

Scientific Contribution

Self-Knowledge and Ethics of Suicide : A Narratological Study

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Abstract :

In this paper, I discuss the problems of self-knowledge, suicide, and some ethical issues concerning them. My main argument in this paper is the following. If self-knowledge is a necessary condition for one's rationality, in cases in which one is considered to lack sufficient self-knowledge, one is not necessarily a locus of agency of one's own actions. We tend to assume that a first-person is a locus of agency, but in some cases it is possible to doubt this assumption. There are *some* cases in which a first-person does not fully know her/his reasons for suicidal actions. (Shneidman's classical studies of first-person suicide notes show this point clearly.) In particular, Shneidman's meta-analysis of a suicidal individual named Arthur shows the difficulty of achieving unanimously approvable interpretations of the first-person's reasons for suicide. If it is difficult to know one's reason(s) for an action (either for the first-person her/himself or for third-persons), one is not considered a locus of agency of one's own actions. Thus, there are cases in which suicidal attempts do not arise from one's own free will. This argument, if sound, has important ethical consequences concerning suicidology and suicide prevention.

Keywords : Edwin S. Shneidman, Donald Davidson, Tyler Burge, *Rashômon*; Narrative, Self-knowledge and rationality, Theory of action, Kurosawa Akira, Akutagawa Ryûnosuke, Autopsy

Introduction

The problem of suicide (and, consequently, any programs for

suicide prevention) inevitably has an ethical dimension. It raises a series of moral questions: Why/what justifies someone to terminate her/his life? What justifies *us* to keep someone from committing suicide? More broadly, to what extent need a person's free will be restricted by society? If individuals attempting to commit suicide have free wills (and in fact they do), and if suicide is considered an act of an individual free will, there arise these issues concerning practical ethics of a suicidal individual.

A crucial issue in answering these moral questions is whether or to what extent a suicidal mind can be regarded as a locus of agency. There is an underlying assumption of all these ethical questions: that a suicidal mind is considered to be an agent of its own actions. That is to say, if a person's suicidal attempt (causally) arises from the person's free will, by preventing the person's attempt, one is forced to interfere with the person's individual freedom of will. Consequently, there are a series of moral questions concerning suicide-prevention programs (as just mentioned). However, if a first-person is not necessarily a locus of agency, there is the possibility of alternative ethics regarding suicide prevention.

I would like to argue that there is a reason to reconceptualize autonomy (agency) of a suicidal individual, and that it is not always necessary to consider these ethical questions concerning preventing suicide. In some cases, at least, one can call into question the agency of suicidal individuals. In what follows, I discuss five main issues.

- 1) first-person authority and rationalism
- 2) agency and first-person authority
- 3) Shneidman's psychological autopsy
- 4) the concept of multi-vocality (a narratological study of psychological autopsy)
- 5) the "skeptic" solution for ethical problems concerning suicide prevention

My discussion below will largely depend on the thesis of so-called "rationalism." ¹ Given the rationality thesis (the thesis that self-knowledge is required for agency), one without sufficient

self-knowledge is not considered a full-fledged agent. Shneidman's case report (especially if we consider its narrative multi-vocal structure) shows that there are *some* cases in which an individual lacks such self-knowledge. Specifically, because of the complex psychological and social circumstances a suicidal individual is situated in, the first person's psychology is rationally much more ambiguous than usual. (The first person often vacillates between reasons for and against suicide.) This rational ambiguity makes a suicidal mind less self-knowledgeable, raising an issue regarding the first-person's agency.

First-person authority as rational necessity: Davidson and Burge

The problem called first-person authority has been a major locus of debates concerning theories of mind and consciousness in recent analytic philosophy. I clarify the ideas called "rationalism," especially the ones most notably advocated by Donald Davidson and Sydney Shoemaker. Their views are called thus because they consider reason as the source of epistemic justification for self-knowledge and/or first-person authority. Below I focus on the theory proposed by Tyler Burge as a representative case of rationalism. I discussed his basic view in my previous article on Nishida's practical philosophy². Here I would like to summarize its main points.

