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DIETRICH BONHOEFFER WERKE

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DIETRICH BONHOEFFER WORKS

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DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Ethics

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MINNEAPOLIS

from life, but precisely by immersing ourselves in it.^[3] The question about the good is itself part of our life, just as our life is part of the question about the good. The question about the good is asked and decided in the midst of a situation of our life that is both determined in a particular way and yet still incomplete, unique and yet already in transition; it happens in the midst of our living bonds to people, things, institutions, and powers, that is, in the midst of our historical existence. The question about the good can no longer be separated from the question of life.^[4]

Ethical thought is still largely dominated by the abstract notion of an isolated individual who, wielding an absolute criterion of what is good in and of itself, chooses continually and exclusively between this clearly recognized good and an evil recognized with equal clarity. This notion we have abandoned (in everything that has been said earlier). Such an isolated individual does not exist, nor do we have at our disposal such an absolute criterion of what is good in and of itself, nor do good and evil manifest themselves in history in their pure form. Indeed, the basic scheme of this abstraction, in each of its elements, misses precisely the specifically ethical problem. It is at least highly questionable whether isolated individuals, divorced from their historical situation and their historical bonds, can be considered as relevant ethical agents at all. And since such an individual is unreal, this is at any rate a borderline case that is theoretical and uninteresting. The absolute criterion of what is good in and of itself—provided that such a concept can even be conceived without contradiction—turns what is good into a dead law, a Moloch,^[5] to whom all life and freedom are sacrificed. It loses the validity of being a genuine obligation, precisely because it is a metaphysical entity that exists in and of itself without being essentially related to life. In the decision between the clearly recognized good and the clearly recognized evil, human understanding itself is excluded from the decision. The ethical problem is transferred to the struggle between the understanding, which is already aligned with what is good, and the will, which is still resisting.

[3.] In this sentence, the words "we" and "immersing ourselves" are lightly underlined in ink; in the margin there is also a question mark in ink.

[4.] The following text incorporates material from "History and Good [1]"¹; see above, page 219.

[5.] Replaces: "destroyer." [While the historical meaning of "Moloch" is still debated by scholars, Bornhoeffer uses it here according to the tradition that Moloch was a God in the ancient Near East to whom human sacrifices were offered; see Acts 7:42f.] [CC]

HISTORY AND GOOD [2]^[1]

245 THE QUESTION ABOUT the good always finds us already in an irreversible situation: we are living. This means, in any case, that we can no longer ask and respond to the question about the good as if we first had to create life new and good. We ask about the good not as creators but as creatures. We are not concerned about what would be good if we were not living, that is, under some imaginary circumstances. Indeed, as those who are living we are not even able seriously to ask that question, since we can contemplate an abstraction from life only as those who are bound to life, and thus not in genuine freedom. Our question is not what is good as such, but what is good given life as it actually is, and what is good for us who are living.^[2] We ask about the good not in abstraction

[1.] An abandoned beginning of this second version is found, undetected, on the front side and half of the back side of a halved double sheet with the "Erdberger" watermark; this sheet is not numbered. Like the first version of "History and Good" (and also like the first page of the manuscript "Heritage and Decay"), the first page of the actual beginning of the second version contains the sheet number "15" in the upper left corner. The number for sheet "17" is also written in the upper left corner; all other sheet numbers are written in the top center of each sheet. The number "16" on the second sheet is written so that it hides, and thus replaces, the number "2." The beginning of this second version of the manuscript is also written on *Doppelbogen*, or double sheets, with the "Erdberger" watermark. The second version incorporates several substantial passages from the first but has a different structure. New parts include the introductory first paragraph on the theme "we are living" up to "the question of life, of history" (see below page 247); the section on "Christ as our life" (see below, pages 249–51); and, building on these foundations, the definition of the concept of "responsibility" in strictly christological terms (see below, pages 254–56). [Another new part is mentioned on page 264, editorial note 66.] [CC]

[2.] The words "for us" are lightly underlined in ink; there is also a question mark in the same ink in the margin.

It thus misses the genuine decision in which the whole person, with both understanding and will, seeks and finds what is good only in the very risk of the action itself, within the ambiguity of a historical situation. In this abstraction, the ethical problem is reduced from real life to a static basic formula, which cuts people off from the historicity of their existence in order to place them into the vacuum of a purely private and purely ideal sphere. In this approach, the ethical task is seen as applying specific principles,^[6] regardless of how they are related to life. This results in two possible alternatives. The first defines what is good exclusively as one's own adherence to principles without any regard for the other person, and thus leads to a complete privatization of life. Depending on how radical these principles are, the lifestyle connected with this approach can range from a retreat into the private sphere of bourgeois existence to withdrawing to a monastery. In the second alternative, the abstract understanding of the ethical leads to religious enthusiasm [Schwärmerei]. Again depending on the underlying principles, the resulting lifestyle encompasses the great political fanatics and ideologues and ultimately even the crazy, pushy life reformers of every possible shade. Of all these attempts we have to say that they have foundered upon life itself, and always will. By this we do not mean failure as such in a banal sense. After all, the life of Jesus Christ, who was neither a private saint nor a religious enthusiast, also ended in failure. Instead, we mean the specific failure (which always is already a failure even in the disguise of temporary triumph) that is ultimately caused by the fact that here no genuine encounter with life, with actual people, has taken place. Indeed, in this kind of failure something alien, inauthentic, contrived, fictitious, and at the same time highly tyrannical is cast off without human beings themselves, in the core of their being, really having been touched, transformed, and forced to make a decision. Ideologies, having had their fling with human beings, leave them like a bad dream leaves someone upon waking. They leave behind a bitter memory. Through them human beings do not become stronger and more mature, but only poorer and more suspicious. It is grace when, in the hour of such woeful awakening, God reveals himself to us as creator before whom we can only live as creatures, thus blessing our poverty.

[6.] See above, page 222, editorial note 15; there is a line at that point in the margin, indicating that this material is to be incorporated, with some revision, into the second version.

The charge that an abstract understanding of the good fails to connect with life does not mean that here good is considered as opposite to life. Instead, it means that there is in fact no genuine opposition but simply a failure to engage. Life is reduced to a quantitative negligible that can be disregarded at will. Life is understood, at best, as that part of "nature" that owes its origin as well as its redemption to the spirit, to the idea. However, where good and life are supposed to be related in this way like nature and spirit,^[7] life cannot really be overcome. Instead, both are defined as opposites, and understood legalistically; between them there can be no reconciliation but, at best, only a violation of one by the other. A concept of the good that disregards life is essentially unproductive. Such a concept implicitly contains a particular concept of life, which neither corresponds to reality, nor is it even capable of overcoming the opposition between life and the good. The barrenness of such a concept now leads us to ask the question about life itself, and, in answering that question, to seek guidance for a proper understanding of the good.

Ever since Jesus Christ said of himself, "I am the life" (John 14:6; 11:27),^[8] no Christian thinking or indeed philosophical reflection can any longer ignore this claim and the reality it contains. This statement of Jesus about himself declares every attempt to formulate the essence of life in itself as futile and doomed from the start. While we are still living and are thus ignorant of the limit of our life, namely, death, how could we be able to say what life is in itself? We can only live life, but not define it. The saying of Jesus binds every thought about life to his own person. I am the life. No question about life can reach behind this "I am."^[9] The question of *what* life is changes here into the answer of *who* life is.^[10] Life is not a thing; an essence, or a concept,^[11] but a person—

[7.] The sweeping success of modern natural science tended to make a dichotomy out of the old distinction between "nature" and "spirit." The humanities then severed spirit from nature and interpreted spirit as occupying the superior position; spirit was supposed to impose its laws on nature. [Bonhoeffer, however, regarded spirit and nature, and soul and body, as "co-inheriting"; see *Creation and Fall* (CF [DBWE 3]:74ff.), especially his statement: "The body is the form in which the spirit exists, as the spirit is the form in which the body exists" (77).] [CG]

[8.] The second reference should read 11:25.

[9.] In the 1933 Christology lectures Bonhoeffer distinguishes the question of "who" from the question of "how" in order to phrase appropriately the christological question (see CC 28–32 [DBW 12 (2/12):381–84]).

[10.] Compare *Creation and Fall*, where Bonhoeffer writes that freedom is not an attribute, possession, or object but a relation between persons (CF [DBWE 3]:62–64). [CG]

more specifically, a particular and unique person. This particular and unique person is life, not in possessing life among other attributes, but as an I, the I of Jesus. Jesus posits this I in sharpest contrast to all thoughts, concepts, and approaches that claim to capture the essence of life. He also does not say I have life, but I am the life. Life can thus never again be separated from this I, from the person of Jesus. By *proclaiming* this fact, Jesus says that he not only is *the* life, in the sense of some sort of metaphysical entity that might perhaps not affect me, but that he is precisely *my* life, our life. This is a^[11] fact that Paul expresses most appropriately and at the same time paradoxically with the words "Christ is my life" (Phil. 1:21) and "Christ, our life" (Col. 3:4).^[12] My life is outside myself, beyond my disposal. My life is another, a stranger, Jesus Christ. This is so not in the metaphorical sense that my life would simply not be *worth* living without this other person, meaning that Christ would add a special quality or special value to my life, while life itself would nevertheless have existence in and of itself. Rather, Jesus Christ is life itself. And what is thus true of my life is true of all that is created. "What has come into being—in it he was life" (John 1:4).¹

"I am the life"—this is the word, the revelation, the proclamation of Jesus Christ. The statement that our life is outside ourselves and in Jesus Christ is in no way the result of our own self-understanding. Instead, it is a claim that encounters us from outside, which we either believe or contradict. When we are struck by the word—which is the purpose for which it is spoken—we recognize that we have fallen from life, from our life. We recognize that we live in contradiction to life, to our life. In this word of Jesus Christ we thus hear the No spoken over our life, which

1. Cf. R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 39. [13]

[11.] Deleted: "mysterious."

[12.] NRSV: "For to me, living is Christ" and "Christ who is your life." In the latter phrase, Bonhoeffer follows the Nestle Greek text, which reads "our." [CG]

[13.] See Bultmann's translation of John 1:4a: "What has come to be—in it he (the Logos) was the life" (*The Gospel of John*, 39). [Bonhoeffer follows Bultmann's translation of the Greek, which differs from the Luther Bible. NRSV: "What has come into being in him was life."] [CG] The Greek term *Logos*, "Word," denotes the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God the Father from eternity. Bultmann's commentary on John's Gospel was published as a complete volume in 1941, after having been issued incrementally as fascicles between January 1938 and April 1941. *Ethics* working note No. 30 contains the comment next to "John 1:4": "Christ my life" (Phil.) Col. 3:4" (ZE 85).

is not life, or rather, is life only in the sense that even in our contradiction we actually still live from the life called Jesus Christ, the life that is the origin, essence, and goal^[14] of all life and of our life. The No spoken over our fallen life means that it cannot become the life that is Jesus Christ without its own end, annihilation, and death. The No that we hear brings about this death. However, by killing us, the No becomes a hidden Yes to a new life, to the life that is Jesus Christ. Christ is the life that we cannot give ourselves, but which comes to us completely from the outside, completely from beyond ourselves. Nevertheless, it is not a distant and strange life unrelated to us, but our own real daily life. This new life is not present other than hidden under the mark of death, of the No.² We now live stretched between the No and the Yes. We can no longer speak about our life other than in this relation to Jesus Christ. Apart from Christ as the origin, essence, and goal of life, of our life, and apart from the fact that we are creatures who are reconciled and redeemed, we can only arrive at biological or ideological abstractions. As a life that is created, reconciled, and redeemed, and that in Jesus Christ finds its origin, essence, and goal, our life is stretched out between the Yes and the No. Only in the Yes and the No can we recognize Christ as our life. It is the Yes of creation, reconciliation, and redemption, and the No of judgment and death over life that has fallen away from its origin, essence, and goal. However, no one who knows Christ can hear the Yes without the No and the No without the Yes. It is the Yes to what is created, to being, coming to growth, to flower and fruit, to health, to happiness, to ability, to achievement, to value, to success, to greatness, to honor,^[16] in short the Yes to the flourishing of life's strength. It is the No to falling away from the origin, essence, and goal of life, which is always already inherent in all of these things. It is the No that means dying, suffering, poverty,

2. Bultmann, *ibid.*, 404. [15]

[14.] Cf. above, page 226: "origin, essence, and goal." [This anthropological formula, which Bonhoeffer repeats several times, is an implicit trinitarian reference to God the Creator, the incarnate Christ who is truly human, and the Holy Spirit who consummates eschatological redemption.] [CG]

[15.] Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*: "For the world, therefore, the *Gen* [life] appears under the mask of death" (404).

[16.] Deleted: "to victory" [Siegl], presumably due to the use of this term in the standard National Socialist greeting *Sieg Heil*, literally "hail victory." Triumphant special news releases praised German military victories.

renunciation, surrender, humility, self-deprecation, and self-denial, and that, in these very forms, again already contains the Yes to new life. This new life does not disintegrate into a parallel Yes and No, as if, for example, a boundless expansion of vitality were to stand side by side with, yet unconnected to, an ascetic spiritual attitude to life, or as if what is "appropriate to creation" were simply to stand alongside what is "Christian." In such a scheme the Yes and No would lose its unity in Jesus Christ. Instead, this new life, which is *one* in Jesus Christ, is held between the Yes and the No so that in each Yes already the No is perceived, and in each No also the Yes. Both the flourishing of life's strength and self-denial, growth and death, health and suffering, happiness and renunciation, achievement and humility, honor and self-deprecation belong inextricably together in a living unity full of unresolved contradictions. Any attempt to isolate one from the other, to play one off against the other, or to appeal to one against the other is an unholy destruction of the unity of life. This then leads to the abstractions of a vitalistic ethic and a so-called ethic of Jesus,^[17] those well-known theories about autonomous areas of life that have nothing to do with the Sermon on the Mount.^[18] This approach tears apart the unity of life, and though it seems to be accompanied by the paths of an especially profound knowledge of reality because it casts a dark glow of tragic heroism^[19] on life, nevertheless it misses the reality of life as it is given in Jesus Christ. As a consequence of false abstractions, this kind of thinking remains stuck in eternally insoluble conflicts, which practical action is unable to leave behind and by which it is worn down. It is plainly evident that all this is completely foreign to the New Testament and to the sayings of Jesus. The activity of Christians does not spring from bitter resignation over the incurable rift between vitality and self-denial, between "worldly" and "Christian," between an "autonomous ethic" and the "ethic of Jesus,"^[20] but from

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[17.] See above, pages 229–30.

[18.] See above, page 230, regarding "platinides . . . such as declaring the Sermon on the Mount useless for politics", and pages 56–57, regarding "autonomous spheres."

[19.] See above, pages 237–38.

