the good via the notion of the natural. The true self is who one is by nature, before society and others exert their corrupting influence. Nature, on Rousseau's conception, is ultimately good. Human beings are good insofar as they act in accordance with nature. Society, by contrast, is primarily a source of inequality and immorality.[4]

To conclude the characterization of essentialist authenticity, it makes sense to position essentialist authenticity with respect to a further differentiation in the spectrum of views on authenticity. Besides a distinction between essentialist and existentialist authenticity, we can draw a distinction between what one could call *conservation* and *process views* of authenticity (Leuenberger, forthcoming). A *conservation view*, such as the above-defined essentialist authenticity, judges a persons' authenticity solely by assessing whether core characteristics changed.[5] Different conservation views distinguish themselves by what counts as a persons' core characteristics, what their metaphysical status is (e.g., if it is an essence), and when and how they develop (e.g., innate or after childhood). *Process views*, on the other hand, judge authenticity based on the process of change. It does not matter which aspects of the self change over time, as long as the way they changed is not inauthentic, for instance, through manipulation or peer-pressure. Existentialist authenticity is a process view. It demands that changes are caused by a free choice but does not limit the aspects of a person that can change authentically. A different process view, which is also influential nowadays, holds that authentic changes need to occur 'naturally'. According to such an account, a change is authentic if it is not produced by social conditioning, manipulation, or dissimulation. Instead, natural changes occur when a person matures and makes new experiences. Even changes to deep-held beliefs or long-lasting traits can be authentic as

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[3] However, the true self is often thought of as fundamentally good. Rousseau supported this view, though especially Freudian psychology contributed to a conceptual shift, which views the self as naturally containing destructive and evil elements.

[4] However, also virtue only develops in society. It has been pointed out that Rousseau makes a distinction between being good and being virtuous (Kelly, 2001). To be good means to do what is good for oneself with the least possible harm for others. Virtue, on the other hand, can lead you to choose the morally right over your self-interest. Thus, while it is not necessarily virtuous to follow your true self, it is nonetheless good.

[5] In the neuroethics debate on authenticity, the impact of a neural intervention on authenticity is often judged based on which characteristics of a person changed through the intervention and not the process of change (e.g., Erler, 2011).

long as they occur 'naturally'. Such views are sometimes associated with essentialist authenticity, most likely because of the connotation of the essence as natural. However, since those two views use a different basis for evaluating the authenticity of a person and also appear to perform different functions, it makes sense to separate them.

3. The need to be steady

After characterizing essentialist authenticity, we can turn to genealogy to answer the question what might have let to its development, what draws people to it and in which situation essentialist authenticity becomes particularly attractive. As a first step of the genealogy, the fundamental need essentialist authenticity responds to is established. This part argues that humans have a general need to steady the self. As mentioned above, the inherently static true self of essentialist authenticity is empirically implausible. But some pragmatic needs require that we steady our selves and give rise to social practices favoring a steadied self. In line with the essentialist view, one could argue that what needs steadying is not the self but rather people's behavior, which can either manifest the static true self or depart from it. Besides the empirically disputable assumption of the static self, such a strong separation between the true self and one's behavior is problematic. It appears that we are to a high degree defined by our actions (compare Leuenberger, 2020). Otherwise, a person that never actually helped or tried to help anyone could have a helpful true self, which seems implausible.

With the term self, which I will now argue we have reasons to keep steady, I mean individual characteristics like views, dispositions, values, interests, goals, and traits.[6] If those characteristics do not change strongly over time the self is steady. An antipode of a steady individual would be Rameau's nephew, a figure in a novel by Denis Diderot (Diderot, 2016). He is a constantly shifting character, changing his motives, views, outlooks, and passions over and over throughout the dialogue. It seems impossible to pinpoint the beliefs which are most central to Rameau's nephew because his mind is so unstable. Not all of our characteristics are equally prone to change (Williams, 2002, pp. 191–194). Some views, such as what I just had for lunch or that a pencil falls to the ground if I drop it, are almost

impossible to give up or change. To change the belief about the memory of a particular experience or standing facts about the world I may have to question a large network of beliefs and I might even end up being viewed as insane. Other characteristics are much more flexible. I can change my mind about a hobby, a life-goal, or my opinion about another person without my worldview collapsing. We do not necessarily have a fixed dispositional state with regard to those kinds of beliefs. Individuals with a steady self do not tend to change their personal characteristics, even those for which this would be easier.