Contemporary rationalism has a historical precedent, often called "(continental) rationalism," which emphasizes the roles of reason or reasoning in philosophical ideas (such as Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza). American rationalists share some of their ideas, but, in general, these two groups of philosophers are historically distinct from one another. For example, Burge once discusses certain similarity of the first-person authority with the certitude of *cogito*-like judgments.³ My first-person beliefs about my own desires have an epistemic authority over and above others' (third-person) beliefs about them,⁴ and this epistemic authority of first-person judgments has an apparent similarity with the

infallibility of my *cogito*-like judgment, i.e., my ongoing judgment that (in this very ongoing thought) I am thinking. Both my first-person authoritative judgment (about my desires) and my *cogito*-like judgment are second-order judgments on my own mental states. The difference is that, while the truth of the latter is logically necessary, the former seems to have a more empirical nature. (That is, a first-person may be mistaken in her/his judging that s/he has a certain desire.) Nevertheless, Burge attempts to assimilate the first-person authority to the infallibility of the *cogito*-like judgment. This is why his standpoint is called “rationalism.”

How does Burge explain the first-person authority, assimilating it to the *cogito* judgment? Here is an outline of his argument. (He has at least two independent arguments for his rationalist claim, but this is one of them.) As a rational thinker, one must be able to make, change, or confirm one’s own judgment or inference. For example, recognition of a contradiction in one’s attitudes is a good reason to change them. Burge calls this sort of rational thinking “critical reasoning.” Being a critical reasoner, so he claims, one already has an epistemic entitlement to one’s propositional attitudes. For, unless I am justifiably knowledgeable about my own propositional attitudes, my reactions to the contradiction in my beliefs cannot be rationally evaluated.

Since one’s belief or judgments about one’s thoughts, reasons, and reasoning are an integral part of the overall procedures of critical reasoning, one must have an epistemic right to those beliefs or judgments. To be reasonable in the whole enterprise, one must be reasonable in that essential aspect of it.⁵

It’s possible to construe this argument as based on Davidson’s thought-experiment of radical interpretation. The rationalists often implicitly assume a certain practical situation in theorizing their views of the first-person authority. The situation is something like this. An organism with a cluster of beliefs and a set of desires

has to take an action to survive in its environment. If the environment changes, the organism's beliefs will change, and it behaves differently. Observing *its* behaviors, how do *we* (as observers) evaluate this organism's behaviors? If the organism is human, we also have to judge whether her/his intentions and behaviors are reasonable ones. The organism's (epistemic) entitlement to its own mental attitudes is a condition for this rational evaluation (in radical interpretation). In order for evaluation to have rational norms, the organism must have an epistemic entitlement to its own thoughts. This is a summary of the rationalist's theory concerning the first-person authority.

This rationality thesis has a few advantages as a theory of self-knowledge. For example, compare it to Armstrong's inner-sense theory, which assimilates self-knowledge to special perceptive knowledge (called "inner sense"). The inner sense model cannot explain an important fact of self-ascription of attitudes. A sensation is causal and thus perceptual knowledge based on it is contingent; but self-attribution of a mental state is not contingent in the same manner. My knowledge of my own mental states cannot have the same contingent nature as my perceptive knowledge of the outside world. Moreover, it is not clear what one can observe by such an inner-sense. Self-attribution is often epistemically *transparent*. In self-ascribing a belief (i.e., the belief that it is raining), what I look for as evidence are facts in the external world (clouds, rain drops, temperature). I am not looking *inside* myself. I evaluate my first-order belief by certain environmental facts.⁶ The rationality thesis is subject to neither of these problems.

It goes without saying that the rationality theories of self-knowledge have their own problems. In particular, it may be possible to *make sense* of others' behaviors without explicit rational evaluations of their behaviors. It is not clear whether there need be rational (cognitive) norms to make sense of an organism's actions. The rationalists' theories overemphasize the rationality aspect of radical interpretation. Nevertheless, there is an element of truth in the rationality theories. Whether cognitive

or not, self-knowledge is indispensable for social communication. An observer has to share an organism's self-understanding (rational or non-rational) in order to make sense of the organism's behaviors. If making sense of others is an essential part of our social life, the rationality theories have some larger significance in philosophy of mind.

