INDIVIDUALITY AND SHAREABILITY:
AN EXPLORATION TO THE NISHIDA KITARO'S ACCOUNT OF THE ABSOLUTE NEGATION-QUA-AFFIRMATION

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ABSTRACT

The internal justification of the individuality leads us to a tendency of a solipsistic self. This justification lacks a consideration to include external agent or the others as a part of recognition of the individuality of the self. The analytical approach argues that the reference of the external agent in utterance realizes the individuality of the speaking subject. This viewpoint of the significance of the external agent should be equipped with another approach. Nishida's account of the principle of the absolute negation qua affirmation brings forth the argument that the individuality of the self realizes the nature of interconnectivity with the others. This interconnectivity then marks the shareability of

individuals. This article yearns for a social system that allows the safeguarding of the individual and at once the upgrading of dialogical interactions between individuals for the benefit of ingenious construction of the world of reality.

Keywords:
•*internal justification* •*solipsistic self* •*individuality* •*shareability* •*absolute negation qua affirmation* •*shareability of the self* •*continuity of discontinuity* •*public place* •*dialogical interactions*

Introduction

It is almost taken for granted that individuality is considered a foundation of modern ontology. Individuality I consider here reveals a conception of the self as the unified and irreducible subject. Following Descartes, Kant since the era of Enlightenment, Modern Philosophy had already shared the significance of individuality to cultural, social, legal and political systems. Laws of privacy, the declaration of human rights, democracy, and market economy are some examples of how the modern system turns a belief in individuality into the system of individuality.

The conviction of individuality, however, is not without a tendency to put individuality in the extreme position. This tendency attempts to consider the individuality as a closed representation of the self. This extreme position believes that *only* the internal justification of truth and existence through the thinking capacity asserts the existence of the self. This claim could be regarded as the worldview of solipsistic self. The emergence of the solipsistic self as the complete realization of the selfhood then emerges as a problem not only on the level of individual relationships but also on that of social interactions.

Regarding this problem, an appreciation of individuality can be considered a viewpoint offered as an alternative approach to an interpretation of the self. In this article I refer to Nishida Kitaro (1870 – 1945), a Japanese philosopher of Kyoto School of philosophy, whose Zen Buddhism viewpoint analyzes and appreciates the Western account of individuality. This paper will develop his argument of the principle of absolute negation qua affirmation[1] which implies the idea of shareability as

an alternative approach of being. By shareability I mean that the self-determined selfhood does not only appear as an 'open system' but also as an interactive relationship with the other. In this sense the self is unique due to its nature of sharing.

Therefore, I construct this paper in two parts. The first part explains a question of individuality interpreted from the Cartesian account of the thinking subject, or 'I think'. In this exploration this paper highlights the argument that the thinking self is clearly bounded or individual lead to the problem of solipsistic self, or the individual whose assertion of existence relies on its own judgment or belief and rejects a relation with the other. Meanwhile, if one only insists on the individuality of the self, then one will find out a paradox that the existence thinking subject includes necessarily relationship with the Absolute Other in order to determine its existence.

This highlight leads us to the second part which develops Nishida Kitaro's formulation of the mutual determination of individual based on the principle of 'the absolute negation-qua-affirmation'. His epistemological formulation considers the paradox of the self as the nature of shareability of the self. This argument of shareability does not wipe out the individuality of the self. Both are complement to each other.

The Problem of Solipsistic Self

Many philosophers and philosophical mainstreams have analyzed and debated over the topic of individuality of selfhood, especially since Decartes and the modern philosophy. One of these mainstreams is the analytical approach of the 'I' as the speaking subject (who is also thinking). This idea implies in the proposition of '*cogito*' which reveals the argument of the 'speaking subject as the self-determined subject. The capacity of speaking indicates a representation of thinking subject in order to *know* its existence. 'To know' in this sense also embodies a cognition that '*I am*'. This proposition asserts the certainty that 'I exist'. This also indicates a causal relation between thinking and existence of the self. One could recognize this causal relation as to guarantee the self-determination of subject. Once a thinking subject obtains her self determination by means of an utterance then the subject *recognizes* the self as the singular and bounded entity. This rational justification is significant due to it also guarantees the *unity* of the self as the individual.

