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The Fact of the Person of Jesus Christ: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Act and Being*

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Abstract

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By Michael P. DeJonge

This dissertation interprets the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's (1906-1945) post-doctoral dissertation, *Act and Being.* I argue that it operates in the intellectual space cleared by Karl Barth, who places at the center of theological discussion the problem of transcendence, which says that the constructive, productive, and projective functions of human epistemological faculties make knowledge of a transcendent God impossible. In light of this problem, which reduces God and revelation to objects at human disposal, Barth argues that theology's conceptual basis must be a concept of contingent revelation. Barth articulates this contingency by treating revelation as the free 'act' of the God who is transcendent subject rather than object.

Bonhoeffer learns from Barth that the problem of transcendence requires theology to operate with a concept of contingent revelation, but Bonhoeffer finds Barth's understanding of contingency inadequate, since an act-concept of revelation cannot account for any continuous connection between the acting God and the human historical world. Bonhoeffer offers an alternative account of contingent revelation in the concept of 'person.' God is neither object nor subject but person, a historical *being* who *acts*. Only on this conceptual basis can theology maintain both the contingency and continuity of revelation.

Although the argument of *Act and Being* proceeds largely in philosophical terms, it is as its core a Lutheran theological argument. Barth's actualism, as Bonhoeffer puts it elsewhere, is a "Reformed actualism," reinterpreting in light of the problem of transcendence a traditional, Reformed or Calvinist understanding of revelation as the act or word of a sovereign God. Against this, Bonhoeffer develops the Lutheran understanding of revelation as the person of Jesus Christ. In the incarnation, God so fully enters the world that God acts out of historical being.

From Bonhoeffer's perspective, the superiority of the Lutheran person-concept of revelation, reflecting both the contingency and continuity of revelation, rests in its ability to fund a theology oriented to both the word and the world. It provides the leverage, therefore, to correct pre-Barthian theology's neglect of transcendence without bargaining away, as Bonhoeffer fears Barth does, attention to the historical world.

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For Noël.

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Chapter 1 : Between Berlin and Barth

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) announces in the first sentence of *Act and Being*, "The most recent developments in theology appear to me to be an attempt to come to an agreement about the problem of act and being."[1] Bonhoeffer's situating of the theme of his *Habilitationsschrift* or post-doctoral dissertation in its intellectual context largely fails, however, since he describes neither 'the problem of act and being' nor 'recent developments in theology' with any precision. As the shape of the problem emerges over the course of *Act and Being*, it becomes clear that Bonhoeffer's claim – that recent theology wrestles with the problem of act and being – is in one sense false. The problem of act and being is not a problem generally recognized by Bonhoeffer's theological contemporaries, but is instead a problem idiosyncratic to Bonhoeffer. However, there is another sense in which Bonhoeffer's claim is true. With 'the problem of act and being,' Bonhoeffer provides his own version of a generally recognized problem, namely, theology's loss of its orientation to transcendence.

The starting point for seeing the problem of act and being's participation in this generally recognized problem of transcendence is Bonhoeffer's observation that "the heart of the problem is the struggle with the formulation of the question that Kant and idealism have posed for theology."[2] Specifically, Bonhoeffer sees the problem of

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[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., trans. H. Martin Rumscheidt, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 25 Written in 1929 and 1930, *Act and Being* was published originally in 1931.

[2] Ibid., 27.

transcendence originating in what could be called Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) transcendental insight, that "Being 'is' only in reference to knowing."[1] Whatever the status of being – be it the being of a known object or the being of the knower – access to that being comes only through the act of knowing. Thus, being is in reference to act. Crucially, Kant's philosophy portrays the relationship between act and being as referential; neither act nor being is reducible to the other. This lends Kant's philosophy its transcendental character: "it is integral to the concept of genuine transcendentalism that thinking refers to something transcendent which, however, is not at its disposal."[2] The act of knowing refers to a being that transcends that act.[3]

For various reasons, idealist philosophers like J.G. Fichte (1762-1814) and G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) interpreted Kant's transcendental insight in a more radical direction. It is not only that, as Kant argued, being is given in act. Rather, argued the idealists, being *depends* on act: "where there is no knowing consciousness, there is also no being."[4] This radicalization of Kant's transcendental insight eliminates the tension between act and being. The two-term act/being structure of Kant's philosophy gives way

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[1] Ibid., 37.

[2] Ibid., 34.

[3] Bonhoeffer's account of Kant's philosophy in terms of 'reference to transcendence' is deeply indebted to Hinrich Knittermeyer, "Transzendentalphilosophie und Theologie. Eine kritische Erinnerung zum 22. April 1924," *Die Christliche Welt* 38 (1924): 220-226, 258-267, 354-361, 408-413. As Bonhoeffer writes, "'transcendental' means for Kant (as it has been shown clearly by Knittermeyer and others) not involving transcendence, but referring to transcendence," Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Theology of Crisis and its Attitude toward Philosophy and Science," in *Barcelona, Berlin, New York, 1928-1931*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Douglas W. Stott, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 10 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 471.

[4] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 48.

to the monistic structure of idealism, where transcendent being collapses into the knowing act. This transition from duality to monism carries with it the loss of transcendent orientation. Thinking is no longer in reference to something genuinely other, genuinely outside itself. Thinking refers only to itself and "is imprisoned in itself."[1]

On this reading, Kant and idealism, therefore, pose for theology the problem of transcendence. The development of post-Kantian thinking indicates that the constructive, productive, and projective functions of the mind make the knowledge of a transcendent impossible.[2] Such a problem is clearly devastating for a theology that claims to talk about a transcendent God and about the lives of those who are in relationship with a transcendent God.

A theological impasse

The problem of transcendence became a topic of discussion in European theology between the world wars in large part because of the work of the Swiss, Reformed theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968). Barth persistently criticized the variety of ways that theology places God 'at its disposal.' Barth's sensitivity to this domestication of God's transcendence accounts for much of Barth's theological restlessness and constant polemics during the period of his thought relevant to this study. As Barth took aim first at liberal theology, then Lutheran theologians, Catholic theologians, and his fellow

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[1] Ibid., 39.

[2] This, in short, is how I define the problem of transcendence as generally recognized by a number of Bonhoeffer's contemporary theologians. As I discuss later, Bonhoeffer and Barth understand the problem in slightly different terms.

dialectical theologians, a constant feature of Barth's polemic was the accusation that his opponents reduced divine revelation and human faith to human possessions or possibilities.[1]

Also constant in Barth's development was his focus on the category of revelation. If theology is to reflect the reality that "God is always beyond humanity; new distant, foreign, superior, never in human reach, never in human possession,"[2] then theology must begin with revelation. Specifically, theology must understand revelation not in terms of possibility but in terms of contingency. Revelation and faith must originate in God, not in human possibilities. Barth's conviction that the problem of transcendence

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[1] For an example of Barth relying polemically on the category of possibility against liberal theology, see Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. E.C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 225. For his polemics against Catholic theology, see his accusation that the Catholic understanding of the church reduces revelation to a human possession, Karl Barth, "The Concept of the Church," in *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings, 1920-1928*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1962), 282. For his polemics against dialectical theologians, see, for example, his letter to Rudolf Bultmann, where he accuses Bultmann, Friedrich Gogarten, and Emil Brunner of understanding "faith as a human possibility, or, if you will, as grounded on a human possibility," Bernd Jaspert, ed., *Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann: Letters, 1922-1966*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 49. Barth's polemics against Lutherans will be discussed in chapter three.

[2] Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 120. Translation altered. "Immer ist Gott dem Menschen jenseitig, neu, fern, fremd, überlegen, nie in seinem Bereich, nie in seinem Besitz …," Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1940), 96.

must be overcome through an understanding of contingent revelation led him to declare that "the problem of contingent revelation … is today more urgent than ever before."[1]

Bonhoeffer first engaged seriously with Barth's theology while still a student in Berlin. In the winter of 1924-25, he read *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (1924) and *Romans* in its second edition (1922), and began following Barth's development through Bonhoeffer's cousin Hans-Christoph von Hase, who was then attending Barth's lectures at Göttingen.[2] Bonhoeffer quickly incorporated these two Barthian themes – the rejection of the category of possibility and the search for an understanding of contingent revelation – into his own developing theology. In this sense, the young Bonhoeffer became a Barthian.[3]

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[1] Karl Barth, "The Doctrinal Task of the Reformed Churches," in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper, 1957), 260.

[2] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, Revised edition. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 73.

[3] Because Barth figures prominently in *Act and Being*, Barth figures prominently in this dissertation. Nonetheless, this dissertation remains primarily about Bonhoeffer's *Act and Being* rather than about Barth or even the relationship between Bonhoeffer and Barth. Therefore, it is Bonhoeffer's reading of Barth leading up to the composition of *Act and Being* that determines the aspects of Barth's thought that come into consideration. Barth's works considered here are primarily those written in time to influence the composition of *Act and Being.* The most directly relevant period of Barth's thought is from 1916-29, bracketed on the early end by essays in Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper, 1957), and bracketed on the late end by Karl Barth, "Fate and Idea in Theology," in *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth: Essays and Comments*, ed. H. Martin Rumscheidt, trans. George Hunsinger et al. (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1986), 25-61. Although Bonhoeffer wrote *Act and Being* 'in conversation' with Barth, the conversation was at that time running in one direction. Bonhoeffer carefully followed Barth's every theological move, but Barth knew nothing of Bonhoeffer, who was twenty

These Barthian themes put Bonhoeffer's student theology in tension with the theological climate in Berlin. Shortly after discovering Barth, Bonhoeffer wrote a seminar paper that attacked on Barthian grounds the historical-critical method, the very foundation of the Berlin theological model.[1] Reinhold Seeberg (1859-1935), who would later supervise Bonhoeffer's doctoral dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*,[2] interpreted that paper as a disturbing exercise in Barthianism, and rewarded Bonhoeffer with the lowest grade of his theological education.[3] Bonhoeffer's neighbor, teacher, and veritable incarnation of the historical, scholarly approach to theology, Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), felt his grip on the prize pupil slipping.[4] Only a few years prior, Harnack had

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years Barth's junior and still in his academic training. The two men did meet in 1931 and began a lasting professional and to some degree personal relationship, Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 178.

[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Paper on Historical and Pneumatological Interpretation of Scripture," in *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, ed. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 9 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 285-300.

[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

[3] Bonhoeffer, "Paper on Historical and Pneumatological Interpretation of Scripture," 285, fn. 1.

[4] Letter from Harnack to Bonhoeffer, 22 December 1929. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York: 1928-1931*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Douglas W. Stott, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 10 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 196-7.

publically debated Barth on the merits of historical, scientific theology.[1] Now Bonhoeffer seemed to be siding with the enemy.

Bonhoeffer, like so many young theologians of the time, broke from the traditions of his teachers. As has been noted by many historians, the Weimar era of German history is one of intergenerational conflict: "when we think of Weimar … we think of the rebellion of sons against fathers."[2] The venom with which Friedrich Gogarten (1887-1967) and Karl Barth attacked their intellectual fathers in the pages of *Zwischen den Zeiten* and *Die Christliche Welt* reveals that the theological world, too, participated in the oedipal dynamic. However, if Bonhoeffer rebelled against his intellectual fathers, his rebellion took the form of a quiet distrust manifested in critical intellectual distance. Temperamentally, Bonhoeffer was worlds apart from Barth and Gogarten, never failing to show deference and respect to his elders. Unlike the dialectical theologians themselves, Bonhoeffer continued to sit at the feet of the old masters. Despite his omnivorous consumption of Barth's theology, Bonhoeffer dutifully attended the seminars of Berlin's theological old guard: Reinhold Seeberg, Karl Holl (1866-1926), and Adolf von Harnack. If, as subsequent generations of theological students have been taught, Karl Barth's second edition of *Romans* sounded the death knell of liberal theology, then

[1] The debate between Harnack and Barth over critical and historical method appeared in 1923 in *Die Christliche Welt*. It is translated in James M Robinson, ed., *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Louis De Grazia (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1968), 165-187.

[2] Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Insider as Outsider* (Harper and Row: New York, 1968), xiii.

Bonhoeffer was apparently content to live at least a little while longer among the corpses.[1]

In fact, Bonhoeffer never fully rejected the Berlin tradition nor fully accepted Barth's theological orientation. His theological education navigated between these two worlds. Initially, Bonhoeffer negotiated the tensions between these two theologies with varying degrees of success. His seminar papers crudely alternated between these two perspectives or simply juxtaposed them. The same semester that Bonhoeffer began to question the historical method, he applied it to the great satisfaction of one of its masters, Karl Holl.[2] By the time of his doctoral dissertation in 1927, however, Bonhoeffer began "to discover his own way,"[3] attempting "to bring sociology and the critical tradition in harmony with the theology of revelation, that is, to reconcile Troeltsch and Barth."[4] Bonhoeffer was able to find his own way in part because he maintained a critical distance

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[1] In contrast to Gogarten's assessment of the decline of liberal theology's culture: "And now we are glad for the decline, since no one enjoys living among corpses," Friedrich Gogarten, "Historicism," in *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology*, ed. James M Robinson (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1968), 279.

[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Luther's Feelings about His Work as Expressed in the Final Years of His Life Based on His Correspondence of 1540-1546," in *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, ed. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 9 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 285, fn. 119.

[3] The phrase comes from Seeberg's evaluation of Bonhoeffer's dissertation, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, ed. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 9 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 176.

[4] Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 83.

even from those teachers he admired – both his official teachers in Berlin and his teacher from afar, Karl Barth.

Act and Being was another phase in Bonhoeffer's attempt to "discover his own way" between Barth and Berlin, specifically on the question of the concept of contingent revelation. If Bonhoeffer agreed with Barth that the seriousness of the problem of transcendence required rethinking theology from the ground up with an eye toward a concept of contingent revelation, he disagreed with Barth about the proper concept of contingent revelation.[1] The question of the proper concept of revelation stands at the heart of Bonhoeffer's problem of act and being.

At issue in *Act and Being* are, initially, two rival concepts of revelation: act and being. Being-concepts of revelation, in one way or another, deliver the transcendence of revelation into the power of human epistemological structures. In other words, being-concepts of revelation, as concepts of possibility, encounter the problem of transcendence. While Bonhoeffer implicitly treats a range of being-theologies, the most important is that of his own Berlin teacher Karl Holl. According to Bonhoeffer's criticism (presented in chapter seven of this dissertation), Holl ties revelation to the conscience and thereby reduces revelation to a possibility latent within the processes of human consciousness. In a criticism with which Barth could agree, Bonhoeffer rejects this prominent Berlin theologian's reduction of revelation to a human possibility.

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[1] I argue that this statement describes, in the broadest terms, the theological relationship between Bonhoeffer and Barth at the time of *Act and Being* on the cluster of issues treated in *Act and Being.* Much of this dissertation unpacks this statement by articulating Bonhoeffer's and Barth's respective concepts of revelation ('person' and 'act'), forms of thinking corresponding to them (hermeneutical and dialectical thinking), and theological traditions from which they are drawn (Lutheran and Reformed).

In opposition to being-concepts of revelation are act-concepts, which avoid the problem of transcendence by presenting revelation as a momentary, sheer act of God. Bonhoeffer takes Barth as the main representative of act-theology. Bonhoeffer finds Barth's act-theology an unsatisfactory solution to the problem of transcendence for a variety of reasons (chapter five). Most important, Bonhoeffer argues that a theology based on an act-concept of revelation cannot make sense of the continuous, historical aspects of the Christian life. In other words, an act-concept of revelation encounters the problem of historical existence.

As will be detailed in chapter two, the problem of transcendence and the problem of historical existence are the two principal hinges upon which Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the problem of act and being hangs. In characterizing the inherited problem of transcendence as the problem of act and being, which includes the problem of historical existence, Bonhoeffer understands the problem inherited from post-Kantian theology to be the articulation of a concept of contingent revelation that not only re-establishes God's transcendence, but also grounds the historical aspects of the Christian life. In framing the problem of act and being in terms of an orientation both to transcendence and to history, Bonhoeffer mediates what he takes to be the concern of Barth's theology – an orientation toward transcendence – and the concern of Berlin theology – an orientation toward the historical world.

Bonhoeffer identifies this mediation as the task facing theology in his lectures on "The History of Systematic Theology in the Twentieth Century" (1931-2), delivered shortly after the publication of *Act and Being*. Bonhoeffer spends the bulk of the lectures

on culture Protestantism, which seeks to balance Christianity with culture.[1] Karl Barth plays a central role in Bonhoeffer's narrative, since he redirects theological attention away from the concerns of the world – those of culture, history and ethics – to the "hearing of the word of God."[2] As Bonhoeffer tells the recent history, theology divides into two groups: the pre-Barthian culture Protestantism, which addresses culture, positions the church in relationship to culture, and avoids making unbearable claims on culture; and Barth's theology, which dedicates itself to the word of God even as it speaks against culture.

In the concluding section of the history lectures, entitled "Where do we stand?," Bonhoeffer evaluates the theological situation he and his contemporaries inherited from culture Protestantism and Barth. While generally affirming Barth's turn, Bonhoeffer finds that the way Barth focuses on revelation leaves many important issues unresolved, and perhaps insoluble. How can we understand the church's place in culture and in relationship to the state? Given that Christians exist in culture and as citizens of states, how can Barth's theology ground a concrete ethic?[3] Barth's theology seems incapable of dealing with the concerns that had so occupied culture Protestantism. Despite transforming the theological landscape through an orientation to the transcendent word of God, Barth's theology cannot ground the this-worldly ethical aspects of the Christian life.

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[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Die Geschichte der systematischen Theologie des 20. Jahrhunderts," in *Ökumene, Universität, Pfarramt, 1931-1932*, ed. Eberhard Amelung and Christoph Strohm, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke 11 (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1994), 192. Bonhoeffer's 'culture Protestantism' is roughly synonymous with Barth's 'liberal theology,' although neither term is precise.

[2] Ibid., 195.

[3] Ibid., 211-2.

If pre-Barthian theology focuses on the world in a way that precludes an orientation to the word, Barth's orientation to the word forecloses true being in the world. To the question, "Where do we stand?," Bonhoeffer answers that we stand at a theological impasse, oriented *either* to the world *or* to the word.

With this impasse at the conclusion of the history lectures, Bonhoeffer expresses in historical, concrete terms what he named in *Act and Being* in much more theoretical terms. Contemporary theology stands at this apparent dilemma between word and world precisely because it has not solved the problem of act and being. The result of an act-concept of revelation like Barth's is the inability to ground theoretically the being-aspects of the Christian life – ethics, culture, and other aspects of life in the historical world. And the result of a being-concept of revelation like Holl's is the inability to ground theoretically the act-aspects of the Christian life – revelation and faith.

The way beyond this impasse is through a third concept of revelation, the articulation of which is the task of *Act and Being.* Theology requires a concept of revelation that is both contingent and historically continuous, that captures the characteristics of both act and being. Bonhoeffer thinks he has such a concept in 'person,' which he understands as conceptually preceding and therefore uniting act- and being-characteristics. The person-concept of revelation is the decisive concept in *Act and Being.*

The person-concept of revelation

The person-concept of revelation is the decisive concept in *Act and Being*, first, because it is the crux of Bonhoeffer's argument. It is the foundation of Bonhoeffer's own position, a theology that solves the problem of act and being. It is also the criterion of

Bonhoeffer's criticism of act- and being-theologies; they fail to solve the problem of act and being precisely because they lack a person-concept of revelation. And it is the concept around which Bonhoeffer's interaction with philosophy revolves; philosophy's theological value is determined negatively by its inability to arrive at the proper concept of revelation and positively by the assistance it provides for Bonhoeffer's articulation of that concept.

The person-concept of revelation is crucial, second, for reading Bonhoeffer's theological relationship to Barth. With 'person' and 'act,' Bonhoeffer and Barth develop alternative concepts of contingent revelation that organize alternative solutions to the problem of transcendence. Barth's solution, which Bonhoeffer calls 'act-theology,' involves, in addition to an act-concept of revelation, a subjective concept of God and a formal account of God's freedom. Bonhoeffer's solution, which I call a 'person-theology,' involves, in addition to a person-concept of revelation, a person-concept of God and a substantial account of God's freedom. These alternative solutions to the problem of transcendence further imply alternative thought-forms; Barth's act-theology proceeds dialectically, and Bonhoeffer's person-theology proceeds hermeneutically. The person-concept of revelation marks Bonhoeffer's alternative to Barth.[1]

The person-concept of revelation is crucial, third, because it locates Bonhoeffer's argument in relationship to two intellectual traditions on which he draws. Bonhoeffer develops his person-concept of revelation out of the Lutheran christological tradition,

[1] According to the current consensus in Bonhoeffer scholarship, Bonhoeffer's theology around the time of *Act and Being* does not constitute an alternative to Barth's theology, either because Bonhoeffer misrepresents Barth's position, or because of subsequent developments in Barth's theology. My argument breaks from this consensus, as I discuss at the conclusion of chapter six.

which understands the person of Jesus Christ as the historical reconciliation of opposites and the starting point of all theological reflection (chapter four). Bonhoeffer's Lutheran account of person allows him to deploy what he considers the crucial insight of Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) early philosophy, that human existence is the coordination of act and being, toward his own theological solution to the problem of act and being. Bonhoeffer's 'person' is both Lutheran and Heideggerian.

