

Compartmentalization of Trivialism: Nishida on Contradictory Self-identity

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This talk tries to interpret the later Nishida who advocated *absolutely contradictory self-identity* (絶対矛盾的自己同一) as committing actual trivialism and to render his position as making sense or plausible by introducing such ideas as *trivializer* or truth maker that makes every proposition as true, *non-transitive identity* for which the transitivity doesn't hold; $a = b, a = c \not\Rightarrow b = c$, and etc.

Trivialism is the claim that every proposition is true. It can be derived from the extreme version of dialetheism; not only some, but also all contradictions are true, given the conjunction elimination; because, if, as an extreme dialetheist claims, $A \wedge \neg A$ is true for any A , A is true by virtue of the inference. Even some contemporary philosophers who are brave enough to be dialetheists don't commit trivialism, taking it as simply wrong or absurd on the reason, among others, that it flies in the face of obvious falsity of some propositions such as 'one plus one is three' and 'here isn't my hand' (Priest 2006, chap.3).

But we claim that some Asian philosophers, traditional or modern, embraced not merely dialetheism but also its extreme version, and therefore trivialism. Our list of Asian suspects of trivialism includes Laotzu who seems to declare that Dao as the principle or nature of everything is self-contradictory and Hua-yen thinkers who asserted that one is all and all is one. Among those suspects is the later Nishida who advocated absolutely contradictory self-identity, claiming that anything is identical with anything else, which possess the properties that are contradictory with each other (西田 1987).

Then how can the later Nishida's trivialism avoid persisting some obviously false propositions as true? Or how can we reinterpret or reconstruct his stance in such a way that it doesn't go against the obvious falsity of the above mentioned propositions?

The first idea that might come to our mind is to modify his trivialism by using the concept of possible worlds. Estrada-González distinguishes stronger or weaker versions of trivialism in terms of possible worlds (Estrada-González, 2012, 181). Let us reduce his versions into the two; actual and counterfactual trivialism. An actual trivialist claims that every proposition is true in the actual world whereas a counterfactual trivialist holds that every proposition is true only in a counterfactual world.

Then let us note that the obviously false propositions are to be taken as wrong about, at least, the actual world, in other words, they are to be dismissed as *actually* false. So by modifying the later Nishida's stance as a counterfactual trivialism, one

can make it compatible with the actual falsity of some propositions. This measure for reconciliation implies possibilism; the claim that every truth is merely possible and there is no necessary truth.

But such a measure cannot be applied for the later Nishida who seems to uphold actual rather than counterfactual trivialism. Then how can we rescue his actual trivialism from the absurdity? An answer is to introduce a special ilk of truth maker that makes every proposition true; i.e., *trivializer*, and to claim that in the actual world there is at least one trivializer, or actual *trivializer* as well as other truth makers that make some propositions false and their negations true, or *actual non-trivializer*. (This means that truth value of a proposition is not a function of one or another possible world, but rather a function of one or another truth maker in a given possible world. Therefore, even in a given possible world truth value of one and the same proposition varies with truth makers.) Thus we try to reconstruct the later Nishida's absolutely contradictory self-identity as implying that both trivializer and non-trivializer inhabit in the actual world. Putting another; we try to sort the actual world into two compartments; the one of trivializers and the other of non-trivializers, and to delimit the later Nishida's trivialism to the section of trivializers, or shortly to compartmentalize his actual trivialism.

Nishida developed his idea of absolutely contradictory self-identity in several different contexts; philosophy of time, that of life, that of self and etc. Each context has its own ontological domain. The domain for philosophy of time consists of such temporal points as past, present and future. His philosophy of life presupposes such entities as humans, non-human organisms, and non-living things as its basic ontological categories. So his trivialism is to be interpreted against the background of each of those ontological domains and categories. In other words, the later Nishida's actual trivialism is to be categorized into different ontological milieus. Thus, in the ontological domain of philosophy of time, we take *present* as trivializer and *past* and *future* as non-trivializers. Also in the context of philosophy of life, humans are interpreted as trivializers and non-human organizes and non-living things as non-trivializers.

References

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