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From Spiegelberg's "I-am-me" Experience to the Solipsistic Experience: Towards a Phenomenological Understanding

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Abstract

The "I-am-me" experience, whose typical expressions are "Why am I me?" and "Why am I here and now?" was first investigated by Spiegelberg in 1964. Research in Japan since the 1980s indicates that approximately 30 percent of undergraduates have had this experience at least once, with the first experience most likely to have occurred in childhood. Recently, empirical research into this experience has been extended to include solipsistic experience, typically expressed as, "There might be no other 'selves' except myself in the world!" Defining these experiences with reference to Blankenburg's concept of self-evidence allows a phenomenological understanding of them. The "I-am-me" experience is a disruption in the self-evidence of one's own self-identity; solipsistic experience is a disruption in the self-evidence of one's own self as a member of the species. A comparison of these experiences with schizophrenic and autistic experiences illustrates the relationship between them and "normal" and psychopathological development.

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Section 1. Introduction

In 1964, the phenomenological philosopher Herbert Spiegelberg (1964) published a paper about the “I-am-me” experience in childhood and adolescence, which he considered to be “strangely neglected by both philosophy and psychology” (p. 3). He included several examples that he had encountered in European literature. The example below is taken from a story written by Richard Hughes, an English novelist:

[Example 1-1] (Case of “Emily”)

. . . And an event did occur to Emily of considerable importance. She suddenly realized who she was. There is little reason that one can see why it should not have happened to her five years earlier, or even five later; and none, why it should have come that particular afternoon. She had been playing houses in a nook right in the bows behind the windlass; . . . and tiring of it was walking rather aimlessly aft, thinking vaguely about some bees and a fairy queen, when it suddenly flashed into her mind that she was *she*. She stopped dead, and began looking over all of her person which came within the range of her eyes. (Hughes, 1929, p. 83)

Once fully convinced of this astonishing fact, that she was now Emily Bas-Thornton (why she inserted the “now” she did not know, for she certainly imagined no transmigrational nonsense of having been anyone else before), she began seriously to reckon its implications. First, what agency had so ordered it that out of all the people in the world who she might have been, she was this particular one, this Emily; born in such-and-such a year out of all the years in Time, and encased in this particular rather pleasing little casket of flesh? (p. 84).

After analyzing this passage and several other examples, Spiegelberg conducted several questionnaire surveys with the aid of psychologists and high-school teachers. These surveys yielded many interesting “I-am-me” experiences among American college and high school students. The example below sounds essentially like a summation of the case of Emily:

[Example 1-2] (Case of a senior high school girl)

One day when I was about five years old, I was just sitting around, doing nothing, when I realized I was me, and began to wonder why I wasn't somebody else. It bothered me for about a week afterwards and since then. The thought has come up from time to time, though less often recently. (Spiegelberg, 1964, p. 18)

Spiegelberg wrote, “Perhaps one of the most poignant features of the ‘I-am-me’ experience is the strange dissociation of the ‘me’ from the body with which it used to identify” (p. 8). Therefore, this experience “differs even more basically from Erik H. Erikson’s significant and fruitful concept of self-identity. . . . From Erikson’s concrete

development of this concept I receive the impression that this ‘Identity’ almost coincides with what is usually called personal character or social role. . . ” (p. 9).

He concluded that more studies, including “a careful phenomenological investigation of the experience behind the puzzling expression” (p. 20), should be conducted in the future to elucidate such experiences.

Afterwards, he several times consulted this experience in his philosophical considerations of the self (Spiegelberg, 1986). However, his expectations about future research do not appear to have been fully realized, at least in Western countries. Since the 1980s, it has been Japanese psychologists who have conducted studies related to this experience. Although they called it “I-experience,” these studies may be considered an extension of Spiegelberg’s research. Recently, psychological research on the “I-experience” branched out into a new area: solipsistic experience.

Although experiential, these studies of “I-experience” and solipsistic experience were not phenomenological. However, in Section 4, these studies are reinterpreted phenomenologically. Section 5 elucidates these two experiences by introducing the concept of the “sense of obviousness” or “self-evidence” of the self as suggested by Blankenburg (1971) and Kimura (1973). This section also discusses how these experiences are related to normal development, as well as to psychopathological development, including schizophrenia and autism. As a result, it appears that these two types of experiences may originate from a “developmental epochè.” Neither as a philosopher undertaking phenomenological epochè nor as the Blankenburg’s (1971) patient suffering from pathological epochè, would one encounter the fundamental split in the subject (Husserl’s *Ich-Spaltung*) at certain stages of normal personal development, especially in childhood.

Section 2. Japanese Studies of the “I-experience”

Japanese researchers have investigated the ‘I-experience’ since the 1980s. They did not adopt the term, “I-am-me experience,” because they were unaware of Spiegelberg’s research. Instead, they built on C. Bühler’s *Ich-Erlebnis*, which had been translated into Japanese from the original German and was, therefore, familiar. The following is one of Bühler’s typical examples.