The Lutheran provenance of Bonhoeffer's concept of person sheds further light on Bonhoeffer's position as an alternative to Barth's. Although Bonhoeffer evaluates Barth largely in the philosophical-theological terms of 'actualism,' both he and Barth recognize the Reformed character of Barth's actualism (chapter three). Bonhoeffer's alternative to Barth must be understood, therefore, in confessional-theological terms as well; his 'Lutheran person-theology' is an alternative to Barth's 'Reformed actualism.'[1]

Further, that Bonhoeffer locates the heart of Lutheran theology in the person of Jesus Christ defines his Lutheranism over against Holl's. Holl identifies Luther's understanding of justification by grace through faith as the doctrine by which the church stands and falls, and he locates justification in the dynamics of the conscience.

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[1] "Here the confession-problem reappears, since Barth's actualism in the concept of God and the concept of revelation continues a Reformed tradition. It is shameful for contemporary Lutherans that they do not know at all how to distinguish the Lutheran understanding of revelation from Catholic substance-thinking on the one hand and Reformed actualism on the other," Ibid., 212, fn. 309. Bonhoeffer carries out the argument of *Act and Being* largely in what I call 'philosophical-theological' terms, terms like 'act,' 'being,' and 'transcendence.' But Bonhoeffer's philosophical-theological argument is also a 'confessional-theological' one; its key concepts both draw on and reinterpret the theological tradition of the Lutheran confession.

Bonhoeffer criticizes Holl's theology of conscience as resting on a being-concept of revelation and therefore reducing justification to a human possibility. Bonhoeffer's Lutheran person-theology establishes as justification's precondition the presence of the person of Christ. Justification is the doctrine by which the church stands or falls, but justification stands or falls by the prior presence of Christ. The Lutheran personal-theology that constitutes Bonhoeffer's alternative to Barth also redefines the essence of Lutheranism against Holl.

The person-concept of revelation, understood as the central element of Bonhoeffer's Lutheran person-theology, is also the key for reading *Act and Being* in relationship to Bonhoeffer's later works. While Bonhoeffer abandons many of the conversations and much of the terminology that fill *Act and Being*, he returns repeatedly to the person-concept of revelation and the hermeneutical thought-form it entails. Bonhoeffer relies on these in *Act and Being* to deal with a meta-ethical, meta-theological problem, that is, the grounding of an ethical theology. In *Discipleship* (1937) and *Ethics* (1940-3),[1] the person-concept of revelation and hermeneutical thought-form drive Bonhoeffer's solutions to the concrete ethical and theological problems to which his attention later turns (chapter eight).

The person-concept of revelation is also, then, central to the argument of this dissertation: Critical of what he perceived to be Barth's act-theology (and its echoes of Kantian transcendental philosophy), which privileges act over being, Bonhoeffer sought

[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004).

to unify act and being by anchoring them in a Lutheran concept of the fact of the person of Jesus Christ and interpreting that concept in the hermeneutical tradition of Dilthey and Heidegger.

Chapter 2 : The problem of act and being

Part A of *Act and Being*, which includes Bonhoeffer's technical treatment of philosophy since Kant, poses many challenges, principle among which is the challenge of discerning the relationship of Part A to the remainder of *Act and Being*'s argument. In this chapter, I argue that Part A plays three important functions, all of which relate directly to the overall task of *Act and Being*, which is the solution of the problem of act and being through the person-concept of revelation.

First, Part A plays a *general introductory function* by presenting the problem of act and being against the background of post-Kantian philosophy. We learn that the problem of act and being is the problem of a lack of coordination of the concepts of act and being in theology. And we learn that the key to solving the problem is a proper concept of revelation. By outlining, albeit gradually and somewhat amorphously, the shape of the problem of act and being against the background of post-Kantian philosophy, Bonhoeffer introduces the problem and terminology that govern the argument of *Act and Being*.

Part A also performs a *preparatory critical function* by laying the foundation for Bonhoeffer's criticism of competing theologies. By demonstrating that philosophy cannot solve the problem of act and being because philosophy thinks from the self rather than from revelation, Part A sets the stage for the coming criticism of act- and being-theologies, namely, that they fail to solve the problem of act and being because they think with inadequate concepts of revelation. Part A therefore provides the philosophical context to which Bonhoeffer's criticisms of theology constantly refer.

Third, Part A plays a *preparatory constructive function*, providing Bonhoeffer with philosophical concepts that, once recast in light of revelation, help in the articulation of the person-concept of revelation. Specifically, Bonhoeffer understands the strength of the Kantian, transcendental-philosophical tradition to rest in its attempt to portray human existence as 'in reference to' transcendence, while the strength of the Heideggerian, ontological tradition rests in its portrayal of human being as 'being in' the world. Although Bonhoeffer finds both these philosophical concepts theologically inadequate on their own, he recasts and combines them in light of revelation to form his person-concept of revelation that solves the problem of act and being.

Part A advances the overall task of *Act and Being* – the solution of the problem of act and being through a person-concept of revelation – by articulating the problem, by laying the foundation for exposing the failure of other theologies in the face of the problem, and by providing some of the conceptual tools Bonhoeffer deploys to solve the problem.

'Act' and 'being'

Bonhoeffer announces that "The most recent developments in theology appear to me to be an attempt to come to an agreement about the problem of act and being,"[1] but he provides only slender accounts of both 'the problem of act and being' and 'recent developments in theology.' In his introductory description of the problem, Bonhoeffer produces a list of philosophical and theological conceptual issues, leaving their

[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 25.

relationship to each other, and therefore their status as a unified problem, unclear.[1] An equally desultory list of about a dozen contemporary theologians and their projects does little to illuminate the problem through its intellectual context.[2] In the whole of *Act and Being*, despite repeated references to the problem of act and being, Bonhoeffer never precisely formulates its nature or succinctly indicates the criteria for its solution.

Getting a handle on the problem of act and being, and eventually on *Act and Being*'s argument, requires understanding how Bonhoeffer uses the terms 'act' and 'being.' He deploys them, first, as basic, formal, oppositional terms. The terms are *basic* because Bonhoeffer sees them as necessary for thinking about revelation,

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[1] "It is a matter of the formation of genuine theological concepts, the decision one comes to between a transcendental-philosophical and an ontological interpretation of theological concepts. It is a question of the 'objectivity' of the concept of God and an adequate concept of cognition, the issue of determining the relationship between the 'being of God' and the mental act which grasps that being. In other words, the meaning of 'the being of God in revelation' must be interpreted theologically, including how it is known, how faith as act, and revelation as being, are related to one another and, correspondingly, *how human beings stand in light of revelation*. Is revelation 'given' to them only in each completed act; is there for human beings such a thing as 'being' in revelation? What form does the concept of revelation have when it is interpreted in terms of act and when it is interpreted in terms of being?" Ibid., 27-8.

[2] To illustrate his claim that recent theology deals with the problem of act and being, Bonhoeffer provides only terse allusions: "On the one hand, by means of his 'critical reservation' Karl Barth seeks to hold on to the freedom of God's grace and thereby to provide a foundation for human existence. Friedrich Gogarten and Rudolf Bultmann wish to free the human being in its 'concrete situation' or 'historicity' from the delusion of being at its own disposal. Hans Michael Müller maintains that, in the contingency of temptation, people reach their decision *propter Christum*. Friedrich Karl Schumann holds the epistemology of idealism culpable for the decline in theology up to and including that of Barth and tries to develop an objective concept of God …," Ibid., 25-7.

epistemology, and anthropology.[1] Act and being are *formal*, since Bonhoeffer tends to use the terms to refer to characteristics or features of things rather than to things themselves. Thus, 'act' names not so much *an* act, but the act-characteristics or -features of a particular thing or phenomenon. Defining act and being is less a matter of getting down to what an act or being is; it has more to do with what the characteristics of act and being are. What, then, are the characteristics of act and being?

Bonhoeffer provides some of these *oppositional* characteristics in these "general and preliminary definitions" of act and being:

> On the on hand, act is comprised of relationality, the infinitely extensive, that which is bound to *conscious*ness, discontinuity, and existentiality. (The term 'existentiality' here should be taken to designate not the sphere of the 'there is,' but rather the central, potential engagement of a person.) On the other hand, being is comprised of confinement-to-the-self, the infinitely-intensive, that which transcends consciousness, continuity.[2]

These preliminary definitions reveal act and being to be oppositional in temporal, modal, and relational ways. *Temporally*, act refers to the discontinuous, the momentary, or, if repeating, the serial. Being, in contrast, is continuous and persists. Because the discontinuity of acts gives them an unpredictability, they are *modally* contingent, occurring freely. Being's modality, on the other hand, is characterized by possibility; a being is always either there or potentially there. For Bonhoeffer, therefore, being and

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[1] In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer generally divides theology into these three conceptual levels: revelation, epistemology, and anthropology. See, for example, how Bonhoeffer organizes his treatment of act- and being-theologies in sections that correspond to these three levels, Ibid., v.

[2] Ibid., 29.

possibility are essentially related.[1] Because being exists out of its own possibility, *relationally*, it is directed toward itself. In contrast, act relates toward an other in 'existentiality,' as Bonhoeffer puts it in the quotation above. Being remains immanent in itself while act transcends itself.[2] To sum up the formal characteristics of act and being, acts means the discontinuous, contingent, and structurally open; being means the continuous, the possible, and the structurally closed.

Bonhoeffer uses 'act' and 'being' not only as conceptual terms, but also to name philosophical types that privilege one term over the other. Because the opposition between act and being is philosophically basic, the tension between act- and being-orientations reappears perennially in the history of philosophy, as in the tension between medieval nominalism and realism, which Bonhoeffer sees corresponding to act- and

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[1] Bonhoeffer makes this close connection between being and possibility explicit in his inaugural lecture, delivered before the faculty at the University of Berlin. In this lecture that reprises much of the content of *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer replaces the terms 'act' and 'being' with 'limit' and 'possibility.' See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Inaugural Lecture: The Anthropological Question in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology, July 31, 1930," in *Bonhoeffer, Berlin, New York*, ed. Clifford J. Green, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 10 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 459.

[2] Being is structurally at rest (*Ruhe*), remaining in itself (*In-sich-bleiben, Beisichselbstsein*). Act is in relation (*Beziehung*), motion (*Bewegung*), and orientation (*Richtung*) toward the outside. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein. Tranzendentalphilosophie und Ontologie in der systematischen Theologie*, ed. Hans-Richard Reuter, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke 2 (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1988), 23-4. Christiane Tietz-Steiding, *Bonhoeffers Kritik der verkrümmten Vernunft. Eine erkenntnische Untersuchung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 16.

being-philosophies respectively.[1] But in *Act and Being,* Bonhoeffer concerns himself primarily with the act- and being-orientations' post-Kantian manifestations. He takes the transcendental and idealist tradition, classically articulated by Kant, Fichte, and Hegel in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries, to represent the modern act-tradition, since it emphasizes the act of mind in constituting the being of the world. And he takes the phenomenological and ontological tradition, articulated by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Max Scheler (1874-1928), and Heidegger in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, to represent the modern being-tradition, since it (culminating in Heidegger) focuses on the way being-in-the-world determines the character of thinking acts.

Ultimately more important than the philosophical types are the theological ones, which Bonhoeffer also categorizes according to act and being. Their designations depend, as with philosophy, on their emphasis of one term over the other. More specifically, Bonhoeffer classifies a theology according to its concept of revelation, that is, according to whether it understands revelation in terms of act or in terms of being.

Although Bonhoeffer identifies a number of act-theologians in *Act and Being*, the dominant figure is Karl Barth. During the 1920s, Karl Barth worked to articulate an understanding of revelation that could avoid an error he identified in his theological mentors – the reduction of revelation from a divine act to a human possibility. Toward this end, Barth developed an act-concept of revelation where "God is made known only

[1] He associates Duns Scotus and Occam with act-thinking and Thomas Aquinas with being-thinking, Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 82, 73.

in acts that God freely initiates."[1] Because revelation-as-act is "alien to being,"[2] and has no historical continuity, such revelation never comes under human power, is never at human disposal, and is never a human possibility. God in God's act of revelation remains ever free. Barth is for Bonhoeffer the quintessential act-theologian.

Things are less clear on the being side of the equation. Despite often presenting Catholic thought as the being-theology *par excellence*, citing the Thomist pattern of prioritizing being over doing (*esse* over *agere*),[3] Bonhoeffer dispatches with it quickly in *Act and Being.* He does so, in one case, by treating the Catholic understanding of the church as a version of being-theology that crudely associates revelation with an object of knowledge and therefore leads revelation directly into the power of human noetic structures.[4] In another instance, he treats the Catholic *analogia entis* tradition articulated by Erich Przywara (1889-1927) as a failed attempt to open up Heidegger's general ontology toward transcendence.[5] These relatively quick dismissals reflect that Bonhoeffer, despite his respect for Catholic tradition,[6] was not deeply conversant with its theology and did not consider it a live option at this point in his career.

The being-theology that draws Bonhoeffer's attention is neither a theology that associates revelation with being *per se* nor a theology that associates revelation with an

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[1] Ibid., 83.

[2] Ibid., 28.

[3] Ibid., 103.

[4] Ibid., 104-5.

[5] Ibid., 73-6.

[6] Bonhoeffer gained this respect during his 1924 semester in Rome. See, Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 59f.

existing object of knowledge. Instead, Bonhoeffer concerns himself primarily with a third type of being-theology, a type that associates revelation with a process of knowledge or consciousness. Such theology finds its philosophical background in the epistemology of idealism, which, by insisting that all being is determined by knowing consciousness, rules out an objective concept of God. This leaves theology to locate God in the activity of the self: "I discover God in my coming to myself."[1] God reveals God's self in the processes of consciousness. Because the particular conscious process that theologians found especially suitable for their purposes, and the process to which Bonhoeffer devotes a detailed analysis in the last section of *Act and Being,* was conscience, the most important being-theology in *Act and Being* is the theology of conscience.[2]

In his inaugural lecture delivered several months after the completion of *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer categorizes "the overwhelming majority of contemporary theologians" as theologians of conscience, but he names Karl Holl as a particularly important representative.[3] The Barthian version of the history of theology encourages us to imagine that Barth's *Romans* commentary swept aside all competing theologies, if not in 1919 then certainly with the publication of its revised edition in early 1922. But 1921 also saw the publication of Holl's 'Luther Book,'[4] an opening shot in the Luther Renaissance, a theological movement at the time as significant as Barth's dialectical

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 50.

[2] I demonstrate in chapter seven why Bonhoeffer considers Holl's theology of conscience to be a being-theology.

[3] Bonhoeffer, "Inaugural Lecture," 400.

[4] Karl Holl, *Luther*, Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte 1 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1921).

theology. [1] With the spread of the Luther Renaissance came also Holl's message about conscience. As Holl argued, Luther's religion is a "religion of conscience," since the dynamics of judgment and forgiveness that make up the defining moment of the Christian life, justification, unfurl in the theater of conscience. [2]

In summary, the basic terms of Bonhoeffer's *Habilitationsschrift* are 'act' and 'being,' which Bonhoeffer uses as basic, formal, oppositional terms. Acts means the discontinuous, contingent, and structurally open; being means the continuous, the possible, and the structurally closed. Act and being refer also to types of thought that privilege one term over the other. Bonhoeffer classifies transcendental philosophy and idealism as modern act-philosophies, and he classifies phenomenology and ontology as modern being-traditions. The most important theological type of act-theology is Barth's dialectical theology, whereas the most significant theology of being is Karl Holl's theology of conscience.

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[1] Volker Leppin discusses the historical importance of Holl's 'Luther Book' vis-à-vis Barth's *Romans*: "Der Zeitpunkt des Erscheinens war fast derselbe, zu dem Karl Barth die zweite Auflage seines *Römerbrief[s]* vorlegte. In der Realität der Theologie der Weimarer Republic dürfte die Hollsche Luther-Deutung eine mindestens ebenso große Bedeutung gehabt haben wie die erst von späteren Generationen als dominierender Neuansatz herausgestrichene Dialektische Theologie," Volker Leppin, "Lutherforschung am Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts," in *Luther Handbuch*, ed. Albrecht Beutel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 21.

[2] Karl Holl, *What did Luther Understand by Religion?*, ed. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense, trans. Fred W. Meuser and Walter R. Wietzke (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 48.

Philosophy and the problem of act and being

The shape of the problem of act and being emerges gradually over the course of Bonhoeffer's discussion of post-Kantian philosophy in Part A of *Act and Being*. Because it is difficult to keep an eye on both the definition of the problem and the philosophical background against which it emerges, I briefly describe the problem formally before presenting Bonhoeffer's interpretation of philosophy. This provides the material for the last section of this chapter, in which I relate Bonhoeffer's discussion of philosophy to the rest of *Act and Being*'s argument.

The problem of act and being defined

In the philosophical-theological language of *Act and Being*, then, what is the problem of act and being? As it emerges over the course of Bonhoeffer's argument, the problem of act and being is 'the lack of coordination of act- and being-concepts in theology.'[1] ('Lack of coordination' here means that act and being are understood in a way that one concept overdetermines or swallows up the other.) As this definition indicates, the problem of act and being is not a single one, but can manifest itself in a variety of ways. Since Bonhoeffer understands theology as composed of three levels of

[1] As is discussed below, Bonhoeffer makes clear that 'coordination' is an aspect of the problem of act and being when he praises Heidegger for solving the problem through a coordination [*Zusammenordnung*] of act and being in the concept of *Dasein*. Bonhoeffer immediately proceeds to criticize Heidegger's philosophy as "unsuitable for theology" because his concept of *Dasein* is atheistic rather than oriented toward revelation. I add the phrase 'in theology' into the description of the problem of act and being, therefore, to distinguish between the philosophical problem of act and being and the theological problem of act and being, Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 71-3.

discourse – revelation, epistemology and anthropology – the problem of act and being can manifest itself at any one level or any combination of those levels. And at each of those levels, the problem can appear in one of two ways; the coordination can break down because act overpowers being, or because being overpowers act.

Of the various ways that the problem of act and being manifests itself, two in particular are important for understanding *Act and Being*. The first, which I name the problem of transcendence, occurs when the human epistemological act overpowers the being of God and God's revelation, making it impossible for the human mind to know "something transcendent which, however, is not at its disposal."[1] The structure of the mind, as laid bare by the transcendentalist and idealist traditions, is irreducibly active. The mind does not simply receive information but always acts on its objects of knowledge through the application of mental categories. In the case of knowing a genuinely 'other' object, i.e., a transcendent, the active nature of the mind prompts a dilemma. Either the transcendent escapes the mind's grasp, because the mind lacks categories appropriate to it, or the mind does grasp it. But in the second case, the known object cannot be truly transcendent. Either it never was truly transcendent to begin with, or its transcendence is blunted somehow in the process of being known. Given the structure of the mind, therefore, it seems impossible to know a transcendent without

[1] Ibid., 34. "And, if [theology] thinks [the reality of God], how can it be avoided that God should again be pulled into the circle of thought? That is the central and most difficult problem of a genuine theological epistemology, which springs from the Christian idea of God," Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Concerning the Christian Idea of God," in *Barcelona, Berlin, New York, 1928-1931*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Douglas W. Stott, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 10 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 454.

destroying its character as a transcendent. As will be discussed in chapter seven, the problem of transcendence encounters primarily being-theology.

Such a problem has far-reaching consequences for a theology that concerns itself with transcendents like God and revelation. If these remain inaccessible, how, if at all, is a person connected, either epistemologically or existentially, with the divine? The problem of transcendence, therefore, calls for a re-distribution of power, so to speak, from the knowing, human self toward the divine act of revelation. This, in short, is the project of act-theology. But crucially, this redistribution of power must avoid the second hinge of the problem of act and being, which I call the problem of historical existence. If the self is determined by discrete acts of revelation, how can human life be understood in historical continuity?[1]

These two problems taken together, which in *Act and Being* make up the problem of act and being, also constitute the impasse Bonhoeffer names at the end of the history lectures. The pre-Barthian tradition, in which Bonhoeffer places Holl, has lost its orientation to a transcendent God and God's revelation. But Barth's solution to this

[1] The two manifestations of the problem of act and being have different forms according to whether Bonhoeffer discusses them in a philosophical or theological context. The problem of transcendence, which occurs when the epistemological act overpowers transcendent being, has a different form according to whether the 'transcendent' is understood philosophically or theologically. In a philosophical context, the transcendent tends to be understood in epistemological terms, as an object of knowledge. In a theological context, the transcendent tends to be understood as God or revelation. The problem of historical existence, which occurs when a creative act overdetermines human being, also has a different shape according to the nature of that creative act. In a philosophical context, this creative act tends to be the self's epistemological act. In a theological context, it tends to be God's revelatory act and the accompanying human, believing act.

problem of transcendence is a partial one, since it leads to the problem of historical existence. Barth and Holl fail in the face of the problem of act and being, in part because they fail to distinguish themselves sufficiently from act-philosophy and being-philosophy respectively.

Act-philosophy

Transcendental philosophy

Bonhoeffer outlines the problem of act and being against the background of post-Kantian philosophy, which he divides into act- and being-philosophy. Act-philosophy further divides into transcendental philosophy and idealism.