The need to steady the self arises because some basic social practices and individual endeavors concerned with planning, controlling, and anticipating the future require a reasonably steady self. Society can still accommodate a fair amount of diachronic change among its members but the trust we place in those practices and their reliability shrinks if people become overly unsteady. This leads to social practices in support of steadying the self. I want to discuss three, partly overlapping, basic human practices requiring a steady self. First, long-term planning and cooperation require continuous characteristics. Before entering long-term cooperation or investing in a long-term plan you want to be sure that the person/s you cooperate with keep/s having an interest in successfully executing the plan in question to its conclusion. In short, you want to be sure that you can rely on the relevant characteristics of others before you commit yourself. Equivalently, you want others to see declarations of who you are, what you believe, and what you want as persisting if you want them to enter into commitments with you. Thus, we have an interest in steadying ourselves and others. Also outside the social realm, such continuity of the self is relevant, in particular for complex cultural aspects of human life. When pursuing long-term plans, I want to make sure that *my* dispositions are to some degree preserved, even if no other parties are involved. To plan the future and to try to control it through long term plans, we need to be reasonably reliable and steady in our characteristics.[7]

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[6] The given definition pertains to what a self is on the surface and not its underlying ontology which is not at stake for essentialist authenticity. I do not advance a metaphysical definition of the self (as, for instance, discussed by Olson, 2007) at this point.

[7] The idea that long-term planning turns us more steady and predictable is not new, for instance, Nietzsche argued: 'In order to have that degree of control over the future, man must first have learnt to distinguish between what happens by accident and what by design, to think causally, to view the future as the present and anticipate it, to grasp with certainty what is end and what is means, in all, to be able to calculate, compute – and before he can do this, man himself will really have to become reliable, regular, necessary, even in his own self-image, so that he, as someone making a promise is, is answerable for his own future!' (Nietzsche, 1994, p. 36).

Second, we predict each other's behavior based on the characteristics we derived from previous interactions. For those predictions to be reliable over time, and to ensure that we can build up relevant knowledge of other people, they need to remain reasonably steady. In many social interactions, we rely on such predictions. If I buy a present for a friend because he said he would like to have it, if I tell someone a joke because I think she laughs at this sort of humor, or if I am very polite because I know my counterpart is easily offended – in all those situations I use predictions about other people's behavior to make social interactions more successful. Predictions provide a further reason for a social practice that favors steadiness.

Third, mental time travel requires steady characteristics. Mental time travel refers to the faculty to mentally project oneself to past or foreseen future events (Suddendorf & Corballis, 1997). When we imagine, for instance, future situations, we tend to imagine ourselves and others as remaining more or less the same. I might imagine myself and my family enjoying cooking in the spacious kitchen I am planning to install. Thereby, I rely on the assumption that we will still like cooking at the time the kitchen is ready to use. If someone tries to motivate himself to stop smoking by imagining his future life as a non-smoker, or how much better his past would have been had he not smoked, he needs to assume that besides the habit of smoking he remains largely the same. If we take mental time travel to be informative or motivating, we presuppose that the imagined people do not change to a degree that would invalidate the imagined scenario.

