Disaster: The Otherization of Nature, the Reification of Human Beings, and the Sinking of the MV *Sewol*

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Disaster is a phenomenon in which civilization, the product of human accomplishments, is violated by nature. A careful examination of their disruptive characteristics shows that disasters can be man made as well as natural. This article discusses how natural disasters become human disasters, a configurative process which is ironically a product of human civilization and social structures. The sinking of the MV *Sewol* on April 16, 2014, which was one of the most devastating maritime accidents in Korean history, demonstrates that nature can destroy civilization—or "otherized nature." Political power otherizes human beings and exceptional, inhuman occurences become routine.

Keywords   otherization of nature, reification of human beings, MV *Sewol*, cognitive fluidity, conceptual blending, homo sacer

The Power of Nature

The English word "disaster" is derived from two Latin words: *dis* (dislocation) and *aster* or *astrum* (stars or celestial bodies). Likewise, the traditional Chinese characters with the same meaning, 災難, signify the enormous power of nature overwhelming human capacity. To sum up, a "disaster" is a circumstance in which nature is perceived to be in discord with pre-existing conditions. In this context, it is important to note that it is human beings that perceive natural phenomena to be either beneficial or disastrous. In other words, certain natural forces are only regarded as disasters if human beings suffer as a result of them.

Human beings have always sought to control nature, but they are not powerful enough to do so entirely. As a result, natural phenomena, such as earthquakes and storms, have always destroyed human lives and achievements, and as such have been regarded as "disasters."

This article aims to investigate how a natural disaster turns into a human

disaster with the help of insights derived from the work of Immanuel Kant. According to Kant's analysis of theodicy, natural evil is distinguished from moral evil, and the idea of evil should be discussed within the realm of human reason, instead of directly connecting it to the notion of God (Kant [1791] 1996, 27-28). In a similar way, this article analyzes the essential causes and meaning of human-induced disasters, rather than natural disasters, and their social structures. More specifically, I examine the sinking of the ferry, the MV *Sewol*, one of Korea's worst maritime disasters, from the perspectives of Hannah Arendt, Slavoj Zizek, and Giorgio Agamben. Through a critical analysis of civilization, this article identifies the ways in which natural and political philosophy explain how disasters occur. In doing so, it demonstrates that disasters—which should be exceptional—are actually a normal part of civilization, and that they proliferate as a result of the otherization of nature.

This article adopts a critical standpoint in relation to political power, in particular, the way power reifies human beings and its capacity to transform inhumane practices into the norms of civilization, as happened during the Holocaust. I do not utilize specific religious terminology, but I do cite Reinhold Niebuhr and Emmanuel Levinas in an attempt to show that the governance of disaster prevention should be planned and executed in a religious spirit. As the title indicates, the core message of this article is that the fundamental causes of disasters are the otherization of nature and the reification of human beings.

Disaster as the Otherization of Nature

The Otherization and Resubjectification of Nature

Human beings instinctively abide by the laws of nature. At the same time, their intellect allows them to objectify the laws of nature. For instance, when prehistoric man learned to make fire by rubbing two pieces of wood together, that meant he or she objectified and recognized a law of nature—the creation of fire. Thus, human beings learned these laws of nature and passed them on down the generations. The laws of nature gave birth to technology, which is the origin of all our civilizations. Civilized human beings began controlling the laws of nature for their own purposes and identifying themselves as controllers of nature and of others (Nishitani 1982).

Although nature cannot become an "other" to human beings, it can be controlled by those who have acquired technologies. When this happens, human beings forget the fact that they are part of nature. As the idea of the Cartesian Self clearly exemplifies, modern humans perceive themselves as the principal agents of nature, while recognizing nature as an extension of objects (*res extensa*). This otherized nature does not embrace human beings and the ego is indifferent to it. Ultimately, human beings do not feel any sense of responsibility toward nature,

modifying and abandoning it at will.

In this reified and desanctified space, where mechanical rules created by humans to serve their own purposes prevail, human beings try to control the laws of nature onto which they project their desires and illusions. Simultaneously, nature loses its sanctity and naturalness and eventually becomes a multi-layered aggregation of human beings' desires and fantasies.