There is another important issue concerning the rationality theories of first-person authority: the problem of agency. The rationalists' theories of self-knowledge go hand-in-hand with a particular kind of action theories. For Davidson (and probably for Burge too), rational explanation of an action is a *causal* explanation. That is to say, first-person authority and first-person agency are two sides of the same coin. Consider, for example, my belief that I am a good citizen. If I can make an authoritative judgment that I have such a belief, this self-reflexive judgment is inseparable from my (self-reflexive) intention to be a good citizen. Such a self-reflexive intention *causally* explains why I take certain actions but not others. (In brief, I am *committed* to this self-reflexive judgment, which is to say, I am committed to taking actions expected from a good citizen.)

Davidson presents his rationality theories mostly in the context of philosophy of action.⁷ He holds that there are cases in which an agent takes an action *for* a primary reason, and in such cases the reason's explanation of a given action is a causal explanation. I consider this to be a version of a commitment theory, because without an agent's commitment to a primary reason, the reason does not constitute a cause for the action.

Suicide and first-person authority

Edwin S. Shneidman's *Autopsy of a suicidal mind* (2004) examines the first-person psychology of a suicidal individual (called Arthur), by analyzing a series of interviews with clinicians, suicidologists, and his family members. The book is a classical example of "psychological autopsy," a suicidological method to

investigate an individual's reasons for suicide. However, while most other studies of psychological autopsy utilize standardized semi-structured interviews and investigate the etiology of suicide rather quantitatively, *Autopsy of a suicidal mind* is a case report of a single individual, consisting of investigations of the case by numerous specialists and interviews with family members and close individuals. In short, the book is Shneidman's attempt at a meta-level analysis of various clinical investigations (and familial interpretations) of a single suicidal case.

I would like to argue that Shneidman's work presents a counter-example against the overall picture of the rationality theories, either with regard to self-knowledge in general or self-knowledge of a suicidal mind in particular. Specifically, I focus on one important aspect of his analysis: that psychological autopsy of a suicidal mind has a *multi-vocal* structure. The term, multi-vocality, is my own coinage, and Shneidman himself does not mention it, but I believe this narratological concept explains the basic nature of his psychological analysis. Below I would like to clarify the concept more fully, and then examine the multi-vocal nature of the psychological autopsy case in Shneidman's book.

Although Shneidman himself was probably not aware of this theoretical issue regarding rationality theories, perhaps unintentionally, his empirical investigations of suicidal notes illuminate a problem of the theories. In the 1950s, he and his fellow researcher Farberow conducted a "blind" "control" study of suicide notes.⁸ Specifically, the two researchers compared simulated suicide notes (ones elicited from non-suicidal persons) and genuine ones, hoping to gain an insight into psychological causes of suicide inductively. While they found some differences between the two groups, they thought of the experiment as a whole as not very successful.

At the very beginning, we believed (with excessive optimism) that... suicide notes might prove to be the royal road to the understanding of suicidal phenomena. Reluctantly, after a

decade or so of earnest efforts, I came to recognize that many notes are, in fact, bereft of the profound insights that we had hoped would be there.⁹

Shneidman admits that *first-persons' self-reflective notes were not as informative as he had hoped they would be*. Notes have to be, at the very least, placed in specific contexts and interpreted along with other information collected. The methods called “psychological autopsy” were necessitated with this recognition that suicidal causes are multifarious.

Why are first-person's suicide notes not as informative as initially expected? Shneidman's book provides an answer to this question: Typically, a first-person's intention to commit suicide is *rationally* ambiguous (one is often partially undetermined and thus there are a multitude of reasons for and against suicide). Thus the person's intention (and the rational psychology behind it) needs to be interpreted with the aids of testimonies by various people surrounding the case.

I would like to call this particular structure of first-person rational psychology *multi-vocality*. Below I explain this notion by referring to both the clinical case study of Arthur (by Shneidman), and a film narrative Shneidman mentions in the same book.

Autopsy of a suicidal mind has twenty-one chapters, with an appendix being a suicide note written by the first-person (Arthur) himself. That is, the reader first reads various (third-person) accounts and narratives concerning a suicidal mind, and then finally finds Arthur's (first-person) suicide note at the end. Because of this textual structure, it may appear that this book simply assumes the first-person authority of a suicidal individual concerning his reason(s) for suicide. To the contrary, however, the content of the book clearly suggests Shneidman's skepticism.

