

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Reframing Identity
In the Age of Authenticity

A Thesis Project Submitted to
The faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Masters of Arts in Christian Apologetics

by

Daphne Edmonston
Appomattox, Virginia
March 22, 2018

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

THESIS APPROVAL SHEET

Dr. Joshua Chatraw

THESIS MENTOR

Dr. Ronnie Campbell

READER

Abstract

Many in American culture have either actively or passively adopted the idea that authenticity is one of the highest virtues, if not the highest. The cultural ideal of authenticity states that personal identity and meaning are found within oneself. Being true to ‘the real you’ is the path to meaning, pleasure, and flourishing. This way of framing personal identity proves to be insecure, unstable, and leads to a lack of flourishing. In contrast, a Christian view of authenticity provides stability and security and leads to the possibility of flourishing in this life as well as for eternity. There is a great deal that these two differing views of authenticity have in common, which provides many areas of overlap for relational and apologetic engagement. This apologetic approach is strongly relational and requires that each individual be pursuing redeemed authenticity in their lives. It also requires engaging in genuine relationships with non-Christians, which involves seeking to listen to their thoughts in order to understand their unique perspectives and opinions regarding authenticity, its strengths, and its weaknesses. After this information gathering is complete, appropriate apologetic arguments can be brought to bear with sensitivity and wisdom. Personal testimony, the argument from desire, moral and non-moral good, and Pascal’s wager are all very good starting points. The apologist must be prepared to have a sincerely felt discussion of God’s sufficiency to meet each individual’s need for stable authenticity and explain how Jesus is the most authentic individual that ever lived.

Contents

Introduction	1
Literature Review	4
Research Method	6
Chapter One: What is the Authentic Self	8
Historical Shift	9
Cultural Ideal of Authenticity	28
Redeemed Authenticity	30
Chapter Two: Worldview Overlap	33
Source: Internal or External	34
Meaning: From Within or From Without	36
Flourishing: Pleasure Alone or Meaning and Pleasure	38
Chapter Three: Apologetic Approach Part 1	41
Relationality	42
Explore Authenticity	47
Chapter Four: Apologetic Approach Part 2	51
Apologetic Arguments	51
The Sufficiency of God	61
Conclusion	68
Bibliography	70

Introduction

Authenticity is an idea that has taken hold of the culture in America. This concept of authentic identity promises the truest sense of personal identity, meaning, and pleasure but actually leads to diminished flourishing. Charles Taylor and Robert Bellah have done extensive work on this concept of authenticity.¹ Their work has impacted many cultural discussions. Jonathan Grant draws on Taylor and Bellah as he summarizes this idea, “The authentic self believes that personal meaning must be found within ourselves or must at least resonate with our one-of-a-kind personality. We must, as we often hear, ‘be true to ourselves.’”² He goes on to state, “[this way of thinking] is now one of the dominant ways by which we see ourselves.”³ One cultural example of how the ideal of authenticity has been lifted up as the ultimate value can be seen in a conversation between two authenticity gurus: Teal Swan and Ralph Smart. Teal Swan is speaking about her relationship with her son. She states that she would like to say that he is the most important thing in her life. However, when she looks at how she prioritizes her time it is clear that he is not. She concludes, “I want to pretend that I’m the best mom in the world and that the truth is that I prioritize him over everything else in my life. But I can’t. I can’t do that and be authentic.” After more discussion she finally concludes, “It’s a loving thing to teach your child that they are an important priority in your life, but if you are trying to teach them that and it’s not the actual truth, A) they will feel it and B) you are teaching them to live in-authentically. So, at the end of the day I have to ask myself, ‘Do I want him to be completely authentic? If that is the

¹ See Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart* and Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity, Sources of the Self, and A Secular Age*.

² Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015), 30.

³ *Ibid.*, 32.

truth then I have to be completely authentic.”⁴ This mother has placed the value of authenticity before the relational needs of her son. She is communicating in words and actions that she values her authenticity, and his, more than she values her relationship with him. In the culture today, it often seems that personal authenticity is a value that trumps all other values and is emphasized even above the needs of others and the community.

The purpose of this thesis is to challenge the cultural ideal of authenticity by revealing that it leads to an insecure personal identity and diminished human flourishing while affirming redeemed, Christian authenticity as the true satisfaction for personal identity and the God given desire for human flourishing. The development of a positive apologetic approach based on these overlapping, but very different, ideas of authenticity is the culmination of this thesis. American culture has been taken captive by this flawed way of seeking personal identity, referred to in this thesis by the terms: identity, ideal of authenticity, and authenticity. Christians must become aware of this cultural situation so they are better equipped to prevent it from infiltrating their lives and the life of the church, as well as to provide an apologetic to this generation regarding the true nature of authenticity and how redeemed authenticity can lead them to fulfillment in this life and also for eternity. The cultural ideal of authenticity looks internally for identity and rejects external rules or prescriptions for life. These presuppositions make it difficult for those holding this ideal to accept the biblical directive to conform to the commands of Christ. The understanding that giving full expression to one’s inner desires is the path to personal fulfillment makes the call of Christ to self-denial and sacrifice appear as a death sentence for many in American culture. The results of the cultural ideal of authenticity lead to isolation and a loss of

⁴ Teal Swan, “How to Be Authentic” (YouTube video), June 24, 2015, 11:10 - 20:10, accessed June 6, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irxqCDeQulk>.

community,⁵ which is especially tragic when found in the church where there should be connection and fellowship. The sense that one must authentically feel before one acts has limited Christian witness and service to the world. This is a result of the confusion between authentic belief, the call to obedience, and feelings. The culture of authenticity is driven by what feels true or pleasing. Christians are to be motivated by God's character and his commands; these are to govern and guide each individual's feelings. The pervasiveness of the idea that authenticity is an ultimate value compels Christians to explore and understand it so as to offer a meaningful and significant God honoring response.

These two related but different views of authenticity provide an opportunity for apologetic engagement on two levels. First, Jesus is the most authentic individual that has ever lived. Christians are called to become like him. In this way Christians, if living according to Christ's example, should be able to connect with those in the culture through their character quality of authenticity. Second, since authenticity is so freely discussed, it is an excellent inroad to apologetic conversations. Asking questions surrounding the concept of authenticity opens doors to point to Christ. This is an important area for Christians to grasp and utilize because it is often not understood in Christendom. This is evident by the fact that young Christians are absorbing a great deal of worldly thinking on authenticity and the apologetic value of these discussions would serve as a corrective. Alister McGrath points out, "Christian apologetics represents a serious and sustained engagement with the ultimate questions raised by a culture, people group, or individual, aiming to show how the Christian faith is able to provide meaningful answers to such questions."⁶ American culture and the young adult population are orienting their

⁵ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 31-41.

⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers & Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 21.

values around the ideal of authenticity. In order for Christians to speak meaningfully to this generation the concept of authenticity must be grasped and utilized as a tool, not in a negative way, as a sledgehammer, but instead as a craftsman would use a chisel. Os Guinness elaborates on this approach,

The positive side of apologetics . . . used all the highest strengths of creativity in the defense of truth. Expressing the love and compassion of Jesus, and using eloquence, creativity, imagination, humor and irony, open-hand apologetics had the task of helping to pry open hearts and minds that, for a thousand reasons, had long grown resistant to God's great grace, so that it could shine in like the sun.⁷

This cultural preoccupation with authenticity opens the door for Christians to communicate, through life and word, the truth about redeemed authenticity's ability to bring true fulfillment and flourishing in this life and the next.

Literature Review

The concept of authenticity has generated a great deal of research. Studies that in some way utilize this concept are numerous and cover diverse fields from psychology, education, nursing, and leadership to athletics, branding of products, marketing, and tourism. There has been a wide range of research done relating to the role authenticity and personal identity play in the health and mental stability of individuals.⁸ This understanding of authenticity has worked its way into culture to such an extent that it is simply an assumed concept. Octavia Clader-Dawe and Nicola Gavey state that, "Authenticity is so much part of cultural common sense that it

⁷ Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 253.

⁸ See Alexander Erler and Tony Hope, "Mental Disorder and the Concept of Authenticity," *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology* 21, no. 3 (September 2014), 219; Michail D. Kokkoris, and Ulrich Kuhnen, "'Express the Real You': Cultural Differences in the Perception of Self-Expression as Authenticity," *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology* 45, no. 8 (2014): 1121; and Manfred Diehl, Laurie M. Jacobs, Catherine T. Hastings, "Temporal Stability and Authenticity of Self-Representations in Adulthood," *Journal of Adult Development* 13, no. 1 (March 2006): 10.

appears to be at once assumed and imperative: everyone has a right — and a duty — to live ‘authentically.’”⁹ The definition, or concept, of authenticity that is delineated in the research seems to vary slightly depending on the academic field or the cultural application for which it is being used.¹⁰ As Gavin Rae concludes in his work, “Different conceptions of the authentic self do, therefore, lead to different analyses.”¹¹ However, the basic understanding of authenticity, as it relates to personal identity, has been detailed by Charles Taylor in several books.¹² Taylor’s description of the cultural ideal of authenticity is the understanding that this thesis will utilize. The cultural ideal of authenticity encompasses the, “understanding . . . that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one’s own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from the outside.”¹³ The sense of being true to oneself and conforming only to one’s own internal constraints is the center of the cultural ideal of authenticity.¹⁴

The history of authenticity’s development, promotion, and opposition has been well examined. Robert Bellah and Taylor, who have been widely quoted, have traced the historic and cultural roots of this ethic as well as its impact on individuals and society.¹⁵ There is also a great

⁹ Octavia Clader-Dawe and Nicola Gavey, “Authentic Feminist? Authenticity and Feminist Identity in Teenage Feminists’ Talk,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* (2017): 2. doi: 10.1111/bjso.12207.

¹⁰ See Dana Yagil and Hana Medler-Liraz, “Feel Free, Be Yourself: Authentic Leadership, Emotional Expression, and Employee Authenticity,” *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* 21, no. 1 (2014): 60; Gavin Rae, “Alienation, Authenticity, and the Self,” *History of the Human Sciences* 23, no. 4 (2010): 28; and Carolin Kreber and Monika Klampfleitner, “What do You Mean by ‘Authentic’? A Comparative Review of the Literature on Conceptions of Authenticity in Teaching,” *Adult Education Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (November 2007): 41.

¹¹ Rae, “Alienation, Authenticity, and the Self,” 28.

¹² See Taylor: *Ethics of Authenticity, Sources of the Self, and A Secular Age*.

¹³ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 85. Smith is quoting Taylor from *A Secular Age*.

¹⁴ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*.

¹⁵ See Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart* and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self and A Secular Age*.

deal of popular literature and media promoting this ideal.¹⁶ Christians have noted that this cultural ideal is foreign to historical Christianity.¹⁷ Steven James, as well as others, has written encouraging Christians to be authentic.¹⁸ There is also a growing body of literature calling for clarification, warning of problems, or calling for change.¹⁹ Timothy Keller has addressed this issue in an apologetic way, drawing on Taylor and Bellah.²⁰ Considering what has been written, there is a scarcity of literature detailing how to bridge the communication and relational barrier between these opposing views of authenticity. There is a gap in the literature clearly delineating an apologetic approach to effectively communicating the truth and hope of Christianity to those holding this cultural ideal of authenticity. This thesis offers a plan for bridging this gap. This will be accomplished by analyzing both the cultural ideal and the Christian understanding of authenticity, and providing an apologetic bridge for relationship and communication of redeemed authenticity and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Research Method

The primary method utilized for this research will be qualitative descriptive research. Qualitative content analysis of the texts will be utilized to research the cultural ideal of

¹⁶ See Mike Robbins, *Be Yourself Everyone Else is Already Taken: Transform Your Life with the Power of Authenticity*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossy-Bass, 2009) and Teal Swan, YouTube videos and books.

¹⁷ See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 471-504, C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Harper One Publishing, 1980), 223-227, and Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex*.

¹⁸ Steven James, *Becoming Real: Christ's Call to Authentic Living* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Co., 2005).

¹⁹ See Steve Bruce, "Secularization and the Impotence of Individualized Religion," *The Hedgehog Review* (Spring and Summer 2006): 45; B.D. McClay, "Signifiers Hypocrite," *The Hedgehog Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 2; and James Nolan, "A Conversation with Sherry Turkle," *The Hedgehog Review* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 5; Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 1-5.

²⁰ See Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God* (New York, NY: Viking, 2016) and *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016), Chapters 4 and 5.

authenticity and what Christians are communicating on the subject. This method enables an objective and systematic description of the material being examined regarding the subject of authenticity. The research will be conducted primarily in the library.

There are four specific objectives to be achieved by this analysis: (1) to understand the current cultural idea of authenticity; (2) to describe what those holding this idea believe the strengths and weakness to be; (3) to understand the idea of redeemed authenticity; (4) to describe what those holding this idea believe the strengths and weaknesses to be. In order to obtain an unbiased selection for the samples studied, efforts will be made to seek cultural norms, mainstream material, and highly regarded academic sources. In addition to these representative samples, some samples that represent extremes on the positive and negative side will be examined.²¹ This sampling strategy will provide the fullest picture of the cultural ideal of authenticity as well as that of redeemed authenticity. Any extreme samples from either view of authenticity will be noted as such in the reporting process.

This thesis will not give a comprehensive history of how the American culture of authenticity arrived at its current state. Although historical background will be given the intent is not to trace the roots of the current situation but to explore how to move forward. The core foundational beliefs of historical Christianity are assumed in this paper and will not be established. The validity of Christian apologetics is assumed and will not be demonstrated. The content analysis will be done by only one person. All efforts will be made to avoid bias as much as possible.

²¹ Jim Macnamara, "Media Content Analysis: It's Uses; Benefits and Best Practice Methodology," *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal* 6, no. 1 (2005): 18.