[Example 2-1] (Case of “Rudi Derius”)

I was about twelve years old. I woke up very early. . . . In this moment, I had the I-experience (*Ich-Erlebnis*). It was as if everything broke away from me and I was suddenly isolated. A strange floating feeling. And at the same time, I proposed the bewildering question to myself: Are you Rudi Derius? Are you the same person whom your friends call so? The same who has a certain name and gets a certain mark in school? Are you the same person as him? At that moment, inside myself, a second ‘I’ faced the first ‘I’ (the one that worked here entirely objectively as a name). (Bühler, 1923, pp. 44-45²)

In discussing the discovery of self in adolescence, Bühler defined the “I-experience” as “suddenly experiencing the self in its isolation and locality” (p. 41). Spranger (1948), another German psychologist, later defined it as a “(metaphysical) fundamental experience of individuation”, (p. 47). Notwithstanding, the study of the “I-experience”

did not progress in a systematic way after these studies were published. Curiously, Spiegelberg appeared to be unaware of the work of these Germans, and Japanese psychologists were responsible for reviving this theme.

After having analyzed the case of “Rudi Derius,” Takaishi (1988) conducted the first systematic study of this phenomenon in Japan. Hypothesizing that the “I-experience” may not be a special experience, but may occur in everyone at least to some degree, she developed the “I-experience scale,” which contains seven dimensions. She administered a questionnaire using this scale to 622 junior high school and high school students in Japan. The questionnaire also asked them to report the age of any “I-experience,” the context, and any consequences. Most participants reported at least one or more partial experiences. The first “I-experience” tended to occur around the age of 10 and was generally triggered by conflictual relationships with friends. Watanabe (1992, cited by Watanabe, 2004), distributed a questionnaire with four examples to illustrate the “I-experience” to 227 undergraduate students. The students were then asked to describe their first memory of any thoughts that were similar to the examples. Overall, 45 cases were identified as “I-experiences.” The age of the first experience tended to peak between 10 and 14 years.

The most typical of these examples include the following:

[Example 2-2] (Case of a woman, age 19)

At the age of 6 or 7, on a fair Sunday, just before noon, I was in an upstairs room of my house. I was vaguely gazing at the sunlight through the window. Suddenly, I thought, “Why am I me? Why am I here?”

2 Thanks to Dr. T. Teo for the translation from German.

Amaya (1997, cited by Watanabe, 2004), conducted a study of the “I-experience” with two groups: 160 college students and 18 junior high school students. She used a semi-structured interview, in addition to a questionnaire. She found that 31.3 percent of the college group and 65 percent of the junior high school group had had an “I-experience.” According to Amaya, the difference between the two age groups indicated that although almost all people undergo an “I-experience” during childhood, they gradually forget it during adolescence. Watanabe and Komatsu (1999) asked 345 undergraduates to complete an “I-experience Questionnaire” by responding “yes” or “no” to 19 items. Those undergraduates who had undergone an “I experience” were then asked to describe it. Overall, 27.5 percent (145 individuals) of the respondents reported at least one “I-experience.” The 145 identified cases of “I-experiences” were classified on the basis of four aspects. Table 1 presents typical examples of these aspects (see also Watanabe, 2004).

Table 1. Four Aspects of “I-experience”

<p>1. Questions about the origin and basis of the self</p> <p>“Why am I me?”; “Why am I here and now?”; “Why was I born as me, not as another person?”; “Am I really me?”</p>
<p>2. Separation of “I” and “me”</p> <p>“Am I really the same person who has a certain name and appearance?”; “The ‘real I’ is what is inside myself, invisible to others!”; “The second ‘I’ confronts the first ‘I’ inside me!”</p>
<p>3. Awareness of Original Uniqueness of the Self</p> <p>“I am really me!”; “I am nothing but me!”</p>

4. Solipsistic Skepticism

“There might be no other ‘selves’ than my ‘self’ in the world!”

Following these pioneering studies, several other investigations were conducted.

Table 2 summarizes the main studies on this topic conducted in Japanese.

Table 2. Research about the First Occurrence of the “I-experience”

[Cited from Watanabe (2009), and translated from Japanese by the author]

Study	Participants (N =)	Method	Ratio of report	Peak or mean age of first occurrence
Watanabe (1992)	Undergraduates (227)	Questionnaire	19.8%	10~14
Amaya (1997)	Undergraduates (160)	Semi-structured interview & questionnaire	31.3%	8~12
Amaya (1997)	Junior high school students (18)	Semi-structured interview	65%	
Watanabe & Komatsu (1999)	Undergraduates (345)	Questionnaire	29.9%	9.5
Watanabe (2001)	Undergraduates (309)	Questionnaire	27.2%	11
Amaya (2002)	Junior high school students (60)	Semi-structured interview	63.3%	
Amaya (2003)	Undergraduates (150)	Questionnaire	57.3%	
Amaya (2003)	Senior high school students (307)	Questionnaire	34.0~42.3%	
Amaya (2003)	Junior high school students (424)	Questionnaire	30.6~44.6%	
Takaishi (2003)	Undergraduates (176)	Questionnaire	36.3%	

