

## Self as We and Its Implications for Our Ways of Life

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The self is generally represented by the singular first person "I", and "we" is regarded as consisting of multiple "I"s. Here, however, I invite you to consider the possibility of "we" being an indivisible unit of self. This is a thought experiment aimed at redefining and reviving East Asians' "holistic self" as a "we-self", and at inspiring new ways of living that are based on this perspective.

The "holistic self" concept derives in part from the ancient Buddhist idea of the "true self", a key topic of investigation for Kitaro Nishida and other philosophers of the Kyoto School. The holistic self can be described as being one with the universe, embodied, and trans-dichotomous or non-dual, transcending even the self-other distinction. Meanwhile, philosophers in early modern Europe regarded the self as the successor to God, as a "strong self" that constitutes the world. In recent years, however, the idea of a "weak self" — one devoid of substance, identity, and autonomy — has become a major topic of philosophical discussion, and there now exist a sizable number of what can be considered variations on this model, including the "ecological self", which shares numerous characteristics with the holistic self.

The holistic self can be experienced in terms of somatic agency. Let us now consider this in reference to two contrasting schemas: the "we" schema, which is based on a holistic perspective, and the "I" schema. In the latter, the self is an agent of a somatic action, and has an awareness of "I am doing this". This "I", however, is actually entrusting parts of the action to other agents, such as the individual's own body or a tool. Nevertheless, it remains an independent agent of its share of the action, a fact that can evoke a sense of inexorable solitude.

In contrast, the self in the "we" schema is not an agent but a "multi-agent system", in which every action is "entrusted to" all of the multiple agents involved, including the "I". The self in this context can be defined as whatever is "entrusting" the action, or one with "entrustorship of somatic agency".

Another notable feature of a multi-agent system is that its boundary is not completely closed, meaning that the system is highly encompassing, so much so that, for example, however far away the "I" appears to be from its center, there is always at least one other, even more remotely located agent. This openness, which does not exist in the "I" self, is what gives the "we" self its holistic nature.

To summarize, in the "we" schema, "I" is not *the* self but is just another agent, one that is not "doing X", but "entrusted to do X". This shift in perspective is essential not for the sake of factual accuracy, but from an ethical standpoint.

How can we then possibly heal our existential solitude, which inevitably arises in the "I" schema? As a possible answer to this question, I would suggest that we just try to switch our view of self from "I" to "we", to stop seeing ourselves as self-contained agents of all actions. This may eventually lead to positive changes in our ways of life, society, and the world.