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That Beautiful Song of an Edomite Watchman

Hideo Oki

We are holding this symposium in commemoration of the late Prof. Hisao Otsuka. In doing so we cannot evade the issue of our understanding of Weber. This necessarily leads to the interpretation of modernity, and our perspectives on the future as well.

Thus my first point today is this: Weber's scholarship is attractive because of the underlying but not readily apparent theological elements, as if they were a hidden ingredient in a secret recipe, and that the efforts to identify these theological elements require a carefully trained, robust but also resilient theological intellect. Some observers point to *Zwiespaltigkeit* in the thinking of Ernst Troelsch, Weber's close friend. However, there is definitely *Zwiespaltigkeit* in Weber as well. In fact, it is even stronger in Weber. And it seems to me that this is precisely where Weber's theological ingredient is hidden.

Toward his end of his life he gave two lectures, 'Science as a Vocation,' and 'Politics as a Vocation.' In both of these lectures a schism between science and politics is clearly evident. However, this does not warrant the view that Weber was a duelist with a gaping, unsutured intellectual wound separating science and politics. Nor should we think of the Village of Engadine in the deepest valley in the Swiss Alps, where Nietzsche once took up his temporary quarters. What I see, first and foremost, in this *unsutured, and un-mediated void - or vacuum and utter nothingness* — with the tensions inherent in the schism is his ultimate rejection of the 'liberale Theologie' 'of the past twenty years' (of which Troelsch was one of the representative figures). I see here Weber's perception of this 'liberale Theologie' as a case of pitiful failure — an intellectual blunder. I therefore see that Weber and

Troelsch went separate ways in the end, despite their friendship, and Weber was deeply theological in his departure from Troelsch. Weber was even more profoundly theological than Troelsch the theologian in the former's possession of the void.

For the modern Japanese intellect, with its conspicuous lack of theological training, Weber is hardly an easy entity to grasp. Prime Minister Koizumi spoke of unintelligible 'theological argument' in his parliamentary debate, as if ignorance made him bold. We should not emulate our political leader in this sense. Jaspers, indeed a great philosophical intellect, saw 'an ultimate mystery' in Weber. There may be a mystery in the un-mediated void. This 'mystery' could be better called a 'penetralia.' It requires a theological penetration.

Weber concluded the two lectures, 'Science as a Vocation' and 'Politics as a Vocation,' with the concept of *Beruf* with its attendant theological connotation. For Weber this connotation had a special meaning. In his first lecture he looked forward to intellectual sincerity to gaze squarely upon the void in today's fate as *Entsaeuberung*, and in the other he looked forward to a charismatic leader with a new prophecy to overcome this same void. If these two can ever be integrated, the only possible path would exist, I would humbly submit, in the kind of dialectic integration that embraces both science and politics in the negativity of pursuing the non-religiosity of '*Beruf*' up to the very end in the former and in the positivity of enquiring how to regain religiosity in that same '*Beruf*.' In this context Weber was in a greater theological tension in not mediating the two than Troelsch's attempt at mediation to attain cultural comprehensiveness.

The link between these two lectures through the concept of '*Beruf*' is related to an issue of how to revive the prophetic tradition when we have 'neither God nor prophets.' Weber does speak of a new prophecy. In our contemporary context we have no prophets. But Weber goes a step further. We do not have a prophet, and therefore we await one. Weber thus empathize with 'that beautiful song of an Edomite watchman with his longing for the establishment of a 'true commune' by a 'new and true

prophet.' In 'Science as a Vocation' Weber looks beyond and above what is possible.

'That beautiful song of the Edomite watchman' will never die once Weber noted it. If the void of this un-mediatedness will not lead to nihilism, it will lead to an intellectual challenge such as that of 'theological relativism' of prophetic intellect nurtured in radical monotheism.

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Weber's intellectual struggles were fought on the stage of the 'late-coming peoples' in the 'Die verapaete Nation' by Helmut Plessner, or that of the 'discrepancy with the times' that delayed the arrival of modernization. Otsuka wrote a number of essays in 1945, immediately following the end of World War II, all compiled in "Kindaika no Ningenteki Kiso (Human Foundation of Modernization)". In these essays he also struggled with the discrepancy with the times as applying to Japan of his day. Otsuka understood Weber from this vantage point, or probably more appropriately we should say that he analyzed Japan's post-war situation with Weber's insights. Otsuka understood theology as a Christian. And it was this theological knowledge that kept him on the correct path in understanding the essence of Weber and in the way Weber's insights might be applied to the Japanese situation. Jaspers writes the following on the essence of Weber, drawing on Weber's "the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism": *'Even though this may be completely value-free, empirical and objective, it in effect constitutes what might be called an indirect report to us of what sort of relations Weber stood in vis-a-vis Christianity.'* (italics added) I feel Otsuka follows this line of Weber interpretation. We at the General Research Institute wish to inherit this line, and further develop it. Both Seigakuin University Graduate School and the General Research Institute have a division of serious theological studies, along with their social science division. It is our belief that we cannot be able to pursue all the vital issues of modernity without a profound understanding of theology.