A CRITIQUE OF DREYFUS'S KIERKEGAARDIAN ANALYSIS OF THE INTERNET

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In this paper, I will argue that embodied presence and ultimate commitments are not necessary for the authenticity of online relationships. In the first section, I will present Hubert Dreyfus's Kierkegaardian analysis of the Internet. In the second, I will show the different positions that disagree with Dreyfus. And finally, in the third, I will look into (1) the distinction between human to human and human to nonhuman online interactions, (2) the continuity or discontinuity of the online and the offline relationships of persons, and (3) the forms of the relationship that occurred. From that analysis, I will derive some cases that will show the inadequacies and problems of the conditions presented by Dreyfus.

INTRODUCTION

From the very beginning of life, every individual will always see oneself in relationships with others. Indeed, a relational character is intrinsic in the existence of human beings. Florentino Timbreza (2008, 65) expounds on this in saying,

> Man is essentially a community, "a community of persons in relation," and he exists meaningfully only insofar as a genuine community or a togetherness is not a dream but a concrete reality. He is essentially with others, and he can become truly himself only if he recognizes that others also exist and allows their existence to influence his life and actions. Man, in short, is being-with-others.

And, in the process of relating to the other, one does not simply aim to establish a certain connection or a mere network. Rather, as Lori Wagner (2015, 115) says, "...we are, it appears…seek intimate participation and companionship with our fellows" and it always involves participation "to see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another." Further, relating to other people also involves self-reflection and self-knowledge. The process of building relationships is an opportunity to reflect and know oneself deeper. It is in the profundity and depth of our relationships that we will be able to examine our lives.

The humanistic principle of authentic relationship (see Timbreza 2008, 66) states: "I can be myself only in your presence. But if I need you in order to be myself, you likewise need me. Each of us holds each 'personhood' as a gift from the other, so that to betray the other is always to betray oneself."

And it is because of this relational character of human beings that lead humanity to take advantage of technology in order to establish wider relationships, specifically through the creation of the Internet. As David Brunskill (2014, 392) maintains, "The human is a profoundly social animal and has a brain to match, so it is not surprising to observe that the many advances in computing technology have been routinely explored for their accompanying social potential." Like any other technology and innovation, the Internet specifically that of social media provides humanity with advantages and promises that aim to uplift certain aspects of daily living and contribute to the improvement of the individual and society.

It is in this regard that any research and study regarding the Internet and its social media becomes very significant. On the existential and practical level, Hubert Dreyfus (2009, 2) notes:

> We are told that, given its new way of linking and accessing information, the Internet will bring a new era of economic prosperity, lead to the development of intelligent search engines that will deliver us just the information we desire, solve the problems of mass education, put us in touch with all of reality, allows us to have even more flexible identities than we already have and thereby add new dimensions of meaning to our lives.

Indeed, the Internet and social media are not just "unique environments that provide users with a platform that allows them to communicate with others in mediated space"and "an additional platform with which to share their lives with friends and acquaintance," but also provides an array of economic, educational, and even existential promises of a more meaningful future (Kapidzic and Martins 2015, 280). Hence, studies regarding the Internet will be able to examine and assess the different benefits (economic, political, and sociocultural) and dangers that the Internet brings to humanity. Philosophically, such endeavors will allow us to reflect on how the Internet can become a new avenue for actualizing the relational character of human beings in a new and emerging medium, which is the online realm. Internet studies become more crucial and significant due to the fact that authentic individuality and community can be compromised by a communication which focuses only on information that is shared by disembodied persons; hence changing the interpersonal perceptions of participants (Prosser and Ward 2001). Further, the Internet can lead people to remain anonymous in their online interaction via anonymous information and identity (Petrik, Kilybayev, andShormanbayeva 2014).

On the theoretical level, the first attempts to engage in a scholarly discourse on social media are mostly psychological and sociological in nature. There are only few philosophical studies on the topic. Most philosophical engagements either rely on the empirical results yielded by the social sciences or on the past theories of the philosophy of technology and computer ethics, which, however, may not comprehensively address the rapid changes that are happening on the Internet (Vallor 2015). Currently, the philosophy branches that begin to contribute to the discourse comes from ethics (Elder 2014; Froding and Peterson 2012;

Sharp 2012; and Vallor 2012), metaphysics (Stokes 2012; Rodogno 2012), and pragmatism (van den Eede 2010). Of particular interest as well is the engagement of analytic philosophy of language in what they coined as "Philosophy of the Web," which utilizes the established frameworks on semantics and referential theories (Halpin and Monnin 2014). Hence, there is a need and challenge for contemporary philosophers to engage themselves more profoundly and fill in the philosophical gap via their own fields of expertise and traditions.

These endeavors bring and situate us to a much wider and ongoing discussion on virtual communities and human relations online. Further, its relevance and context are noted by Maria Bakardjieva (2005) in contending that until today the discussion on virtual communities continue because of the optimistic reaction of scholars on the possibility of realizing and actualizing the community with all of the accompanying human values in a new realm or domain, which is the virtual. On the other side of the discourse, there are those who are pessimistic of the hopes that virtual communities give and uphold their technological criticism on the Internet.

