

The following is yet another redacted journal entry, this time dated 1/30/2024. This entry is a bit longer than the first one I shared, though the overall trajectory – in moving from the personal to the abstract – is similar. As for the actual argument presented, I will say that cognition can get a little funky at 3:00 AM. In a particularly important paragraph, I seem to have forgotten that whether a force is acting on an object is a fact that exists independent of the reference frame one has selected. Though this can perhaps be salvaged by replacing “large forces acting upon the self” with “large forces *having acted* upon the self.”

# Journal



Feeling depressed, likely a downstream consequence of my IQ test performance on Saturday. Throughout my life I have harbored the illusion that I was an incipient Great Mind. It was only a matter of time, I figured, before

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] like I was the next David Foster Wallace. Sprinkle in a proof of the Riemann Hypothesis and

[REDACTED]

Such fantasies are, of course, grandiose - evidence of Narcissistic Personality Disorder, in fact. There have been fleeting moments in my life where I have come round to this awareness, and this entry is one of the few times I've bothered to record it. A pressing question, perhaps, is whether I should view this state of awareness as an "authentic" ground state or as just another fluctuation of the mind. Put another way, does the cognitive universe have a privileged reference frame?

[Just now my crank detector went off. Implicit comparisons to Einstein are a very, very bad sign. Be wary.]



That aside aside, my point is a commonplace one, and in fact reflects an article I was reading earlier today. This was the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy's entry on authenticity. As the proponents of authenticity would have you believe, there is a privileged set of behaviors which are taken to be representative of one's "true self." All other behaviors are taken to be "bad faith" deviations from this true self. If one accepts the STEM-lord hypothesis that all serious intellectual progress is in the quantitative fields, and that the rest of academia is merely transplanting these thoughts into other domains in a secondhand sort of way, then the concept of authenticity will be seen to have a Newtonian origin. Essentially: the self is an object with consciousness (mass), and it behaves (moves) under the influence (force) of other objects with consciousness (other objects with mass). In the complete absence of an outside force, this "self-object" would move *according to its inertia* at a certain velocity. As behavior had before been equated with movement, we say that authentic behavior corresponds with the self-object's inertial velocity.



Put another way, the authentic self is "the self in a vacuum."

I can think of at least two objections to authenticity off-hand:

1) Can this vacuum ever be meaningfully brought into existence? That is, are we even able to measure the inertial velocity vector of the self-object, i.e., pin down the precise set of behaviors meant by "the authentic self"?

2) Even if we were able to pin down the authentic self, what would be the point? From a behavior-prescribing standpoint, why should this inertial velocity be preferable to other velocities?

The first objection, perhaps, can be handled as a physicist handles this sort of thing. Determining the velocity of an object is meaningless without first defining a reference frame. With this in mind, one can imagine both a degree of free will afforded the self and a degree of determinism. While the self *is* free to choose the reference frame used to compute the "authentic behavior velocity vector," the velocity vector itself is fixed once that choice has been made.



To extend the analogy further, a shift in the reference frame occurs when something that had once been considered a "core" part of one's being is called into question. When such an act of questioning occurs, something which had previously been taken to be part of the reference frame - say, the moving train one is seated on - is brought *inside* the reference frame, while the new reference frame is taken to be something else. In this particular example, the ground becomes the new reference frame, and one's total velocity *increases*, as what had before been "zeroed-away" as authentic behavior is now taken to be the result of an external influence (force).

Subjectively, it is rather uncomfortable when one chooses a reference frame that makes for a high velocity. This is because such reference frames imply large forces acting upon the self. What results is a feeling of powerlessness. The flip side of this, meanwhile - simply declaring the self-object to be the reference frame - removes all prescriptive meaning from the theory. Gone is the information that would have been conveyed by a discernible inertial velocity vector; we arrive back at "the self is the sum total of all your actions and no action is privileged."

Having gotten into the habit of roping everything I possibly can into the liberal-conservative dichotomy, it may be a fruitful line of investigation to see which sorts of people are inclined to set which sorts of reference frames. My initial thought is this. Liberals, by virtue of residing in areas of higher population density, are subjected to higher interpersonal forces on average. In order to preserve a feeling of personal power, they are more inclined to zero-away (i.e., incorporate into the reference frame) behaviors which a conservative would consider to be a matter of disputation. See, for example, the conservative idea that sexual orientation is a choice, or that mental health diagnoses are just excuses for poor habits.

Now the goal is to come up with a set of novel, testable hypotheses this framework would generate. But that will be for another day. It's 3:45 AM now...



Oh yeah, and the second objection. I almost forgot. This one, to me, is obvious. So much so that I can't even fathom the authenticity side's rebuttal. After all, what's the point of privileging authenticity for its own sake? This is how you end up with grunge musicians trying to one up one another with how depressed they can get. Indeed, the moment you posit a "good" that exists independent of the normal health, productivity, positive affect, etc., you've effectively prescribed maladaptive behaviors.

[I am aware of the circularity of this last sentence, and I don't particularly care.]

A primary goal of philosophy, at least starting out, was to recommend behaviors. Think the Stoics and the Epicureans. Now, seeing as authenticity - with all its attendant misery - was one of the most potent recommendations to come from the field this past century, I'm inclined to think doctors, psychologists, and economists are the *real* standard bearers of behavior recommendation.



Put another way, "the good" is, for most people, easy to intuit. It's the particulars that bog us down. Folks don't need to be told *that* financial security and a good work-life balance are worth seeking - they want to know some genuine, evidence-based strategies for attaining them. Folks don't need to be told *that* eating healthy and getting good sleep are valuable goals - they want to know what to buy at the grocery store and when to set the alarm. Folks don't need to be told *that* it would be nice to have fewer people living in poverty - they want to locate that fine line of aid that comes between helping temporarily and enabling indefinitely.

Etc.

Tuesday, Jan 30



1. The IQ test that gave me an existential crisis...

<https://openpsychometrics.org/tests/FSIQ/>

2. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy's entry on authenticity...

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/authenticity/>