[20.] See above, page 229, regarding an "ethic of Jesus." Troeltsch, in "Grundprobleme der Ethik," discusses Wilhelm Herrmann's appeal to the "Kantian autonomy" (228 et passim). See also Holt's claim that Luther "established a moral 'autonomy' of the highest order" (*Luther*, 227). By "autonomous ethic" (from the Greek terms *αὐτός*, "self," and *νόμος*, "law") Bonhoeffer means a modern self-understanding based not on faith but on the conviction that human beings establish laws for themselves by virtue of their reason.

the joy over the already accomplished reconciliation of the world with God, from the peace of the already accomplished work of salvation in Jesus Christ, from the all-encompassing life that is Jesus Christ. Because in Jesus Christ God and humanity became one, so through Christ what is "Christian" and what is "worldly" become one in the action of the Christian. They are not opposed to each other like two eternally hostile principles. Instead, the action of the Christian springs from the unity between God and the world, and the unity of life that have been created in Christ. In Christ life regains its unity. Although this takes place in the mutual contradiction of Yes and No, this is again and again overcome in the concrete activity of those who believe in Christ.

We now return to the question about the good.^[21] So far we can say that it is definitely not an abstraction from life, such as a realization of certain ideals and values that are independent of life, but life itself. Good is life as it is in reality, that is, in its origin, essence, and goal, life as understood by the statement: Christ is my life.^[22] Good is not a quality of life but "life" itself. Being good [Gutsein] means "to live."

This life is concrete in the contradictory unity of Yes and No^[23] that lies outside life itself, namely, in Jesus Christ. But Jesus Christ is the human being and God in one. The original and essential encounter with the human being and with God takes place in Jesus Christ. From now on it is no longer possible to conceive and understand humanity other than in Jesus Christ, nor God other than in the human form of Jesus Christ. In Christ we see humanity as a humanity that is accepted, borne, loved, and reconciled with God. In Christ we see God in the form of the poorest of our brothers and sisters.^[24] There is no human being as such, just as there is no God as such; both are empty abstractions. Human beings are accepted in God's becoming human and are loved, judged, and reconciled in Christ, and God is the God who became human.^[25] So there is no relation to other human beings without a relation to God,

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[21.] See above, page 245, "The question about the good . . ." and page 235. [Also, see above, page 182, editorial note 43, regarding "the next chapter on the 'good.'"] [CG]

[22.] Phil. 1:21.

[23.] Deleted: "which happens ever anew [replaces: 'which in every thinking, feeling, and acting'] and of which life consists."

[24.] See Matt. 25:40. This is possibly an echo of the reference to the Jews in the church's confession of sin (see above, page 139, line 22). [CG]

[25.] Cf. above, page 223; there a line is found in the margin of the manuscript.

and vice versa. Again, only the relation to Jesus Christ is the basis for our relation to other human beings and to God. Just as Jesus Christ is our life, so we may now also say—from the vantage point of Jesus Christ!—that other human beings and that God are our life. This means, of course, that our encounters with others, like our encounters with God, are subject to the same Yes and No that is present in our encounter with Jesus Christ.

We "live" means that in our encounter with other human beings and with God, the Yes and the No are bound together in a unity of contradiction, in selfless self-assertion, in a self-assertion that is a surrender of myself to God and to other human beings.^[26]

We live by responding to the word of God addressed to us in Jesus Christ. It is a word that addresses our whole life. The answer, therefore, can also only be a complete one, one that is given with our whole life as it is realized in activities in particular cases. The life that encounters us in Jesus Christ as the Yes and the No to our life must be answered by a life that incorporates and unites this Yes and No.

This life, lived in answer to the life of Jesus Christ (as the Yes and No to our life), we call "responsibility" [*"Verantwortung"*].^[27] This concept of responsibility denotes the complete wholeness and unity of the answer to the reality that is given to us in Jesus Christ, as opposed to the partial answers that we might be able to give, for example, from considerations of usefulness, or with reference to certain principles.^[28] In light of the

[26.] A section is inserted into the manuscript at this point, beginning here and extending to page 257, line 2, in which Bonhoeffer develops the christological concept of responsibility; the section ends with the subtitle "The Structure of Responsible Life." A draft of the beginning of this section is found in *Ethics* working note No. 17 (ZE 108). The inserted section is written on whitish double sheets with a rather porous surface; the same paper as was used later in the manuscript, beginning on page 270, line 5.

[27.] See Barth's understanding of responsibility in *Church Dogmatics* 2/3:641ff. Bonhoeffer here develops an understanding of human beings not only as relational but also as responding. To be human means "to answer" with your life. [The German word *Verantwortung*, "responsibility," comes from the verb *antworten*, "to answer."] [CG] See *Ethics* working note No. 31: "Individuals are responsibly tied to and incorporated into their environment" (ZE 97). Bonhoeffer's theological understanding of "life" in terms of Christology clearly distinguishes his position from the psychological school of behaviorism, which understands behavior on a stimulus-response model.

[28.] The word "usefulness" may be an allusion to the utilitarianism of Bentham, Mill, and others. The words "certain principles" replace "the principles of conscience."

life that encounters us in Jesus Christ, such partial answers^[29] will not suffice, but only the complete and single answer of our life. Responsibility thus means to risk one's life in its wholeness, aware that one's activity is a matter of life and death.^[30]

We thus define the term "responsibility" with a fuller meaning than is the case in everyday usage and even in cases where it has become a highly defined ethical concept, as with Bismarck and Max Weber.^[31] But also in the Bible the term is rarely found in so prominent a place, although wherever it occurs, it does possess decisive characteristics.^[32] Responsibility in the biblical sense is primarily a response, given at the risk of one's own life, to the questions people ask about the Christ event (1 Tim. 4:16; 1 Pet. 3:15; Phil. 1:7, and 17).^[33] At the risk of my life, I give an account and thus take responsibility for what has happened through Jesus Christ. Primarily, therefore, I do not take responsibility for myself, for my actions; I do not justify myself (2 Cor. 12:19). Rather, I take responsibility and answer for Jesus Christ, and with that I naturally also take responsibility for the commission I have been charged with by him

[29.] Regarding "partial answers," see Nohl, *Die stillleben Grundlegefahrungen*: "Every theory of importance captures an aspect of moral reality; its fault merely lies in that it now seeks to interpret and shape the moral life in its totality from its own one-sided perspective, considering only such a partial facet of the ethical life. . . . The productive life has an individual historical form. That is both its strength and its limitation" (15). *Ethics* working note No. 30 contains the words "Strength—*Stärke* [Nohl]" (ZE 85).

[30.] *Ethics* working note No. 19, entitled "Responsibility" (ZE 105), contains a numbered outline and preliminary drafts for the remainder of the current manuscript, pages 255–98.

[31.] See Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 117f. 125ff. Ritter, *The Corruption Influence of Power*, writes of Bismarck after the foundation of the German Reich in 1871: "The Man of Iron of the 1860's slowly changed, so it seemed, into a Lutheran Christian, a statesman who was aware of his responsibilities in the face of God and who repudiated all temptations to wage preventive wars or overreach himself in foreign affairs" (152). Bismarck himself wrote that "Germany is perhaps the single Great Power in Europe which is not tempted by any objects which can only be attained by a successful war" (*The Memoirs*, 2:292).

[32.] In the following section Bonhoeffer consciously plays on the linguistic connection between the German words *Antwort*, "answer," *verantworten*, "to answer for," *Verantwortung*, "responsibility," and *verantwortlich sein*, "to be accountable." This cannot be replicated to the same extent in the English translation. When the translation uses "the responsible for" or "take responsibility for," the idea of "answering for" and "being accountable for" should be included. In different sentences the translation is varied to convey the nuances of meaning. [RK]

[33.] The correct references presumably are 2 Tim. 4:16 and Phil. 1:16.

(1 Cor. 9:3). The audacity with which Job seeks to be accountable and take responsibility for *his* way before God (Job 13:15) [34] is ultimately shattered by God's word to him: "He who accuses God must take responsibility by arguing his case."^[35] Then Job speaks: I am of too small account; what shall I reply to you? I lay my hand on my mouth (Job 40:2-4).

¶ We trace the biblical lines further when we now state: by being responsible for Christ, who is life, before human beings, and only thus, I simultaneously take responsibility for human beings before Christ. I *simultaneously* represent Christ before human beings, and represent human beings before Christ. My answering [Verantwortung] for Christ before human ears simultaneously reaches the ears of Christ as my answering for human beings. Being accountable [Verantwortung] for Jesus Christ before human beings at the same time means being accountable for human beings before Christ; only thus can I take responsibility for myself before God and before human beings. Called to account by human beings and before God, I can only answer for myself [mich verantworen] by witnessing to Jesus Christ who was the advocate of God before human beings, and of human beings before God. Taking responsibility [Verantwortung] occurs before God and for God, before human beings and for human beings; it is always answering and being responsible for the sake of Jesus Christ, and in that way alone being accountable for my own life. Responsibility, answering, and being accountable exist only in confessing Jesus Christ in word and life.^[36]

But we cannot simply repeat biblical terminology in ethics any more than in theology. Different ethical problems require different terminology. In so doing we must consider that an expanded terminology involves

[34.] Whereas the NRSV has Job "defend" his ways to God, Bonhoeffer follows the Luther Bible and has Job take "responsibility" for his ways. [CG]

[35.] Luther's translation of Job 40:2 in Bonhoeffer's Bible reads: "Wer Gott tadelt, soll's der nicht verantworten?" ("Whoever reprimands God, must not that person be responsible for it?") [Here the German means both answering and taking responsibility.] [RK] [See Bonhoeffer's seminar paper on Job in *This Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927, DBWE 9(2/14):420ff.*] [CG]

[36.] Regarding responsibility for human beings, see below, pages 257-59, on "vicarious representative action." Regarding responsibility before human beings, see below, page 257, on "accountability," *Selbstzurechnung*, and page 282, lines 27-30, and pages 275-76, which speak of those who are connected with Christ allowing themselves to be held accountable by human beings because of that bond. [Here, in using the important Lutheran term *Bekennnis*, "confession of faith," Bonhoeffer emphasizes that it involves *life* as well as word—that is, deed as well as creed, faith, and doctrine.] [CG]

the danger of slipping away from the real subject matter, and that biblical terminology cannot be used without danger either.

The Structure of Responsible Life

The structure of responsible life is determined in a twofold manner, namely, by life's bond to human beings and to God, and by the freedom of one's own life. It is this bond of life to human beings and to God that constitutes the freedom of our own life.^[37] Without this bond and without this freedom there can be no responsibility. Only the life that, within this bond, has become selfless has the freedom of my very own life and action. The bond has the form of *vicarious representative action*,^[38] and *accordance with reality* [*Wirklichkeitsgemäßheit*]. Freedom^[39] exhibits itself in *my accountability* [*Selbstzurechnung*] for my living and acting, and in the *venture* [*Wagnis*] of concrete decision. This, then, is the framework [Disposition]^[40] within which we have to consider the structure of responsible life.

Responsibility is based on vicarious representative action [Stellvertretung].^[41] This is most evident in those relationships in which a person is literally required to act on behalf of others, for example, as a father,^[42] as a statesman, or as the instructor of an apprentice. A father acts on

[37.] See the remark of Nohl, *Die sittlichen Grundverhältnisse*, that "it was always a bond that liberated" (198). Regarding "structure," see Nohl's comment: "As in logic, so ethics also has a dual starting point: the structure of the subject matter and the unity of our systematic thinking. It is never possible to reduce one of these to the other" (137; in Bonhoeffer's copy the margin contains two lines and an exclamation mark beside the words after the colon). In this regard see below, page 267, regarding "system." [See also *CF (DBWE 3):64* on created freedom.] [CG]

[38.] "Vicarious representative action" is one of Bonhoeffer's central theological and ethical ideas; it is developed christologically and anthropologically in his first book, *Son-lonum Communio* (SC [DBWE 1]:120, 146f., 155f., 182ff., 187f.). [CG]

[39.] This should be read as though it were italicized, in parallel to *bond*. [CG]

[40.] The summary on page 288 lists the concepts "vicarious representative action," "accordance with reality," "taking on guilt," and "freedom."

[41.] The German word has the basic meaning of taking the place, *Stelle*, and thus standing in for, *Vertretung*, another, representing them, acting on their behalf and for their sake. It is important for Bonhoeffer that it is understood to include acting on behalf of a corporate group as much as for an individual. The translation of *Stellvertretung* as "deputyship" in the previous English edition of *Ethics* does not convey the strong initiative the word has for Bonhoeffer; see Green, *Bonhoeffer*, 56. [CG]

[42.] See above, page 221.

behalf of his children by working, providing, intervening, struggling, and suffering for them. In so doing, he really stands in their place. He is not an isolated individual, but incorporates the selves of several people in his own self. Every attempt to live as if he were alone is a denial of the fact that he is actually responsible. He cannot escape the responsibility, which is his because he is a father. This reality refutes the fictitious notion that the isolated individual is the agent of all ethical behavior. It is not the isolated individual but the responsible person who is the proper agent to be considered in ethical reflection.^[43] The extent of the responsibility makes no difference in this regard, that is, whether it is borne only for a single human being, for a community, or for entire groups of communities. Nobody can altogether escape responsibility, which means vicarious representative action. Even those who are alone live as vicarious representatives. Indeed, they do so in an especially significant sense, since their lives are lived in a vicarious representative way for human beings as such, for humanity as a whole.^[44] For the idea of having responsibility for myself is naturally meaningful only insofar as it denotes the responsibility that I exercise toward myself as a human being, that is, because I am human.^[45] Responsibility for myself is in fact responsibility for human beings as such, that is, for humanity. The fact that Jesus lived without the particular responsibility of a marriage, a family, and a vocation does not at all remove him from the domain of responsibility. Instead, it shows all the more clearly his responsibility and his vicarious representative action for all human beings. With this we already touch on the foundation that undergirds everything that has been said thus far.^[46] Jesus—the life, our life—the Son of God who became human, lived as our vicarious representative. Through him, therefore, all human life is in its essence vicarious representation. Jesus was not the individual who sought to achieve some personal perfection, but only lived as the one who in himself has taken on and bears the selves of all human beings. His entire living, acting, and suffering was vicarious representative action [Stellvertretung]. All that human beings were supposed to live, do, and suffer was fulfilled in him. In this real vicarious representative action, in which his human existence consists, he is the responsible

human being par excellence. Since he is life, all of life through him is destined to be vicarious representative action. Even if a life resists this intrinsic character, it nevertheless remains vicariously representative, be it with regard to life or with regard to death, just as a father remains a father for good or for ill.

Vicarious representative action and therefore responsibility is possible only in completely devoting one's own life to another person. Only those who are selfless live responsibly, which means that only selfless people truly live. Human beings live responsibly where the divine Yes and the divine No become one within them. The selflessness in responsibility is so complete that here it is apt to cite Goethe's statement that the person who acts is without conscience.^[47]

¶ The vicariously responsible life is in danger of being corrupted in two different ways, namely, by absolutizing either my own self or the other person. In the first case, the relation of responsibility leads to violation and tyranny. This case ignores the fact that only the selfless person is able to act responsibly. In the second case, the welfare of the other person for whom I am responsible is made absolute while ignoring all other responsibilities. This leads to an arbitrariness in my action, which makes a mockery of my responsibility before God, who in Jesus Christ is the God of all people. The origin, essence, and goal of responsible life is denied in both cases, and responsibility has become a self-made, abstract idol. As vicariously representative life and action, responsibility is essentially a relation from one human being to another.^[48] Christ became human, and thus bore vicarious representative responsibility for all human beings. There is also a responsibility for things, conditions, and values,^[49] but only by strictly keeping in mind that the origin, essence, and goal of all things, conditions, and values is determined by Christ (John 1:4).^[50]

the one who in himself has taken on and bears the selves of all human beings. His entire living, acting, and suffering was vicarious representative action [Stellvertretung]. All that human beings were supposed to live, do, and suffer was fulfilled in him. In this real vicarious representative action, in which his human existence consists, he is the responsible

[43.] Replaces: "who is the subject of ethical behavior."