While those basic practices create a general need for a reasonably steady self, it could of course at times still be advantageous to be unsteady. But valuing continuity is not the result of a conscious egoistic decision of the individual which could be overthrown in case the circumstances demand it. Instead, it grows out of social practices. The shared social need for steadiness leads to social pressure to be reliable and predictable. We mutually stabilize each other's beliefs and learn to present ourselves to others and also to ourselves as having reasonably steady views (Williams, 2002, pp. 192-193). It is, for instance, a common practice to demand an explanation of individuals who suddenly changed their evaluative outlook. The valuation of a steadied self is also reflected in social roles, insofar as they require a certain permanence in conduct and belief. For instance, being a good friend involves a long-term positive attitude towards a person. To take on the role of a close friend one cannot like a person

one day and genuinely despise her the next. Breaking the expectations of constancy that come with such roles can lead to negative social repercussions.

By grounding the need essentialist authenticity fulfills in general human practices, I avoid having to stipulate the need to be steady. Instead, I only have to make the less contentious assumption that humans make long-term plans, try to predict each other's behavior, and may use mental time-travel. People who engage in those practices have a need for steady characteristics. But some circumstances can make it difficult to remain steady in one's characteristics or they can facilitate self-change.

4. The predicament

This part presents a model of circumstances that can make it harder to stick to steady characteristics. I will discern three categories that can influence the flexibility of the self: relationships, roles and group affiliations, and beliefs and authorities. Moreover, I will show how some structural developments in modernity lead to destabilizing conditions for the self in the three mentioned categories.[8] However, those circumstances are not bound to the historical epoch of modernity. They can occur at different times and places. In Europe, those developments became more prevalent between the 17th century and the First World War. Of course, not everyone was affected equally or at the same time. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify self-destabilizing circumstances which affected large groups of people in that period.

The developments of modernity have been identified as the structural roots of authenticity before (Guignon, 2004; Lindholm, 2013; Taylor, 2003; Trilling, 1972). It has been shown how the idea of authenticity built on and presupposed the modern worldview. I am drawing on those works and the picture of the modern worldview they provide. What the following will add to this debate on the history of authenticity, is to view those developments in a functional context. What functions did the concept of authenticity serve to make it an attractive idea at that time? As I will argue in this part, in modernity it became more challenging to uphold a steadiness in one's characteristics and changing

oneself became easier. The subsequent part will show how essentialist authenticity can lend support to uphold the steadiness of the self.

1) Social affiliations: If it is easy to change social affiliations, one's self is more prone to change. Roles and group affiliations can be self-defining. For instance, being a lawyer, being part of a political or religious movement, or having a certain nationality could be a central aspect of who a person is. A change in profession, social status or other group affiliations often entails changes in interests and desires. It can be challenging to steady oneself once group affiliations or social roles change easily. A steady social affiliation can keep connected interests and views steady.

In modernity, various developments led to more flexibility regarding social affiliations. First of all, social mobility increased unprecedentedly. People could climb or fall down the social ladder much easier. Adding to this was a change of view on the nature of society. Rather than a predestined composition, society came to be understood as a product of human arrangements we agreed upon in exchange for certain benefits (Guignon, 2004, pp. 17–19; Trilling, 1972, pp. 15–16). With this understanding of society, people are freer to find their own way in life. Furthermore, the increased urbanization meant that not only well-known communities were abandoned, but also the roles within them. In more and more populated cities, people had to find and fit in new social roles and groups. Flexibility also increased in the working environment due to a decline of the feudal and guild system. With the rise of wage labor, work was no longer something you were bound to your whole life. These developments went hand in hand with a change in the spiritual outlook. The idea that the world has an ordering scheme, where everyone has a proper position and function, lost its appeal. The ordered cosmos became a universe, an accumulation of material objects, which stand in contingent causal relations to each other, bar of providence or supernatural principles. In this unpredictable environment, it became possible to leave prescribed roles behind and find one's own way (Lindholm, 2013, p. 365).

2) Relationships: The second aspect which facilitates changing yourself is to have fewer interactions with people that know you well enough to build up reasonably elaborate expectations of your behavior. If people we think we know do not meet our expectations, we are irritated, we might

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[8] In this respect I defend the debated epoch transition to modernity. Modernity shows indeed considerable differences compared to the preceding ages, not least in the conception of the self (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 138;

demand explanations or insist that they take responsibility for damages resulting from their unpredictability. As discussed in part 3, we have social practices that value standing with one's beliefs. But those practices only come to effect once those beliefs are known. If I mostly interact with people who do not impose any previously formed expectations on me, the hurdles to change myself are lowered. It is easier to reinvent myself if I am not pushed into roles I used to take on, if there are no expected patterns of behavior, or if I do not have to explain and account for my changes.