So in the end we see that there is no simple understanding of any one suicide, that we are back at the end of *Rashômon*... wanting

to run the film over again albeit with a different ending, and, unhappily, thinking about it and puzzling over it for the rest of our lives...¹⁰

In the twenty-first chapter, right before Arthur's suicide note, Shneidman argues that there is no simple reason for a suicidal action, comparing it to Kurosawa's well-known film *Rashômon*, particularly its enigmatic narrative.

The narrative of the film *Rashômon* (or more precisely, the original short-story written by Akutagawa Ryûnosuke, *In a grove*) consists of a few main testimonies, each of which significantly contradicts one another. Shneidman finds the epistemic difficulty of psychological autopsy to be similar to the *Rashômon* narrative. In Kurosawa's *Rashômon*, contradictions between testimonies cannot simply be explained by difference in perspectives. This is the narrative structure I have called *multi-vocality*, the concept I would like to clarify below. I then argue that Shneidman's meta-analysis reveals a multi-vocal structure in specialists' (second-order) interpretations of Arthur's case.

Multi-focalism and multi-vocalism: Two hypotheses

There is a distinction between narrative "mood" and narrative "voice" in certain classical narratological theories. For example, Gerald Genette's *Narrative Discourse* explicates the two concepts in the following manner. Moods are "different points of view from which the life or the action is looked at," while voices are "the mode of action of the verb considered for its relation to the subject."¹¹ In other words, a narrative voice is that function of a narrative discourse by means of which a narrative is organized (often discursively) as a single action, which is different from a narrative focalizer who provides a perspective from which a narrative is to be told. For example, even if a narrative discourse is focalized through one character, this does not mean that the character is the enunciator of the narrative. Put differently, a narrative voice

concerns *who speaks* in a narrative. In sum, if we can identify a single person whose narrating act constitutes a given narrative discourse, we consider the narrative to have a single voice.

How are narrative mood and voice organized in the film *Rashômon*? The different narrative explanations by three main characters (a young samurai, his wife, and the bandit Tajomaru) in the film do not seem to arise from their perspective differences. It is difficult to think that the three have significantly different perspectives with respect to the murder. Especially, each of them confesses that s/he her/himself murdered the samurai. Of course, there can be minor differences in perspectives, but such perspectival differences do not change the *fact* that she/he *her/himself* killed the samurai (at least if she/he did it in the way she/he describes it). In other words, the difference is not in the mood, but in the voice of each testimony. *The multi-vocal discrepancy in this fictional work* (i.e., the discrepancy between different testimonies) *cannot be reduced to its multi-focality*. Put simply, the three narratives do not merely repeat *the same* story-fact (*fabula*)¹² from different points of view. They each tell *their own* stories-facts. This is an essential point for our discussion.

A crucial difference between multi-focal and multi-vocal narratives is the sense in which individual voices are to be treated as *different* from one another. In one respect, *multi-focalism is nothing but uni-vocalism*. If one attributes the conflict of *Rashômon* narrative to its multi-focality, she/he implicitly assumes that *any* person would think and narrate in *similar* fashions if they were placed in the same narrative perspective. (For example, if the wife were to have the husband's perspective, she would have told a story essentially identical to the husband's.) There is one good reason to deny this: I do not necessarily have the same hermeneutic background as another person would have, and thus would not always reason as another person would in a given narrative situation. (We may call it the principle of hermeneutic "democracy": Each first-person has an epistemic or a pragmatic

“right” to think differently from her/his fellows.) The main characters in *Rashômon* film are all provided with essentially the same narrative information. Nevertheless, they interpret it in significantly different fashions, and tell different stories about it.

This point (multi-vocalism) may be better explained by a psychological example. Consider Jastrow’s classical duck-rabbit picture.¹³ Suppose that I see this ambiguous picture and understand it as a rabbit. It is, however, perfectly possible that someone else might think of it as a picture of a duck. Such fallibility is even a necessary condition of our perception. Name this situation (a), and compare it with another situation (b) in which I see a (unambiguous) picture of a rabbit and the other person sees a picture of a duck. The situation (a) (Jastrow’s duck-rabbit picture) is analogous to a multi-vocal narrative, while the situation (b) being comparable to a multi-focal narrative. In the situation (b), if I were in the other person’s perspective, I would understand the picture as a picture of a duck (I wouldn’t disagree with the other person). However, in the situation (a) (the duck-rabbit picture), even if I saw it from the other person’s perspective, my perception of the picture would remain the same. The difference is not in the perspectives, but in the ways in which agents interpret the ambiguous (duck-rabbit) picture.