[44.] See SC (DBWE 1):120, 146f., 178, 191. [CG]

[45.] Replaces: "which I exercise toward the person who I am."

[46.] Compare the following section with the passage above on pages 231–32.

[47.] Baumgarten, *Politik und Moral*, contains the quote from Goethe: "The person engaged in action is always devoid of conscience [Gewissenlos]; no one except the spectator has a conscience" (150, citing Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, 27 [trans. altered]). This statement, especially the first part, has been cited frequently, e.g., by Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 2:442; Friedrich Meinecke, *Machtpolitik: The Doctrine of Reason d'état and Its Place in Modern History*, 429; Nohl, *Die sittlichen Grundverhaltungen*, 173; and Lüger, *Ethik der Liebe*, which quotes the statement in the section entitled (like Baumgarten's book) "Politik und Moral" (232).

[48.] Replaces: "from person to person."

[49.] Deleted: "idens only indirectly, namely, as these things, conditions, and values are there for human beings [für den Menschen da sind]."

[50.] Bonhoeffer apparently means to refer to verse 3, in conjunction with verse 4.

the God who became human. It is through Christ that the world of things and values is given back its orientation toward human beings, as was originally intended in their creation.^[51] The frequent talk about responsibility toward a cause is legitimate only within these limits. Outside these limits it serves in a dangerous fashion the inversion of all life through the dominance of things over people. There is a kind of dedication to the cause of the true, the good, the right, and the beautiful that would be desecrated by questioning their usefulness, although that dedication makes it self-evident that the highest values have to serve human beings. However, there also exists an idolization of all these values, which no longer has anything to do with responsibility but springs from an obsession that destroys human beings by sacrificing them to the idol. "Responsibility for a cause" must therefore be understood not as the usefulness of that cause for human beings, thereby abusing its very nature, but as the intrinsic orientation of that cause toward human beings. This, then, totally excludes the kind of myopic pragmatism^[52] that turns the goddess into a milk cow.^[53] In Schiller's words, by shortsightedly and directly making something valuable in itself subservient to what is useful for human beings. However, the world of things receives its full freedom and depth only where it is seen as oriented toward the world of persons in its origin, essence, and goal. For all of creation, as Paul says, waits with longing for the revelation of the glory of the children of God; indeed, creation itself will be freed from the bondage of its transience (which also consists of its false self-deification) to participate in the glorious freedom of the children of God (Rom. 8:19, 21).

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[51.] Bonhoeffer had made this point in his Christology lectures when treating Christ as the mediator of God and nature (CC58). [CC]

[52.] "Myopic pragmatism" translates the German *Bonanz*, a term of Greek origin denoting a person with a conventional mentality and an extremely narrow horizon who perceives things, conditions, and values only within the limits of self-centered interests. This is the way issues such as justice were understood during the Third Reich; see the National Socialist slogan, "*Recht ist, was dem Volke nützt*," "justice is what is useful for the people."

[53.] See Nohl, *Die sittlichen Grundgedankungen*, on "The Studies of the Student": "He may consider his work as a means toward making a living in the future. But in doing so, he will be aware that he has abandoned the straight path and, to use Schiller's phrase, turned the goddess into a milk cow, i.e., uses a higher value in the service of a lower one" (19). The latter part of the passage ("turned the goddess . . .") is marked with a marginal line in Bonhoeffer's copy. See Schiller's distich "Scholarship": "To some she is the high and heavenly goddess; to others she is a useful cow providing them with butter" (Goethe-Schiller, *Kenntnis*, 21). In the manuscript follows the deleted phrase "thus, for example, serving art or truth."

The attention of responsible people is directed to concrete neighbors in their concrete reality. Their behavior^[54] is not fixed in advance once and for all by a principle, but develops together with the given situation. They do not have at their disposal an absolutely valid principle that they have to enforce fanatically against any resistance from reality. Instead, they seek to understand and do what is necessary or "commanded" in a given situation. For those who act responsibly, the given situation is not merely treated as the raw material on which they want to impose and imprint their idea or program, but instead it is included in their action as the formation of the act itself. The goal is not to realize an "absolute good." Instead, the self-denial of those who act responsibly includes choosing something relatively better over something relatively worse, and recognizing that the "absolute good" may be exactly the worst. Responsible people are not called to impose a foreign law on reality. On the contrary, their action is in the true sense "*in accord with reality*."

However, this concept of accordance with reality [das Wirklichkeits-gemäß] requires further clarification. It would be a complete and dangerous misunderstanding to view it as that "servile attitude toward the facts" of which Nietzsche^[55] speaks that always retreats from wherever the pressure is greater, that justifies success on principle, and that in any given situation chooses the expedient as being in accord with reality. "Accordance with reality" in this sense would be the opposite of responsibility, namely, irresponsibility. However, just as a servile attitude toward the status quo fails to meet the true standard of accordance with reality, so too does a protest based on principle, or a principled rebellion against the status quo, in the name of some ideal higher reality. Both extremes fall equally wide of the mark of the matter. In any action that is truly in accord with reality, acknowledgment of the status quo and protest against the status quo are inextricably connected. The reason for this is that *reality* [*die Wirklichkeit*] is first and last not something impersonal [Neutral], but the *Real One* [*der Wirkliche*]^[56] namely, the God who became human. Everything that actually exists receives from the Real

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[54.] Starting here, up to page 263, line 17, the text corresponds closely to the section on pages 221, line 25, to 224, line 20, of "History and Good" [1], which is almost completely marked with a marginal line.

[55.] Nietzsche, *Werke*, 10:402. See above page 222, editorial note 19.

[56.] Here Bonhoeffer emphasizes, first by italicizing *der Wirkliche* and then by the name in the following sentence, that the *Real One* is Jesus Christ, God who became human. In "Christ, Reality, and Good" (and in *Ethics* working note No. 13 [ZE 39] that belongs to it),

One, whose name is Jesus Christ, both its ultimate foundation and its ultimate negation, its justification and its ultimate contradiction, its ultimate Yes and its ultimate No. Trying to understand reality without the Real One³ means living in an abstraction, which those who live responsibly must always avoid; it means living detached from reality and vacillating endlessly between the extremes of a servile attitude toward the status quo and rebellion against it. God became human, taking on^[58] human being in bodily form, thus reconciling humanity's world with God.^[59] The affirmation of human beings and their reality was based on God's taking on humanity, not vice versa. God did not take on humanity because human beings and human reality were worthy of divine affirmation. Instead, it is because human beings and human reality deserved the divine No^[60] that God took on humanity and affirmed it; God became human in the body, thus bearing and suffering, as God, the curse

3. In the first picture of his Dance of Death cycle, Hans Holbein, in portraying creation, depicts the sun, the moon, and the winds as people. In so doing, he gives expression in a naive way to the fact that reality ultimately has a personal structure. This very same feature [is] an aspect of truth in primitive animism.^[57]

Bonhoeffer had used the neuter term, *das Wirkliche* (see above, page 50, line 10). He referred back to this in "History and Good [1]" (see above, page 223, lines 11-12), where he wrote "*die Wirklichkeit des menschigewordenen Gottes*," "the reality of the God who became human." In the corresponding sentence of "History and Good [2]," he changes what he wrote in the first version by stressing that *die Wirklichkeit*, "reality," is "first and last" the person of Jesus Christ, *der Wirkliche*, "the Real One." See Barth's insistence that the human being is "not a mere thing, a neuter, but a person" (*Church Dogmatics* 2/2:510). See also below, page 325, editorial note 96.

[57.] It appears that Bonhoeffer confuses the famous series of Hans Holbein the Younger on *The Dance of Death* with the first of the woodcuts in his *The Images of the Old Testament*. It was the latter book that Bonhoeffer owned in a facsimile edition (see *ML-Bibl*, 232). [CG] The term "animism" is derived from the Latin *anima*, "soul," "breath of life," and denotes the belief that all things are endowed with a soul. The note is written in tightly spaced script in the bottom margin of the page and is apparently a later addition.

[58.] "Taking on" translates the German word *annehmen*, which is often rendered in theological English as "assume"; this technical term means to describe the incarnation, in which God, in becoming human in Jesus Christ, fully and bodily takes on human nature itself, as well as becoming an individual human being. This translation, however, consistently uses "taking on" rather than "assume" lest the latter word even slightly suggest that God's becoming human in Jesus Christ was in any way appearance rather than reality. [CG] [59.] The phrase "taking on... with God" replaces "taking on and affirming reality as the Real One."

[60.] Corresponding to page 223, line 20, above, "the divine No" corrects a typographical error in earlier German editions, which read *Sans*, "being," instead of *Nam*,

of the divine No upon human nature. Because of what God has done, because of the Real One, because of Jesus Christ, reality now receives its Yes and its No, its legitimacy and its imitation. Affirmation and protest now unite in the concrete action of those who have come to know the Real One. Neither affirmation nor contradiction now comes from an unreal world, nor from a programmatic understanding of the expedient or the ideal. Instead, they come from the reality of the world's reconciliation with God as it has taken place in Christ. In Jesus Christ, the Real One, all reality is taken on and summed up; Christ is its origin, essence, and goal. That is why it is only in and from Christ that it is possible to act in a way that is in accord with reality. The origin of action that is in accord with reality is neither the pseudo-Lutheran Christ whose only purpose is to sanction the status quo, nor the radical Christ of religious enthusiasts who is supposed to bless every revolution; it is rather the God who became human, Jesus Christ, who took on humanity and who has loved, judged, and reconciled humanity, and with it the world.^[61]

This, then, leads us to the statement that action in accordance with Christ is action in accord with reality. This statement is not an ideal demand but an assertion that springs from knowledge of reality itself. Jesus Christ does not encounter reality as someone who is foreign to it. Instead, it is he who alone bore and experienced in his own body the essence of the real, and who spoke out of knowledge of the real like no other human being on earth. He alone did not lapse into any ideology but is *the Real One* as such, who in himself has borne and fulfilled the essence of history, and in whom the inner law [Lebensgesetz] of history itself is embodied.^[62] As the Real One he is the origin, essence, and goal of all reality. That is why he himself is the Lord and the law of the real. The sayings of Jesus Christ are therefore the interpretation of his existence, and thus the interpretation of that reality in which history

⁵⁷no." [This led to the theologically impossible translation that humanity was "worthy of divine being" (EE 225).] [CG] See the correction in 1970 by Feil, *Theology*, 200, note 44. [This note is not found in the English translation of Feil's book, *Theology*] [CG] Rainer Mayer was misled by the typographical error and believed that here Bonhoeffer spoke about the "divine being" (*Christuswirklichkeit: Grundlagen, Entwicklung und Konsequenzen der Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers*, 199).

[61.] Here ends the revised version of the section corresponding to pages 221, line 25, to 224, line 20; see above, page 261, editorial note 54.

[62.] See the section of the Christology lectures on Christ as the center of history (CC 61-64 [DBW 12 (2/12):279-348]). [CG]

finds its fulfillment. They^[63] are the divine commandment for responsible action in history insofar as they are the reality of history that has been fulfilled in Christ, that is, insofar as they are the responsibility for human beings that has been fulfilled in Christ alone. Therefore they are valid not [within] an abstract ethic—indeed, there they are completely incomprehensible and lead to insoluble conflicts. Rather, they are valid within the reality of history, because this is their source. Any attempt to disconnect them from this origin distorts them into a weak ideology. Only when rooted in their origin do they possess the power to gain control of reality.^[64]

Action in accordance with Christ is in accord with reality because it allows the world to be world and reckons with the world as world, while at the same time never forgetting that the world is loved, judged, and reconciled in Jesus Christ by God. This does not involve a confrontation between a "worldly principle" and a "Christian principle." Indeed, any such attempt to make Christ and the world commensurate, if only through the conceptual construct of a principle, and thus to enable Christian action in the world based on that principle, leads in two directions. On the one hand, it leads to different forms of secularism [Säkularismus]^[65] or the teaching about "autonomous spheres of life"; or, on the other hand, it leads to religious enthusiasm. What results in both cases is the destruction of the world reconciled in Christ with God. This approach leads to those eternal conflicts that are the basic elements of all tragedy, thereby in fact destroying the unity of Christian life and action, which is not tragic at all. Whenever a worldly [weltlich] and a Christian principle are set over against each other, there the ultimate reality is the law—or rather, a number of mutually irreconcilable laws.^[66] The essence of Greek tragedy is that human beings are destroyed by the clash of

[63.] [The manuscript actually has the plural, "They."] [CG] In the corresponding place in "History and Good [1]" this sentence refers back to the preceding plural: "The sayings of Jesus . . ." (see above, page 235, line 26).

[64.] Marginal note: "World remains world—but claim of Christ and fulfillment through him—thus world in Christ—not in principle: *worldly—Christian*." [See the next paragraph.] [CG]

[65.] Beginning at this point, the following section contains parallels to "History and Good [1]," pages 237–38, which is marked with lines in the margin up to page 239, line 9.

[66.] Bonhoeffer's reflections on "a number of laws" are new in "History and Good [2]." In "History and Good [1]" (page 238, line 4, but not here), Bonhoeffer refers to the Sermon on the Mount in this context.

incompatible laws. Creon and Antigone, Jason and Medea, Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, are all subject to the claim of two eternal laws that cannot be reconciled in one and the same life; one pays for obedience toward one law with guilt for breaking the other.^[67] The meaning of all genuine tragedies is not that one person is proven right over against another, but that both become guilty toward life itself, that life's intrinsic structure is transgression against the laws of the gods. Western thought, especially since the Renaissance, is so decisively shaped by this deepest insight of antiquity that only very rarely has it been noticed that the Christian message has actually overcome this insight.^[68] In the early church and the Middle Ages, tragedies do not exist. But even the most recent^[69] Protestant ethics still portrays the intractable conflict of the Christian in the world, colored by a dark pathos. In its claim to depict ultimate realities, there is certainly no doubt that Protestant ethics is still firmly under the spell of antiquity without being aware of that fact. It is not Luther but Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides who have given human life this tragic aspect. Luther's seriousness is completely different from the seriousness of those classical tragedians. What must ultimately be taken seriously in the view of the Bible and in Luther's view is not the conflict between the gods as expressed in their laws, but the unity of God and the reconciliation of the world with God in Jesus Christ; not the inevitability of becoming guilty, but the plain and simple [einfältig] life that flows from reconciliation; not fate,^[70] but the gospel as the ultimate reality of life; not the cruel triumph of the gods over the

[67.] Bonhoeffer refers here to three particularly important Greek tragedies, *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus, *Antigone* by Sophocles, and *Medea* by Euripides. See Scheier, *Formalism*, on "the phenomenon of the tragic, as presented in the literature of Aeschylus and Sophocles" (394, note 322). Baumgarten, *Politik und Moral*, speaks of the "great tragic dramatists" of Greece: "—one only has to think of Antigone!—portrayed the offense of the private moral sense against the law of the state as a tragic conflict. . . . the state and its laws are sacred fundamental forms of life and tolerate no contradiction" (13). In Bonhoeffer's interpretation, Antigone also follows a law, namely, that of the sacred bonds of kinship. [68.] See Schneider, *Macht und Gnade*, in a dialogue about the artist and the demons, who wrote that "Paul Ernst confessed that his writing of tragic poetry came to an end as he began to approach faith" (220).