Chapter One

What is the Authentic Self

Authenticity is a concept that involves many strands of thought and ideas regarding who man is as a being. The focus is on each person as an individual becoming their truest and best self. Authenticity and the focus on being true to one's self encompass many aspects of an individual's identity, such as how people find true meaning and pleasure. Bellah explains the scope involved in an authentic quest for one's true self, "Finding oneself means, among other things, finding the story or narrative in terms of which one's life makes sense."²² The question of who man is and how he seeks meaning and pleasure in life is not new. In modern times people have used the phrase "The search for self" to indicate man's quest to clarify his identity and place in the cosmos. Allan Bloom did extensive research into how people view themselves, their hopes, and their purpose. He comments, "The essence of the self: mysterious, ineffable, indefinable, unlimited, creative, known only by its deeds; in short, like God, of whom it is the impious mirror image. Above all, it is individual, unique; it is *me*."²³ From this definition it is clear that the concept of the "self" necessarily encompasses many varied and disputed experiences and philosophical categories. It is a complex subject. No simplistic, reductionist account can capture the totality of the authentic self. The following historical sketch and the definitions that follow cannot be comprehensive. What is being presented is the general historical shift in thought, belief, sentiment, and mood that has led to the current ideal of authenticity. The definition of this ideal is meant to provide a stereotype of what is commonly portrayed in culture, through the arts and entertainment as well as expounded on one level or another by some in the academic arena. However, it is true that very few people hold to any ideal consistently or purely.

²² Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 81.

²³ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 173.

This thesis does not suppose that the majority of people one would come across in daily life would express this ideal in the form articulated below. The definition of the cultural ideal is given to provide a sketch of the ideas that are prevalent in culture and that, to one degree or another, are influencing the way a majority of Americans view themselves and the relationships they share with others and the broader society. The definition provided for redeemed authenticity is not intended to be an exhaustive theological statement on the subject but a biblical counter perspective to the cultural ideal.

Historical Shift

How people view their place in the world, who they are and what their purpose is, has shifted. The process by which this shift occurred has been long and complex. Bellah's, extensively researched book, *Habits of the Heart* and Taylor's three volumes *The Secular Age*, *The Ethic of Authenticity*, and *Sources of the Self*, are fairly exhaustive resources on this subject. Taylor's works trace the many strands of history, religion, politics, industry, and other influences that have caused a series of changes in how people view the world, the supernatural realm, themselves, and their place in the world. This has destabilized how people view themselves and how they find meaning and purpose in life. Each of his books has a different focus but all lead to the conclusion that the shift has been away from some form of communal source of identity and toward expressive individualism. Bellah's focus is on what Americans value and how they find meaning in life. His team of researchers conclude that individualism is the primary lens through which Americans view life and the world and that they have lost the categories with which to express moral concepts. As the above-mentioned volumes detail, this shift has been comprehensive and complex. For the purposes of this study there are four facets of this complex shift that will be explored.

In an attempt to better understanding the cultural ideal of authenticity and the apologetic approach that is being proposed the following four facets of this historical shift will be highlighted: supernaturalism to naturalism; objectivity to subjectivity; horizons of significance to self-choosing; meaning combined with pleasure produces flourishing to pleasure alone equals flourishing. Each of these will be briefly sketched using the following broad, general time periods: pre-modern (Antiquity to Middle Ages); Modern (c. 1400 to 1945); Late-Modern or Postmodern (1945 to present). The use of these general time periods is simply to highlight the contrast in thought over time. Historical shifts are rarely able to be neatly segmented, therefore, these time periods are being used to highlight general trends in each of these facets over time.

Naturalism

In examining the shift in identity from pre-modern times to late-modern, the first relevant facet is supernaturalism to naturalism. Supernaturalism, the understanding that reality includes that which is beyond nature and the material world, was the default worldview during pre-modern times. Greek and Roman gods are good examples. These gods controlled everything from human fertility to crop production and success in love and war. Judaism and later Christianity are two related examples of monotheism. The expectation in all these examples is that mankind is dependent and to some extent in submission to the supernatural reality. This understanding anticipated real, meaningful interaction between the material world and the supernatural leaving the world a richer, deeper, and more mysterious place. This supernatural world gave mankind a point of orientation, a north star by which to navigate life. Meaning and pleasure were authoritatively guided and given parameters from without.

With the advent of the modern era and the enlightenment, mankind began to see the world in terms of systems, mechanisms, and formulas. The supernatural seemed to be less

necessary to explain how things work and why things happen. Mankind began to harness the power of machinery. There were advances in science that led to greater understanding of the world and man himself. All these technological advances led mankind to feel like all things were within his control. A great confidence in the human ability to achieve and conquer all obstacles and mysteries grew and began to envelope the hearts and minds of the populace. Although the general population still believed in the supernatural, the role that it exercised in their lives was being marginalized. Deism began to emerge as a way to maintain belief in God while not requiring his intervention in daily life. By the end of the modern era even those who still professed to believe in God or the supernatural often acted as if the natural was truly all that was real. Commenting on German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk's view, Volf states, "[Modernity] is that age in which only the world may be the case, or is the case. So, there is no sense of transcendence. Modernity is an age in which all of us, whether we believe in transcendence or not, act as if only the world is the case."²⁴ This shift towards naturalism, as the lens through which people viewed life, was well underway when Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and the concept of evolution and the survival of the fittest was published; however, Darwin's work added momentum to man's sense of self-determination.²⁵ If man is the product of time and chance then God was no longer needed as an explanation for mankind's creation. This demystification flattens the world leaving it predetermined and mechanized. Mankind was losing any external, authoritative sense of orientation and meaning in the world. Meaning and pleasure were being diminished to utilitarian purposes and physical sensations. This shift toward naturalism resulted in some unpleasant and unanticipated results in the following centuries.

²⁴ Laura Turner, "A Conversation with Miroslav Volf," *Newbigin House of Studies*, March 20, 2017, accessed February 19, 2018, <http://newbiginhouse.org/2017/03/a-conversation-with-miroslav-volf/>.

²⁵ Paul Johnson, *Modern Times* (New York, NY: Harper Row Publishers, 1983), 5.

In the late modern era, the fruit of the modern era's shift began to come to maturity. Mankind increasingly began to see itself in mechanistic and utilitarian terms and less as unique special creations. The shift toward naturalism led some to a greater devaluation of humanness and even life itself. Sherry Turkle has studied artificial intelligence and its impact on human social interaction and psychology since the 1970's. After observing some children at an exhibit of the Galápagos Islands tortoises, a child pointed out that they could have just used a robot. The child's comments were prompted by concern for the tortoise and a lack of concern for its authenticity. Turkle points out, "I have lived with this idea [authenticity] for many years; yet, at the museum, I found the children's position strangely unsettling. For them, in this context, aliveness seemed to have no intrinsic value. Rather, it is useful only if needed for a specific purpose."²⁶ This is a simplistic example of how a naturalistic view of life can lead to a devaluing of human life and framing it in strongly utilitarian terms. The end of the modern era and the beginning of the late modern highlighted that naturalistic views of mankind, and the world, can lead to catastrophic results. Naturalistic impulses spurred by concepts such as the survival of the fittest and the eugenics movement led to the killing or sterilization of many people. In regimes such as Hitler's, Mao's, and Marx's many millions were killed for utilitarian reasons. As people began to see themselves as products of time and chance, with no supernatural purpose, they began to lose their sense of self, their deep sense of meaning and pleasure in the world.

This flattening of everything into materialistic categories has begun to create a backlash. Mankind is not content to, nor is he able to, view himself as a mere cog in some naturalistic machine. People sense that there must be more to life than seeking pleasure. As these sentiments find little affirmation in a naturalistic world, perception again seems to be shifting toward

²⁶ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011), 1.

openness to a deeper spiritual reality.²⁷ On a popular level there seems to be an increase in blatant spiritual themes depicted in recent movies. Although there are many movies that still carry a naturalistic view the presentation of the supernatural as plausible hints at a renewed openness. Two examples are Wonder Woman and Gifted. In Wonder Woman, the audience is presented with a Goddess who is tasked to protect and defend mankind against the evil within them and the evil spiritual forces opposed to them. Gifted depicts two very brilliant individuals having a conversation about whether God exists or not. The concept of God is spoken of as a real possibility and one that does not compromise one's intellectual capacity. The concept of life after death is apparently affirmed. It is even suggested that the Christian is the one who loves and cares for the young girl and not the atheist voice on the television. These are major concessions in major movie productions. However, even many who acknowledge God, or a supernatural reality, often still function within a framework that is in practice naturalistic. These examples show the late-modern attempt to blend the supernatural, or mystical, back into the dominant naturalistic framework. This attempted blending is related to the second facet to be summarized; objectivity to subjectivity. Scott Burson and Jerry Walls point to this relationship in their list of some features of late-modernity; "The denial of absolutes, a celebration of connectedness, a renewed quest for spirituality and a threatening nihilism."²⁸ People are struggling to find the orientation point by which they can find meaning and pleasure that truly fulfills them and satisfies their sense that there is more to life than merely the natural. Lewis points to this when he speaks of myth. He points out that mankind throughout history has sought more than the

²⁷ Andrew Fellows, "Paganism Strikes Back" (L'Abri Ideas Library). Lecture January 2009. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://www.labri-ideas-library.org/store/Paganism%20Strikes%20Back%20%20Andrew%20Fellows.mp3>.

²⁸ Scott R. Burson and Jerry L. Walls, *C. S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer: Lessons for a New Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 18.

merely natural and this seeking has given rise to many mythologies. He goes on to suggest that these myths are full of truth mixed with error as God was preparing them for the “Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact”²⁹ that was revealed in Christianity. He explains, “These stories may well be . . . a divine hinting in poetic and ritual form at the same central truth which was later focused and (so to speak) historicized in the Incarnation.”³⁰ A renewed openness to myth and the supernatural seems to be emerging. These indicators suggest the late modern era is giving way to some new era that cannot as yet be defined. Taylor suggests we are in a time, “in which the hegemony of the mainstream master narrative of secularization will be more and more challenged. . . . We are at the beginning of a new age of religious searching, whose outcome no one can foresee.”³¹ Naturalism prevails, but supernaturalism seems to be reasserting itself in the minds and imaginations of men and women.

Subjectivity

The move from objectivity to subjectivity is the second facet of this shift in identity. This facet is absolutely crucial to understanding the cultural ideal of authenticity. In pre-modern times, the objective reality of the world was assumed, as was man’s ability to know truth about both it and himself. C. S. Lewis amply establishes this in *The Abolition of Man* by tracing the deep historical roots of objectivity in its various forms: Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Asian.³² In each of these examples there was a solid sense of right and wrong, good and bad, that which ought to be and that which ought not to be. These objective truths guided both thought and action. There may have been disagreement over what that ought actually should be but there

²⁹ Ibid., 67.

³⁰ C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), 132.

³¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 534-35.

³² C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1955) 29-30.

was little disagreement about the fact that there was actually an ought that people should obey. One specific example is found in Plato's *Republic*. He states, "He [the child] would blame and hate the ugly in the right way while he's still young, before he's able to grasp reasonable speech. And when reasonable speech comes, the man who's reared in this way would take most delight in it, recognizing it on account of its being akin?"³³ There is no subjectivity here. There is a right and wrong that children should be trained up to objectively live by. The expectation is that when these children grow up they will find that living according to these objective realities will bring pleasure as they find their affections line up with the truth of the external world. This sense of objective reality enabled people to feel grounded and secure in their identity and what was meaningful and significant. This objectivity gave them solid knowable parameters in which to find pleasure and exercise their freedom.

In modern times, objectivity as a means to understanding oneself and the world began to be challenged. During this era Enlightenment thinking and a general frustration with the religious fighting between Catholics, Protestants, and even Jews began to marginalize God as an authoritative source of truth. In place of faith, reason was the foundation. Baron von Holbach, a representative of the enlightenment, gives an example of this rationalist view,

Let us endeavor to disperse those clouds of ignorance, those mists of darkness, which impede Man on his journey, . . . Let us try to inspire him . . . with respect for his own reason—with an inextinguishable love of truth . . . so that he may learn to know himself . . . that he may learn to consult his experience, and no longer be duped by an imagination that has been led astray by authority—that he may renounce the prejudices of his childhood—that he may learn to base his morals on his own nature, on his own wants, on the real advantage of society—that he may dare to love himself—that he may learn to pursue his true happiness, by promoting that of others . . . in short, so that he may become a virtuous and rational being, who cannot fail to become happy.³⁴

³³ Plato, *The Republic*, Second Edition, Trans. Alan Bloom (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1968), 402 a, 80.

³⁴ Baron von Holbach, *The Systems of Nature or the Laws of the Moral and Physical World*, Vol. 1, 2nd ed. (London, England: Paternoster Row, 1817), 6-7.

Holbach speaks of truth, however, the only way to achieve that truth is by consulting one's experience and giving up truths that originate from "authority." Reason and the senses are the foundation. With Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and the introduction of the concept of transcendental idealism man's ability to rely on his senses to discover truth come into question. Kant proposed two realms, the real or noumenal world and the phenomenal world that is accessed by human senses. Leslie Newbigin explains, "The real or noumenal world must remain forever impenetrable by our senses. We can only know what appears to our senses, the phenomenal world."³⁵ This is the idea that people experience only the appearance of things, not the actual things in themselves. There have been many interpretations of this idea, however, he is clearly introducing a barrier between the reality of a thing and an individual's perception of the thing. This line of thinking greatly influenced many thinkers and was influential in hastening the shift toward subjectivity. At the end of the modern era the news of Einstein's theory of relativity had a broad and sweeping impact on many disciplines and common perceptions of the world. Social historian Paul Johnson states, "The impact of his theory was immediate, and cumulatively immeasurable." Johnson continues, "At the beginning of the 1920's the belief began to circulate, for the first time at a popular level, that there were no longer any absolutes: of time and space, of good and evil, of knowledge, above all of value. Mistakenly but perhaps inevitably, relativity became confused with relativism."³⁶ From Einstein's perspective this was a distressing and unintended consequence.³⁷ Some perceived science to be underscoring the subjective nature of reality giving more momentum to this shift. This marginalization of objective truth combined

³⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 18.