We should discuss *Autopsy of a suicidal mind* with respect to this narrative distinction between mood and voice.

Arthur’s multi-vocality

Arthur, the case on which Shneidman’s book is written, is “a 33-year-old male Caucasian who was both a physician and an attorney and who committed suicide by means of a drug overdose.” His parents are “nonobservant Jews of central European descent.” Arthur killed himself in “a large metropolitan area in the United States in the early years of the twenty-first century.”¹⁴

The book has interview data from ten peoples (Arthur’s mother,

his father, his older brother, his younger sister, his best friend, his former wife, his current girlfriend, his long-term psychotherapist, and the psychiatrist who treated him), and eight consultations by eminent suicidologists on these autopsy data. I call the former “first-order” narratives (or interviews), while the latter “second-order” narratives (or consultations).

There are some agreements among those interviews and consultations concerning Arthur, his life history, and possible causes of his suicide.

- a) Being a “difficult child,” frustrated, frightened, angry, and full of rage ¹⁵
- b) The parents’ divorce
- c) A psychopathological history during his childhood
- d) Being bullied in school
- e) A certain type of learning disability
- f) The breakup of Arthur’s own marriage
- g) Tendency to feel disappointed once he attains what he wants (a girlfriend, admittance to medical school and so forth) ¹⁶
- h) Inner pain (“psychache”) ¹⁷

Typically, those interviewed focus more on some of these elements over the others. This is natural, as they usually know some phases of Arthur’s life, but not the rest of it. What is more important, however, is that the eight consultations vary significantly, emphasizing some facts more than the others. As a result, the consultants, each of whom is either a specialist in suicidological interventions or a medical professional, do not converge on the “cause” of Arthur’s suicide. That is to say, neither the first-order discourses (interviews) nor second-order ones (consultations) come to any single (unanimously approvable) conclusion. As one reads the book, it gradually becomes clear that there are more than a few interpretations possible in regard to possible “causes” of Arthur’s suicide.

One may consider, for example, the consultation by John T. Maltzberger, M.D., which focuses on clinical problems often arising from what he calls “split therapies,” in particular, therapies in

hands of two or more specialists.

My experience with patients like Arthur makes me mistrust split therapies, with one person in charge of drug prescription and another in charge of the psychotherapy... I see nothing in the protocols that suggests that the split treatment resulted in the ultimate suicide that happened here; however, they do in some.¹⁸

Doctor Maltzberger suggests, though with some reservations, the possibility that the split treatment of Arthur constituted a cause of the ultimate suicide. He seems to think that, if both drug prescription and psychotherapy were in the charge of a single clinician, the suicide could have been prevented. Compare this second-order narrative with another consultation by David Rudd, Ph.D. His diagnosis is rather different.

Do I think the suicide could have been averted? Yes... I would have targeted his suicidal belief system more directly, couple with traditional work, to enhance his distress tolerance. Oftentimes, a better understanding of the suicidal cycle enhances a sense of control and provides for related psychological needs (e.g., achievement, inviolacy, order, understanding), alleviating psychache enough to permit survival.¹⁹

Doctor Rudd contends that there was some problem in the patient's belief system, which kept him from survival. Cognitive therapy, according to him, is "about information processing, what we make out of our experience."²⁰ That is, if one altered the ways in which Arthur made sense out of his experience, he could have alleviated his psychache, and eventually saved himself from suicide. The etiologies these two consultations provide differ, and consequently they propose different approaches to the case.

I would like to raise two issues. First, the apparent disagreements or different interpretative frames in the first-order discourses can be explained by their different perspectives. They know different phases of Arthur's life, and they interpret Arthur on the basis of their own perspectival knowledge. That is, their disagreements (if there are any) mostly arise from multi-focality. Second, however, the lack of convergence at the second-order level (specialists' non-converging accounts of Arthur's suicide) is not simply attributable to their perspective differences. Every information was essentially available to all these eight consultants. Nevertheless, they reasoned differently, leading to somewhat different theories about the psychology of this suicidal case. The narrative structure of the second-order discourses is similar to that of the *Rashômon* film. Different rational interpretations originate from distinct hermeneutic backgrounds of agents, not simply from their perspectives. In summary, *Autopsy of a suicidal mind* has an element of multi-vocalism. This is a crucial point for the interpretation of this book.