[69.] Replaces: "modern."
[70.] Replaces: "law." Elert, whose name appears in *Ethics* working note No. 35 (22-94), emphasized the contrast between the revealed and the hidden God, thereby weakening the concept of the unity of God, and propagated the concepts of "fate," *Schicksal*, and "tragedy," *Tragik*, among neo-Lutheranism in the twentieth century. "The tragedy of antiquity used the kinship association to illustrate this point [i.e., that 'the social nexus of the

perishing human being, but the election of human beings as children of God in the midst of the world reconciled by grace.

However, just as it is a regression from the Christian reality back to that of antiquity to posit a worldly [weltlich] principle and a Christian principle as two opposing ultimate realities, so it is likewise wrong to understand the Christian and the worldly as a unity in principle. The reconciliation^[71] of God and world accomplished in Christ consists solely and exclusively in the person of Jesus Christ; it exists in him as the God who acts in vicarious representative responsibility, who became human out of love for humanity. Originating from him alone, human action occurs that is not crushed by conflicts of principle, but springs instead from the already accomplished reconciliation of the world with God. This is an action done in vicarious representative responsibility. What is "Christian" and what is "worldly" are now no longer defined from the outset. Instead, both are understood in their respective uniqueness and their unity only within the concrete responsibility of action that is based on the unity of the reconciliation accomplished in Jesus Christ.

We have stated that action that is in accord with reality allows the world to remain the world.^[72] But after all that has been said, this fact can no longer mean an isolation of the world in principle or a declaration of its autonomy. Instead, it must itself directly follow the foundation of all reality in Jesus Christ. The world remains the world *because* it

association itself makes our becoming guilty inevitable.] The generational curse manifests itself *like a fate* in our becoming guilty. Aeschylus... (Eliert, *Der christliche Glaube*, §15, "Fate contradicts itself," 196f.). He speaks of "the seriousness toward reality of the tragic authors" (128): "We believe, however, that *Eulior* was correct when he coined the phrase: Deus vult suos fortes facere. God wants to make his own into heroes [Eliert's translation; *fortes* actually means 'strong ones']. A hero arises only in struggle" (663). Compare this emphasis on the heroic aspect in Eliert with Bonhoeffer's phrase: "the dark glow of tragic heroism" on pages 238 and 252 above.

[71.] Replaces: "unity." "Unity" is the term Bonhoeffer used in the corresponding section in "History and Good" [1] (see page 238, line 12; cf. above, page 239: "the unity... created in Jesus Christ"). Pages 266-67 are a new version of pages 238-39 above. See also the manuscript "Christ, Reality, and Good," where Bonhoeffer wrote in 1940: "The unity of the reality of God and the reality of the world established in Christ" (see above, page 59). In 1942, Bonhoeffer questions the choice of the term "unity" and replaces it with "reconciliation."

[72.] See above, page 264. The marginal note "R. G." next to the sentence means *Reich Gottes*, "kingdom of God"; see below, page 267.

is the world that in Christ is loved, judged, and reconciled. No one is commissioned to leap over^[73] the world and turn it into the kingdom of God. However, this does not lend legitimacy to the kind of pious indolence^[74] that only preserves its own virtue and abandons the evil world to its fate. Instead, human beings are placed in a position of concrete and thus limited, i.e., created,^[75] responsibility that recognizes the world as loved, judged, and reconciled by God, and acts accordingly within it. The "world" is thus the *domain of concrete responsibility* that is given to us in and through Jesus Christ.^[76] It is not some kind of general concept from which one could deduce a corresponding system.^[77] Those who encounter the world in a way that accords with reality do not perceive the world as containing a self-sufficient principle—whether it be good, evil, or a mixture of both—and then act accordingly.^[78] Instead, they live and act in limited responsibility, and in so doing allow for the world's nature and character to be revealed to them ever anew.^[79]

Action in accord with reality is *limited by our creatureliness*.^[80] We do not create the conditions for our action but find ourselves already placed within them. In our action we are bound by certain limitations from both the past and the future that cannot be leaped over. Our responsibility is not infinite but limited. Nevertheless, within these limits it includes the whole of reality. It is not merely concerned with good intention, but also with the good outcome of action: not only with motive, but also with content. It seeks to understand the entire given reality in its

[73.] See exactly this language in Bonhoeffer's 1932 address "Thy Kingdom Come" (in Godsey, *Preface to Bonhoeffer*, 28). [CG]

[74.] The phrase "pious indolence" replaces "a leisurely [replaces: 'quietist'] and indolent conservatism [Konserwativismus]."

[75.] The word "created" is written in the left margin next to the line that begins with the word "responsibility."

[76.] The phrase "the domain... Jesus Christ" replaces "the respective *placet* [Raum]." [77.] In the manuscript this deleted sentence follows: "In Jesus Christ the domain of responsibility is universal, for us it is limited"; there are also two additional incomplete sentences that were intended to elaborate on "imitation."

[78.] Replaces: "who sees all good or evil principle—psychologically speaking the optimist or the pessimist."

[79.] A question mark is in the margin next to the last words of this sentence (after "allow"), which ends on the final line on the double sheet numbered "21." Below the end of the line is written "transition?"

[80.] From his dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, onward, the idea of *Creata*, "boundary," "limit," is an important ethical category for Bonhoeffer. [CG]

origin, essence, and goal, seeing it under the divine Yes and No. The objective is not the application of some kind of limitless general principle. Thus, in the given situation it is necessary to observe, weigh, evaluate, and decide, and to do all that with limited human understanding. We must have courage to look into the immediate future; we must seriously consider the consequences of our actions; and we must attempt seriously to examine our own motives and our own hearts. It cannot be our task to revolutionize the way the world operates, but at the given place to consider reality and do what is necessary. In so doing we must also ask what is possible, since we cannot always take the final step right away,^[81] and responsible action does not want to be blind. All of this must be so^[82] because God in Christ became *human*, because God said Yes to humanity, and because we as human beings are permitted and called to live and act before God and the neighbor within the confines of our limited human judgment and knowledge. However, because it was *God* who became human, responsible action, although conscious of the human character of its decision, can never prematurely judge its own origin, essence, and goal, but must completely surrender such judgment to God.^[83] Whereas all action based on ideology is already justified by its own principle, responsible action renounces any knowledge about its ultimate justification. The deed that is done after responsibly weighing all personal and factual circumstances, in light of God becoming *human* and *God* becoming human, is completely surrendered to God the moment it is carried out. Ultimate ignorance of one's own goodness or evil, together with dependence upon grace, is an essential characteristic of responsible historical action. Those who act on the basis of ideology consider themselves justified by their idea. Those who act responsibly

[81.] The two sentences beginning "It cannot be . . ." are a marginal addition, the end of which, after "right away," is deleted and reads: "instead, it goes step by step." Cf. above, page 225 in a part of "History and Good [1]" marked by a marginal line.

[82.] The following section up to page 269, line 2 (including the deleted phrase that follows), incorporates, partly modified, the section of "History and Good [1]" from page 225, line 13, above, to page 226, line 3. With the exception of the beginning of the paragraph, the text in "History and Good [1]" is marked by a marginal line.

[83.] Regarding surrendering judgment to God, see Luther's maxim that in the civil domain "No one ought to be their own judge" (quoted in Gotfried Maron, "Nemand soll sein eigener Richter sein," which includes the pertinent references to Luther's writings).

place their action into the hands of God and live by God's grace and judgment.^[84]

Another limitation of responsible life and action is that other people who are encountered must be regarded as responsible as well. What distinguishes responsibility from violation is this very fact of recognizing other people as responsible persons, indeed making them aware of their own responsibility. The responsibility of a father or a statesman finds its limit in the responsibility of the child or the citizen. Indeed, the responsibility of the father or the statesman consists precisely in raising to a conscious level the responsibility of those entrusted to their care, in strengthening their responsibility. There can never be an absolute responsibility that does not find its essential limit in the responsibility of the other person.^[85]

By recognizing that responsible action is limited both by surrendering our action to God's grace and judgment, and by the responsibility of the neighbor, it simultaneously becomes apparent that precisely these limits qualify the action as responsible in the first place. For God and neighbor, as we encounter them in Jesus Christ, are not only the limits of responsible action, as we have already recognized,^[86] but they are also its origin. Irresponsible action is defined by its disregard for these limits of God and neighbor. Responsible action, on the other hand, gains its unity, and ultimately also its certainty, from this very limitation by God and neighbor. It is not its own lord and master, nor is it unbounded or frivolous. Instead, it is creaturely and humble. This is precisely why it can be sustained by an ultimate joy and confidence,^[87] knowing that in its origin, essence, and goal it is sheltered in Christ.

Thus far we have come to understand that responsibility is always a mutual relation between persons, derived from the responsibility of Jesus

[84.] Replaces: "by grace"; this is followed by the deleted sentence: "In so doing, a profound mystery of history as such is disclosed to them and only them. Especially the." Cf. above, page 226.

[85.] Because of his emphasis on the ethical responsibility of all parties, Bonhoeffer's position is not vulnerable to the common objection that responsibility and vicarious representative action on the part of some amounts to patronizing others and to making them dependent.

[86.] Cf. above, page 254, and the section on the concept of responsibility, which Bonhoeffer inserted at that point on pages 254-57.

[87.] The phrase "can be sustained by an ultimate joy and confidence" [replaces: "certainty"] replaces "finds contentment for itself."

Christ for human beings, so that the origin, essence, and goal of all reality is the Real One, who is God in Jesus Christ. Based on this foundation, we now can and must also speak about the relationship of the responsible person to the world of things. [88] This relationship we call *appropriate to the subject matter* [Sachgemäßheit]. [89] This implies a dual thesis. [90]

First, in dealing with things in a way that is appropriate to the subject matter [sachgemäß], it is imperative to keep in view that in their origin, essence, and goal they are related to God and human beings. This kind of relationship does not impair but cleanses objectivity [Sachlichkeit]. [91] it does not stifle but instead purifies and intensifies the ardor of dedication to a cause [Sache]. The more purely one serves a cause, free from secondary personal agendas, the more it frees us from ourselves. The God and human beings, and the more it frees us from ourselves. The cause to which the ultimate personal sacrifice is made must, in this very act, serve human beings. For example, wherever there is an attempt—based on demagogic, pedagogic, or moralistic reasons—to make an academic discipline useful for human beings in a mistakenly direct way, damage is done not only to people but also to that particular field

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itself. [92] But where people, in whatever field of inquiry, are exclusively and unreservedly committed to knowing the truth and selflessly renounce all their own aspirations, there they find themselves; and the cause [Sache] that they served selflessly must in the end serve them. Thus, appropriate action must never overlook how the subject matter [Sache] is related to the person. At issue is the restoration of the original relationship of subject matter and person based on the responsibility derived from Jesus Christ. True, we know this relationship only in a thoroughly distorted form. Either the subject matter claims an independent status in opposition to the person or the person in opposition to the subject matter, or both stand unrelated side by side.

Second, in every subject matter [Sache], whether it be an existing natural entity or a creation of the human spirit, whether a material entity or a mental one, there is an intrinsic law [93] [Wesensgesetz] that is grounded in its origin. As an "object" or subject matter [Sache] in this sense, we thus define any given thing in which there is an intrinsic law, again regardless of whether it is a more impersonal or a more personal entity. The axioms of mathematics and logic are as much a part of this as the state and family, a factory, or a corporation. The task in each case is to discover the respective intrinsic law by which the entity subsists. The more the object is tied to human existence, the more difficult it is to discern its intrinsic law. The laws of logical thought are easier to define than, for example, the law of a state. In the same way is it easier to discover the law of a corporation than those of entities such as the family or the nation, which have evolved gradually. To be in accord with reality, responsible action has to discern and comply with these laws. At first, the law appears to be a formal technique to be mastered. However, the closer the particular entity in question is related to human existence, the more it becomes obvious that the intrinsic law cannot be exhausted by a formal technique, but instead challenges any purely technical approach. The best example in this regard is the problem of developing a technique or

[88.] The phrase "about... things" replaces "responsibility toward the world of things." Deleted in the margin: "of circumstances."

[89.] In the following, *Sachgemäßheit* will frequently be translated by the shorthand "appropriateness." Depending on the context, translators variously render the word *Sache* in English by "thing," "object," "subject matter," "entity," "cause," "fact," "matter," "business," "concern," "event," and so on. In this context Bonhoeffer uses the word to emphasize the "objectivity" of things, institutions, and situations—their reality distinct from the thinking and acting person or subject. See the title of his essay, "Personal" and 'Sach' ethos, which was previously translated as "Personal" and 'Objective' Ethics." There he argues [EE 316ff.], but is better rendered as "Personal" and 'Real' Ethos" (DBW 16 [2/13]:550ff. against Dilschneider that Christian ethics is concerned not only with the person but also with institutions such as the state, as well as theories and practices such as economics and science. This part of the *Ethics* manuscript is concerned with the appropriateness, or pertinence, of responsible action to such given realities. [CG]

[90.] Beginning here, the manuscript is written on whitish double sheets with a rather porous surface, which Bonhoeffer also used for the inserted section above; pages 254–57. Later he used such sheets from time to time up to the manuscript of the drama fragment that he wrote in 1943 in Tegel prison (FP [DBWE 7]:26, editorial note 1). [CG]

[91.] Bonhoeffer had marked the following passage in his copy of Pieper, *Reality and the Good*: "Objectivity [Sachlichkeit], as the right attitude in knowing, is the fitting answer to the fact that knowledge is essentially determined by reality" (87). In his 1919 Tübingen address "The Christian's Place in Society," Barth emphasized "that our thinking, speaking, and acting already carries a promise by virtue of its simple objectivity [Sachlichkeit] in whatever particular circumstances" (*The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 308 [trans. altered]).

[92.] Wilhelm von Humboldt, on whose initiative the University of Berlin was founded, had promoted freedom of academic inquiry. In the Third Reich this spirit was replaced by an ideological use of the academic disciplines for the National Socialist regime. See above, page 260. Bonhoeffer's phrase "myopic pragmatism."