³⁶ Johnson, *Modern Times*, 3-4.

³⁷ Einstein wrote to his colleague in September 1920, "Like the man in the fairy-tale who turned everything he touched into gold, so with me everything turns into a fuss in the newspaper." Johnson, *Modern Times*, 4.

with the growing sense that man was master of his own destiny unshackled the sense of absolute right and wrong, good and bad, ought and ought not. This leaves identity and meaning as fluid things that are not rooted in anything fixed and lasting. Some saw this as a new form of freedom, while others felt the discomfort that comes from having no firm foundation on which to base their identity or their sense of meaning. The understanding that truth and reality are subjective took strong root and bore much fruit in the late-modern era.

In late-modern times subjectivity has worked its way into the thinking of most people and “every area of intellectual life.”³⁸ In this culture, according to James Sire, “The only kind of truth there is is pragmatic truth. There is no truth of correspondence.”³⁹ There is an ever-shrinking number of objective truths that people feel are absolutely binding on their lives. Among the many influences that have accelerated this shift away from objectivity are deconstructionism and poststructuralism. These philosophies are difficult to define precisely; however, they include the understanding that the self is a construct worked out by each individual⁴⁰ and language itself is also a construct whose meaning is determined by the reader or the listener.⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Michel Foucault, are just a few of the influential thinkers that promoted this subjectivity. John Stackhouse explains that these philosophers, “Used the tools of reason and experience to undermine what most people thought of as issues already settled by reason and experience.”⁴² When identity and language find their meaning in each individual knowledge becomes contextual and subjective. Lyotard expresses the subjective view,

³⁸ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁴¹ John G. Stackhouse Jr., *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), Chapter 2 and Roger Scruton, *Modern Philosophy* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1994), 477-479, 504.

⁴² Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*, 33.

“Knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?”⁴³ Once knowledge is relativized, truth claims become elusive. At the point that communication becomes utterly subjective, the subjectivists can say, as Foucault has, “What difference does it make who is speaking?”⁴⁴ Critiquing this subjectivity Newbigin states, “The deconstruction ‘program’, which is extending from literary theory to other branches of what was once thought to be knowledge and which, appears to make any claim to speak of truth untenable.”⁴⁵

This is one of the major strands of the cultural ideal of authenticity that must be understood. Subjectivity is perceived as freedom on the surface. However, when examined deeply it leaves people with no lasting sense of good and bad, right and wrong. There is nothing lasting or certain and this places the burden on each individual to make up some reality that will bring them meaning and provide lasting pleasure. Their individual identity is just as fluid and subjective as everything else. This shift from objective, knowable truth to subjectivity has impacted how people perceive and relate to the world around them. If people no longer see themselves as part of a fixed and knowable background of reality against which choices and actions are taken, then they are likely to see themselves as simply part of a variety of constructed stories that may or may not work for today.

⁴³ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Vol. 10, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 8-9.

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, Edited by Paul Rabinow (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 120.

⁴⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 3.

Horizons of Significance

Horizons of significance is the phrase Taylor uses for these backgrounds of reality. The third facet under consideration is the change from horizons of significance to self-choosing. These horizons are made up of family, church, government, friends, coworkers, and other social structures.⁴⁶ These horizons of influence have historically helped shape individual identity and enabled people to find their meaning and purpose in the world. In pre-modern times these horizons were strong determiners of identity. People gained their sense of identity, meaning, occupation, and religion all from where they were born and by their familial relationships. This contributed to a simplicity and certainty in life. Individual identity was largely a part of the fabric of life. It was not a matter of self-choice. The religious and moral norms of a geographic region were generally fixed. This meant that an individual knew how to relate to the gods, or God, and what was expected from them in terms of devotion and moral conduct. This created a stability to life. Keller explains, “Older societies were much more religiously and culturally homogeneous. It was believed that a society could be cohesive only if it was built on the basis of commonly held moral and religious beliefs.”⁴⁷ Conforming to the moral and religious norms was simply a part of reality in the pre-modern era. People in pre-modern times did not wonder who they were or what they were supposed to do with their lives. That was determined by their birth. If you were born a slave you remained a slave. If you were born into a family of carpenters you were brought up to be a carpenter. If you were born into nobility, you were noble. Aristotle is a good example of this pre-modern thinking. He asserts in *Politics* that nature determines that there are

⁴⁶ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 33.

⁴⁷ Keller, *Making Sense of God*, 98.

some men born to be slaves and some born to be freemen,⁴⁸ and some are artisans by birth.⁴⁹

These horizons of influence exerted strong control over individual identity well into the modern era, but their dominance began to deteriorate.

During the modern era, many factors contributed to the deterioration of the dominance of these horizons of influence. The Industrial Revolution played a major role in the shift toward self-choosing. New technologies began transforming industries thus creating new job opportunities and ending some older forms of vocation. These new industries not only allowed people to move out of family trades and into new forms of employment but also spurred relocation from rural locations to cities. The growth of cities as well as new forms of transportation accelerated this relocation. These were titanic shifts that began to breakdown the horizons of influence that had previously brought an individual his sense of identity and meaning.⁵⁰ New jobs gave people a choice of occupation and allowed a few to move from one station in life (laborer) to another (factory owner). Self-choosing began to play a much more significant role in peoples' thinking. New places to live weakened ties to family, community, and church horizons leaving people free to choose new friends, colleagues, and congregations, or to remain without connections. Anonymity became a possibility in the growing cities. The loss of tight ties to community and religious bodies enabled men and women to avoid the moral and religious accountability that had previously been a matter of fact in their lives. Self-choice became an increasing reality. Many horizons of influence were still powerful in forming identity but the ties had begun to weaken.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Aristotle, *Politics*, Vol. 2, Part 2, Trans. B. Jowett (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1885), Bk. 1, 6.9, 22.

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk. 1, 4.4, 14.

⁵⁰ Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 42-43.

⁵¹ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Chapter IV.

In late-modern times, for many individuals, horizons of significance have disappeared altogether. Social historian Paul Johnson, referring to the tumultuous times culminating in the 1980's, highlights this trend away from horizons that anchor people in society, "There were . . . disquieting currents of thought which suggested the image of a world adrift, having left its moorings in traditional law and morality."⁵² Many people now feel free to choose to be whatever, wherever, whenever they wanted. However, without these moorings there is now no reliable way for these individuals to know which decisions are right or wrong, good or bad. They have no reliable maps or guides. No True North to set a course by. A good decision has come to be seen as a decision freely made. This has become the perceived path to pleasure. Can self-choosing deliver meaning, pleasure, or flourishing? Miroslav Volf wrestles with this question, "What good is it to me if I know everything and I can do anything but I don't know what is truly worth knowing and doing? That's the question that concerns me."⁵³ This question was presented in an apologetic talk given to Google employees and it emphasizes the current relevance of this issue. Although there have been many problems associated with this shift toward self-choosing it has also enabled many individuals to acquire true freedom. It has paved the way for meaningful choice in life goals and has freed many people from oppressive institutions such as slavery and rigid class systems.⁵⁴ This shift has had beneficial as well as detrimental effects. Self-choice has come to dominate the late-modern era to such a degree that it is now seen as a virtue for parents and authority figures to refrain from guiding or giving advice to the young on how they should live, what they should pursue as a career, and other meaningful life decisions. It must be their

⁵² Johnson, *Modern Times*, 48.

⁵³ Volf, "Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World" (YouTube video. Uploaded by Talks at Google). Posted February 3, 2017, 53:44, accessed September 13, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqr2YbC2qN0>.

⁵⁴ Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 84.

free choice with no reference to what anyone else thinks. This can be seen in the current historical moment by the appeal for people to allow their children to choose their own religion and their own sexual orientation. One popular example of this is found in the 2009 movie *Star Trek*. Spock is shown as a preteen wrestling with a decision that will result in life-long consequences. His father advises him, “You are fully capable of deciding your own destiny. The question you face is; Which path will you choose? This is something only you can decide.”⁵⁵ His father makes no attempt to give counsel or guidance. This boy is simply given the responsibility of deciding his own future. This freedom to choose one’s own path or destiny is presented as offering freedom, yet often leads to paralysis of decision making, leaving individuals to ask, as Volf has, “What is truly worth knowing and doing?”

Flourishing

Flourishing is in many ways a culminating facet. Many of the previous facets are interwoven with flourishing and thread their way through this brief sketch. Authenticity and flourishing are interconnected concepts. Being authentic is about a person becoming who they were meant to be and each individual attaining all that they desire. In the deepest sense this is flourishing. The broader concept of flourishing goes beyond the individual and encompasses towns, countries, and the world. Volf has written an entire book on this subject, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized Society*. He defines and explains what is required for human flourishing:

Meaning and pleasure, I think, belong together. The unity of the two is a source of true joy and a condition of human flourishing. No matter what we have and under what condition we live we languish when meaning and pleasure are not united. For meaning without pleasure is oppressive and pleasure without meaning is empty.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Star Trek*, directed by J. J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2009), DVD.

⁵⁶ Volf, “Flourishing,” 15:34.

The word meaning, as used in terms of flourishing, carries a deep sense of purpose and motivation that drives a person to press on even in the face of discouragement and hardship. In its most profound sense, it is always connected to something larger than the individual and this is often the supernatural. As mentioned earlier, meaning usually springs from the horizons of influence with which an individual is attached. Pleasure encompasses physical sensations, emotions, and the deep sense of enjoyment and satisfaction that come from genuine connection to people, places, and things. The importance of meaning, pleasure, and the necessity of marrying them together is critical to any discussion of authenticity. As with all the previous facets, this is a vast subject and a brief sketch of vital ideas, utilizing the research of others, is all that space will permit. However, this sketch should be sufficient to highlight the significant shift that has taken place in the concept of flourishing from pre-modern to late-modern times. In a survey of the historical understanding of meaning, Keller points out that pre-moderns were not troubled by the question of meaning the way people are today.⁵⁷ As discussed previously, in the pre-modern era individuals gained their sense of meaning from the horizons of influence into which they were born. Pleasure was found within those horizons and there was meaning found in relation to the community and supernatural world in which one was immersed. Flourishing, in terms of meaning and pleasure being wedded together, would have been fairly widespread.⁵⁸ In the broader context of flourishing, including some freedom of choice and material comfort, there would have been much that could have been classified as a lack of flourishing. However, the focus of this facet is the core of flourishing: meaning combined with pleasure. For even in the

⁵⁷ Keller, *Making Sense of God*, 59.

⁵⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 35-36.

hardest times of struggle and deprivation if there is meaning and some pleasure there can be personal and relational flourishing.

During the modern era, many changes occurred that influenced how people relate to the supernatural world, each other, and the governing authorities.⁵⁹ These shifts greatly influenced the concept of flourishing and how it is to be obtained. The continuing degradation of meaningful connection to the supernatural world began to erode the transcendent sense of meaning and destiny. This led people to seek meaning in the merely natural spheres of life: relationships, material objects, work, and politics. In addition to the continued weakening of a transcendent sense of meaning two significant factors contributed to a truncated sense of meaning and pleasure, especially in America: changing economic and political structures.⁶⁰ In America the opportunity for men, and eventually women, to work hard and become financially stable with adequate food and material goods was an actual possibility for a growing number of people. The free-market economic system opened up the doors for this advancement. Self-determination leading to financial and material prosperity linked wealth production with happiness. J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur was a French farmer who settled in America. He had been influenced by the Enlightenment mentality and expresses the growing sense of rational, self-interested individualism that had emerged during this era.⁶¹ In 1782 he wrote, “Here the rewards of his industry follow with equal steps the progress of his labour; his labour is founded on the basis of nature, *self-interest*; can it want a stronger allurements?”⁶² Here self-interest is the highest motivational factor. It is evident that in Crevecoeur’s mind self-interest and success in

⁵⁹ These ideas are presented more fully in the previous three facets.

⁶⁰ Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, especially Chapters 3 and 8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

⁶² J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, (New York, NY: Fox, Duffield and Company, 1904), 55. Emphasis original.

labor are tightly connected. This allurements promises to give meaning and bring pleasure to the laborer. This is a truncated view of where meaning and happiness are to be found. The focus is on financial and material prosperity as the source for meaning and pleasure. It is true that not all people ascribed to this view, however, this view become more dominate throughout this era. Politically, in America's burgeoning democracy, each voter began to see himself as holding a certain degree of power and combined with the economic independence previously discussed the idea of being self-sufficient began to take on a new form.⁶³ Alexis de Tocqueville uses the term "individualism" to describe the new state of social relationships he observed in the American culture. "Individualism is a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellow-creatures; and to draw apart with his family and his friends; so that, after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself."⁶⁴ In Tocqueville's observation a further flattening is becoming evident. Individualism leads to a separation from wider horizons of influence and limits the individual to the tight circle of people he has chosen to gather around him. It is important to note the interwoven nature of self-choosing with the reduction in flourishing. Tocqueville's observations are very keen and relevant on this point,

As social conditions become more equal, the number of persons increases who, although they are neither rich enough nor powerful enough to exercise any great influence over their fellow-creatures, have nevertheless acquired or retained sufficient education and fortune to satisfy their own wants. They owe nothing to any man, they expect nothing from any man; they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands. Thus, not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants, and

⁶³ Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 32-44.

⁶⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Trans. Henry Reeve (PN: Penn State Electronic Classics Series, 2002), 574. <http://seas3.elte.hu/coursematerial/LojkoMiklos/Alexis-de-Tocqueville-Democracy-in-America.pdf>.

separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone, and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart.⁶⁵

These words are almost prophetic of what was to come to full flower in the late-modern era.

Meaning was becoming defined by economic advancement and happiness was slowly shifting to material acquisitions and surrounding oneself with a small number of congenial people.

