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KOBE UNIVERSITY

Meta-theoretical Premises of Christian Smith's "Personalist Social Theory": Reality, Person, and Society

クリスチャン・スミスの「人格主義的社会理論」におけるメタ理論的前提―実在、人格、社会―

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概要

本稿の目的はクリスチャン・スミスの「人格主義的社会理論」のメタ理論的な諸前提を取り上げ、それらの連関を明らかにすることである。この社会理論は批判的実在論と人格主義に立脚するものであるが、ここでそれらの関係の概略を示せば次の通りとなる。すなわち（1）批判的実在論はそれについての人間の観念や知識から独立した実在の存在を説く。（2）スミスはこの思想に基づいて、人間の人格もまたそのような実在的なものであるという倫理的な主張を展開する。そして（3）彼の社会理論において社会は、これらの実在による制約を受けるものとして概念化されているということである。以上の帰結として、スミスの社会理論はある独特の屈折を帯びたものとなる。本稿は彼の社会構造概念を引き合いに出しながら、この特徴を明らかにする。またその際本稿は現代のアメリカ社会とアメリカ社会学に対する彼の批判的な関心にも付随的に触れる予定である。かくして本稿は、彼の社会理論を今後さらに詳細に検討していくための不可欠の準備的作業となると共に、それを通じてアメリカ社会学説研究全体に対しても寄与することになるだろう。

Keywords

Critical realism, Personalism, American Sociology

I Introduction

Christian Smith is an American sociologist, born in 1960, who is now the William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame. Nowadays he is regarded as one of America's most renowned sociologists, owing to his attempts to develop an ingenious theory of society based on philosophical thoughts, such as critical realism, personalism, and his own Catholic faith [1]. In this paper, following his usage,

we call the entirety of his thoughts on society, including his theory of person, his "personalist social theory" (Smith 2015: 8), or simply "social theory." In social theory as a whole, especially sociological theory, it might be said that concepts like "reality" or "person," which are discussed in this paper, are treated at the meta-theoretical level. Indeed, this is in line with Smith's views. Thus, in the following discussion, we refer to his arguments about reality and person as "the meta-theoretical" premise in accordance with his usage.

Smith is widely regarded as a sociologist representative of those who rely on critical realism. In his book, which analyzes American sociology in terms of critical realism, Douglas V. Porpora refers to Smith's works repeatedly and even introduces parts of Smith's arguments in his book (Porpora 2015). However, what Smith calls personalist social theory has unique characteristics because of its basis in the aforementioned philosophical thoughts and his Catholic faith; hence, the intention behind his theory and the logical structure supporting it are not evident to those who do not share these assumptions. Therefore, the substance of Smith's so-called personalist social theory cannot be understood fully unless we clarify its meta-theoretical premises. The purpose of this paper is to clarify and examine in detail Smith's meta-theoretical assumptions and to reveal connections between his social theory and the meta-theory.

While Smith has now built an original system of social theory, his major was once sociological research on religion. A glance at his works list reveals that his concern about religion has been obvious and strong from the beginning. For example, in his career, he has dealt with the movement of liberation theology (Smith 1991), evangelicalism in America (Smith [2000]2002), and religious concerns of the younger American generation (Smith & Denton [2005]2009; Smith & Snell 2009). Notably, his two books about the religious lives of American youth have received impressive reviews and won *Christianity Today*'s Distinguished Book Award in 2006 and 2010. He was also awarded prizes for other works by various societies, funds, and magazines [2)]. Thus, it is clear that he has a good reputation in the field of sociological research on religion and social theory. Moreover, he is a fervent Catholic and writes books that are characterized by his strong Catholic faith [3)].

Thus, Smith had already established a solid position in sociological research on religion; however, he decided to try to build a system of social theory during the 2000s. It is what he calls "personalist social theory," and the basis of it is "critical realist personalism" (Smith 2010: 17). From these labels, it is obvious that his social theory depends on critical realism and personalism; however, his ideas about the former basically follow the arguments of Roy Bhaskar, an English philosopher who first expressed a philosophy of science later recognized as critical realism, and other critical realist theorists.

Then, what are the relationships among the three thoughts, namely, critical realism,

personalism, and social theory? This can be answered based on the three ideas we address in this paper: (1) critical realism argues that much of reality exists independently of human intention or representation of it; (2) building on this argument, Smith makes an ethical argument that human beings also have a similar ontological reality as persons; and (3) in his personalist social theory, society is conceptualized as one that is restricted by these different realities. This logic combines Smith's meta-theoretical ideas and structures his social theory. This paper aims to explain this connection in a little more detail. In this way, this paper will establish a necessary framework to examine the details of Smith's theory.

In addition, Smith's effort to build his theory is connected with his critical concern about the current state of American society and American sociology. Smith considers the main trends in contemporary American sociology as running parallel to the present relativistic and polarizing situation in American society. He refers to its main trend as "the sacred project" (Smith 2014) and discovers that the "run[ning] amok" (Smith 2010: 152) of constructionist thinking is at the heart of it. Whether such a view of American sociology is valid or not is a question for another paper; however, here, we discuss his attempts to build his own social theory as an alternative to the mainstream theories.

In the following sections, we first sketch out critical realism, based on which Smith posits his theory (II); second, we deal with his arguments for personalism with a focus on his 2010 work, *What is a Person?* (III); and finally, we reveal how he tries to construct his theory in contrast to the sacred project of American sociology (IV).

II Critical Realism

As mentioned above, regarding critical realism, Smith does not present original thoughts, but basically follows the arguments of Bhaskar and other critical realists (Smith 2010: 90-2). However, Smith's thoughts are characterized by the fact that he links critical realism with personalism. The following is an outline of the critical realist assertions on which Smith relies [4].

Critical realism is a philosophy of science that was first proposed by Bhaskar. Therefore, critical realism itself is not a sociological theory but a philosophical thought that has been successfully applied to the social sciences, including sociology. It is at the meta-theoretical level for each social science and suggests methodological plans for various studies in the social sciences. In addition, it frequently offers sociological theorists helpful ideas and suggestions for building new theories. Thus, critical realism has steadily increased its reputation among sociologists in recent years, although it has not spread explosively.