In modernity, increased urbanization meant that large sectors of society were leaving the more personalized environment of the medieval times behind. A growing population, the decline of the plague, and a thriving economy, among other reasons, furthered the growth of the cities. People streamed into the cities, abandoning the steady structures and relationships of their villages. The neighbors that had known them all their lives and that had built up a detailed personal impression were replaced by strangers (Guignon, 2004, p. 15; Lindholm, 2013, pp. 364–365; Trilling, 1972, p. 15). They found themselves in more and more superficial relationships, lacking preestablished expectations of behavior. There has been a growing discussion resisting the image of static modes of existence in the middle ages, compared to the mobility of modernity (O'Doherty & Schmieder, 2015). But even though traveling was also common in the middle ages, which can similarly lead to impersonal contacts, the growing cities created an unprecedented urban environment that brought contact with strangers into everyday life. Changing oneself, also in very basic aspects, became easier in the urban anonymity compared to the intimacy of the village.

3) Beliefs and authorities: If new insights and findings question fundamental views, systems of belief, ideals, role models, and authorities, we can be forced to adapt and in doing so to change ourselves. For instance, devoted followers of a spiritual leader might feel the need to reconsider their values, commitments and life goals after the leader turned out to be a fraud. In such a case, self-defining aspects can be challenged, which can enforce adaptations that destabilize the self. In a dogmatic and authoritarian environment, such a kind of destabilization is less prevalent.

With modernity, a rise of skepticism can be observed (Popkin, 2003), in particular during the enlightenment. Formerly unshakable beliefs and authorities were questioned on various grounds.

Taylor, 1989).

References to tradition lost their weight in validating a case and authorities were challenged (Guignon, 2004, pp. 23-26). Instead, sound reason could provide novel viewpoints, overthrowing traditional views. Modernity and enlightenment destabilized the self because they necessitated adaptations to new worldviews and nurtured skepticism towards established beliefs. Moreover, in politics and social life, many traditional authorities were replaced. For instance, bureaucratic and centralized structures were established at the expense of provincial autonomies and aristocratic privileges.

The increased flexibility of social structures, relationships, beliefs, and authorities in modernity increases flexibility in individual characteristics. A figure like Rameau's nephew fits much better into this kind of environment than into the ones of pre-modern times. Those developments are a challenge for a steady self. This does not mean that one cannot remain steady in this flexible living environment or that everyone at that time experienced this increased flexibility. However, those challenges became more widespread during modernity and thus, a concept supporting a steady self can gain functional appeal.

In the person of Rousseau, an awareness for those structural developments coincide with the emergence of essentialist authenticity: 1) He sees social structures not as God-given but as unnatural human creations that should be changed (Rousseau, 1992). 2) According to Rousseau, society corrupts our connection to others and prevents sincere and authentic interactions (Rousseau, 1992). 3) In his political philosophy, Rousseau demanded more participation of the people in politics, calling for a disempowerment of existing authorities (Rousseau, 1994). He denied the legitimation of the feudalistic ruling of kings and nobility. Moreover, in his pedagogical work, he partly undermined and redefined the authority of the parents who should no longer drum their own views into their children (Rousseau, 2009). Rousseau's philosophy is coined by his talent to identify such structural changes. Thus, it is no coincidence that it was he who developed the idea of authenticity in the face of the predicament of his time.

