The Rise of Profilicity and the Decline of Identity As We Know It

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Abstract

This paper serves as a critical response to Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul J. D'Ambrosio's recent approach to technologies of identity in their book, *You and Your Profile: Identity after Authenticity* (2021). After giving an outline of the paradigms of profilicity, sincerity, and authenticity, I elaborate on several parallel developments in philosophical thought and power dynamics that accompany the rise of profilicity. Heidegger's observation of the decline of metaphysics into what we now call cybernetics is equated to the reduction of identity to second-order representation. Furthermore, the rise of big data alongside the evolution of power dynamics toward systems of control is shown to represent the face of totalitarianism in the age of profilicity. Finally, I critically assess whether an Eastern-inspired approach, such as "genuine pretending," suffices to serve as a countermeasure to the perils of profilicity.

Keywords

You and Your Profile: Identity after Authenticity by Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul J. D'Ambrosio (2021) explores "technologies of identity" (TOI). In this case, "technology" is not a mechanical or electrical apparatus but a technique for forming a representation of the self in relation to society and its prevailing paradigm. The authors name three identity paradigms they identify as dominating societies throughout history: *profilicity*, *sincerity*, and *authenticity*. At first glance, the latter two terms appear to be rather positive characteristics, while the first neologism refers to an identity technology centered around curating your profile according to the second-order observation of what they call the "general peer." The authors make it clear that none of these modes of identity are to be idealized or preferred over the others (176). The essential message of the book focuses on the necessity of overcoming these rigid frameworks for identity and adopting a more relaxed, released, or even detached attitude toward identity that they refer to as "genuine pretending." It is also argued that an overly dogmatic belief in the outlined TOIs could pose a threat to a person's sanity, and therefore any such dogmatism should always be regarded with suspicion.

As the title of Moeller and D'Ambrosio's book suggests, profiles represent its central theme. Profilicity, a TOI centered around the profile, has only recently been able to establish itself as a new paradigm. Only since the beginning of the internet— and mainly since the rise of social media—has one's profile become the dominant means of presenting oneself. The unique way in which identity is presented in the era of profilicity is through the viewpoint of second-order observation (Moeller and D'Ambrosio 16). While the perception of others has always played an important role in society, it is now culminating in the adaptation of one's identity to match that which best engenders the favor of the so-called "general peer" (47). This abstraction of a *socius* represents the form in which the social environment is encountered in the current age of media.

Moeller and D'Ambrosio also discuss an important cultural correlate that parallels the rise of profilicity: what has been referred to by Heidegger as the "end of metaphysics," the emergence of a worldview that no longer entails a separation between representation and the thing-as-such (Moeller and D'Ambrosio 132). In this vein, profiles are less and less regarded as symbols portraying an underlying true self but rather are seen as the primary form of personal identity (the person becomes their own persona). This reduction of the person to their surface-level representation is possible because, as Moeller and D'Ambrosio claim, the so-called "true self" of the authenticity paradigm has never been more than an illusion (176). While some may abhor this development, regarding it as a destruction of personal integrity by means

of invasive modern technology, one could more level-headedly countenance it as an evolution of the cultural paradigm. This does not mean, however, that profilicity does not entail its own unique, destructive forces and potential dangers: young people, especially, increasingly suffer under the societal pressure to curate their profiles and please an increasingly demanding general peer. Still, it is important to remember that threats and dangers specific to a certain identity paradigm can be found throughout all modes of identity, and therefore one should avoid merely focusing on the hazards of profilicity (Moeller and D'Ambrosio 248).

As profilicity is coupled to the advance of media, the question arises as to what the dominant modes of identity have been hitherto. Across the vast diversity of human cultures, traditions, and morals, the authors discern a common technology of identity that prevailed from the beginning of documented history until the dawn of modernity. This long-lasting paradigm is referred to as "sincerity" and may, when it appears residually in current times, be tied to tradition. The tenets of sincerity are simultaneously straightforward and not well-defined, as their explicit contents tend to vary strongly across cultures and societies. Nevertheless, it is possible to understand sincerity as a form of identity that promotes striving to sincerely embody the social role one is born into.