Bonhoeffer presents Kant's transcendental philosophy as fundamentally act-oriented because it portrays the being of reality as disclosed in the thinking act.[1] That is, transcendental philosophy places logical priority on act rather than being, since act discloses being. Being depends on act, first, in epistemology, where the thinking act reveals the basic transcendental structure of knowledge. Specifically, the act of thinking reveals its two transcendental presuppositions, the transcendental unity of apperception (transcendental subjectivity) and the thing-in-itself (the transcendental object). Thus, the structure of knowledge is the suspension of thinking between these two poles that transcend it. Being depends on act, second, in anthropology, where the thinking act discloses the structure of existence. As Bonhoeffer puts it, "In knowing, human *Dasein*

[1] As mentioned above, Bonhoeffer's account of Kant's philosophy in terms of 'reference to transcendence' relies heavily on Knittermeyer, "Transzendentalphilosophie und Theologie."

knows itself to be suspended between two poles that transcend it."[1] Therefore, human existence's structure parallels that of thinking; it too is a "pure act"[2] suspended between two transcendent poles. In these ways, Kant's philosophy places priority on the concept of act over being. All forms of being – the being of objects, *Dasein*'s mode of being, and transcendent being – are accessible only through the act of thinking. "Being 'is' only in reference to knowing."[3] In this way, Kant's transcendental thought represents for Bonhoeffer the archetypal modern act-philosophy.

By prioritizing act over being without collapsing being into act, transcendental philosophy seeks to maintain openness to transcendence. For Kant, act discloses being, but, crucially, act does not create or completely determine being. It is this tension between act and being that gives Kant's philosophy a transcendent orientation, an orientation to a being that transcends the thinking act: "it is integral to the concept of genuine transcendentalism that thinking refers to something transcendent which, however, is not at its disposal."[4] At this point, the transcendent connotations in Bonhoeffer's preliminary definition of 'act' come into play. Kant's act-orientation maintains a relation (*Beziehung*) to the outside, a creative tension or motion (*Bewegung*) that insures an orientation (*Richtung*) beyond *Dasein* and its thought. In naming Kant's philosophy an act-philosophy, Bonhoeffer highlights its orientation toward transcendence, which represents a certain philosophical openness to revelation. Here

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 35. Bonhoeffer imports Heidegger's term for human existence, *Dasein*, into his discussion of transcendental philosophy. Ibid., 35, fn. 4.

[2] Ibid., 36.

[3] Ibid., 37.

[4] Ibid., 34.

"the decisive boundary of the Creator's integrity is honored in principle, that is, to the extent which this is at all possible in philosophy."[1]

According to Bonhoeffer, however, transcendental philosophy's mode of orientation to transcendence leaves it incapable of truly understanding the self. Bonhoeffer puts the difficulty this way. *Dasein* is

> pure act. But as such, the understanding of Dasein must always transcend itself. Constantly oriented in reference to itself, such understanding can never attain itself. Were it able to do so, it would no longer be 'in reference to' and no longer be pure act.[2]

Standing behind Bonhoeffer's claim that act-philosophy cannot understand existence is the presupposition that "Understanding [of existence] emerges only from a still *point of unity*."[3] Because act-philosophy portrays existence as a structure open to transcendence, it can provide no such still point of unity. Therefore, transcendental philosophy cannot attain an understanding of existence without undermining its very character as an act-philosophy.

In indicating transcendental philosophy's inability to understand *Dasein* as a unity, Bonhoeffer does not invoke the language of the problem of act and being. Nonetheless, the outlines of the problem emerge already here. On Bonhoeffer's reading, transcendental philosophy attempts to relate *Dasein* to transcendence and, as such, speaks to the problem of transcendence. But transcendental philosophy fails to understand

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[1] Ibid., 44. Bonhoeffer borrows from transcendental philosophy the notion of 'in reference to' as the genuine articulation of the concept of act, a desideratum of his own theology of revelation, Ibid., 79.

[2] Ibid., 38.

[3] Bonhoeffer, "Inaugural Lecture," 389.

existence as a whole, since such an understanding would require the self to attend to itself, and this form of attending would displace the self's 'reference to' transcendence. The transcendental-philosophical attempt to understand existence as a whole comes at the cost of the act-character of the self on which the very orientation to transcendence rests. On Bonhoeffer's reading, transcendental philosophy encounters the problem of historical existence.

Idealism

Bonhoeffer treats idealism as the other major, modern tradition of act-philosophy, since it shares with transcendental philosophy an act-starting point, namely, that "being is given in the knowing consciousness." Idealism is a radicalization of transcendental philosophy, however, since it steps beyond Kant, asserting that being *depends on* the knowing act for its very being: "where there is no knowing consciousness, there is also no being."[1] This step eliminates the tension between act and being that characterizes transcendental philosophy. As a result, idealism solves neither the problem of historical existence nor the problem of transcendence.

As Bonhoeffer presents it, idealism moves beyond transcendental philosophy after recognizing transcendental philosophy's inability to understand the self. Idealism puts this problem in terms of a paradox it perceives in Kant's treatment of subjectivity. The idealists observe that, on Kant's account, the I logically precedes thinking, yet somehow thinking also logically precedes the I.[2] Kant would respond to this charge by pointing to his distinction between what idealism considers the thought-preceding-I (the

[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 48.

[2] Ibid., 38.

transcendental unity of apperception or the transcendental subject) and the thought-succeeding-I (the empirical subject, which Bonhoeffer calls *Dasein*). In this way, Kant would resist the language of preceding and succeeding, since he prefers to remain agnostic about the causal relationships involved. Nevertheless, idealism takes Kant's need to split subjectivity in this way as a clue to the deeper structure of mind, and idealism sees Kant's refusal to examine these causal relationships as an arbitrary and dogmatic limit on the philosophical exploration of this structure. The paradox of subjectivity inherent in Kant's philosophy signals to idealists the need to recast the very structure of the mind. They themselves do so, identifying the transcendental I with the act of thinking.[1] This diffuses Kant's paradox: neither thinking nor the I precede the other, since they are one in the same.

This modification radically alters the character of Kant's philosophy. It is true that transcendental philosophy and idealism remain kindred philosophies, since they both begin with the thinking act.[2] But idealism's identification of the transcendental I with the thinking act makes subjectivity "the *point of departure* instead of the limit-point of philosophy."[3] Idealism thereby crucially reconfigures Kant's relationship between act and being. The tension Kant maintains between thinking and transcendental subjectivity is itself a limit between act and being. In bringing thinking and transcendental

[1] Ibid., 39.

[2] Ibid., 43.

[3] Ibid., 38.

subjectivity together, therefore, idealism collapses subjective being into act.[1] Thus, Bonhoeffer could describe idealism as pure act-thinking, unrestrained by reference to any transcendent being, a system of "pure transcendence."[2] "[I]dealism seems to have resolved the concept of being … entirely into the concept of act."[3]

Bonhoeffer continues by arguing that idealism's resolution into pure act is more accurately described the other way around, as a philosophy of pure being.

> And yet, something surprising has come to pass in this apparent radicalization of the transcendental position. If in original transcendentalism the human spirit was suspended between and, consequently, irrevocably in reference to them, now the movement of the spirit is turned in upon itself. In Luther's words this is *ratio in se ipsam incurva*. Spirit has, in principle, come to rest.[4]

In radicalizing Kant's act-philosophy, idealism eliminates the two-term, act/being nature of Kant's system, becoming a monistic act-philosophy. But a monistic act-philosophy is an act-philosophy turned in on itself, which is, by definition, absolute being.[5] "Thus the

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[1] Because the abstract terminology complicates the picture, it may be helpful to think of the change in philosophical structure with this numerical and graphic representation. Kant's structure, as Bonhoeffer understands it through Knittermeyer, is this:

1. transcendental subjectivity/being 2. *Dasein*/act 3. transcendental objectivity/being

So 2 is suspended between 1 and 3. Idealism, on Bonhoeffer's account, identifies 1 and 2, thereby collapsing subjective act and being.

[2] Ibid., 39.

[3] Ibid., 40.

[4] Ibid., 41.

[5] Ibid., 42. "But spirit at rest in itself … is substance, that is absolute being."

pure concept of act belongs, after all, to transcendentalism."[1] Idealism begins with Kant's act-orientation but ends in pure being.

Where does this leave idealism in terms of the problem of act and being? It appears, first, that by arriving at a stable concept of being, idealism overcomes transcendental philosophy's inability to understand the self. The self understands itself from itself as a still point of unity. Idealism's apparent solution of the problem of historical existence proves illusory, however, since this kind of self-understanding suits only a monistic, isolated self that lacks a connection to the outside world. Bonhoeffer, with Kierkegaard, objects that idealist "philosophizing obviously forgets that we ourselves exist."[2] Idealism, like transcendental philosophy, fails to understand the historical, existing self.

Moreover, in securing this false self-understanding, idealism also bargains away the main asset of transcendental philosophy, its orientation to transcendence. The precondition of idealism's false self-understanding is the elimination of the self's openness to transcendence. *Dasein* understands itself without reference to transcendence.[3] From the perspective of the problem of act and being, then, the turn from transcendental philosophy to idealism is disastrous, since idealism fails with regard to both manifestations of the problem of act and being. Idealism secures no knowledge of the historical self and it loses Kant's transcendental orientation in the process.

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[1] Ibid., 44.

[2] Ibid., 39.

[3] Ibid., 40.

The transition from transcendental philosophy to idealism is marked, therefore, by a loss of "reality and transcendence." When thinking knows no limits, even objective being becomes strictly a function of thought. Thus, idealism's systematic character is that of a "monism unaffected by reality." Bonhoeffer understands this as both the "great temptation" and the great disaster of philosophy. This end tempts philosophy as a liberation from transcendence, as a chance for the freedom of self-determination. Yet, "precisely where it is free from the transcendent, from reality, there it is imprisoned in itself."[1] The act-philosophical tradition, while beginning with Kant's attempt to orient thinking "in reference to" transcendence, ends with the idealist isolation of thought and the self from everything that transcends them.

The tragedy of the act-philosophical tradition is this: the ill-fated transition from Kant to idealism is inevitable because, on Bonhoeffer's view, the structure of Kant's transcendent-referring philosophy necessarily collapses into idealist self-reference. Bonhoeffer thinks that the 'limit' that stands between the Kantian self and transcendence is not a genuine limit but a limit drawn by the self. This limit, in effect, collapses, revealing Kant's purportedly transcendent-referring structure to be in self-reference. I set aside for now the details of Bonhoeffer's claim that transcendental philosophy collapses into idealism, returning to them in connection with Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth (chapter five). For now, what are the consequences of this collapse?

This collapse entails, first, that transcendental philosophy shares the problems of idealism – the imprisonment of the self in itself and the accompanying loss of transcendence. The Kantian self, too, "is imprisoned in itself, it sees only itself, even

[1] Ibid., 39.

when it sees another, even when it wants to see God."[1] Bonhoeffer sees transcendental philosophy, like idealism, ultimately suffering from both manifestations of the problem of act and being.

Bonhoeffer's claim that transcendental philosophy collapses into idealism has implications, second, for the structure of the problem of act and being. Although the problem tends to manifest itself in two ways, as the problem of transcendence and the problem of historical existence, Bonhoeffer's treatment of act-philosophy suggests that one manifestation implies the second. For example, transcendental philosophy initially seems to solve the problem of transcendence, suffering only from the problem of historical existence. But on further examination, transcendental philosophy's strategy for securing a limit before transcendence fails. The relationship between the problem of transcendence and that of historical existence is not, as it initially appears, zero-sum.

If the problem of act and being is somehow a unified problem, if its two manifestations tend to follow on each other's heels, is there a single mistake in which the problem of act and being originates? Bonhoeffer begins to work his way toward an answer to this question. "Everything converges in the decisive question that must be put to transcendental philosophy and idealism alike: Can the I understand itself out of itself? Or must fundamental objections be raised at this point?" Both versions of act-philosophy, idealism more overtly than transcendental philosophy, attempt to understand the self from the self. Transcendental philosophy collapses being into act when it is revealed that the self orients itself not to transcendent being, but to the self's act of drawing a limit between itself and that being. Idealism takes this collapse as its starting

[1] Ibid., 45.

point. In both cases, the point of orientation for self-understanding and, indeed, for all thought is the self.[1] In locating act-philosophy's failures in the self's orientation to itself, Bonhoeffer foreshadows his own argument that the solution to the problem of act and being, in both manifestations, comes only through a reorientation of thought to revelation rather than the self.

Being-philosophy

In the second section of Part A, Bonhoeffer turns from act- to being-philosophies, those that try to maintain "the primacy of being over against consciousness."[2] In contrast to the act-traditions, these begin with and try to maintain the priority of being over act, or, in the Greek terms Bonhoeffer often uses in this section, the priority of *hon* over *logos*.

Phenomenology

Bonhoeffer finds that Edmund Husserl, despite his attempt to focus on being, does not progress beyond the problems of idealism. Husserl's problems begin with his attention not to being *per se* but to phenomena, to being as given in consciousness. Husserl's attention to being in phenomena introduces into his thinking a rift between the

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[1] By this point in Bonhoeffer's treatment of philosophy, the conversation shifts from epistemology to anthropology, as indicated by the focus on the question of the understanding of the self. Bonhoeffer foreshadows this trajectory in his introduction, where he indicates that the problem of act and being finds its first expression in epistemology, but quickly becomes a question of anthropology, Ibid., 30. See also, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 30-1: "So the question of transcendence is the question of existence, and the question of existence is the question of transcendence."

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 59.

essence (*essentia*) and reality (*existentia*) of being, a rift that reveals an ambiguity in Husserl's thought about the priority of being over act. On the one hand, like "transcendental realism," Husserl affirms "that over against the beholding subject there stands an independent, self-contained being." On the other hand, Husserl, by insisting "that consciousness is constituent of all that is … moves over to the side of pure idealism which, it would seem, is contrary to his original intentions." Bonhoeffer judges this latter impulse to be the stronger: "the human logos has overcome the *hon*, preventing any clear grasp of the concepts of being and God." Husserl remains "under the spell of idealism."[1]

With Max Scheler's thought, being-philosophy gains some distance from idealism by asserting being's independence from thought. By presupposing "a being that transcends consciousness," [2] Scheler breaks from the idealist tendency, repeated in Husserl, to merge being and the conscious I.[3] Nonetheless, Bonhoeffer still finds in Scheler significant aspects of the knowing self's mastery of being. [4] In Scheler's treatment of God, "the object of Scheler's investigation is the essence of the idea of God, rather than the existence of God." Here Bonhoeffer sees shades of Husserl's separation of essence from existence. Moreover, when Scheler's theory of value claims that in the "'feeling of values' the beholding I is capable of taking into itself the whole world, the

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[1] Ibid., 62-4.

[2] Ibid., 65. Translation altered.

[3] Of Husserl, Bonhoeffer says, "now the I, or consciousness, is once again restored to the place of God – an assertion which Husserl would deny, but which is an inescapable consequence of his philosophical starting point," Ibid., 64.

[4] It is in summarizing Husserl and Scheler's thought that Bonhoeffer uses this poignant phrase, Ibid., 67.

fullness of life," the return to the idealist standpoint is complete. With this, "the being of God, the world, and the I have once again been delivered into the hands of the person understanding himself from, and remaining in, himself." The all, including God, is enclosed in the I. [1]

Husserl and Scheler, who together constitute what Bonhoeffer considers the phenomenological branch of being-philosophy, fail to secure being's independence from thought. Their attention to the essence of being (being as it appears to mind) without proper attention to being-as-it-exists leads them down the road of idealism. All being comes under the power of the knowing I. This failure can be expressed in terms of essence and reality, or essence and existence. It is Martin Heidegger who breaks from Husserl and Scheler by identifying being's essence and existence. With him, modern being-philosophy moves beyond phenomenology, becoming what Bonhoeffer calls 'genuine ontology.'

Genuine Ontology

Heidegger's philosophy focuses on being *per se* (the Latin *esse* or German *Sein*), "taking ontology itself as its object."[2] Heidegger insists that the question of being cannot even arise unless there "*is* something like an understanding of being," unless something exists which has an implicit understanding of being.[3] For Heidegger, the existing human

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[1] Ibid., 66.

[2] Ibid., 67.

[3] Ibid., 70. Bonhoeffer quotes Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962), 244.

being, or *Dasein*, is such a being. "Being is understood from Dasein."[1] For this reason, recovering the question of being requires an existential analysis of *Dasein*.

In examining being through existence, Heidegger sees himself breaking from the modern philosophical tradition, which focuses largely on epistemology. Modern philosophy, according to Heidegger's indictment, forgets the question of being (*Sein*) because it forgets that thinking is always the thinking of an existing being (*Dasein*).[2] Heidegger's project can be put in Bonhoeffer's terms. Against the act-philosophical tradition, which imagines that being is given in the thinking act, Heidegger insists that being is given in the thinking act only when such thinking is understood as the thinking of existing beings. Heidegger's *Dasein* analysis, therefore, aims to disclose being through an examination of human existence.

In the course of his *Dasein* analysis, Heidegger articulates *Dasein*'s existential anthropology and epistemology. On the anthropological level, Heidegger argues that 'being in the world' is *Dasein*'s mode of being. *Dasein* has no being apart from its world, since it finds itself always already 'being in' the world. On the epistemological level, there corresponds to *Dasein*'s being in the world an existential mode of knowing. To be in the world is always already, in some way, to know. With this primordial, existential mode of knowing that is tied intimately to *Dasein*'s mode of being, Heidegger counters modern philosophy's preoccupation with objective or propositional knowledge. For Heidegger, objective knowledge is posterior to and derivative of existential knowing.

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 68.

[2] "It had been the basic mistake of Descartes and all his followers that, in explicating the *cogito sum*, they neglected to put the question of being to the *sum*," Ibid., 70. Bonhoeffer cites Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44ff., 254.

For example, if one is in the world, one knows how to sit in a chair before one knows how to analyze its chemical composition. Thus, Heidegger presents two sorts of knowing: an existential, implicit knowing which he calls 'fore-knowledge' or 'pre-understanding,' and a theoretical or propositional knowledge derived from the existential knowledge. An existential anthropology and epistemology stand at the center of Heidegger's *Dasein* analytic; *Dasein* has its 'being in' the world and thinks from its 'being in' the world.

For Bonhoeffer, the importance of Heidegger's *Dasein* analysis is its success "in forcing together act and being in the concept of *Dasein.*" In *Dasein*'s structure, act and being presuppose each other. *Dasein*'s actions (or 'decisions,' as Heidegger tends to put it) presuppose already being in the world – act presupposes being. But *Dasein*'s being in the world has the character of decision; in every case, being in the world involves a decision to be in the world – being presupposes act. The equiprimoridality of being and knowing means neither being nor knowing subsumes the other. Stated negatively: "Dasein is neither a discontinuous succession of individual acts nor the continuity of being that transcends time." Stated positively: "Dasein is constant decision-making and, in every instance, already being determined." [1] *Dasein* is the historical unity of act and being.

This unity of act and being extends beyond Heidegger's anthropology to the relationship of thought and being *per se* (*Sein*). In contrast to all the other philosophical types Bonhoeffer examines in *Act and Being*, here "thought does not… produce a world for itself." Heidegger avoids this, the fate of idealism, by presenting thought itself as but

[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 71.

a "determination of the being of Dasein."[1] Thought, like *Dasein*, is in every instance already in the world it understands. Precisely by disclosing being through *Dasein* and by tying thought essentially to *Dasein*, the unity of act and being in *Dasein* carries over, so to speak, to the structure of thought and being *per se*. Bonhoeffer declares, "From the perspective of the problem of act and being, here, as it appears, a genuine coordination [*Zusammenordnung*] of the two has been reached."[2]

Heidegger therefore has a unique place among philosophers in *Act and Being.* In contrast to the other philosophies Bonhoeffer considers, for Heidegger, "thought does not … produce its world for itself." Heidegger's *Dasein* encounters neither the problem of transcendence, since its mode of being rests in transcendent being (*Sein*), nor the problem of historical continuity, since its decisions for being are always imbedded in its already-being. All of this rests on Heidegger's insistent interpretation of *essentia* in terms of *existentia* or being in terms of time.[3]

Bonhoeffer's evaluation of Heidegger is a major step in his gradual articulation of the problem of act and being. In discussing Heidegger, Bonhoeffer states clearly that a solution to the problem involves the 'coordination of act and being,' where act presupposes being and being presupposes act. By inference, the problem of act and being involves the lack of coordination or disharmony of act and being such that one concept determines or swallows up the other.

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[1] Ibid., 70.

[2] Ibid., 71. Translation altered.

[3] Ibid., 70-2.

Nonetheless, Bonhoeffer judges Heidegger's solution to the problem of act and being as theologically unacceptable. Heidegger portrays the coordination of act and being as occurring independent of revelation. Instead, *Dasein* coordinates act and being in itself out of its own resources as its "ownmost possibility." Put otherwise, Heidegger solves a *philosophical* version of the problem of act and being, a version of the problem oriented around the self rather than revelation. He solves a problem of transcendence where the transcendent is the world which "is contained in Dasein" rather than God or revelation. And he solves the problem of historical existence where the human is understood in terms of finitude rather than creatureliness.[1]

Bonhoeffer's criticism of Heidegger reveals another aspect of the problem of act and being. The solution to the problem comes not only through the coordination of act and being but also through a theologically acceptable coordination. What distinguishes a philosophical solution like Heidegger's and the theological solution Bonhoeffer will articulate is the point of orientation. A philosophical solution, like philosophy in general, is oriented around the self. A theological solution, in contrast, is oriented around revelation. For theology, act and being must come together originally not in the self but in the concept of revelation. For this reason, I define Bonhoeffer's problem of act and being as 'the lack of coordination of act and being *in theology*.'

