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**Abstract****The Irony of the Relation of Human Freedom to Human Sin:  
Reconsideration of Reinhold Niebuhr's Concept  
of Irony and his Theory of Sin****Masataka Sakai**

In Niebuhr's thought, the relation of human freedom to sin can be understood as an ironic relation as is articulated fully and clearly, first, in *The Irony of American History*, where the concept is different from that suggested in his previous work, *Faith and History*. Niebuhr elaborated his theory of sin most completely in his Gifford Lectures, later published as *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. In this his magnum opus, the relationship was expressed almost exclusively as a dialectical one. This paper will show that for Niebuhr, the relation of human freedom and sin is actually an ironic one.

Niebuhr presented the theory of sin in such a way that the complacency and optimism of the modern enlightenment and liberal Protestantism were shattered, but not so pessimistic that indeterminate human possibilities might be denied. His view of human nature corresponds to the category, "irony." In order to make this clear, the concept of irony as mentioned above must be understood correctly. The one indispensable presupposition to make a human situation ironical consists of the element of a virtue, which, miscarried "so comically," is transmuted into a vice in contrast. This contrast becomes irony if a hidden cause of it is an unconscious but not completely unaware vice, the responsibility for which therefore no one can escape, that is, an implicit "pretention" or "pride" or "vanity." In terms of human nature, this vice is "original sin," and one of the indispensable virtues constituted in the structure of human nature to make the condition of irony is human freedom. Understood so, the state of human existence involved in some corruption called "original sin" can be expressed as irony, not as tragedy. In this paper, the nature of the relation of freedom to sin in most deeply developed among Niebuhr's works in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, is reconsidered through the concept of irony in his mature thought.