Fate and destiny are important values in a traditional society, with its morals and customs upheld by members who stick to their assigned roles. One's destiny is determined by birthright and rarely changes. This holds true for occupations as well as family duties. For example, traditional society might expect a craftsman to simultaneously embody the roles of a sincere worker, husband (if applicable), and servant of the given religion and authority. In the same way, even a king is bound to adhere to his role as sovereign leader, which entails its own form of oppressive compulsion. Sincerity is also manifest in certain Eastern cultures where the pressure to maintain the honor of the family or nation could drive individuals to suicide or condemn them to harsh punishments for the "crime" of stepping outside their designated place in society (146). It becomes clear that the problem with sincerity is the rigid framework to which each person is made to submit (148).

While sincerity still exists in many parts of the world, it is being replaced by profilicity in technologically developed nations. Arguably, a different development can be observed in the Western world. These nations, especially those where the technologies for profilicity originated, underwent an intermediary stage referred to as "authenticity."

It is possible to perceive this "authenticity" development in the now-familiar concept of "searching for the authentic self." This notion arose in consequence of the

transition to modernity and industrialization, which gave rise to individualism with the paradigm of the free and rational agent (from which women and most of the lower classes tended to be excluded previously). Individualism resulted in the belief that individuals could break from the oppressive forces of tradition, instead tailoring their lives according to what they considered to be of value and thereby be true to their authentic selves.

With authenticity, one is seemingly no longer bound by the shackles of traditional society and is thus free to discover what it means to be *oneself*. This apparent liberation can also be retroactively justified as leading to the "triumph" of Western liberal democracy, colonial power, and industrial innovation. Through the unprecedented transformations these developments have effected, sincerity is no longer seen as truly sincere. Of course, it is still important to sincerely embody one's roles in society, but what is the worth of that if one does not authentically embody oneself? A persistent problem with authenticity stems from the illusion that there is a metaphysical, immutable self that can be discovered simply by dropping, or at least minimizing, traditional obligations and constraints. This crisis of authenticity is played out whenever someone attempts to be unique and different but in fact merely reacts to societal expectations. Often the identities of such people end up becoming more determined by their environment than before, all without them being aware of it (Moeller and D'Ambrosio 171). Meanwhile, the loss of traditional directions and duties leaves the individual rather isolated and without purpose. Removing the ties to sincerity was supposed to strip the individual of all the burdens linked to social duty, allowing for the discovery of the "true self." Instead, this true self turns out to be hollow, with nothing left to prevent the individual from fragmenting and becoming a *divisible* entity—namely, a profile.

The fact that each of the aforementioned modes of identity carry within them the potential to become malignant is attributed to the need to dogmatically adhere to an identity technology. Even sanity (which is often wound up with the current dominant mode of identity) may exhibit the same malignancy that insanity ostensibly does. The solution that Moeller and D'Ambrosio offer is to regard all TOIs with suspicion and detach oneself from them through a process of "genuine pretending." It is genuine in the sense that one recognizes the social reality of whatever mode of identity is being adhered to, yet it also involves a form of pretending because one also recognizes that identity is not bound to that particular mode. This concept is drawn from Daoism, which itself developed in reaction to the rigid sincerity of

Confucian culture.[1] It seems, however, that the introduction of Daoist philosophy to aspects of Western modernity can be lost in cultural translation due to separate cultural trajectories. While it is useful to learn from different cultures, a confusion of terms may arise when introducing teachings that are an expression of a different era of human civilization to a social environment burdened with completely different demands and problems. Although there is an attempt to do away with the adherence to a particular mode of identity, the individual is still being addressed when, for instance, they are called to "draft with ease" (Moeller and D'Ambrosio 240). Meanwhile, the authors suggest that similar notions within Western philosophy remain entrenched in a form of dogmatic authenticity.