For example, in the United Kingdom, there are sociologists such as Margaret S. Archer, who constructed the original realist social theory based on the philosophical

thoughts of Bhaskar (Archer 1995), and Dave Elder-Vass, who attempted to reform social constructionism from the standpoint of critical realism (Elder-Vass [2012]2013). In addition, Routledge has published a series of studies on critical realism (Routledge Studies in Critical Realism) by critical realist editors, such as Bhaskar, Archer, Andrew Collier, Nick Hostettler, Tony Lawson, and Alan Norrie. While these are examples of studies in social theory, critical realism spreads over many different concrete studies and provides many methodological suggestions. In this field, Danermark and his coauthors penned a helpful and easy explanatory work that presents a critical realist methodology for social sciences (Danermark et al. 2002). The original work was published in Swedish in 1997 and has been widely read in Scandinavian countries. In Japanese sociology too, critical realism was gradually introduced by Sato Harukichi, who translated the works of Archer and Danermark into Japanese. Thus, critical realism is gaining advocates in English-speaking circles, Nordic countries, and Japan; although its center is still the United Kingdom.

Critical realism aims to offer a constructive alternative to both "the positivist empiricist paradigm" (Smith 2010: 92), which equates the fact of our experience with reality itself and the "constructivism, postmodernism, and certain versions of the hermeneutical perspective" (Smith 2010: 92), which maintain that only socially constructed ideas about reality exist. The latter stance is often grouped under the umbrella of "social constructionism." It can be said that "social constructionism" is an ambiguous label that can include a wide variety of thoughts within it. However, in this paper, following Smith's usage, we use this label to refer to theorists who make radical and relativistic statements, such as the aforementioned one. When critical realists criticize social constructionism, they often do not list the names of social constructionists. More often than not, the subject of their criticism is social constructionist trends as a whole, or more specifically, "misguided schools and strains of thought, particularly poststructuralism and postmodernism" (Smith 2010: 121). This means that their supposed enemies are not specific thinkers, but a group of claims (quoted below), which are shared by various contemporary thinkers. For instance, "[r]eality itself for humans is a human, social construction, constituted by human mental categories, discursive practices, definitions of situations, and symbolic exchanges that are sustained as 'real' through ongoing social interactions that are in turn shaped by particular interests, perspectives, and, usually, imbalances of power —— our knowledge about reality is therefore entirely culturally relative, since no human has access to reality 'as it really is'" (Smith 2010: 122) [5]. Thus, on one hand, critical realism rejects positivism that simply equates our experience with reality; and on the other hand, it objects to relativistic social constructionism like that.

There are two steps to achieve this aim of providing the constructive alternative. The first is a shift from epistemology to ontology in philosophy, and the second is a shift in

ontology from events to the mechanisms that cause them. Let us examine these two steps as the central assertions of critical realism.

Regarding the first step, critical realists criticize a tendency in philosophy, which they consider as typical of modern philosophy, to take epistemology more seriously than ontology. In other words, according to them, in modern philosophy, particularly after Immanuel Kant, all the questions about something that exists have been subordinated to the question of how we can rightly know it. Bhaskar, and other critical realists who follow him, tried to reverse this order; that is, they argued that ontology should precede epistemology. Suppose that a perception of something is valid; then we must clarify what kinds of attributes the object of perception has, to make such a perception possible. The term "critical" of critical realism has to do with this point. That is, one of the implications of it is about transcendental philosophy [6]. This means that we should shift the point of the transcendental question from the perceiving subject to the perceived object. It is important not to inspect epistemologically the preconditions for our valid perception in the subject, but to investigate them ontologically in the object.

Therefore, critical realism prioritizes ontology over epistemology. The implicit statement is that the real exists independently of our ideas or knowledge. While our ideas or knowledge of something might be relative, the reality of it is not negated by that fact. Thus, on one hand, like social constructionism, critical realism acknowledges the relativity of our ideas and knowledge; however, on the other hand, unlike social constructionism, it does not claim that all our ideas and knowledge are equally relative and fallible. Our ideas and knowledge are not only socially constructed but also defined by objects that ontologically exist independently of our conceptions about them.

If so, are our ideas or knowledge valid if we only empirically observe the objects and exclude the influence of their social construction? Critical realism says "no," as our real world is complex, different, and stratified by a great variety of interacting causal powers. This is related to the second point noted above. The second point of critical realist assertion regards a shift in the focus from the events to the mechanisms that bring them about. The reason is that the real world is multilayered and, therefore, not coextensive with what we experience. That is, reality is much richer than what we actually experience, and it is not confined to what we can experience. To clarify this, critical realism argues that reality consists of three overlapping domains: the empirical, the actual, and the real. The empirical is what we experience in the world, either directly or indirectly. The actual is what happens as events in the world, and it occurs whether we experience it or not. Therefore, the actual covers a broader realm than the empirical one. Finally, the real is what exists, whether we know it or not. The domain of the real is even larger than the actual, and it includes what does not actually happen in the world. According to critical realism, it contains the mechanisms that cause various events (= the actual) in the world. What does this mean?

This view of a three-layered reality emerges mainly from critical realist insights about experiments in natural sciences. From the standpoint of critical realism, experiments are not simple operations that replicate a variety of phenomena in a laboratory. According to critical realism, experiments are operations that, from a world that is an open system consisting of various, complex, and interacting causal powers, artificially extract as a closed system a causal mechanism that brings about a particular phenomenon. Critical realism views a variety of phenomena in the world occurring as a result of causal powers that interact and interfere in complex ways with each other behind those phenomena. Thus, the mechanisms that cause the events we experience do not always appear in the realm of our experience.

This does not mean that the mechanisms do not exist. Indeed, the mechanisms can appear in the domain of the empirical by operations done to extract them. From this, we can see that mechanisms that cause events are the real, although they do not necessarily appear in the realm of our experience; that the real exists apart from and independently of our experiences. Therefore, the view that reality consists of these three domains (the real, the actual, and the empirical) rejects a thinking as reductionism that confuses our experiences with reality itself. Reducing one to the other is to flatten the world, which is intrinsically stratified. For this reason, critical realism is a strong antireductionist idea. The world that contains a wide variety of events is far from flat or one that can be reduced to a single dimension.

For this reason too, according to critical realism, the criterion for judging whether something is real is not whether we can experience it, but whether it has causal powers. That is, as far as it possesses causal powers that can bring about a certain phenomenon, we can see it as real. Therefore the mechanisms that cause events are included in the domain of the real. Moreover, this rejects the positivistic view that we can discover a variety of laws ruling the world by a comprehensive observance of our experiences, because the laws that cause various events and experiences work behind these phenomena, interacting or interfering with each other. Thus, critical realism argues that science ought not to examine events, rather try to discover the mechanisms that cause them. This distinguishes critical realist science from a positivistic perspective.