Bonhoeffer's evaluation of Heidegger, therefore, is double. In contrast to other philosophers, Heidegger is superior, since he avoids the philosophical problem of act and being that confounds other philosophies. But from theology's point of view, Heidegger repeats the error of all philosophy, orienting thinking and ultimately the world around the

[1] Ibid., 72-3.

self. As we shall see, Bonhoeffer's own solution to the theological problem of act and being recasts Heidegger's existential unity of act and being in light of revelation.

Part A in *Act and Being*

Theological criticism of philosophy

Act and Being contains, therefore, a damning criticism of philosophy. No philosophy can solve the problem of act and being in a theologically satisfactory way. Moreover, philosophy, with the exception of Heidegger's, seems incapable of solving the problem of act and being in a philosophically satisfactory way. It is crucially important for understanding the argument of *Act and Being,* however, to arrive at a proper understanding of the mode of criticism Bonhoeffer employs against philosophy. Specifically, it is crucial to recognize Bonhoeffer's criticism of philosophy as a theological rather than a philosophical one.[1] Only then can his treatment of philosophy be placed in relationship to the rest of the argument of *Act and Being*.

[1] In making the distinction between a philosophical and theological mode of criticism, I have in mind Bonhoeffer's own definitions of philosophy and theology as thinking apart from revelation and thinking in light of revelation respectively. That Bonhoeffer's mode of criticism is theological means it is incorrect, therefore, to call Bonhoeffer's criticism of philosophy, as Wayne Floyd does, 'immanent criticism' or, as Walter Lowe does, an 'internal critique of reason.' Floyd describes Bonhoeffer's criticism of philosophy in *Act and Being* as "what Adorno would later call immanent criticism," which starts "within the presuppositions of idealism, with 'its own standards and ideals and confronts it with its own consequences,' 'adhering strictly to the elements under scrutiny,'" Wayne Whitson Floyd, *Theology and the Dialectics of Otherness: On Reading Bonhoeffer and Adorno* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1988), 53. [The sources Floyd cites here are, Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 150;

Philosophy cannot solve the problem of act and being theologically because it thinks from the self rather than from revelation. Philosophy's inability to solve the problem is therefore inherent in its character *as philosophy,* since Bonhoeffer defines philosophy as thinking 'from the self,' in contrast to theology as thinking 'from revelation.' The former is an "offense against Christian thinking" that "believes human beings to be capable of giving truth to themselves, of transporting themselves into the truth by themselves." For the latter, "truth means only that reference to God which Christian theology does not hold possible save in the *word* of God."[1] Since philosophy's failure stems from its orientation around the self, and since philosophy is by definition oriented around the self, philosophy's inability to solve theologically the problem of act and being is implicit in Bonhoeffer's definition of philosophy.

Therefore, philosophy can solve the problem of act and being only by becoming theology. But philosophy lacks even the resources to convert itself into theology. Theology is theology by virtue of revelation, the very thing to which philosophy lacks

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Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 100; Theodor W Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 32.] The key methodological strategy of immanent criticism, according to Floyd, is "to expose the contradictions within the assumptions of idealism itself, until idealism collapses from the weight of its own unresolved aporias," Floyd, *Dialectics of Otherness*, 53. Lowe sees in Part A of *Act and Being* an "internal critique of reason," Walter Lowe, "Bonhoeffer and Deconstruction: Toward a Theology of the Crucified Logos," in *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. and Charles Marsh (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 218.

[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 79.

access.[1] Philosophy not only lacks the resources to solve the problem of act and being, it lacks the resources to put itself in a position to solve the problem of act and being.

Moreover, philosophy lacks the resources for recognizing its inability. To say that truth is a function of revelation means *only* revelation demonstrates that *only* revelation places thinking in truth. As Bonhoeffer puts it

> the untruth of human self-understanding is made clear only from within revelation and its truth, once it has taken place and has been believed. Were it not so, revelation would itself be pulled into the untruthfulness of self-understanding.[2]

Philosophy not only lacks the resources for solving the problem of act and being, and the resources for placing itself in a position to solve the problem, but also for recognizing its inability to do either.

Philosophy's dire situation in the face of the problem of act and being can be put in terms of Heidegger's insight into the intimate relationship of thinking and existing. Philosophy cannot solve the problem of act and being because it has its 'being in' the problem of act and being. Philosophy encounters the conceptual problem of act and being – it cannot think in reference to transcendence – precisely because philosophy is the mode of thinking proper to an existence that is cut off from transcendence. Put

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[1] "*Per se*, a philosophy can concede no room for revelation unless it knows revelation and confesses itself to be Christian philosophy in full recognition that the place it wanted to usurp *is* already taken by another – namely, by Christ," Ibid., 76-8.

[2] Ibid., 81.

theologically, philosophy is the thinking of humans who have their 'being in' sin. Citing Luther, philosophical thinking is *ratio in se ipsam incurva*. [1]

All of this indicates that Bonhoeffer's criticism of philosophy is theological. Thinking that is grounded in revelation criticizes thinking that is grounded in the self. Bonhoeffer's understanding of philosophy, theology, and that which distinguishes them – self-authenticating revelation – rules out the possibility of a criticism of philosophy on philosophical grounds.

Philosophy and the argument of Act and Being

Philosophy's inability to solve the problem of act and being out of its own resources does not render the efforts of philosophy worthless for theology, however. In fact, philosophy aids theology's task in two ways.

Philosophy assists theology by illustrating the problems theology must avoid if it wants to articulate a proper concept of revelation. Philosophy, as thinking apart from revelation, establishes patterns of thought that theology will mirror, sometimes in less drastic forms, if it thinks with inadequate concepts of revelation. Because the concepts of act and being operate similarly in philosophy and in theology, and because philosophy has "thoroughly thought through the philosophical problem of act and being,"[2]

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[1] Ibid., 41. I return in chapter seven to the relationship between sin and philosophy. As Christiane Tietz notes, Bonhoeffer here applies the Lutheran description of the sinner to philosophical thinking. "Daß *der Mensch* ohne Gott in sich selbst verkrümmt ist, gilt als eine Grundüberzeugung lutherischer Theologie. Dietrich Bonhoeffer überträgt diese Strucktur auf das Wesen des Denkens als in sich selbst verkrümmt beschreibt," Tietz-Steiding, *Bonhoeffers Kritik*, V.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 79.

philosophy's wrestling with the problem of act and being can serve as a negative lesson, an example of what theology must avoid.

Because philosophy serves theology as a negative example, Bonhoeffer's treatment of philosophy performs a preparatory critical function by laying the foundation for Bonhoeffer's criticism of act- and being-theology. Philosophy cannot solve the theological problem of act and being because philosophy thinks from the self rather than from revelation. Theologies that fail to solve the theological problem of act and being fail because they think with inadequate concepts of revelation. In a sense, then, such theologies fail to distinguish themselves enough from philosophy. Therefore, Bonhoeffer's treatment of philosophy lays the foundation for indicating where act- and being-theology fall into philosophical patterns of thought.[1]

In addition to this negative function, philosophy serves theology positively by providing concepts that help theology in its articulation of the concept of revelation. As Bonhoeffer notes in this programmatic statement, Kant and Heidegger especially have something to offer:

> In what follows, nevertheless, genuine transcendental philosophy and genuine ontology – as distinct from idealism and phenomenology – are said to make a contribution to the understanding of the problem of act and being within the concept of revelation.

[1] I will show how Bonhoeffer draws on Part A in his criticism of Barth's theology in chapter five and Holl's theology in chapter seven.

This is "because of their view that not only are human beings pure act 'in reference to' but also that thought is ontologically 'suspended' in being."[1] Bonhoeffer will draw on these two concepts – 'reference' and 'suspension' – in his own solution to the problem of act and being.

Heidegger's 'suspension' [*Aufgehobensein*] of act and being in *Dasein* allows for an "enormous expansion" in theological categories "through the discovery of the existential sphere."[2] As we will see, Bonhoeffer brings Heidegger's insight into theological anthropology, portraying the believer as a unity of act and being. But, as Bonhoeffer's criticism of Heidegger indicates, Heidegger's 'suspension' is only fruitful for theology when recast in light of the reality of revelation. Heidegger's unity of act and being in *Dasein* is an atheistic unity, a unity cut off from transcendence. Bonhoeffer therefore supplements Heidegger's anthropological unity of act and being as, borrowing from Kant, 'in reference to' transcendence.

With 'in reference to' [*in Bezug auf*], Bonhoeffer recalls the earlier discussed "pure concept of act [that] belongs, after all, to transcendentalism."[3] Because transcendental philosophy refers thinking and existing to a transcendent, "the decisive boundary of the Creator's integrity is honored in principle, that is, to the extent which this is at all possible in philosophy."[4] But, as Bonhoeffer argues by pointing to Kant's collapse into idealism, such 'reference' is secured only in relationship to revelation.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., 73.

[3] Ibid., 44.

[4] Ibid. From transcendental philosophy he borrows the notion of 'in reference to' as the genuine articulation of the concept of act, a desideratum of his own theology of revelation, Ibid., 79.

Heidegger's notion of 'suspension' and Kant's notion of 'reference' function, for them, at the level of anthropology. But the problems inherent in these two concepts are overcome, according to Bonhoeffer, only when they are coordinated at the level of revelation.

> The concept of revelation will restore an entirely new form to those questions and it will be clear in the process that, on the basis of that concept, the 'in reference to' and the 'suspension' of the act in being are basically amenable to a theological interpretation and, therefore, of help in understanding the concept of revelation. We shall see that in the concept of revelation both are brought together, surmounted, and transcended in an original fashion.[1]

A theologically acceptable unity of act and being begins with the concept of revelation.

The proper concept of revelation, to reiterate, can be articulated only by a mode of thinking that has its 'being in' the reality of revelation. This emphasizes that the solution to the problem of act and being will be derived theologically. Bonhoeffer does not arrive, as it might appear, at the unity of act and being by bringing together or synthesizing the insights of Kant and Heidegger. Such a synthesis would undermine Bonhoeffer's criticism of philosophy, for it would amount to a transition from philosophy to theology by philosophical means. Bonhoeffer explicitly rejects such a mode of arriving at a concept of revelation:

> We are sent onward to revelation itself, yet we cannot understand this as one, the final one, open to us; rather we need to see it as one that must already have been taken so that we may be able to take it at all.

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[1] Ibid.

The proper concept of revelation is available only to those who have their 'being in' revelation. Therefore, the proper description of revelation is the result of thinking from revelation with the aid of categories borrowed from philosophy. Only in this way can Bonhoeffer hope "to unify the concern of true transcendentalism and the concern of true ontology in an 'ecclesiological form of thinking.'"[1]

[1] Ibid., 32.

Chapter 3 : Karl Barth's Reformed Actualism

Inasmuch as Bonhoeffer, in *Act and Being*, presents and criticizes Karl Barth's thought as a kind of act-theology, Bonhoeffer carries out his discussion of Barth's theology in the language of philosophical theology. However, understanding Bonhoeffer's criticism of and alternative to Barth requires reckoning with Barth's position not only as 'actualism' but also as 'Reformed actualism.'[1] As both Barth and Bonhoeffer fully recognized, Barth's commitment to act-theology at the time of Bonhoeffer's composition of *Act and Being* was inseparable from his commitment to Reformed theology. Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth's philosophical theology (his 'actualism') was also a criticism of Barth's confessional theology (his Reformed theology), even as Bonhoeffer executed this criticism primarily through the philosophical-theological language of 'actualism.'

The task of this chapter is to recall the Reformed character of Barth's 'actualism' in order to make clear what is at stake in Bonhoeffer's rejection of that 'actualism.' When Barth's act-theology is understood as Reformed, the challenge of Barth's theology for *Act and Being* can be put this way: In arguing for an act-theology, Barth also argues that only a Reformed theology has the resources to negotiate the problem of transcendence; Lutheran theology both lacks the resources to solve the problem and is complicit in the development of the problem. This sets the stage for the coming chapters, in which I present Bonhoeffer's solution to the problem of act and being as one funded by a Lutheran, person-concept of revelation.

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[1] "Here the confession-problem reappears, since Barth's actualism in the concept of God and the concept of revelation continues a Reformed tradition," Bonhoeffer, "Geschichte," 212, fn. 309.

Barth's act-theology

Bonhoeffer's presentation of Barth's act-theology

In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer discusses Barth's theology in the context of his own attempt to solve the problem of act and being. Bonhoeffer presents Barth's theology as one that, in recognizing the problem of transcendence, attempts to overcome being-theology's reduction of revelation and faith to human possibilities. Bonhoeffer describes Barth's attempt as an 'act-theology,' the central concepts of which include an act-concept of revelation and its logical correlates: a formal account of God's freedom, a subjective concept of God, and a dialectical form of thought.

In Barth's theology, writes Bonhoeffer, "Revelation is interpreted purely in terms of act."[1] God's relationship to the human through revelation should be thought as "always *a matter of action*, that is, with all the instability of a deed being done right now."[2] The revealing act is momentary, "essentially supratemporal."[3] God relates to humanity through serial acts that occur outside of space and time.

With this act-concept of revelation, continues Bonhoeffer, Barth emphasizes God's freedom from human grasp. The act-tradition of theology emphasizes the "contingency of revelation," treating revelation as "an event that has its basis in the freedom of God." Barth's concept of freedom is, according to Bonhoeffer, "a *formal* one:

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 83.

[2] Ibid. Bonhoeffer quotes from Karl Barth, *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf: Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes. Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik* (München, 1927), 295.

[3] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 84.

> God is free inasmuch as God is bound to nothing, not even the 'existing,' 'historical' Word. The Word as truly God's is free. God can give or withhold the divine self according to absolute favor, remaining in either case free. Never is God at the disposal of human beings; it is God's glory that, in relation to everything given and conditional, God remains utterly free, unconditioned.[1]

God's formal freedom follows logically from an act-concept of revelation; when God relates to humans in discrete acts, nothing binds God to remain in that relation. Formal freedom is proper to a God who acts.

Bonhoeffer claims that Barth's theology finds its "philosophical counterpart in genuine transcendentalism,"[2] since Barth assumes with Kant that knowing is possessing. The act of knowing both discloses the being of the known object and places it within a system of knowledge. Thus, "through the act of knowing, the known is put at the disposition of the I." If revelation is to stand against the system, "it seems to follow necessarily that God can be known only in the act, that is, existentially. Otherwise, God would be delivered into the system. For to know is to have."[3] Barth's strategy for securing revelation's transcendence through act-theology presupposes the epistemological tenets of transcendental philosophy, as Bonhoeffer understands them.

Barth's transcendental epistemology and his formal concept of God's freedom lead him to assert that God "always remains subject."[4] A subjective God-concept follows from these two factors because, within a transcendental framework, "the only

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[1] Ibid., 82.

[2] Ibid., 91. See also, 83: "transcendentalism is lurking here."

[3] Ibid., 94-5.

[4] Ibid., 92.

option is to consider revelation as objective or nonobjective."[1] An objective concept of God is out of the question, since it delivers God to the power of human knowing. A subjective concept of God, on the other hand, fits seamlessly with the other basic elements of Barth's theology, since, within a transcendental framework, formal freedom is proper to subjects. Objects operate according to the strictures of cause and effect, while subjects act in freedom. A God who acts freely in revelation is a subjective God.

If theology concerns itself with a formally free, subjective God's revelatory act, then theology must operate with a dialectical – rather than a systematic – thought-structure.[2] Systematic thinking describes God and God's revelation in "unequivocal theological statements," which "eliminat[e] the concept of contingency."[3] The dialectical method breaks up the system of unequivocal theological statements by "counter[ing] a judgment of knowing with one of not-knowing."[4] Dialectic is the proper form for thinking theologically about a formally free God.

In *Act and Being*, therefore, Bonhoeffer presents Barth as an act-theologian, whose theology consists of a series of features that follow quite directly from an act-concept of revelation: a formal account of freedom, a subjective concept of God, and a dialectical thought-form. And in outlining these features of Barth's thought, Bonhoeffer

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[1] Ibid., 91.

[2] "Such a formal understanding of God's contingent activity could not but lead Barth to develop the concept of the 'dialectical,'" Ibid., 85.

[3] Ibid., 85-6.

[4] In *Act and Being,* Bonhoeffer tends to portray Barth's dialectic as a method that adds "the antithesis to the positive assertion." But he recognizes that "one will not arrive at an unambiguous concept of dialectic in Barth," Ibid., 124.

emphasizes the parallels between Barth's act-theology and Kant's act-philosophy. For it is within the logic of transcendental thinking that an act-concept of revelation logically entails a formal concept of freedom and a subjective concept of God. Bonhoeffer presents Barth's God as he does Kant's I: as a freely acting subject.

Barth's act-theology and the issue of dialectic

I briefly raise here a point that receives more consideration at the end of chapter six, the question of whether Bonhoeffer's portrait of Barth in terms of act-theology is accurate. Bonhoeffer scholars often claim that his description of Barth at best applies only to an earlier manifestation of Barth's theology. Often presupposed in this claim is some version of the influential thesis offered by Hans Urs von Balthasar that the development of Barth's theology involves a 'turn from dialectic to analogy.'[1] Such a thesis, however, does not accurately describe the development of Barth's theology.[2] Barth's theology between the second edition of *Romans* and Bonhoeffer's composition of *Act and Being* is stable enough that we can evaluate Bonhoeffer's criticism of and alternative to Barth's theology without periodizing Barth's thought. Furthermore, even if the 'turn to analogy' thesis were correct as a description of Barth, such a thesis, as generally employed, would be of no use in evaluating Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth. In

[1] I have in mind Charles Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 15-20 and Tietz-Steiding, *Bonhoeffers Kritik*, 167-172.

[2] The thesis has been challenged by a string of Barth scholars, most persuasively and completely in Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realist Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

order to prepare the ground for me to argue this latter claim, a brief examination of the concept of 'dialectic' is necessary.

The issue of dialectic in Barth is tremendously complex, in part because Barth uses the term 'dialectic' to refer to a series of disparate things. As Michael Beintker demonstrates, Barth operates with four distinct dialectics in the second edition of *Romans* alone.[1] The range of dialectics in Barth's thought has produced no end of confusion in Barth scholarship, which does not always sufficiently distinguish Barth's dialectics or make clear which of them are under discussion. For the 'turn from analogy to dialectic' thesis to be of any help at all, of course, it would need to be clear which dialectic is involved in the turn. And insofar as any evaluation of Bonhoeffer's relationship to Barth will touch on the issue of dialectic, this confusion transfers into Bonhoeffer scholarship.

Since the concern of this work is limited to Bonhoeffer's relationship to Barth around the time of *Act and Being*, a complete examination of dialectic in Barth is not required, but the following point is crucial. The most important distinction between the various dialectics in Barth is between what Beintker calls a dialectical form of thought (*Denkform*) and a real dialectic (*Realdialektik*). A dialectical form of thought is a "method which calls for every theological statement to be placed over against a counter-statement, without allowing the dialectical tension between the two to be resolved in a higher synthesis."[2] According to Barth, a dialectical thought-form is made necessary by a real dialectic, an oppositional structure in reality. Attaining clarity on Bonhoeffer's

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[1] Michael Beintker, *Die Dialecktik in der 'dialektischen Theologie' Karl Barths* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1987), 25-31.

[2] McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 11.

relationship to Barth requires remaining attentive to this distinction between real dialectic and dialectical thought-form.

In contrast to much other Bonhoeffer scholarship, I will argue that Bonhoeffer's account of Barth's theology at the time of *Act and Being* is, with some qualifications, accurate enough for recognizing the theological alternative to Barth that Bonhoeffer proposes. But in order to make this argument, I need to present Barth's act-theology here in my own terms rather than in Bonhoeffer's. My version of Barth's act-theology, which will in some ways overlap with and in some ways depart from Bonhoeffer's account of it, then provides part of the basis for assessing Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth and Bonhoeffer's own theological alternative.

The Feuerbach problem and the elements of a solution

In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer evaluates Barth's act-theology in relationship to the problem of act and being. In reality, of course, Barth's theology is not motivated by the problem of act and being as Bonhoeffer quite idiosyncratically outlines it. However, Barth's act-theology is in significant ways a response to his own understanding of the problem of transcendence; Barth recognizes that the constructive, productive, and projective functions of the mind, as laid bare by post-Kantian philosophy, trouble theology's claims to knowledge of a transcendent God. But whereas Bonhoeffer expresses the problem of transcendence in terms of idealism's totalizing I, Barth tends to frame the problem in conversation with Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872).

In a 1926 lecture course in Münster, Barth locates Feuerbach's significance for theology not only in his well-known reduction of theology to anthropology but also in his

corresponding elevation of anthropology to theology. As Feuerbach himself puts it in *The Essence of Christianity*,

> Although I do bring down theology to anthropology, it is much more true that I am raising anthropology to theology. And the latter is true of Christianity; while it brought God down to man, it made man God.[1]

In the elevation of anthropology to theology and the reduction of theology to anthropology, Feuerbach takes his cues from what he takes to be the heart of Christianity: the reciprocally related divinization of humanity and humanization of divinity. Feuerbach champions the conflation of anthropology and theology as a reflection of the essence of Christianity.