Hence, it is in the light of the challenges posed above that this paper seeks to delve into the discussion that existential phenomenologists have contributed. If one looks into the writings of the existentialists, one will see that despite certain differences, in how they deal with human existence and condition, all of them would deal with the question of authenticity. *What is it to be an authentic and genuine human being? What do we mean by a meaningful human existence? How does one establish a genuine relation with the other?* However, human existence became more complex which includes the modes by which the self-other relation is actualized, especially in this age of rapid and expansive interconnectedness brought about by the Internet. And so the existential questions that our age may now ask are: *Is an authentic human relationship possible online? How does one become authentic online?* Dreyfus (2009) is one of the philosophers who first attempted to answer the question in his book *On the Internet.* According to him (2009, 3-6), two of the necessary conditions that make relations authentic are embodied presence and ultimate commitments, which apparently the online realm does not have and must have for it to be authentic. But we also ask: *Are embodied presence and ultimate commitments really necessary for the authenticity of online relationships?*

In this paper, I shall argue for the claim that embodied presence and ultimate commitments are not necessary for the authenticity of online relationships. I shall argue for my claim by demonstrating that it is possible for an online relationship to be authentic even without embodied presence and ultimate commitments.

HUBERT DREYFUS ON THE INTERNET

Soren Kierkegaard's present age and the internet

Dreyfus (2009) begins by discussing Soren Kierkegaard's critique of his present age. According to Kierkegaard(2005, 3-6), his present age was characterized by a disinterested/detached reflection and curiosity which leads to the levelling of all qualitative differences, distinctions, status, and values. All of these according to him, are to be blamed to the public, specifically the press. It is because of the public/press, that massive and desituated

information becomes readily available for everyone, everywhere, and anytime. And this information produces and proliferate all sorts of opinions, discussions, and debates which according to Kierkegaard reduces the person to a mere desituated/detached spectator. One is always ready to say an opinion on every matter without having any first-hand experience and without having any sense of responsibility and drive to act and decide. Reflections and discussions are an end in itself; hence, Kierkegaard contends that this opens up the possibility of endless reflections, which delays any form of concrete decisions and actions. Therefore, the public sphere is a detached world. It detaches and removes from the human person his or her own individual relativity and concreteness. And these phenomena lead to the dehumanization of the individuality of the human person. One is simply reduced to the "invisible and nonexistent crowd." One's personal thoughts, choices, and subjective experiences do not matter anymore to the objectivity of the grand scheme of things that the crowd purports.

Dreyfus (2009) sees the reductive and dehumanizing characteristic of Kierkegaard's age, two-centuries ago, in our contemporary era brought about by the Internet. This is the reason why he finds Kierkegaard's framework as appropriate in analyzing the Internet. He finds the Internet as the epitome of what Kierkegaard described centuries earlier. The Internet with all its websites, newsgroups, blogs, and social media becomes an avenue for impersonal and endless engagements and discussions (Prosser and Ward 2000).

The three modes of existence and the Internet

Dreyfus (2009), in the light of Kierkegaard's description of the public's levelling, provides a solution. According to Kierkegaard, the way for the individual to salvage himself or herself from the crowd/public is by plunging himself or herself to some form of activity, which involves a passionate commitment. This passionate commitment can be seen in each of the three modes/spheres of human existence: aesthetic, ethical, and religious. The aesthetic stage is characterized as a shallow, superficial, and hedonistic way of living. One jumps from one activity to another endlessly and extensively. One's goal is to attain all the pleasures and possibilities that life can give. One simply cares for the satisfaction of the desires of the present moment. Dreyfus (2009, 80) compares the aesthete with the net-surfer:

> Such an aesthetic response is the characteristic of the Net-surfer for whom information gathering has become a way of life. Such a surfer is curious about everything and ready to spend every free moment visiting the latest hot spots on the Web. He or she enjoys the sheer range of possibilities. For such a person, just visiting as many sites as possible and keeping up on the cool is an end in itself.

According to Dreyfus (2009, 81), the net surfer's life is a life dedicated to "fighting off boredom by being a spectator at everything interesting in the universe and in communicating with everyone else so inclined," and this produces the so-called postmodern/experimental self, which is "a self that has no defining content or continuity but is constantly taking on new roles." And what makes an aesthete and a net surfer inclined to this life of passionate commitment to curiosity? It is the noninvolvement of risk, commitment, and responsibility in this kind of living. One can be anything that one wants and not be what one truly is in reality.

However, this kind of living by the aesthete leads to a certain despair, and will come to a point when one cannot find an activity to jump on to. In the same way, the net surfer could not find any in the Internet that will feed his or her curiosity. It is in this sense that the distinction between the interesting and the boring is levelled. Everything becomes equally interesting and equally boring at the same time.

And so the person takes a leap into the ethical stage, which is characterized by having a direction or purpose in life that one gets from objective morality. If applied to the net surfer, this stage is characterized by having serious, intensive concern for certain causes, actions, and persons in the web. The person now commits himself or herself to a web group or individual. Dreyfus, however, is aware of the possibility of having multiple commitments and the ease of joining and leaving such commitments which may lead to either paralysis or arbitrary choices. And so he suggests that one could choose a commitment that is in line with the facts about one's life situation, an online advocacy or an interest group, for instance, that could be related to one's own interest or facts in life.

