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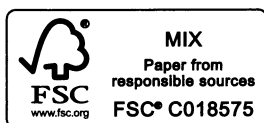
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14. Deep authenticity – an essential phenomenon in the web of life

Knut J. Ims and Ove D. Jakobsen

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of authenticity has received an increasing amount of attention recently. Taylor (1991) criticizes the increased degree of individualization in modern society, ‘the malaise of modernity’. He claims that we have ignored the presence of an individual in a deeper sense, a ‘self’ that has ties to communities as well as a ‘horizon of meaning’. For Taylor authenticity is the courage to be true to oneself within a horizon of important values, while traditional concepts of individuals are one-dimensional and instrumentalist and do not emphasize the importance of social and dialogical relations with others. Authenticity is often connected to the search for individual ‘wellbeing’, ‘enjoyment of life’ and ‘quality of life’. People living in harmony with their own values and principles and experiencing meaning and purpose in their lives are supposed to be authentic. The fallacy is that individuals are not open to the horizon of significance. One consequence is loss of meaning. We suggest a conception of authenticity that interprets man as a part of a web of life.

Interesting contributions to a new conception of man are offered by Richard Niebuhr (Kaiser, 1995), who makes a phenomenological analysis of man’s moral existence. Niebuhr’s man is relational, and the self exists in a triadic relation to itself, to society and to nature. And the appropriate action is a fitting one within the context (Kaiser, 1995). This view has important consequences. It follows from here that the question ‘Who am I?’ is more important than ‘What is real?’ Niebuhr argues that we should reflect upon the former question because self-knowledge is an important avenue to the responsible life. And Niebuhr states that when we ask about responsibility, we ask about ourselves!

In another strand of literature, the ‘deep ecology movement’, the main norm is self-realization for all sentient beings (Næss, 1989). This means that all sentient beings have the right to self-unfolding on their own premises. The mature deep-ecological man has developed an ecological

self, a self which is not impersonal but transpersonal and has the ability to identify with all other sentient beings. The ecological self negates the minimal self, which is self-centred, self-obsessed, attached to hedonistic pleasures and as a consequence alienated from itself, from other beings and nature. One consequence of being an ecological self is that if you hurt nature, you hurt your own interests and in a deep sense you hurt yourself (Drengson and Inoue, 1995; Næss, 1989; Sessions, 1995).

In accordance with deep-ecology thinking we argue that the interpretation of authenticity should be expanded or 'deepened' to encompass a holistic rather than individualistic context. This means that the individual's authenticity is richer and more meaningful because of its connection to the web of life. In other words, how we choose to live our lives is dependent upon our connections within the web of life. Both society and nature will have an impact on human authenticity, on both the individual and the collective levels.

Our argument is based on the presupposition that understanding is always guided by the interpretative framework used or our background assumptions. According to Rose, our interpretative framework is a continually evolving construction that functions to 'highlight or bring into focus certain features of experience, moving them from the background to the foreground of experimental awareness' (Rose, 2002, p. 11). This indicates that understanding starts from a set of ontological and epistemological presuppositions, which can be aggregated up to a worldview. In accordance with this view, we contend that authenticity depends on the interpreter's worldview. In the following paragraphs we will state some reasons for these assumptions and conclusions. More precisely we will draw a demarcation line between shallow and deep authenticity.

We will define shallow authenticity as a mode of being based upon a mechanic worldview, indicating that people might be authentic independent of their relations to other living organisms. Shallow authenticity is a characteristic of an individualistic mindset. In contrast we define deep authenticity as based upon an organic holistic worldview, indicating that authenticity is a relational concept. Deep authenticity is a characteristic of the individual strongly embedded in society and nature. To be deeply authentic implies being an integrated part of social and natural systems. In other words, deep authenticity is based upon organic interdependence as described in Næss' 'Ecosophy' (Drengson and Inoue, 1995; Næss, 1989) and in Whitehead's 'Philosophy of Organism' (Whitehead, 1925 [1967], 1929 [1985], 1933 [1967]).

From the statement that everything is intensively interconnected, it follows that a precondition for deep authenticity is cooperation between interrelated, self-realizing subjects. A deeply authentic person

is simultaneously free and committed to society and nature. Shallow authenticity is possible within an atomized market based on a mechanic worldview where all entities are isolated atoms with a natural inclination to compete against each other. Deep authenticity is inseparably connected to communicative coexistence between human beings and nature. We will illustrate the discussion with some practical examples. First, we will examine and elaborate organic and mechanic worldviews as concepts in some detail. Next, we will discuss shallow and deep authenticity, respectively. The meaning of authenticity depends on the worldview being discussed.