The existentialist turn in Western philosophy after the decline of metaphysics would, according to Moeller and D'Ambrosio, represent a departure from the sincerity paradigm toward authenticity. I would argue that many (but not all) existential analyses are reflections upon the loss of sincerity as well as authenticity, and in some cases, these analyses specifically warn of the dawn of profilicity. Moeller compares the notion of genuine pretending with "existential ease" (Moeller, "What Is Daoist Philosophy?" 48:00-51:30), which further indicates that *You and Your Profile* is itself engaged in an existentialist pursuit beyond mere advocacy for authenticity. It seems insufficient to do away with the notion of existential *Dasein* and instead apply Daoist-inspired terminology to the same issues. The authors understand this to the extent that they look to Western philosophy and acknowledge the conclusions of postmodernity, which leads them to apply the principles of systems theory to the distinctly systemic societies of the present. However, their leap from the end of Western metaphysics to Eastern poetic traditions (specifically that of Daoism) partially overlooks the nature of the current struggle with identity. Consequently, they avoid discussing the contemporary need to existentially reflect on a loss of sincerity and authenticity in order to overcome the challenges posed by the accelerating growth of profilicity. It is clear that Moeller and D'Ambrosio cannot account for the specific threat that profilicity poses when they refer to profilicity as "no more totalitarian" than the other TOIs (249), for totalitarianism differs from authoritarianism and was only able to arise when authenticity entered crisis—a development I discuss in more detail below.

In the remainder of this essay, I will discuss how the development of TOIs is correlated with the rise and decline of Western metaphysics, which has long been centered around an ontology of Being. This ontology began with the emergence of

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[1] See Moeller, "What Is Daoist Philosophy?"

ancient Greek philosophy and is now culminating in the cybernetics of late capitalism. The trajectory of the industrialized world has been investigated and partially conceptualized by existentialist and phenomenological philosophers such as Heidegger, Husserl, and Ellul. I will argue that the *eigentliche Selbstsein* ("actual selfhood")[2] of Heidegger's philosophy does not correspond to the same concept of authenticity proposed by Moeller and D'Ambrosio. Rather, the authors mistakenly equate this concept with a mode of identity essential to individualism. This equation should be reconsidered in light of the fact that the existential analysis of *Dasein* represents but a stage in the course of Heidegger's thought. This is due to the fact that *Being and Time* is a move toward rediscovering what lies before the rise of any TOI (130).

Heidegger, along with Nietzsche and many others, has identified nihilism and technocracy as the endpoint of Western civilization.[3] This nihilism cannot be remedied by equating it to the (affirmative) emptiness of ancient Daoism or Zen Buddhism. It is precisely the totalitarianism of profilicity (for example, the emergence of the "social credit" [Auctor]) facing the globalized world that represents the end of the great cycle that originated in the sincerity-based proclamations of classical antiquity. Moeller and D'Ambrosio are correct insofar as there is no turning back to revive past modes of identity; but profilicity needs to be overcome without making false equivalences with past TOIs. In the following sections, I will consider the trajectory of Western thought and power dynamics, the rise of data science as a profilicity-based resource, and how the simulacrum of pretend genuineness may be just as unhelpful as clinging to idealized forms of obsolete TOIs.

Identity after Authenticity: From Metaphysics to Cybernetics

When asked in an interview about what metaphysics represents in the modern age, Heidegger responded, "die Kybernetik," meaning "cybernetics" ("'Nur'" 210). The word *Kybernetik* means something akin to "steering" and denotes the science that emerged in the middle of the twentieth century in order to explain complex interconnected systems of humans and machines. In cybernetics, the concept of regular causality is eschewed in favor of feedback and control. What does it mean when metaphysics becomes cybernetics and how does it correlate with the rise of profilicity?

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[2] All German vocabulary translations throughout the essay are my own.
[3] See Heidegger, "The Question of Technology."