5. Supporting a steady self

This section shows how essentialist authenticity can help to steady oneself and how identifying its function can rationalize essentialist authenticity. As argued in part 2, the concept of authenticity combines an account of the nature of the self and norms how we should relate to our self. In an essentialist view of authenticity, both components support a steady self. First of all, essentialist authenticity introduces a norm to be continuous in one's characteristics. To be authentic one should not try to change central aspects of one's true self, even if it would be profitable. Moreover, in case of an identity crisis, individuals are encouraged to undergo introspection to find what was always already there. Similarly, if one has conflicting dispositions, the essentialist account of authenticity gives reasons to identify with the reoccurring aspects of the self since they can be understood as revealing the true self. It delivers a normative incentive to stay stable because what drives us persistently is who we truly are and should be in order to be authentic. Failing to be steady leads to inauthenticity and thereby to an unfulfilled life, alienation, and ultimately self-loss. An unstable and fluctuating person, such as Rameau's nephew, cannot be authentic in the relevant sense. Such individuals miss the point of their lives according to the essentialist idea of authenticity. This ideal provides a reason to remain steady by linking continuity to a fulfilled, authentic life.[9]

There is another, more subtle way in which essentialist authenticity can support the continuity of the self. Essentialist authenticity includes an account of the nature of the self as unchanging in its core. This picture of human psychology allows us to make sense of the injunction to be steady as a path to how we would naturally be. The ideal we should reach is ingrained in human nature; it is already part of us. On this basis, we can be motivated to follow the norm and be reasonably optimistic that it can be met. The essentialist idea of the self entails that the return to one's true essence is always possible. The true self is never lost or destroyed no matter how much one changes. It can only be hidden. Moreover, especially in the philosophy of Rousseau and the Romantics, we can find a highly positive evaluation of nature and the natural. The natural is not something to be challenged or overcome but to be cherished and protected. In combination with this positive view on nature, the assumption that a steady self is natural can motivate steadiness.

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[9] This norm is more demanding than the related norm of sincerity. The latter demands a congruence between a persons' avowal and her actual feeling, thinking, or acting. The norm introduced by essentialistic authenticity demands a congruence between a persons' thoughts, feelings, and actions with his steady true self, which first has to be discovered.

One could object that essentialist authenticity can also lead to drastic life-changes. Examples of such cases populate a multitude of literary and cinematic narratives: e. g. someone becoming aware that she always followed the wishes of her parents, who subsequently breaks free to finally realize her true self. However, at least after the change, this person should remain steady to stick with the newfound true self. The ideal essentialist authenticity proposes is one of a person who does not change in her core views, passions, and dispositions. Even if the calling of essentialist authenticity can lead to fundamental change, this view opposes a fluctuating self and sets a standard of continuity.

I have argued that: 1) We have a fundamental need to steady ourselves due to social and private practices of long-term planning, prediction of behavior, and mental time-travel. 2) In modernity, when the ideal of essentialist authenticity developed, many people faced structural developments regarding social affiliations, relationships, as well as beliefs and authorities which made it more difficult to remain steady. And 3) essentialist authenticity can give support in steadying the self by introducing a norm that links steadiness to a fulfilled life as well as an account of the nature of the self that depicts the self as naturally stable. Taken together, those three steps let us identify a function of essentialist authenticity: steadying the self.

The genealogy has shown that the concept of essentialist authenticity is rooted on the one hand in synchronic social and private practices, leading to a need for a steady self which is continuous and not tied to a specific historical situation, and on the other hand in a contingent predicament which exerts a pragmatic pressure. What happens to the genealogical argument if the predicament is understood as contingent? One consequence is that the concept is not vindicated to the same degree as if the function of the concept would address a general human problem. Craig, for instance, argues that we cannot get around using a concept of knowledge (Craig, 1990). The answer to the question for whom this concept can serve a useful function is 'everyone who cooperates and communicates'. Essentialist authenticity on the other hand only gains its functional appeal in a situation where it is difficult to uphold the steadiness of the self. The predicament does not follow from a state of nature; it arises out of more specific circumstances. Thus, what the genealogy can show is that essentialist authenticity serves a function for people in those circumstances. The use of the concept is justified for

individuals facing this predicament, insofar as they have reasons to think in terms of essentialist authenticity.