These are the outline of critical realism. As noted above, these assertions stem mainly from insights into the natural sciences. However, Smith connects it with personalism as he thinks that "naturalistic scientism cannot recognize, much less adequately understand and account for, immaterial realities, like value, meaning, morality, and personhood" (Smith 2010: 114). "Naturalistic scientism" is a stance in science that maintains that we ought not to rely on our personal, subjective, and phenomenological experience, but follow the methodology and findings of science modeled on natural sciences. Smith does not agree with this statement [7]. It can be said that critical realism is far from naturalistic scientism; however, Smith's focus is more

on questions about personhood than those about natural sciences. Hence, Smith turns to thoughts about persons and society on the basis of critical realism. To Smith, this logic links critical realism with personalism.

III　Personalism

As the name suggests, personalism is a philosophical thought that sees human beings as persons. To see human beings as persons is to distinguish the persons from all other nonpersonal things; that is, in Martin Buber's terms, to "separate every self who is a 'you' from everything else that is an 'it'" (Smith 2010: 104). This is one of the fundamental claims of Smith's personalist social theory, which is labelled "the meta-theoretical premise" in this paper. Smith, in his 2010 book named *What is a Person?,* for the first time systematically expressed his critical realist personalism. He maintained that existing sociological theories do not fully grasp human beings; therefore, he devotes a great part of the book to discussions about human beings as persons.

In his book, Smith argues that persons come into existence as emergent realities. Emergence is a process in which something comes into being as a new entity that cannot be reduced to its components. We have already seen that critical realism considers the real world to be multilayered. According to this view, reality exists on multiple levels, each of which operates in its own particular way. Meanwhile, these different levels of reality are connected to each other, and emergence is the way in which they are interconnected. Reality at a higher level emerges from reality at a lower level, and together they make up the stratified world of reality by overlapping each other. For example, a human body consists of extensive material components, and the human physical body produces a great variety of realities, including material and nonmaterial realities. These construct a stratified order in the real world, which is different from the three-layered reality noted above [8].

Persons also come into being as emergent realities in this way, too. Smith says that persons emerge from thirty causal capacities as follows: consciousness; unconsciousness; understanding the real properties of quantity, quality, time, and space; mental representation; volition; practical consciousness; assigning causal attributions; interest formation; emotions; episodic and long-term remembering; intersubjective understanding; creativity; being the efficient causes of their own actions and interactions; inventing and employing technology; material cultivation and development; self-transcendence; creating, grasping, and communicating meaning; symbolization; using language; composing and recounting narratives; valuation; anticipating the future; identity formation; self-reflexivity; abstract reasoning; seeking truth; moral awareness and judgment; forming virtue; aesthetic judgment and

enjoyment; and interpersonal communication and love (Smith 2010: 43-53). These are also realities that emerge from human bodies and environments surrounding them and possess causal powers. Persons being emerging realities means that they can never be reduced to these capacities, materials making up physical bodies, or social structures in which the personal beings emerge; —— needless to say, persons cannot exist without them. Thus, persons are higher realities emerging from lower realities.

What is a person? Smith's definition is as follows:

> By *person* I mean a conscious, reflexive, embodied, self-transcending center of subjective experience, durable identity, moral commitment, and social communication who —— as the efficient cause of his or her own responsible actions and interactions —— exercises complex capacities for agency and intersubjectivity in order to develop and sustain his or her own incommunicable self in loving relationships with other personal selves and with the nonpersonal world. (Smith 2010: 61)

This definition includes important statements about persons. Let us examine them in detail. The definition of a person quoted above assumes at least three phases as follows: (1) a subjective self, (2) communicative relationships with others, and (3) ethical character that regulates these relationships.

With regard to the first point, it is said that "Persons … are *centers* of something" (Smith 2010: 62). Persons are centers of subjective experiences and durable identity, and, at the heart of it, there is an incommunicable self that is not replaceable. It is also a center that has a reflexive consciousness and possesses its physical body. As such, persons have their own inner worlds "that are not accessible to objective observation unless and until we express them through means of communication" (Smith 2010: 66).

However, this center is far from self-closed. This was the second point. The term "self-transcending" is symbolic of this. In Smith's definition, this means "the ability to pass beyond a concern with themselves to engage other and different concerns, those of other persons, of better understanding reality, of the possible meanings and purposes of life and cosmos" (Smith 2010: 65). In Smith's view, persons not only have characteristics like a distinct center, but are also equipped with pathways to the outside of themselves at first. For this reason, relationships with others are woven into persons from the beginning, and persons communicate with other persons on the basis of this intrinsic property. Persons are also equipped with capacities for communication such as "capacities for agency and intersubjectivity." Agency is "the human capacity to employ intention, deliberation, and choice to make decisions and to impose them on the surrounding world" (Smith 2010: 69-70). Intersubjectivity is "the existence of a state of mutually understood or shared cognitions, affects, meanings, evaluations, or desires

between two or more persons" (Smith 2010: 70). These capacities enable persons to affect other persons and their surrounding environments. In this way, persons are responsible for their own actions.

Moreover, the actions and interactions of persons are not purposeless. It is done "in order to develop and sustain his or her own incommunicable self in loving relationships with other personal selves and with the nonpersonal world." This part pertains to the third point noted above. Not all social relationships and communication define persons. It is important that the relationships of a person is loving. Smith defines the term "loving" as "relating to other persons and things beyond the self in a way that involves the purposive action of extending and expending of oneself for the genuine good of others" (Smith 2010: 73). Thus, a person is a being who benefits both oneself and other persons, or rather, that benefits oneself by benefiting other persons. Relationships between persons are defined by an ethical characteristic like this.

Hence, persons are centers of subjective experiences while they build relationships with other persons and nonpersonal things; these relationships are defined as ethical ones. Smith's social theory explains that this is why persons are the source of social structure. Therefore, social structures are constrained in a way. Then, why are the relationships among persons defined as "loving" ones in the first place? Personalism, on which Smith depends, says, "[H]uman persons possess an inherent dignity by virtue of the properties of their existent personal being" (Smith 2010: 434). If so, why do persons possess dignity? This is an important point in the understanding of Smith's personalism and his social theory based on it; hence, we examine this point in more detail.

Smith says, "Dignity is a real, objective feature of human personhood" (Smith 2010: 434). This is a fundamental claim of personalism. Human dignity exists without human recognition or ideas about it; it is a reality. Therefore, if it is recognized, it can be expressed in various ways. "For this reason, there are atheistic, pantheistic, and theistic accounts as well as Muslim, Jewish, Confucian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian accounts of human dignity" (Smith 2010: 441). Human dignity has been recognized at various times and places through human history. This fact can admittedly mean that arguments for it are not a particular ideology stemming from specific regions or ideas. However, this fact is not sufficient to verify the reality of human dignity. The question is what are the reasons or grounds for thinking human persons possess their dignity.