These studies clarify previously unknown features of the “I-experience”: the “I-experience” is an experience of incongruity and uncertainty over the self-evident

knowledge of one’s own self. It’s typical expressions include such questions as the following: Am I really me,? Why am I me? Why am I here at this time? Approximately 30 percent of undergraduates and 60 percent of junior high school students report having had this experience at least once. Although the first occurrence tended to be in childhood, the memory of it was apt to fade by adulthood.

Remarkable progress has been made with regard to research methodology. An Assessment Manual for the I-experience was developed. In Watanabe and Komatsu (1999), two judges independently examined all documented descriptions and classified them into “I-experiences” and other experiences based on this manual. Table 3 shows how the manual could be applied to the case of Rudi Derius; the right-hand column lists the phrases in the example that correspond to the criteria.

Table 3. Assessment Manual for the I-experience (abbreviated version). If an experience involves Criteria 1 and at least another one of the criteria listed below, it can be classified as an “I-experience.” [Cited from Watanabe (2009, p. 71) and translated from Japanese by the author]

Criteria	Phrases taken from the case of Rudi Derius
1. In the text, what matters is the self.	Whole text
2. Suddenness, unexpectedness	“ <u>In this moment</u> I had ...and I was <u>suddenly isolated.</u> ”
3. Feeling of strangeness, or being out of place	“A <u>strange</u> floating feeling. ...I proposed the <u>bewildering question.</u> ”
4. Separation of two selves	“... a <u>second ‘I’</u> confronted the first ‘I’”
5. Feeling of being unique and isolated	“It was as if everything broke away from me and I was suddenly <u>isolated.</u> ”

Section 3. Solipsistic Experience

Watanabe and Kanazawa (2005) and Watanabe (2008) re-examined cases of the “I-experience,” distinguished solipsistic skepticism (see Table 1) from the other three aspects of the “I-experience,” and reclassified these cases as solipsistic experiences. Based on the Assessment Manual for the Solipsistic Experience, which had evolved from the Assessment Manual for the “I-experience” (see Table 3), 60 cases were identified as solipsistic experiences. That is, of 615 undergraduate subjects, 6.1 percent reported having this kind of experience. Curiously, the estimated ages at which the solipsistic experience first appeared averaged 1 to 2 years younger than those for the other three kinds of “I-experience.”

The next step was the classification of these cases of solipsistic experiences to clarify the implicit structure of the experience. All 60 cases were arranged according to two classification axes: 1) doubt about others/doubt about the world; and 2) watching/ being watched. The first example below was classified as doubt about others, and the second was classified as doubt about the world.

[Example 3-1] (Woman, age 19)

In the lower grades of elementary school: When I was studying in class, occasionally an idea came to mind: I wondered, “Is it only me who is now thinking in this way? Are the other people around me also human beings?” (Cited from Watanabe and Kanazawa (2005) and translated from Japanese by the author.)

[Example 3-2] (Woman, age 19)

In the lower grades of elementary school: Once in a while I thought that all that exists out of my sight doesn't exist in reality; new things come to existence as I move along. For example, when I was in the classroom, nothing existed except the classroom and the view out of the window, I thought. (Cited from Watanabe and Kanazawa (2005) and translated from Japanese by the author.)

The example below includes both watching and being watched:

[Example 3-3] (Woman, age 21: Case of a “cylindrical world”)

In my childhood, I sometimes thought that I might be the only real being in the world. I felt like this: a cylindrical screen is built around me and as I move, pictures on the screen change and various persons appear. I also thought that all the senses, such as feeling, hearing, vision, and others, were total illusions and that there existed nothing outside the cylinder except someone (or something) that was watching the cylindrical world from above. This idea was a really horrible fancy for me, because the fact that my loving mother and friends were all fakes or illusions on a screen made me very sad. I thought of myself like this until the third grade of primary school. (Cited from Watanabe (2008) and translated from Japanese by the author.)

What is the common feature of these examples? In Examples 3-1 and 3-2, the subject's “I,” as a unique subjectivity, watches everything. In Example 3-3, the subject also watched her mother and friends, who might have been illusions on a screen. However, she was also watched by someone or some transcendent entity who watches this world. Of the 60 cases of solipsistic experience, this kind of example with its structure of “nested

boxes” appeared in 12 cases. The other 48 cases belong to either the type illustrated in Example 3-1 or that in Example 3-2. The theme of these examples is the absence of reciprocity; i.e., the absence of a reciprocal relationship between the self and others, which has now been identified as a characteristic common to every solipsistic experience.

