

Type the number of the topic AND the name of the author of the quotation here: #4, Tetsuro Watsuji

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Theme: Environment is the moment that objectifies human existence; but by so doing, the human understands him/herself. We can call it self-discovery through one's environment.

1. Introduction

Among the many realms of philosophy, the problem of the self was the main concern for philosophers through times. Even though Albert Camus argued the absurdity of human life, we cannot live fully as humans without the consciousness of self; otherwise we would end up as *das man*, as Heidegger criticized in his writing. In this context, the investigation of the self, which I'm going to conduct in this essay, is meaningful.

Tetsuro Watsuji claimed that we can discover our self through our environment. This claim seems to be innovative (I will explain later why this idea can be innovative). It is really worth considering deeply. Therefore, in this essay, I will first examine the preceding argument about the problems of self, and then find the reason to support Watsuji's claim, and finally show you a completely different point of view from the conventional one in regard to self and identity.

And in this essay I will use these words in the following meanings.

Identity: A certain nature which assures that A is A.

Self: The mind which has identity.

Existence: The way of being (the term "being" just means that a person is in the world) in which one has identity.

Environment: Surroundings of the man, including all kinds of thing, except for the representation in mind and the self.

2. Preceding argument and the *expedient* requirement for “self”

In order to examine the Watsuji’s quote validly, we had better refer to the preceding arguments by other philosophers. This reference will clarify how self and identity has been regarded, and in what way Watsuji’s remark was innovative.

I will mention Rene Descartes, who is said to be the founder of modern philosophy through methodological skepticism. He doubted nearly everything – he believed that in order for us to get the solid true knowledge about this world we have to doubt all our knowledge thoroughly. His plan was to build a solid construction of knowledge based on one absolutely true knowledge, by means of logical deduction. And he found it – at least he believed so. He thought that although every single perception dependent on the sense can be dubious but that our self, who perceive the outer world or think about it, definitely exist. He expressed his discovery in Latin words *cogito ergo sum*, or in English, I think therefore I am.

In this way Descartes thought that our thought indicates our self. And this was dominant through the history of modern philosophy. However, an English philosopher, Bertrand Russell, diputed Descartes in his book *The problems of philosophy*. Russell argued that *cogito ergo sum* implies more than needed in logical reasoning, therefore inappropriate as the evidence of existence of self. The reason for this claim is as follows: the being of thought or perceptions indicates nothing but the being of thought or perceptions; it doesn’t assure that our self is identical from day-to-day; thus Descartes’ idea to connect thought and perceptions with the existence of self is just based on a preconceived ideas in our minds.

Russell did not provide an alternative idea to explain the identity of self, so I can just analyze his claim. We can derive a notion about the self that it has to be identical through times. It really makes sense – if our self is changeable, how can we of yesterday be ourselves of today? It is obvious that we are ourselves however long time we lived, thus our self should be identical through times.

This is the common notion in regard to the problem of self in philosophy. Actually we are destined to think like that, for there is a law of identity, which Russell himself mentioned in *The problems of philosophy*, besides other two law of thought. “The law of identity” is this: Everything is, is. Or it can be replaced by this proposition: If A is B, A is always B. This law seems to be absolutely valid, and mathematics and logics are constructed on this law of thought. If $2+2=4$, $2+2$ is always 4.

This is the conventional idea as to the problem of self. But here we have to follow Descartes’ methodological skepticism. We can doubt this idea, however valid it may

seems to be. This view that self has to be identical over times will be disputed in the next section.

3. The possible objections to Watsuji's claim, and how we can dispute this objection

We have to go back to the quote by Watsuji Tetsuro. He argues that our self can be discovered through the environment. This means he put the basis of self on the environment, our outer surroundings. As far as I know, there is no Western philosopher who claimed like Watsuji. Why? I think this is deeply related to the notion of identical self, which I mentioned in section 2.

As long as philosophers believe this notion, there is a possible objections to Watsuji's quote. They would argue, "Environment is really easy to change. But self does not change through times. Thus, the idea to put the basis of self on the environment is inappropriate." I think this is why Western philosophers didn't employ Watsuji's view. However, really? Is this claim by conventional philosophers in case? As long as the law of identity is based on human nature, that dispute against Watsuji can be doubted, however true it may seem.

We can dispute to this claim by doubting the fundamental of it i.e. the law of identity. It is true that this is the case when we deal with the physical entity (in which I mean the entity which does not have mind). But when it comes to human beings, it is not the case, because humans are very easy to change. You cannot put your basis of identity on body as well, because all the atoms which constitutes your body change in a few years. And you cannot put the basis of your self on your mind, for it is also very changeable. For example, if you are involved in a car accident and see someone dies, your view on life would completely change. Or, if you compare yourself of 6 years old and yourself now, you may well be convinced to say that you have drastically changed. Even the most fundamental belief which one holds can be replaced by another one, as many of the literature or story tells us.

Therefore, there is no reason to support the notion that the self and identity is identical through times (although "identity is not identical" sounds contradiction, it is not from the definition I have made in introduction). As Heraclitus said, everything flows. There is nothing which continues to be through times. We can still hold the concept of self, but we have to modify the notion of self. Then what kind of modification can be taken? This question will be considered in the next section.

4. The new perspective in regard to self

In the previous section, we disputed the opposing views to Watsuji's that self is identical through times. But we haven't provided the reason to support Watsuji's quote. In this section I will find the reason to support Watsuji's view and show you another alternative view on self.

In regarding the relation between self and the environment, we can refer to the theory of pure experience by Nishida Kitaro, a philosopher in Japan where Watsuji was born. He argued that "It is not that we experience because we are, but that we are because we experience." Suppose you are impressed by a beautiful artwork, for instance. When you are purely impressed (in which I mean you are impressed by the beauty of the artwork itself, not the price or the knowledge in regard to the artwork), you don't work on the artwork with initiative, since you are impressed (it is also interesting that emotivos are expressed in passive voice in English) by the artwork itself, not the interpretation on it which you have made. You may argue that one cannot feel something purely (in my sense) because we are made by our experience if we employ the empirical point of view. But I don't think so, because there are numerous examples in which a person, who is not relevant to art, was greatly impressed by an artwork and became an artist.

Nishida argued that in pure experience one cannot be distinguished from the object, since there is no subjective initiatives in the subject who experiences. And that is why he argued that experience makes a person to exist, for it is only after one experiences pure experience that he begins to have subjective initiatives (such as interpretations). And after the pure experience, the subject has the opportunity to discover himself in the surroundings, because the result of interpretation (interpretation is just an example of subjective initiative act, but you may find in another kinds of act this is the case) reflects his self.

Then, how can the self, which can be discovered in environment, be? As I pointed out in previous section, self isn't identical through times. Thus, the self should be the self *at the time*, in relation to the environment. It is just like the hole of doughnuts. The hole of doughnuts itself doesn't exist (it is indeed impossible for you to pick up and show someone the hole of doughnut itself). The hole of doughnuts is formed through the relation to the body of doughnuts. I think the human self is just like this; we cannot pick up the self itself, but it is formed in relation to the environment *at the time*.

5. Conclusion

In this essay we have seen that the self is formed in relation to the outer environment. The modern philosophy was builded upon the belief that the self is absolute and continue to exist, but as we have seen, it isn't. Therefore I think the concept self related to the environment can change the philosophy drastically. How can the whole

philosophy based on this concept be? This will be our next aim of philosophical investigation. The journey of investigation still continues.