According to Smith, there are three accounts of this question. The first is capacities-based accounts that maintain that persons have dignity by virtue of certain capacities, such as rational nature or purposive agency. The second is theistic accounts, which argue that human dignity comes from a relationship between God and human beings, or that it is gifted by God. The third is skeptical accounts that abandon the notion of dignity altogether (Smith 2010: 446-7). Smith considered all of them to be inadequate. It is natural that skeptical accounts are rejected as Smith argues for

personalism; however, what are the problems with other two accounts? He thinks that capacities-based accounts are vulnerable to the criticism that there are those who lack the capacity that supposedly imparts dignity, such as capacities for rational reasoning or agency. Although he finds some theistic accounts to be persuasive, they are not universal; hence, it is difficult for those who do not share the theistic assumptions to agree with the theistic accounts. Hence, Smith tries to develop "an approach that is compatible with but not dependent upon a theistic account of dignity" (Smith 2010: 479). We noted earlier that Smith is a devout Catholic. Yet, he does not rely only on his religious faith; rather, based on his faith, he tries to develop an account that even nonbelievers can accept [9]. However, at least for now, he does not assume that the account about the grounds for human dignity, which he tries to show, is universal and complete. A time might come when he or someone else can offer such accounts or theories. However, these theories have not yet been developed, and he only hints about a theory that will be completed in the future. In the following discussion, we consider these suggestions.

According to Smith, it is easy to point out and complement the weak points of capacities-based accounts from the standpoint of critical realism. Its main fault is that it does not fully grasp the stratified order of reality. As we have seen, in critical realist personalism, persons are higher realities emerging from a variety of human capacities. Thus, capacities-based accounts search for the grounds for personal dignity in the wrong level of reality, as persons and their dignity cannot be reduced to the causal capacities from which they emerge. Thus, even though these capacities are not fully realized —— for example, because of serious accident or certain disabilities, either physical or mental —— personhood is not nullified. The reason is that persons are not human causal capacities in themselves. Personhood does not emerge at a decisive phase of development, but "exist[s] at the start of life" (Smith 2010: 457) [10]. Smith also notes that not all human persons always fully realize their own capacities. Even if a person lacks personal capacity, he or she is a person as long as the one is a human being. Behind such arguments, there is a critical realist notion that the real does not always appear as the actual or the empirical. Therefore,

> In pondering the grounds for the recognition and defense of the dignity of human beings, then, the correct question is not whether we can empirically observe people exercising reasoned decisions, agency toward a goal, self-awareness, or some other specific capacity. The question is whether the human lives under consideration are persons. If they are persons, they possess dignity. (Smith 2010: 453)

This is a statement that human beings possess real and objective dignity as long as they are persons. However, it can be suspected here that Smith answers the question of

dignity with the definition of a person. In other words, it seems that his argument already assumes the conclusion in the premise. He questioned the grounds for personal dignity at first; however, what he noted above is that human beings have dignity as an intrinsic property insofar as they are persons. This is clearly a logical fallacy of begging the question.

In fact, Smith did not reveal the grounds for human dignity. According to him, the grounds are what we cannot speak of, that is, a "mystery" (Smith 2010: 456). He says,

> One may not understand how dignity could characterize the emergent reality of personhood. But then again we do not understand how wetness characterizes the emergent reality of water. And we have no good reason to hold double standards of acceptance because we are more obviously familiar with certain kinds of emergent ontologies (the wetness of water) than others (the dignity of persons) [.] … Life, including science as one dimension of life, has its mysteries. In this case, however, the readiness to live with a partial mystery involved in emergence may open up the door to a much greater explanation and understanding of what we have heretofore been perplexing. (Smith 2010: 456-7)

In arguing this, Smith plainly admits that human dignity cannot be justified persuasively by our knowledge or ideas (at least for now) [11]. The grounds for it is exactly what we cannot speak of. This may remain so in the future. However, Smith is not silent in the face of it. He proposes a change in thinking; that is, the discussion about "the supply side of dignity" (Smith 2010: 461).

In the discussion so far, we have questioned why persons can be considered as beings of dignity. It involves questioning what types of personal beings possess dignity. However, the grounds for dignity are an inexpressible mystery, at least in Smith's view. Dignity is an essential property of a person; therefore, questions about the grounds for dignity cannot help but stop at this point. Hence, Smith proposes a change in viewpoint. According to him, in the history of theorizing about the dignity of human beings in the West, a predominance of liberal individualism has brought an unfortunate consequence; that is, the ascendency of discussions about the demand side of dignity —— discussions about those who are respected for their dignity. These discussions have focused on "the right of persons possessing dignity to make moral demands on other individuals" and "attend[ed] almost exclusively to the question of which individuals rightly possess dignity and what that entitles them to demand of other individuals" (Smith 2010: 461). Yet, as we have seen, this line of questioning will reach an impasse. Hence, by turning to the supply side of dignity —— those who respect the dignity of other personal beings ——, Smith tries to offer an account of a person's self-concern responding to moral demands from other persons and of their motivation to treat other persons as beings of

dignity.

Smith defines persons as ones who are in ethical relationships with other persons and seriously interested in serving for the benefit of others. This means that as long as we are persons, we have to respect the dignity of others and attempt to realize the personhood of others; by doing this, our personhoods will flourish. “An innate part of our quest to achieve the flourishing of our personal being … is to advance the flourishing of the personal being of other persons” (Smith 2010: 462-3). The realization of our personal being and other personal beings is inseparable. Smith says, “[I]t provides a ‘supply-side’ rationale for desiring to treat other persons as creatures in possession of dignity” (Smith 2010: 463). Dignity is not simply the right of others or the duty that we must recognize and carry out, because to recognize the dignity of other persons and serve it will lead to the flourishing of our personal being. Thus, even if there may not be absolute evidence for the dignity of persons, it is somewhat meaningful to deal with other persons as “creatures in possession of dignity.” Of course, this kind of treatment does not bring dignity into existence. However, Smith writes, “[T]hey do recognize and enhance the development toward the realization of the dignity of every person involved” (Smith 2010: 465). This is a discussion about the supply side of dignity. It does not seem to theoretically justify the dignity of persons; however, it attempts to show a positive reason to recognize it.

This is an outline of Smith’s argument for the grounds for dignity. As we have seen, this is far from a complete theory. Smith himself admits that the argument is the seed of an idea from which to build such a theory. However, even if we grant that fact, it seems that the question remains: is his argument a totally circular one? As we observed earlier, insofar as we search for a persuasive reason for dignity, we cannot help but reach an impasse. This reasoning becomes a tautology. This is because the reason is a mystery. Yet, even if we change a viewpoint, has that fact not changed? Indeed, Smith may be correct in maintaining that there is an advantage in seeing human dignity as a reality. However, if his argument seems persuasive in some degree, this is because we accept the view of personalism and the definition of persons by Smith. In other words, Smith seems to make the logical fallacy of begging the question again at this point. What is to be answered is why we accept the view of personalism. However, Smith does not necessarily demonstrate clearly the grounds for it. How should this be evaluated?