This multi-vocality hypothesis has two important consequences.

- 1) First, it can raise a challenge to the rationality theories concerning self-knowledge. The challenge is the following. If an analyst's interpretative frame differs (or *can* differ) from an analysand's self-reflective interpretation, what reason is there to assume that one as a rational agent has an epistemic entitlement to one's own mental states? Once one admits a multi-vocal structure of rational psychology, one should take into consideration the multi-vocality in examining first-person agency. There are, as a matter of fact, many ways in which a first person can be interpreted as rational. This (given rationalism) leads to general skepticism with respect to self-knowledge.
- 2) Second, alternatively, the multi-vocalism of psychological autopsy (at least the one for Arthur's case) may entail skepticism only with regard to one's reasons for suicidal actions. In fact, Arthur's case only entails this (narrow) skepticism. If

different analysts have different hermeneutic backgrounds, there seems to be no ground available for judging that one interpretation is more accurate than the others with respect to Arthur's reason(s) for suicide. Importantly, this epistemic difficulty applies to the first-person's own self-reflective interpretation.

In summary, one needs to either accept general skepticism all together, or (if one still holds onto the rationality thesis) to accept a form of skepticism concerning a suicidal mind. In the former, one is forced to give in to skepticism of one's self-knowledge in general; In the latter, the multi-vocalism only entails skepticism with regard to reasons for suicidal actions in particular. I believe that it is difficult for us to simply accept general skepticism regarding self-knowledge entailed by 1). I think it is an undeniable fact that, in usual cases, one knows one's reasons for actions. Therefore, I would like to discuss the second consequence of the multi-vocality.

Skepticism concerning first-person agency

Although Shneidman's psychological autopsy is very thorough and elaborate, it does not clarify a *cause* for an event called suicide. Rather, his point is to the contrary: It is difficult to perfectly describe the etiology of a suicidal mind in psychological terms. The eight consultations do not converge into a single interpretation of the first-person's psychology. The apparent skepticism of Shneidman's suicidology has a deeper layer. The following may not be Shneidman's own view, but I would like to suggest that his analysis entails this.

I just argued that the multi-vocal structure of Shneidman's meta-analysis has a form of skepticism as its important consequence. I would like to explain the nature of this skepticism in the following way.

If analysts cannot reconstruct a reason for the suicidal act of a person because of the multi-vocal structure of its etiologies, then what *other* fact could the first-person know? We tend to regard the

first-person to be an authoritative agent, i.e., to consider one to be more knowledgeable about oneself than others. There is, however, nothing that assures this first-person authority concerning *the* reason for a suicidal act. It might well be the case that, compared to the analysts' careful and thorough-going psychological autopsy, the person's own introspection reveals little more than the third-person analysis by the analysts. Presumably, the first person is just as knowledgeable as others (including Shneidman) are, with respect to the reasons for a suicidal act. In other words, it is often difficult to narrow down a *rational* interpretation of a suicidal mind in a linear narrative, either for analysts in the third-person or for a suicidal individual in the first-person.

This multi-vocality of first-person rational psychology is compatible with Shneidman and Farberow's study of suicide notes in the 1950's I mentioned previously. In fact, it provides a hypothesis regarding why their study was not very successful. As I discussed earlier, unless a first-person note is contextualized within a larger interpretative framework, it is often not as informative as it is expected to be. One not only has to hear what an agent speaks of, but also has to know how such an utterance is to be interpreted. The present discussion raises further complexity of the same issue. Consider a multitude of theories/interpretations regarding a first-person utterance. If a third-person cannot determine which of the interpretations are the "correct" interpretation, what entitlement the first-person (Arthur) himself has to declare which is the one? This undecidability is precisely due to the multi-vocality of an agent's first-person utterance. One may think of this as an underlying moral of Shneidman's skepticism.

Ordinarily, a first-person utterance does not have multi-vocality. A first-person's self-interpretation constitutes a unified narrative voice, and this is why a first-person is considered to be an authoritative agent. (That is, being a single, unified voice and having agency are phenomena closely related to one another. In ordinary circumstances, first-person-hood is a paradigm case of

such uni-vocal agency.) However, psychological and social complexity of a suicidal individual creates a multi-vocal situation that undermines such first-person authority. A suicidal mind is often rationally ambiguous.