Section 4. Phenomenological Reinterpretation of These Studies

These studies of “I-experience” and solipsistic experience were not so phenomenological, although they were experiential. However, I will reinterpret these studies phenomenologically. In Watanabe (2008, 2009), 18 examples, including the case of Emily, were analyzed to identify the characteristics integral to an “I-experience” and a solipsistic experience. Of these 18 spontaneous cases (here “spontaneous” describes cases observed by chance, rather than those elicited directly by a questionnaire or other systematic method), 10 were “I-experiences,” 5 were solipsistic experiences, and 3 had components of both kinds of experiences. These texts were interpreted by reading them *as* the interpreter’s own narratives. Then, each structure of inner experience for these spontaneous cases was diagrammed.

4-1 First-person Reading

The method of reading and interpreting texts *as* the interpreter’s own memorandum was termed a “first-person reading.” The reason is that it would be difficult to understand a sentence such as “Why was I born as me, Ichiro?” as an “I-experience” without replacing “Ichiro” with one’s own name, for example. Similarly, it would be difficult to understand the text, “I occasionally wonder if everybody around me is only an illusion,”

as a solipsistic experience without interpreting the “I” in the text as the interpreter’s own self, rather than as the author of the text. The secret of understanding examples of “I-experience” and solipsistic experience is to interpret texts written by others *as the interpreter’s own texts*.

There is certainly a difference between this kind of first-person reading and empathetic reading. Whenever a person is absorbed in reading novels or autobiographies, for instance, the person experiences the episodes in the texts written by others *as though* they were experienced and written by the reader. The reader empathizes and identifies with the author of the texts. However, According to Watanabe (2009), empathy is a concept presupposing the real existence of others. If one assumed the existence of others in understanding a sentence such as, “The existence of others around me might be only an illusion,” it would be the same as implicitly considering this sentence to be absurd, wrong, or abnormal. Thus, first-person readers should interpret the text, not *as if*, but literally *as* their own narrative.

For these reasons, a first-person reading is one way to complete a “phenomenological reduction,” as it brackets the real author of the text, that is, the existence of others. Bracketing the existence of others is inevitable to a phenomenological understanding of experiences in which the existence of others is spontaneously bracketed.

4-2 Diagramming the Structure of Inner Experience

As described above, in Watanabe (2008, 2009), the structure of inner experiences for all 18 spontaneous cases were diagrammed and three types of structure were distinguished, as illustrated in Figure 1.