In the meantime, human beings unwittingly become subordinate to the very technologies they have created. They cannot control civilization, because civilization itself is the product of otherized nature through a process whereby abstract mechanical rules force human beings to be subordinate to those rules. Gilles Deleuze observes that certain human actions generate entirely different meanings, and may ultimately lead to random accidents through the intricate workings of multi-layered desires (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 3-25).

Civilization is not designed to look after human beings, as it is created through the otherization of nature and of human beings. Instead, civilization hands out cruel challenges at every turn. The most serious of these challenges can be interpreted as disasters. Due to the way that humanity has rid itself of responsibility for nature, such byproducts of civilization occur outside the realm of human rationality and that is the reason why natural phenomena become human disasters.

Nature's Revenge

Technology is so standardized and specialized that it can be applied everywhere. Meanwhile, Hans-Georg Gadamer argued that "truth" based on humanity cannot to be found through method. He insisted that "truth" is the convergence of given information and the innate understanding of human beings (Gadamer [1960] 2004).

In Gadamer's opinion, "what is called 'method' in modern science, remains the same everywhere and is only displayed in an especially exemplary form in the natural sciences. The human sciences have no method of their own" (ibid., 7). Technology, as a method, has always existed *outside* of human beings; and as technologies become more complex, human beings become more dependent on them, and as a result disasters become more frequent.

The 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster that followed the mega-earthquake in Japan, for instance, was essentially a counterattack by nature otherized by human beings. Simply put, the earthquake and tsunami were natural disasters, but the subsequent meltdowns at the nuclear power plant constituted a human disaster. This is the fundamental difference between a natural disaster and a human disaster.

From a microscopic perspective, the generation of energy during nuclear fission appears to be a natural phenomenon. Though the generation of nuclear energy is based on the laws of nature, it does not occur naturally; instead it

occurs in a way that is highly objectified and manipulated by human beings. The problem is that although human beings appear to be in control of this process, it is actually beyond human control.[1]

Another problem is that nuclear technology is in the hands of a few technicians. Disasters are more likely to occur when a technology is controlled by only a few specialists who assume responsibility for others' lives. Furthermore, as nuclear technology is divided into many different specialist areas, it becomes more and more difficult for any of these specialists to understand the overall workings of a nuclear plant. This kind of situation is itself a recipe for disaster.

In a technocratic society, the public are excluded from the policymaking process in the name of efficiency and certainty, and this is a direct contradiction of the essence of democracy (Kang 2011, 20). Disasters themselves may be "democratic," in that they affect large numbers of people, but the way that they are dealt with can be dictatorial. According to the disaster equation proposed by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies,[2] professionalism increases risk (ibid., 24-27). From a strictly theoretical standpoint, nuclear fission itself does not cause disasters, but despite this, we have already witnessed tragedies at Chernobyl, Three Mile Island, and Fukushima.

Likewise, nobody anticipates that a ship will sink when it is being built and launched. Nevertheless, there have been numerous maritime accidents, from the sinking of the *Titanic* to the wreck of the *Costa Concordia* and, of course, the sinking of the *Sewol*. These examples show that human beings cannot perfectly control the laws of nature. All anyone can do is estimate the durability of the vessels concerned and replace dysfunctional parts, etc. Meanwhile, when human beings are overconfident and fail to do their best to prevent accidents, disasters are inevitable.

This is the view of the Yale University sociologist Charles Perrow, who points out that accidents are bound to happen in a society that is so dependent on high-risk technologies, regardless of the safeguards. Perrow has described tragedies of this kind as "normal accidents." Jaeyeol Yee, another scholar who has studied the sociology of disaster, argues that occurances such as the Bhopal disaster, the radiation leak at Three Mile Island, and the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger* show that small mechanical faults can result in tragic outcomes by influencing other parts and structures (Perrow 1999; Yee 2004, 146).

As I have explained above, a society that uses state-of-the-art technologies is a high-risk society. As Ulrich Beck convincingly argues in his book *Risk Society*, civilization itself creates risk by generating side effects that are beyond the purview of human beings' rational planning (Beck 1986). From this point of view, it is clear that risk is built into society.