The diminution of flourishing accelerated in the late-modern era. Many who had rejected supernaturalism for naturalism, began to wrestle with the realization that meaning becomes absurd in a world of blind forces and chance. More and more people actively began to think about meaning in this light and even more simply began to sense or absorb this view. One outspoken thinker who saw true meaning as unattainable was Bertrand Russell. In an honest reflection on people in a purely material universe he explains that man is the byproduct of an, “accidental collocations of atoms” and is therefore, “Purposeless . . . and void of meaning.”⁶⁶ For Russell the flattening has become turned into a complete void leaving pleasure as the only hope for human flourishing. Jean-Paul Sartre while acknowledging the desires in man, echoes Russell in his belief that life lacks meaning or purpose when he states, “Man is a useless passion.”⁶⁷ There seems to be a struggle within people during this late-modern era as many find it difficult to give up on the reality of true meaning in life. They sense the loss of having a greater purpose to live for than simply pleasure. Andrew Delbanco, a professor of American Studies, identifies the need and the reality of finding meaning in something greater than ourselves when he references the Puritans and explains, “that if we fail to contribute to some

⁶⁵ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 575.

⁶⁶ Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship,” *Bertrand Russell Society* (1903).
<https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/courses/264/fmw.htm>.

⁶⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York, NY: Washington Square Pres., 1984), 615.

good beyond ourselves, we condemn ourselves to the hell of loneliness.”⁶⁸ The fact that people continue to hold onto meaning frustrates Thomas Nagel who has completely given up on the idea and suggests that people need to stop trying to force meaning on a world that is meaningless. Once people stop trying to find meaning where there is none they will no longer feel the sense of meaninglessness.⁶⁹ His suggestion would eliminate some discomfort but would leave seeking pleasure in material things as the sole means of flourishing. This attempt to find lasting satisfaction in pleasure alone has led many to despair.⁷⁰ Volf concludes of late-modern times, “A separation of meaning and pleasure, I would argue, is a chief defect of our civilization and it’s tied to our stubborn, or perhaps addiction induced, insistence that we live by bread alone.”⁷¹ By bread alone Volf is referring to the naturalistic world and temporal pleasures. Fortunately, many still feel the pull towards meaning even if only as a longing they believe is unattainable.

The shift in how people perceive identity has been massive. Only four of the many facets involved have been touched on, but these are crucial to understanding the cultural ideal of authenticity and formulating an effective apologetic approach. These four facets: supernaturalism to naturalism; objectivity to subjectivity; horizons of significance to self-choosing; and meaning wedded to pleasure vs. pleasure alone as the source of flourishing provide the historical backdrop for grasping the current understanding of authenticity from a cultural perspective and from a redeemed Christian perspective.

⁶⁸ Andrew Delbanco, *The Real American Dream* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 117.

⁶⁹ Thomas Nagel, *What Does It All Mean?* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), 101.

⁷⁰ N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 32-33 and Francis A. Schaeffer, *Francis A. Schaeffer: Trilogy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 57-59.

⁷¹ Volf, “Flourishing,” 15:34.

Cultural Ideal of Authenticity

Authenticity is not easily defined in scientific categories. Charles Taylor makes this light hearted but helpful clarification, “Talk of self-fulfillment or authenticity can seem . . . vague and wooly.”⁷² There are some commonalities that unite most popular definitions of authenticity. To be authentic involves an introspective search, on the part of each individual, to find a source of power and identity within themselves. This usually requires that an individual move away from institutional or social norms and other people’s agendas. It is a way of living that makes one’s own personal actualization and fulfillment the most significant value in life. It actively resists accommodating to external priorities, moral demands, or serious commitments to others,⁷³ especially if these commitments would infringe on the individual’s ability to “live in their own authenticity.” In examining many of the popular sources on authenticity,⁷⁴ two common elements are uncertainty regarding how to truly be authentic and the constant struggle against adapting to those forces outside oneself. These videos and books are not simply defining what authenticity is but explaining why it is so difficult to be authentic. Even those doing the teaching admit they find it difficult to be authentic.

Contrary to bringing the flourishing desired, this ideal often leads to insecurity, uncertainty, and a constant striving. N. T. Wright’s insights are helpful in understanding this, “There is no longer an ‘I’: just a swirling mass of emotions, of signifiers, of impulses, meaning that ‘I’ am in a constant state of flux. . . . The postmodern claim that one’s deepest self is a

⁷² Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 74.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 44, 56.

⁷⁴ There is no shortage of material on this. The following is a sample: Robbins, *Be Yourself*; Swan, “How to Be Authentic,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irxqCDeQulk>; Ana Saldarriaga, “The Power of Authenticity” (YouTube video by TEDx Talks), posted June 24, 2016, accessed June 6, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKwasbVGaek>.

fluid, unstable thing.”⁷⁵ This is an existential weakness that many who are trying to live with this ideal run up against. Taylor suggests that another weakness of this ideal is the foundational belief that people need relationships to fulfill but not define one’s self. This view, “Forgets how our understanding of the good things in life can be transformed by our enjoying them in common with people we love, how some goods become accessible to us only through such common enjoyment.”⁷⁶ Taylor is arguing that the people individuals love and connect deeply with are internal to their identity because it is through them that many of the things that are of great value become accessible.⁷⁷ Each individual’s identity is shaped by, made manifest to, and enhanced by the people with whom they are connected. If relationships are viewed merely as a means to personal fulfillment then people will be unable to truly become their truest self because they have cut themselves off from the relational sources that actually bring that self to maturity. Taylor suggests that the self-centered, or narcissistic, manifestations of authenticity are self-defeating and inadequate to fulfill the purpose of authenticity, or finding one’s true self.⁷⁸ This ideal strives for many good goals, however, the way these goals are pursued can often lead people further from the attainment of the very authenticity they seek. This ideal has penetrated the culture as a whole. The degree to which each individual adheres to this ideal will vary. Some will hold it more consistently and intentionally while others absorb it inadvertently. This idea leads to diminished flourishing because it cuts it’s adherent off from the horizons of influence that are required for meaning and deep pleasure to be experienced. Superficial pleasures may be accessible, but they are fleeting and empty.

⁷⁵ Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God*, 31.

⁷⁶ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 34.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 35.

Redeemed Authenticity

A Christian understanding of authenticity shares much with the cultural ideal. The biblical view of identity speaks of each person as a unique and special creation (Gen 1:27; Ps 139). God has not created uniformity among individuals, but great diversity (1 Cor 12; Eph 4:7-16). Christians are admonished not to be conformed to the pattern of the world (Rom 12:2). Along with these commonalities are many differences. Redeemed authenticity requires that an individual find his or her source of power and identity outside him or herself, in the triune Christian God. It is in relationship with the triune God that each person finds the strength (2 Tim 2:1; 2 Tim 4:17; 1 Pet 5:10), wisdom (Jam 1:5), and meaning (Matt 5:13-14, 28:19-20; 1 Pet 2:14; 2 Cor 5:12) that enables them to live a truly authentic life with confidence. God takes the responsibility of bringing each Christian to their full potential through Jesus Christ and the power of the Spirit (2 Cor 9:8; Phil 1:6; Heb 10:14, 12:1). This requires that an individual move toward God's standards and toward community with him and others. Redeemed authenticity is other-centered and values community and self-sacrifice as the most significant value in life. This is the model Jesus left for his followers. In living this type of authentic life believers have the external connections that allow them to fully develop their individuality. Taylor explains, "It [being externally connected] allows us to live (potentially) a fuller and more differentiated life, because [it is] more fully appropriated as our own."⁷⁹ Appropriating our own beliefs and opinions is only possible when individuals are connected to a higher and wider reality. Expressing this idea of redeemed authenticity in a slightly different way C. S. Lewis states, "The more we get what we now call 'ourselves' out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we

⁷⁹Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 74.

become.”⁸⁰ This is a truth that is very significant and vital to the understanding of redeemed authenticity. The cultural ideal suggests that getting more of our true selves is the path to authenticity, while Christians understand that getting more of God is the only way to truly find ourselves. Matthew records Jesus’s explanation, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt 10:39). The Christian life is to be a balanced life. A life of devotion to God which result in transformation and a life of external connection to people and nature which results in flourishing. The Ten Commandments (Exod 20) teach devotion to God, deep inner consistency, and a sacrificial commitment to others’ wellbeing. Additionally, in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5 - 7), Jesus’s teaching echoes this balance. Volf presents a wonderful picture of this type of life in describing his parents, “They make God the source and goal of their lives and the power through which they acquired, enjoyed, and distributed the goods of ordinary life to those less fortunate than themselves.”⁸¹

It is true that Christians have not always lived consistently with this biblical teaching on identity. Unfortunately, throughout history individual Christians and the church have often appeared as, “mind-shutting and freedom-trampling cultural edifices used as instruments of social control.”⁸² This failure has often resulted in Christianity being seen as dictating uniformity in every detail of human life. The legitimate critique regarding this flattening of Christianity into a system of controlled behavior and particular types of actions and appearance opened the door for the claim of inauthenticity. This fraudulent example of biblical teaching has aided the push towards the cultural ideal of authenticity in the world as well as its infiltration into the church.

⁸⁰ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Harper One Publishing, 1980), 225.

⁸¹ Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 9.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 7.

Many believers are trying to be authentic and Christian. However, too often they lack a clear understanding of what is meant by either authenticity or Christian, and therefore, they are at a loss as to how to accomplish their goal. Sadly, many Christians find themselves wrestling with similar identity issues as those who are not believers. The question of identity and authenticity is crucial to address in the church. This conversation must be handled with sensitivity, graciousness, as well as doctrinal faithfulness. This affirmation, that redeemed authenticity is founded in the triune God of the Bible, can serve as a positive apologetic for the church as well as the world.

Chapter Two

Worldview Overlap

Proclaiming the message of the cross as effectively as possible “means asking what points of contact there are for the gospel,”⁸³ according to Alister McGrath. Within these contrasting views of authenticity there are important areas of overlap, core beliefs, and desires that are held in common by both versions of authenticity. It is crucial to keep in mind that every person is unique and holds their beliefs and desires differently and with varying degrees of tenacity. There is no formulaic approach to finding points of contact. These proposed areas of common ground are presented simply as possibilities that can be explored thoughtfully and carefully with friends who hold the cultural ideal of authenticity providing opportunities for affirming dialogue. The Apostle Paul provides an important example of finding points of affirmation and common ground in his discourse with the Athenians when he affirms that they are religious, shows that he knows about their gods, and quotes their poets (Acts 17:22-34). Each of these three areas of overlap highlight points of agreement on one level and points of contrast when more closely examined. This quality enables them to serve as a bridge allowing the fullness of the Christian account to be explored. In each of these overlaps the commonalities are touched on and the points of divergence are briefly explored. The areas of common ground to be examined are: source, meaning, and flourishing. These areas of overlap are not meant to exhaust the commonalities but to serve as a solid foundation for beginning the bridge building process in order to encourage meaningful dialogue.

⁸³ McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 57.

Source: Internal or External

What is the source for authenticity? How does an individual become authentic? The common ground is found in the fact that everyone needs a direction in which to look to find who they are and what they ought to be. The direction that a person looks to find these answers reveals whether their source is internal or external. This apologetic approach is limited to how the cultural ideal of authenticity, in contrast with redeemed authenticity, would respond to the question of source. In addressing where authenticity originates those holding the cultural ideal ordinarily state that the source is found inside each individual. It is each person looking within to discover their truest self. In other words, the source for authenticity is internal. It is the self. The self is meant to convey that true and enduring essence that at the core makes a person unique, special, and meaningful. It is important to note here that there is no one who develops a sense of self in a vacuum. All people interact with the world and society to varying degrees and are shaped by them. People can be in denial about this or attempt to disown these influences, but they are influenced none-the-less. The influence society exerts on individuals can also lead to significant conversations. There may be some who would cite family, work, or nation as an example of their source, however, this would not be typical of the cultural ideal of authenticity. In contrast, the Christian answer to the question of source is an external one: the triune God of the universe. Exploring the quality, viability, and sustainability of a person's source for authenticity can create grounds for fruitful discussion.

An internal source for authenticity is limited by the resources present within each individual. The quality of the self as a source can be diminished by any impairment to a person's mental and physical health. These limitations could prevent an individual from being their true selves. It may be argued that this new state simply presents a new opportunity for the

individual's true self to emerge. This view would call the sustainability of this source into question. The ability to maintain authenticity in an ongoing way at a satisfactory level is sustainability. However, if a person's authentic self changes over time, then the original authentic self must be abandoned for a new authentic self. This idea seems counter to the whole ideal of authenticity and is also very unstable. Viability of the source is its ability to produce the desired result. This is an incredibly valuable concept to explore in view of the fact that even proponents of authenticity concede that having a solid, strong, and unchanging inner self is difficult to sustain.⁸⁴ Allan Bloom explains that this view of self represents a reframing of Pascal's wager, "It is Pascal's wager, no longer on God's existence but on one's capacity to believe in oneself and the goals one has set for oneself."⁸⁵ Is an individual willing to wager their authenticity on such a limited internal source? That is the question to be explored.

The Christian trusts in an external source for authenticity: the God of the Bible. He provides an external source that is unlimited. God is revealed through the person of Jesus Christ as being unchanging, "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8). He does not change his mind like people do (Num 23:19). Scripture reveals that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. God's power, his constant presence through the Spirit, and his complete knowledge of us and everything else provides confidence that he can sustain an individual's identity over time and through whatever may come. These omni-qualities also ensure the viability of God as the source for authenticity. He is more than able to produce the desired result; a truly authentic self. The triune Christian God provides an incredibly stable source for authenticity.

⁸⁴ Robbins, *Be Yourself*, Chapter 2.

⁸⁵ Bloom, *Closing of the American Mind*, 201.