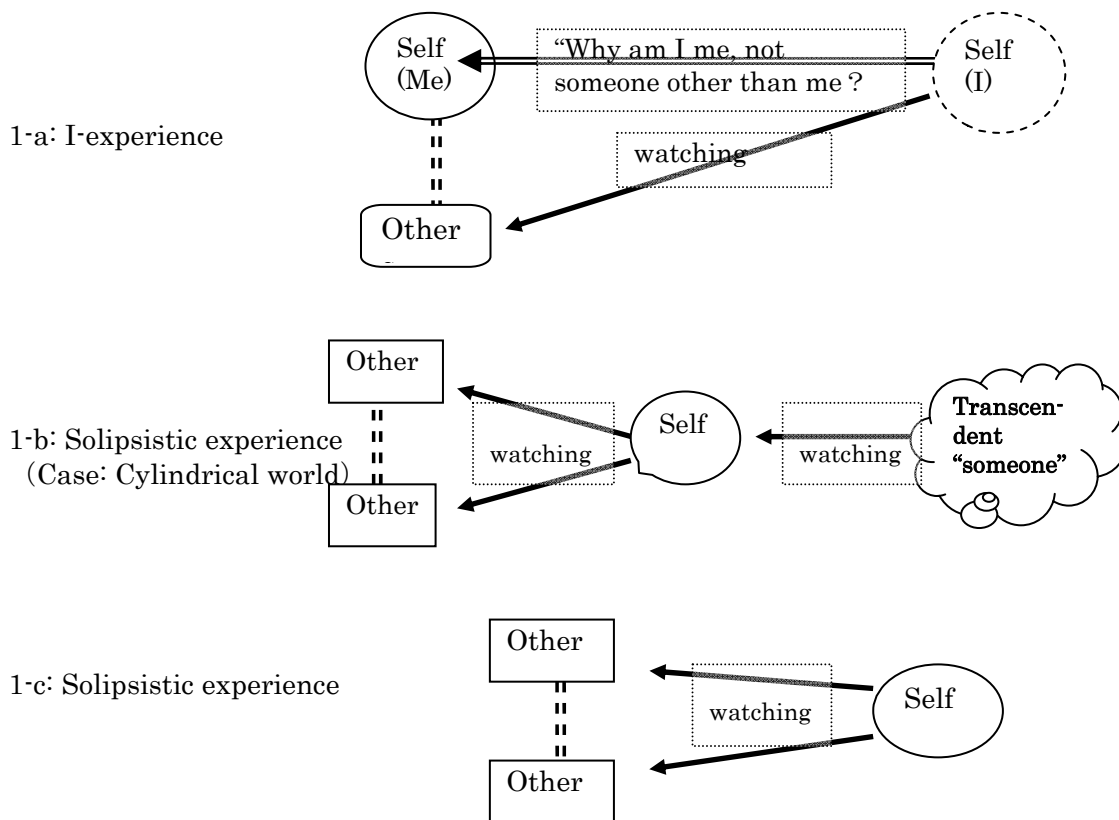


Figure 1. Three Types of Inner Experience Identified from 18 Spontaneous Cases (Cited from Watanabe (2008, 2009) and translated from Japanese by the author)

Figure 1-a illustrates a specific structure common to “I-experiences.” Figure 1-c illustrates a structure that is typical of a solipsistic experience: the self objectively watches others. A dotted line between two “others” designates that they belong to the same species. In Figure 1-a, a dotted line connects the self and others, whereas in Figure 1-c, the self is alone and isolated. In other words, no reciprocity exists between the self and others. Figure 1-b illustrates the cylindrical world from Example 3-3. It appears to have an intermediate structure between Figures 1-a and 1-c. However, it actually represents another type of solipsistic experience: a dotted line connects others, while the self is alone. Again, no reciprocity exists between self and others, a fundamental structural feature of the solipsistic experience.

The method of diagramming the structure of inner experience allows a phenomenological reinterpretation. According to Giorgi (2009), the phenomenological philosopher seeks essences through the method of free imagination. However, “the scientific phenomenological method” (p. 94) is described as follows:

...instead of searching for essences through the method of free imaginative variation, I seek the structure of the concrete experiences being analyzed through the determination of higher-level eidetic invariant meanings that belong to that structure. (p. 100)

In Figure 1, one “higher-level eidetic invariant meaning” is the “I-am-me” experience; the other is solipsistic experience. The former belongs to the structure diagrammed as 1-a, and the latter, to that diagrammed as 1-b and 1-c. The two structures are differentiated by whether or not there is a dotted line connecting the self and others.

Other studies cited in Table 2 are not phenomenological, although experiential. However, they offer many useful examples for a phenomenological investigation.

Section 5 Towards a Phenomenological Understanding of the “I-am-me”

Experience and the Solipsistic Experience

5-1 Phenomenological Definition

Observations of cases presented in the studies cited earlier through first-person reading and the diagramming of the structure of inner experience lead to an integral definition of the “I-am-me” experience and solipsistic experience. Both experiences can be defined phenomenologically by introducing the “sense of obviousness” or

“self-evidence” (*Selbstverständlichkeit*) of the self, as suggested by Blankenburg (1971) and Kimura (1973, 1997, 2001). An “I-am-me” experience is a disruption in the self-evidence of one’s own self-identity, whereas a solipsistic experience is a disruption in the self-evidence of one’s own self as a member of the species. Both experiences can thus be integrally understood as two sides of one phenomenon: disruption in the self-evidence of one’s own self.

The introduction of a concept used by psychiatrists is not meant to imply any intention to interpret these phenomena from a pathological viewpoint. However, examples drawn from related psychiatric literature allow a comparison of pathological cases to the “I-am-me” experience and the solipsistic one phenomenologically, which would lead to an integral understanding of these different types of experience.

5-2 Kimura and Psychiatric Literature Corresponding to the “I-am-me” Experience

Blankenburg did not overtly focus on the problem of selfhood in his considerations about the loss of natural obviousness, or self-evidence. It was Kimura who concentrated on the problem from the perspective of phenomenological psychiatry. Kimura published an important book concerning the problem of self-evidence of the self in 1973, in Japanese: “When we observe a situation wherein a schizophrenic is really schizophrenic, there we inevitably find *the loss of the self-evidence of his/her self-identity*” (Kimura, 1973, p. 122. Translated from Japanese by the author). This is the phrase the most exactly corresponds to the definition of the “I-am-me” experience discussed in this paper. In addition, a quotation from his recent English text sums up his considerations about the selfness of I very well, and another exemplifies the situation:

The certainty of “I am I myself” is quite self-evident for most people, but in schizophrenia, this selfness of I is not sufficiently constituted to the effect that the patients are incessantly forced to an excessive and painful self-reflection. (Kimura, 1997, in English abstract)

Another young male patient said: “Each person has both a real and a virtual being: both are replacing one another. ... my real being is my own existing self born with this body. The virtual being is a thinking self, which cannot be grasped in its true form.” (Kimura, 2001, p. 333)

This example is reminiscent of the antagonism between the first “I” and the second “I” in the Case of “Rudi Derius” (Example 2-1). Although there are some common features between these examples, the one is pathological and the other is developmental in the sense that it occurs in the course of normal personal development. Therefore, is there any legitimacy in understanding both of them integrally?