As to this problem, we do not want to simply blame Smith for his arguments, but to go one step further with our question; that is, the question of why Smith tried to develop his argument, going so far as to make such a logical fallacy. Why was he cornered into such a position? Contemplating on this point, we assume that his underlying concerns will be revealed. As to the skeptical accounts that negate the existence of dignity, he states the following:

> [I]f we humans truly lack an innate dignity as persons, we are free to disregard any others at will with whom we do not wish to engage, without having to offer, even in principle, any account justifying our indifferent and dismissive treatment of them. Without dignity, common truth and accountability get lost to the overriding concerns of individual desire and preference. (Smith 2010: 440)

Smith's serious concerns were expressed in this passage. It is this urgent concern that led him to lean toward critical realist personalism and propose the approach noted above. This is an ethical quest similar to the impatience —— a request for the indispensable stance to respect dignity of others [12]. Indeed, as we have seen, Smith's arguments for dignity may be circular ones from the standpoint of logic. However, what matters is not logic; what matters is whether it is *really* possible to get out of such a logical circle *here and now*. Smith sees it as impossible. Therefore, he was forced to appeal for the recognition of dignity, going so far as to make a logical fallacy. Why was he led to a point to think so? It has to do with his concern and criticism of American society and American sociology.

IV　Toward Sociology: Smith's criticism against "the sacred project"

In this section, we deal with Smith's social theory based on critical realist personalism in light of discussions above. However, we focus on its basic parts, as the entirety of Smith's social theory is too vast a subject for us to fully examine in this paper. Thus, we examine his concept of social structure as a typical characteristic of his social theory. The reasons for this are as follows.

An important insight of critical realism is that phenomena or events (the actual), our experience of them (the empirical), and the mechanisms that cause them (the real) are not always the same. In the social sciences, it means that we have to distinguish between the social phenomena we experience and the mechanisms that bring them about. Social sciences should specify and clarify the mechanisms that cause social phenomena. In the critical realist view, social structures are mechanisms. Social structures possess a great variety of causal powers and bring about different social phenomena because of complex interactions among the causal powers. In this sense, the concept of a social structure is not limited to that at the macro level. For example, the microstructure of a tripartite relationship can also be considered a constitutive structure that causes social phenomena.

It is important to note that, in Smith's view, social structures are located at a level other than that of our experiences; that is, at the level of the real. The reason this is important is that social structures are constructed by human ideas and actions based on those ideas; nevertheless social structures are considered to be the real and at a higher

level than ideas and actions. In accordance with the criterion of reality noted earlier, insofar as social structures possess mechanisms (causal powers) that cause various social phenomena, they are seen as the real. The fact that they are constructed by human beings does not contradict the fact that they are real [13].

Furthermore, Smith notes that social structures are located at a level other than that of our experiences; this means that although we can have a variety of knowledge and notions about social structures, and they may be socially or culturally relative, the reality of social structures is not easily negated by this fact. Whatever knowledge or notions we hold, social structures exist and exercise various causal powers. Smith briefly states this as follows: "We do not socially construct reality, but we do out of reality creatively construct the social and refabricate the material. And the social in turn becomes for us a part of reality" (Smith 2010: 196-7). This is deeply linked to the question of the extent of plasticity of social structures in Smith's conception.

These arguments include a keen criticism of social constructionist thinking. Importantly, it can be noted that they overlap with Smith's anxiety about the present state of American society and criticism of the mainstream in American sociology. Thus, to clarify the stance of his social theory, we have to examine the connection he assumes between contemporary American society and the main trend of American sociology, which he calls "the sacred project."

Current American society is afflicted with serious polarizations across different scenes. Smith has also analyzed this problem in his book that was released in the year 2000, which deals with evangelicalism (Smith [2000]2002). Smith found that at its root, this situation of ongoing polarization is due to the fact that there is pluralization of the social world and meanings of the human lives in it, which he call "narratives;" and as a result of these, a relativistic situation has been brought about [14]. Differences in narratives that give meaning to our lives sometimes prevent mutual understanding and sympathy between others and ourselves, and in the worst-case scenario, they can cause violent conflicts. Smith is very concerned about this situation. To stop the worsening of the situation, there must be a certain powerful normativity. However, depending on the conditions, it might be imposed on us as a strong appeal. In searching for a way out of this polarizing situation, Smith adopted critical realism. With regard to this, he writes,

> My turn toward critical realism was in fact primarily spurred by inadequacies that I recognized in my own reasoning in parts of *Moral, Believing Animals*, particularly around the unacceptable consequences (namely, total cognitive and perhaps moral relativism) of my arguments concerning presuppositional epistemology (chapter 3) and the foundational character of cultural narratives (chapter 4). Critical realism met and overcame those problems, and has significantly influenced my work since then. (Smith [2017]2019: 75-6)

In this way, in order to get out of cognitive and moral relativism, Smith searched for a position on the basis of which he could argue for the existence of objective reality independent of our experiences and knowledge. His deep concern about contemporary American society drove him to make an ethical appeal based on critical realist personalism to stem its current. That is, there must be recognition of the dignity of all human persons in order to hold back the divisions in American society. Smith's appeal may seem to contain a kind of logical leap; however, it clearly indicates the seriousness of the actual situation of contemporary American society. Considering this, what is the situation of American sociology that deals with an increasingly divided American society as its study subject?

According to Smith, what he calls "the sacred project" occupies the center of American sociology, and as a result, American sociology only inadequately grasps human beings and society. The sacred project is, he says, an implicit purpose to which American sociologists commit without awareness about it. Smith formulated this as follows:

> American sociology as a collective enterprise is at heart committed to the visionary project of *realizing the emancipation, equality, and moral affirmation of all human beings as autonomous, self-directing, individual agents (who should be) out to live their lives as they personally so desire, by constructing their own favored identities, entering and exiting relationships as they choose, and equally enjoying the gratification of experiential, material, and bodily pleasures*. (Smith 2014: 7-8)

What is stated here is the autonomy and equality of all individuals and moral endorsement of their various desires. This appears to be similar to Smith's personalism prima facie. However, Smith assumes that it contains a particular philosophical anthropology antithetical to his personalism. Of course, the sacred project is an amalgam of different thoughts; however, it contains at least three central thoughts; atomistic individualism, utilitarian hedonism, and social constructionism. Hence, the image of human beings in the sacred project is that of equal, self-reliant individuals who are subject to no external influence and are free to construct themselves and relationships with others, taking their wishes or desires as the primary standards rather than moral norms. Even if there may be a certain constraint on them, it is a very weak one, such as "so long … as they do not prevent any other individual from doing the same" (Smith 2014: 16). This view of human beings is opposite to that of Smith's. In Smith's view, human beings are somewhat constrained by natural reality or ethical relationships with others.