Besides the fact that the use of the concept is only justified if a certain situation applies, the contingency of the predicament offers a different route out of the problem. Instead of trying to find a way to cope with the problem, we could try to get rid of it. Rather than aspiring to be our true selves we could also try to create less flexible living conditions. However, at least from the perspective of the individual, this seems to be nothing but a theoretical option. Another difference to genealogies of anthropologically necessary concepts is that the essentialist view on authenticity is not the only possible answer to the given predicament. In Williams' and Craig's genealogies, the solution in the form of a basic concept of truthfulness or knowledge follows from the predicament. The nature of the predicament seems to demand this kind of solution. In the case of authenticity, there may be other means to steady the self.[10] It is a matter of contingency that an idea of an unchanging true self was used for this end.[11]

Nevertheless, the upshot is that it can be reasonable and justified to promote essentialist authenticity, given one needs to steady oneself and others. Even though the genealogy can only provide a qualified vindication of essentialist authenticity, it still shows that thinking in terms this concept is an apt response, if the self is not sufficiently steadied.[12] Thus, the use of essentialist authenticity can be rationalized through this functional genealogy. Insofar as vindication can be understood as justification, as yielding reasons for acting or believing, a genealogy of a contingent concept can vindicate it. Attacks on authenticity based on claims that trying to achieve authenticity does not always promote well-being, rationality or moral behavior or that it can lead to self-indulgence or narcissism show that we may have other reasons not to think in terms of authenticity. However, depending on the circumstances, the reasons speaking in favor of the essentialist account of authenticity could still outweigh the reasons speaking against it. Even if we can identify situations in which striving for authenticity is not a reliably good way to promote human well-being, rationality, or

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[10] Other possible means to steady the self might be the practice of 'self-fashioning' in the Renaissance (Greenblatt, 1980) or the turn towards a social anti-individualism and collectivism as suggested by Hegel and Marx and interestingly also by Rousseau through his *volonté générale*.

[11] For a discussion on how genealogies can exhibit concepts and practices as rationally contingent and how the concept does not have to be destabilized or subverted thereby see Queloz (2021, p. 216–221).

[12] For more on how genealogies vindicate concepts and the genetic fallacy see Queloz (2021, 213–242).

a moral life in general, as Feldman (2015) argued, it can nevertheless be justified to think in terms of essentialist authenticity in other circumstances. Through a functional understanding of essentialist authenticity, it is possible to identify those circumstances in which striving for this ideal can be sensible and helpful.

The finding that supporting the steadiness of the self is a function of essentialist authenticity ties in nicely with discussions in neuroethics. It has been shown that people with a mental disorder often refer to the concept of authenticity, in particular to essentialist notions (Erler & Hope, 2014; Hope et al., 2011). Mental disorders can lead to substantial inner conflict and shifting mindsets. In such a situation, essentialist authenticity can play an important role because it can provide guidance for self-development. People with a mental illness turn to essentialist views because they hope 'to find a stable position from which to make judgments and decisions' (Erler & Hope, 2014, p. 230). The genealogy has shown that referring to essentialist authenticity in a situation where the mind is shifting and unsteady is a fundamental function of essentialist authenticity which contributed to its development and spread and which can be of use for anyone striving for a steadier self.

6. Conclusion

Through a genealogical approach, I have argued that a function of essentialist authenticity is to support the steadiness of the self. It is not a very bold claim to say that the increased flexibility of the environment that contributed to making essentialist authenticity an attractive conception has not ceased. If anything, the social world seems to have become more flexible and we have more options who we can be. This indicates that the function of steadying the self has not lost its relevance. Moreover, it suggests that an explanation of why essentialist notions of authenticity are still prevalent can be found in this function. By attributing the function of steadying oneself to essentialist authenticity, we understand what draws people to this conception and under what circumstances it is

reasonable to follow such an ideal. The idea of having a true, immutable self within can provide

something to hold on to in the face of a rapidly changing environment.[13]

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