5-3 Laing Versus Broughton, or Psychopathology Versus Developmental Theory

A response to this question comes from the works of Broughton (1978, 1981), who critically reconsidered Laing’s pathological example in the light of his developmental studies. Laing (1960, pp. 71-73) used the following example:

[David] had grown up taking entirely for granted that what he called his “self” and his “personality” were two quite separate things... The whole organization

of his being rested on the disjunction of his inner “self” and his outer “personality”.... What the individual variously terms his “own,” “inner,” “true,” “real,” self is experienced as divorced from all activity that is observable by another, what *David* called his “personality.” One may conveniently call this “personality” the individual’s “false self” or “false self system.”

Broughton’s finding was that when asked directly what someone’s self is, adolescents in his study tended to espouse views not at all unlike David’s. This particular study was a longitudinal study of 36 normal male and female adolescents and young adults in suburban Boston (Broughton, 1978). It involved lengthy interviews designed to probe reflective or philosophic world views — the network of concepts of self, mind, reality, truth, and knowledge. These semi-structured interviews were based on direct, reflective questions such as, “What is someone’s self?” And “What is reality?”

Broughton’s point is “not that David is ‘normal’, but that in Laing’s overenthusiasm he was willing to include as evidence for his interpretation of an ‘alienated personality’ what other research would suggest is a way-station in the normal development of concepts of self” (Broughton, 1981, p. 24). According to Broughton (1978), “it is possible to see three phases: a pre-dualistic childhood period, followed in adolescence by the emergence of the ‘great dualisms’ (such as mental/physical), which in adulthood the individual attempts to reconcile through a truly reflective awareness of self, reality, and knowledge” (p. 79).

There are dissimilar features, as well as common ones, between the “I-am-me” experience and Broughton’s “great dualisms.” One of differences is that first episodes of the “I-am-me” experience are most likely to occur in childhood, while his “great

dualisms” are located in adolescence. However, this difference may be attributed to the fact that the former are experiences reported through recollections of past memory, while the latter is based on the interviewee’s current opinions. In addition, studies of “I-am-me” experience indicate that there is some evidence to suggest that the earlier and the more strongly one is impressed by the “I-am-me” experience, the more one is likely to adopt a dualistic worldview (Watanabe, 1992, 2009).

A kind of parallelism exists in the fact that the relationship of Kimura’s clinical examples and “I-am-me” experience is, in a sense, analogous to that of Laing’s clinical ones and Broughton’s great dualism. Therefore, to the question of whether it is legitimate to understand both integrally, I would respond by saying that the point is not that Kimura’s schizophrenic patients are normal, but that the loss of self-evidence of one’s own identity may occur as a way-station in the normal development of experiencing the self.

What then differentiates the pathological and the normal? It is not the structural content of the experience, but the way of experiencing. The pathological experience is long-lasting, and the normal one is transient. For this reason, the expression, “disruption of the self-evidence,” is preferable to the expression, “loss of the self-evidence.” In addition, the pathological one is compelling; the other one is voluntary to a certain degree.

5-4 Solipsistic Experiences in Schizophrenic Patients

Once again, Kimura offers insight into integrally understanding the normal and the pathological in the solipsistic experience:

My hypothesis on the essential disturbance of the schizophrenia is, as a consequence, to think about some *disjunction fundamental*, probably due to some genetic or genotypic abnormality, *between the existence as an individual and that as a member of the species*. (Kimura, 1997, p. 348. Translated from French by the author)

This passage relates well to the definition of solipsistic experience as a disruption in the self-evidence of one's own self as a member of the species. Other writers, as well, offer examples. In an article entitled, "Self, solipsism, and schizophrenic delusions." Parnas and Sas (2001), citing Moeller and Husby (2000), described the following:

Moeller and Husby observed in their study (confirming a common clinical experience) that young pre-schizophrenic patients become preoccupied with philosophical, supernatural, and metaphysical themes. It seems as if for many patients a fundamental transformation of their worldview is taking place.... He experiences phenomena, which are beyond commonsensical, naturalistic folk metaphysics: "Reality" is increasingly mind-dependent; "other minds" become malevolent projective constructions; causality seems non-physical.... The term "solipsism," denoting here a paradoxical mixture of increasing subjectivization of the world and self-dissolution, seems to capture such a position.... (pp. 109-110)

Another example, which may correspond to [Example 3-2] in Section 3, is as follows:

Case 10. A young patient reported that he had, in brief moments, a feeling that only the objects in his current field of vision were real, as if the rest of the world, including most familiar places and persons, did not really exist. Probed about suicidal intentions, he replied: “No, I could never kill myself. I can’t imagine the world not being represented [by me].” (Parnas & Sas, 2001, p. 110)

Based on this case and a few others, Parnas and Sas explain that “Solipsism may be a source of a quite specific type of subtle grandiosity observable in the schizophrenia spectrum conditions...” (p. 110). Another important point suggested by Parnas and Sas is the existence of certain affinities between schizophrenia and childhood autism. Citing Frith (1992), they say, “Frith seems to have been impressed by certain affinities between schizophrenia and childhood autism and proposed that schizophrenic individuals might suffer from an underlying disorder similar to that characteristic of autism, namely, a deficit in ‘theory of mind,’ in the person’s ability to be aware of the nature or perhaps even the existence of one’s own mental states and those of other people” (Parnas & Sas, 2001, p. 115).