As you can imagine, sociology that is implicitly committed to a project like that is

quite vulnerable to the relativistic situation noted above. The reason is that "[s]ince different people find different kinds of experiences to be pleasurable, nobody has the right to define what pleasures or relationships other people should pursue and enjoy" (Smith 2014: 17). The sacred project of American sociology has a strong orientation toward egalitarianism; however, according to Smith, precisely because of this orientation, it is almost helpless against relativism and its resultant divisions. In Smith's view, this is because American sociology has lost a substantial idealistic core. This means that the main tendency of American sociology is, if not directly causal, parallel to the problematic situation of contemporary American society and perhaps can even worsen it. A part of the reason is an excessive social constructionist claim that because human beings can freely construct any realities, those constructs are equivalent as a result of it. Smith writes the following:

> Infusing the older, received, optimistic heritage of Enlightenment, liberalism, and progressive social reformism with new energy and purpose were the … experience of the black civil rights movement, a renewed theoretical interests in Marxism, and a moral commitment … to feminist theory and politics. Peter Berger's social constructionism after the late 1960s provided a key theoretical legitimation for activism designed to transform social institutions (much of it against Berger's intentions). … Neither poststructuralism nor postmodernism ever caught on in a big way in mainstream American sociology … although, as I said above, their skeptically relativizing and authority-hostile outlooks and sensibilities, which nicely complement the sacred project, have influenced the discipline in more diffuse, background ways. (Smith 2014: 128-9)

> Sociology's sacred endeavor is wedded to social constructionism in particular [.] … But sociologists … often take it too far. Nearly all of reality is talked about as if it were socially constructed, which is ludicrous. Social constructionism must be properly set into context by a more basic and adequate framework of realism —— critical realism, to be specific. (Smith 2014: 153)

Having stated this, Smith proposed his critical realist personalism in contrast to the sacred project. Here, Smith focuses his criticism on the "run[ning] amok" (Smith 2010: 152) of constructionist thinking. What, then, does he suggest? Let us consider this while citing his concept of social structure.

In *What is a Person?*, Smith writes as follows: "[m]y view is that a good theory of the origins of social structures needs to be rooted in a larger theory about the nature of human persons" (Smith 2010: 5). Smith tries to elaborate on the concept of social structure based on critical realist personalism. When we compare the concept of social

structure in Smith's social theory with that in the sacred project of American sociology, the biggest difference is that the former is conceptualized as one that is constrained by some factors and assumes ethical character as a result of it. Of course, as we have seen, Smith also acknowledges that society is a reality partially constructed by human beings; however, he also points out some constraints imposed on it. He says,

> Human persons are endowed with immense causal powers to make and remake themselves, their relationships, their cultures, and the material world. But all such human powers operate within the confines of natural limits on human bodies, consciousness, and action. This meeting of powers and limitations produces a creative, dynamic tension and energy that generates and fuels the making of human social life and social structures. (Smith 2010: 331)

Social structures are produced not only by human causal powers, but also by collisions and tensions between natural limits and human causal powers. Needless to say, there is a variety of limits on persons in their bodies, their mental lives, and so on. First of all, human constructing actions cannot escape from these confines. However, there is another limit to social structures.

In Smith's view, social structures are produced to enable human beings to sustain their personal beings when they face these limitations. He writes,

> It is thus *the natural drive toward a sustained and thriving personal life broadly* —— more so than motivations for, say, material advantage, relational dominance, or ontological security more exclusively —— when confronted with our limitations, *that generates social structures out of human existence*. (Smith 2010: 340)

Thus, the raison d'être of social structures is not only for material interests but also for the continuation of living as persons. For this reason, social structures must not oppress some people by benefiting other people, either materially or mentally. Instead, they must contribute so that all human persons can flourish. This means that social structures must create ethical relationships with persons. This is because, according to Smith's theory, persons are defined as those who have ethical relationships with other persons. Thus, social structures are influenced by various natural limitations of human beings and simultaneously constrained by the property of persons.

This is the biggest difference from the view of the sacred project. That is, according to Smith's social theory, social structures are conceptualized as being constrained by the two aspects of natural limits and personalism. If we call the former the realist constraint, the latter can be called the ethical constraint stemming from personalism. Because of this difference, the sacred project "seeks to overcome and transcend the

confining constraints of nature," whereas Smith acknowledges "humanity's belonging to a *natural* world, including all of its limitations and determinations" (Smith 2014: 201). And the sacred project thinks that "the human will, people's desires, are the ultimate drive in life," whereas Smith "understands the *interest* in realizing natural *goods* to be our basic life motivation" (Smith 2014: 201) [15]. Furthermore, "[s]ociology's sacred project is suspicious of social institutions and structures as almost innately oppressive, exploitative, and constraining. Personalism recognizes the powerful capacity and frequent tendency of social institutions and structures to be those things, but more deeply understands them as good and necessary *conditions for human flourishing*" (Smith 2014: 202). In this way, Smith contraposes critical realist personalism and common moral norms based on it to social constructionism in the sacred project and the resultant relativism. Consequently, he illustrates an image of society with much lower plasticity than that assumed in the sacred project. In other words, it is society with "the intricacies and discomforts of our complex, dynamic, stratified, tension-animated reality" (Smith 2010: 197).

Smith categorizes the characteristics of social structures into eight points as follows: (1) social structures "are always *actively sustained* by human behaviors, practices, and interactions"; (2) "social structures are not merely durable, but have specific *dynamic historical existences* involving generation, development, and change"; (3) "social structures always involves human *bodily practices* of various kinds to be sustained and expressed"; (4) "social structures always implicate *inanimate material objects* in their existence"; (5) "social structures are always constituted in part by *mental categories* that are culturally significant;" (6) "the human activities that generate and sustain social structures may be instrumental but they also always have significant *normative and moral* dimensions"; (7) "support for, cooperation with, and conformity to the implicit and explicit bodily and cognitive practices prescribed by social structures are governed and encouraged by *normalizing sanctions*"; and (8) "for these and other reasons, social structures usually encourage passive acquiescence if not agreeable adherence" (Smith 2010: 322-6). These characterizations clearly express that while social structures are constructed by a variety of human practices, either bodily or mental, explicit or implicit, they are imposed some limitations at the same time. Social structures depend on different kinds of mental categories, whereas they are constrained both by containing human bodily practices and material objects and by always relating to normative dimensions. For this reason, social relationships, social institutions based on them, and social structures containing them cannot be easily changed by arbitrary choice and must not be purposelessly transformed in a way that anything goes.