At the time the individuality is obtained the subject also acquires the precondition of sameness. It means that the self stays unchangeable regardless flows of time and a position in space. The self has its permanent side which is independent from external influences like temporal and spatial movement. In other words, the Cartesian proposition '*I am, I exist*'[2] implies that such an utterance implies a continuation that the speaking subject is *the same with* the self-determination of subject.

To explain this, take an example of this proposition '*I am a student*'. This logical proposition contains not only a speaking subject 'I' as it is indicated in the word 'I', but also a predicate '*(am) a student*'. One can analyze the predicate in two forms: a physical representation of the predicate and the mental one[3]. Both are associated with the speaking subject. The first form of predicate embodies a physical appearance of subject which according to Cartesian category attributes to change in temporal and spatial context.

Meanwhile, the second form of predicate points out a mental attribution of '*being a student*'. This consciousness characterizes an identification of the speaking subject, 'I', to itself. Here the identification means that the subject and itself are '*the very same (thing) person*'[4]. Moreover, such identification also justifies that the subject *experiences* an individualization of her identity. Thus, the mental attribution in this utterance guarantees the individualization of a thinking subject thence such individualization establishes the permanent identity of such subject. One can suggest that the consciousness of individualization makes the subject the individual. '*Being a student*' does not only attribute one's permanent status but also the individualization of the speaker as *the student*. The reasonable justification of true person as the student signifies the awareness that the speaking subject is distinguished from the others students as *the individual*.

This semantic analysis of a speech act clearly implies that as *being the individual* the speaking subject occupies a specific status which is impenetrable by an intervention of others. This occupation of a specific status posits the self-determination of the subject 'I". One would have a vain existence unless one asserted this self-determination. In this sense the self-determined subject is also a required condition to individuality of the subject 'I'. In Ricoeur's analysis this self-determination of the subject implies the "*condition of the neutralization of the self*". This neutralization of the self necessarily asserts that "*the possession of the body by someone or by each one poses the enigma of an untransferable property...*"[5]

Now the individualization of the self by means of semantic analysis of the speech act of speaking subject 'I' conceives the true self-determined of the subject. This rational justification implies a belief that the individuality is determined by the subject alone. In this sense this image of the individuality of subject implies a solipsistic view of the self.

Nevertheless if one perceives this conception from the other side of the coin, the image will be different. One can refer to Nietzsche's satirical review of the rational justification of the individuality of the self. In his essay "On Truth and Lies in a nonmoral sense" (1873), Nietzsche argues for the idea that *"The intellect as a means of preserving the individuals, develops its principal strengths in dissimulation, for this is the means by which weaker, less robust individuals preserves themselves,..."*.[6] Nietzsche considers that this 'dissimulation' contains *"... deception, flattery, lying and cheating, talking behind the backs of others, keeping up appearances, living in borrowed splendor, donning masks, the shroud of convention, playacting before others and before oneself ...."*[7] This satirical critique implies that the intellectual justification only hides the weak traits of the self and it simply appears as a self-defense mechanism. This is the reason one could concurs with Nietzsche's argument that the merely internal justification of the individual is simply "illusion and dream images".

This satirical conception is part of the critical questions about the image of solipsistic self. Ricoeur, for instance, has indicated that the underlying reason of the speaking subject 'I' to assert its self-determination 'borrows' or 'relies on' the authority of the absolute Self or God for the sake of the certainty of this self-determination. The absolute Self is the *ratio essendi* and *ordo essendi* for the cogito so that the speaking subject has a reason or *ratio cognoscendi* and *ordo cognoscendi* for explaining the individuality of itself.[8]

The reliance on the external agent which embodies the absoluteness reveals that individuality is nothing unless the speaking subject involves in an ontological interaction. The self gains the individuality not simply by means of asserting the internal sameness between the speaking subject 'I' and the consciousness of being the individual. The individuality is guaranteed then by the correlation of the external absolute agent. In other words, the acknowledgment of individuality is not derived from internal reference as if it were as such only by referring to the transcendental conception of the Self.