However, the problem comes in when we take into consideration the goal of the ethical life which is to be morally mature, which implies being able to act lucidly and freely. If that is the case, then the ethical net surfer will be having problems reconciling the very freedom he or she has as a moral agent and the facts of life which he or she imposes in him or herself in his or her chosen commitment. This is then the despair of the ethical: "either I am stuck with whatever just happens to be imposed on me as important in my life and so I'm not free, or else the pure power of freedom to make or unmake commitments undermines itself" because if everything were up for a choice, including the very reasons, guidelines, or basis for choosing one over the other, then there would be no reason for choosing one set of reasons over another (Dreyfus 2009, 85). There would be no serious difference at all since anytime, one could choose to give up one over the other because we have a choice! Levelling then comes into the picture again, with the consideration of the person's freedom, all meaningful differences are levelled. One can simply revoke a chosen commitment even though it is based on one's facts in life, since one is always free to choose. One is then challenged to immerse oneself to an unconditional or ultimate commitment, which is:

> …neither the ones that I arbitrarily choose nor the ones that I am obliged to keep because of my social role. Rather, these special commitments are experienced as grabbing my whole being. When I respond to such summons by making an unconditional commitment, this commitment determines who I am and what will be the significant issue for me for the rest of my life. Political and religious movements can grab us in this way as can love relationships and, for certain people, such vocations as the law or music. These unconditional commitments are different from the normal sort of commitments. They define the world in which our everyday commitments are made. They thus determine which commitments really matter and why they do… (Dreyfus 1999, 19).

This is the stage of authenticity that Dreyfus advocates for the Internet: a meaningful and authentic life is one of enduring commitments. Any endeavor, activity, and relationships

that a person immerses in become authentic by the presence of ultimate commitments.

Ultimate commitments

Hence, what is essential for a commitment to be ultimate is that it (a) grabs one's whole being ("commitment defines thoroughly one's identity and involves embracing fundamental values that define the trajectory of one's life"), (b) unconditional ("commitment is not itself justified in terms of other considerations that are more fundamental"), and (c) irrevocable (Petrik, Kilybayev, and Shormanbayeva 2014, 277). In the aspect of irrevocability, it seems that, at first, no commitment could really pass this condition since even marriages and religious vows can be revoked and could fail anytime. However, Dreyfus clarifies this by distinguishing choosing to revoke one's commitment versus failing to sustain or achieve one's commitment. The former is that which is not ultimate, while the latter is. The choice to revoke one's marital commitment shows it not being ultimate; while, the breakdown of one's marriage despite doing everything to sustain the commitment is still considered an ultimate one.

Most importantly, ultimate commitments are only possible in the presence of true and real risks which, apparently for him, are what the Internet lacks and undermines. Further, without these risks there can be no true meaning or commitment in the online realm. What the online realm can only give is that it allows people to play and experiment with "notions of identity, commitment, and meaning, without risking the irrevocable consequences that ground real identities and relationships" (Vallor 2015). And finally, Dreyfus (2009, 87-88) believes that "the test as to whether one had acquired an unconditional commitment would come only if one had the passion and courage to transfer what one had learned on the Net to the real world." Hence the condition of embodied presence which can be done in two ways: first, a fully embodied presence where there is no involvement of an online realm in one's relations and, second, the online realm as a supplement, not a replacement, to current embodied relations.

Embodied presence

It is important to note that Dreyfus (2009, 4) defines embodied presence as,

...not only our physical body with its front and back, arms and legs, and ability to move around in the world, but also our moods that make things matter to us, our location in a particular context where we have to cope with real things and people, and the many ways we are exposed to disappointment and failure as well as to injury and death…they include all aspects of our finitude and vulnerability.

Meaning to say, embodied presence does not only mean an empirical-physical existence of an embodied person, a mere "being-there"; rather, by embodied presence it includes different aspects such as the involvement of risk, which gives rise to ultimate commitments as well as trust among persons and a sense of responsibility, shared moods, and emotions. Dean Cocking and Steve Matthews (2001, 227-229) affirm Dreyfus by contending that what the Internet misses are the nonvirtual involuntary aspects of the self, which includes

physical manifestations of emotions that one might not be aware of, but is obvious to one's friend given a certain context. For example,

> I notice, for instance, my friend is anxious in confined spaces, in crowded places, or when her ex-partner is in the room. I notice her excitement or enthusiasm over her team winning the football match, her delight in a delicious meal, or her exuberance in discussion after a few drinks at the bar. Because of such interpretations I will, for example, be more attentive to my anxious friend when her ex-partner enters the room, or try to lighten up the situation with a joke or strategy of distraction or just discreetly get her out of the room. Similarly, I might affectionately tease her about her excitement at the football game, or how lively she gets after a few drinks. I might on the other hand, find myself spurred on by her enthusiasm in such circumstances (Cocking and Matthews 2001, 227).

On the other hand, self-presentation being interpreted virtually are controlled and a product of choice. They are nonspontaneous and noncomplex expressions. Cocking and Matthews (2001) further emphasized that the filtered or sifted presentation and expressions misses out a number of aspects that only an embodied presence could give. Cocking and Matthews (2001, 228) maintains:

> Typical features of interaction in the nonvirtual case include such things as rapid-fire half-finished sentences, talking over one another, a complexity of intonation, facial and bodily gestures, and so on…Even if I manage to curb all voluntary behavioural indicators of such things, there are simply too many non-voluntary indicators which no-one we have ever known (*qua* close friend) could consistently screen out. I will, e.g., smile at the joke or try too hard to not smile, or I'll sweat over those of whom I'm envious or jealous, or engage in frenzied small talk in telling desperation to feign indifference.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST HUBERT DREYFUS'S CONDITIONS