Disaster and the Reification of Human Beings

Cognitive Fluidity and the Reification of Religion

Besides the accidental disasters discussed above, there are also many more disasters that are created deliberately by human beings themselves, such as genocides and crimes against humanity. Man-made disasters of this kind are the worst kind of catastrophes that human beings can inflict upon each other, and their repercussions are far more direct than those of natural disasters. How come human beings are both the cause and the victims of disasters? To answer this question we need to look at the otherization and reification of human beings.

Steve Mithen, a cognitive archaeologist, argues that cognitive fluidity developed once humans began to apply their ability to instrumentalize and exploit nature to other humans. Though it is true that cognitive fluidity has inspired the development of science, the arts, and religion, it has also been manipulated to emphasize the superiority or the savagery of certain races and, eventually, to discriminate between them on that basis (Mithen 1996, 196-197).

The effects of cognitive fluidity are evident in the ambivalent attitude of primitive tribes toward the animals they hunted for food, which they may also have worshiped or deified (ibid., 274). Even in contemporary societies, it is possible to witness cognitive fluidity in the way that some people cherish their pets more than their neighbors, or care more for TV stars than their own family members.

Attitudes toward religion are similar to the examples mentioned above. Although religion can be a response to philosophical inquiry from deep within the individual, to non-believers religions are merely an extension of objects, and even believers of one specific faith will regard other religions as heretical. Rather than understanding and sympathizing with each other through religious experience, people use their beliefs to build barriers, a sign of the "reification of religion," something which according to Wilfred Cantwell Smith began in the West and spread to the rest of the world in the nineteenth century (Smith [1964] 1991, chap. 2). These reified and inhumane religions have occasionally been used as criteria for discrimination. In a broad sense, reified religions may be seen as evidence of the presence of cognitive fluidity even today.

The Holocaust, one of the worst tragedies in history, shows just how disastrous the "reification of religion and human beings" can be. The Nazis tried to justify their crimes by reifying and dehumanizing the Jews in Auschwitz, something which Hannah Arendt analyzed so well.

Conceptual Blending and the Banality of Evil

After having attended the trial of the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, Hannah Arendt published a book entitled *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. But how can something as exceptional as evil ever be banal? Arendt

concluded that evil stems from a lack of the ability to empathize with others. In other words, the Holocaust was not so much the result of intentional cruelty as "an inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of someone else" (Arendt 1963, 44). If people do not care for others and only focus on their own daily lives, they are likely to reify others and be indifferent to them.

The Italian-Jewish writer and Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi believed that in the eyes of anti-Semites, Jews were subhuman. He said that Jews in Auschwitz "are overcome before they can adapt themselves; they are beaten by time; they do not begin to learn German, to disentangle the infernal knot of laws and prohibition until their body is already in decay, and nothing can save them from selections or from death by exhaustion" (Levi 1996, 90). Jews were even hunted like animals, an indication that the main cause of the Holocaust might have been a lack of empathy resulting from the reification of human beings. The lack of an ability to empathize with others can also explain the inhumane practice of slavery and massacres such as those committed around the time of Korea's liberation from Japan.

In an effort to explain the intertwining of the concepts of human beings and objects, the cognitive scientists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner introduced the idea of "conceptual blending" which accords with the ideas of Steve Mithen mentioned above (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 17-38). They claim that conceptual blending influenced various human accomplishments and worked as a basic mental operation in language, art, science, magic and ritual, and the simplest mental events in everyday life (ibid., 3-15).

Conceptual blending also serves as a logical basis for explaining a variety of disasters that result from the reification of human beings, including the Holocaust. Fauconnier and Turner introduce a dehumanized area in mental space that results from the merging of *input space* into a *blended space*. Such conceptual blending is clearly illustrated in the process of the Holocaust, during which the administrative system integrated with genocide (ibid., 39-58).

As Levi statesd, Nazis devised various "precautions, in order to keep the secret, only cautious and cynical euphemisms were employed by the official language: one did not write 'extermination' but 'final solution,' not 'deportation' but 'transfer,' not 'killing by gas' but 'special treatment'" (Levi [1965] 1995, 213). As the terminology of genocide was transformed into mundane words, the Holocaust became a part of everyday life. Charles Fred Alford describes it thus:

> If you go to the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C., you may find that it is not the photographs, or even the piles of shoes and hair, that overcome you. For better or worse, many seem to have become immune to the pathos of such images. Overwhelming is the perverse rationality of it all, the elaborate categories of beings to be destroyed, the Institutes for Racial Hygiene, the Offices of Purification of the Reich, the Departments of Special Procedures. The Holocaust was science, industry,

and bureaucracy driven by images of doom, impurity, and dread, the stuff of precategorical evil (Alford 1997, 81).