Metaphysics as a term was coined by Aristotle as being that which comes "after physics"—namely, the natural world. His works on metaphysics outline the structure of God (the "unmoved mover"), substance, truth, and reason. Aristotle said that only reasoning could lead to truth, as perceptions are akin to opinion and may thus be obfuscated by illusion. In this, Aristotle held that the supreme reason was God, which was a motif maintained by the scholastic tradition of the Middle Ages up until the Enlightenment, when the focus shifted toward the rational man and *his* ability to understand the natural world (Nestle 146). In the Enlightenment, reason and rationality were increasingly subject to the demand to yield immediate results that were empirically observable. With the "death of God" and the subsequent disintegration of metaphysics, there came about an increasing operationalism (Marcuse 32) that stemmed from technics accelerating the productive forces. This operationalism was applicable to both humans and machines: each aspect of the mind was externalized to productive processes (Haraway 36). As a result, the newly industrialized societies were no longer capable of maintaining any "other" world of a spiritual substance in their philosophical thought.

This cybernetic ontology is picked up by Moeller and D'Ambrosio when referencing systems theory (206). The thing-in-itself and its representation are no longer separate substances but can be reduced to a system of signs and signifiers with particular structural dynamics. The mind or spirit of a human being no longer lies hidden beyond a surface appearance of various behaviors. Rather, the pattern of its whole behavior represents the totality of mind or spirit. The term "mind" then merely denotes a signifier with the functionality of referring to a pattern of more functionalities. This has been referred to by members of the Frankfurt School as the "technical rationality" of behaviorism and operationalism (Marcuse 43). It is clear that the underlying ontology here is a negative one, where the traditional attempt at generating a holistic unity of ideas is negated in a "negative dialectic" (Adorno 79) of separation. This is further exemplified in the understanding that systems are "operationally closed"—meaning they cannot interact with each other but are merely "structurally coupled." Separation and closure are derived from the very definition of the system being the "difference between system and environment" (Luhmann 92) rather than from an ontological distinction between systems. For example, when it is claimed that artificial intelligence is a misnomer because these algorithms represent systems of communication that are merely structurally coupled to intelligent or conscious systems, the reasoning behind this does not stem from an essentialist idea of what intelligence or consciousness really *are*. The understanding of identity as

entirely based on second-order observation implies such a system of functionality as the main framework of human personality.

It is at this point that Moeller and D'Ambrosio commit a crucial error in their analysis of profilicity: the cybernetic stage of ontology is simply accepted as a matter of fact, while the remedy to the dangers of profilicity remains on a surface level. Their advised Daoist dissociation from profiles and their oppressive demands is certainly helpful to an extent. Yet a Daoist disassociation is deeply entrenched in its own historical reaction against Confucian sincerity. Although it is true that a return to an expired mode of identity is not feasible, it is also not possible to detach from the historical situation in which these TOIs have played out. The age of profilicity comes with what Heidegger refers to as *Seinsvergessenheit* (the "forgetting of Being"). His *Seinsfrage* ("question of Being") turns thinking toward the very source that this *ontic* understanding had initially sprung from, and this source is now culminating in its nihilistic negation (Heidegger, "The Question" 27). The initial world-encounter, in which truth and meaning were not yet separated (truth being *ἀλήθεια* or "unconcealment"), correlated with the age of sincerity. What something *is* is also what it means. One can observe this in premodern architecture where the structure of the building itself, rather than a sign at its entrance, conveyed its purpose (Scruton 34).

Philosophers had long attempted to salvage the unity of truth and meaning by means of idealist metaphysics until the great post-Hegelian negations of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud put an end to the outdated dogmas of the past. Moeller and D'Ambrosio are misled in locating Heidegger within the era of authenticity. In a way, Heidegger saw the collapse of metaphysics as a disclosure of nothingness. Nietzsche sought to overcome this void by means of the re-evaluation of morals by the sovereign *Übermensch* ("overman"). The Nietzschean rejection of morality, and with it sincerity, is recognized by Moeller and D'Ambrosio, but they still regard it as entrenched in the lingo of authenticity. The reason Heidegger is easily incorporated by Eastern thinkers like Nishitani lies in the fact that he represents a figure similar to many Eastern thinkers within the cycle of modern Western civilization (in the same way that Plato and Diogenes can be seen as versions of Confucius and Laozi, respectively). Heidegger's philosophy can be characterized as being entangled within the language of authenticity just as Daoism is entangled within the language of Confucianism. *Dasein* does not represent the rational, authentic individual but a primordial ground (or horizon of Being) from which the polarities of subject and object, thing and representation, have emerged. The *eigentliches Selbstsein* or "actual selfhood" of *Dasein* is explicitly not an idealized true self that one ought to discover.