The stability of a person's sense of being authentic is uncertain at best when based on the self alone. Founding one's authentic self on the immovable rock of the God of the Bible has provided countless people the stability they need to maintain their sense of authenticity in the face of great adversity and uncertainty. Lewis comments on this sense of stability and certainty when he writes, "Their delight in the Law is a delight in having touched firmness; like the pedestrian's delight in feeling the hard road beneath his feet after a false shortcut has long entangled him in muddy fields."⁸⁶

Meaning: From Within or From Without

What makes life worth living? Is there any deep and lasting meaning to life? How does one attain purpose and significance in life and can it last? These are questions that every person asks at some point in his or her life. At times this question can be connected with very strong emotions. This is an area that should be considered carefully and thoughtfully as it may open up some sensitive issues for conversation. People can seek a sense of meaning by connecting with something within themselves or something external. Looking at this from the perspective of meaning from within, an individual would see them self as having innate meaning that is discovered through introspection. This sense of meaning then animates the person's decisions, goals, and sense of worth. In contrast, people who perceive their meaning as coming from without would look outside themselves for meaning and purpose in the natural or supernatural world. There is some overlap as the sense of meaning from without would resonate within as well. However, for the purposes of dialogue with friends, discovering the perspective of each individual is the important point.

⁸⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1958), 62.

One proponent for finding meaning from within is Richard Taylor. He makes the case for connecting inwardly when he states, “The meaning of life is from within us, it is not bestowed from without.”⁸⁷ He wants to reject the idea that people need to connect with someone or something external in order to find meaning. This allows a person to maintain more autonomy and limits the need for other people in order to find meaning and purpose as an individual. This idea is more strongly asserted by Stephen J. Gould who suggests that there is no real, objective sense of meaning that can be achieved by connecting to other individuals or the community. “We must construct these answers ourselves—from our own wisdom and ethical sense. There is no other way.”⁸⁸ This puts the entire burden of finding meaning in life on each individual. This can be deeply problematic. When a person has looked within and finds no sense of meaning it is their own fault. There is no place else to look. This can lead to insecurity and a sense of despair. Thomas Nagel admits that people want their lives to matter “from the outside” but he does not believe there is such a thing as objective, external meaning. His solution is to suggest that people give up the desire for meaning altogether.⁸⁹ It would be very convenient if people could just give up on the sense of meaning, but as Nagel admits people have this built-in sense that their lives should have meaning and need a purpose outside themselves. This built-in sense is why meaning is such constructive common ground to explore.

This pervasive sense that our lives must have meaning connected to something outside ourselves leads naturally to the suggestion that meaning might in fact be found by connecting with people and things external to one’s self. People find a variety of ways to explain this type of

⁸⁷ Richard Taylor, “The Meaning of Life,” in *The Meaning of Life*, 2nd ed., ed. E. D. Klemke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 175.

⁸⁸ Stephen J. Gould, “The Meaning of Life: The Big Picture,” *Life Magazine* 11, no. 14 (December 1988): 76-86. In this article, Gould is one of many who contribute. He states that “We may yearn for ‘higher’ answers [meaning]” but they do not exist.”

⁸⁹ Nagel, *What Does It All Mean?*, 101.

external connection; Charles Taylor speaks of, “horizons against which things take on significance for us.”⁹⁰ And Lionel Trilling speaks of, “the complex process of . . . self-realization through society.”⁹¹ Regardless of the phrasing, the end result is that people need to be connected to reality that is greater than themselves if they are to have a deep and lasting sense of meaning. Christians would strongly agree that the ultimate source of meaning is God and his calling on each believer’s life. This deep and abiding sense of meaning has sustained people in prison. It has enabled people to be martyred. It enables Christ’s followers to have and maintain a hopeful purpose in the daily routines of life. This is good news to those grasping for meaning.

Christians and non-Christians alike can affirm and agree on the fact that people seem to feel a need for meaning in their lives. A lack of meaning is at the root of much despair in many of the people with whom the apologist may have opportunity to talk. This area of overlap is one that should be treated lovingly and cautiously. Yet, the apologist must not avoid sensitively speaking the truth in love. The examination of how lasting meaning can be attained may be the gateway through which disciples gain the chance to point people to God as the source of eternal meaning.

Flourishing: Pleasure Alone or Meaning and Pleasure

What is the good life? What is worth living for? Is pleasure the highest goal for men and women? Does flourishing involve happiness in union with meaning? When people are saying, “There must be more to life than this,” it is clear that they are not experiencing flourishing. Volf has defined human flourishing as meaning in combination with pleasure. He warns, “In choosing between meaning and pleasure we always make the wrong choice. Pleasure without meaning is

⁹⁰ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 37.

⁹¹ Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 81.

vapid; meaning without pleasure is crushing.”⁹² There is a lot of worldview overlap that can be affirmed in this area. Pleasure is that which makes people happy and glad, brings satisfaction and contentment. This normal understanding of pleasure is firm common ground. Christians can affirm that God created people to enjoy his creation in these ordinary ways. Physical pleasure: taste, touch, smell, sight, and sound are all things that God created and are good. Meaning has already been addressed so that will not be repeated. The connection between meaning and pleasure is what is to be explored with friends. Pleasure often reaches its highest earthy satisfaction in conjunction with meaningful relationships. This is an area of overlap that, if carefully tuned into, can be easily brought into conversation. Jerry Walls points out that, “There is a deep connection between our yearning for love and our desire for happiness. Only if we love and are loved can we be truly and deeply happy.”⁹³ It is far more pleasurable for a person to enjoy something physical with an individual whom they deeply love than it is to experience that pleasure alone or with strangers. Deep discussion can be had in attempting to discover how someone can achieve this unity of pleasure and meaning that leads to flourishing. Flourishing is an area in which many will find abundant agreement. However, it is likely that the apologist’s non-Christian friends have a different view of meaning or have given up on the idea completely. Seek to understand each person’s views individually.

It may be that some who hold to the cultural ideal of authenticity have given up on a deep sense of meaning; however, they may still feel the tug of desire toward genuine flourishing. This might be a place of common ground demonstrating the possibility that meaning exists and when combined with pleasure brings the flourishing that all people intuitively sense they were made

⁹² Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion*, 201.

⁹³ Walls, *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory*, 23.

for. As an aid to those who have given up on meaning, as well as for its own sake, it is helpful to explore Volf's assessment that happiness isolated from meaning is empty. This thought is echoed by Christopher Lasch when he indicates that the pursuit of happiness as an end leads to a preoccupation with one's self.⁹⁴ If a person is primarily concerned with their own pleasure it leads to an intense focus on themselves: their wants, likes, dislikes. It leaves very little room to consider other individuals or society. This often leads to isolation. If personal desire is the last word and the highest end, flourishing will languish.

It is vital that Christians do not give the impression that God wants people to serve as slaves experiencing no pleasure as they carry out their purpose in his Kingdom. The disavowal of any form of oppressive servitude is another place Christians can find agreement with unsaved friends. As noted earlier, Scripture speaks of emotional and physical pleasure as a God given gift. It is to be exercised within the bounds he has set; not as a deprivation, but the means by which to most fully appreciate those pleasures. Often Christ's disciples lean very heavily on meaning and spend little time on pleasure in discussion. This is a mistake. Balance is what is required because meaning without pleasure can be crushing.

This particular area of worldview overlap has the potential to provide a unique opportunity to clarify many biblical truths. Truths about God's love, his care, his creative act, and his sacrifice. The apologist should leave his listener in no doubt that the God of Christianity created mankind for pleasure and meaning; the final consummation of which will be realized in heaven⁹⁵ (Rev 21:3-5).

⁹⁴ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1979), XV.

⁹⁵ Walls, *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory*, Chapters 1-3.

Chapter Three

Apologetic Approach Part 1

The following two chapters will detail an apologetic approach for engaging with people enmeshed in the culture of authenticity. This approach is not a magic formula. God deals with each person as an individual (1 Cor 12:27; Rev 13:8) and there is no infallible argument that will compel someone to be saved. The approach presented here is meant to serve as a guide or general plan for engagement. Wisdom, prayer, and personal attention will be required in each unique encounter with those who are lost and searching. Wisdom and prayer will not be elaborated on as there are many wonderful works that have been written on them and the ideal of authenticity does not require any new emphasis. However, both prayer and wisdom are necessary for any Christian endeavor to succeed and should not be neglected. In Part One of this apologetic character, relationship and listening are emphasized. Relationality is the foundational component to all Christian pursuits. Every disciple's life begins with a renewed relationship to the triune God. As sons and daughters of this God, every Christian is called into relationship with others, Christian and non-Christian alike. Believers are given relational designations such as brother (Acts 10:23), children (Eph 5:1), ambassador (2 Cor 5:20), and peacemaker (Matt 5:9). All of these presuppose that Christians are in intentional relationships. Ultimately it is of no value if a disciple of Christ knows every argument ever written and has orthodox theology if they never share these truths with others in caring relationships. It is through personal interaction that this knowledge typically becomes fruitful to others. This is especially true when attempting to meaningfully connect with people in America's current cultural setting. Listening carefully and thoughtfully is a critical component of meaningful connections with others. The pursuit of actual relational involvement with people of all religious and non-religious backgrounds is necessary

and should not be considered merely in theoretical terms. It is vital that the redeemed authenticity required by Christian discipleship be obvious in their lives as the apologist communicates the love and truth of Christianity.

Relationality

Relationality is the state or condition of being relational. This involves personal character, hope, availability, and hospitality. Each of these will be explored, however, the central point is that this relationality must be lived out in reality not simply agreed with in principal. None of these are revolutionary concepts. Their profundity lies in their actual embodiment. Although relationships are so vitally important, many in American culture find it difficult to maintain consistent relationships. Wiley Miller expresses this important struggle in a comic way, “The foundation of all art, science, and society—indeed our very existence—is our relationship to one another. Which probably explains why deserted islands are so universally appealing.”⁹⁶ The struggle to maintain regular, meaningful, human connection is real. Relational qualities cannot be put on and taken off; they must inhere in the believer as they inhere in the creator. The triune Christian God is a relational being. There has been love between the members of the trinity from all eternity. As they love and serve each other, so God’s children are to love and serve one another and all with whom God brings them into relationship. The challenge to every disciple is the commitment to intentionally integrate this type of relationality into their daily lives.

⁹⁶ Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur’s Beastly Things* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 1999), 11.

Personal Character

Consistency of character is mandatory for developing the plausibility and credibility of redeemed authenticity. The entire concept of authenticity rests on people being themselves, being at peace with who they are, and being transparent, or real. In order to be an effective disciple each believer must pray that God would cultivate in them a truly loving, hopeful, other-centered, character, like that of Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit (Phil 2). Then the disciple must cooperate with God in living this out in relationship with others. Perfection is not the standard; however, making a sincere effort to love and serve others is required. Scripture is clear that the character and behavior of believers will affect whether or not people believe the Gospel message. Unity among Christians is a sign to the world that the Father sent the Son (John 17:20-21). The disciple's inward character and outward actions are to be pure and Godly so the Word of God will not be reproached and not be maligned (Titus 1 and 2). Christians' outward visible love for one another is a sign to non-believers that they are Jesus's disciples (John 13:34-35; 1 John 3-4). Paul delivers a comprehensive statement on the imperative that believers have to cultivate deeply pure, other-centered, Christ-like character (Phil 2:1-8). He details this further in Romans 12 when he challenges Christians to, "Let love be genuine" (Rom 12:9). He goes on to explain that godly love involves effort and zeal; loving one's enemies, associating with those who are difficult to love, and it requires forgiveness and living in harmony. This is a picture of redeemed authenticity that gives plausibility and credibility to the Gospel. Michael Green underscores this necessity, "Paul in his farewell to the Ephesian elders says, 'You know how I have lived with you at all seasons.' His life was utterly transparent, and that was what gave power to his message. You cannot pretend to be a man of God. Our lives have got to manifest

such a new quality, such marks of transformation, that people will be intrigued and will want to know why.”⁹⁷

Hope

The reality of Christian hope provides compelling incentive to consider Christianity. Hope is a Christian reality that must permeate a believer’s entire life. It also must ring through all the apologist’s various arguments. The Christian’s hope is not founded on wishful thinking or fairy tales but on the reality of God and his faithfulness, as proven through Scripture, to fulfill that which he has promised. The pivotal example of this is Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. Christ is the fulfillment of God’s promises, and his resurrection proves he is that fulfillment (Col 1:19-22). It also provides the hope that Jesus will raise believers from the dead as he promised. Jesus promised his followers that he would send the Spirit to empower, convict, and comfort them after he ascended. This is an additional source of hope as each disciple experiences the presence and the power of the Spirit in his or her own life. Baggett and Walls highlight the power and hope that believers have through relationship with Christ, “[Jesus’s resurrection] ushered in a new order, making available the same power that raised Jesus from the dead to be at work within us, transforming us into his likeness, as God originally intended, and revealing what can be our own hope that death is not the last word.”⁹⁸ There is little hope and virtually no power to be found in the cultural ideal of authenticity. Being true to one’s self is a relentless struggle that can easily lead to isolation. The very popular Disney movie *Frozen* is an excellent example of this. At the point where Elsa, one of the main characters, gives free reign to her feelings and powers and rejects the constraints put on her, she passionately expresses her freedom. She no

⁹⁷ Michael Green, *Evangelism Now and Then* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 22.

⁹⁸ David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 184.

longer has to hide and pretend. What does she gain from this freedom? Isolation in a snowy ice castle far removed from everyone. This allows her to express herself freely, however, she now has no one with whom to express herself. Many people feel the burden of this liberation in their search for authenticity. The hope that permeates Christianity is the promise of a liberation from self which results in deeper, richer relationships that last for eternity. Hope is powerful and must permeate the lives of the saints. It is foundational to all relationships and apologetic conversations.