On ultimate commitments

James Petrik, Talgat Kilybayev, and DinaraShormanbayeva (2014, 279-82) argue that Dreyfus (1) "overstates the extent to which anonymity and absence of risk are dominant aspects of the web," meaning there are many instances where people would use the Internet using their own true identities without pretensions, and there are people who would risk their lives for certain commitments, say political ones, as, for example, the case of Malala Yousafzai, a fifteen year-old girl who through blogging, protested against the Taliban regime and who receive death threats to silence her; (2) Dreyfus "understates the respects in which the web can support significant human commitments," meaning there are instances where the Internet can support and complement existing human relationships as well as help establish new ones; (3) "not all deeply meaningful relationships enjoyed by human beings are interpersonal," meaning certain relationships could also be established with the

environment and with technology itself, which if this is the case, could open the possibility of having authentic relations with virtual people in the Internet as well; (4) Dreyfus's ultimate commitment arises from a false dilemma: it is either "if one's commitments are subject to revision and revocable then they are automatically not ultimate and would not render life meaningful" or "if one's commitments are irrevocable then it is ultimate and will render life meaningful." But does it really follow that if one's commitments are constantly reflected upon, modified, and corrected, would render that particular commitment not ultimate; hence, an inauthentic and meaningless commitment? Further, this dilemma could even lead to extremism where one simply ought to live one's life according to an ultimate commitment or one ought not to live one's life without any commitment at all; and lastly, (5) the abovementioned dilemma is brought about by Dreyfus's confusion of epistemic commitments and practical commitments. The former are commitments that are in no need of further rational justifications as in some foundational beliefs. They do not need reevaluation and critical assessment. On the other hand, the latter are the everyday commitments that one makes that are related to one's practical state of affairs. These can be long-term or short-term and can be revoked anytime. The problem with Dreyfus is that he is conflating the irrevocability and unconditionality of epistemic commitments to that of practical commitments (Petrik, Kilybayev, andShormanbayeva 2014, 281-83).

On embodied presence

On the other hand, Adam Briggle (2008) challenges Cocking and Matthews (2001) and Dreyfus. He argues that the Internet is able to filter distractive nonvoluntary interpretations advocated by Cocking and Matthews that may impede the relationship; hence, it becomes more focused. Writing correspondences are more sincere and deliberate since it is a product of self-introspection. Through the use of Internet mediums such as emails, communication becomes a product of constant reflection and composition that a spontaneous embodied interaction may hamper and distract, for example, by being abruptly and unintentionally silenced for being talked over by another person (Standish 2002).

The offline world, in itself, cannot facilitate being truly oneself due to demands, structures, pressures, compromises, and insecurities. Here the online world plays a role as an avenue for authentic self-expression. It breaks the demanding structures restraining self-expression offline. Hence, contrary to Dreyfus, it does not follow that life becomes meaningful in the affirmation of bodily selves, as what Dreyfus's Bodily Determinism claims. There are instances (see Burbules 2002) where an embodied life and relation becomes problematic such as in violence, objectification, abuses, harassment, handicaps, etc. Also, the risk and trust that Dreyfus treats as a positive characteristic of an embodied world are also problematic for there are instances when risks lead to self-destruction and the degradation of trust among persons.

In addition, Nicholas Burbules(2002, 390) finds the dichotomy between "real" versus "false" identities as well as "fully embodied presence" versus "disembodied telepresence" as a false dichotomy. It seems that Dreyfus is imposing an ideal standard which the internet cannot really achieve such as a fully embodied presence and a real

self. He further argues that the embodied world and the online world are two different contexts and judging one using the standards of the other would render the analysis problematic.

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF DREYFUS'S CONDITIONS

I shall now argue for my claim that ultimate commitments and embodied presence are not necessary for the authenticity of online relationships. In arguing for my claim, I find that addressing the argument of Burbules (2002) about "embodied presence" and "disembodied telepresence" is fundamental in resolving the issue at hand. It is because it does not only concern Dreyfus alone but any other philosopher of the Internet, who aims to put forward a certain evaluation of a realm/domain using a standard from another realm/domain, which the former may not really be able to attain. I propose that in evaluating Dreyfus's conditions as well as the arguments against him, we should look into their underlying positions regarding (1) the distinction between human to human online interaction and human to nonhuman online interaction, (2) the continuity or discontinuity of the online relationship and the offline relationship of persons, and (3) the forms of relationships established.

Human to human vs. human to nonhuman online interaction

One way of understanding this distinction is by taking a look into the different uses of the Internet. According to Haim Weinberg (2014, 2-3), there are three main uses of the Internet. The first is for information. The Internet is primarily used as a source for data gathering. The second is for transactions. Here the Internet is used for different commercial and business transactions as in e-commerce. For both users (see Bakardjieva 2005, 179),

> They were using the Internet to find positive, reliable, scientific, professionally presented information and were more often finding it in the virtual projections of institutions such as online magazines and newspapers…radio and television stations' sites…government sites…news agencies…scientific publications online…. To most of these users, newsgroups and mailing lists had little to offer and respectively, communal forms were questionable in principle.

Hence for these kinds of users, one does not care much of the other aspects of the Internet and could easily give up its existence one's pragmatic purposes end. Lastly, the Internet can be used for interactions. The primary avenues for this kind of use are the different social media and networking sites. One could interact with different people from all over the world, ranging from one's close friends to distant strangers. The primary aim is to build a connection and a relationship. Now, given those three uses, we can say that the first two falls under the human to nonhuman kind of Internet interaction. A human being on the one side simply interacts with mere Internet programs, apps, and software where no human being is involved on the other side. One's interaction with Wikipedia, Google Scholar, virtual games, travel websites, etc., are just some examples. On the other hand, the third use falls under the human to human kind of interaction. A human being using an online medium interacts with another human being on the other side of the medium. One's interactions with one's friends

using chat, email, or video calling in Facebook, Twitter, etc., are some examples.