Heidegger closes the loop of identity by tying the loose ends of sincerity and profilicity together at the transitional phase between the two (i.e., authenticity). The original sense of "actual selfhood" can be understood as the culmination of sincerity as a sincerity with regards to oneself, which needs to be rediscovered as the rise of profilicity increasingly robs us of the very basis that enables life. This should not be understood as a reactionary retrenchment or return to older paradigms. It was precisely Heidegger who changed the paradigm of continental philosophy by performing his ontological destruction of traditional metaphysics. It is only through the encounter with the void, which is revealing itself both in the emptiness of profilicity and in the form of the "greatest danger," the so-called *Gestell* ("frame") of technics, that Being will disclose itself anew. It is no coincidence that French deconstructionists like Derrida and Stiegler (by no means sentimental adherents of authenticity or sincerity) purport to carry on Heidegger's legacy. The principal mistake on Heidegger's part was the assumption that a *Kehre* ("turning") is possible within the paradigm of modern thought. Instead, it is a spark that persists so that the greatest danger posed by technics can be outlived. Looking closer at the language used toward the end of *You and Your Profile*, it becomes even clearer that what Heidegger means by *eigentlich* may be better translated as "genuine" rather than "authentic." Following Moeller and D'Ambrosio's description, it is likely that "drafting with ease" (240) may just be the way of practicing *Gelassenheit* ("ease") in view of the possibilities unfolding in one's own *Entwurf* ("draft"). At the end of his life, Heidegger wrote a short story titled "Der Feldweg" (1949), which roughly translates as "The Country Path." One may notice that this tale that dwells on a winding path, leading us along the so-called Sending of Being, may just as well have been written by an Eastern sage.

You and Your Data

It is clear that data is now a valuable resource because it can be used to make profit based on predictions of consumer behavior ("The World's"). Psychometric profiles are created by means of the data footprints each user leaves behind on the internet (Rust et al. 128). What this means is that the statistical analysis of user behavior represents a good-enough personality profile to allow for rather accurate predictions about future behaviors. The applications range from targeted advertising to advanced manipulation by means of "nudging." People can end up living in their own simulated realities while being reduced to a ubiquitous compilation of data sets.

It is interesting to consider what kind of information is most sought after: there is, in online psychometric questionnaires, an implicit assumption that the profile is an accurate representation of a person's personality, given the assumption that questions are answered honestly, and this implies that there is a *true* self as opposed to a mere performed one being assessed by the questionnaire. Data miners are also eager to gain information about one's family and community. I would argue that the spheres of authenticity and sincerity still represent ones where most of the salient information is disclosed and that profilicity figuratively feeds off their essences.

Profilicity cannot prevail without a foundation or "host" of authentic resources—otherwise it becomes the mere dynamics of automated data structures and thus indistinguishable from algorithmic bots. Social media discourse, such as that which takes place on Twitter, has already shown that the increasing curation of one's profile leads to one's behavior eventually becoming indistinguishable from bots. The realm of the profile is the realm of the machine, which means either that a healthy dissociation from one's profile needs to take place (which Moeller and D'Ambrosio correctly advocate for) or that identity is entirely dissolved into the technological ontology of mere data structures. To rather loosely apply terminology from systems theory, a data system can merely be structurally coupled to a system of identity but cannot directly operate on it. The underlying contradiction-loaded substrate of identity, however, is not systemic and evades the attempt at systematization. The technological system strives to continuously force the unavailable to be made available as a standing resource for operation and production (Heidegger, "The Question" 18). It is the rise of the rule of technics.

The Profile of Technocracy

The development of identity from sincerity through authenticity to profilicity has been described in various forms using different terminologies. Some refer to it as a development from premodernity through modernity to postmodernity, where these historical phases align with certain dynamics of power. For instance, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the transition from sincerity to authenticity as an evolution from societies of authority towards societies of discipline. He suggests that whereas in traditional societies one had to sincerely fit into one's position in the social hierarchy, these hierarchies have since been destroyed and replaced with a new power dynamic.