This illustrates how genocide was transformed into formal administrative procedures. In other words, "Holocaust perpetrators recognized homicides as mere administrative executions in their own 'mental space', because they had integrated those two different actions" (Lee 2012, 343). Through this process, "mass murder and routine had become one. Normality itself had become exceedingly abnormal" (Browning 1982).

In arguing for four months during his trial that, being a mere lieutenant colonel, he could not be held responsible for the crimes of which he was accused, Eichmann was demonstrating the blending of two actions—killing and administrative behavior. Returning to Arendt's explanation, Eichmann behaved as he did because he lacked the ability to imagine the pain of others, and also because "the imaginative structure of that time was dominant in Eichmann, that 'Jews are animals/objects', 'genocides are administrative procedures', and 'killings are the final solution'" (Lee 2012, 355). Within the blended space of Eichmann's imagination, human beings were merely the ordinary objects of administrative procedures. This was the main cause of the genocide, and as long as we lack the ability to empathize with others inhumane disasters will continue to occur. This is how evil becomes banal.

Disasters: Normality Accumulated

The *Sewol* disaster painfully highlights structural issues in Korea. If the ferry had not sunk, it would have continued to operate as usual. In the blended space of those responsible for its operation, the ferry was never going to sink, despite there being some safety concerns. However, the accumulation of everyday evils can eventually bring about catastrophes. Indeed, most disasters that have occurred recently in Korea have been the result of an accumulation of ordinary events (Yee and Kim 2004, 164-165). The Seongsu bridge collapse in 1994, the collapse of the Sampoong department store in 1995, the Daegu subway fire in 2003, and the collapse of the Mauna resort in Gyeongju and the Sewol ferry disaster in 2014 can all be attributed to the banality of evil, the reification of human beings, and a failure to empathize with others.

From the point of view of organization theory, disasters caused by the accumulation of ordinary events are "bred within a culture that undermines pre-existing procedures. And these risk factors occur all at the same time, thereby threatening a society's subordinate structures" (ibid., 165). "Based on these definitions, it can be inferred that many human disasters result from a culture of not recognizing and ignoring precautions. … there are often ample signs before each accident, but they are either ignored or misinterpreted and that is how risk factors accumulate to the point where they cause disasters" (ibid., 169).[3] Signs of

an impending disaster are ignored or distorted by routine everyday practice.

Agreeing with Arendt's analysis, Slavoj Zizek argues that atrocities such as genocides are the result of banality. He mentions how Stalin's daughter remembered her father as a generous and benevolent leader and claimed that he was falsely accused of committing mass murder by his state security chief, Lavrenti Beria. Meanwhile, Beria's son also claimed that his father was an affectionate man who only obeyed Stalin's orders. The son of Georgy Malenkov, Stalin's successor, repeated a similar narrative (Zizek 2008, 47). To their family members, Stalin, Beria, and Malenkov, as well as Eichmann, were all ordinary men. However, they all ignored the disastrous results of their decisions—they were blind to how their administrative acts could lead to acts of killing. Regarding the banality of evil, Zizek said:

> Hannah Arendt was right: these figures were not personifications of sublime Byronesque demonic evil: the gap between their intimate experience and the horror of their acts was immense. The experience that we have of our lives from within, the story we tell ourselves about ourselves in order to account for what we are doing, is fundamentally a lie—the truth lies outside, in what we do (ibid., 47).

According Zizek's analysis, the majority of those "condemned at Stalinist show trials faced the firing squad professing their innocence and their love for Stalin," and this was a "pathetic gesture aimed at redeeming their image in the eyes of the big Other" (ibid., 51). Displaying ruthless violence against an enemy while showing humanity and kindness toward their own group members and slaughtering hostages while writing heart-felt letters to their families are all examples of hypocracy in Zizek's eyes. Zizek goes even further in suspecting that declarations of love to one's nearest and dearest at times of imminent catastrophe, such as just before a plane crash, are also hypocritical, like those who seek to make their peace with God on their deathbeds.