It is important to look into this because in any form of criteria/conditions for authenticity that a philosopher purports, there must be a distinction if the criteria/conditions are only applicable to a single self or individual who interacts with a nonhuman material on the

Internet or applies to two or more individuals interacting with one another in a certain online medium. If one's criteria pertain to the former then, one has to be careful not to conflate certain criteria that may be meant only for and are applicable to the latter and vice versa. To illustrate, if the person's intention in using the Internet is only for information and transaction purposes, for mere efficiency and pragmatic uses, then any form of criteria which pertains to a human to human interaction cannot be justifiably used to evaluate this kind of scenario. In the same way, if one's intention of using the Internet is to build connections and relationships, one cannot simply evaluate this using a criterion from a human to nonhuman interaction.

Continuity vs. discontinuity of the online and offline realms

Another crucial position that has to be considered is the continuity or discontinuity of the online relation to the offline relation. In order for us to understand this distinction, it would be helpful if we elucidate the two senses of the word "online" or the so-called "virtual." According to Gordon Graham (1999, 153-160), the concept of the virtual could mean "a simulacra of the real" or "a reality in itself." By "simulacra of the real," we mean the virtual implies being as good as the real thing. Formally, "a virtual experience of X is in some important and interesting way closer to the actual experience of X." An example of this would be, having some experience of virtual friendship or virtual romance is in some aspects closer to having a real friendship or romantic relations. It allows one to experience certain happiness and satisfaction that is as good as the real experience, though incomplete and not identical. By a "reality in itself," we mean the virtual is not simply an incomplete copy of the real; but is a separate and distinct reality in and of itself. The virtual is "not a semblance of something else, but an alternative to it—an alternative type of reality with properties both similar and dissimilar to that which it is contrasted" (Graham 1999, 159). In short, it is a new metaphysical entity. Hence, the virtual relationship in friendship or romance is as real as offline friendships and romance.

We can borrow from the above distinction what we mean in our own distinction. The "simulacra" sense of the virtual could be applied in what we mean by the continuity of the online relationship and the offline relationship. We can say that when the two are continuous, one can derive aspects of the online relationship from aspects of the offline relationship and vice-versa, "people bring to them stocks of knowledge and systems of relevance generated throughout their unalterable personal histories and experience" (Bakardjieva 2005, 167). In this sense, there is no gap between the offline realm and the online realm. The online realm is part of the offline realm and vice-versa. "The Net is only one of many ways in which the same people may interact. It is not a separate reality" (Wellman and Gulia 1999,334). Although they may not be completely separate, one should not treat the relation of the two as identical.[1] Both have unique characteristics which the other could not possess.[2] On the other hand, the "reality in itself" sense of the virtual could be applied to what we mean by discontinuity, which simply is the opposite of continuity. The two are totally separate and

distinct metaphysical entities. It is important to look into this because if there is continuity between the online and the offline then it can serve as a viable justification in saying that we can judge online relationships using the standards of the offline realm. While, if there is discontinuity, then the two are indeed totally different contexts and we cannot judge the online realm using the standards of the offline realm.

Forms of relationship

By the form of online relationship, I do not simply mean the kind of relationship such as friendship, familial, professional, romantic, etc. In the same way, the kind of social media used is not our concern as well. But what I mean is the mode of how the relationship was established. I find five forms by which online relationships may be established:

> (i) Person A met Person B online and continued their relationship online without meeting offline;
> (ii) Person A met Person B online but continued their relationship offline;
> (ii) Person A met Person B once offline but due to circumstances had to continue their relationship online;
> (iii) Person A has a well-established relationship with Person B offline but due to certain circumstances continued their relationship online; and
> (iv) Person A and Person B simply treat social media as supplement to their established offline relationships.

The five forms above are important if we are to evaluate the conditions given by Dreyfus. For one, all of those are involved in the online realm. If Dreyfus's conditions are not able to take into account one of them, it would render his conditions problematic. Further, if we are able to show that at least one of those forms will reveal the unnecessariness of embodied presence and ultimate commitments, then our claim is correct.

The possibilities

When it comes to the first distinction, it has certain implications in our analysis of Dreyfus. For one, the existential conditions of Dreyfus may not be applicable for a human to nonhuman interaction and are only for a human to human interaction online. We can deem his analysis problematic once he imposes these conditions to the former; that is to demand embodied presence and ultimate commitments from a human who is simply interacting with a nonhuman online. Second, it seems that the context by which Dreyfus's aesthetic stage rests on concepts that are leaning towards the information and transactions use of the human to nonhuman interaction such as information gathering and net surfing. Hence, Dreyfus has to take into consideration the intention of the users themselves in engaging on the Internet because, obviously, not everyone has the goal of identifying one's self to the online realm and replacing one's offline reality, contrary to what Dreyfus claims. There are those who simply use the Internet for information and transaction purposes. Hence, if Dreyfus fails to clarify and consider this, his evaluation of the aesthetic net surfer may be wrong in the first place.