We cite a concrete issue as an example of the discussions noted above. While there is a wide variety of dividing lines in contemporary American society, one of the central issues is that of gender. Discussions about gender are the field on which social

constructionism greatly exercises its influence, including a positive one. Regarding the gender issue, for example, under social constructionism and antiessentialist claims based on it, the sacred project has condemned oppression in existing social relationships and fought to emancipate all authentic selves. Surprisingly, Smith positively evaluates the claims as follows:

> A great deal of the energy behind academic antiessentialism appears to issue from the moral and political commitments of people who want to deconstruct certain cultural assumptions about "natural" gender and sexual roles. An antiessentialism that distinguishes the culturally constructed from the naturally fixed is valid and important. (Smith 2010: 233)

However, what matters here is the qualification in the second sentence. Smith accepts constructionist, antiessentialist claims as long as they separate the constructed from the fixed. However, Smith believes that today, that distinction has been lost in American sociology. He says,

> But that is a far cry from denying the existence and explanatory relevance of natural entities with essential natures and characteristic capacities, when and where they do exist. Valid antiessentialism is sociological insight and historical consciousness. But many in academia today —— significantly influenced by problematic versions of social constructionism —— are running rampant with indiscriminate antiessentialism[.] (Smith 2010: 233)

Against this tendency, Smith tried to develop a kind of essentialist claim. However, these are far from a request to return to premodern, feudalistic behavior patterns. Smith attempts to demonstrate where social constructionism must stop and constructionist claims must be brought into the framework of critical realism [16]. To do this, he classifies reality into three categories; "dependently subjective reality," "dependently objective reality," and "independently objective reality" (Smith 2010: 184-5).

The distinction between "dependently" and "independently" has to do with whether something real depends on the human mind or not. Dependently subjective reality is a belief that is real for those who hold it, but not institutionalized in society. Of course, it is real insofar as it exercises causal powers on those people; however, it is only subjective and particular to say the least. In contrast, dependently objective reality is a belief that is institutionalized and, as a result, can produce behavior patterns concerning a certain number of people and material resources. These two types of reality are constructed by human beings. Social structures have to do with these types

of reality. In contrast, independently objective reality is to be strictly distinguished from the dependent reality because it is a natural raw fact that does not depends on the human mind. Dependent reality is not included in it. Therefore, independently objective reality possesses invariable properties and workings, regardless of human will or believes about it.

Regarding these conceptual distinctions, Smith enumerates four points as decisively important: (1) the third type of reality noted above is never constructed by human beings as it exists independently of human practices; (2) much of what concerns human beings, including physical bodies, is independently objective reality; hence, human beings are influenced by this type of reality and determined by it in some respects; (3) independently objective reality possesses natural powers to shape human knowledge, and for this reason, human beings can shape their knowledge and understandings about reality beyond the socially constructed; and (4) human beings impose significant limits on the extent to which they can construct dependently objective reality out of independently objective reality; that is, all human belief and the socially constructed institutions based on them are produced and operated within the confines of the order of natural reality (Smith 2010: 188). Thus, Smith points out that human beings are surrounded by various natural things, including their physical bodies, and that these natural things can neither be disregarded nor negated by human will about them. For this reason, human beings have to participate in constructing actions with natural limits on them. Indeed, many social structures are dependently objective realities. However, they also contain independently objective reality; therefore, they cannot disregard the limitations stemming from them. These claims attempt to stop excessive social constructionism and the resultant relativism. Human beings are not engaged in creating anything ex nihilo in a vacuum state.

In addition to these claims, in Smith's view, social structures are deeply connected to an ethical dimension. Social structures sometimes oppress human beings; however, they are not an intrinsic property of social structures. Thus, while Smith rejects excessive claims of antiessentialism, he is also against essentialism, which commits to oppression of personal dignity. He writes, "[A]ssuming that all women are naturally meant to be full-time homeworkers responsible for raising children, cooking, cleaning, and volunteering for the PTA is an illegitimately essentialist view of the female sex" (Smith 2010: 232).

Thus, Smith's personalist social theory is connected to a larger ethical orientation at the meta-theoretical level. In the concluding part of *What is a Person?*, he writes,

> A central purpose of sociology as a discipline should be to help achieve the human good by providing reliable knowledge and understanding about what kinds of social institutions and structures tend to lead toward the thriving of human personhood,

on the one hand, and that tend to be obstruct or diminish it, on the other. (Smith 2010: 487)

In Smith's view, sociology ought to help persons flourish. To do so, sociology needs to grasp human beings as persons, recognize their dignity as objective reality, and reconceptualize social structures based on it. For the above reasons, we can say that Smith's social theory has unique characteristics, as we have seen in this paper. He tries to build his social theory on the basis of literal critical realist personalism.

V　Conclusion

Smith's personalist social theory has a strong ethical character that differs from that of the sacred project. While it comes from his critical realist personalism, as we have seen in the third section, it also seems to have a relationship with his Catholic faith. Therefore, it is important to study Smith's social theory as an example of the Catholic position in American sociology. However, we must further examine his thoughts in keeping with various concrete problems in order to clarify what he calls "personalist social theory."

To accomplish this task, we note that Smith's social theory contains what seems to be an affinity to political conservatism. His criticism of the sacred project of American sociology is an illustration of this. In his 2011 book, which elaborates on conversions to Catholicism based on his experiences, he offers a critical view of artificial birth control and advocates the importance of defending life, marriage, and family (Smith 2011: 148-9). It appears that these opinions are related to his social theory. Therefore, his social theory seems to be close to the opinions of a group of conservatives, for example, those who are called "theocon" or are other religious conservative; however, in contrast, it is also naturally the subject of criticism from liberals and left-wing thinkers. Smith is aware of this; hence, he points out that those who commit to the sacred project have excluded some heretical sociologists from mainstream American sociology (Smith 2014: 172-5). Moreover, Protestant sociologists may hold different views on American society and American sociology, even if their roots are similarly religious. For example, James Davison Hunter, a famous sociologist, explains contemporary American society in terms of "culture wars." Although Smith appreciates Hunter's arguments (Smith 2014: 173-4), he is skeptical about the validity of the term "culture wars" (Smith [2000]2002: 48). In this respect, there are some differences between their views.