Yet, in order to sustain the cohesion of society, the individual needed to be allowed their authentic self while somehow still maintaining the new power

structures. Therefore, power was replicated in institutions where the authentic individual would be disciplined into never allowing their authenticity to come into conflict with the interests of the state. In Deleuze's later paradigm of "societies of control" ("Postscript" 4), power is no longer exerted through authority or discipline but by information feedback. The individual becomes a consumer of goods and services that are tailored to him or her. What a person is allowed to be or do is laid down by the cybernetic network. Power has become a systemic process.

When it is claimed by Moeller and D'Ambrosio that profilicity is no more totalitarian than any other TOI, it is not clear what is meant by the term "totalitarian." There have been many different definitions of what constitutes totalitarianism, many of which are indistinguishable from authoritarianism. Totalitarianism and authoritarianism are certainly correlated to some extent, but in order to understand the dynamics of power marked by profilicity, it is useful to make a distinction between the two: authoritarianism represents power originating in personal authority, whereas totalitarianism does not need to be personal at all ("What Is the Difference"). Foucault's descriptions of societies of discipline also suggest this. An authoritarian leader, such as a monarch, does not necessarily need to "totalize" his rule to the extent that he gains insight into the private lives of all his subjects. Often, monarchs do not even need to control public opinion as long as there is not too much overt resentment against their regime. Totalitarianism, in contrast, is an invasion into the private sphere (Weber 9:54-10:23). This can happen authoritatively, by dictates from a supreme leader, but it may also originate from a faceless bureaucratic administration. Especially in societies of control, it becomes increasingly efficient to have totalitarian power entirely outsourced to systemic processes rather than authoritarian rule. Not only does the emergence of social media allow for an even more invasive totalitarianism, it is also the true face of it.

Regimes of sincerity throughout the world have usually been centered on authority. It is true that the private sphere was very much affected in many of its aspects, but forms of authority were often to be found within that same sphere. Adherence to the roles of sincerity was often enforced by leaders of the same household or community. The distant emperor or king was in no position to check on whether his subjects were adhering to the social norms of his realm (and likely had no interest in doing so). Only now, when cybernetics come into play, can every move, every conversation, and potentially every thought be registered and used to punish, reward, and predict behavior. The transition from sincerity to profilicity thus becomes a transition from authoritarianism to totalitarianism, with the intermediary stage of authenticity representing a mixture of the two. The dictatorships of the

twentieth century can be seen as a symptom of a major crisis within the age of authenticity, when attempts were made to reconcile the isolated individual with a loss of social integration. At that stage, the dynamics of power were characterized by both authoritarian and totalitarian elements.

Moeller and D'Ambrosio understand the significance of the transformations that technological media has undergone in recent history. This evolution of technics has changed the dynamics of what are perceived as the powers that enforce the current social order. Moreover, they reject the reductive interpretation of a mere broadening of the social sphere (79). However, it is clear that something else is taking place in cultural phenomena such as "wokeism." Contrary to many other leftist perspectives, the "woke" narrative is not a re-emergence of a socialist or Marxist narrative. It can be more accurately described as a systemic product of ideology that carries, maintains, and propagates the technological system of control. It also reflects Langdon Winner's understanding of technocracy, which is not the rule of a given cabal of technocrats but quite literally the reign of technics as "autonomous technology" (15). The ideologies and narratives espoused in the current age of woke cultural dominance are short-lived, fluid positions that represent "simulacra" in Baudrillard's sense. It can be difficult to make sense of the interpretation of power in terms of systemic processes, but it helps to remember Marshall McLuhan's sentiment that "the medium is the message" (9), because there is no central narrative guiding the spectacle (Moeller and D'Ambrosio 45). In conclusion, profilicity can be seen as a form of totalitarian identity technology that is accelerating toward the ultimate trajectory of technocracy.