For the second and third distinctions, granting that Dreyfus accepts the view that

there is continuity between offline and online realm, then one can judge the online realm using the standards of the offline, and we should yield the following results:

(a) form (i) would surely be inauthentic for Dreyfus because it is disembodied;
(b) form (ii) is possible to be authentic since the relationship will continue to be embodied;
(c) form (iii) and (iv) would be inauthentic because they opted for a disembodied relation; while
(d) form (v) is possible to be authentic, in fact Dreyfus would approve of this.

Now if we grant that Dreyfus accepts the view of discontinuity, then he would succumb to the objection, where Dreyfus seems to be unfair in imposing a standard which the online realm itself could not attain. By accepting the discontinuity, he also has to accept that it is plausible to make a separate criteria for authenticity for online and offline realm. Hence, forms (i), (iii), and (iv) are possible to be authentic even without the embodied presence at all. While, forms (ii) and (v) are possible to be authentic no matter which view of continuity or discontinuity he accepts because of the presence of embodiment.[3] Table 1 below summarizes the possibilities:

Table 1. A Summary of the Possible Implications of Hubert Dreyfus's Position

	Continuity View	Discontinuity View
(i) You met online and stayed online	INAUTHENTIC	Plausible to make a separate criteria for authenticity
(ii) You met online and continued offline	AUTHENTIC	AUTHENTIC
(iii) You met once offline and continued online	INAUTHENTIC	Plausible to make a separate criteria for authenticity
(iv) You have a well-established offline relationship but opted to stay online	INAUTHENTIC	Plausible to make a separate criteria for authenticity
(v) Online media as mere supplement	AUTHENTIC	AUTHENTIC

Analysis

Now that we have laid out the possibilities, what is indeed Dreyfus's position? When it comes to the distinction between the human to human versus human to non-human online interactions, it is very obvious that his position in the ethical and religious stage is leaning towards the human to human kind of online interaction. In the ethical stage, the person commits oneself to some sort of endeavor, causes, groups, and individuals that he or she finds congruent with one's facts about life, interests, and situation. This stage is where the person engages in some serious and intensive engagements. An example of this can be found in one of the case studies conducted by Bakardjieva (2005) on virtual togetherness. Patrick and Myra, a young couple would engage themselves in a newsgroup that shares their own Albanian identity that deals with highly controversial socio-political issues and topics that are not simply for mere information resource, prattle, or chatting, but as a space for serious intellectual sociability and alliance building.   According to them, "we started

talking about serious politics…Albanian, Eastern European. We were talking—long, long, long messages – political analysis, how this or that could be. No jokes, no stupidities like oh, I find you attractive, nothing like that" (Bakardjieva 2005, 172).

Surely, all of these involve another human on the other side of the online medium to which one will interact to in order to actualize the online advocacy for instance. The only difference of this with the religious stage is that, commitments done at this stage are still revocable; hence, conditional. Also, there is a lack of response to the challenge of embodied presence and risks. One can still commit to an online advocacy even without meeting the other people offline as in the case of Myra and Patrick. On the other hand, commitments on the religious stage are characterized as ultimate, and the person is challenged to transfer his or her learnings, realizations, and the online relation established to something offline or embodied. Hence, at this point we could say that Dreyfus is justified in analyzing the ethical and religious stage in the light of existential standards/conditions derived from a human to human interaction: embodied presence and ultimate commitments.

What is crucial, however, is his analysis of the aesthetic stage. On the one hand, it seems that the kind of interaction that an aesthete in the online world engages in is in the human to nonhuman kind. Dreyfus (2009, 80-81) himself admitted that "information gathering" is the way of life characterized by an endless curiosity, "visiting the latest hot spots" and websites. Yet on the other hand, there is also some sense of human to human online interaction as in claiming that people who engage and jump from one blog, chatroom, forum to another endlessly and carelessly without any commitment also characterizes the aesthetic net surfer. This obvious dichotomy is laudable in his analysis.

However, what is problematic is his analysis per se. First, if the sole intention of the aesthetic net surfer is endless information gathering and is simply curious on a number of websites, applications, soft wares, etc., then one could ask if there is really something existentially wrong in that kind of activity? Some cases that may further illustrate this point (although there already involves some human on the other side of the medium, still the intention is simply for pragmatic/rational purposes), include Martha, a mother to a son who has Attention Deficit Disorder, who would go online to talk to people from different parts of the world to consult about the disorder. There is this thing called ADD forum which provides instant and useful information. According to her, "It wasn't chatting to meet people and get to know people. It was chatting about ideas and exchanging information" (Bakardjieva 2005, 170). In the same way with John, who involves himself with a mailing list called SkyTraveler's Digest where he could consult motor glider hobbyists like him whenever problems arise on technical aspects of equipment. Once a problem is solved the interpersonal communication fades. According to him (see Bakardjieva 2005, 171):

> We don't normally communicate socially—how are you, what's the weather….
> It's usually when a technical question comes up. After that question is solved,
> we may talk a little bit about how old we are, what we did. But once the problem
> is solved this fades away.