For Barth, the humanization of God and the divinization of humanity is not the essence of Christianity but its corruption. True Christianity portrays a God who reveals in such a way that God remains God, and humanity remains humanity. Nonetheless, Barth relies on Feuerbach when articulating his own understanding of the problem of transcendence. On Barth's reading, Feuerbach shows that *if* Christianity errs by preaching a God who becomes human, then it will also project humanity onto God. That is, it will preach a divinized humanity and it will conflate anthropology and theology. The key to avoiding the problem of transcendence so construed is to abandon the corruption of Christianity that consists of a humanized God and a divinized humanity; Christianity must emphasize that, even in the revelation and the incarnation, God is God and humanity is humanity.

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[1] Karl Barth, "Ludwig Feuerbach," in *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings, 1920-1928*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1962), 222.

The following conceptual elements, all of which will be discussed later in this chapter, are central to Barth's attempt to avoid the problem of transcendence as captured by Feuerbach. First, God and humanity are in a relationship of *diastasis*, standing over against each other with no possibility of reconciliation in some other form of being. Second, the only thing that bridges this diastasis is *God's revelation*, which is emphatically God's and not humanity's action. Third, this diastatic relationship holds even during and after revelation, because revelation is *act* rather than being. Fourth, as the God who acts, God is always *subject*, never object. If God is to remain always subject, God can be known only indirectly through an object. Therefore, fifth, revelation is *indirect revelation*. Last, and because of the preceding five conceptual elements, theology must at times employ a dialectical thought-form. These elements together constitute Barth's act-theology, his strategy for overcoming the problem of transcendence as expressed by Feuerbach.

Barth's Reformed actualism

Barth interprets Reformed theology in terms of his act-theology and his act-theology in terms of Reformed theology. Specifically, Reformed interpretations of the doctrines of the trinity and the incarnation allow Barth to imbed these six concepts, which are present in his pre-dogmatic thought, into a dogmatic structure. Barth's first dogmatics maintains these act-elements of his thought and, therefore, constitutes a Reformed, dogmatic response to the problem posed by Feuerbach. The following presentation of Barth's act-theology in *Göttingen Dogmatics*[1] provides the background

[1] Bonhoeffer knew of Barth's *Göttingen Dogmatics* through student notes, likely provided by von Hase. These notes, which survive in Bonhoeffer's literary estate, reproduce verbatim the sentences that

for understanding Bonhoeffer's characterization of Barth's theology not only as 'actualism,' but also as 'Reformed actualism.'

In one sense, the problem of transcendence is epistemological. The knowing human subject turns God into a known object, objectifying God and thereby domesticating God's transcendence. But Barth often puts the same problem in terms of language, since speech as much as thought seems to reduce God to an object. This poses an acute problem for theology, which must be passionately concerned with talk about God. Barth's understanding of the problem of transcendence therefore raises the question: How can one talk about God without turning God into an object? Barth's

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appear (italicized in the English translation) at the beginning of each paragraph section. Bonhoeffer knew the Münster dogmatics in published form. He read them while in Barcelona in 1928 [Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Register und Ergänzungen*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, Ernst Feil, and Christian Gremmels, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke 17 (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1999), 71] and cites them in *Act and Being*. I will look primarily at the prolegomena to *Göttingen Dogmatics.* The prolegomena is largely unchanged between Göttingen and Münster, and the Göttingen version is more readily available for readers of English. The Göttingen dogmatics lectures are published as Karl Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil 1: Prolegomena*, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1985); Karl Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil 2: Die Lehre von Gott/Die Lehre von Menschen*, ed. Hinrich Stoevesandt (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1990); Karl Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil 3: Die Lehre von der Versöhnung/Die Lehre von der Erlösung*, ed. Hinrich Stoevesandt (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2003). One of two projected volumes is available in English translation: Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). The Münster dogmatics lectures are published as Barth, *Dogmatik im Entwurf.*

answer to this question is consistent: humans can talk about God only when God speaks.[1] The precondition of human speech about God is God's own speech. For this reason, Barth calls "God's own speaking the problem of dogmatics."[2]

Barth's strategy for grounding human speech about God in God's own speech is analogous to Kant's transcendental method of argument. Kant inquires into conditions of possible knowledge by assuming the validity of knowledge and working toward its conditions. This transcendental method asks: Given the reality of knowledge, what conditions must obtain to make it possible? Barth deploys an analogous transcendental approach in *Göttingen Dogmatics*, where he describes the solution to the problem of speech about God in terms of the search for "the transcendental basis of Christian preaching."[3] Barth's "methodological starting point" is Christian preaching, "the phenomenon of Christian *speaking*."[4] Of preaching, he asks, "How can it be God's Word as a human Word?"[5] On what basis do the church and its ministers "dare to speak about God"? Thus, Barth begins with a phenomenon, the validity of which is assumed, and ascertains the conditions of the phenomenon's validity. This transcendental argument leads Barth to the ultimate transcendental basis of Christian speech: "the concept of the Word of God."[6]

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[1] Karl Barth, "The Need and Promise of Christian Preaching," in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper, 1957), 121, e.g.

[2] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 3.

[3] Ibid., 319.

[4] Ibid., 23-4.

[5] Ibid., 319.

[6] Ibid.

Barth elaborates "the concept of God's Word in three stages."[1] God speaks in three moments – in revelation itself, in scripture, and in preaching. Barth refers to the original, basic moment of revelation itself with the phrase *Deus dixit* – God spoke. Scripture functions as "a second address,"[2] the second stage of revelation. Preaching, the third stage, speaks this word anew to the contemporary church. Preaching rests on scripture, which in turn rests on *Deus dixit* revelation, which is the ultimate presupposition or transcendental condition of speech about God.[3]

At each of the three stages of revelation, Barth examines revelation's objective conditions – those that must obtain for God's word to be spoken – and its subjective conditions – those that must obtain for God's word to be spoken *to us.* Barth works systematically through the three stages of revelation first by considering each stage of revelation in itself, then by considering its objective condition, and finally by considering its subjective condition. This plan provides the organization for much of the prolegomena to *Göttingen Dogmatics*.[4] *Deus dixit* (§3) has as its objective condition the incarnation (§6) and as its subjective condition faith and obedience (§7). Scripture's (§8) objective condition is authority (§9) and its subjective condition is freedom (§10). Preaching's (§11) objective condition is the dogmatic norm (§12) and its objective condition is dogmatic thinking (§13). In this way, Barth dedicates virtually the whole of the prolegomena to the elaboration of the transcendental conditions of revelation.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., 14.

[3] Ibid., 57.

[4] Barth entitles the first volume of the dogmatics the 'Prolegomena.' This corresponds to §§1-13 in the first of two planned volumes of English translation.

The subjective God's act of revelation

What, then, is the nature of this revelation upon which speech about God rests? First, to say that revelation is fundamentally *Deus dixit* is to say that God spoke. *God* spoke – "he not we."[1] With this emphasis on revelation as *God's* revelation, Barth incorporates into his dogmatics at the ground level the theme of diastasis. Against the errors of liberal theology, Barth insists on understanding the relationship between God and creation in terms of diastasis, "a relation in which two members stand over against each other with no possibility of a synthesis into a higher form of being."[2] Theology must never confuse any aspect of creation, be it humanity, culture, history, or any of their attributes, with the God who is absolutely, qualitatively different. Revelation as *Deus dixit* establishes this diastasis by drawing the line between God and humanity.[3] Because "we are human and not God,"[4] if God and human meet, they do so by God's initiative. And even in this meeting, creator and creature are absolutely, qualitatively different and never to be confused.

To say that revelation has the form of *Deus dixit* means not only *God* spoke, but also that God *spoke*. Revelation is emphatically speech, and, therefore, act rather than

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[1] Ibid., 134.

[2] McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 129. It sometimes is thought that Barth's so-called turn from dialectic involves a softening of the diastasis. But "Barth never turned away from the starting-point which was embodied in the diastasis motif," Ibid., 244.

[3] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 319.

[4] Ibid., 197.

being. "The presupposition of the Bible is not that God *is* but that he *spoke*."[1] Barth emphasizes the act-character of revelation, that "only in full *action* [*Aktion*] is revelation revelation,"[2] in order to avoid revelation becoming a sacred object at human disposal. *Deus dixit* means revelation is always an act of 'revealing' rather than a state of 'revealedness.'[3]

An essential corollary to Barth's act-concept of revelation is that, in revelation, God is subject. This is so not only in the sense mentioned above, that God rather than the human is the actor in the event of revelation. Rather, it also means that in revelation God always remains the subject and never becomes an object. As Bonhoeffer puts it, Barth's significance for twentieth-century systematic theology is his demonstration of the need to speak adequately about God's non-objectivity.[4] But if God is not an object, what then? Barth's answer: in revelation, God "is always unchangeably subject."[5]

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[1] Ibid., 58. Translation altered to reflect the emphasis in the German, Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil I*, 70.

[2] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 58. Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil I*, 70.

[3] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 59. Here Barth writes that revelation is *Offenbarung* not *Offenbart*heit (his emphasis). Elsewhere, he says revelation is a 'becoming open/revealed' (*Offenwerden*) rather than a 'being open/revealed' (*Offensein*), Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil I*, 70, 71. In each case, the emphasis is on an act of revelation rather than a state of being revealed.

[4] Bonhoeffer, "Geschichte," 202.

[5] In Barth's mind, this is the conclusion his teacher Wilhelm Herrmann should have, but failed, to draw. "Herrmann once asserted, against Natorp, that one could discover religion in *no object*, however sensitive, not even in the hidden nature of the soul. Beautiful! Most excellent! But if true, then Herrmann himself would have been compelled at the very least to deal quite differently, to deal *dialectically*, with the concepts of 'experience' and 'historical fact.'" The rejection of God's objectivity should have pointed

This subjective concept of God stands at the very heart of *Göttingen Dogmatics*. In fact, *Göttingen Dogmatic* is an attempt to work the notion of God's subjectivity into the very definition of dogmatics. "That is what I am trying to do when I call God's own speaking the problem of dogmatics."[1] Because human speech about God rests on God's own speech, and because in God's speech God remains subject, theology is concerned with God's subjectivity.

From Barth's point of view, working God's subjectivity into the very definition of theology is the only way to head off Feuerbach's problem. The fateful confusion of heaven and earth begins when God becomes an object to be manipulated by the human subject. Barth sees the solution: "if we are not to fall into the arms of Feuerbach at the very first step, [then] in this relation [between God and humanity] we must think of God as the subject."[2] If theology does not maintain God's subjectivity, "then openly or secretly it sides with Feuerbach in viewing God as the product of faith instead of vice versa."[3] To avoid Feuerbach, theology must maintain, from beginning to end, God's subjectivity.

Herrmann to the God who "is always unchangeably subject," Karl Barth, "The Principles of Dogmatics according to Wilhelm Herrmann," in *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings, 1920-1928*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1962), 260. Cf. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 12, 422.

[1] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 11.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., 12.

The indirect communication of revelation

Barth elaborates on the meaning of God's subjectivity in revelation through the following formula, which provides an entrée into the notion of indirect revelation: "the content of revelation is God alone, wholly God, God himself."[1] First, the "content of revelation is *God*" means "that in revelation as such we may not distinguish between form and content, that is, between the revealing subject and the revealed object."[2] God, the revealing subject, is also the thing revealed in revelation. But this revelation occurs in such a way that the revealer never becomes some*thing* revealed, but rather is revealed as the revealer. There is nothing revealed except the act of God's revealing. Any attempt to talk about the object of revelation leads immediately back to the subject, and any attempt to talk about the content leads immediately back to the form.[3] Because the content of revelation is the revealing God, God is always subject.

Second, the "content of revelation is God *alone*" means a strict observance of the distinction between "revelation itself … and all means of revelation."[4] This maintains the diastasis, the principle that even during and after revelation, God (revelation) and creation (the means of revelation) are qualitatively distinct. When speaking of revelation

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[1] Ibid., 87.

[2] Ibid., 88, 95.

[3] God is always subject and not predicate, since all predicates are "only references back, not to the statement 'God is,' but to the statement 'God spoke.' For even the statement 'God is' is obviously a reference back to God's self-knowledge in his Word. God's action in relation to the world and us, what does it consist of but simply his making himself known in this relation as the one who himself alone acts?," Ibid., 88.

[4] Ibid., 95.

itself, form and content (as subject and object) are identical. But when speaking of revelation and the means of revelation, form (the means) and content (revelation itself) must be kept separate, lest God be reduced to an object of knowledge. The distinction between revelation and its medium must be observed always.

The conjunction of these two points – God's subjectivity in revelation and the distinction between revelation and its medium – means revelation reaches humanity through indirect communication. The subjective, unknowable God is knowable indirectly through an object. Barth operates with the notion of indirect revelation at least since the second edition of *Romans,* where revelation must be seen not "as though it were an intuitable thing in the midst of other intuitable things." Rather, it is "intuitable only in its unintuitability."[1] In *Romans,* Barth contents himself primarily with reveling in the paradox of the God who is known as the unknown. But as he reaches the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth begins to pay more attention to the objects through which the subjective God reveals. Barth's doctrine of the trinity makes this possible.

Trinity

Barth unfolds a doctrine of the trinity out of his understanding of revelation by presenting the three persons of the trinity as the "three subjects of revelation." The subject of revelation as *Deus dixit* is God the Father. The content of that revelation must be, as just discussed, also subject – "a second revealing subject [who] is the content of the

[1] Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 92. Translation altered. I have translated *anschaulich* (which Hoskyns renders 'visible') as 'intuitable' in order to allow the Kantian allusion to resonate more fully in English. In Kantian philosophy, sensible intuition (*Anschauung*) is the input, so to speak, of the faculty of sensibility. Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, 92.

revelation of the first." This is the second person of the trinity, the eternal Logos or Son. Father and Son in turn reveal "the eternal Spirit of the Father and the Son, a third revealing subject whose revealed object – the circle closes – is again no other than the Father and the Son." The three persons of the trinity are the "three subjects of revelation."[1]

By connecting the doctrine of the word of God to the doctrine of the trinity, Barth incorporates the act-elements of his thought into a dogmatic structure. The word of God, since Barth's break with liberalism in 1915, had been the foundation of his thought. But only by employing the trinity as "the doctrine of the perpetual subjectivity of God,"[2] could Barth unfold the doctrine of the word of God in three stages, corresponding to the three persons of the trinity, while maintaining God's subjectivity at each step. Having done so, Barth can then treat the various loci of traditional dogmatics – church, christology, etc. – in terms of the subjective and objective conditions of these three moments of revelation. Before Barth found this trinitarian key, he tended to give many of these loci short shrift, for fear of detracting from revelation itself. The doctrine of the trinity allows him to treat these doctrines without detracting from the doctrine of revelation that stands at the center of his thinking. Barth himself realized the significance of his discovery, writing to his close friend Eduard Thurneysen, "At all costs the doctrine

[1] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 99-100.

[2] Ibid., 98.

of the Trinity! If I could get the right key in my hand there, then everything would come out right."[1]

The doctrine of the trinity, "as the true center of the concept of revelation,"[2] stands with the doctrine of the word of God on a meta-doctrinal level. Just as revelation as *Deus dixit* is "the principle behind every theological dogma," [3] so the trinity is the "dogma of all dogmas."[4] In recognition of this status, Barth gives the trinity privilege of place in the prolegomena rather than in dogmatics proper.[5] Indeed, as "the a priori of all dogmas," its "discussion is to be viewed as the *pro*legomena par excellence."[6]

Incarnation and indirect communication

When discussing christology in the context of the prolegomena of *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth's main concern is that doctrine's relationship to indirect revelation. In order to maintain the structure of indirect revelation, Barth presents the incarnation as facilitating God's subjective self-revelation through an objective medium. The incarnation is the objective condition of the subjective, trinitarian content of revelation.[7]

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[1] Barth's letter to Thurneyson, 20 April 1924, in Karl Barth, *Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel, Band II: 1921-1930*, ed. Eduard Thurneysen, Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe V.4 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich), 245. Cf. McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 350f.

[2] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 131.

[3] Ibid., 10.

[4] Ibid., 103.

[5] Ibid., 96.

[6] Ibid., 98.

[7] Ibid., 140.

Barth accomplishes this by returning to the structure of indirect revelation developed in the second edition of *Romans*. Barth's depiction there of God as 'unknown' naturally raises the question of the knowledge of God: How do humans know the unknown God? To answer this question, Barth develops an indirect account of knowledge, where the unknown God is known as unknown through a knowable medium. Put otherwise, the subjective God is known as a subject through an object. The paradigm of such indirect knowing is the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, where "God reveals Himself inexorably as the hidden God who can be apprehended only indirectly. In Him He conceals Himself utterly, in order that He may manifest Himself to faith only."[1] There are, so to speak, two movements to this revelation in Jesus Christ: veiling and unveiling.[2] First, God veils God's self in Jesus of Nazareth. "The revelation which is in Jesus, because it is the revelation of the righteousness of God, must be the most complete veiling of His incomprehensibility."[3] In order for this veil to become a medium, and this is the second movement, God must lift the veil, so to speak, in an act of revelation. Revelation "is the unintuitability of God becoming intuitable, is always God's act."[4] Revelation in Jesus Christ is God's act of unveiling which allows humans to know the subjective God through an objective medium.

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[1] Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 369.

[2] McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 249-51.

[3] Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 98.

[4] Ibid., 106. Translation altered. Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, 80.

In *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth develops a robust christology that in many ways advances beyond the thin account in *Romans.*[1] But at its center stands the same structure of indirect revelation, where the subjective God is known through an objective medium in an act of revelation. For Barth in *Göttingen Dogmatics*, the result of the incarnation is the incarnate divine person of the Logos,[2] who assumes or takes on a second, human nature without change to either the divine or the human nature.

> The real deity and the real humanity must be so united that neither can be changed into the other or mixed with it … It must be a union in inequality, in differentiation. It must be a strictly dialectical union.[3]

The incarnation of the Logos preserves the diastasis, the qualitative distinction between divine and human natures.

Because the union of divine and human natures is a real dialectic, Barth's understanding of the incarnation serves his maintenance of God's subjectivity in indirect revelation. Indirect revelation requires, first, that "the content of revelation is *God*," which further entails that the content of revelation is always subject. Indirect revelation requires, second, that "the content of revelation is God *alone*," which implies the distinction between subjective revelation and its objective medium. Barth's version of

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[1] In *Romans*, Barth restricts revelation in Christ to the resurrection event, Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 30. In *Göttingen Dogmatics*, "the dialectic of veiling and unveiling had now been localized in the incarnation as a whole, and not just in the event of the cross," McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 366.

[2] "The whole trinity is the subject of revelation, of the incarnation … The result, however, is the incarnate Logos, not the incarnate Trinity," Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 154.

[3] Ibid., 138.

the incarnation fulfills both these conditions; because both natures remain unchanged, God remains God and humanity remains humanity.

> Now God's revelation in any case means God's revelation in his concealment. It means the radical dedivinization of the world and nature and history, the complete divine incognito, God's dealings with us exclusively by indirect communication, revelation by law and limit, by distance and judgment.[1]

By understanding the union resulting from the incarnation of the Logos as a real dialectic of divine and human natures, Barth maintains the diastasis of God and humanity that is a condition of indirect revelation.

Confessional polemics and the person of Christ

In addition to treating the incarnation as an objective condition of revelation (§6), Barth also discusses christology in the context of the doctrine of reconciliation (§28), where he elaborates on the nature of the divine-human union in Christ. Barth develops his account of the union in critical conversation with the Lutheran dogmatic tradition.[2] Throughout *Göttingen Dogmatics,* and indeed in many of his works from this time, Barth resurrects the heated disputes between Lutheran and Reformed thinkers surrounding the doctrines of christology and the sacraments. Why does Barth return to these technical,

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[1] Ibid., 144.

[2] Daniel Migliore's introduction to the *Göttingen Dogmatics* correctly notes, "Barth's most frequent dialogue partner in these early lectures in dogmatics is not the Schleiermacherian, Ritschlian, or Hegelian traditions but orthodox Lutheran theology," Ibid., xxxix. He continues by saying the "most important differences between Lutheran and Reformed theologies are in the doctrines of christology and sacraments," Ibid., xli.

polemically charged controversies that seem so removed from the concerns of modern religion? First, Barth finds these disputes helpful for discerning the true character of Reformed theology. He narrates the emergence of Reformed theology as a tradition distinct from Lutheranism by pointing to the two traditions' disagreement on the nature of the union in Christ and the closely related issue of the *unio sacramentalis* in the Lord's supper.[1] Barth's interests are not merely historical, however. He returns to these disputes, second, because they point beyond themselves to issues of meta-dogmatic significance, specifically to the central concern of the proper understanding of revelation. Theses disputes are "not necessarily about Christology and the Lord's Supper but about the problem of contingent revelation, which is today more urgent than ever before."[2] For Barth, the divergent Reformed and Lutheran stances on the union are significant as pointers to their different understandings of revelation.