Although our society is more diversified than ever, and seems to value that diversity, this pluralization ironically tends to exclude strangers, namely others, from its architecture. When one enters a pluralized individual space, one does not question the existence of others. The universal claim that one should love humanity in its entirety could be a fallacy, as no one can be a brother or sister to everyone. Speaking of "neighbors" totally excludes neighbors. This is why Zizek says that "the Neighbor is a thing" (ibid. 46, 59). The reification of neighbors is equivalent to the impersonalization of others.

As is the case in the sinking of the *Sewol* and its aftermath, the cries of victims are heard everywhere, but there is as yet no social apparatus to connect these individual cries, despite the fact that those who lost their loved ones desperately want one. It is not too much to say that such a deficiency is a characteristic of the modern nation-state. The paradox of the modern disaster is

that although disasters should be exceptional, they are actually a normal part of life.

Homo Sacer and the Normalization of Exceptions

In his volume, *Homo Sacer*, Giorgio Agamben clearly illustrates the normalization of exception (Agamben 1998).[4] Under ancient Roman law, *homo sacer* ("sacred man" or "accursed man") is an individual that cannot be sacrificed to the gods and can be murdered with impunity. By not being a candidate for sacrifice, the *homo sacer* is excluded from the religious order, and the fact that he can be murdered with impunity means he is also excluded from the legal order (ibid., 71).[5]

According to Agamben, the creation of a *homo sacer*, which is called *sacratio*, involves the conjunction of two traits: immunity from prosecution for murder and exclusion from sacrifice (ibid., 81). Agamben calls this the state of exception, and the modern power justifies its existence by making exceptions. In other words, the *homo sacer* shows how power constrains humans by excluding them, even though it may appear that power exists for the sake of human beings. Agamben says, "We shall give the name relation of exception to the extreme form of relation by which something is included solely through its exclusion" (ibid., 18). Power lies precisely where something that should have been an exception is transformed into normality.

The *homo sacer* is intrinsically exceptional because it is excluded from the law. Paradoxically, however, the law confirms its identity through the exclusion in the first place. *Homo sacer* sustains the law through its very exclusion, maintaining its identity by its inability to be offered as sacrifice. "Just as the law, in the sovereign exception, applies to the exceptional case in no longer applying and in withdrawing from it, so *homo sacer* belongs to God in the form of unsacrificeability and is included in the community in the form of being able to be killed. Life that cannot be sacrificed and yet may be killed is sacred life" (ibid, 82).

Exceptions are no longer exceptions. On the contrary, they go straight to the heart of the legal dimension. Levi and Agamben both mention the use of the term *muselmann* ("Muslim") in Auschwitz (Levi 1996, 88-90; Agamben 2002, 41-44) to describe inmates who, suffering from starvation and exhaustion, became resigned to their impending death. *Muselmänner* had lost the characteristics of living human beings because they had been actively ignored by society, like walking corpses. So the *muselmann* would have been an exception, except in Auschwitz where he became the norm. Paradoxically, although he lacks the will and the awareness to testify to the realities of Auschwitz, he is the true witness of Auschwitz. As Agamben says, "Auschwitz is precisely the place in which the state of exception coincides perfectly with the rule and the extreme situation becomes the very paradigm of daily life. But it is this paradoxical tendency of the limit

situation to turn over into its opposite that makes it interesting" (Agamben 2002, 49).

The *Sewol* disaster should also have been an exception, but instead it laid bare the true face of everyday life—during both the sinking itself and the recovery operation. For a long while now, exception has been part of everyday life, right at the heart of it. Civilizations brought it into being and its existence is sustained by the human power system. Power is something that exists for the sake of itself, not others. It exists by making humans disposable, and is therefore inherently violent. Two years on since the sinking of the *Sewol*, the recovery operation is still deemed a mission impossible. Of course, citizens are well aware that responsibility gets bigger as one approaches the center of power, but the law itself does not recognize this. This is because power is maintained by controlling the law, and power exists for itself alone through the exclusion of humanity; it is also because civilization is sustained by creating exceptions, similar to the *homo sacer*. In that way, crises are resolved not by law, power, or civilization, but by the passage of time and forgetting. A nation-state is in fact an empty space rather than a holistic entity that encompasses law, power, and civilization. This may be the fundamental disaster.