This is the reason that Ricoeur also argues for the reliability of the self to the other in order to justify its individuality. His semantic analysis indicates that the speaking subject ascribes its utterance to 'someone' that is, oneself or the Self. This external agent realizes the *ratio essendi* for the capability of *cognoscendi* of the speaking subject. Ricoeur continues with the argument that "*there is no self alone at the start; .... I cannot speak meaningfully of my thoughts unless I am able at the same time to ascribe them potentially to someone else*".[9] It means that the ascription of my thought to someone or something, or 'The transcendental Self', makes myself as an individual comprehensible. This interconnectivity between the subject 'I' and the other(s) also contributes to the self-determination of the self.

The semantic analysis and interpretation of the speaking subject 'I' lead us to think of the nature of shareability of the self besides that of individuality. Ricoeur suggests this when he interprets the ascription of the speaking subject 'I' to someone else. He argues that one should regard the consciousness of both an experience of subject through her utterance and an observation to someone's speech act as two complementary references. In this sense, the speaking 'I" reciprocally correlates with 'you' as the other self.[10]

This idea of correlating the self-reflexivity and the idea of otherness is challenging insofar as one could provides a thinking foundation on which one can explore the interconnectivity of subjects. This exploration of thinking foundation, according to Ricoeur should take into account the opposition of 'I' against 'you' and simultaneously equip it with another approach which transform the opposition of 'I – you' into a shareable interaction.[11]

For this purpose, I now am ready to refer to Nishida's argument which posits a thinking principle which is named 'the absolute negation qua affirmation'. This thinking principle takes into account the self determination of the individual and the nature of shareability of I and you.

An Exploration of the Shareability of the Self

How can one understand that the self-determination of individual is acquired not only through the internal justification of the self as *the individual*? This question leads us to Nishida's interpretation, which applies his logical principle for the phenomena of the speaking subject 'I' and the others, Thou, you, or things. His dynamic-circular approach[12] starts with

the experiential realm of these subjects whose presences on that field are never regarded as the solipsistic persons respectively, but as the interconnecting agents. He underlines that this experiential subject 'I' does not detach from interconnectivity with the 'rational subject 'I'. This is the reason that Nishida considers a condition of temporal and spatial movement as the indispensable categories of experiential realm.

Nishida follows the arguments that our apprehension of this experiential realm conceives of a categorization of the temporal and spatial conditions, or the social and historical world. The temporal condition comprises of the self of past, present and future. The spatial conditions are the external space, the target or objective world of our understanding, and the internal one, the subjective inclination to think or to know an intended object. The Western philosophers consider these conditions, respectively or collectively as categories of thinking. These categories logically appear in opposite or contradictory pairs.

Nevertheless, Nishida argues against the argument which puts these categories in opposition or contradiction. He considers these binary pairs cannot be separated as if one could conclude its existence apart from the other. The determination of the self, either as subject or object, either internal or external, necessarily includes the interconnectivity with the other.

Nishida considers this interconnectivity as the '*continuity of discontinuity*'[13]. This metaphor signifies an essential interaction between ontological entities whatever their respective positions. Moreover, he views that the individualization of the selves is comprehensible on the virtual field or place of or medium, or '*basho*' in Zen Buddhism's term, which emerges as intersections of these categories of experiential realm. This 'place' or 'field' is more like virtual than physical appearance of 'space'. In this virtual place of experiential interaction, one can indicate an interconnectivity between entities such as subject-objects, I-Thou, even time-space[14]. On this virtual place, too, the selves emerge as the individuals respectively.