Genuine Pretending and Pretended Genuinity

In this section, the focus will be on Moeller and D'Ambrosio's proposed method for surviving in a society dominated by dogmatic profilicity: "genuine pretending." They make it clear that this is not to be seen as a fourth regime following after profilicity. Instead, it rejects but also reconciles the regimes of sincerity, authenticity, and profilicity.

It resembles the Heideggerian notion of *Gelassenheit*, where one leaves established modes of being to their own devices while avoiding over-attachment (*Verfallenheit*) to them. It becomes clear that the emergence of existentialist or phenomenological thought is the answer to a declining regime of metaphysics in its late stage of profilicity. Again, this does not promote a bleak, pessimistic vision of the future but underlines the need for a kind of detachment. The emergence of

Daoism represents a similar answer to Confucian sincerity. As Moeller and D'Ambrosio accurately state, the current situation in Western societies cannot be characterized as a regime of sincerity but one of profilicity. In fact, many tenets of so-called "wokeism" represent a radical opposition to traditional roles and customs.

The answer to profilicity thus cannot follow a Daoist recipe; it must in some sense retain and preserve the real value of what has remained of the age of sincerity. This is not the same thing as advocating for a conservative reaction or the establishment of a historical simulacrum. Sebastian Junger, in his work *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging*, presents the pre-civilized, tribal mode of life without attempting to reconstruct an expired cultural ideal. He addresses the current loss of a meaningful identity and emphasizes the human need for community and belonging. Moeller and D'Ambrosio interpret him as advocating for a return to a sincerity-based identity (165). This strikes me as somewhat confusing since they associate sincerity with traditional civilization. Indeed, Moeller's lecture on civilization and its unease emphasizes the fact that Daoism satirically questioned the rigid structures and hierarchies of the so-called civilized and orderly world by sketching an almost primitivist counter-image at times ("What Is Daoist Philosophy?"). Can the tribal structure and its arguably more instinctual and communal life also be counted as a form of sincerity? If the answer is yes, then it seems to be implied that there is no qualitative difference between the TOIs of primal tribal society and traditional civilization, but merely a difference in degree. One could then raise the question as to whether the "unease" is due to civilization itself or a universal, existential mode of human life. If the answer is no, then there seems to be another, archaic mode of identity that has not been accounted for, or is not relevant to, Moeller and D'Ambrosio's work.

The loss of sincerity and authenticity needs to be addressed as much as the dawning reign of profilicity. It is precisely here that Moeller and D'Ambrosio point out that the rebellious reaction against the loss of authenticity is "not helpful" (176). However, the authors leave the reader in a state of confusion about what constitutes the real and what does not, which is equally unhelpful. It is true that their acknowledgment of the contradictory nature of TOIs and their affirmation of these contradictions is appropriate advice for many of the ills associated with dogmatic identity formation. However, the absence of a "central perspective" (45) and the consequent loss of any fundamental reality pertaining to the self can very well lead to an equally pathological crisis of identity.

A society overflowing with a neurotic need to incorporate the world within a meaningful order may very well be helped by a measured dose of laid-back negation.

However, a society threatened to be devoured by looming nihilism may not profit from hearing that even their own sense of self is a mere illusion, a simulacrum (and the solution is to keep up a form of pretending). In fact, a central perspective is implied within all of the TOIs: the supreme order, hierarchy, authority, or deity in the case of sincerity; the individual subject in the case of authenticity; and the general peer in the case of profilicity. Pointing out, with recourse to Hegel (Moeller and D'Ambrosio 224), that this central observer transforms and changes throughout history does not disprove or render nonexistent the underlying reality—it merely binds them to the forces of time. On the one hand, the perceptions of these central perspectives and their resulting social dynamics are recognized as real; on the other hand, the essential substance of their implied identity structures is denied. People want to be genuinely genuine rather than pretend genuine. It is acknowledged that the notion of genuine pretending places a poetic emphasis on the contradictory nature of identity. Even so, the Daoist inspiration of this concept strikes me as empty because it stems from a tradition with its own dragons to slay.