Although Frith and Corcoran (1996) observed evidence suggestive of the dysfunction of theory of mind in patients with paranoid delusions, Parnas and Sas (2001) seem to be critical of cognitive approaches, such as the theory of mind, to integrally understand schizophrenics and infantile autism. Notwithstanding a cognitive foundation of psychopathological experiences, the experiences themselves as phenomena are my concern.

5-5 Infantile Autism, Schizophrenia and the Solipsistic Experience

[Example 5-1] I really didn't know there were people until I was seven years old. I then suddenly realized that there were people. But not like you do. I still have to remind myself that there are people.... I never could have a friend. I really don't know what to do with other people, really. (Hobson, 1993, p. 3)

[Example 5-2] I was about 8 years old when I became worried about the difference between others and me. I had been long aware that I was different from others. At that time, however, I found that I should be the same as others. Before then, I'd never thought that I belonged to the same category with other children. That's because other children had their backs. Other children's backs were visible, while my back was invisible. (Niki, 2000, cited by Watanabe (2009, p. 111) and translated from Japanese by the author)

Both of these experiences were recounted by intelligent, young, autistic people, and both appear to exemplify a total absence of the self-evidence of one's own self as a member of the species. What differentiates solipsistic experiences such as Example 3-1 and these autistic experiences is the way of experiencing: what matters in Example 3-1 is not an absence, but a transient disruption of the self-evidence of one's own self as a member of the species.

[Example 5-3] (Sechehaye, 1950, translated from French by the author)

Around me, my classmates, with their heads bent, appeared to be robots or dummies activated by an invisible mechanic. On the platform, the teacher, who spoke,

gestured, and stood up to write on the board, seemed to be a grotesque puppet, her too (p. 9). But she appeared more to be a statue than ever. It is a mannequin, put into action by a mechanic, that moves and speaks as if an automaton.... (p. 15)

This episode, recounted by a person with schizophrenia, reveals that the previously experienced self-evidence of the subject's own self as a member of the species has been dissolved.

5-6 Developmental Connotations

Broughton's critical reconsideration of Laing's example suggests the importance of the developmental perspective. The "I-am-me" experience, the solipsistic experience, and certain types of pathological experience may integrally be understood through the developmental model suggested by the German psychiatrist Rempp (1992). He theorized that during the process of development, humans live in two realities. The world of our childhood is an egocentric world, until adolescence, when we move to the objective world in which we can empathize with others. He called the former *Nebenrealität* (neighboring reality), and the latter, *Hauptrealität* (main reality). Rempp considered schizophrenia to be a condition in which patients had reached the main reality but were forced to regress to the neighboring reality. He considered autism to be a condition in which patients remained in the neighboring reality due to some cognitive disability.

However, reaching the main reality or objective world may not be the final stage of human personal development. According to Watanabe (2009), we live in a subjective world in early childhood; by late childhood, we may discover the objective world where the self is just one self among others. However, the story does not end there. By

developing reflective self-consciousness, an individual may become aware of his or her private, inner self, an awareness which could lead to a rediscovery of the subjective world, at the center of which is his or her private, inner self. In this way, a conflict between two worlds might occur, leading, in turn, to a disruption of the self-evidence of one's own self in childhood and adolescence.

The "I-am-me" experience may also occur outside of childhood or adolescence, for example, among women during pregnancy and among elderly people who are facing death (Watanabe, 2009). In fact, a conflict between the two worlds may occur at any major turning point of life.

Based on Rempp's (1992) model, two models of the developmental process are possible. In one, the developmental process moves from a subjective reality to objective reality linearly, as illustrated in Figure 4-a. In the other, a spiral model, development can be seen as oscillating between these two realities, as illustrated in Figure 4-b. When the developmental process crosses the boundary between the two worlds, conflicts occur and the self-evidence of one's own self may be disrupted.