How can this 'virtual place' of intersection between experiential categories explain the self-determination of subject through the interconnectivity one with the others, I – Thou? Nishida's account of the temporal movement, for example, explains that the individuality of the self is derived from the interaction of the self of yesterday and that of today. The 'I' of yesterday is defined by that of today and vice versa. Besides the identity

of subject in the past time, Zen Buddhism's conception of time also takes into account the 'today' time which embodies a presentation of the self here and now. This presentation is infinite and it is metaphorically depicted as a circular extension of time according to Zen Buddhist worldview. In this context, the self remains in the infinite present as the individual too.

The linear movement from the past to the present uncovers the change or the progression of the self while the circular present reveals the permanent or the continuity of the self. The merely changing and progressive self does not depict the self determination of subject and so does the permanent one. Nishida considers that within the virtual 'place' (basho) the intersection of the past and present the subjects are actualized.

Along with the temporal context, the existence of the self concludes within the intersection of the external space or the realm of objects. As the external side of spatial context, this world is neither determined by a subjective intervention, nor does it appear as the sole source to define the existence of subject. Rather, the world of object becomes the target of subject's apprehension of reality or the teleological direction of our knowing and thinking.[15]

Besides the external space, the second type of spatial context is implied in Nishida's argument of 'desire' and 'intuition' as the part of our inclination towards the intended object. In this sense, one can consider them as the internal space whose function is to define the world as it is intended (*noema*)[16]. The internal space emerges from intentional actions of the subject (*noesis*) in response to the world of object.

The explanation of the intersection of temporal and spatial categories of experiential realm leads us to Nishida's logical principle whose function is to yield the comprehension of the nature of interconnectivity embodied by the subject. For this purpose, one should not skip Nishida's conception of the relation of 'I - Thou'. The former metaphorically signify the thinking or knowing subject (*noesis*), while the latter metaphorically represents the external agent whose presence necessarily interacts with the former. This external agent can represent the 'I' of yesterday, intended objects of thinking (*noema*), social or historical worlds, the universal or simply 'the thing'[17]. In other words, the relation I – Thou metaphorically signifies the intersection of subjective consciousness with the intended entities of understanding through interconnectivity.

The 'I' does not merely communicate with 'Thou' in this sense. The interaction indicates that 'I' is the determination of the existence of Thou

and vice versa. This mutual determination asserts the existence of the agents as the individual. In this sense, the subject 'I' negates the other in order to affirm its existence. The merely presentation of 'I' is not sufficient to prove that the 'I' exists. It has to negate itself so that it can be regarded as the self from the apprehension of the other or 'Thou'. The first negation only signifies a distinction of 'I' against 'Thou', yet this distinction does not confirm that 'I' necessarily exists. The mere existence of I is meaningless or empty. It becomes meaningful then when the second negation occurs. The other apprehension of the other is not merely a viewpoint. Rather 'Thou' in this sense necessarily determines that 'I' exists. This is why Nishida says 'the individual is only determined only relative to other individuals'[18]. This double negation also applies for 'Thou' as the other(s). The double negation according to Nishida indicates the absolute negation. This absolute negation does not eliminate the 'I' and 'Thou' and retain one of them. Rather, this absolute negation affirms that both entities exist. This way of thinking then becomes the principle of 'the absolute negation-qua-affirmation'. This principle transforms the individuality into 'the relative' (in Nishida's term), or in my term, the shareable[19].

To the extent of the relativity or shareability of the individual one should refer to Nishida's account of action and life otherwise the principle of absolute negation-qua-affirmation is considered merely as a tautological exchange ('or dependant causation'[20]) in our mind. Nishida views the mutual determination of the individuals more as *an action* than a contemplation or thinking on the virtual medium of intersection or '*basho*'. According to Nishida, an intention of subject towards the object or the other(s) constitutes an involvement of the others or 'a submersion of a subject in the object'[21]. This mutual determination is the reason Nishida asserts, "For if not, there is no objective world relative to individual"[22]. Thus, the action in Nishida's account is not a derivation of thinking as it is thought in the Western philosophy. *Action is thinking* which *in itself* realizes the desire to apprehend an object.