This skepticism leads to the following conclusion. According to rationalists' theories, one needs to be knowledgeable about oneself to *count* as a rational agent. That is, without assuming one's epistemic entitlement to one's own mental attitudes, it is difficult to rationally evaluate one's actions. If a suicidal person does not have first-person authority, it is difficult to attribute, in observing the person's actions, any rational norms to the first-person. This was a summary of the rationality thesis. Given this thesis, if a person is unable to provide a rational interpretation of her/his suicidal attempts, s/he is not regarded as an agent of such attempts. Thus, Shneidman's skepticism (if *combined with* the rationality theories of self-knowledge) entails that a suicidal mind is not necessarily considered to be a locus of agency.

One may challenge this conclusion in various manners.²¹ Importantly, one should note that both the rationality theories and Shneidman's study are premised upon certain ontological and/or practical commitments prevailing in contemporary American culture. In fact, the issue of agency in suicidal cases and moral questions arising from it, which have guided our present study, both stem from this particular cultural background. However, it is also important to realize that this skeptic solution has ethical consequences. In particular, this conclusion suggests that there are some suicidal actions that are presumably *not* caused by first-person's own free will. It is clear that this particular solution needs further investigations, for a better understanding of what one ought to do in preventing others' self-destructive behaviors.

Notes

1 Although I consider this version of rationality thought has some close relation to ontological and/or ethical commitments prevailing in

contemporary Anglophone world, for the present study I will not raise any issue regarding this basic frame of thought. I will simply grant it as an assumption for the present discussion.

2 Odagiri, Takushi. "First-person authority and Nishida's practical philosophy," *Annual report of Nishida Philosophy Association*, Vol.6, 2009: 145-168.

3 Tyler Burge, "Reason and the first person" in *Knowing our own minds: Essays on self-knowledge*. Eds. Smith, Wright, and MacDonald. Oxford Clarendon Press 1998.

4 For example, I seem to be able to make an authoritative statement about my present desire for water, but no one else can have such an epistemic authority about my same desire. If I state, *about myself*, that I want to drink water, this statement is taken to be true *by default*. Others cannot have this default authority with respect to this desire of mine.

5 Tyler Burge, "Our Entitlement to Self-Knowledge" in *Externalism and Self-Knowledge*. eds. Peter Ludlow & Norah Martin. Stanford: CSLI Publication 1998: 249.

6 Richard Moran, *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge*. Princeton University Press 2001, especially the section titled "2.6 Relations of Transparency"

7 Donald Davidson. "Actions, reasons, and causes," in *Essays on actions and events (Second edition)*. Oxford Clarendon Press 2001: 3-19.

8 Shneidman, E and Farberow N. "Some comparisons between genuine and simulated suicide notes." *Journal of General Psychology*, 56: 251-256.

9 Edwin S. Shneidman. *Autopsy of a suicidal mind*. Oxford University Press, 2004: 7.

10 *Ibid.*, 163.

11 Gerald Genette. *Narrative discourse: An essay in method*. Cornell University Press, 1980: 161 and 213, respectively.

12 In classical structural narratology, "fabula" refers to a narrative action that is variously represented in different narrative discourses. An action may be narrated differently depending on ordering of its temporal sequence, points of view, or camera angles. Put in plain terms, it is a "fact" to be narrated in stories. For further discussions of this issue, see references of narratology, such as the following.

Jonathan Culler. "Fabula and Sjuzhet in the Analysis of Narrative: Some American Discussions." *Poetics Today*, 1: 27-37.

13 For Jastrow's picture, see Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical investigations; the English text of the third edition*. Translated by G.E.M. Anscomb. New York, Macmillan 1968: 194.

14 *Autopsy of a suicidal mind*: 32.

15 *Ibid.*, 125.

16 *Ibid.*, 110.

17 *Ibid.*, 121.

18 *Ibid.*, 90.

19 Ibid., 140.

20 Ibid., 140.

21 One can question the rationality thesis as an underlying assumption of the skeptic argument. Also, since Shneidman's study of Arthur merely discusses a single case, one should not generalize its skepticism without further investigations.