Availability

Making time to sincerely get to know and truly care for others is a biblical mandate and is paramount for this apologetic (Luke 10:27; Matt 28:19-20). Time is required to build trusting relationships and for people to begin to understand themselves better. It is in relational contact and dialogue with others that people begin to understand who they are and feel connected to a larger reality than themselves. Taylor points out that people are “fundamentally dialogical.”⁹⁹ By this he means that people develop their fullest sense of humanity and identity in dialogue with the world through relationships with people as well through “the ‘languages’ of art, of gesture, of love, and the like.”¹⁰⁰ Taylor’s key concept here is that, “No one acquires the languages needed for self-determination on their own. . . . The genesis of the human mind is in this sense not ‘monological,’ not something each accomplishes on his or her own, but dialogical.”¹⁰¹ This is what Christians should expect having been created in the image of a Trinitarian God who is dialogical. Every disciple must actively pursue opportunities for dialogue. At times this can be an uncomfortable command. Prayer is required to bring about the inward desire and conviction to

⁹⁹ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 33.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

make people a priority. Accountability is also important if intentional availability is to be maintained as a way of life. As Jesus observed, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt 26:41). Disciples must make themselves available to help, pray with, support, comfort, and simply talk to others. It is in these moments that God speaks to others through his people in deep and meaningful ways.

Hospitality

The word hospitable brings so many qualities and actions together: welcoming, gracious, friendly, accommodating, neighborly, warm, kind, loving, giving, and generous to name just a few. Being hospitable is a non-negotiable part of the Christian life and is vital to an apologetic of redeemed authenticity. Hospitality is a practice that the New Testament indicates is expected to be part of the Christian’s life (Matt 25:35; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8). Hospitality is not formal entertainment. It is marked by a gracious spirit that welcomes people as part of the family. This intimate link to family requires that Christians have families that are warm and able to enfold others. There is an incredible amount that is contingent on believers living the way Christ commanded. The ideal of authenticity that emphasizes an inward focus on being true to one’s self often leaves one isolated and lonely. When believers are in the habit of hospitality they know how to make people feel welcome and ‘at home.’ This is more powerful than many people realize. If those who subscribe to the cultural ideal of authenticity see authentic Christian relationships in homes, churches, and other gatherings, they may be drawn closer to Christ simply by the love and acceptance that flows from such encounters. Michael Green movingly sums up the need for hospitality, “The world has to see in Christian circles a warmer, more

accepting and caring fellowship than they can find anywhere else—and until they see that they are not going to be all that interested or impressed with God-talk.”¹⁰²

Explore Authenticity

The importance of authenticity is something everyone should be able to agree on. Taking time to ask and listen to how others define authenticity and the role it plays in their lives and the lives of others creates the opportunity to identify shared common ground. This allows believers to establish the foundation for apologetic conversations. Honesty and some degree of transparency on the part of both parties is required for these conversations. There are some people who consider authenticity in naturalistic terms while others are open to various spiritual realities. There can be a great deal of divergence in belief regarding authenticity from person to person. The goal of this exploration is for the believer to gain a more intimate understanding of their friend so that they can understand their friend’s unique situation, longings, desires, beliefs, and disappointments. These dialogues can enable depth of relationship and mutual respect to develop over time. It is always important to begin discussions where people are and not just begin from a predetermined set of assumptions. Taylor explains, “[People] are trying to shape their lives in the light of this ideal [authenticity] . . . If we start from the ideal, then we can ask: What are the conditions in human life of realizing an ideal of this kind: And what does the ideal properly understood call for?”¹⁰³

This is the thrust of the following suggested areas of conversation and consideration. The three subheadings are not exhaustive but are meant to give a general path to progress through a possible conversation. The questions are simply suggestions and should be modified to fit each

¹⁰² Green, *Evangelism Now and Then*, 25.

¹⁰³ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 32.

new situation. Each question that is presented can and should be followed up with ‘Why?’ and ‘What do you mean by that?’ The importance of authenticity, the challenges of authenticity, and the past lack of authenticity are highlighted below. Wisdom and prayer will be required as the apologist adapts this suggested approach to his/her actual relational experiences.

Importance of Authenticity

Why is authenticity important to you? This can be a very revealing question and may guide the rest of your conversation and possibly your relationship. What does it mean, or look like, for you to be authentic? This question may allow for a deeper insight into what qualities a person is hoping to develop in their lives and to see in other people’s lives. What is wrong with being inauthentic? Here the negative side can be expressed. This is also where the individual’s view that Christianity produces inauthenticity may be discovered. It is important to follow up on this and ask why they believe this to be true. More than likely it will stem from some past personal encounters with people who called themselves Christians who were living less than Christ-like lives. If Christianity is not voluntarily mentioned it might be advisable to ask what they think about Christianity as it relates to authenticity.

Challenges of Authenticity

Is it easy or hard to be authentic? This is a very important question. It seems a common experience that people find it very difficult to live consistently in accordance with the cultural ideal of authenticity. Follow up questions to their answer are essential. Examples of follow up questions would be: Why do you find it difficult to live in your own authenticity? Why do you feel the pressure to conform to the desires of those around you? Why is it wrong to conform to the expectations of friends, society, church, etc.? Pursuing the matter further, asking if

authenticity has any drawbacks, may yield some helpful insights. Shifting the focus to others is also a helpful way for the apologist to understand the person with whom they are talking. What does it look like to be in relationship with others who are authentic? The answers to these inquiries should reveal the character qualities they expect from authentic people. Frequent responses may be: honest, real, deep, and sincere. Follow up with theoretical questions surrounding hypothetical situations. For example, “What if the honest response of your friend is to explain that you are behaving in a way that is hurtful to them. Would you perceive that as impeding your authenticity? Or would you accept it, assuming it is true, and attempt to change?” These types of questions should be asked sincerely and with compassion. They are not questions that are designed to trap people. They are intended to reveal the truth to them as they consider their own answers. They are also to help the apologist truly understand the perspective and life experience of each individual. Ask questions surrounding any differences in expectations between what it means for the individual to be authentic and the expectations they have for others. There are at times conflicting expectations, and often others are held to a more virtuous standard than the individual being addressed. This should be carefully examined with humility and love.

Past Lack of Authenticity

Have you experienced a lack of authenticity in your own life? Have you experienced a lack of authenticity in the lives of those around you? What have you done about this? How did this lack of authenticity affect you? These questions and sensitive follow up questions should be very carefully attended to. The answers may reveal expectations that have not yet been expressed. They may also reveal some areas of inconsistency that should be noted for future apologetic engagement. It is almost certain that follow up questions will be needed with these

questions. There may be an opening here to ask about final attainment of perfect authenticity, such as, “Do you believe that anyone can reach a point where they live a perfectly authentic life until they die?” This may open the door to discuss their thoughts on death and the possibility of life after death.

The intention behind asking all these questions is to fully understand the individual’s thoughts and unique perspective on authenticity. Becoming acquainted with each person’s actual life experiences will enable the apologist to understand their friend and begin to formulate a sensitive but truthful apologetic response. After his/her beliefs and experience become clear it is the apologist’s aim to seek out the areas where flourishing is lacking, expectations are unmet, and spiritual openness seems likely. This is when the apologetic arguments can be presented with understanding and compassion in anticipation of the Holy Spirit illuminating their heart and mind to receive the truth of how Christ is more than sufficient to give them happiness, meaning, and lasting authenticity.

Chapter Four

Apologetic Approach Part 2

This section of the apologetic approach focuses on the actual arguments for why people should consider Christianity as the source for stable authenticity, which results in abundant flourishing. Four arguments are presented that may prove helpful in relation to the concept of authenticity. Given the unique questions and past experiences of every person it is possible that other arguments will be needed. These are offered as a place to begin. The close of the chapter contains an examination of the character of God. The triune God is more than sufficient to meet the needs of those seeking to live truly authentic lives. Although some today do not give a great deal of weight to universal truths or metanarratives, they still use logic and are not devoid of a sense of desiring to be connected to something larger than just one's own individual story. The Christian story is the good news that can enable those currently pursuing the cultural ideal of authenticity to realize deep and lasting authenticity which leads to stable and lasting flourishing.

Apologetic Arguments

The following arguments are intended to provide opportunities for intentional discussions aimed at reasoning systematically for Christianity and redeemed authenticity. As with any attempt to persuade, understanding and connecting with people is vital. At times God may prompt his disciple to speak to strangers strongly and directly with little or no previous contact. However, this approach emphasizes a personal love for and knowledge of each soul God sends into the apologist's life in an attempt to woo these souls to Christ by showing that Christianity is

truly appealing. As Blaise Pascal explains, “We must make it lovable, to make good men hope it is true.”¹⁰⁴

Authentic Testimony

Up to this point, the relationality described has primarily been relationship building and information gathering. At the prompting of the Spirit, there comes a time for the disciple to impart information. Sharing a sensitively crafted testimony can be a powerful apologetic. The concept of Christians sharing their testimonies is certainly not new; however, in connection to authenticity, it carries unique significance. Here the apologist has the opportunity to honestly make their friends hope Christianity is true by pointing out how their lives have changed and become more stable and authentic after following Christ. Using the knowledge gained through prior conversation, the apologist should craft their testimony to honestly include those areas that will be of significance to the individuals he or she is talking with. Pre-scripted and memorized testimonies will not be as powerful as those prompted by the actual individual to whom the disciple is relating. The power of personal testimony should not be underestimated as an actual apologetic argument. This is especially true when communicating with those who are searching for what will actually work in their lives. The apologist is living proof that stable, authenticity can be attained by trusting in Jesus’s work on the cross through the power of the Spirit. If previous conversations have opened the non-Christian to the need for a stable, external source for their authenticity, then a clear testimony of transformation and freedom may persuade them to consider Christ as their source. It may be possible to argue that Christ is the only source; however, in practical encounters with people, in contrast to theoretical discussion on

¹⁰⁴ Blaise Pascal, *The Harvard Classics: Blaise Pascal*, Charles W. Eliot, ed. (New York, NY: P. F. Collier and Son Corporation, 1961), 68.

metaphysical issues, it may only be necessary to persuade them to consider Christ as their source.

Desire as a Pointer to God

It is to be hoped that the personal character of the apologist and the testimony of their transformed life will be used by the Spirit to stir the hearts of non-Christians. Another area of argumentation that may touch their hearts is the reality that desire is a pointer to heaven. Every human has desires that are good and even necessary. Yet, all people find that these desires are only met temporarily. Even in the best situations desires are met for a time then they return and must be met again and again. There is even a connection to the law of diminishing return. The more temporal satisfaction that is enjoyed the less that desire is actually satisfied. The fact that we have desires that do not seem to be satisfied in any material or temporal way can lead one to conclude that perhaps they must have their ultimate fulfillment by means of a future life and the supernatural. Lewis describes this concept at length in his excellent essay “The Weight of Glory.” He explains, “Now, if we are made for heaven, the desire for our proper place will be already in us, but not yet attached to the true object.”¹⁰⁵ He then continues, “If a transtemporal, transfinite good is our real destiny, then any other good on which our desire fixes must be in some degree fallacious, must bear at best only a symbolical relation to what will truly satisfy.”¹⁰⁶ One key insight relating to authenticity is that each person’s real destiny is trans-temporal and transfinite. Therefore, if an individual is seeking their true destiny it will not be found within, as in the cultural ideal of authenticity. It must be found outside of themselves in something infinite. The second key insight is that anything less than this transtemporal, transfinite good will not

¹⁰⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and other Addresses* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1980), 28.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

ultimately satisfy human desires for pleasure or authenticity. There is some degree of satisfaction to be found in this life, yet it is fleeting. The powerful Christian truth is that temporal satisfaction is maximized when individuals are intimately connected to their creator, God. Volf succinctly explains, “Attachment to God amplifies and deepens enjoyment of the world.”¹⁰⁷ He explains that there is some degree of pleasure that comes from material objects, through bodily senses, that bring pleasure and gratify desire. However, pleasure is heightened and desire is more fully satisfied when the object is connected to the social relations that inhere in the objects.¹⁰⁸ He uses the example of a gift. The object given is pleasurable, but the deepest pleasure comes from the gift’s connection to the giver. In this way, even temporal pleasures are enhanced by relation to God, the giver of everything. To cut oneself off from the giver diminishes fulfillment of desire. The challenge for the apologist is to point these desires out to their friends and call their attention to the fleeting nature of the satisfaction they experience, explaining that this points to a need for supernatural fulfillment that can be realized only in Jesus Christ. The hope is that as these friends begin to see their longing for authenticity and their lack of ability to sustain it they will begin to realize Jesus is the answer to their need. Jesus gives two practical examples of how he meets human need: that of bread and water. Hunger and thirst are never finally satisfied. They always return just as forcefully as they did before they were quenched. Jesus repeatedly explains that he is the bread of life and those who eat will never hunger again (John 6:35). Also, Jesus says he is the source of living water and that those who drink it will never be thirsty again (John 4:7-15). This is truly fulfillment of desire. The ideal of authenticity encourages people to look within, embrace their desires, and satisfy them. This is the essence of being true to oneself. However, it is often the case that satisfaction is temporary or elusive. In these moments, this argument from

¹⁰⁷ Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion*, 203.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 202-205.

desire can be very helpful. The very desire for authenticity is a pointer to the giver and ultimate fulfillment of authenticity. Some may argue that Christianity suppresses desires and forbids satisfactions of human pleasures. One way to approach this is by seeking to show that God created the human ability to experience pleasure in all its forms and intends for people to experience them. The restrictions are given to enhance pleasure not to diminish it. It is vital to communicate that God not only intends but enables his people to find significant pleasure and fulfillment of desire in this life and total satisfaction for all eternity. God is not attempting to eliminate human desire but to fulfill it. Lewis' insight on this is very striking,

Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.¹⁰⁹

This reality should ignite the hearts of those who understand longing, and is a powerful argument for non-believers to consider the Christian God as the source for stable, lasting authenticity and fulfillment of desire. Lewis believes that this argument from desire is difficult for the honest person to escape, “Do what they will, then, we remain conscious of a desire which no natural happiness will satisfy.”¹¹⁰

Moral Argument

Many who hold the cultural ideal of authenticity feel very deeply about morality. They may have different ideas about what is morally permissible and what is not; however, the concept of morality can be a productive area for apologetic discussion. The vast majority of people believe that objective moral obligations exist even if they have not thought much about

¹⁰⁹ Lewis, *Weight of Glory*, 26.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

this topic. For example, most people from different times and cultures would agree that torturing children for amusement is objectively morally wrong. This suggests that there are moral obligations that are outside time and culture that impose themselves on all people. Each individual finds themselves praiseworthy if they obey these obligations and blameworthy if they do not. These moral obligations open many doors for fruitful apologetics. There are numerous books that detail the many facets of the moral argument for theism and the Christian God;¹¹¹ however, for the purposes of this thesis discussion will be confined to moral and non-moral goodness as pointers to God.