As we can observe, the context by which Dreyfus analyzes the aesthetic stage is grounded on something that involves a human to human interaction; that is why in the latter part of his analysis one can sense elements of commitments and embodied presence. But in

the cases above, the person is simply engaging for pragmatic purposes and has no existential import at all. It seems that he is judging a human to nonhuman online interaction using a framework from a human to human online interaction. Indeed, Dreyfus can be justified in analyzing the aesthete who engages in blogs, chatrooms, etc., using a framework grounded on human to human interaction, since it involves two or more humans in the online medium. But then again the question on the purpose of those users comes in. We cannot simply assume that all of those users will ground his or her existence solely on this stage. Some simply engage in those activities as mere pastime, or for experimental purposes as Dreyfus himself admitted. A case in point is Sandy's involvement in particular chatrooms where her primary purpose of involvement is simply for meeting new people and having a goodtime. According to Sandy (see Bakardjieva 2005, 174-75):

> I was drawn to the rooms that were like the parent zone, health zone and things like that, just general interest…. I would talk to people in there and then I met this guy who lives in Ontario and his wife and they had a room called the Fun Factory. It was about 10 of us. We just hang out there, we went in there and just chatted about life. All kind of fun things – we goofed around, told jokes, stories, whatever. The same ten people…. In the room it was mostly goofing around, telling cracking jokes. And also there was always stuff going on in the background in private conversations and then you'd have the public room. And often you would have three or four private conversations going at the same time as the room.

None of those people and Sandy admitted that they would spend the rest of their lives in this kind of existence. Hence, one cannot simply generalize that the aesthetic net-surfer's activity will be the be all and end all of his or her online existence as Dreyfus would claim.

On the other hand, when it comes to the distinction on continuity versus discontinuity as well as the forms of relationship, in his appropriation of the Kierkegaardian modes of existence, Dreyfus treats the aesthetic stage online as no continuity at all with the offline realm which leads the person to simply be experimental, curious, and jump from one online relation to another without worrying about the offline self and relationships. Dreyfus treats chatrooms and blogs as examples and would fall under form (i) only. Now if this is the case, then Dreyfus is wrong in treating the aesthetic stage as simply inauthentic, since he accepts that at this stage there is a discontinuity between the offline and online; hence, there can be a separate criteria for online authenticity. It is plausible that given another set of criteria, the online realm at this stage could be authentic.

Dreyfus's position then changes at the ethical stage; he now treats persons and relationships online as having continuity with the offline realm. It is because commitments to persons and groups are a product of aspects that are indeed relevant to facts about one's life-situation in the offline world. Hence, at this stage form (i) simply becomes a starting point of building relationships but cannot remain at that, and hence he treats it as inauthentic. His ethical stage is possible to be best exemplified by forms (ii) and (v) where the online realm is transformed into an offline one. A concrete case that will illustrate this is that of Theodore. Compared to those of Patrick and Myra earlier where their serious engagements remained online, Theodore did not. Their online political discussion went beyond the online and started to organize an actual collective action going beyond mere discussions and

sense-making of events/issues. According to him, "individuals on the list started talking about this thing and said we should do something about it and so started as a virtual organization and it transformed itself…" (Bakardjieva 2005, 173). It transformed itself into an embodied common cause for Ethiopian refugees around the world. On the other hand, forms (iii) and (iv) would be inauthentic for Dreyfus because the relation simply continued and is replaced online.

Finally, Dreyfus treats the religious stage as a stage of continuity between online and offline, since this is the stage of ultimate commitments which would involve one's whole life and being. At this stage, form (i) is totally unacceptable and inauthentic for Dreyfus, while forms (ii) and (v) are possible to be authentic. While forms (iii) and (iv) would still be inauthentic because they continued online.

The Case of Forms (i), (iii), and (iv)

As one may notice, there is something peculiar in treating forms (i), (iii) and (iv) as inauthentic just because of the absence of embodied presence as they continue their relationship online. The difference of form (i) from forms (iii) and (iv) is that the relationship began and remained online, while forms (iii) and (iv) began offline and then continued online. The only difference of forms (iii) and (iv) is the time period of the offline realm. For form (iii) met once, while form (iv) has a well-established offline relationship. What is interesting here is form (i) since this is what Dreyfus is totally against and if we are able to show that it is possible for it to be authentic even in some aspects, then we can conclude that Dreyfus is wrong. Another interesting case is form (iv) because it already involves a long time, well-established offline relationship and it would be crucial on how Dreyfus would evaluate this since there is a danger for him to take for granted this well-established relation in saying that it becomes inauthentic just because it continued online. Now, form (iii) could be set-aside since this case does not happen often as much as forms (i) and (iv) does.

Let us show a concrete case to illustrate. A good case to illustrate form (i) is the case of Ellen who was diagnosed with a rare chronic disease that caused her to be immobile and homebound. Her primary intention of going online is for a support group that will provide valuable information about her situation and a loving help for the misery that she is experiencing. According to Ellen (see Bakardjieva 2005, 177):

> …to discover that thousands of people are going through exactly the same incredible experience and nobody in their family understands, their husbands and wives don't understand, the doctor doesn't believe them and they have this terrible difficulty functioning. And yet, there is this tremendously strong community of people who have never met and probably will never meet but who are so loyal to each other and have such as strong support because it is a lifeline for all of us.

Ellen further describes her online group with "loyalty, high tolerance for 'dumping,' safety, family-like atmosphere, compassion" that has concrete effects on her, such as regaining "a lot of confidence, getting my life in proportion again, getting my sense of self,

feeling much less a failure." Lastly, she considers the information that she gets with this group as more of a dynamic learning experience rather than a static prescription given by doctors. As Ellen (see Bakardjieva 2005, 177) continues:

> I learnt so much from these people who had had the disease for years. I had tried to get hold of some medical information. But getting online is different because there, for the first time, you get information from people who have trodden this path already!