Thus, Smith's social theory occupies a significant part of American sociology while confronting other arguments on a variety of delicate issues. Smith's social theory is essential for understanding American sociology in terms of its relationship with religion and political thought. Therefore, clarifying the main thrust and significance of his

theory will greatly contribute to the study of American sociology as a whole. We conclude this paper by presenting these tasks for future researchers.

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Notes

1) This paper is a part of a series of my studies on American sociology from the viewpoint of relationships between American sociology and religion, or between American sociology and contemporary American society. The aim of this paper is to explore the thoughts of Smith as an important example of a Catholic sociologist in contemporary America.

2) For instance, the section on Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity of the American Sociological Association awarded Smith with the Distinguished Career Award in 2012 (ASA 2021).

3) Smith was originally an evangelical Protestant; however, he converted to Catholicism in 2010. His work in 2011 explains questions about evangelicalism that he had held for a long time, and describes the process that he had experienced in his conversion to Catholicism (Smith 2011).

4) The following discussion about critical realism draws upon the works listed below, which intend to translate Bhaskar's philosophical statements into sociological arguments (Danermark et al. 2002; Smith 2010; Porpora 2015).

5) Smith indeed enumerates some theorists (Smith 2010: 127-8). However, his focus is not on treating a particular thinker among these but on criticizing a shared tendency of theirs.

6) "Critical" of critical realism is an ambiguous term. However, it needs another paper to adequately explore the entire meaning of the term. Danermark and his coauthor summarize it into five points as follows: (1) an attention to the transcendental level transcending the empirical level, (2) a criticism against the conflation of structure and agency, (3) a criticism against the universalist claims that disregards the social characters of knowledge, (4) a social criticism included in explaining society, and (5) critical reflections on everyday thinking (Danermark et al. 2002: 200-1).

7) Following Charles Taylor, Smith calls this position "antiscientistic phenomenology" (Smith 2010: 104).

8) According to Raymond Martin, Smith's explanations as to emergence and the stratified reality is thin and insufficient (Martin 2011). Martin also criticizes Smith's work for its superficiality, especially the way Smith argues for the dignity of persons.

9) Smith says, "My own reason for believing in dignity are at rock bottom theistic. But the defense of human dignity today and in the future will require more than only believers in God to support the cause…. Human dignity, even *if* its ultimate source is in

God, should disclose itself in various this-worldly experiences, signs, and evidences that even people who cannot believe in God may observe and about which they might rationally theorize" (Smith 2010: 452). Although this paper does not examine the relationship between his Catholic faith and his social theory in detail because of limited space, some reviews deal with this problem (Gushee 2014; Jakelić 2014).

[10] Regarding this point, there are different views among critical realist sociologists who are interested in the conception of persons. According to Porpora, "Archer leans most closely, like the practice theorists, on Merleau-Ponty and bodily practice whereas, I, like the discourse theorists, lean most closely on language, indeed, approaching what Archer disparages as a conception of personhood as 'society's gift.' Smith would … argue on the contrary … that we are persons even before language acquisition" (Porpora 2015: 142). However, among these theorists, there is no disagreement about the importance of the concept of a person.

[11] Smith also writes, "My personalist account here has not stopped at a more superficial level of explanation than Kant or anyone else. We all at such a point simply hit the bedrock of our premises and logic of explanation" (Smith 2010: 455). However, as we have seen, Martin criticizes the superficiality of Smith's arguments. He says, "I agree with him that many issues in science and philosophy *ultimately* terminate in mystery. My difficulty in accepting his account of personal centers is not that it terminates in mystery, but that he arrives there so quickly;" or, "Not in this case, but in general, in making the case for his account of person Smith argues *from*, but not much *for*, critical realism, philosophical personalism, and an anti-foundationalist phenomenological epistemology" (Martin 2011). Given these criticisms, it needs another paper to examine the significance of Smith's social theory more deeply.

[12] Indeed, the meta-theory of Smith's social theory does not describe the empirical reality of human beings. Smith himself admits that there are various types of "brokenness" in our world. Unfortunately, this problem has not been fully examined in *What is a Person?*, which we address here. Smith is aware of this; although, he notes as follows: "I would rather follow a line of thought suggesting that every existence of unbroken reality creates … the inescapable *possibility* of brokenness, just as every affirmed 'yes' carries with it an implicit, potentially expressible 'no'; every shining of light brings into possibility (though not necessarily actuality) of a shadow through the obstruction of light; every real capacity and power involves the possibility of its abuse; and every act of freedom is open to misuse, even of the sort that can lead to oppression and slavery. Such an approach would suggest that the existent reality we occupy inescapably entails the *risk* of brokenness, but not necessarily its actual inevitability or essential, natural, inevitable reality. In fact, in the world we experience, the possibility of brokenness has been actualized. In which case, brokenness is a fact, but one that is neither essential nor accidental to reality, but rather an actualized possibility" (Smith

2010: 76). In his later book, *To Flourish or Destruct*, Smith formulates this as the problem of evil as a "privation of good" (Smith 2015: 234) and examines it in more detail.

13) Smith's argument seems to be parallel to Bruno Latour's criticism of constructionism (Latour 2005). It is an important to understand the outlines of the various criticisms against constructionism in contemporary sociology, including that of Latour, and offer a typology of them. However, this is not our present purpose; hence, this paper stops at the point where we indicate the importance of the task and goes no further.

14) Smith writes as follows: "[A]ll of our knowledge and life practices … are built like large rafts on beams of particular trusted assumptions and beliefs that themselves float freely in the shifting seas of culture and history. And all of us, in our particular, historical communities of believers float together on those rafts, typically unable to see beyond our rafts to the open sea on which we float and thus accustomed to assuming our raft to be all that exists and is true" (Smith [2003]2009: 52-3).

15) What are the "natural goods?" Smith briefly explains that it is a flourishing of persons. In his 2015 book, *To flourish or Destruct*, he specifies its concrete substance in more detail by referring to Aristotle's ethical thought. Incidentally, according to Smith, it is because of the ascendancy of social constructionist thinking in the sacred project that American sociology cannot accept a critical realist view. "[R]ealism is threatening to the sacred project dominating sociology. That is because realism recognizes certain natural orders, structures, tendencies, human conditions, causal mechanisms, social processes, possibly moral facts, and so on that regulate and direct the nature and dynamics of human personal and social life, as well as the natural order" (Smith 2014: 153).

16) However, on that matter, it may be natural that some people take a critical stance as follows: "The idea that there is a natural human condition and that humans who deviate from it are therefore unnatural and in being unnatural are defective and/or immoral has been used historically to denigrate people who are 'different,' such as homosexuals. Smith does not advocate denigrating anybody, but the sort of view he advances opens the door for others to advocate the denigration of minorities of various kinds" (Martin 2011).

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