What can account for mankind's awareness of moral goodness? How is it that people know that torturing children for fun is morally wrong and that loving and taking care of children is morally good? The only plausible account requires that the objective moral order is higher than, or over and above, man. If this moral order is higher than man and authoritatively enforces obligation on him, then man must conform to those obligations in order to become all he or she was meant to be. In the words of H. P. Owen, man must conform in order "to fulfill his essence."¹¹² This authoritative moral order that is higher than man is a "designing Power" that "instilled and actualized" man's "capacity for moral adaptation," as Owen explains.¹¹³ This designing Power is a significant pointer to God. The thrust of this argument forces an external designing Power as the source for attainment of one's self-fulfillment. This has obvious implication for the concept of authenticity. Conformity to the moral law is part of how individuals fulfill their essence and become their truest self. If a person wishes to be true to

¹¹¹ H. P. Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism* (London, England: George Allen and Unwin LTD., 1965). This book is difficult to find but is available through interlibrary loan. Also see, Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, and David Baggett, and Marybeth Baggett, *The Morals of the Story: Good News About a Good God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018).

¹¹² Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 70.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

themselves they must yield to the external authority or the moral law and the designing Power. This points the person seeking authenticity outside themselves and toward a supernatural source for their authenticity. There are many alternative explanations for moral goodness that have been suggested; however, when pressed these objections lead either to “theism or absurdity.”¹¹⁴ Many scholarly in-depth discussions and refutations of these alternatives are available.¹¹⁵ The obligatory nature of moral obligations assumes a personal source for these obligations. One key piece of evidence for this claim is found in everyday life. People are not obligated to the concrete to walk on it. However, people are obliged to other people to treat them morally. In actuality, moral obligation is never compelled by inanimate objects but is always linked to people.¹¹⁶ This is a very strong pointer to the Christian God. Owen states, “Personal theism gives the only explanation by affirming that value-claims inhere in the character and will of God.”¹¹⁷

It is a common line of thinking that if a person is good they will be happy. This good is a non-moral goodness, however, found in things like meeting human desires for creative endeavors, relationships, and pleasure; and life shows that often good people doing good things are not happy. Even with this knowledge it is still our human intuition that goodness ought to lead to happiness. The meaning of happiness is vital for this discussion. The word happiness identifies a deeply profound sense of being what a person was made to be, attaining their rightful end. Owen explains that happiness is not reducible to mere pleasure, duty and happiness interact

¹¹⁴ Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 71.

¹¹⁵ Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, Chapter 4; David Baggett, “On Thomas Nagel’s Rejection of Theism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 106, no. 2 (2013), 227-238; ¹¹⁵ Baggett and Walls, *Good God*; and George I. Mavrodes, “Religion and the Queerness of Morality,” *Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitment: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright, 578-586.

¹¹⁶ Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 80.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

and enrich each other. Goodness is man's long-term, or final end.¹¹⁸ Owen's understanding echoes that of Volf in his understanding of flourishing. Pleasure alone leaves people empty. This sense of flourishing is the non-moral good individuals sense they were made for and that they deserve. This idea resonates with the concept of authenticity. Becoming all that a person is meant to become, being their true self, is what brings that deep sense of happiness. If goodness is the path to man's ultimate happiness and allows him or her to reach their final end then this must be a consideration in any honest person's search for their own authenticity. This is a very practical apologetic because even in the most ideal situation, people do not maintain this happiness. Death brings an end to all of these non-moral goods leaving the survivor with a loss of the very happiness they once enjoyed. This is a very real existential struggle that all humans share. The fact that in this life people never reach and maintain a lasting sense of 'the good' suggests that there must be something else. There must be more. There must be another life, an eternal life, in which the attainment of this deep lasting sense of happiness will be realized. Owen explains, "the pursuit of happiness . . . requires the postulation of God and immortality."¹¹⁹ Individual's intuition about non-moral goodness is a strong pointer to God. This intuition that the good requires God and immortality coupled with the argument from desire can be a powerful apologetic combination. It is the Christian's privilege and pleasure to explain that the perfection and ultimate fulfillment and flourishing people sense they are made for is promised by the God of the Bible.

It is important to point out that God made man to seek happiness in him. This means that when people pursue this deep happiness they are actually pursuing God. However, until each person is enabled to participate in the perfect, eternal, divine nature they will not be able to attain

¹¹⁸ Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 91-92.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

their ultimate end, their authentic self, this enduring state of flourishing. As a Christian, it is crucial to remember that these arguments are meant to draw people to the joy and completeness for which they are searching. It is a call to caring and compassion. David Baggett and Jerry Walls explain this beautifully, “The tug of morality within us is less like a cold deliverance of reason, and more like a warm and personal invitation to come and partake, to drink from a brook whose water quenches our thirst in the most deeply satisfying way we can imagine.”¹²⁰

Pascal’s Wager

Friends that ascribe to the cultural ideal of authenticity are sometimes of the mindset that if something works they are willing to try it. If it becomes clear that these friends have been convinced that Christianity is plausible and even attractive they may still be reluctant to move forward in pursuing faith. At this point Pascal’s wager may become a persuasive tool. This argument is not helpful when people are still indifferent toward God and is of little use with those who refuse to accept that God exists. It is for those who see the possibility of God and also the possibility that there is no God. When presented with the Christian faith some may feel the reality that their lives will have to be very different if they choose to follow Christ. This is a significant hurdle to many. To those seeking to be authentic self-renunciation seems counterproductive. The apologist’s personal testimony, the argument from desire, and the moral argument can help allay some of these fears and explain how yielding human will to the divine will can produce true authenticity. However, an individual may still be struggling with the idea of giving up self-control and denying themselves immediate gratification. At this juncture, following Pascal’s lead, the Christian could point out to their friend that every person must wager, or bet, on whether God exists or not. Since all people must bet it is reasonable to assess

¹²⁰ Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 185.

the stakes involved before deciding which to choose. If a person chooses to bet on God's existence they might have to give up some short-term pleasure as well as all morally destructive behavior; however, most Christians would assert that they are happier and more fulfilled after they have believed. If a person chooses to bet that there is no God they can keep pursuing their fleeting sense of happiness and all evil desires. If the person who bet against God was incorrect and God does exist, then this person eternally loses everything. However, if they bet on God and are correct they gain, as Pascal explains, "an eternity of life and happiness."¹²¹ The main point is for the apologist to put this decision into an eternal perspective for their friend. This eternal perspective may be enough to help them see the gravity of the decision in a new light. Lewis's observation that looking at a beam of light is very different from looking along it is helpful here.¹²² This approach is asking people to look along the beam, not at it. To look forward to eternity. An individual may be able to muster an unstable sort of authenticity in this life and experience some pleasure, although fleeting; yet eternally they will lose pleasure and authenticity. The stakes are very high and the apologist should not be afraid to ask people to consider the eternal cost of their choice. Someone may argue that they do not need to wager at all. Pascal simply responds, "Yes; but you must wager."¹²³ Indifference is not an option. In reference to this wager, Peter Kreeft uses the analogy of a marriage proposal that God has offered to every individual. He explains, "Not to say Yes is eventually to say No."¹²⁴ Upon death the opportunity to accept God's proposal is no longer a possibility and therefore the marriage proposal is ultimately refused.

¹²¹ Pascal, *The Harvard Classics: Blaise Pascal*, 85.

¹²² Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 212-215.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Peter Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal's Pensees* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1993), 300.

A word of caution is needed. This is not a simple hedging of bets. A person cannot become a disciple simply by intellectually weighing the pros and cons of this eternal situation and deciding that they do not want to risk hell so they will choose heaven and therefore they are a disciple of Jesus. That is not what is being suggested. Some Christians have argued that this is a self-centered approach and therefore cannot result in true conversion. Although the warning against any type of 'cheap grace' should be heeded, this is not what is in view. The apologist is not arguing at this point for the existence of God; instead, he is arguing that the individual should have faith. Faith requires more than intellectual assent. Salvation always requires a personal, inward, relational commitment to Jesus Christ. This should be made completely clear. However, if an individual begins to walk alongside the road of faith simply as an act of self-preservation, he will be led into the path of goodness and truth and these can be used by God to bring about a true conversion. Salvation is a process, often a long and circuitous one.

The Sufficiency of God

It is the prayer of every apologist that through relationship, listening, conversation, and argumentation people will come to realize there is a deeper source for authenticity than themselves that enables them to achieve abundant and lasting flourishing. It is not to be expected that every person will agree that their choices have led to a lack of flourishing, and even those who do agree that they have not experienced deep meaning and happiness may still refuse to accept redeemed authenticity as an acceptable alternative. This is unfortunate, but to be expected. Jesus himself was rejected by many of those that heard him. Peter and Paul had their message rejected by many. The Christian's mandate from Scripture is to share the good news (Matt 28:19-20; Rom 10:9-15). The results of this sharing are between God and the individual. When someone reaches the place where they are willing to consider God as the source for their

authenticity the truth of God's wondrous character can be unfolded before them. This is the most exciting stage of the apologetic journey.

God the External Source

God, as he is revealed in the Bible, abundantly provides the sufficient, stable, and eternal source necessary for deeply authentic living. The triune Christian God is all-powerful (omnipotent), all-knowing (omniscient), everywhere-present (omnipresent), and all-loving (omnibenevolent). These qualities uniquely enable God to be more than sufficient to bestow all the resources humans need to become all they were created to be. The desire for authenticity is created in each person by God. The sense that individuality matters springs from the fact that each human being is a unique individual wonderfully made to be special (Ps 139). God's love, power, knowledge, and presence with each person enables him to know intimately all that is needed for perfect authenticity and flourishing.

God is stable. Scripture teaches that God is not like men in the way he relates and makes decisions. He does not change his mind in a fickle or random way and he does not lie or deceive (Num 23:19). A very strong confirmation that this stability is consistent in the trinity is found in Hebrews, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8). This steadiness of the character and resolution of God to carry out what he has begun means that his creatures can trust him, rely on him, rest their hopes in him. This is a key quality of God that can have a profound and lasting impact on the lives of those who can internalize it.

He is eternal (Rom 16:26). Therefore, what he provides will never cease to be available, "The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut 33:27). This is security to the uttermost. God will not run out of resources for the task of sustaining his creation. God makes himself responsible for the glorification of each individual (Rom 8:30),

completing the process of salvation and providing eternal flourishing to all who have believed on him. The alpha and omega, the beginning and the end (Rev 21:6), made the way for restored relationship with his creation by coming in the form of man and living as an example of how people should live, and dying as the necessary sacrifice for sin.

Jesus the Ideal of Authenticity

God became man in the person of Jesus Christ. He provided a living example of what redeemed authenticity is and how it can be lived out in daily life. As the perfect image bearer of God, Jesus is the example to all image bearers, mankind, of how to glorify God with our lives. Several attributes of Jesus have been selected and highlighted because they are of special interest to those focused on authenticity. These do not exhaust all of Jesus's attributes, nor will the references listed exhaust all that is said in Scripture. The purpose of this selection is simply to point out specific qualities in Jesus's life that reveal his perfect authenticity.

External source

Jesus reveals that the source for his life and activity was the Father. Jesus prayed to the Father (Luke 24:34, 46; John 11:41), did the work and spoke the words of his Father (John 5:17-19; 8:28), represented and was the image of the Father (John 8:19; John 14:9), and did the will of his Father (Luke 22:42). The Father and Jesus were in relationship. This relationship provided the external source necessary to give him all that he needed to fulfill his purpose. The best example of his reliance on the Father as an external source for strength and guidance is the Garden of Gethsemane,

And he [Jesus] said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are

possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will (Mark 14:34-36).

Jesus went on to complete his mission of dying on the cross making salvation available to the very men who crucified him. The Father was the external source of strength, encouragement, guidance, and purpose that Jesus continued to draw upon.

Other-centered

The previous example of the cross is the paramount example of being other-centered. However, he showed this sacrificial quality in daily living. He put others before himself when he was tired (Mark 4:38; 6:30). He had compassion at the end of a long day and fed many people (Matt 15:32). Even when weary he took time to speak with a woman whom his disciples considered beneath his dignity (John 4:6). An astonishing act of other-centered life was the fact that Jesus, who was and is God, humbled himself to become a mere man (Matt 1:18-25). He did not come as a powerful ruler or a rich man. He came as a humble servant (John 13:5-14). Jesus came willingly to earth and he served others sacrificially. His entire life was other-centered not out of duty but because he went beyond duty to love. He was motivated from within and empowered by his relationship within the godhead. Baggett and Walls express this reality beautifully, “It adds nothing to say that Jesus was doing his duty when he went to the cross; but saying that he did it out of his inestimable love, setting aside his rights in the process, speaks volumes.”¹²⁵

Jesus the non-conformist

Jesus was radical and a true non-conformist. He left people an example of how to be true to one’s own nature and calling in the face of worldly and religious pressure to conform to an

¹²⁵ Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 182.

external mold that is not true to who one truly is. He taught women and treated them with respect (Luke 10:39; John 7:14-26; John 20:14-18). He broke many of the religious traditions of the day (Matt 12:1; Luke 14:1-6; Mark 2:18-20). He was not the violent leader that the zealots desired. He would not try to become king as many of the Jews wanted. He held unwaveringly to his purpose in the face of opposition from friends (Matt 16:22-23), church rulers (Mark 14:60), political rulers (John 18:33-38), and torcher (John 19:1-3). Jesus lived in his own authenticity and did not conform to any outward pressure from the world.

