

On "Authentic," etc.

In *The Oxford Universal Dictionary* (3d ed; 1955), the adjective "authentic" is defined as having nine meanings, four of which (1, 2, 4, and 7) are judged obsolete, and the last two of which (8a and b) are said to have to do respectively with a mode of church music and a musical cadence. The first seven meanings are: (1) of authority, authoritative; entitled to obedience or respect; (2) legally valid; of persons, legally or duly qualified; (3) entitled to belief, as being in accordance with, or as stating fact; reliable, trustworthy, of established credit; (4) original, first-hand (opposed to copied); (5) real, actual, genuine (opposed to pretended); (6) really proceeding from its reputed source or author; genuine (opposed to counterfeit, forged, etc.); (7) own, proper. The third meaning is identified as "the prevailing sense." And the substantive, "authenticity," defined separately simply as "the quality of being authentic," is said to have four senses: (1) as being authoritative or duly authorized; (2) as being true in substance; (3) as being genuine; genuineness; and (4) as being real, actual; reality.

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1975) gives six meanings of "authentic." The first four are: (1) authoritative (judged obsolete); (2) worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to fact or reality; trustworthy; (3a) not imaginary, false, or imitation; (3b) corresponding to an original so as to reproduce essential features. The fifth and sixth meanings (numbered 4a and b) are again technical uses having to do with a mode of church music and a musical cadence. The synonyms of "authentic" are given as "genuine," "veritable," "bona fide," and "the shared meaning element" of all four terms is said to be, "being actually and precisely what is claimed." "Authentic," then, is singled out as stressing "fidelity to actuality and fact" and possibly implying "authority or trustworthiness in determining this relationship," as in the expression, "confirmed both by legend and *authentic record*." "Spurious" is said to be the antonym, while "authentically" and "authenticity," though mentioned, are not defined.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (1976) gives five meanings of "authentic": (1a) worthy of trust, reliance, or belief, as in "authentic records";

(1b) having an undisputed origin; genuine; (2) executed with due process of law, as in "an authentic deed"; (3a) designating a medieval mode of music having a range from its final tone to the octave above it; and (3b) designating a musical cadence with the dominant chord immediately preceding the tonic chord. Synonyms are given elsewhere in the entry on "real" (along with "actual," "true," "concrete," "existent," "genuine," "tangible," and "veritable"), and "authentic" is said to imply "acceptance of historical or attributable reliability rather than visible proof" (*sic!*). "Authenticity" is defined in a separate entry as meaning the condition or quality of being authentic, trustworthy, or genuine.

Finally, according to the *Oxford American Dictionary* on my Mac OS 10 (10.4.7) word processor, "authentic" has five meanings: (1) genuine and original, as opposed to something that is a fake or reproduction; (2) shown to be true and trustworthy; (3) legally valid because all necessary procedures have been followed correctly; (4) performed in the style current at the time of composition, and on instruments similar to those of the time; (5) used to describe church music, such as Gregorian chant, that has an upward range from the keynote of the scale. The synonyms given are "genuine," "valid," and "bona fide," while "fake" is said to be the antonym. "Authenticity" is defined as having two meanings: (1) the genuineness or truth of something; and (2) the legal validity or correctness of a legal document.

It seems clear from the above that my uses of "authentic" and its cognates over the years have all been entirely proper. I find it particularly interesting that my use of the term as, in effect, synonymous with "realistic," in the sense of "in keeping with, or authorized by, things as they really are," closely conforms to standard usage. Also of interest in the same connection are (1) the synonyms, especially "real," "true," and "bona fide"; (2) what the one dictionary gives as their "shared meaning element," i.e., "being actually and precisely what is claimed"; and (3) what it says about "authentic" stressing "fidelity to actuality and fact" and possibly implying "authority or trustworthiness in determining this relationship."

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