[93.] See Lümgert, *Ethik der Liebe*, which says that on the basis of faith in the Creator, "it is utterly appropriate to consider the ethical law as each entity's intrinsic law, adherence to which results in self-preservation and transgression of which leads to self-destruction" (215; Bonhoeffer's copy has a marginal line and underlinings at this point).

craft of political governance [Staatskunst], whereas the technique for manufacturing radios^[94] is relatively unproblematic. Admittedly, political governance also has its technical side; there is a technique to administration and diplomacy.^[95] In the widest sense this would include not only positive legal regulations and treaties, but also those rules that have not been legally codified, as well as historically sanctioned forms of national and international political coexistence, and finally even generally accepted moral principles of political life. No statesman can disregard one of these laws without having to pay a price. Reckless disrespect and violation of these laws is a misperception of reality, which sooner or later must exact its revenge. Appropriate action [sachgemäßes Handeln] will operate within the confines of these laws. It will do so not merely out of hypocrisy,^[96] but recognizing that they constitute an essential component of any order. It will utilize such forms, recognizing that they embody the wisdom distilled from the experience of many generations.⁴ However, it is precisely at this point that appropriate action is inevitably forced to recognize that these laws of statecraft do not exhaust the content of the intrinsic law of the state, and indeed that the law of the state ultimately extends beyond any legal definition, precisely because the state is inextricably linked to human existence. And it is only at this point that responsible action reaches its most profound expression.

There are occasions when, in the course of historical life, the strict observance of the explicit law of a state, a corporation, a family, but also of a scientific discovery,^[98] entails a clash with the basic necessities of

[94.] Replaces: "technique of a shoemaker's craft," which replaced "the manufacture of shoes."

[95.] Spengler speaks of the technique of diplomacy in *Man and Technics*, 10.

[96.] See above, page 240, and editorial note 85.

[97.] Ritter compares the "continental and island politics" of Bismarck and Gladstone and contends that English foreign-policy decisions are characterized by "the unhurried indolence with which aristocratic semi-amateurs attended to business" (*The Corrupting Influence of Power*, 98 [trans. altered]). Bonhoeffer's footnote 4 is a marginal addition.

[98.] See Todd reports that Bonhoeffer may have known through his brother Karl-Friedrich of the discovery of nuclear fission by Lise Meitner and Otto Hahn in 1938, news of which was published in January 1939. [CG]

human life [Lebensnotwendigkeiten]. In such cases, appropriate responsible action departs from the domain governed by laws and principles, from the normal and regular, and instead is confronted with the extraordinary situation of ultimate necessities that are beyond any possible regulation by law. In his political theory Machiavelli coined the term *necessità*^[99] for such a situation. For politics this means that the craft of political governance [Staatskunst] becomes political necessity [Staatsnotwendigkeit]. There can be no doubt that such necessities actually exist. To deny them would mean ceasing to act in accord with reality. It is equally certain, however, that these necessities, as primordial facts of life itself, cannot be captured by any law and can never become laws themselves. They appeal directly to the free responsibility of the one who acts, a responsibility not bound by any law. They create an extraordinary situation, and are in essence borderline cases. They no longer permit human reasoning [ratio] to come up with a variety of exit strategies, but pose the question of the ultima ratio.^[100] In politics this ultima ratio is war, but it can also be deception^[101] or breaking a treaty for the sake of one's own life necessities. In economic life it means the destruction of people's livelihoods for the sake of business necessities. The ultima ratio lies beyond the laws of reason;^[102] it is irrational action. It would now be a complete and total misunderstanding if the ultima ratio itself were again turned into a rational law, if the borderline case were made the norm, the *necessità* a technique.^[103] Baldwin was right in saying that there is only one evil greater than force, namely, force as a principle, a law, a norm.^[104]

[99.] "Necessity." See Machiavelli, *The Prince*: "Hence a prince who wants to keep his authority must learn how not to be good, and use that knowledge, or refrain from using it, as necessity requires" (52). Machiavelli's concept of *necessità* is discussed by Meinecke (*Machiavellismus*, 37-39 et passim) and by Ritter (*The Corrupting Influence of Power*, in critical discussion with Meinecke; chap. 2, "Machiavelli: Pathfinder of Continental Power Politics," refers to the term *necessità* [18, 22]). Also see Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* working notes Nos. 28 and 19 (ZS 89 and 105).

[100.] "Last resort," "hierarchically" "ultimate rationale."

[101.] Replaces: "ie."

[102.] Replaces: "is a deed which can no longer be decided by the laws of reason," i.e., not amenable to rational rules or calculation.

[103.] See Meinecke, *Machiavellismus*: "But it was quite another matter to decide whether, on the one hand, the moral law should be broken only in the practice of politics, or whether, on the other hand, it was permissible to justify... such an infringement by the plea of an unavoidable 'necessity'" (39).

[104.] Since 1935 the British conservative government of Stanley Baldwin had demanded a defense program. After Baldwin's resignation in 1937, Prime Minister Neville

He did not intend by this to deny that the necessity for the use of force as *ultima ratio* can occur as the extraordinary, as the borderline case; otherwise he would be a dreamer and not a statesman. However, under no circumstances did he want to see the extraordinary, the borderline case, be mistaken as the norm, the law. In other words, for him the borderline case could never justify substituting chaos for the relative order that is ensured by an appropriate observance of the law.

Extraordinary necessity appeals to the freedom of those who act responsibly. In this case there is no law behind which they could take cover. Therefore there is also no law that, in the face of such necessity, could force them to make this rather than that particular decision. Instead, in such a situation, one must completely let go of any law, knowing that here one must decide as a free venture. This must also include the open acknowledgment that here the law is being broken, violated; that the commandment is broken out of dire necessity, thereby affirming the legitimacy of the law in the very act of violating it. In thus giving up the appeal to any law, indeed only so, is there finally a surrender of one's own decision and action to the divine guidance of history.

The question, never to be answered theoretically, remains whether in historical action the ultimate is the eternal law or free responsibility that is contrary to all law but before God. Here great nations stand on opposite sides of a final, irreconcilable divide. Acknowledging the law as the ultimate authority defines the greatness of English statesmen—Gladstone, for example, comes to mind here. Standing in free responsibility before God, on the other hand, defines the greatness of German statesmen—here I am thinking of Bismarck.^[105] Neither side can claim here to be more in the right than the other. The ultimate question remains open and must be kept open. For in either case one becomes guilty, and is able to live only by divine grace and forgiveness. Those

Chamberlain pursued a policy of appeasement toward Germany and Italy (see Baldwin, *Services of Our Lives*, 100f.). In his farewell speech as prime minister on April 10, 1937, Baldwin had warned his electorate that “ideas may be very dangerous things”; he was referring to the ideas of communism and fascism that governed hundreds of millions of people in Russia, Germany, and Italy. He continued, “no man who brings about changes by force in any country can maintain himself and the changes he has effected except by the continuation of force; because it is force alone that can dethrone him” (102f.).

[105.] For a comparison of Gladstone and Bismarck from a different perspective, see Ritter, *The Corrupting Influence of Power*, 98ff.

bound by the law as well as those acting in free responsibility must hear and accept the indictment by the other side. Neither can be the judge of the other. Judgment remains with God.

From the discussion thus far, it follows that the structure of responsible action involves both *willingness to become guilty* [*Bereitschaft zur Schuldübernahme*]^[106] and *freedom*.

By turning our focus back to the origin of all responsibility, we come to understand what willingness to become guilty means.^[107] Jesus' concern is not the proclamation and realization of new ethical ideals, and thus also not his own goodness (Matt. 19: [17]f.), but solely love for real human beings. This is why he is able to enter into the community of human beings' guilt, willing to be burdened with their guilt. Jesus does not want to be considered the only perfect one at the expense of human beings, nor, as the only guiltless one, to look down on a humanity perishing under its guilt. He does not want some idea of a new human being to triumph over the wreckage of a humanity deflated by its guilt. He does not want to acquit himself of the guilt by which human beings die. A love that would abandon human beings to their guilt would not be a love for real human beings. As one who acts responsibly within the historical existence of human beings, Jesus becomes guilty. It is his love alone, mind you, that leads him to become guilty. Out of his selfless love, out of his sinlessness, Jesus enters into human guilt, taking it upon himself. In him, sinlessness and bearing guilt are inextricably linked. As the sinless one, Jesus takes the guilt of his brothers and sisters upon himself, and in carrying the burden of this guilt he proves himself as the sinless one. Now in this sinless-guiltily [*sündlos-schuldig*] Jesus Christ all vicarious representative responsible action [*stellvertretend verantw. worthes Handeln*] has its origin. Precisely because and when it is responsible, because and when it is exclusively concerned about the other human being, because and when it springs from the selfless love for the real human brother or sister—it cannot seek to withdraw from the community of human guilt. Because Jesus took the guilt of all human beings upon himself, everyone who acts responsibly becomes guilty.^[108]

[106.] *Schuldübernahme* involves an active *taking on* of guilt—in the course of, and incidental to, responsible action—and, depending on the context, can mean both becoming guilty oneself and taking on the guilt of others. [CG]

[107.] The following section corresponds quite closely to pages 233–35 above.

[108.] See below, page 282, “those who act responsibly become guilty without sin.”

Those who, in acting responsibly, seek to avoid becoming guilty divorce themselves from the ultimate reality of human existence; but in so doing they also divorce themselves from the redeeming mystery of the sinless bearing of guilt by Jesus Christ, and have no part in the divine justification that attends this event. They place their personal innocence [Unschuld] above their responsibility for other human beings^[109] and are blind to the fact that precisely in so doing they become even more egregiously guilty. They are also blind to the fact that genuine guiltlessness is demonstrated precisely by entering into community with the guilt of other human beings for their sake. Because of Jesus Christ, the essence of responsible action intrinsically involves the sinless, those who act out of selfless love, becoming guilty.

Against all this one can raise an objection of indisputable gravity. It springs from the lofty authority of conscience,^[110] which refuses to sacrifice its integrity to any other good, which refuses to become guilty for the sake of another human being. Here, responsibility for the neighbor has its limit in the inviolable voice of conscience. A responsibility that would force a person to act against conscience would thereby condemn itself.^[111] What is correct and what is false in this line of argument?

It is correct that it can never be advisable to act against one's own conscience. All Christian ethics agrees on this point. But what does this mean? Conscience is the call of human existence for unity with itself,^[112] voiced from a deep wellspring beyond one's own will and reason. It manifests itself as the indictment of lost unity and as the warning against losing one's self. Its primary focus is not a specific act, but a specific way of being. It protests against activity that threatens this being in unity with one's own self.

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[109.] Deleted: "they value the integrity of their own conscience higher than the brother or sister." See above, page 80, on "private blamelessness." A little further down in the margin is written: "Conscience?"

[110.] Regarding conscience see also *AB* (*DBWE* 2):138f.; and *CF* (*DBWE* 3):128-30 et passim.

[111.] Replaces: "would in itself be immoral."

[112.] See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §56, "The Character of Conscience as a Call" (251). Bonhoeffer's *Act and Being* (*AB* [*DBWE* 2]:69) cites §57, "Conscience as the Call of Care," which says that the conscience calls *Dasein* "its ownmost potentiality-for-being" (see *Being and Time*, 254f.). [CG]

According to this formal definition, conscience remains an authority the defiance of which is extremely inadvisable;^[113] disregarding the call of one's conscience, rather than leading to a meaningful surrender of oneself, must result in the destruction of one's own being, a disintegration of human existence.^[114] Acting against one's conscience is similar to suicidal action against one's own life, and it is no accident that both frequently go together. Responsible action that would violate one's conscience, defined in this formal sense, would indeed be reprehensible.

However, this does not yet fully answer the question. If the call of one's conscience comes from the threatened unity with one's own self, then we must now also investigate the content^[115] of that unity. It is, first of all, one's own ego in its demand to be "like God"—*sicut deus*—in knowing good and evil.^[116] In the natural human being, the call of conscience is the attempt of the ego who knows good and evil to justify itself to God, to others, and to itself, and to be able to sustain this self-justification. The ego, which fails to find any grounding in its contingent^[117] individuality, traces itself back to a general law of the good and seeks unity with itself by conforming to this law. The call of conscience has its origin and goal in the *autonomy* of one's own ego. The task in following this call is to re-create this autonomy, whose origin is "in Adam" beyond our own desires and knowledge, each time.^[118] So in conscience human beings remain bound to a self-discovered law. Although it can manifest itself concretely in different forms, it remains an inviolable law lest one lose one's own self.

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[113.] The most famous example from German church history, of course, was Luther's refusal at the Diet of Worms on April 18, 1521, to recant his teachings against the voice of his conscience.

[114.] The words "human existence" replace "one's own self."

[115.] Regarding Bonhoeffer's differentiation between "form," *Form* (as in "formal"), and "content," *Inhalt*, see above, pages 174-75, on the formal and substantive definition of what is natural.

[116.] Gen. 3:5. [See also Bonhoeffer's commentary on that verse and on the use of the knowledge of good and evil in *Creation and Fall* (*CF* [*DBWE* 3]:111ff. and 80ff.).] [CG]

[117.] Bonhoeffer employed the philosophical term "contingent," as in "contingency of revelation" (from the Latin *contingens*, "not necessary," not graspable by any law or rule), in his *Habilitationschrift*, or postdoctoral dissertation, *Act and Being* (see *AB* [*DBWE* 2]:82).

[118.] See *Act and Being*: "The conscience . . . of human beings in Adam [is] . . . the confirmation and justification of their self-fulfilling solitude" (*AB* [*DBWE* 2]:139). Regarding "autonomy," see above, pages 252-53.

The great change takes place, as we now come to understand, the moment the unity of human existence no longer consists in its own autonomy, but, by the miracle of faith, is found in Jesus Christ, beyond one's own ego and its law. This relocation of the center of unity in fact has its formal analogy in the secular domain. When the N.S. [119] says, "my conscience is A.H.," [120] then this is also the attempt to ground the unity of the ego beyond one's own self. The consequence is the surrender of the self's autonomy in favor of an unconditional heteronomy. This, in turn, is possible only if the other human being, in whom I seek the unity of my life, [121] takes on the role of my redeemer. This would be the closest secular parallel to Christian truth and thus its most pronounced antithesis.

Where Christ, true God and true human being, has become the unifying center of my existence, conscience in the formal sense still remains the call, coming from my true self, into unity with myself. However, this unity can now no longer be realized by returning to my autonomy that lives out of the law, [122] but instead in community with Jesus Christ. [123] The natural conscience, even the most scrupulous, is now exposed as the most godless self-justification. It is overcome by the conscience that has been set free in Jesus Christ, calling me to unity with myself in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has become my conscience. This means that from now on I can only find unity with myself by surrendering my ego to God and others. The origin and goal of my conscience is not a law but the living God and the living human being as I encounter them in Jesus Christ. For the sake of God and human beings Jesus Christ became a breaker of the law: he broke the law of the Sabbath [124] in order to sanctify it, out of love for God and human beings; he left his parents in order

[119.] Bonhoeffer's abbreviation for *Nationalsozialisten*, "National Socialist."

[120.] Bonhoeffer's abbreviation for Adolf Hitler. The remark is attributed to leading Nazi Hermann Göring (see Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks*, 84; for a discussion see Möser, *Gemütsphysiologie*, 417). See the exclamation point in *Ethics* working note No. 78: "Christ (or some other authority) is my conscience. My conscience is A.H." [CG] Rauschning, was: "I have no conscience. My conscience is A.H." [CG]

[121.] The phrase "in whom... like" replaces "to whom I submit myself."

[122.] By "law" Bonhoeffer does not mean only or primarily religious law such as the Decalogue, but law as an "abstract ethical principle"; see below, page 279, the discussion of Kant's "grotesque" principle of truthfulness. [CCJ]

[123.] The words "conscience in the formal sense... Christ" replace "I can attain unity with myself only by being bound to Jesus Christ."