One also should consider the principle of absolute negation qua affirmation neither in dualistic conception of existence, nor in the dialectical thinking. The dualistic or dialectical thought employs the contest of the particular (thesis vis-à-vis antithesis) in order to deductively yield the unconditioned agent or the universal. Nishida does not follow this thinking mode. He argues that the universal is merely an ultimate representation of an individual in itself. In this sense, the deductive

inference from the dialectical thinking of I – Thou only produces another unresolved opposition or contradiction between individuals or the universal against the particulars. Moreover, according to Nishida, one can find out a contradiction between universals as if there were the universal of universals.[23]

This is why one should go beyond the opposition or contradiction of 'I – Thou' in order to explain the mutual determination of the self through the principle of absolute negation qua affirmation. It is indispensable to consider a third feature besides the two others: 'I – Thou'. There should be a 'mediating activity' in dialectical thought which avoids the elimination of one entity and keeps the other, since 'there can be no wholly singular life'[24]. Moreover, this mediating activity allows an act of creativity which preserves and develops the existence of 'I – Thou'.

This third feature in Nishida's term is pertinent to the '*public place/field*' (basho), out of which 'the mutual determination of two things', I – Thou is actualized. This is the 'virtual place of intersection' about which I have explored above. Thus, the third feature as the virtual place of intersection should be regarded as the mediating activity on which the individuals gain its self determination.[25]

The existence of the third feature in this sense echoes a characteristic in Zen Buddhist worldview[26]. This worldview depicts three elements of existence as the triadic structure. The third element in Nishida's account becomes the 'virtual place'of intersection which is also pertinent to nothingness. It is the third element that engenders a determination of 'I' as 'I' and 'Thou' as 'Thou'. This place from its depth realizes the interconnectivity between 'I – Thou' so that these two features experience their meaningful existence. Regarding this intermediary nature in the experiential realm, one should not regard this determining 'place' as an abstraction from the dialectical thinking. Instead this determining place realizes the context of social and history, which both of them respectively or together appears as the virtual intersection of individuals, or that of time and space. In this case the opposition or contradiction between 'I and Thou', time and space remains. They do not appear in order to eliminate each other; rather, within in this virtual intersection they serve as a preservation of each other, and actualize the creative extension out of the relationship in form of a 'new creation'[27].

This is the significance of the idea of shareability between individuals. The nature of shareability realizes that there is a true existence out there.

That external existence can articulates their respective 'minds', 'voices', 'interests' or any means of expressions. A dialogical interaction between the self and the external existences realizes the experience that individuals are *naturally* interconnected(-ing).

Concluding: Individuality and Shareability

So far I have presented my argument that the insistence of individuality based on merely internal justification leads us to the problem of solipsistic self. The problem arises when the assertion of personal existence only relies on the internal justification to thinking capability. This way of assertion turns into a belief that a justification of truth only comes out of the internal justification. In other world, the solipsistic self put the individuality of subject impenetrable by external knowledge. Moreover it disregards any external references as part of this internal belief of truth. This conception then entails rejection of the others.

Meanwhile, the analytic and semantic approaches clearly indicate the external reference of the other (as someone or something) in the realization of individuality in utterance. These approaches still retain the authority of subject in order to confirm its individuality against any external agent of utterance since Aristotelian philosophical analysis.[28]

One can refer to another approach which allows the others as something true and indispensable. This is what Nishida tries to prove in front of his readers who are from the west and who are educated in the framework of Western philosophical view. Nishida offers an argument that justification of individuality indispensably includes the others through the interconnectivity between subject – object, or 'I – Thou'. This individuality implies the nature of shareability of the self in such intermediary action. Moreover the interconnectivity itself expresses an active involvement of the self in socio-historical context. On this domain, the virtual 'place' of intersection between selves determines not only the individuality of the self but also confirms the dialogical interaction. In this sense, this interaction does not only echoes moral intention of individual towards other or merely capacity of communication. This also realizes that the existence of oneself is the inseparable part of the others and vice versa.