Dangerous Disasters, Unethical Responses
Disasters are the most explicit evidence of a risk society, something that was analyzed by Ulrich Beck. In a risk society, there is an intensification of unrest among individuals, but no political apparatus capable of resolving it. This is because the political system itself is producing the risks. Beck claims that the political subject of a risk society "is only the victimization of all by more or less tangible massive dangers" (Beck 1992, 48). However, it is difficult to mobilize victims on a large scale, so Beck doubts whether intangible, universal afflictions can be organized politically at all, and asks "Is 'everyone' capable of being a political subject?" (ibid., 49).

Traditional hierarchical societies use utopian equality to build momentum for the accumulation of wealth, while a risk society increases shared anxiety about safety. Reality proves otherwise, however, because solidarity born out of anxiety seldom organizes itself into a political power (ibid., 49-50). On the contrary, a community of unrest has extremely fragile foundations that are easily undermined by the presence of contradictory information. That is why, in a risk society, the victims of risks find it hard to come together, and politics falls into a vacuum.

This is similar to the distinction drawn by Reinhold Niebuhr in his *Moral Man and Immoral Society* between individual morality and collective immorality. Niebuhr asserts that ethical individuals do not necessarily make an ethical society. Individuals, by nature, are moral in that they have feelings of fraternity, sympathy, and understanding for each other and consider each other's interests.

However, "in every human group there is less reason to guide and to check impulse, less capacity for self-transcendence, less ability to comprehend the needs of others and therefore more unrestrained egoism than the individuals, who compose the group, reveal in their personal relationships" (Niebuhr 1960, xi-xii). For this reason, groups cannot easily acquire morality like individuals. Collective selfishness, which combines the selfish impulses of all individuals, does not allow space for rational thinking. For this reason, societies cannot solve crises of their own creation.

Over two years after the sinking of the *Sewol,* for example, the site of the disaster still serves as a space for plots, negotiations, and competition among the groups that were largely responsible for the accident. So far, Koreans have only confirmed the following: the search for the missing was actually a business deal designed to minimize accountability, maximize profits, and maintain and expand the power holders' grasp on power. More effort was expended on escorting the president to perform various ceremonies than was used to search for the missing, and the president has done no more than deliver a belated ambiguous apology. The salvage contractor, who had an exclusive deal with the Korea Coast Guard and the owner of the *Sewol,* valued the contract more than the rescue operations. The Korea Coast Guard, through an exclusive contract with a specific company, secured a space in which it could draw its own conclusions about the cause and the effects of the disaster. The owners of the vessel put profit before safety by overloading the ferry, and their sole concern was to minimize their responsibility. The *Sewol* disaster was the result of capitalist greed, condoned and endorsed by the state,[6] but even the Blue House has tried to avoid responsibility by arguing that it is not a "control tower" for disasters. By establishing a Ministry of Public Safety under the prime minister's supervision, the Blue House has avoided legal accountability in the event of national crises (Woo 2014, 130, 180). The *Sewol* Special Law, supposedly enacted to facilitate investigation of the sinking, has been revealed to be part of a strategy for minimizing and avoiding accountability or expanding authority. Even the religious organization linked to the vessel's owner has sought to control religious sentiments by conducting various ceremonies and misappropriated donations collected from its congregation. The Korea Coast Guard, the Blue House, and the vessel's owners, as well as the religious organization, tried in their various ways to benefit from the victims' suffering. Faced with this huge tragedy, each individual mourns the dead, while the response of society as a whole is anything but ethical.

In this context, disasters are inevitable. According to Perrow's theory of "normal accidents" mentioned above, disasters nowadays are not the products of deviant social systems but are normal occurences produced by our current social systems. As the scope of human civilization becomes bigger and more delecate, disasters are bound to increase in scale. Disasters are simply unavoidable in current societies, be they modern industrial or neoliberal capitalist. Of course,

the theory of safety culture holds that the establishment of organizational practice that prioritizes trust over efficiency will help avoid disasters. However, the logic established by otherizing nature tells us otherwise; disasters brought about by nature's counterattacks are inevitable. Responding to technological issues with technology alone is a logical fallacy, an example of circular reasoning. In societies where disasters are normalized, accidents and disasters are things that must be endured. The inability to empathize with others and see things from their perspective means that disasters even bigger than the sinking of the *Sewol* are deeply embedded in our routines, eventually becoming part of our culture.