[124.] See the Sabbath regulations in Deut. 5:14.

to be in his Father's house, and thus to purify the obedience owed to one's parents; he ate with sinners and outcasts, and, out of love for humanity, he ended up being forsaken by God in his final hour. [125] As the one who loved without sin, he became guilty, seeking to stand within the community of human guilt. He rejected the devil's accusation that sought to distract him from this path. [126] So Jesus Christ is the one who sets the [127] conscience free for the service of God and neighbor, who sets the conscience free even and especially where a person enters into the community of human guilt. The conscience that has been set free from the law will not shy away from entering into another's guilt for that person's sake. Rather, precisely in so doing it will prove its purity. Unlike the conscience bound to the law, the freed conscience is not fearful. Instead, it is wide open to the neighbor and the neighbor's concrete distress. The freed conscience aligns itself with the responsibility, which has been established in Christ, to bear guilt for the sake of the neighbor. In contrast to the essential sinlessness of Jesus Christ, human action is never sinless but always contaminated by original sin, which is part of human nature. Nevertheless, as responsible action, in contrast to any self-righteous action justified by a principle, it does participate indirectly in the action of Jesus Christ. Responsible action is thus characterized by something like a relative sinlessness, which is demonstrated precisely by the responsible taking on of another's guilt. [128]

Treating truthfulness as a principle leads Kant to the grotesque conclusion [129] that if asked by a murderer whether my friend, whom he was pursuing, had sought refuge in my house, I would have to answer honestly in the affirmative. [130] Here the self-righteousness of conscience has

[125.] See Mark 2:23-28 (Sabbath); Luke 2:48-50 (leaving his parents); Matt. 9:11 (eating with sinners); Mark 15:34 (being forsaken by God).

[126.] See Mark 8:31-33 (prediction of his suffering, and Peter's "satanic" objections). See also *D* (DBWF 4):84f.

[127.] Deleted: "natural."

[128.] The three preceding sentences ("In contrast... sin") correspond to "History and Good [1]" page 275, above. In "History and Good [2]" he added the following section up to and including the quotation from Goethe's *Iphigenia* (see below, pages 281-82).

[129.] Replaces: "assertion."

[130.] See Nohl, *Die sittlichen Grundverhältnisse*: "Thus 'honestly' one ought to answer yes to a murderer who asks us whether our friend, whom he is pursuing, had sought refuge in our house" (114; Bonhoeffer's copy has a marginal pencil mark here). See Kant: "For if you had told the truth to the best of your knowledge, then neighbors might have come and apprehended the murderer while he was searching the house for his enemy

escalated into blasphemous recklessness and become an impediment to responsible action. Since responsibility is the entire response, in accord with reality, to the claim of God and my neighbor, then this scenario glaringly illuminates the merely partial response^[131] of a conscience bound by principles. I come into conflict with my responsibility that is grounded in reality when I refuse to become guilty of violating the principle of truthfulness for the sake of my friend, refusing in this case to lie^[132] energetically for the sake of my friend—and any attempt to deny that we are indeed dealing with lying here is once again the work of a legalistic and self-righteous conscience—refusing, in other words, to take on and bear guilt out of love for my neighbor. Here, as well, a conscience bound to Christ alone will most clearly exhibit its innocence precisely in responsibly accepting culpability.

It is astounding how close Goethe comes to these thoughts from a purely profane knowledge of reality. To quote the dialogue in which Pyliades urges Iphigenia to act responsibly in violation of her inner law:

PYLADES. Too strict demands betoken secret pride. . . .

IPHIGENIA. The spotless heart alone has pure enjoyment.

PYLADES. You have remained untainted in this temple;⁵

life teaches us, and you will learn it too,

to be less rigorous with ourselves and others.

This human breed is formed in such astounding fashion,

so variously linked up and interwoven,

that keeping pure and disentangled

5. The introduction of the characteristic concept of "enjoyment" [*Genießen*] is also notable in this context.

and the deed would have been prevented" ("On a supposed right to lie from philanthropy," 612f.).

[131.] See above, page 254, the reference to "partial answers."

[132.] Concerning "lying," see above, page 77. Bonhoeffer planned to discuss "truthfulness," *Wahrhaftigkeit*, in the intended chapter on the good; the term is found in *Ethics* working notes Nos. 82, 64, 66, and 81 (*ZE* 59, 63, 64, 24). See also his exegesis of Matt. 5:33-37 in *D* (*DBWE* 4):128-31. During his imprisonment in Tegel, Bonhoeffer emphasized his reservations against truthfulness as a "principle" in working note *NL A*, 75, 122 (*ZE* 145: "Only the *gryk* is completely 'truthful'"), in the letter of the second Sunday of Advent (December 5, 1943), *LPP* 157f., and in the essay fragment "What Does 'Telling the Truth' Mean?" (*EE* 358-67). A person who, during interrogations by the National Socialist regime, could not "lie energetically" posed a deadly threat to coconspirators.

within ourselves or with regard to others is far beyond a human being's grasp.

Nor are we meant to judge ourselves:

our first duty is to walk and watch our path,

for we can seldom rightly judge what we have done,

and still less judge what we are doing. . . .

It seems you have not known the pain of loss

if to avoid such great calamity

you will not even pay the price of speaking falsely.

IPHIGENIA. Oh, if only I had a man's heart in me

which, when it harbors some bold resolution,

closes itself to all dissuading voices!^[133]

No matter how much the conscience freed in Jesus Christ and responsibility might agree with each other, there nevertheless remains an irremovable tension between them.

In two ways conscience still limits taking on and bearing guilt [*Schuldtragen*], which a particular responsible action necessarily entails.

First, the conscience freed in Jesus Christ still essentially remains the call to unity with myself. Acceptance of responsibility must not destroy this unity. Surrendering the self in selfless service must never be confused destroying and annihilating the self, which would then also no longer be able to take on responsibility. The measure of guilt incurred in connection with a particular responsible action has its concrete limit in one's unity with oneself, in one's ability to bear the weight [*Tragkraft*]. There are responsibilities that I am not able to bear without being broken by them, whether it be a declaration of war, the breach of a political treaty, a revolution, or merely the dismissal^[134] of a single father of a family who thus finds himself unemployed, or, lastly, just giving advice in a personal life decision. It is true that the ability to bear the weight of making responsible decisions can and should grow. It is also true that each time I fail to meet a responsibility, I have already made a decision for which I am responsible. Nevertheless, in the concrete situation

[133.] *Iphigenia in Tauris*, verses 1649, 1652-64, 1674-79 [trans. altered]. The lines "This human breed. . . beyond a human being's grasp" are quoted by Nohl in connection with Kant's "fanatical insistence on truthfulness" (*Die sittlichen Grundannahmen*, 114).

[134.] Replaces: "or the dismissal from office." Under the National Socialist regime, members of persecuted groups were dismissed from civil service.

the call of the conscience to unity with oneself in Jesus Christ remains inescapable. This explains the infinite variety of responsible decisions.

Second, even the conscience freed in Jesus Christ confronts responsible action with the law that, when obeyed, keeps one in unity with oneself as grounded in Jesus Christ, whereas disregarding it can lead only to irresponsibility. This is the law to love God and neighbor as spelled out in the Decalogue, in the Sermon on the Mount, and in the apostolic parenesis.^[135] In its content, the law of the natural conscience corresponds remarkably closely with the conscience set free in Jesus Christ. This correct observation is due to the fact that conscience has indeed to do with preserving life itself and therefore contains basic traits of the law of life [Lebensgesetz], even if it is distorted in detail and fundamentally perverted. Even in its liberated form, conscience still has the function it had in its natural state, namely, to warn us not to violate the law of life.^[136] However, Jesus Christ rather than the law is now the ultimate. Wherever conscience and concrete responsibility clash, we must therefore freely decide in favor of Jesus Christ. This does not entail an eternal conflict, but rather means gaining the ultimate unity: for the ground, essence, and goal of concrete responsibility is, of course, the very same Jesus Christ who is lord of the conscience. So responsibility is bound by conscience, but conscience is set free by responsibility. It has now become evident that these two statements are saying the same thing: those who act responsibly become guilty without sin; and only those whose conscience is free can bear responsibility.

Those who in acting responsibly take on guilt—which is inescapable for any responsible person—place this guilt on themselves, not on someone else; they stand up for it and take responsibility for it. They do so not out of a sacrilegious and reckless belief in their own power, but in the knowledge of being forced into this freedom and of their dependence on grace in its exercise. Those who act out of free responsibility are justified before others by dire necessity.^[137] before themselves

[135.] Bonhoeffer replaced the more colloquial German term *Ermahnung*, "admonition," with the technical theological term *ταπεινωσις* or "exhortation." See below, pages 318–19, the biblical references regarding examples of "apostolic admonitions," namely, to give "in simplicity."

[136.] The phrase "to warn . . . [deleted: 'our own'] the law of life," replaces "to accuse us when we violate the law of life and to exhort us to obey it."

[137.] See above, pages 272–73, regarding "the basic necessities of human life," *Lebensnotwendigkeiten*. [CG]

they are acquitted by their conscience, but before God they hope only for grace.^[138]

The analysis of the structure of responsible action thus requires us to deal finally with *freedom*.^[139]

Responsibility and freedom are mutually corresponding concepts. Responsibility presupposes freedom substantively—not chronologically—just as freedom can exist only in the exercise of responsibility. Responsibility is human freedom that exists only by being bound to God and neighbor.

Those who are responsible act in their own freedom, without the support of people, conditions, or principles, but nevertheless considering all existing circumstances related to people, general conditions, or principles. That nothing comes to their defense or exoneration, other than their own action and person, is proof of their freedom. They themselves have to observe, judge, weigh, decide, and act on their own. They themselves have to examine the motives, the prospects, the value, and meaning of their action. But neither purity of motive, nor favorable conditions, nor the meaningfulness of an intended action can become a rule for their action behind which they can hide, appealing to its authority, and by which they can be exonerated and acquitted.⁶ For in such a case, of course, they would no longer be truly free. Those who act

6. This also eliminates the spurious question of determinism or indeterminism—whether the essence of decisions of the human spirit is to be falsely assumed under the law of cause and effect.^[140]

[138.] Although disguised by translation in the plural, in this sentence and in the last sentence of the previous paragraph, Bonhoeffer writes *der Mann*, "the man," rather than his normal *der Mensch*, "the human being." Given the pertinence of these sentences to his personal involvement in the conspiracy against Hitler, this usage suggests an autobiographical interpretation of these sentences. [CG]

[139.] The following section corresponds with "the *venture* of concrete decision" in the outline above, page 257. The discussion deals with a specific component of freedom, namely, the free act. Like the preceding passage about taking on guilt, pages 283–85 also portray the internal situation of those who were active in the resistance and the planning of the coup. What Bonhoeffer wrote has validity beyond their special situation of conspiracy. See above, page 76, regarding Bonhoeffer's conviction that in exceptional circumstances like they were in, reality unveils itself. [This is an ethical parallel to Barth's argument that revelation, as event, happens "from time to time." See, for example, Barth's discussion of the Barman Declaration as an event of revelation, expressly rejecting talk about Hitler as a revelation (*Church Dogmatics* 2/1:176f.)] [CG]

[140.] "Determinism" is the philosophical and religious belief that all human decisions are fixed and determined by preceding causes, i.e., according to the law of cause

responsibly do so while bound to God and neighbor as they encounter me in Jesus Christ, the only bond that is liberating, totally liberating. Responsible action takes place in the sphere of relativity, completely shrouded in the twilight that the historical situation casts upon good and evil. It takes place in the midst of the countless perspectives from which every phenomenon is seen. Responsible action must decide not simply between right and wrong, good and evil, but between right and right, wrong and wrong. "Right collides with right," as Aeschylus stated.^[141] This very fact defines responsible action as a free venture [Wagnis], not justified by any law; rather, those who act responsibly relinquish any effectual self-justification; indeed, in so doing they relinquish an ultimately dependable^[142] knowledge of good and evil. As responsible action, the good takes place without knowing,^[143] by surrendering to God the deed that has become necessary and is nevertheless (or because of it) free, surrendering it to God, who looks upon the heart,^[144] weighs the deeds, and guides history.

Thus a profound mystery of history as such is disclosed to us. Precisely those who act in the freedom of their very own responsibility see their activity as flowing into God's guidance. Free action recognizes itself ultimately as being God's action,^[145] decision as God's guidance, the venture as divine necessity. In freely surrendering the knowledge of our own

and effect. In this view, human will and decisions would not be free. Modern science, with its strict adherence to explanations based on the law of cause and effect, exacerbated the problem for proponents of human freedom; however, the foundational crisis in twentieth-century physics, especially during the 1920s, made clear that a dichotomy between determinism and indeterminism is not meaningful even within science.

[141.] Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers* 109, line 461 (the *Chiaiphane* or *Libation Bearers* is the second part of the *Orestia* trilogy, first performed in 458 B.C.E.).

The two sentences "Responsible action . . . stated" are a marginal addition. The following section, from "This very fact" up to "later in our discussion" at the end of the next paragraph, is like pages 268–69, based on page 225. The sentence "In so doing a profound mystery of history is disclosed to them [replaces: 'us']," whose equivalent has been deleted above on page 269, is used here as the beginning of the subsequent paragraph.

[142.] Replaces: "based on principle [prinzipiell]."

[143.] See *Discipleship*, where Bonhoeffer writes that "the goodness of discipleship takes place without awareness" (*D*) (*DBWE* 4:151). [The German sentences are parallel, both using the expression *es geschieht*, "it happens."] [CG]

[144.] See 1 Sam. 16:7b: "for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." See also Matt. 6:4.

[145.] This section rather closely follows "History and Good [1]" (see above, page 225), but omits the term "passivity." A "clarifying word" on the "concept of passivity" is found

goodness,^[146] the good of God occurs. Only in this ultimate perspective can we speak about good in historical action. We will have to come back to this point later in our discussion.^[147]

Before that, however, we must explore a decisive question that is essential to clarifying the issue at hand, namely, what is the relation between free responsibility and obedience? At first it would appear that everything we have said about free responsibility would actually find its application only where someone "holds a responsible position" in life, as we say—that is, where a person needs to make independent decisions of some significant magnitude. But how does responsibility play any role in the steady routine of daily work of a day laborer,^[148] a factory worker, a lowly office worker or a military recruit, an apprentice, or a pupil. The situation is admittedly somewhat different for an independent farmer, a business owner, a politician or statesman, a military commander, an instructor of an apprentice, a teacher, or a judge. But how many technical details and prescribed routines finally do govern their lives, and how few truly free decisions do they actually make? It would therefore seem as if everything we have said about responsibility applied in the end only to a very small group of people, and to them only in a few moments of their lives, and as if for the great majority of people we consequently would have to speak about obedience and duty, rather than responsibility. This would mean one kind of ethic for the great, the strong, and the rulers, and another kind for the little people, the weak, and the subordinates. Responsibility on the one side, obedience on the other, freedom here and servitude there. In our modern social order, especially in Germany, the existence of the individual is doubtless prescribed, regulated, and therefore also secured to such an extent that only a few are granted the opportunity to breathe the free air sweeping the wide-open spaces of major decisions, and to become acquainted

in the last paragraph of the manuscript "The Love of God and the Disintegration of the World" (see below, pages 337–38). The terms "passive" and "enduring" are used below, page 384.