Regarding this nature of individuality and shareability of the self one can start with an exploration of an adequate social system. Such a system allows the preservation of the individual and simultaneously the

enhancement of dialogical interactions between individuals for the sake of the creative construction of the world of reality.

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Endnotes:

[1] See Nishida 1970, 1987; cf. Dilworth 1987: the introduction chapter of Nishida 1987; 1979:249-267.

[2] See Descartes' 'Second Meditation' in 1996:17, cf. Ricoeur 1992:6-7.

[3] Cf. Ricoeur 1992:33f.

[4] Cf. Ricoeur 1992:36.

[5] Both quotations see Ricoeur 1992:37.

[6] Nietzsche 2010:20.

[7] Idem

[8] Ricoeur 1992:8.

[9] Ricoeur 1992:38. Due to the purpose of this topic, I suggest readers to refer more to the semantic approach of the problem of cogito and the hermeneutics of the self in this Ricoeur's book.

[10] Ricoeur 1992:39. *"... we have to acquire simultaneously the idea of reflexivity and the idea of otherness, in order to pass from a weak correlation between someone and anyone else, which is too easily assumable, to a strong correlation between belonging the self, in the sense of mine and belonging to another, in the sense of yours"*

[11] Idem Ricoeur writes *"In this sense, if a purely referential approach in which the person is treated as a basic particular is to be completed by another approach, it cannot be thereby abolished but will be preserved in this very surpassing."*

[12] If one reads Nishida's works especially the publication to which I refer, one will find out the repetition of some 'formulas' or ideas, some in somewhat consistent formulations, and in modified ones. I would like to call his style as a dynamic-circular expression rather than a tautological mode or merely a circular style. His expanding mode of writing attempts to delineate the interconnectivity of binary conception which is usually depicted in opposition or contradiction between two different concepts, as one is familiar with the modern (Western) philosophy. A commentary of his style as a circular style is indicated in Dilworth 1979:261

[13] Nishida 1970:43.

[14] Nishida 1987; cf. Dilworth 1987:15-16: Nishida develops this idea by positing 'the place of nothingness' which is considered as teleological place where the intersection of subject-object gains the determination of meaning existence. Cf. also Dilworth 1979:253-254, 259.

[15] Nishida 1970:60. In my opinion it is comparable with the phenomenology's term of 'noema' or 'an object as it is meant', yet it is different from Kant's '*Das Ding an sich*' or '*noumenon*'.

[16] Nishida 1970:61.

[17] See Nishida 1970:48, 57; I also develop the identification of Thou from the commentary of Nishida by Dilworth 1979:258.

[18]   Nishida 1970:49.

[19]   Nishida 1970:44; in another works 1987:69 Nishida writes *"As I have often written, the absolute is not merely non-relative. For it contains absolute negation within itself. Therefore the relative which stands in relation to the absolute is not merely part of the absolute or a lesser version it. If it were, the absolute would indeed be non-relative but it would no longer be the absolute, either. A true absolute exists in that it returns to itself in the form of relative."*

[20]   This term is coined by Dilworth 1979:265.

[21]   Cf. Dilworth 1979:265 *"... the self as a free person paradoxically finds itself through submerging in itself in objectivity, as in the case of aesthetic creation."*

[22]   Nishida 1970:52.

[23]   Nishida 1970:48.

[24]   Nishida 1970:53

[25]   The topic of the determining 'place' of the interconnecting I – Thou is spread in Nishida's work. For example see in 1979:55, 57, 64, 67, 84, etc.

[26]   One can read the chapter 3 of the second part of Nishida book (1970) for further explanation of the characteristics of worldview. Cf. my exploration of some Asian traditions of wisdom. These wisdoms depict a constellation of triadic structure of existence which metaphorically put 'I – Thou – the Universe' as complementary to each other in Djunatan 2010; 2011:chapts. 3 & 6.

[27]   Nishida 1970:57, 64, 66, 69, 79 cf. Dilworth 1979:264-265.

[28]   See Nishida's conception of the worldview of the Western Culture in 1970 part II chapter 3; 1987; Dilworth 1979:260f.

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