Conclusion

Despite the criticisms espoused in this critical interpretation of Moeller and D'Ambrosio's *You and Your Profile*, it is a very important and insightful text that remains highly relevant to contemporary social and cultural developments. For precisely this reason the book inspired in me the need to philosophically reflect on its implications. Many of the arguments made by Moeller and D'Ambrosio require serious consideration, but it struck me as particularly necessary to point out problematic aspects of their use of Western and Eastern thought. For some people (perhaps especially the Chinese), Daoism may already be providing a basis for surviving the age of profilicity. However, Moeller and D'Ambrosio mention that Western societies are unique in that they underwent the paradigm of authenticity before turning toward profilicity. Because of this, Western existentialism will need to be different. The technological developments that provide for the possibility of profilicity have in many cases been appropriated by countries like China, but Chinese society encounters profilicity in a different way with some of its malignant Western forms suppressed and others more pronounced. A culture that until recently has been much more dominated by a regime of sincerity is more likely to be receptive to the full depth of a tradition such as Daoism (as opposed to mere fashionable aphorisms extracted from it), which in its origins strove to give an answer to the reign of sincerity.

One crucial point to take from *You and Your Profile* is a twofold acknowledgment that we are in the process of a major, global transition toward the identity paradigm of profilicity and we must therefore rethink how we relate to identity. This is important because authenticity is fading and likely cannot be revived by any concerted effort. The structural dynamics of technology, as well as the exhaustion of the resources extracted from an individualist economy, determine the end of such a cultural paradigm. The forces of history rarely allow for reversals, and acknowledging this can help us let go of a mode of identity that itself once supplanted the traditional forms of sincerity.

A second crucial point is the need for a turning point in contemporary thought. Moeller has referred to this as the "need for a second enlightenment" ("Kant's Philosophy"). Such a transformation must proceed by leisurely dissociating from one's profile in consequence of recognizing the fundamental trajectory of profilicity. The dissolution of identity into a cybernetic network of data systems cannot be overcome from within systemic thought. It is the opening up and clearing of a space for such discourse by thinkers such as Heidegger that lets us overcome profilicity in our thinking. We can then turn toward a new beginning, beyond the confines of a system.

What this turning will look like is not entirely clear.

I have pushed back against several claims made in *You and Your Profile*, mainly those that equate the problems of profilicity with other malignant forms of identity. Against Moeller and D'Ambrosio, I would argue that a profilicity-based identity is not only schizophrenic (in the cultural sense of Deleuze and Guattari), but it also totalizes schizophrenia into becoming the paradigm of identity. The contents of our world are simultaneously becoming closed-off systems and a deterritorialized global network of information flows. This is due to the negative ontology of cybernetics, in which a reconciliation of the subject and object is not only not attempted, but the divide is widened to the point where they are torn apart. Schizophrenia in this sense represents the resulting dissociated flow of identity, which has become an objective flow of data that completely engulfs the subject to the extent that social integration outside of the technologized social network becomes impossible. It should be emphasized once again that focusing on the great dangers that accompany the rise of profilicity does not minimize the malignant aspects of authenticity and sincerity. Nor does it imply a proposal to return to a reconstructed form of either of the two. However, Moeller and D'Ambrosio relativize the unique threat of profilicity when they promote a Daoist remedy that was a historical answer

to a Confucian paradigm of sincerity. Therefore, the approach the two authors take is certainly helpful to some extent, however in many ways incomplete.

This critique intends to pay respect to the philosophical work of Moeller and D'Ambrosio while appealing to an important issue regarding the adaptation of ancient Daoist philosophical inquiry into modern contexts. It is not easy to integrate separate philosophical traditions without misunderstandings and mistranslations. As my expertise by no means lies in the area of Chinese philosophy, nor am I proficient in the Chinese language, I am in no position to comment on the quality of their translation and application of Eastern schools of thought. However, I am equally (if not more so, due to my age) faced with the perils of profilicity and therefore feel in a position to express ways of thinking that might enable a more fundamental understanding of the current global dynamics. In this, I have been sincere in my role as a student while hopefully expressing my authentic beliefs in order to curate my academic profile.

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