14.2 ORGANIC AND MECHANIC WORLDVIEWS

Referring to Capra's (1982) definition, an organic worldview refers to a reality composed of living entities having a high degree of 'non-linear' interconnectedness. This means that individuals and communities simultaneously create and require each other. Thurow goes into more detail when he argues that societies are not merely statistical aggregations of individuals engaged in voluntary exchange but something much more subtle and complicated. 'A group or community cannot be understood if the unit of analysis is the individual taken by himself. A society is clearly something greater than the sum of its parts' (Daly and Cobb Jr, 1994, p. 7). According to Whitehead a society is self-sustaining and has its own reason for being. A society is more than a set of entities to which the same class-name applies. 'The self-identity of a society is founded upon the self-identity of its defining characteristics, and upon the mutual immanence of its occasions . . . and the creative advance into the future' (Whitehead, 1933 [1967], p. 204). Therefore it is important to ask questions about patterns, organization, rhythm and flow. We have contrasted some essential differences between organic and mechanic worldviews in Table 14.1.

We argue that organic thinking is based on the concept that culture is a collective phenomenon rather than a sum of individuals exclusively. Within this complex and dynamic framework, individual behaviour is both multifaceted and context-dependent; hence, accepting the organic worldview has far-reaching consequences for the interpretation of the individual as a self-realizing person in society.

In addition to holistic integration the organic worldview is based upon the concept of inherent values. The motivation for introducing values and purposes into nature is the acknowledgement that materialism cannot give an adequate account of the emergence and meaning of life. In accordance with this reasoning we argue that we have to rethink the status of life

Table 14.1 Mechanic and organic worldviews

Mechanic worldview	Organic worldview
Linear connectedness	Non-linear interconnectedness
Instrumental values	Inherent values
Deterministic	Co-creation
Physical laws	Creativity
Dualism	Holism
Isolated ego	Extended self
Purposelessness	Purposefulness

in nature and to accept that integrated organisms have inherent value. The term 'life' refers to the appreciation of things like 'self-enjoyment', 'freedom', 'creativity', 'purpose' and 'subjectivity', derived from the past and aimed at the future. The idea of including human nature as an element in ecosystems results in the notion that such variables as value and freedom can no longer be excluded from the descriptions of nature.

Within the organic worldview life and mind are interwoven with matter and motion. It is the essence of life that it exists for its own sake, as an intrinsic reaping of value. The point is that we can understand neither physical nature nor life unless we fuse them together as essential factors in the composition of the whole universe. Nothing in nature could be what it is, except as an integrated ingredient in nature as a dynamic whole.

In contrast to the organic worldview, mechanism presupposes that physical matter is identical with reality, and that everything can be explained in terms of imposed physical laws. From this perspective, the social sciences are characterized by the idea that bits of matter are isolated individuals (atomism), related to one another purely externally. 'The material universe, including the human organism, was a machine that could in principle be understood completely by analyzing it in terms of its smallest parts' (Capra, 1995, p. 21). Through natural laws, society represents no real unity in itself. Society is nothing more than a mere mechanism based on the interplay among egocentric individuals seeking their own ends ('the economic man').

As a consequence the explanations based upon the mechanic worldview claim that every biological or social event is a pattern of non-biological occurrences. This formulation cannot be interpreted as an assertion that all organisms are like machines. To avoid some of these problems we are using the term mechanism more broadly than machine. In other words, mechanism is a worldview claiming that physical matter is reality, complete and total. Everything in the universe can be explained in terms of physical laws.

Table 14.2 Principles of coordination, in the context of different worldviews

	Mechanic	Organic
Competition	1. Efficiency	3. Disintegration
Cooperation	2. Collusion	4. Responsible co-creation

The great forces of nature, such as gravitation, were entirely determined by the configurations of masses. Accepting that the whole universe is completely causal and deterministic has serious consequences concerning the possibilities of human creativity, freedom and self-fulfilment. Interpreted from a mechanic worldview, ‘all that happened had a definite cause and gave rise to a definite effect, and . . . the future of any part of the system could – in principle – be predicted with absolute certainty if its state at any time was known in detail’ (Capra, 1997, p. 120). A consequence of this logic is that ‘dead’ nature can provide no reasons, and it aims at nothing.

Today, the mechanical worldview still forms the basis of many scientific disciplines, including mainstream economics. In lifeless nature, problems can be solved within the framework of physical laws. It is, at least in principle, possible to arrive at unambiguous solutions to these kinds of convergent problems. Schumacher (1977) argues that convergent problems have nothing to do with self-consciousness or life functions. In accordance with Georgescu-Roegen (1971) and Daly and Cobb Jr (1994), we contend that this assertion still holds validity for modern mainstream economics.