[146.] The phrase "In freely surrendering the knowledge of our own good [replaces: 'of good and evil']" replaces "In freely surrendering any self-justification one knows . . ."

[147.] See below, pages 378–87, the discussion of "God's commandment," especially page 385, which speaks of allowing oneself to be guided "by the commandment as by a good angel."

[148.] Replaces: "peasant."

with the danger of acting responsibly on their very own. The compulsory structuring of life into a specific apprenticeship, education, and vocation^[149] has made our lives relatively safe from ethical dangers. People who are embedded in this process since childhood are ethically emancipated; they have been robbed of their creative ethical power, which consists in freedom. This reveals an aberration that is deeply rooted in the nature of our modern social order and that can be challenged only by clearly lifting up the fundamental concept of responsibility. Given the situation as it stands, the bulk of experiential resources relating to the problem of responsibility will have to be sought among the great political leaders, the captains of industry, and military commanders, because the few others who venture to act in free responsibility amid the pressures of daily life are crushed by the machinery of all-pervasive rules and regulations.^[150]

It would nevertheless be a mistake to consider the question only from this perspective. For in fact there is not a single life that cannot come to know the situation of responsibility, indeed in its most distinctive form, namely, in the encounter with other human beings. Thus, even where free responsibility is more or less excluded from one's vocational and public life, one's relation to other human beings, from the family to one's coworker, will always demand responsibility,^[151] and the exercise of genuine responsibility in this arena provides the only sound possibility to expand the sphere of responsibility once again into one's vocational and public life. Wherever human beings encounter one another, including the world of work, genuine responsibility arises, and no rules and regulations are able to invalidate these relationships of responsibility. This is true not only for the relationship between spouses, parents,^[152] and children, and between friends, but also for instructors and their apprentices, teachers and their pupils, judges and defendants.

[149.] See Jaspers regarding career mobility for proletarians as "possibilities [that] are open only to very few; and they are tending to decrease even further, being displaced by the inescapable circumstances of their lives: sociological fate" (*Man in the Modern Age*, 25 [trans. altered]). [In the fifth German edition of 1933 the translation of the final phrase reads "inescapable circumstance of a life reduced to a standardized fate."] [CGI]

[150.] The phrase "the all-pervasive rules and regulations" is written above "the social order," which is not deleted.

[151.] From his earliest work Bonhoeffer had defined the human person in terms of ethical encounter with an other, e.g., SC (*DBWE* 1):48-52. [CG]

[152.] Replaces: "father"

And we can even go one step further. Responsibility exists not only *alongside* relationships based on obedience [Gehorsamsverhältnis], but also *within* this arena. Apprentices, whose duty it is to obey their instructors, are at the same time freely responsible for their work, their achievement, and thus also for their instructors. The same is true for pupils, for students, but also for employees in any company, and soldiers in war. Obedience and responsibility are interwoven, so that responsibility does not merely begin where obedience ends, but obedience is rendered in responsibility. There will always be relationships based on obedience and dependence.^[153] The only thing that is important, though, is that they not eliminate responsibilities, as is already the case today to a large extent. It is more difficult for those who are socially dependent to be aware of their responsibility than it is for those who are socially free. However, by no means does a relationship of dependence as such preclude free responsibility. Master and servant can and ought to be freely responsible for one another while maintaining their relationship based on obedience.

The relationship between God and human beings that has been realized [verwirklicht] in Jesus Christ is the ultimate reason why this is the case. Jesus stands before God as the obedient one and as the free one. As the obedient one, he does the will of the Father^[154] by blindly following the law he has been commanded. As the free one, he affirms God's will out of his very own insight, with open eyes and a joyful heart; it is as if he re-creates it anew out of himself. Obedience without freedom is slavery; freedom without obedience is arbitrariness. Obedience binds freedom, freedom ennobles obedience. Obedience binds the creature to the Creator; freedom places the creature, made in God's image, face-to-face with the Creator. Obedience makes clear to human beings that they have to be *told* what is good and what the Lord requires of them (Mic. 6:6).^[155] Freedom lets them create the good themselves. Obedience knows what is good and does it. Freedom dares to act^[156] and leaves the

[153.] Replaces: "super [ordination] and [subordination]."² See below, pages 390-93, regarding "above and below." "*Oben und Unten*." [It is important to note that relationships of obedience are not blind submission to authority but involve mutual responsibilities; the parties ought to be "freely responsible for one another," as Bonhoeffer states at the end of the paragraph.] [CG]

[154.] Deleted: "and nothing else."

[155.] Correct: Mic. 6:8.

[156.] The phrase "dars to act" replaces "finds the good only in the act itself."

judgment about good and evil up to God. Obedience follows blindly, freedom has open eyes. Obedience acts without asking questions, freedom asks about the meaning. Obedience has tied hands, freedom is creative. In rendering obedience, human beings observe God's Decalogue, in exercising freedom, they create new decalogues (Luther).^[157]

In responsibility both obedience and freedom become real [realisieren sich]. Responsibility has this inner tension. Any attempt to make one independent of the other would be the end of responsibility. Responsible action is bound and yet creative. Making obedience independent would lead to Kant's ethic of duty, making freedom independent to a romantic ethic of genius.^[158] The person bound by duty as well as the genius have their justification within themselves. Responsible human beings, who stand between obligation [Bindung] and freedom and who, while bound, must nevertheless dare to act freely, find justification neither by their bond nor by their freedom, but only in the One who has placed them in this—humanly impossible—situation and who requires them to act. Responsible human beings surrender themselves and their action to God.

We have sought to grasp the *structure of responsible life* with the concepts of vicarious representative action [Stellvertretung], accordance with reality [Wirklichkeitsgemäßheit], taking on guilt [Schuldübernahme],^[159] and freedom. The desire to become even more concrete now leads us to the question whether it is possible to determine more precisely the *place [Ort]* at which the responsible life is realized. Does responsibility place me into an unlimited field of activity, or does it tie me firmly to the limits given with my concrete daily tasks? For what am I genuinely responsible, and for what am I not? Does it make sense to consider myself responsible for everything that happens in the world, or can I watch the great world events as an uninvolved observer, as long as my own

[157.] See Luther, *Disputationen*, ed. Drews, 12; also cited in Holl, *Luther*, 223. See Bonhoeffer's 1926 statement: "The new person... could create new decalogues, which would be clearer than that of Moses" (DBWE 9 [2/10]:381).

[158.] The term *Genie-Ethik*, "ethic of genius," is found in Nohl, *Die sittlichen Grundlagen der Kultur*, in the context of a critical engagement with Kant (192; the entire sentence is marked by a marginal line in Bonhoeffer's copy).

[159.] The phrase "taking on guilt" encompasses both one's own guilt and that of others—i.e., acting responsibly when one's own action brings guilt and also acting to rectify a situation caused by the guilt of others, such as a church community or a nation. [CG]

minute domain [Bereich] is in order? Should I let myself be worn down while eagerly but powerlessly confronting all the injustice and all the misery in the world, or may I, in self-satisfied security, let the evil world run its course, so long as I myself cannot do anything to change it and have done my part? What is the place [Ort]^[160] and what are the limits of my responsibility?

The Place of Responsibility

In this section we will draw on the concept of *vocation [Beruf]*, which in the history of ethics has gained an almost unique significance. However, in so doing we must be clear from the outset about the following: (1) what we have in mind here is not the secularized concept of vocation as "a definite field of activity" (Max Weber);^[161] (2) nor do we think of the kind of pseudo-Lutheranism that views vocation merely as the justification and sanctification of the worldly orders as such;^[162] (3) even Luther's own concept of vocation^[163] is not simply identical with that of the New Testament; with great boldness, he fills the New Testament concept of vocation (1 Cor. 7:20) with a richness that, although justified in substance just like his translation of Rom. 3:28,^[164] stretches the actual Greek usage. We will therefore start with the biblical evidence. (4) The two concepts of vocation and responsibility have such a uniquely fortuitous correspondence that it seems especially appropriate to employ

[160.] Replaces: *Raum*, literally "room" or "space"; see *Ethics* working note No. 19: "The Arena [Raum] of Responsibility" (ZE 112).

[161.] See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: "The passage in 1 Cor. 7:17 does not... use κληρος ['call'] at all in the sense of *Beruf* ['vocation'], a definite field of activity; [Leistungen, 'accomplishments']" (209).

[162.] See *Discipleship* regarding Luther's successors (or "descendants") on the conflict between "a Christian and a bourgeois-secular vocation"; for the latter the "Christian life consists of my living in the world and like the world" (D [DBWE 4]:50). Bonhoeffer's own subject index of *Discipleship* references this page under "vocation."

[163.] See Luther's translation of 1 Cor. 7:17-24, especially verse 17: "just as the Lord has called a person, so they should continue to live." See *Discipleship*, on "The Call to Discipleship" (D [DBWE 4]:57-76 et passim). Holl's article "Die Geschichte des Wortes *Beruf*" was for a long time the standard for interpreting Luther's understanding of vocation (*Gesamte Abgäbe zur Kirchengeschichte* 3:189-219).

[164.] We therefore hold that a person is justified apart from the works of the law, by faith alone. "The emphatic 'alone' in Luther's translation is not found in the Greek text.

them here, even though in our usage neither term is identical with that of the New Testament.^[165]

In encounter with Jesus Christ, a person experiences God's call [Ruf], and in it the calling [Berufung] to a life in community with Jesus Christ.^[166] Human beings experience the divine grace that claims them. It is not human beings who seek out grace in its place, for God lives in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16). Instead, grace seeks out and finds human beings in their place—the Word became flesh (John 1:14)—and claims them precisely there. It is a place that in every case and in every respect is burdened with sin and guilt, be it a royal throne, the home of a respected citizen, or a shanty of misery. It is a place of this world. This vocation by grace took place in Jesus Christ becoming human, and still occurs in the word about Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit brings. The call reaches us as Gentle or Jew, slave or free, man or woman,^[167] married or unmarried. Right where they happen to be, human beings ought to hear the call and allow themselves to be claimed by it. It is not as if this would imply a justification of slavery, marriage, or singleness as such.^[168] Instead, those who are called may belong to God in one state or the other. Only by the call of grace heard in Jesus Christ, by which I am claimed, may I live justified before God as slave or free, married or single. From Christ's perspective this life is now my vocation; from my own perspective it is my responsibility.

This rules out two disastrous misunderstandings, that of cultural Protestantism^[169] and that of monasticism. People do not fulfill the responsibility laid on them by faithfully performing their earthly vocational obligations as citizens, workers, and parents, but by hearing the

[165.] Ilse Tödt notes that "vocation" or "calling" (from Latin *vocatio*; cf. German *Beruf*), points to a call addressed to a person and that "responsibility" (from Latin *responsio*; cf. German *Verantwortlichkeit* and *Antwort*) points to the person's response or answer. The relation between these terms is what Bonhoeffer calls *Entsprechung* "correspondence," a word that includes meanings such as "answering" and "matching." [CG]

[166.] Grammatically, the German also allows for the translation "to a life in the community of Jesus Christ," i.e., the church (see *D* [DBWE 4]:99). [RK]

[167.] See Gal. 3:28.

[168.] The words "imply a [deleted: 'special'] justification of slavery, marriage, or singleness as such" replace "mean that slavery, marriage, or singleness were something holy [replaces: 'good before God']." See *Discipleship* regarding not adding a "religious anchor" for slavery (*D* [DBWE 4]:238), as well as the statement that "Jesus does not make either marriage or celibacy into a required program" (*D* [DBWE 4]:127).

[169.] By "cultural Protestantism," *Kulturprotestantismus*, Bonhoeffer means a Protestantism that is domesticated and virtually indistinguishable from the culture of its society. [CG]

call of Jesus Christ that, although it leads them also into earthly obligations, is never synonymous with these.^[170] but instead always transcends them as a reality standing before and behind them. Vocation in the New Testament sense is never a sanctioning of the worldly orders as such. Its Yes always includes at the same time the sharpest No, the sharpest protest against the world. Luther's return from the monastery into the world, into a "vocation," is, in the genuine spirit of the New Testament, the fiercest attack that has been launched and the hardest blow that has been struck against the world since the time of earliest Christianity.^[171] Now a stand against the world is taken *within* the world. Vocation is the place at which one responds to the call of Christ and thus lives responsibly. The task given to me by my vocation is thus limited; but my responsibility to the call of Jesus Christ knows no bounds.

The misunderstanding of medieval monasticism lies not in the recognition that the call of Jesus Christ enlists human beings in the struggle against the world.^[172] Instead, it lies in the attempt to find a place that is not the world and from which one could therefore respond more appropriately. This futile attempt to escape from the world takes seriously neither God's No, which applies to the whole world including the monastery, nor, on the other hand, God's Yes, in which God reconciles the world with himself. The monastic enterprise thus takes God's call, even its No to the world, less seriously than the worldly vocation as understood by Luther (although certainly not by pseudo-Lutheranism). It is certainly in line with Luther that the response to the call of Jesus Christ might in a concrete case consist in leaving a particular earthly vocation in which it is no longer possible to live responsibly. It is only pseudo-Lutheranism, with its faith in the sanctity of vocational obligations and earthly orders as such, that cannot conceive this thought. Against this distortion of the New Testament understanding of vocation, the protest of the monastery remains justified. Luther's sole purpose in returning to the world was to be fully responsible to the call of Christ. In light of this call, the monastic solution remains wrong in two

[170.] See *Discipleship*: "It is the great mistake of a false Protestant ethic to assume that loving Christ can be the same as loving one's native country, or friendship, or profession [Beruf]!" (*D* [DBWE 4]:144, a page referenced in Bonhoeffer's subject index of *Discipleship* under "vocation").

[171.] This sentence corresponds, in part word for word, to sentences in *Discipleship* (*D* [DBWE 4]:48 and 244f.).

[172.] See *Discipleship* on monasticism and on Luther (*D* [DBWE 4]:47ff.).

respects. First, it confines the ultimately responsible life to the space within the walls of the monastery. Second, it regards as only a false compromise the life in which the Yes and the No to living in this world—both of which are included in the call of Jesus Christ—are to be united in concrete responsibility to this call. Against this misunderstanding, Luther interpreted the meaning of human responsibility as limited yet at the same time grounded in the unlimited; he coupled the fulfillment of one's earthly vocation in responsibility before the call of Jesus Christ with the free and joyful conscience that stems from being in community with Jesus Christ.^[175f] Thus the good and free conscience does not come from fulfilling one's earthly vocational obligations as such. On that level, the unresolved conflict between multiple obligations will always remain an open wound for the conscience, and one can never manage more than a compromise with a semiclear conscience. In concrete deeds, conscience can be free only by fulfilling one's concrete vocation in responsibility to the call of Jesus Christ, that is, only from knowledge of Jesus Christ's becoming human. Only the call of Christ, which is responsibly followed in one's vocation, overcomes the compromise and the resultant uncertainty of the conscience.^[174f]

The question of the place and the limit of responsibility has led us to the concept of vocation. However, this answer is valid only where vocation is understood simultaneously in all its dimensions. The call of Jesus Christ is the call to belong to Christ completely; it is Christ's address and claim at the place at which this call encounters me; vocation comprises work with things and issues [sachliche Arbeit] as well as personal relations;^[175] it requires "a definite field of activity,"^[176] though never

[173.] Marginal note: "compromise, conscience, Naumann." See above, page 230.