Governance of Disaster with a Human Face

The Face of the Other

So how can we deal with this seemingly hopeless situation? The first step might be to acknowledge the problems as they are and then to seek out a ray of hope. As Nietzsche looked forward to the advent of the *ubermensch*—the superman— in the midst of nihilism, we have no alternative but to try to reduce the frequency and severity of disasters.

Human beings need to step out of their individualized space and rebuild their links with others. We cannot rely on an inadequate state. According to Levinas, we must revive our existential sensitivity that enables us to recognize the face of the other (Levinas 1985, chap. 7), which implies listening to the other's inner voice. To Levinas, the "face" is not an object; it makes an appeal and expresses itself. The recognition of a face opens the door to a whole new dimension. Levinas called the way the face presents itself "revelation." The parable of the Good Samaritan, the story of someone reading an absolute demand in the face of a man who had been set upon by robbers, is a good example of this (Gospel According to Luke 10: 29-37). When faced with another's pain and helplessness, the ego recognizes its own sin and its unjust possession and abuse of wealth and power. That is why the Good Samaritan looked after the injured victim (Kang 1996, 235-241). The victim's face, or the face of the other, became *the One* who disclosed universal humanity.[7] *The One* is an *other* before it becomes reified, someone who appeals to you. *The One* is the *other* who inspires the *ego*'s sense of ethics. One solution to the tragedies that beset us today may be to listen to the appeal of the other. Zizek observed that truth is realized by action, not by just talking; and Levinas argued that leaving one's neighbor in distress is the very origin of immorality (Levinas 1998, 98-99). He criticized such an unethical attitude and insisted that we reflect on our responsibility to others. He considered this responsibility to others as "the most important structure that forms the basis of subjectivity." In other words, existing as a subject is possible through one's relationships with others (Levinas 1985, 95-101).

Furthermore, that also explains why Niebuhr never gave up on the idea of social morality, in spite of his belief that society was immoral. He never ceased his quest for social justice, although he considered society to be collectively selfish. As a Christian theologian and ethicist, Niebuhr looked forward to the spread of individual morality in global politics. He saw that the human capacity to transcend–in other words, the ability to objectify oneself–empowers the individual to overcome reality within reality, and such an ability enables the theological ideal to be realized, albeit partially, even in the realm of relative reality. To Niebuhr, man's aspiration to transcend his desires is a fundamental prerequisite for solving today's political problems (Chun 2012, 29-32). This indicates that while Niebuhr believed society to be intrinsically immoral, he never gave up the hope that the morality of the individual could be applied to global politics.

The Spiritually-Planned Governance of Disaster

As disasters become more large-scale and complex, we need to find an answer to this fundamental question, what makes human beings human? Only then is it meaningful to ask why we need to overcome disasters. From a religious perspective, we need to recover the type of faith Smith called the universal trait of human beings, or what Harvey Cox and Marcus Borg refer to as the heart of human beings. Faith in this context does not refer to a particular religion that only goes as far as accepting a specific doctrine. Faith refers to human beings' innate transcendence that enables them to face themselves by reflecting upon existential reality and to become what they should have been in the first place. This very transcendence is something that will allow them to overcome disasters.

This coincides with the notion of transcendence proposed by Zizek, a self-proclaimed materialistic atheist. To him, transcendence is not something so surreal and distant that it cannot respond. Instead, it has already crossed into the dimension of this world, cracking into it, making the idea of revolution feasible through the cracks. If transcendence does not intervene in the world, it is not transcendence. Transcendence is inherent. Zizek claims that God is so immanent within humans that he is aware of his own non-existence. He says: "only atheists can truly believe: the only true belief is belief without any support in the authority of some presupposed figure of the big Other" (Zizek 2009, 101). In this way, Zizek reestablishes God as a main topic of discourse even as he talks about the death of God, paradoxically arguing that discourse on God is not meaningless. Completely incarnated and humanized, God's transcendence will penetrate the pain and, eventually, put an end to the cries of despair through the gap. Humanized and historically inherent transcendence is most prominent when it recognizes the face of the other and empathizes with its suffering.