The mechanic worldview is useful for describing and dealing with delimited physical phenomena encountered in our daily environment. We have argued (Ims and Jakobsen, 2006) that the ontological presuppositions are important for understanding appropriate market behaviour as indicated in Table 14.2. We maintain that a mechanic worldview implies competition among actors in the market as exhibited in cell 1 in Table 14.2. However we should be aware of the problems connected to using abstractions based on the limited worldview of mechanism. According to Whitehead we tend to forget that the mechanic worldview is an abstraction, and even worse, we tend to mistake the abstraction for the concrete actuality (‘the fallacy of misplaced concreteness’). When emotions and values are missing, we lose the connectedness to living society (cell 3 in Table 14.2). Also cell 2 shows a constellation between the mechanic worldview and cooperation, which may be exemplified with different types of collusion. Collusion is illegal activity because it may lead to price fixing or the carving up of markets between different companies. In cells 3 and 4 we assume an organic worldview, and in these constellations the partners are perceived as integrated,

through dialogical process, and they share common long-term values and interests. The organic paradigm presupposes cooperation (cell 4), which leads to responsible co-creation. The organic worldview involves cooperative communication processes among the partners as being essential, inherent parts of the market (network economy). We claim that market behaviour based on competition will often lead to disintegration and ego-centric behaviour. Within an organic worldview use of one-sided power is destructive (cell 3).

Awareness of the ontological and ethical preconditions can help us to see the limitations of the mechanic worldview. To grasp the whole human being, as an individual and as a member of society, it is necessary to expand the perspective. The organic worldview is more fundamental, as the cosmos is seen as interrelated and connected manifestations of one inseparable reality – always in motion, alive, organic, spiritual and material at the same time (see cell 4 in Table 14.2).

14.3 REFLECTIONS ON AUTHENTICITY

For Taylor authenticity is a kind of self-fulfilment that is inseparable from a horizon of important values. And according to Taylor a self has an identity defined in terms of certain essential strong evaluations that provide the horizon. And humans have the capacity for second-order desires, that is, strong evaluations of desires, and they are responsible for their evaluations. However, the deepest evaluations are the most hidden and most subject to interplay with illusion. Thus the struggle for self-interpretation is not trivial. Taylor uses the term ‘deep reflection’ as a kind of radical evaluation, as ‘a reflection which engages the self most wholly and deeply’ (Taylor, 1985, p. 42).

The concept ‘authenticity’ has been described and discussed within philosophical existentialism for centuries. Soren Kierkegaard (1843/1978) maintains strongly that we are able to choose ourselves, and we have the ability to move from living a purely aesthetical life, in the sense of being an ego, to a stage of being which is called ethical. The aesthetic man lives in dread and despair because he cannot sense that he is meant for something higher. In contrast the ethical man truly chooses himself. Individuals who do not live authentically often lose the meaning of life and can be hit by chronic anxiety, boredom or despair. In our modern societies people avoiding the responsibility of living authentically, in the worst case, end up anaesthetizing themselves with alcohol or other drugs. For most people it is important to live as authentically as possible; however, in our globalized, complex world it is not easy to achieve this goal. In the Western world the

Table 14.3 *Reflected self-understanding (inspired by Schumacher, 1977)*

	Inner experience	Outer experience
Me	1. My inner world	3. Me in the eyes of others
Other beings	2. Other beings' inner world	4. The world in the eyes of other beings

advertising pressure oriented towards individuals, which is designed to delude the populace into believing that self-realization depends upon consumption habits, is very strong. The intriguing question is: what does it mean to live an authentic life? Some people choose to appreciate more of their own current approach to life, while others might choose to introduce new activities and lifestyles.

From an existentialistic point of view authentic persons must see themselves as fundamentally free, thereby acknowledging responsibility for their actions and lives. The only way to experience freedom is to regard and treat other people as free, since the acceptance of other people's authenticity is a condition of oneself being authentic. Some existentialists argue that authenticity is based upon intimate personal relations – love and friendship. To elaborate the concept of 'self-understanding' within an organic worldview, we distinguish between the following dimensions: 'inner' and 'outer' experience, and 'me' and 'other' beings, as shown in Table 14.3.

According to the organic worldview we are integrated parts of the web of life, embedded in human societies and nature. To understand our selves in this perspective requires a multidimensional perspective: first (cell 1 in Table 14.3), I have to know myself. This is the old Socratic imperative: 'Know Thyself!' It is a profound point of departure. Schumacher frames it thus: I have to 'feel what I feel like'. And the preconditions for understanding my inner self are self-awareness and self-confidence: 'Without self-awareness, the exploration and study of the inner man, i.e., one's interior world, is completely impossible' (Schumacher, 1977, p. 66). Without self-awareness and self-confidence we think and act mechanically, like a programmed computer. The result is that we have no freedom to act in accordance with our own ideas and intentions.

Second (cell 2), I have to be sensitive to the inner worlds of other people and 'feel what you feel like' (empathy). We believe that we may know something about the inner life of animals, but still more of what goes on inside other human beings. We do not believe that we are able to know much of a plant's inner life, and we know nothing about inanimate matter. Human society depends on 'our ability to understand others and their ability to

understand us' (Schumacher, 1977, p. 81). According to a number of wise men in different traditions – Buddhists as well as Christians – it is impossible to understand others without first understanding ourselves.