Now in the context of Dreyfus's conditions, surely he would not approve of this kind of relationship because everything just happened in an online realm. Further, the way he defines ultimate commitments would not allow for this kind of online interaction. In fact, none of its members actually made any commitment at all, as compared to the cases of Patrick, Myra, and Theodore above. What they created is simply a relatively stable support group communicating regularly and responsible for the welfare of each members. But we may ask, can this scenario automatically be deemed as inauthentic, as Dreyfus would have evaluated it? While it is true that there were none of those ultimate commitments and embodied presence that Dreyfus would demand, can we automatically treat the sense of understanding, support, loyalty, compassion, sharing, and learning that constitute their online community as inauthentic? Hence, such online community must be left behind if they want to make their actual embodied lives meaningful?Note that it is the very problematic situation of their embodied lives that motivated those individuals to create new meaning, and experience loving support from an online realm. Despite their diversities in religion, profession, nationality, and families, they were able to enter into a shared and dialogical space. It seems that Dreyfus is missing the other side of this online reality which does not constitute the failure of his aesthetic and ethical net surfer.

For form (iv), suppose that a single parent, who is a breadwinner, and has a very close and well-established relationship with his or her children, due to financial problems has to go abroad to work. From then on, the only form of communication where they can share their thoughts, experiences, and emotions is through video calling. Again, Dreyfus would treat this kind of relationship as inauthentic because of the absence of embodied presence. The only difference is that there is already a well-established relationship, and that there is no obvious ultimate commitment involved. But the question is, would this make the parent-children relationship automatically inauthentic? It seems that Dreyfus would be neglecting the well-established and authentic relationship of the parent and the children before they went into a "video-calling-relationship." By Dreyfus's evaluation, he would treat any immigrant who would interact with their family through video calling as simply inauthentic. I think he has to consider the possibility of authenticity being transferred from a well-established relationship offline to an online one.

There are obviously authentic well-established relationships that do not involve ultimate commitments. Obvious examples are school and organization work. Indeed commitment is integral to its success but it does not have to be ultimate to say that we

have a good and fulfilling relationship. Young romantic relationships could count as well. There may be no ultimate commitments yet, but could we treat their relationship as already inauthentic? In addition, is not that the possibility of revoking one's commitment as a product of a close scrutiny and reflection, a contribution to authenticity? What if in staying to a certain commitment would lead to the destruction of the self and others, would this not lead to inauthenticity?

Possible Objections to this critique

One possible objection to this paper pertains to the distinction between the continuity and discontinuity of online and offline relationships. Why, for instance, did I deal with continuity and discontinuity and not the philosophical issue of identity which has been a traditional debate and a new one with respect to online identity. My reply is that I find the issues of identity to rest on premises of continuity or discontinuity of online and offline realms. Hence, if I am able to settle certain aspects of the continuity or discontinuity, say, by demonstrating that the fundamental concepts of identity rests on continuity or discontinuity and vice-versa, then in one way or another I have settled some aspects and issues regarding online identity. Moreover, nothing will change on the possibilities that we have laid out earlier if I utilize online identity as the framework.

Another possible objection to this paper is in claiming that a separate criteria for authenticity is possible in an online realm. Given discontinuity, then a possible implication is to commit to the position of having a scenario where one's relationship is inauthentic offline while authentic online, and vice-versa. This, however, can be counter-intuitive on how human relationships are and should be in the first place, which renders the scenario inauthentic. My reply consists in clarifying that though there can be a separate criteria for authenticity of online relationships, it does not mean that the online relationship shall be totally isolated from the offline one. It is the criteria that are separate, but the two realms cannot be separated at all because we cannot deny that human existence is basically embodied. Embodied humanity exists even without the online realm. For the scenario to be authentic, the fruits of one's authentic online relationship should have positive and changing effects into one's own embodied relationship, and vice versa. One should be able to transfer the authenticity online into one's embodied relations, and vice versa. That I shall regard as one of the measures for the authenticity of an offline-online scenario.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion, I have demonstrated that, indeed, Dreyfus's conditions of embodied presence and ultimate commitments are not necessary for the authenticity of online relationships. In at least two cases, in forms (i) and (iv), we have shown that we can have an authentic relationship online even without the embodied presence and ultimate commitments.

NOTES

1. It is important to note that this is different from the issue of personal identity. In

personal identity, one is looking for something that which one could identify oneself with given the changes (emotional, physical, psychological, etc.) brought about by time. If applied to social media, one could ask if the online self is the same with the offline self. If the answer is positive; then, we could identify our online self with our offline self. But in our case, we are not asking if they are one and the same, we are simply inquiring if some aspects of the offline and the online are continuous.

2. Another way of understanding the continuity of the offline and online realms is by borrowing some ideas from the philosophy of mind, specifically those of property dualism or realist physicalism. Property dualism claims that mental states are higher-level physical states. Mental states are simply physical substances that have a property of being immaterial. Mental states and physical states are not distinct substances. Mental states are physical states but of a higher-level due to the interaction of lower-level physical states such as the body or the brain. In applying these ideas to our discussion, the online realm is simply the extension of the offline realm with the former having the property of being online/virtual. The online realm is a higher-level kind of an offline realm, but the two are not distinct or separate entities.

3. Note that in our analysis above, I used the phrase "possible to be authentic" because Dreyfus himself is not saying that a relationship becomes automatically authentic when it is embodied; more so, because ultimate commitments might not be present, among others. What he is simply saying is that in so far as his Kierkegaardian analysis is concerned, it is only in an embodied relation where authenticity resides.

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