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[1] According to Barth, the Reformed refused to give up "the belief that in the Lord's supper there is a double appropriation, a physical appropriation of the bread and wine and a spiritual appropriation of the true body and blood of the Lord, both united in the *unio sacramentalis* but *in* that union still remaining qualitatively distinct; and, secondly, they could not disavow the kindred beliefs: that Christ, the man who was born, dead, buried, rose again, and ascended into heaven, is now no longer here but lives in heavenly glory in a different world [*Raum*] from this – that without departing from his indissoluble *unio personalis* with the omnipresent Godhead, he still remains distinct in that union and is not a part of Godhead's omniscience – and that therefore he is hidden from all thought, being approachable by faith alone and by faith only through the Spirit from above," Barth, "The Doctrinal Task of the Reformed Churches," 255-6; Karl Barth, "Reformierte Lehre, ihr Wesen und ihre Aufgabe," in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1922-1925*, ed. Holger Finze, Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe III.19 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1990), 233-4.

[2] Barth, "The Doctrinal Task of the Reformed Churches," 260.

Barth articulates a classically Reformed account of the union inasmuch as he posits two kinds of divine-human union while attending to the distinction between the divine person and the divine nature. Barth posits, first, a union between the divine person of the Logos and the human nature that the Logos assumes in the incarnation. Barth understands this, the hypostatic union or *unio personalis*, to be a direct union. This direct union in turn mediates the second, dialectical union between the divine and human natures. In this second christological passage of *Göttingen Dogmatics*, we learn that the union of natures is indirect and dialectical precisely because it depends on the first, personal union.[1]

Barth characteristically goes beyond this traditional Reformed position by portraying the first, personal union in terms of act.

> One seeks and finds the essence and the power of this union not in the *having-been*-united [*Gleichgesetztheit*] of the … divine and human nature, but rather … in the *being*-united [*Gleichsetzung*]; not in the having-*become* but in the *becoming* of the God-man; in the *act* whose bearer and executor is the divine Person, not the divine nature in itself and as such …"[2]

The person of the Logos, in discrete acts, repeatedly assumes the human nature. The traditional Reformed position is already quite cautious about the union of natures,

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[1] "Reformed orthodoxy depicted … that *Unio*[*hypostatica*] as an *immediate* union, as the genuine sense of the union of God and humanity in Christ, and moved the other *unio,* the *unio* between the divine *nature* and the human [nature] into the background, as a *mediate* union," Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil III*, 40. Translated in McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 364.

[2] Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil III*, 44. Translated in McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 365.

mediating it through the personal union. Here Barth is even more cautious than his Reformed ancestors, grounding the union of natures in an *act-grounded* personal union.

Barth is cautious about the union of natures in response to what the Reformed tradition perceives as a Lutheran eagerness to identify the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ. In contrast to the Reformed account of a mediated union of natures through an immediate personal union, Lutheran theology traditionally affirms one, immediate union between natures. Without the careful, Reformed attention to the distinction between 'person' and 'nature,' Lutherans portray an immediate union of divine and human natures in Jesus Christ.[1]

Barth sees in this Lutheran union a faulty concept of revelation. By positing a direct union between God and humanity, the Lutherans confuse the distinction between the medium of revelation and revelation itself, eliminating the diastatic structure of indirect revelation, thereby reducing revelation to something directly given: "a piece of direct information [*Mitteilung*], a religious fact [*Gegebenheit*]." This collapses the distinction between heaven and earth, portraying revelation as "a kind of miracle that began and ended on earth."[2] Immediately following this indictment of Lutheran directness, Barth defends the classical Reformed christological doctrine of the *extra calvinisticum* in the name of indirect revelation: "The idea of the notorious *Extra Calvinisticum* was that there is a divine reserve which, being maintained even in

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[1] Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil III*, 40.

[2] Barth, "The Doctrinal Task of the Reformed Churches," 257. Here Barth refers to the means of revelation as a 'witness' to revelation.

revelation, is not to be forgotten or neglected."[1] From Barth's point of view, Reformed christology protects the indirect structure of revelation while Lutheran christology reduces revelation to a given, a fact.

Before continuing with Barth's polemic against Lutheran directness, it is crucial to spell out the terminological implications of the Reformed and Lutheran disagreement on the christological union. Although both the Lutheran and Reformed traditions affirm with the fifth-century Definition of Chalcedon[2] the union of divine and human natures in the person of Christ, they understand 'union' and 'person' in different ways. The Lutherans define the 'person' of Christ as the historical God-man Jesus Christ. And it is in this person that divine and human natures are immediately united. For the Lutherans, therefore, the antithesis of divine and human natures is overcome here and now in history. For Barth, the antithesis of divine and human natures is overcome also in the 'person' of Christ, but Barth defines this 'person' as the eternal second person of the trinity, the eternal Logos. For Barth, the antithesis of God and humanity is overcome in eternity, manifesting itself historically in acts.[3]

This Lutheran and Reformed difference repeats in their differing definitions of 'Jesus Christ.' For the Lutherans, Jesus Christ 'is' (in his being) both God and human,

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[1] Ibid. In this passage, Barth describes indirect revelation in terms of 'concealment' or 'veiling' (*Verhülling*).

[2] John H Leith, ed., "The Definition of Chalcedon," in *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present,* 3rd ed. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), 35-36.

[3] "One seeks and finds the essence and power of the union" between divine and human natures "not in the having-*become* but in the *becoming* of the God-man; in the *act*" of the Logos, Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil III,* 43. Emphases in original.

for in him God and humanity are immediately united. For Barth, the union in Jesus Christ is a mediated, dialectical union which 'is' not in Jesus Christ but is revealed there in acts. In what will be crucial to remember in the coming chapters, the Reformed and Lutheran traditions rely on the same terms – union, person, Jesus Christ – but understand them in different ways.

Barth sees the Lutheran error of directness carrying over to the very structure of Lutheran theology. This is clear, for example, when Barth plays the trinitarian structure of his theology against the christocentric structure of Lutheran theology. The form of Barth's dogmatics is, in the period relevant to this study,[1] essentially trinitarian. The trinity, as 'the dogma of dogmas,' belongs in the prolegomena as an elaboration of the doctrine of revelation. Barth thereby distinguishes the doctrine of the trinity from the doctrine of the incarnation as the subject of revelation from the objective medium or condition of revelation. In this way, Barth's trinitarian dogmatics draws a clear line between 'the given' [*das Faktum*, *das Gegebene*] and its transcendental condition, which is always only indirectly revealed in that given.[2] From Barth's perspective, Lutheran theology is essentially christocentric and therefore errs by treating an objective condition of revelation as revelation itself. In other words, the category confusion that Barth sees in Lutheran christology – the immediate identification of revelation with something given – is reflected in the very structure of Lutheran theology, which places Jesus Christ,

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[1] Barth's theology undergoes a christological reorientation in 1936, McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 453.

[2] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 45, 319. Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil I*, 53 Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil II*, 3

understood as a fact of revelation itself, at its center. Barth resists this confusion of revelation with its condition, whether it appears as Lutheran christocentrism or otherwise:

> We have already had an anthropocentric, a theocentric, a christocentric, and a staurocentric (cross-centered) theology. I believe I could promise to build up a similar kind of theology on the basis of baptism or eschatology, but I want no part in this Protestant proliferation.[1]

Barth himself avoids running "headlong into the exclusive 'Jesus Christ'-pit of the Lutherans"[2] by building his theology, not around a particular dogma, but rather the dogma of dogmas, the trinity, "the doctrine of the perpetual subjectivity of God."[3]

On a related point, Barth contrasts the Reformed, dialectical form of christological thinking with the Lutheran, non-dialectical form. Because Lutherans hold to a direct union of natures in Christ and thereby turn revelation in Christ to a given, they employ a non-dialectical thought form with reference to Christ. Barth, in contrast, maintains that the union is a real dialectic and that revelation is indirect; for these reasons, thinking about Christ must be a dialectical thought-form.[4] As George Hunsinger demonstrates, Barth weaves Alexandrian and Antiochian christological idioms in a

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[1] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 322.

[2] Barth's letter to Thurneyson, 20 April 1924, in Barth, *Barth - Thurneysen, II*, 245. Cf. McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 350f.

[3] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 98.

[4] Barth understands "a strictly dialectical christology" to be one of "the decisive marks of the Reformed school" of dogmatics, Ibid., 294.

"dialectical strategy of juxtaposition."[1] According to Barth, the Chalcedonian mediation of the Alexandrian strain of christology, which stressed Christ's deity at the risk of compromising his humanity, and the Antiochian strain of christology, which stressed the full humanity of Jesus at the expense of the unity of Christ's person, does not rule out or set aside the Alexandrian or Antiochian christologies. Rather, Chalcedon brings them together dialectically.[2] Christological thinking must follow Chalcedon by speaking dialectically in both Alexandrian and Antiochian idioms. "Our task is to hear the second in the first, and the first in the second, and, therefore, in a process of thinking and not in a system, to hear the one [Jesus Christ] in both."[3] In order to reflect the real dialectic of the union of humanity and divinity in Christ, christological thinking is dialectical thinking.

Barth traces the difference between Reformed dialectical thinking about Christ and Lutheran non-dialectical thinking about Christ back to the basic difference in the two traditions' concepts of revelation.

> Is it possible … for man to declare this reality [of revelation] clearly and logically in any word of his own? Yes, said Luther and his followers … No, said the Reformed churchmen, it may not and cannot be possible, else the question would

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[1] George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 132.

[2] Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics, I/2*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromily and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. George Thomas Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 24.

[3] Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics, I/1*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromily and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 25.

> arise whether salvation here set forth were really the salvation of *God*. At least *two* words are necessary to make known the real word of God.[1]

By speaking in one word about Christ, the Lutherans present as a unity that which God "has put asunder."[2] This non-dialectical form of Christological thinking "eliminate[s] the quality of hiddenness from the Lord who had become man," making out of "the indirect identity consummated only in God a *direct* identity between heavenly and earthly gifts, substance and symbol, witness and revelation," i.e., between subjective revelation itself and the objective medium of that revelation.[3] Lutherans thereby reduce revelation to something present, something that 'is' on earth; they turn revelation into a 'being.' Reformed thinking rests not on the unity of heaven and earth, but on the fundamental, diastatic separation of heaven and earth. Heaven and earth are not together in any earthly 'being' but come together only in an 'act' of revelation, in "the majesty of God's utterance."[4] Reformed christology thinks dialectically, thinks so as to keep heaven and earth separate in human thought, recognizing that heaven and earth come together only in God's act.

Barth in fact structures not only his christology but also the whole of the prolegomena to the *Göttingen Dogmatics* dialectically. Recall that the prolegomena proceeds by developing the three-stages of God's revelation together with its subjective and objective conditions. Barth likens this dogmatic structure to a Gothic arch:

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[1] Barth, "The Doctrinal Task of the Reformed Churches," 258.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., 256-7.

[4] Ibid., 268.

> Note that … all the coupled elements [of the dogmatics] that stand over against one another and are dialectically connected are related to the Word of God like the lines of a Gothic arch that culminates at the center, except that in this case – the parallel is not wholly congruent – the center is open. The cornerstone, the center … is God himself, the Holy Spirit, in all the actuality with which he speaks the Word and human beings hear it.[1]

Barth structures his dogmatics dialectically to preserve the tension between heaven and earth that dissolves only in the act of God's revelation.

Barth develops his 'actualism' in part to deal with the problem Feuerbach poses for theology. By portraying God as the subject who self-reveals in objects, and humans as knowing revelation indirectly and speaking of it dialectically, Barth seeks to avoid Feuerbach's fateful reversal of heaven and earth. And Barth's 'actualism' is a 'Reformed actualism,' since he develops this 'actualism' in the context of a trinitarian Reformed dogmatic structure. Further, Barth develops this Reformed theology as an alternative to its Lutheran counterpart, which treats revelation as a given, sees in revelation the immediate unity of heaven and earth, and speaks of this revelation non-dialectically.

The implication of Barth's contrast between Reformed and Lutheran thinking is clear: Lutheran theology cannot solve the problem posed by Feuerbach. Put otherwise, Feuerbach brings to logical conclusion the implications of the Lutheran position. Barth makes this explicit while discussing Feuerbach's significance for modern theology. Lutheran christology and sacramentology, argues Barth, provided fertile soil for Feuerbach. Feuerbach's paraphrase of Christian doctrine, that 'God becomes man, and

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[1] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 320-1.

man becomes God,' "is neither impossible nor absurd under the presuppositions of the specifically Lutheran Christology and doctrine of the Lord's Supper." On these points, Lutheran theology, in its "enthusiastic overemphasis" "overrides joyfully" the Reformed diastasis and "points plainly to the possibility of a reversal of above and below, of heaven and earth, of God and man." Classic Lutheran thinking, therefore, leaves its "successors in a somewhat compromised position." Only the Reformed or "Calvinist corrective," which treats "man's relation with God [as] in every respect, in principle, an irreversible relation" can "repulse Feuerbach's attack." [1]

As 'Reformed actualism,' then, Barth's theology poses the following challenge for Bonhoeffer in *Act and Being*. Barth not only argues that the proper response to the problem of transcendence is act-theology, he also argues that only Reformed thinking can deal with the problem, since Lutheran thinking is both complicit in it and helpless against it. As we will see, Bonhoeffer follows the Lutheran tradition in affirming the fact of revelation in Christ and in thinking about that fact christocentrically. Bonhoeffer thinks this Lutheran position absorbs Barth's criticisms, however, because this fact of revelation has the ontological structure of 'person.' Outlining the special character of the person-concept of revelation is the task of *Act and Being*.

[1] Barth, "Ludwig Feuerbach," 230-1.

Chapter 4 : Bonhoeffer's Lutheran Person-theology

Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth and the development of his own alternative rest on the concept of person. Just as Barth's 'actualism' is embedded in his 'Reformed' theology, so Bonhoeffer's person-theology derives from his interpretation of the Lutheran christological tradition.[1] This chapter presents that Lutheran background by looking at how Bonhoeffer develops the concept of person in his christology lectures. Reading *Act and Being* with "Christology" in mind, as I do in the coming chapters, shows that Bonhoeffer responds to Barth's challenge by arguing that the Lutheran tradition in fact does possess the resources, specifically in its understanding of the person of Jesus Christ, to deal with the problem of transcendence and to do so more successfully than Barth's Reformed alternative.

Bonhoeffer develops a christology based on what he takes to be the best impulse of the Lutheran tradition: its focus on the present person of Jesus Christ. The person of Jesus Christ is the conceptual center of Bonhoeffer's "Christology," informing both its positive and negative (or critical) movements. Positively, the task of "Christology" is the articulation of the ontological structure of Jesus Christ's person, which Bonhoeffer describes as the unity of act and being. Negatively, the task of "Christology" is to draw the boundaries of proper christological inquiry by directing attention to the present person of Christ. This entails the rejection of theological thought-forms that abstract from and divide the whole, present person of Christ. In these positive and negative movements, "Christology" mirrors *Act and Being*. At the center of both works stands a concept of

[1] Bonhoeffer, "Geschichte," 212.

person as the unity of act and being, which constitutes the positive and negative starting point of theological reflection.[1]

Critical christology and Chalcedon

From an objective to a factual christology

Bonhoeffer understands christology as composed of positive and negative movements. The task of negative or critical christology is "the delimiting of what must be placed in the category of the incomprehensible." It "determine[s] the boundaries and establish[es] the rules for what may *not* be said about Christ." Positive christology then begins its work within the boundaries delimited by negative christology.[2]

From Bonhoeffer's perspective, critical christology historically has been the task of ecumenical councils. In the history of christology, individual theologians developed positive christology, which forced the church to delimit critically the boundaries of these statements through conciliar statements. These conciliar statements in turn provide the boundaries of the church's contemporary proclamation, which is another moment of positive christology.[3] For Bonhoeffer, the highpoint of critical christology was the fifth-century Definition of Chalcedon, which pointed the way forward for positive christology

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[1] The argumentative and conceptual parallels between *Act and Being* and "Christology" justify, I argue, reading *Act and Being* with "Christology" in mind, despite the obvious problem of chronology. (Bonhoeffer delivered the latter lectures in 1933, several years after the completion of the *Habilitationsschrift.*)

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 74.

[3] Ibid., 74-5.

first by ruling out unacceptable christological content and second by ruling out unacceptable christological thought-forms.

Bonhoeffer sees Chalcedon ruling against unacceptable christological content[1] through its "classical definition of the God-man, Jesus Christ" as "'one and the same Christ in two natures.'"[2] This definition performs its negative function by condemning opposing heretical misunderstandings of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, Chalcedon defines the two natures as concurring "without confusion and change," and thereby rules against monophysite christologies, which portray the divine nature as assuming and subsequently divinizing the human nature. On the other hand, Chalcedon defines the two natures as concurring "without separation and division," and thereby rules against Nestorian christologies, which attempt to protect the humanity of Christ against monophysite interpretations by maintaining two separate natures in Jesus Christ.[3] On Bonhoeffer's reading, the Definition of Chalcedon functions critically, first, by rejecting inadequate christological content, that is, mistaken statements about Jesus Christ.

But in ruling against inadequate christological content, Chalcedon also rules out two kinds of what Bonhoeffer calls 'objectifying' christological thought-forms. The first kind of objectifying thought-form Chalcedon rejects "make[s] statements about Jesus Christ with unequivocal directness."[4] In fact, some of the false christological content Chalcedon rejects is false precisely because it trades on unequivocally direct statements. For example, the unequivocal assertion of Jesus Christ's deity obscures his humanity and

[1] Ibid., 100.

[2] Ibid., 87.

[3] Ibid., 85.

[4] Ibid., 100.

leads to the heresy of Docetism, while the unequivocal assertion of deity over against humanity leads to the heresy of Ebionitism. By ruling against such heretical christological content, Chalcedon also shows that "an unequivocal, positive, direct statement about Jesus Christ is superseded and split into two contradictory, opposing statements."[1] Chalcedon's rejection of inadequate christological content is also a denial of unequivocal christological thought-forms in favor of a dialectical thought-form.

With the rejection of unequivocally direct statements in favor of dialectical statements, Bonhoeffer seems to interpret Chalcedon in a Barthian direction. But Bonhoeffer in fact proceeds to interpret Chalcedon as a criticism of Barth's dialectical thought-form. According to Bonhoeffer's interpretation, Chalcedon's critical christology does not stop by replacing 'unequivocal, direct' statements with 'contradictory, opposing' ones but continues by indicting dialectical thinking as another form of objectifying thought. "Objectifying thought … comes to an end where its contradictory opposite must be recognized at the same time as necessary with itself. The recognition of this end makes room for what is simply factual [*das schlechthin Tatsächliche*]."[2] Dialectical thinking must give way to some form of thinking that accounts for the 'simply factual,' in the same way that, as I discuss below, questions of 'How?' give way to questions of 'Who?,' and talk of 'natures' gives way to talk about 'person.' It is this 'simply factual' that functions, according to Bonhoeffer's interpretation, as Chalcedon's critical criterion all along; Chalcedon tests "the adequacy of statements made in light of what has been

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[1] Ibid., 102.

[2] Ibid. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Christologie," in *Berlin, 1932-1933*, ed. Carsten Nicolaisen and Ernst-Albert Scharffenorth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke 12 (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1997), 340.

given about the fact of Jesus Christ."[1] Consistent application of this test of factuality requires Chalcedon to pass beyond both direct and dialectical thought-forms. Unlike Barth, who rejects unequivocal statements about Christ for dialectical statements, Bonhoeffer rejects both unequivocal and dialectical statements as objectifying and therefore inadequate for speaking of the fact of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer expands on his rejection of Barth's dialectical christology as he elaborates on what kind of fact Jesus Christ is and articulates the form of thinking proper to it.

From 'How?' to 'Who?'

The transition from objective to factual christological discourse can be put otherwise as the transition from posing questions of the form 'How?' to posing questions of the form 'Who?':

> When one has put the question, 'How?,' to one side, one comes to the Chalcedonian Definition, in which the question, 'How?,' has been eliminated. What remains is a pointer to the question, 'Who are you?' The Chalcedonian definition is itself ultimately the question, 'Who?'[2]

From Bonhoeffer's perspective, this is Chalcedon and critical christology's ultimate contribution. In shifting the form of thinking away from objective discourse, it shifts the form of the question from 'How?' to 'Who?'

Bonhoeffer explores the theme of christological questioning through his 'logos narrative' in a section of "Christology" entitled "The Unfolding of the Christological Question." There Bonhoeffer claims that all scholarly questions can be reduced to the

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 100.

[2] Ibid., 102.

form, 'How?': "How does the object X fit into the existing order? The object is determined, encompassed and recognized by its 'How?'… How can this object be classified?"[1] 'How?' belongs to the mode of objective questioning, where the human mind, what Bonhoeffer calls in this context the 'human logos,' classifies objects within a system.

On occasion, the human logos comes upon what Bonhoeffer calls a 'counter-logos,' something that does not fit into the human logos's classificatory scheme and therefore challenges the human logos's classifying power. The human logos, recognizing a challenge from outside, forestalls this challenge by dismantling its classificatory system. In doing so, the human logos "negat[es] itself and at the same time asserts that this negation is a necessary unfolding of its own nature." As Hegel realized, this "self-negation is also a way of self-affirmation."[2] The human logos builds a newer, better classification to accommodate the counter-logos. In the logos narrative, just as in Bonhoeffer's interpretation of Chalcedon, dialectical thinking remains objective thinking.