Third (cell 3), in order to know myself it is necessary to know how I am known by others. Schumacher argues that the only source for knowing myself is my own inner feelings, and that I tend to understand myself as the centre of the universe. Having the ability 'to see ourselves as others see us . . . will help us to see our contradictions' (Schumacher, 1977, p. 97). Contradictions are not manifestations of error; instead, they are manifestations of truth. Opposites are a part of real life and we have to learn to keep opposites in mind simultaneously. The best way to gather knowledge about myself is by putting myself in other people's situations. This is possible because we are reflective social beings, living with others.

Fourth (cell 4), according to Schumacher this 'is the real homeland of every kind of behaviorism: only strictly observable behavior is of interest' (Schumacher, 1977, p. 100). Many people believe that this is the only field in which true knowledge can be obtained. The strange thing is that we in cell 4 have most knowledge concerning inanimate matter and least about the inner life of human beings. In cell 2 it is the other way round: we can know most about the higher levels of life and least about inanimate matter. In cell 4 we can observe movement and other kinds of changes in matter, but we cannot observe meaning, purpose, feelings or values through our physical senses. In terms of maturity we might say that 'the more mature the object of study, the less mature the science studying it' (Schumacher, 1977, p. 103). We argue that authenticity presupposes knowledge based upon all the four different cells.

Charles Taylor (1989, 1991) supports our reasoning by arguing that self-creation must be added to self-realization. Creativity is always reflexive and is exercised over and with respect to the self. Since the self is social, creativity is transactional and multidimensional. Therefore, creativity is both self-creative and co-creative. Taylor points out both the good and damaging aspects of the modern development of an authentic self, and he mentions the importance of some moral measurement system anchored in strong evaluations. To become authentic we have to take part in cooperative dialogues where we exchange our ideas with others and construct our values and beliefs in the course of communicative processes. In other words, to discover and be aware of our authenticity we have to converse with other people. Dialogue is essential if we want to develop our own authenticity, and according to Taylor authenticity is essential if we want to live a better life. This emphasis on dialogue is in accordance with Niebuhr, who argues that our thinking is an inner conversation where we deal with other concrete, particular selves (Kaiser, 1995).

Table 14.4 *Shallow and deep authenticity*

	Mechanic	Organic
Ego-centric	1. Shallow authenticity	3.
Eco-centric	2.	4. Deep authenticity

14.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

To penetrate authenticity we find it illuminating to draw a demarcation line between ‘shallow’ and ‘deep’. By using these concepts we indicate our inspiration from ‘the deep ecology movement’ (Drengson and Inoue, 1995; Næss, 1989; Witoszek and Brennan, 1999). The difference between shallow and deep ecology concerns the willingness to go to the roots of problems and ask critical questions about oneself as well as modern society with its prevailing institutions. The danger is to confuse the ‘self’ with the ‘ego-centric self’. Deep authenticity depends on our ability to flip to an organic worldview where awareness of an ‘eco-centric self’ becomes possible. We try to visualize the radical and necessary change in mindset in Table 14.4.

We argue that the organic worldview is more suitable than the mechanic for interpreting authenticity. Hidden and unintended consequences are very often connected to advanced technologies. The result is that what we do today will have consequences on many levels for ourselves, for others, for nature and for future generations. Once we discover that we as individual persons are always relating to other human beings, society and nature we have to clarify our positions in the web of life. A consequence of eco-centred awareness is that we become more responsible in the social and ecological worlds. To become more responsive, openness and dialogue are vital. We need courage to change our interpretative map to discover the interconnectedness in the social and environmental realities. The concept of deep authenticity is essential for grasping these new perspectives. In the context of deep authenticity we are free, and we are aware of the responsibility that is laid upon us. Freedom is a burden because we are called upon to act in response to the environment. But the single individual has to face the situation, and if necessary, break with the dominating norms. In our Western world the external pressure to become wealthy and outwardly successful is strong for each individual. To handle the individual, social and environmental challenges we are facing today we have to transition away from the idea of ‘economic man’ to that of ‘ecological man’.

To be inauthentic is to choose the easiest way and thereby follow the

avenue to self-deception – to circumvent and avoid facing up to the real problems in the world. It is to even ignore inconvenient truths, crucial facts about the state of the world in the hope that the problems will in the end be resolved by someone else.

In the perspective of marketing and management literature, assumptions about an organic worldview lead to new perspectives for all stakeholders and the relations between them. Responsibility towards all living beings illuminates the inherent value in the web of life. One important consequence is the shift from maximizing shareholder value to increasing the enjoyment of life for all stakeholders in the context of a long-term perspective.

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