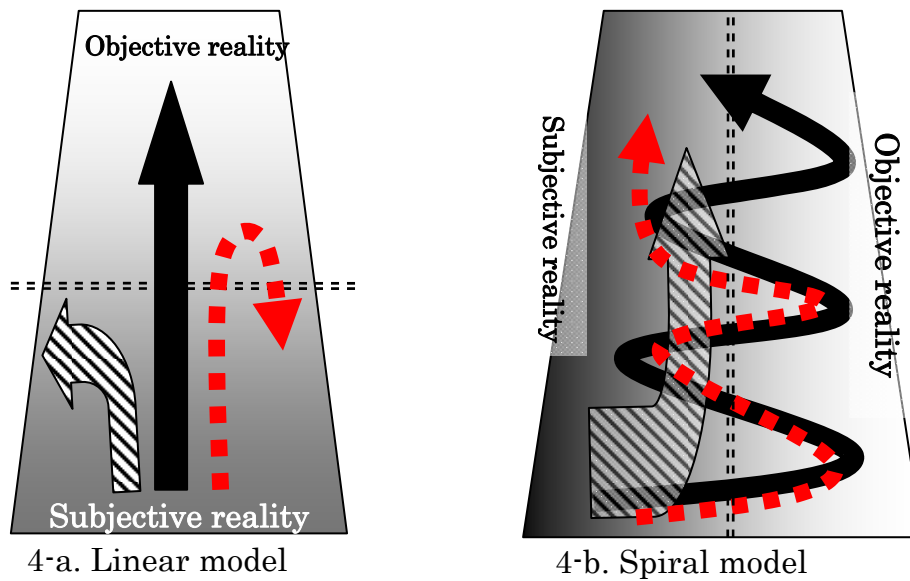


Figure 4. Two Models of Personal Development. In both models, black arrows represent development in “normal” individuals, shaded arrows represent development in autistic individuals, and dotted arrows represent development in schizophrenic individuals.

An “I-am-me” experience may occur when an individual becomes aware of the conflict between “I,” the center of a subjective reality, and “me,” one of many selves in the objective world. In contrast, most solipsistic experiences (e.g., Example 3-1 to Example 3-3) are likely to arise from a kind of reminiscence about living in a subjective reality before reaching objective reality. That is the reason that the estimated ages at the first appearance of the solipsistic experience averaged 1 to 2 years younger than those for the “I-am-me” experience, as described in Section 3. However, several cases in which solipsistic experience immediately followed the “I-am-me” experience (Watanabe, 2009) suggest that the reminiscence may be provoked by the conflict between “I” and “me”.

Section 6. Conclusion

During the almost half-century since Spiegelberg published his study about the “I-am-me” experience, researchers, including me, have made remarkable progress toward clarifying this phenomenon. First, we have empirically established how this experience appears in young people. Second, we have extended these empirical findings to include solipsistic experiences. Third, we have elaborated the methodology for studying these experiences, and, afterwards, reinterpreted it phenomenologically. Fourth, we have started the effort for a phenomenological elucidation of the experiences, in comparing them to pathological experiences, such as schizophrenia or autism. Finally, a spiral model of personal development has been proposed to provide an integral clarification of the “I-am-me” experience, the solipsistic experiences, and pathological experiences. Although the scope of this paper is psychological, not philosophical, I wish to end it by suggesting the idea of a “developmental epochè,” an epochè which may occur not as a pathological experience nor as a philosophical effort, but as an intermediate step in the normal development of experiencing the self.

Blankenburg (1971), as well as Naudin and Azorin (1997, p. 176), proposed that the schizophrenic experience as a “loss of natural self-evidence” can be compared to Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, in that it too suspends the thesis of reality that characterizes the natural attitude. Recently, Japanese psychiatrist Yamamoto (2007) suggested that the autistic experience, such as that exemplified by Examples 5-1 and 5-2, can be compared to Husserl’s another phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 1933/1960), in that it too suspends the thesis of inter-subjective reality that characterizes the natural attitude. These experiences are considered a “pathological epochè”. Both the “I-am-me” experience and the solipsistic experience can also be compared to Husserl’s phenomenological reduction.

The “I-am-me” experience can be compared to the phenomenological reduction or epochè appearing in Husserl’s 1913 book (Husserl, 1982). Within the natural attitude, a person simply assumes that he or she is a real being who exists among other selves in the world. He or she is one of many empirical selves (see Naudin et al., 1999). However, “it [the transcendental reduction] brings to light the fundamental split in the subject (Husserl’s *Ich-Spaltung*) ... (a) a constituted (or empirical) subject which is the subject in the psychological sense and, on the other, (b) a constituting (or transcendental) subject which is the experiential source of the constituted subject and the constituted world” (Naudin et al., 1999, p. 161). This is the phenomenological *Ich-Spaltung*.

As exemplified in Section 5-3, Kimura presented a pathological *Ich-Spaltung*. In the “I-am-me” experience, there is a “developmental” *Ich-Spaltung*, which may be brought about by the “developmental epochè.” The solipsistic experience, as well as the autistic experience, can be compared to Husserl’s another phenomenological reduction appearing in his 1933 book (Husserl, 1933/ 1960). Although elaborating on the idea of a “developmental epochè” is beyond the scope of this paper, I hope it may prove useful for genetic phenomenology, as well as for developmental psychology, psychiatry, and education.

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