Loving and honest

Jesus spoke the truth but he did it out of love and not cruelty or anger. He reached out to those that society and Jewish culture said were unlovable. Tax collectors were hated and despised, yet Jesus chose one to be one of his closest friends (Matt 9:9). On many occasions Jesus spoke to, was touched by, and had compassion on prostitutes, who were very much outcasts (Matt 21:31; Luke 7:38-50; John 8:3-11). He spoke with and taught a Samaritan woman. Women were not to be taught and Samaritans were hated by the Jews. She was startled that he would speak with her and his disciples were surprised to find him talking with her. Regardless of all these worldly prejudices Jesus held a prolonged and deep conversation with her that changed her life (John 4:3-26). He spoke the truth to these people regarding their sin and the things they needed to change about their lives, yet he did this in a way that revealed his love and compassion.

Passionate

Jesus reveals true passion. Jesus was not easily swayed or controlled. He was not a joyless or passionless religious man. His first public miracle was to make more wine at a

wedding feast (John 2:1-11). Jesus was compassionate and wept (John 11:33-35; Matt 15:32). He grieved for those that would be lost because they would not understand (Matt 23:37-39). Jesus loved his friends, acquaintances, and enemies (John 11:5; Mark 10:21; Luke 23:34; Rom 5:8). He was also passionate about the truth and his mission. When people were misusing his Father's house he went in and turned over their tables and forced them to leave (John 2:14-15). He was very honest and direct with the religious leaders of the day that were being hypocrites and making life hard for the common people and were not willing to help them (Matt 23:13-36). Jesus is truly the ideal of authenticity.

Jesus Our Access to Authenticity

More than a perfect example of authenticity, Jesus provides access to the source for the authenticity that people need. Jesus not only mediates relationship with the Father but he sent the Spirit to empower individuals to actualize the authenticity provided in the Father. He bridges the gap between our desire for authenticity and the realization of it. People repeatedly find themselves falling short of their human standards for authentic living and all certainly do fall short of God's standard for authentic living. It is through Jesus's life, death, and resurrection that people gain entry into God's presence, the source of redeemed authenticity, and are indwelt by the Spirit. While Jesus was on earth he said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He also provides knowledge and understanding of what we should do and how we should live. He provides life. These truths are echoed in the epistles. Paul emphasizes that Jews and Gentiles (all people) are included, "For through him [Jesus] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:18). Hebrews provides some very significant insight regarding who Jesus is, who mankind is, and how Jesus is sufficient for all human needs.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:14-16).

Jesus can relate to the human condition and sympathize with people. He provides mercy and grace to help in time of need. His perfect life and resurrection welcome those who follow him right into the heart of the trinity. This is an amazing reality. Believers in Christ are in union with the source of life and redeemed authenticity. Jesus also takes responsibility for the perfecting of the faith that is required, “Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). Jesus offers the power and strength to live a life of consistent authenticity through the agency of the Holy Spirit. This authenticity is available to everyone who is willing to yield their lives to him. Abundant and eternal life is what is being offered to those who choose redeemed authenticity over the cultural ideal.

Christians cannot be afraid to share the glorious truth of the gospel. Too often Jesus’s disciples find themselves feeling shy or even ashamed of the truths of God. Christians have been commanded to go and offer the greatest treasure this world has to offer. Green states this in a most convicting manner, “After all, everyone is entitled to his own opinion . . . we do not want to be accused of proselytizing . . . we must respect people’s privacy! And so, we hold our peace, and men and women around us, for whom Christ died and to whom he commissioned us to go, hear nothing, and are quite oblivious of the fact (if fact it be) that we have found the greatest treasure in the world.”¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Green, *Evangelism Now and Then*, 24.

Conclusion

“I believe that in our culture of simulation, the notion of authenticity is for us what sex was for the Victorians—threat and obsession, taboo and fascination,”¹²⁷ says Turkle. Redeemed authenticity is a virtue not a vice. However, if it becomes the highest ideal detached from God it becomes a destructive force. G. K. Chesterton in describing how the Reformation shattered the religious scheme of the day describes what happened to virtue and vice, “The vices are, indeed, let loose, and they wander and do damage. But the virtues are let loose also; and the virtues wander more wildly, and the virtues do more terrible damage. The modern world is full of old Christian virtues gone mad. The virtues have gone mad because they have been isolated from each other and are wandering alone.”¹²⁸ Authenticity must be combined with all the virtues God created man to cultivate not isolated as the exclusive attribute that will bring complete flourishing to life.

The position taken in this paper is that the cultural ideal of authenticity is faulty and leads to a significant lack of human flourishing and that redeemed authenticity provides it abundantly. The areas of worldview overlap reveal that there is much common ground that can enable meaningful dialogue to take place. It also reveals the weakness of the cultural ideal and areas of strength surrounding redeemed authenticity. The need for relationality and listening to every person’s individual perspective on authenticity is explained and four suggested apologetic arguments are presented. It is vital that apologetic arguments be presented in love and with respect and humility. Apologetics is not about threatening people into heaven. Christ never coerced anyone to follow him. The profound hope is that these arguments will help move people

¹²⁷ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 1.

¹²⁸ G. K. Chesterton, *G. K. Chesterton: Collected Works, vol. 1, Heretics, Orthodoxy, The Blatchford Controversies* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1986), 233.

to be receptive to the beauty of the truths of Scripture. The fact that the triune God is the sufficient source for authentic living and that Jesus not only embodied redeemed authenticity but is the way for all people to live authentically is truly good news. The Trinitarian implications for redeemed authenticity have been briefly touched on here, however, it also represents a fruitful area for further research. Simplistic answers to the quest for deep and complex longings such as love, happiness, meaning, hope, and eternity leave many people unsatisfied. They are searching for something that seems to give a substantive account for the whole of their experience. In reference to the complexity of Christian truth and human nature G. K. Chesterton gives this analogy, “A key and a lock are both complex. And if a key fits a lock, you know it is the right key.”¹²⁹ Christianity gives a robust account of life as it presents itself to mankind’s senses and experiences. It also gives an account for the perennial hope found in most people that eternal joy is a real possibility. The wonder and beauty of God must excite the apologist before it will excite anyone else. Be saturated in the truths of this wonderful news until it renews a passion deep within. Green simply summarizes, “That is how it [the gospel] spreads today, when our enthusiasm for the Lord is allowed to be seen.”¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Chesterton, *G. K. Chesterton: Collected Works*, 287.

¹³⁰ Green, *Evangelism Now and Then*, 24.

Bibliography

- Aristotle. *Politics*. Vol. 2. Part 2. Trans. B. Jowett. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1885.
- Baggett, David. "On Thomas Nagel's Rejection of Theism." *Harvard Theological Review* 106, no. 2 (2013): 227-238.
- Baggett, David and Marybeth Baggett. *The Morals of the Story: Good News About a Good God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017.
- Baggett, David and Jerry L. Walls. *Good God*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Bellah, Robert N. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. New York, NY: Harper Row Publishers, 1986.
- Bloom, Allan. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987.
- Bruce, Steve. "Secularization and the Impotence of Individualized Religion." *The Hedgehog Review* (Spring and Summer 2006): 35-45.
- Burson, Scott R. and Jerry L. Walls. *C. S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer: Lessons for a New Century*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998.
- Chesterton, G. K. *G. K. Chesterton: Collected Works, vol. 1, Heretics, Orthodoxy, The Blatchford Controversies*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1986.
- Clader-Dawe, Octavia and Nicola Gavey. "Authentic Feminist? Authenticity and Feminist Identity in Teenage Feminists' Talk." *British Journal of Social Psychology* (2017): 1-17. doi: 10.1111/bjso.12207.
- Crevecoeur, J. Hector St. John. *Letters from an American Farmer*. New York, NY: Fox, Duffield and Company, 1904.
- Delbanco, Andrew. *The Real American Dream*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Diehl, Manfred, Laurie M. Jacobs, Catherine T. Hastings. "Temporal Stability and Authenticity of Self-Representations in Adulthood." *Journal of Adult Development* 13, no. 1 (March 2006): 10-22.
- Erler, Alexander and Tony Hope. "Mental Disorder and the Concept of Authenticity." *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology* 21, no. 3 (September 2014): 219-232.

- Fellows, Andrew. "Paganism Strikes Back" (L'Abri Ideas Library). Lecture January 2009. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://www.labri-ideaslibrary.org/store/Paganism%20Strikes%20Back%20%20Andrew%20Fellows.mp3>.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault Reader*. Edited by Paul Rabinow. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984.
- Gould, Stephen J. "The Meaning of Life: The Big Picture." *Life Magazine* 11, no. 14 (December 1988): 76-86.
- Grant, Jonathan. *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015.
- Green, Michael. *Evangelism Now and Then*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979.
- Guinness, Os. *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.
- Holbach, Baron von. *The Systems of Nature or, the Laws of the Moral and Physical World*. Vol. 1. 2nd ed. London, England: Paternoster Row, 1817.
- James, Steven. *Becoming Real: Christ's Call to Authentic Living*. West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Co., 2005.
- Johnson, Paul. *Modern Times*. New York, NY: Harper Row Publishers, 1983.
- Keller, Timothy. *Making Sense of God*. New York, NY: Viking, 2016.
- Kokkoris, Michail D. and Ulrich Kuhnen. "'Express the Real You': Cultural Differences in the Perception of Self-Expression as Authenticity." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 45, no. 8 (2014): 1121-1228.
- Kreber, Carolin and Monika Klampfleitner. "What do You Mean by 'Authentic'?" A Comparative Review of the Literature on Conceptions of Authenticity in Teaching." *Adult Education Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (November 2007): 22-43.
- Kreeft, Peter. *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal's Pensees*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1993.
- Lasch, Christopher. *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1979.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Abolition of Man*. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1955.
- . *God in the Dock*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970.

- . *Mere Christianity*. New York, NY: Harper One Publishing, 1980.
- . *The Weight of Glory and other Addresses*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1980.
- . *Reflections on the Psalms*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1958.
- Liotard, Jean-Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Vol. 10. *Theory and History of Literature*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Macnamara, Jim. “Media Content Analysis: It’s Uses; Benefits and Best Practice Methodology.” *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal* 6, no. 1 (2005): 1-34.
- Mavrodes, George I. “Religion and the Queerness of Morality,” *Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitment: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright. 578-586.
- McClay, B.D. “Signifiers Hypocrite.” *The Hedgehog Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 1-2.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers & Skeptics Find Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012.
- Miller, Wiley. *Non Sequitur’s Beastly Things*. Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 1999.
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989.
- . *Truth to Tell*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991.
- Nagel, Thomas. *What Does It All Mean?* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Nolan, James. “A Conversation with Sherry Turkle.” *The Hedgehog Review* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 1-6.
- Owen, H. P. *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*. London, England: George Allen and Unwin LTD., 1965.
- Pascal, Blaise. *The Harvard Classics: Blaise Pascal*. Charles W. Eliot, ed. New York, NY: P. F. Collier and Son Corporation, 1961.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Second Edition. Trans. Alan Bloom. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1968.
- Rae, Gavin. “Alienation, Authenticity, and the Self.” *History of the Human Sciences* 23, no. 4 (2010): 21-36.

- Robbins, Mike. *Be Yourself Everyone Else is Already Taken: Transform Your Life with the Power of Authenticity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009.
- Russell, Bertrand. "A Free Man's Worship." *Bertrand Russell Society* (1903).
<https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/courses/264/fmw.htm>.
- Saldarriaga, Ana. "The Power of Authenticity" (YouTube video by TEDx Talks). Posted June 24, 2016. Accessed June 6, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKwasbVGaek>.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes. New York, NY: Washington Square Pres., 1984.
- Schaeffer, Francis A. *Francis A. Schaeffer: Trilogy*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990.
- Scruton, Roger. *Modern Philosophy*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1994.
- Sire, James W. *The Universe Next Door*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Smith, James K. A. *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014.
- Stackhouse, John G. Jr. *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Star Trek*. Directed by J. J. Abrams. Paramount Pictures, 2009. DVD.
- Swan, Teal. "How to Be Authentic" (YouTube video). Posted June 24, 2015. Accessed June 6, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irxqCDeQulk>.
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- . *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- . *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Taylor, Richard. "The Meaning of Life," in *The Meaning of Life*, 2nd ed., ed. E. D. Klemke. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. Trans. Henry Reeve. PN: Penn State Electronic Classics Series, 2002. <http://seas3.elte.hu/coursematerial/LojkoMiklos/Alexis-de-Tocqueville-Democracy-in-America.pdf>.
- Trilling, Lionel. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978.

- Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011.
- Turner, Laura. "A Conversation with Miroslav Volf." *Newbiggin House of Studies*, March 20, 2017. Accessed February 19, 2018. <http://newbigginhouse.org/2017/03/a-conversation-with-miroslav-volf/>.
- Volf, Miroslav. *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2015.
- . "Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World" (YouTube video. Uploaded by Talks at Google). Posted February 3, 2017. Accessed September 13, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqr2YbC2qN0>.
- Walls, Jerry L. *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory: A Protestant View of the Cosmic Drama*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015.
- Wright, N. T. *Evil and the Justice of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006.
- Yagil, Dana and Hana Medler-Liraz. "Feel Free, Be Yourself: Authentic Leadership, Emotional Expression, and Employee Authenticity." *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* 21, no. 1 (2014): 59-70.