The counter-logos makes a claim in an entirely new form, however, in the incarnation, death, and resurrection. In the incarnation, the counter-logos "somehow and somewhere enters into history as human [*Mensch*] and, as human, declares itself the judgment of the human logos and says, 'I am the truth,' I am the death of the human logos, I am the life of the divine logos, I am the first and the last."[3] In this case, the human logos must respond with the christological question, "Who are you?"[4] The

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[1] Ibid., 29.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., 30. Translated altered. Bonhoeffer, "Christologie," 282.

[4] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 30.

christological questioning comes to a still sharper point through the death and resurrection. For when the human logos realizes that it cannot classify the incarnate counter-logos, the human logos can no longer "endure the Counter-Logos. It knows that one of them must die and it therefore kills the one whom it asks." But the counter-logos, "which was killed, rises alive and victorious as the final Word of God [and] sets himself up against his murderers." The "crucified one shows himself as the risen one." The question, 'Who?,' therefore, is "sharpened to an extreme point" in the presence of the resurrected person of Christ.[1]

The critical christological conclusions of Bonhoeffer's logos narrative mirror those of his interpretation of Chalcedon. Objective questioning, including dialectical questioning, suspends itself in the presence of the person of Christ. The human logos acknowledges the presence of Christ through a shift in its mode of questioning; it transitions from questions of 'How?' to questions of 'Who?' The 'Who?' question to which both Bonhoeffer's interpretation of Chalcedon and logos narrative point is the beginning of positive christology. Before examining Bonhoeffer's positive christology, however, it is important to understand what precisely Bonhoeffer thinks is involved in this transition from 'How?' to 'Who?' What forms of christological thinking does Bonhoeffer think this transition rules out?

From natures to person

For Bonhoeffer, the transition from objective to factual discourse about Christ and the transition from 'How?' questions to 'Who?' questions also rules out discussion of Jesus Christ in terms of abstract natures. As Bonhoeffer points out, the concept of *ousia*

[1] Ibid., 33.

(nature or being) drove the early christological debates up to and including Chalcedon. These debates asked, how do the divine nature and human nature relate in Jesus Christ? Bonhoeffer finds the discourse of natures problematic because in it "the nature of God and the nature of humanity were spoken of in a theoretical and objectifying way. In this way, the two natures were treated like two distinguishable entities, separated from each other until they came together in Jesus Christ."[1] Chalcedon, in annulling objectifying christological thought-forms, bans thinking that begins with divine and human natures as distinguishable in principle and proceeds by asking 'how' they come together in Jesus Christ.

Paradoxically, then, the critical contribution of the Definition of Chalcedon is this: "in its characteristic form the Definition cancels itself out."[2] Chalcedon cancels itself out because "it speaks about 'natures,' but expresses the facts in such a way as to show that the concept of 'natures' is quite inappropriate for this use." It speaks about substance, but pushes the concept into meaninglessness. Therefore the negative consequence: "From now on, it will no longer be permissible to state anything about the substance of Jesus Christ. Speculation about natures is at an end."[3] Put otherwise, the "Chalcedonian Definition had also given an answer to the question, 'How?'; but in its answer, the question, 'How?,' was already superseded."[4] Chalcedon's critical contribution is the cancelation of its own objective mode of inquiry into abstract natures.

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[1] Ibid., 101.

[2] Ibid., 88.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 98.

Just as the dialectic of the logos and counter-logos suspends itself in the presence of the person of Christ, so Chalcedon points to this same person as the starting point of positive christology. The project of Bonhoeffer's positive christology is to ask of this person, Who are you?

Protestant Christology

Behind Bonhoeffer's claim that Chalcedon points away from a discussion of natures and toward the "one God-man" of Jesus Christ[1] stands a distinctively Lutheran innovation of the classical christological tradition. Lutherans shift the meaning of person to refer not to the divine Logos, one of the persons of the trinity, but to the God-man union or hypostasis in Jesus Christ. Because that person of the God-man is the only christological agent, reference to the two natures apart from their presence in this person is by definition abstract.[2] When Bonhoeffer interprets Chalcedon to point beyond a discussion of natures in the abstract and toward a consideration of the person of Jesus Christ, Bonhoeffer reads Chalcedon through a Lutheran lens.[3]

For Bonhoeffer, this definition of the God-man as the christological person is the central insight of the Lutheran christological tradition and the foundation of his own

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[1] Ibid., 45.

[2] Robert W. Jenson, "Luther's Contemporary Theological Significance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 277.

[3] That Bonhoeffer operates with this Lutheran understanding of the christological person is clear from his descriptions of Jesus Christ. For example, when christology asks, 'Who?,' it inquires not of the eternal, divine Logos who has assumed human nature. Rather, "it is the historical, whole Christ who is asked and who answers," Bonhoeffer, "Christologie," 291. Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 39.

positive christology. Precisely because Bonhoeffer grasps this concept of person as the measuring stick of christology, he is no slavish adherent to the Lutheran christological tradition. Rather, the Lutheran concept of person becomes for Bonhoeffer an insight to purify that tradition of the accretions inconsistent with its best impulse. In this way, Bonhoeffer's christology attempts to be more Lutheran than the Lutheran tradition. At times, this pits Bonhoeffer against Martin Luther himself. Bonhoeffer's treatment of Reformation-era christological controversies in "Christology" is in part such a dialogue with his own tradition as he calls Lutheran christology away from speculation about natures and back to its foundation in reflection on the present person of Jesus Christ.

As Bonhoeffer tells the story, sixteenth-century Lutheran and Reformed theologians agreed on the Chalcedonian statement that 'Christ is one person in two natures,' but they disagreed on its interpretation. A catalyst for these disagreements was the question of how to interpret Christ's presence in the Lord's supper. The Lutheran theologians tried to find a christological structure that accounts both for Luther's unflinching interpretation of Christ's statement, 'This is my body, which is for you,' and for Chalcedon's claim, 'Christ is one person in two natures.' Bonhoeffer recounts in considerable detail the Lutheran doctrinal apparatus developed to accommodate these two desiderata, but it can be summarized thus: the communication of attributes in relation to the hypostatic union. The human body of Jesus can be present in the sacrament because the divine attribute of omnipresence is, by virtue of the hypostatic unity of divine and human natures, also attributable to Jesus Christ's human nature.[1] The traditional character of Lutheran christology, with the communication of attributes in relation to the

[1] Ibid., 89-92.

hypostatic union, emerged out of this attempt to make sense of Christ's words of institution within Chalcedon's framework.

After covering this ground in detail, no doubt for the benefit of his students, Bonhoeffer declares the whole discussion a theological dead end. The Lutherans erred by assuming that the "integrity of both natures in Christ must be preserved: the divine nature in its immutability and essential eternity, the human nature in its mutability and ultimate transitoriness." But in assuming the distinction of natures before their integration into the person, the Lutherans "did what Chalcedon had forbidden."[1] Chalcedon directs christological reflection away from the natures in the abstract, toward the present person of Christ.

Thus, Bonhoeffer purifies the Lutheran christological tradition "in the light of what has been given about the fact of Jesus Christ."[2] The fact of Jesus Christ precludes consideration of the divine and human natures independent of their union in the person of Christ. Thereby, Bonhoeffer purifies the Lutheran christological tradition according to his interpretation of Chalcedon as critical christology. But this is also a purification of the Lutheran tradition according to its best impulse, as represented in one of Bonhoeffer's favorite Luther quotations. You should not think about the divine nature or the human nature; rather, "you should look upon the whole man, Jesus, and say, That is God."[3]

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[1] Ibid., 89. Bonhoeffer also covers the Reformed objections and alternative to this Lutheran christology, 92-93. Many of these classical doctrines find contemporary expression in Barth.

[2] Ibid., 100.

[3] Ibid., 78. Wolf Krötke, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther," in *Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation: Theology and Philosophy in his Thought*, ed. Peter Frick (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 56.

Bonhoeffer's christology is an alternative to Barth's. Bonhoeffer stakes his position on the Lutheran "enthusiastic overemphasis" that Barth condemns as complicit with Feuerbach, the teaching "that the deity is to be sought not in heaven but on earth, in the *man*, the *man*, the man Jesus."[1] As we will see, Bonhoeffer thinks he can defend this Lutheran christology against Barth's objections by locating the divinity in Jesus Christ's person, not through the logic of the communication of attributes but through the fact of Christ's person itself. Moreover, in articulating this Lutheran christology, Bonhoeffer develops critical leverage against Barth's Reformed position, since Barth appeals to human and divine natures in abstraction from the person of Christ. Before undertaking this comparison, however, I turn to Bonhoeffer's positive christology, developed on the foundation of the person of Jesus Christ.

Positive christology: the present person of Christ

Bonhoeffer begins his positive christology with the "one God-man" who is the "complete, historical Jesus Christ."[2] And he inquires of this present Christ, not with the question 'How?,' but with the question 'Who?' "The question may not run, 'How is the incarnate one thinkable?,' but, 'Who is he?'"[3] This starting point and this mode of inquiry lead Bonhoeffer to describe Christ's personal, ontological structure in terms of the unity of act and being. Therefore, Bonhoeffer describes the person of Jesus Christ as

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[1] Barth, "Ludwig Feuerbach," 230.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 45, 38. Beginning with the 'complete, historical Jesus Christ' rules against splitting Christ into different states. Thus, Christ is both risen and present, both humiliated and exalted, Ibid., 34, 111.

[3] Ibid., 102.

he describes the person in *Act and Being*. The concept of person with which Bonhoeffer operates in *Act and Being* is one that grows out of his interpretation of the Lutheran christological tradition.

The first positive statement of Bonhoeffer's christology is this: "Of this man, we say: 'This is God for us.'" With this, Bonhoeffer rejects speculative aspects of both the classical Reformed and Lutheran christological traditions in favor of his critically purified Lutheran starting point. Bonhoeffer affirms that 'this human *is* God, and this God *is* human.' But Bonhoeffer's claim is not driven by the speculative Lutheran logic of the communication of attributes, which relies on knowledge of divine and human natures *in abstracto*. It is not as if "we knew something before about what and who God was, apart from Jesus Christ, and then applied it to Christ." Rather, "all that we are able to say about God, we have gained by a glance at him, or better, this man compels us."[1] Like Luther, Bonhoeffer "look[s] upon the whole man, Jesus, and say[s], That is God."[2]

When Bonhoeffer asks 'Who?,' he is interested in arriving at the ontological structure of the person of Jesus Christ: "The subject of christology is *the personal structure of the being* of the complete, historical Jesus Christ."[3] Two aspects of this structure are decisive. First, the person of Jesus Christ is by definition present. It is only the present Christ who reorients the human logos from its questions of 'How?' to its questions of 'Who?' Jesus Christ's being is a 'being-there.' But, as Luther points out, it

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[1] Ibid., 103.

[2] Ibid., 78.

[3] Ibid., 38. My emphasis. "Die personale Seinstruktur des ganzen geschichtlichen Christus ist der Gegenstand der Christologie," Bonhoeffer, "Christologie," 291.

is one thing for God to 'be there,' and another for God to 'be there for you.'[1] Jesus Christ's personal structure is such that his 'being there' is always also a 'being for me.' He is ontologically *pro me*. The personal structure of the God-man Jesus Christ is 'being there' in a way that is also 'for me.'[2]

Bonhoeffer talks about this personal, *pro me* structure of the God-man in terms of the unity of act and being. As Bonhoeffer puts it, "what is decisive about the *pro me* structure is that thereby the being as well as the act of Christ are maintained together. The 'being there *for you'* and the 'being *there* for you' come together."[3] The structure of the person of Jesus Christ as presented in "Christology," therefore, mirrors the structure of person as presented in *Act and Being*; in both cases, person is the coordination or unity of contingent acts and historically continuous being. Christ is "the one who has preserved his contingency freely in being there for me."[4] The person-structure of Christ in "Christology" is the structure of person in *Act and Being.*

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 47.

[2]Although Bonhoeffer does not make the point, these two aspects of Christ's personal presence are reflected in the words of institution. Christ is recorded as saying, "This is my body, which is for you," I Cor. 11.24. This statement contains both the 'is' and the 'for you.' Bernhard Lohse, who presents the major points of Luther's discussion of the Lord's supper historically and systematically, shows that Luther stressed the 'for you' in the polemics against Rome and the 'is' in his polemics against the Reformed. See Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, ed. Roy A. Harrisville, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 171. Bonhoeffer's concept of person functions the same way. The being-aspect stands against Reformed actualism while the act-aspect stands against Catholics and pseudo-Lutherans, Bonhoeffer, "Geschichte," 211-2.

[3] Bonhoeffer, "Christologie," 296.

[4] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 48.

The 'person' which Bonhoeffer describes as the unity of act and being is the same 'person' to which Chalcedon points, the same 'person' at the center of Lutheran christology. This is clear in Bonhoeffer's exploration of Christ's *pro me* structure, where he names the same person-structure with both the language of 'the unity of divinity and humanity' and 'the unity of act and being.' When we inquire into the person-structure of Christ, says Bonhoeffer, "the question is really about the kind of structure of his person which enables Christ to be present in the Church." An answer in terms of divinity and humanity is, he continues, correct but not explicit enough: "If we answer, 'He is able [to be present in the Church] because he is both God and man,' that is right, but it does not explain anything." In order to elaborate Christ's person-structure specifically as *pro me*, Bonhoeffer prefers the language of 'being' and 'act' over that language of 'God' and 'humanity.' Especially when discussing the *presence* of Christ's person, Bonhoeffer finds the language of 'being' and 'act' to be a helpful supplement to the language of 'God' and 'humanity.'[1]

Person, union, and the concept of revelation

Act and Being's idiosyncratic definition of the person of Christ and, therefore, of the person in general is to be clarified against this background of Bonhoeffer's refinement of 'God' and 'humanity' in terms of 'being' and 'act.' While *Act and Being*'s

[1] This does not mean that Bonhoeffer denies the divinity and humanity of the person of Christ: "The presence of Christ requires the statement, 'Jesus is fully man'; but it also requires the other statement, 'Jesus is fully God,'" Ibid., 45. Here again, the starting point is the present person. Nor does he abandon completely the language of 'God' and 'humanity.' Rather, in order to specify more precisely the Lutheran emphasis on the presence of Christ, Bonhoeffer expresses this presence in terms of act and being.

definition of the person as unity or coordination of act and being seems to have no firm precedent in either philosophical or theological discourse about the person, "Christology" demonstrates that Bonhoeffer's concept of person has a long pedigree in the Lutheran christological tradition's emphasis on the presence of Christ.

The Lutheran provenance of Bonhoeffer's basic christological concepts can be demonstrated further by contrast with Barth's Reformed concepts. For Barth, the christological 'person' is the eternal Logos, and the 'union' in the historical Jesus Christ is a real-dialectical union between human and divine natures grounded in the immediate union between divine person and human nature in the person of the Logos. Bonhoeffer follows the Lutheran tradition in understanding the christological person as the historical person of Jesus Christ in whom the Logos is incarnate without eternal remainder.[1] Because of this, Jesus Christ's divinity can be established only by reference to the person of Jesus Christ itself; the 'union' of divinity and humanity is immediate in the person of Jesus Christ. On these issues, Bonhoeffer and Barth diverge along classical Lutheran and Reformed lines.

As Barth makes clear, the Reformed and Lutheran christological differences refer to differing concepts of revelation. Barth's Reformed christology establishes an indirect structure of revelation in Jesus Christ. The incarnation veils the subjective Logos in an objective medium to be unveiled in acts of revelation. In Barth's Reformed christology, then, revelation is an act. In recognition of this, Barth's christological thinking is

[1] Bonhoeffer in effect affirms, though with a different logic, the traditional Lutheran claim that the Logos is enfleshed without remainder (*Logos totus in carne est*). This stands against the Reformed position that the Logos is both inside and outside of the flesh (*Logos totus in carne est et totus extra*), which earned from the Lutherans the derogatory label the *extra calvinisticum*.

dialectical; human thinking proceeds by a thought-form designed to respect the distinction between divinity and humanity that is overcome on earth only in the divine act.

In Bonhoeffer's christology, the person of Jesus Christ *is* revelation. Humanity and divinity do not come together only in acts in Jesus Christ. Rather, humanity and divinity *are* together in the historical being of the person of Jesus Christ. From the vantage point of Bonhoeffer's christology, therefore, christological thinking ought not to reflect the distinction of divine and human natures but rather attend to the 'fact' that they *are* together in the person of Christ. Bonhoeffer's christology rests not on a distinction that comes together in an act, but on a unity in being. For this reason, Bonhoeffer's christological thinking proceeds not dialectically but hermeneutically. Hermeneutical thinking is the thinking proper to the fact of the person of Christ.

Hermeneutical christology

The governing principle of hermeneutical thinking is the concept of a whole in terms of which parts are defined as parts.[1] Bonhoeffer's thinking in "Christology" is hermeneutical, appealing both in its positive and negative moments to the unity of the person of Jesus Christ. A particularly clear example of such hermeneutical thinking is Bonhoeffer's criticism of Luther's doctrines of *ubiquity* and *ubivoli*.

According to Bonhoeffer, Luther developed these doctrines in response to a question posed by Reformed thinking: How can Christ's physical body be present in the sacrament of the Lord's supper? Luther responded, first, with the doctrine of *ubiquity*.

[1] I discuss hermeneutical thinking in more detail in chapter six.

The body of Christ, by virtue of the communication of attributes in reference to the hypostatic union, is bound no longer by space but is present everywhere. Therefore, Christ's humanity, too, is present in the sacrament. However, because 'being there' is something other than 'being there for you,' the doctrine of *ubiquity* ('being there') in itself does not present Christ as available to the believer in the supper. Therefore, Luther added to this the doctrine of *ubivoli* – Christ is present 'for you' when he wishes. In this way, Luther explained Christ's present in the sacrament through two doctrines; under *ubiquity* presence, Christ is there; under *ubivoli* presence, Christ is there for you.[1]

Bonhoeffer criticizes Luther for considering Christ's being (*ubiquity*) and act (*ubivoli*) in distinction from each other. "As metaphysical hypostases, both doctrines are impossible. In each, an element of reality has been isolated and elevated into a system."[2] Luther arrives at the doctrines of *ubiquity* and *ubivoli* by taking an aspect of Christ's personal presence, abstracting it from Christ's person, and elevating it to an independent principle.

Formally, Bonhoeffer's criticism of Luther's account of presence through the doctrines of *ubiquity* and *ubivoli* mirrors his criticism of Luther's account of presence with reference to abstract natures (discussed above). In both cases, Bonhoeffer accuses Luther of abstracting two aspects from the person of Christ. The variable in Bonhoeffer's criticism is not the form, but rather the content. In the first instance, the abstracted principles are 'God' and 'humanity.' In the second, they are *ubiquity* and *ubivoli* or,

[1] Ibid., 54-5.

[2] Ibid., 56.

better, being and act. In both cases, Bonhoeffer corrects Luther hermeneutically, by appealing to the unity of these in the logically prior person of Christ.

As Bonhoeffer's reliance on the language of act and being makes clear, he sees Luther's use of *ubiquity* and *ubivoli* as an instance of splitting the person of Christ into Christ's act and Christ's being. *Ubiquity* understands Christ's presence in terms of being: "The doctrine of ubiquity teaches a Christ outside revelation; revelation becomes the accident of a substance already there."[1] *Ubivoli* understands Christ's presence in terms of act: "The doctrine of ubivoli presence teaches Christ as being present, not in terms of a particular person, but as a promise bound up with the word of Jesus." By splitting Christ's presence into act and being, Luther commits the error of act- and being-theology, presenting Christ or revelation as either something at hand or something lacking continuity. Again, Bonhoeffer corrects Luther by redirecting him back toward the best impulse of the Lutheran tradition. Look to the sacrament, he says, and see that "the complete person of the God-man is present."[2] Luther's error of rendering the personal presence of Christ as *ubiquity* and *ubivoli* presence divides Christ's person into being and act.

It is crucial for reading *Act and Being* to realize that Bonhoeffer's definition of the person as an act-being unity elaborates and stands in for the traditional Lutheran formula

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., 57. In emphasizing the presence of the complete person, Bonhoeffer deploys Luther against the Melanchthonian and liberal theological traditions of Lutheranism, which often separated Christ's work from his person, Karsten Lehmkühler, "Christologie," in *Bonhoeffer und Luther. Zentrale Themen ihrer Theologie*, ed. Klaus Grünwaldt, Christiane Tietz, and Udo Hahn (Hannover: Amt der VELKD, 2007), 57-60.

of the person as a humanity-divinity unity. Seeing this parallel in definitions of persons opens the door for seeing the argumentative parallels between "Christology" and *Act and Being*. In "Christology," Bonhoeffer develops a form of christological thinking that accords with the fact of the person of Jesus Christ, the negative or critical aspect of which involves persistent criticism of other forms of thought that split the person-reality into abstract parts. It is this hermeneutical mode of criticism that Bonhoeffer employs against Barth's act-theology.