In other words, this is an action firmly dedicated to an empathic relationship. Disasters originate from the otherization of nature and reification of human

beings. Therefore, it is essential to recover and to internalize otherized nature; to recover betweenness and relationship; and to revive empathic sensitivity toward human beings. Understanding human beings as human betweenness—not as atomized substances but as togetherness—and establishing an empathic and symbiotic social model is fundamental to minimizing and even removing the causes of disasters.

Brahman is Atman—the highest order of the universe and the essence of the individual are the same; all living things have the nature of the Buddha; human beings are made in the image of God; bearing the spirit within—all people bear the god of Heaven in their minds, etc. These religious principles from East and West provide a way of understanding God, human beings, and nature monistically or as beings of the between.

These are the premises that guide human beings to see others as entities within nature and nature as fundamental within human beings, ultimately making them divine. In an era of disasters, it is necessary to revive such premises, as they may provide the primary impetus for disaster prevention. This is why disaster governance must be implemented with a religious attitude that recognizes the face of the other.

Notes

This is a translated and extensively revised version of Chan Su Yi, 2014, "Jaenan: Jayeonui tajahwa, inganui samulhwa" [Disaster: The Otherization of Nature and the Reification of Human Beings], *Jonggyomunhwa bipyeong* 26: 195-229.

1.   Nuclear fission can only function in a predictable way and be of any use to human beings when it is controlled by people who completely understand nuclear theory. If those who control it do not abide by this theory, horrendous disasters will occur.
2.   This disaster equation [(vulnerability + hazard) / capacity = disaster] illustrates how professionalism increases the likelihood of disasters by raising the value of the numerator (vulnerability plus hazards) and lowering the denominator (capacity). It is a useful tool for analyzing the disaster as a phenomenon, but it is not useful for analyzing the essential cause of disasters. Nature is a force behind vulnerability, danger, and capacity. Disasters are the result of civilization's abstraction and objectification of nature and the absence of love for human beings. Disasters increase in scope in direct proportion to the sum of hazards—human casualties, property loss, socioeconomic chaos, etc.—and vulnerability to such hazards; and if the capacity to cope with them is inadequate, disasters only expand in scope which is how professionalism increases the extent of disasters.
3.   The Daegu subway fire was a complex-and-exploding disaster, which simultaneously displayed characteristics of a complex-and-amplifying disaster. The authors claim that disasters in Korea tend to be normal accidents with complex characteristics.
4.   *Homo sacer* means: sacrificed to God; holy, consecrated, serious as well as accursed,

horrible, and detestable. (Morwood, James, ed. 2005. *Pocket Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press). If we combine these various contradictory definitions, we can translate the term as "something that cannot be approached." *Homo sacer* can then be defined as "a man who cannot be approached."

5.   For instance, Sextus Pompeius Festus defined *homo sacer* as follows: "The sacred man is the one whom the people have judged on account of a crime. It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide; in the first tribunitian law, in fact, it is noted that 'if someone kills the one who is sacred according to the plebiscite, it will not be considered homicide'. This is why it is customary for a bad or impure man to be called sacred." (Agamben 1998)

6.   On September 22, 2011, the Busan Regional Ocean & Fisheries Administration sent a notification to the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education recommending that ferries be used for student field trips (Woo 2014, 105-106). It was immoral to encourage teachers and students to travel on old and illegally adapted ferries on their school trips to Jeju Island in an attempt to promote the marine transportation industry that had been in decline since 2009. The Korean government also introduced legislation designed to encourage the development of the cruise industry. This law, which is still going through the parliament, permits ships to be used for twenty to thirty years beyond their normal lifespan. While the Japanese government sought to ensure safety by limiting the lifespan of vessels, Korea sought to maximize profits by extending ships' lifespans (ibid., 105-129). The recommendation of the Busan Regional Ocean & Fisheries Administration was not a direct cause of the *Sewol* disaster, but it shows how such actions by official bodies can contribute to disasters. One might say that the sinking of the *Sewol* was a disaster that was bound to happen.

7.   Zizek criticizes this type of other. As there is no love in philanthropy, the face of an other that gives absolute orders is equivalent to the Nazis' perception of the Jews, that they were inferior beings, or in other words, the "enemy." (Zizek 2008, 55-56)

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