[174.] At this point, the manuscript continues with the following undeleted new paragraph: "The place of my responsibility is thus, on the one hand, determined by the call of Jesus Christ that encounters me." The sentence remains incomplete; it is the end of the text on this page. The following page of the manuscript starts with a deleted section.

[175.] See the text "Personal" and "Objective" Ethics" (DBW 16 [2/13]:550–62 [EE 316–26]), which critically discusses a thesis by Dilschneider; see also below, page 333. The text is written on whitish, porous double sheets that have been cut to DIN A5 format; this particular kind of paper also was used for the *Ethics* texts starting above on page 270, line 5. In Bonhoeffer's copy of Dilschneider's book *Die evangelische Ethik*, the following passage is underlined: "[w]ith the doctrine of the two kingdoms] the Protestant ethos emerged as a purely personal affair" (104). Bonhoeffer disagrees with this form of Protestant ethics.

[176.] Max Weber; see above, page 289, editorial note 161.

as a value in itself but only in responsibility to Jesus Christ. By being related to Jesus Christ, the "definite field of activity" is set free from any isolation. The boundary of vocation has been broken open not only vertically, that is, through Christ, but also horizontally, with regard to the extent of responsibility. Let us say I am a medical doctor, for example. In dealing with a concrete case I serve not only my patient, but also the body of scientific knowledge, and thus science and knowledge of truth in general. Although in practice I render this service in my concrete situation—for example, at a patient's bedside—I nevertheless remain aware of my responsibility toward the whole, and only thus fulfill my vocation. In so doing, it may come to the point that in a particular case I must recognize and fulfill my concrete responsibility as a physician no longer only at a patient's bedside, but, for example, in taking a public stance against a measure that poses a threat to medical science, or human life, or science in general.^[177] Vocation is responsibility, and responsibility is the whole response of the whole person to reality as a whole.

This is precisely why a myopic self-limitation to one's vocational obligations in the narrowest sense is out of the question; such a limitation would be irresponsible. The nature of free responsibility rules out any legal regulation of when and to what extent human vocation and responsibility entail breaking out [Durchbrechen] of the "definite field of activity." This can happen only after seriously considering one's immediate vocational obligations, the dangers of encroaching on the responsibilities of others, and finally the total picture of the issue at hand. It will then be my free responsibility in response to the call of Jesus Christ that leads me in one direction or the other.^[178] Responsibility in a vocation follows the call of Christ alone.

[177.] Threats of this kind were posed by the race-based eugenics programs of the National Socialist regime, such as forced sterilizations and murders that were termed "euthanasia." In choosing the example of the medical doctor here in this manuscript, Bonhoeffer was certainly also conscious of his own father, the psychiatrist Karl Bonhoeffer. Through public declarations, the elder Bonhoeffer attempted to limit the number of sterilizations. [See Uwe Gerdens, *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik*.] [CG]

[178.] Deleted: "This much is certain, however, that nothing can be regulated in principle [deleted: 'legally'] in either direction." See Nohl's remarks about "formation in which the individual assumes a vocation and a task within a whole," where he says: "I may have a double; but since that person is living in a different life-context, the double is faced with different tasks. This awareness gives rise to a trust and a responsibility, and thus also to security, courage, and a confidence in myself" (*Die sittlichen Grundverfassungen*, 170, 168).

295 There is a wrong and right limitation of responsibility, as well as a wrong and right expansion of it: there is an enthusiastic transgression of [schwärmertisches Durchbrechen] all boundaries, as well as a legalistic erecting of boundaries. From the outside, it is difficult or impossible to determine whether in a concrete case an action is responsible or whether it is born from enthusiasm or legalism. Nevertheless, there are criteria for self-examination, even though they cannot provide complete certainty about one's own self. The following are such criteria: neither the limitation nor the expansion of my field of responsibility must be based on principles, but rather on the concrete call of Jesus alone; if, according to my character traits, I know that I tend to be a reformer, a know-it-all, a fanatic, one who does not heed any limits, there I run the risk of expanding my responsibility arbitrarily, and confusing my natural desire with the call of Jesus; if I know myself to be cautious, anxious, insecure, and legalistic, there I must be careful not to equate the call of Jesus Christ with my limiting responsibility to a narrow domain; and finally, I am never set free to act in genuine responsibility by looking at myself, but only by attending to Christ's call.

296 Unknowingly, Nietzsche speaks in the spirit of the New Testament when he chides the legalistic and narrow-minded misunderstanding of the commandment to love our neighbor with the following words: "You crowd around your neighbor and have fine words for it. But I say unto you: your love of the neighbor is your bad love of yourselves. You flee to your neighbor from yourselves and would like to make a virtue out of that: but I see through your 'selflessness.' . . . Do I advise love of those nearest to you [Nächstenliebe]? Sooner I should even advise you to flee from those nearest you and to love those farthest away [Fernstenliebe]." [179] Behind the neighbor, whom the call of Jesus commands to us, also stands, according to Jesus, the one who is farthest from us, namely Jesus Christ himself, who is indeed God. Whoever does not know this "farthest" behind the "nearest," and at the same time this "farthest"

[179.] Bonhoeffer quotes, with slight deviations, Nietzsche, "On Love of the Neighbor," from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (*The Portable Nietzsche*, 1924 [trans. altered]). See Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethics*, vol. 2, chap. 30, "Love of the Remote"; Bonhoeffer's German copy has a line on page 454, beside the subheading containing the word *Fernstenliebe*, "love of the farthest." Hartmann attributed this term to Nietzsche (*Ethics*, 2:318). [See Hartmann's section "Love of the Remote, Its Moral Character" (*Ethics*, 2:328-31). Bonhoeffer and Nietzsche are playing on the two contrasting German terms, *Nächster*, "neighbor" or literally "the nearest," and *Fernster*, "the farthest."] [CG]

as this "nearest," does not serve the neighbor but themselves, and shuns the free and open air of responsibility to hide in the more comfortable narrowness of fulfilling a duty. Even the commandment to love the neighbor therefore does not mean a legalistic restriction of my responsibility to the neighbor whom I encounter while sharing the same place, citizenship, profession, or family. The neighbor can be met precisely in the one who is farthest away, and vice versa. In a terrible miscarriage of justice in the United States in 1931, [180] nine young black men accused of raping a white girl of dubious reputation were sentenced to death even though their guilt could not be proven. This triggered a storm of outrage that found expression in open letters from the most respected European public figures. A Christian, disturbed by these events, asked a leading church official in Germany to consider raising his voice also in protest against this case. For his refusal to do so, the official cited the "Lutheran" understanding of vocation, that is, the limitation of the extent of his responsibility. But in fact it was protest from all around the world that eventually led to the revision of the verdict. [181] Does the call of Jesus Christ itself lead us here to understand Nietzsche's statement: "My brothers, love of the neighbor I do not recommend to you: I recommend to you love of the farthest?" [182] We say this without making a judgment in this particular case. We say it in order to keep the boundary open.

The Bible is loud and clear in its instruction to do whatever is right in front of us (Eccles. 9:10), [183] to be faithful in the smallest things (Luke

[180.] Deleted: "which was based on racial prejudice."

[181.] In 1981 *Beltage* commented: "The sensational 1931 'Scottsboro' case, a travesty of justice, recently made headlines again in the American press, since the State of Georgia *fact* has now pardoned and restored the rights of one of the last survivors of those nine black men who had been unjustly sentenced. During his stay in New York Bonhoeffer took an active interest in these events and apparently sought, unfortunately without success, to get the leadership of his church (was it Otto Dibelius?) officially involved" ("Afterword" *Ethik*, 6th ed., 1981 printing, 398). The trial opened on Monday, April 6, 1931, and convictions were returned on April 7-9; widespread international objection did not cause the verdict to be annulled. Clarence Norris, the last surviving "Scottsboro Boy," died in 1989; he was the only one to be pardoned by the governor of Alabama (not Georgia), George Wallace, in 1976. See Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South*, [182.] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (*The Portable Nietzsche*, 174).

[183.] There is a marginal line in colored pencil in Bonhoeffer's meditation Bible next to Eccles. 9:10a: "Carry out with energy whatever happens to be in front of you." [NRSV: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might."] [CG] Holl traces the phrase: "Tu, uns dir vor die Hand kommt." "Do what is right at hand," back to Luther and I Sam. 10:6 (*Luther*, 242, note 2; the correct reference is verse 7).

16:10; 19:17), to fulfill our domestic duties before assuming larger ones (1 Tim. 3:5);^[184] and to be cautious about interfering with another person's responsibility or office [Am.] (1 Pet. 4:15). Nevertheless, all of these exhortations remain bound to the call of Jesus Christ, and so they are not legalistic restrictions against exercising free responsibility toward this call. In the German Church Struggle there have been many cases of pastors refusing to assume the public responsibility of speaking out on the affliction of their colleagues and those suffering persecution of all kinds, precisely because their own congregations had not yet been affected. They did so not out of cowardice or unwillingness to act, but solely because they considered this an illegitimate transgression of their assigned vocation to protect their own congregation in its concrete travails and trials. If at a later point their own congregation was also affected, then this led frequently to a responsible action carried out with authority and the greatest freedom. This too we say, not to render a premature judgment, but in order to guard the commandment to love the neighbor against any false limitation, and thus to preserve the freedom that the gospel gives to the concept of vocation.^[185]

But now is it not the case that the law of God as revealed in the Decalogue, and the divine mandates of marriage, work,^[186] and government, establish an inviolable boundary for any responsible action in one's vocation? Would any transgressing [Durchbrechung] of this boundary not amount to insubordination against the revealed will of God? Here the recurring problem of law and freedom presents itself with ultimate urgency. It now threatens to introduce a contradiction into the will of

[184.] *Ethics* working note No. 12 contains the deleted phrases: "Do what is right at hand.—Whoever is not able to manage their own affairs"—1 Tim. 3:15].¹ The neighbor and the one farthest away. Blacks." (ZE 86). In some of his *Ethics* working notes Bonhoeffer deleted those parts that he had already incorporated into a manuscript. For example, see below, pages 354–56, which correspond to the deletion in *Ethics* working note No. 100 (ZE 119). *Ethics* working note No. 12 also contains, among other material, the undetected comment: "examine" what is the will of God Rom. 12:2 Eph. 5:10, 17" (ZE 86). Rom. 12:2 and Eph. 5:9–10 are cited in the manuscript "God's Love and the Disintegration of the World"; see below, page 320.

[185.] The words "to preserve the freedom [replaces: 'wide range'] that the gospel gives to the concept of vocation" replace "to protect the concept of vocation against a legalistic approach." Deleted self-reminder in the margin: "absolute limits set by God? Commandment. Mandates."

[186.] Note the sequence of "marriage" before "work" that was also the original sequence, but subsequently reversed; see above, page 68.

God itself. Certainly no responsible activity is possible that does not consider with ultimate seriousness the boundary that God established in the law. Nevertheless, precisely as responsible action it will not separate this law from its giver. Only as the Redeemer in Jesus Christ will it be able to recognize the God by whose law the world is held in order; it will recognize Jesus Christ as the ultimate reality to whom it is responsible, and precisely through Christ it will be freed from the law for the responsible deed. For the sake of God and neighbor, which means for Christ's sake, one may be freed from keeping the Sabbath holy, honoring one's parents,^[187] indeed from the entire divine law. It is a freedom that transgresses this law, but only in order to affirm it anew.^[188] The suspension of the law must only serve its true fulfillment. In war, for example, there is killing, lying, and seizing of property solely in order to reinstate the validity of life, truth, and property. Breaking the law must be *recognized* in all its gravity—"blessed are you if you know what you are doing; however, if you do not know what you are doing you are cursed and a transgressor of the law" (Luke 5:39 in h⁷).^[189] Whether an action springs from responsibility or cynicism^[190] can become evident only in whether the objective guilt one incurs by breaking the law is recognized and borne, and whether by the very act of breaking it the law is truly sanctified. The will of God is thus sanctified in the deed that arises out of freedom. Precisely because we are dealing with a deed that arises from freedom, the one who acts is not torn apart by destructive conflict, but instead can with confidence and inner integrity do the unspokeable, namely, in the very act of breaking the law to sanctify it.

[187.] See above, pages 278–79, on the Sabbath and parents.

[188.] Replaces: "in earnest."

[189.] The quoted text "blessed are you . . ." is a translation of part of a textual variant to Luke 6:5 cited in the critical apparatus of the Nestle edition of the Greek New Testament. The top line of this Nestle page contains the reference "5:39—6:9" [Bonhoeffer cited 5:39 from this reference instead of the correct verse within it.] [CC]; in Bonhoeffer's 1929 Nestle, "h" refers to a "noteworthy rejected reading" as designated in the appendix of the small 1895 edition of Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*.

[190.] See Meinecke's remark: "In this concept of *necessità* [namely] that the prince who did not want to go under would have to be a fox among the foxes" one vaguely sensed also a higher justification of an immoral policy before the moral conscience; this was the only ethical element in Machiavelli's political theory with a lasting effect" [trans. RK] (*Machiavellism*, 45, which is marked in Bonhoeffer's copy; Bonhoeffer's penciled comment in the top margin of this page reads: "Cynicism and responsibility.").

Love and Responsibility [191]

[191.] The manuscript ends with the title "Love and Responsibility," which is not underlined. The underlined subtitles "The Structure of Responsible Life" (see above, page 257) and "The Place of Responsibility" (see above, page 289), concluded the texts on the respective manuscript pages in similar fashion. The subject of love is discussed more extensively in "History and Good [1]" than in "History and Good [2]"; see John D. Godsey, "Bonhoeffer's Doctrine of Love," 294. *Ethics* working note No. 19 on "Responsibility" lists the points: "1. The word in its comprehensive sense. . . . 2. The structure of responsible life [replaces: activity]. . . . 3. The place of responsibility. . . . 4. Contradiction and unity within responsibility" (ZE 105). Point 3 was planned to cover four subissues, the third of which was to be entitled "The given vocation" (covered in the manuscript above on pages 288–96), and the second of which was to be entitled "The divine mandates" (very briefly touched upon above, page 296). One of the issues to be treated in point 4 is indicated with the key words "Politics and the Sermon on the Mount." This was covered in "History and Good [1]," see above, pages 229–31 and 235–45, and treated differently in "History and Good [2]," pages 263–64. In working note No. 19 Bonhoeffer inserted a line to indicate that "Politics and the Sermon on the Mount" would be treated after "Love and Responsibility." In the manuscript "God's Love and the Disintegration of the World," Bonhoeffer states his basic thoughts on "love," but "responsibility" is not discussed in that context (see below, pages 299–338). In the arrangement of manuscripts for the eventual book, this manuscript on "God's Love and the Disintegration of the World" was presumably intended to come before the elaboration of the concept of responsibility. [In the manuscript title in the previous sentence, Bonhoeffer added the word "God's" at the beginning of his original formulation, "Love and the Disintegration of the World."] [CG]