Chapter 5 : Bonhoeffer's Criticism of Barth

As chapter two detailed, Bonhoeffer essentially levels two criticisms against Kant's transcendental act-philosophy. In the first, Bonhoeffer argues that Kant's admirable attempt to portray human existence 'in reference to' transcendence fails to understand that existence as a historical whole. An understanding of the self requires reflection on the self. Such self-reflection, however, displaces the very orientation to transcendence that constitutes Kant's self. Therefore, on Bonhoeffer's account, Kant's philosophy cannot understand the self as both act-constituted *and* historically continuous. In the second criticism, Bonhoeffer portrays Kant's philosophy as collapsing into idealism. Like the idealist self, Kant's self knows itself from itself. On the first criticism, Kant's philosophy encounters the problem of historical existence; on the second, it encounters the problem of transcendence.

As the present chapter demonstrates, Bonhoeffer develops in *Act and Being* two criticisms of Barth's theology that, like Bonhoeffer's criticisms of Kant's philosophy, hang on the two hinges of the problem of act and being. First, Bonhoeffer argues that the various conceptual discontinuities of Barth's thought render it inadequate for grounding a theological interpretation of the historical aspects of Christian life. Put otherwise, this first criticism argues that, even if Barth solves the problem of transcendence, he encounters the problem of historical existence. In a second, less developed criticism, Bonhoeffer argues that Barth's account of revelation is theologically inadequate since the limit it purportedly establishes between humanity and God is in fact a limit set from the human side. Barth's theology, like Kant's philosophy, collapses into idealist self-reference. In contrast to the first criticism, where Bonhoeffer presents Barth's theology

as succeeding in establishing transcendence but failing in grounding an account of historical existence, Bonhoeffer's second criticism portrays Barth as failing even to secure transcendence. On the second criticism, Barth fails in the face of the problem of historical existence precisely because he fails to solve the problem of transcendence.

On both of these criticisms, Bonhoeffer locates Barth's basic error in the act-character of his theology, which cannot portray God or revelation in historical continuity. The perceived failures of Barth's theology push Bonhoeffer to articulate an alternative, person-concept of revelation.

Discontinuity and the problem of historical existence

In Bonhoeffer's first criticism of Barth, Barth's act-theology creates discontinuities on all three theoretical levels – at the level of the concept of God and, therefore, at the levels of anthropology and epistemology. The lack of continuity in Barth's theological concepts signals to Bonhoeffer that, in Barth's theology, the act of revelation and the corresponding act of faith overdetermine being, especially the historical existence of human being. Barth's act-theology may succeed in keeping God and revelation free from human control, but it cannot ground an understanding of historical life. Put in terms of the problem of act and being, Barth's strategy for negotiating its first manifestation, the problem of transcendence, leads to his failure in dealing with the second, the problem of historical existence.

According to Bonhoeffer, Barth's act-theology renders God's relationship with humanity discontinuous. On Barth's account, God is free to "give or withhold the divine

self according to absolute favor."[1] Because Barth's God relates to humans in acts, God's relationship to humanity – even in faith and revelation – is momentary and discontinuous.

Because Barth's act-theology leads him to interpret in a radical way the theological commonplace that humans depend on God, this act-theology produces discontinuity on the level of anthropology as well. Consistently maintaining God's subjectivity requires Barth to assert that God is the knowing subject even in the believer's act of faith. When the believer believes, "the subject of understanding is God as Holy Spirit."[2] But if the believer's new life depends on revelation, and revelation is discontinuous, then the believer's new life, too, is reduced to a discontinuous series of acts. "From the nonobjectivity of God follows necessarily the nonobjectivity of the I which knows God."[3] Bonhoeffer sees the problem of anthropological discontinuity extending to Barth's account of the communal form of the new I, the church.[4] Barth's act-theology leaves the individual and communal new I in discontinuity.

Barth leaves in question not only the continuity of the new I but also the continuity of what Bonhoeffer calls the 'total I,' the unity of the old I and new I. Barth's act-theology fails to make sense of the relationship between the sinner and the believer within one, unified historical person because he presents the new I as the negation or the non-being of the old I. Bonhoeffer puzzles over how to relate Barth's new I to the

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 82.

[2] Ibid., 92. Later, "God is in God-understanding-God's-self in human beings in the act of faith," Ibid., 93.

[3] Ibid., 94. See also, "It remains a problem how Dasein as decision can be perceived also as something that has continuity," Ibid., 97.

[4] Ibid., 112.

empirical or historical total I: "Is the new I to be thought of in unity with the empirical total-I, or does it remain its 'heavenly double'?" Bonhoeffer proceeds to place blame squarely on Barth's reliance on act-concepts. "This is where Barth's concept of act becomes an issue. If the act of the new I has its continuity in the supratemporal, then the danger of a theology of experience is indeed wholly averted; but this occurs at the expense of the historicity of human beings …"[1] On the level of anthropology, Barth's act-theology can produce neither the continuity of the new I nor the continuity of the total I.

Bonhoeffer portrays Barth's act-theology leading to problems of discontinuity not only in the concept of God and in anthropology, but in epistemology as well. Bonhoeffer draws a direct connection[2] between Barth's concept of God and his dialectical form of thought in which "I always counter a judgment of knowing with one of not-knowing." Bonhoeffer concludes that, for Barth, "Human knowing is not-knowing."[3] If God remains ever free even in self-giving, then human knowledge of God in faith involves unknowing.

Bonhoeffer takes Barth's various discontinuities as evidence of something amiss. Even if Barth's act-theology successfully protects God's transcendence, it cannot ground theoretically the continuous or historical aspects of the Christian life. Barth's act-theology does not adequately reflect the faithful continuity of God's self-giving or the

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[1] Ibid., 99.

[2] Ibid., 85.

[3] Ibid., 124. Bonhoeffer cites, Barth, *Dogmatik im Entwurf*, 61.

constancy of the life of faith that rests in it. Barth's act-theology, even if it solves the problem of transcendence, runs aground on the problem of historical existence.

Limits and the problem of transcendence

In the foregoing criticism of Barth's theology in terms of the problem of historical existence, Bonhoeffer in effect argues that Barth's act-theology succeeds in securing transcendence at the cost of an orientation to the world. In developing this criticism, Bonhoeffer draws a parallel between Barth's theology and Kant's transcendental philosophy. Just as Kant's account of the self as grounded in act cannot portray that self in continuity, so Barth's act-theology cannot ground an understanding of the Christian life in historical continuity.

But Bonhoeffer articulates a second line of criticism that suggests that Barth fails even to secure transcendence. According to this line of argument, Barth encounters the problem of historical existence *because* he fails to secure transcendence. The decisive factor in this second criticism is the concept of 'limit.' Bonhoeffer claims the Kantian limit between the self and the transcendent is not a genuine limit set from outside. Rather, it is a limit in thought, a limit set by the self, and therefore always defined by the possibility of going beyond it.[1] Bonhoeffer, following idealist criticisms of Kant,[2] argues that the mind's self-limitation is always a disguised self-assertion, a disguised claim over

[1] Bonhoeffer, "Inaugural Lecture," 403. Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 45. I return in the following section to Bonhoeffer criticism of Kant's limits.

[2] As articulated, for example, in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), section 84.

the transcendent.[1] Therefore, Kant's transcendent-referring structure collapses into the idealist self-referring structure. Bonhoeffer applies a similar criticism of limits to Barth's theology; Barth operates with a Kantian self-imposed limit between the self and God.

I approach this second criticism through Bonhoeffer's inaugural lecture, which deals explicitly with the question of limits in theology. Here Bonhoeffer presents much of the same material covered in *Act and Being*, but focuses on the anthropological level of conceptuality. He organizes the lecture around the question, 'What does it mean to be a human being?' He then outlines and criticizes contemporary philosophical and theological approaches to answering that question. He says, the "human being tries to understand himself either from the perspective of his *works* or from that of his *limits*." Contemporary thought approaches the anthropological question through the concept of either 'work' or 'limit.' But because 'work' "is the concretization of a possibility," understanding humanity from its 'work' means understanding it from its 'possibility.'[2] So the question of anthropology can be answered from humanity's 'limits' or its 'possibilities.'[3] The inaugural lecture revisits the anthropological layer of *Act and Being*'s argument, substituting the terms 'limit' and 'possibility' for 'act' and 'being.'

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 29. "But self-negation is also a way of self-affirmation. In so far as the logos limits itself it also establishes itself with power."

[2] Bonhoeffer, "Inaugural Lecture," 389-91. For the sake of consistency, I translate *Grenze* as 'limit,' although the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works translation occasionally renders it 'boundary.'

[3] Bonhoeffer begins a seminar paper written in at Union Seminary in New York this way: "It is a difference of method, whether at the occasion of examining a man one asks him for things, which he probably will know or whether one tries to find the limits of his knowledge by asking him questions, which

Bonhoeffer presents Karl Holl's thought as an example of possibility-theology. In Holl's theology of conscience,

> the human being understands himself from his self-reflection on his possibilities … Because the human being is able to hear and have God within his conscience, he is able to understand himself from within his conscience as his most authentic possibility of being human.[1]

Holl's is a theology of possibility, for humanity understands itself by reference to a God it finds in its conscience as its own work, as an expression of its own possibility.

Bonhoeffer then rehearses Barth's objections to such possibility-theology. Barth objects that humanity's question about itself cannot be answered through reflection, "since there is no point within him at which God might gain space. Indeed, the essence of human being it to be *incapax infiniti*." [2] Here Bonhoeffer refers to Barth's endorsement of the Reformed principle, the infinite is incapable of containing the finite (*finitum incapax infiniti est*), arguing that contact with the infinite divine is no possibility for finite humanity. Bonhoeffer casts Barth's theology as a limit-theology, since it understands the divine as a human limit rather than a human possibility.

Bonhoeffer, apparently siding with Barth's limit-theology, continues by announcing, "*The concept of possibility has no place in theology and thus no place in theological anthropology.*" From this general principle, he deduces a series of conclusions indicting possibility-theology. For example, the "person who understands

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he very likely cannot answer quite as well." Bonhoeffer then identifies the second method with Barth's theology, Bonhoeffer, "Theology of Crisis," 434.

[1] Bonhoeffer, "Inaugural Lecture," 400.

[2] Ibid., 400-1.

himself from the perspective of his possibilities understands himself from within his own self-reflection," and, "The concept of possibility includes semi-Pelagianism."[1] With these statements, many of which also appear in *Act and Being,* Bonhoeffer joins Barth in the rejection of possibility-thinking in theology.

But Bonhoeffer then extends his criticism of possibility into a criticism of limits, saying, "The concept of limit undergoes a critique at the same time as the concept of possibility." The concept of limit in fact "degenerates into that of possibility," since "Even the person who intends to understand himself on the basis of his limits ultimately understands himself on the basis of his own possibilities."[2] The criticism of possibility leads logically to the criticism of limits.

Bonhoeffer demonstrates how limit-thinking degenerates into possibility-thinking as he applies the criticism of possibility-thinking to Barth's limit-theology.[3] Barth's rejection of possibility-thinking in the name of the principle of *incapax infiniti*, argues Bonhoeffer, originates in "the Kantian idea of the person who exists only in relation to transcendence."[4] In declaring the *incapax* as a limit, Barth exercises another form of possibility-thinking, because he judges the possibility (even if here the *im*possibility) of revelation on anthropological criteria, i.e., the finitude of humanity.[5] Barth's *incapax*

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[1] Ibid., 403-4.

[2] Ibid. Translation altered.

[3] As in *Act and Being*, Barth is not the only limit-thinker Bonhoeffer criticizes. He also indicts 'I-thou' personalism, in both Grisebach's philosophical version and Gogarten's theological version, for projecting a self-made limit onto the neighborly other, Ibid., 398-403.

[4] Ibid., 402.

[5] Ibid., 403.

functions as a self-imposed limit, a limit drawn from the side of the self rather than from the side of God. A true rejection of possibility-thinking in theology involves thinking from the reality of revelation. But because Barth reasons from the reality of humanity to the possibility of revelation, his attempt at limit-thinking degenerates into possibility-thinking.

In the inaugural lecture, then, Bonhoeffer argues that the criticism of possibility leads to a criticism of limits, revealing Barth's limit-theology to be a covert possibility-theology. In inchoate form, this same criticism is present *mutatis mutandis* in *Act and Being* as the conjunction of the following three elements. 1) Just as Bonhoeffer argues in the inaugural lecture that a criticism of possibility entails a criticism of limits, so in *Act and Being* he argues that a criticism of being entails a criticism of act. 2) As in the inaugural lecture, Bonhoeffer characterizes Barth as arriving at conclusions about the possibility of revelation from anthropological bases. This amounts to the claim that Barth operates with a self-imposed limit on knowledge of God. 3) In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer attributes to Barth's theology characteristics of being-theology, indicating that Barth's limit fails and that his theology suffers a collapse into being-theology.

First, just as Bonhoeffer argues in the inaugural lecture that a criticism of possibility entails a criticism of limits, so in *Act and Being* he argues that a criticism of being entails a criticism of act. In arguing that transcendental philosophy collapses into idealism, Bonhoeffer in effect argues that act collapses into being. In the transition from transcendental philosophy to idealism, "Act pointed to being. Hegel again honored the

ontology Kant had dethroned."[1] The inaugural lecture's claim that a criticism of possibility entails a criticism of limits does indeed find a parallel in *Act and Being*; a criticism of being entails a criticism of act, because act degenerates into being.

Second, as in the inaugural lecture, Bonhoeffer characterizes Barth as arriving at conclusions about the possibility of revelation from anthropological bases and, therefore, operating with a self-imposed limit on knowledge of God. Bonhoeffer describes Barth's dialectical thought-form as a process of "counter[ing] a judgment of knowing with one of not-knowing." As a result, for Barth, "Human knowing is not-knowing."[2] Bonhoeffer thinks Barth arrives at not-knowing from a philosophical conviction about the finite mind's inability (*incapax*) to grasp the finite. In dialectical unknowing, "I introduce a factor into my thinking that renders it *a priori* uncertain, a factor that consists in my adding the antithesis to the positive assertion."[3] But Bonhoeffer argues that, "It is wrong to suggest that to the 'knowing' of revelation there corresponds quite generally a not-knowing *that has been derived from idealistic-rationalistic anthropology*." [4] Bonhoeffer finds it essential that faith is not mixed with unknowing. But what is more important in

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 59. Also, "The philosophy of the pure act turned to be a new ontology; a fact, which Hegel clearly recognized," Bonhoeffer, "Theology of Crisis," 472.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 123-4. "Man wird dann sein *Wissen* um Gott, auf das er - und unter jener Voraussetzung nun also nicht unbegründet - Anspruch erhebt, nicht zurückführen auf eine ursprüngliche oder erworbene Eignung des menschlichen Subjektes zu solchem Wissen (weder auf ein religiöses Organ oder Apriori noch auf ein religiöses Erlebnis!), sondern verstehen als eine Qualifizierung seiner Ungeeignetheit, als «docta *ignorantia*», als gehorsames und verheißungsvolles (und insofern sein Objekt erfassendes, weil von ihm erfaßtes) *Nicht-Wissen*," Barth, *Dogmatik im Entwurf*, 61.

[3] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 123-4.

[4] Ibid., 125. My emphasis.

this context is the methodological criticism; Barth arrives at a 'quite general' not-knowing based on 'philosophical anthropology' rather than on the reality of revelation. On Bonhoeffer's reading, Barth posits on philosophical, rather than theological, grounds the impossibility of such knowledge.

Third, Bonhoeffer attributes to Barth's theology characteristics of being-theology, which indicates that Bonhoeffer believes Barth's limit fails, and that Barth's theology suffers a collapse. This is the case when Bonhoeffer accuses Barth's theology of rationalism, the idea that God reveals God's self in accord with the rules of reason. For Bonhoeffer, being-theology is rationalist, while act-theology resists rationalism through the concept of contingency, which entails "the absolute freedom of revelation as opposed to reason."[1] Barth's strategy for resisting the rationalization of revelation is, according to Bonhoeffer, a formal account of freedom; the ground of revelation is not reason but God's own freedom. But Bonhoeffer thinks Barth's notion of formal freedom simply rationalizes revelation in another way: "to leave open a freedom of God beyond the occurrence of salvation is to formalize, to *rationalize*, the contingent possibility of that occurrence."[2] As we will see later, Bonhoeffer suggests that God acts to bind God's self

[1] Ibid., 82.

[2] Ibid., 124. It is the notion of possibility that links idealism and rationalism. Idealism, as being-thinking, is possibility thinking. And, as Bonhoeffer puts it, "The concept of possibility rationalizes reality," Bonhoeffer, "Inaugural Lecture," 403. This is the logic that stands behind Bonhoeffer's term 'idealistic-rationalistic anthropology,' Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 125.

to humanity. Since Barth's formal account of freedom *a priori* rules out such divine action, Barth, like being-theologians, rationalizes God's action.[1]

[1] This rationalizing of God's revelation based on possibility-thinking stands behind both Bonhoeffer's rejection of the Reformed *incapax* and his qualified affirmation of the Lutheran *capax.* This significance of the *capax/incapax* discussion for Bonhoeffer remains misunderstood in Bonhoeffer scholarship. In reference to Bonhoeffer's affirmation of the *capax* in "Christology," Andreas Pangritz says the following. "Whereas according to *Act and Being* (1930) 'the old *extra calvinisticum'* had been 'in error,' Bonhoeffer now speaks of the Lutheran 'capax' in terms of what sounds like a Reformed proviso: "Finitum capax infiniti, non per se, sed per infinitum [The infinite can hold the infinite, not by itself, but it can by the aid of the infinite].' Barth could have put the matter that way," Andreas Pangritz, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: 'Within, not Outside, the Barthian Movement'," in *Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation: Theology and Philosophy in his Thought*, ed. Peter Frick (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 261. Here Pangritz incorrectly claims (1) a development in Bonhoeffer's position vis-à-vis the *capax* from *Act and Being* to "Christology," (2) that this development involves a movement from a Lutheran to a Reformed position. First, Bonhoeffer's position in Christology does not in fact reflect a change from his position during the time of *Act and Being.* In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer rejects Barth's invocation of the Reformed *incapax* for relying on the logic of possibility, a logic that defines human-divine relationship abstractly, i.e., without reference to the reality of revelation. Insofar as both the Reformed *incapax* and the Lutheran *capax* rely on the logic of possibility, Bonhoeffer rejects both. Bonhoeffer makes this logic explicit in Bonhoeffer, "Inaugural Lecture," 403-405. Bonhoeffer's position in "Christology" is essentially the same, insofar as he rejects statements about humanity in relationship to divinity apart from reference to the reality of revelation. There, the Reformed *incapax* is unacceptable because it assumes a human nature with certain characteristics (including finitude) and a divine nature with certain characteristics (including infinity) which are understood to be *a priori* incompatible. The Lutheran *capax* is just as problematic if it sees divine and human natures that are *a priori* compatible. Insofar as both make *a priori* judgments about the compatibility of divinity and humanity, both positions are to be rejected. The proper starting point for reflection on the relationship of divinity and humanity is, according to Bonhoeffer, the reality of the

In addition, Bonhoeffer sees in Barth's theology the danger of idealism's "inmost identity of God and the I."[1] Barth tries to resist this by treating God as always-free subject, the subject even of faith. But Bonhoeffer argues that theology needs "to reach an understanding of the human I as the subject of the knowledge of God, without which the act of faith would have no contact with the existence of human beings, and, on the other hand, to avoid the identification of the divine and the human I."[2] If Barth does not find some way of articulating the human subject as a knower of God – while of course avoiding turning God into an object of knowledge – then he risks the fate of idealism: the identification of God and the I, and the consequent loss of existential encounter from

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incarnation, which presents divinity and humanity in coordination. On this basis (i.e. *a posteriori*), Bonhoeffer affirms the *capax*. The qualification that follows Bonhoeffer's affirmation of the *capax* ["not by itself but by the aid of the infinite"] is intended to show that he affirms the *capax* not *a priori*, but *a posteriori*, i.e., on the basis of the fact of the incarnation. There is, therefore, no change in Bonhoeffer's position from the writing of *Act and Being* to "Christology" on the question of the *capax*. In both places, Bonhoeffer rejects answering the question apart from the reality of revelation. And the reality of revelation shows, he argues, the *capax* (so understood) to be in the right. Second, since there is no change in the Bonhoeffer's logic with regard to the *capax*, he is not moving from a Lutheran position to a Reformed position, as Pangritz suggests. In fact, Bonhoeffer's qualified affirmation of the *capax* rests on what he sees as the best of the Lutheran tradition, its commitment to thinking from the reality of revelation understood as person.

[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 53.

[2] Ibid., 93. Also, "it remains unclear (even in Barth) how the religious act of human beings and God's action in faith are to be thought, without dividing them into two – by nature different – spheres, or without suspending either the subjectivity of God or the fact that human beings were encountered in their existence," Ibid.

outside the self. Bonhoeffer does not finally accuse Barth of identifying God and the human, but finds that Barth's act-framework leaves this an unresolved problem.[1]

Bonhoeffer also sees Barth's perpetually subjective God effecting a human self absorbed in reflection. On Bonhoeffer's reading, Kant's self is designed to be 'in reference to' transcendence but collapses into an idealist self-contained, self-reflective self. Bonhoeffer observes a similar collapse in Barth's account of faith. Barth's account of faith, according to Bonhoeffer, creates a new self that relates to the old self as its negation. But if Barth's "I and not-I are held to be in a relation of mutual negation, then the faith of the I must direct itself towards its identity with the not-I."[2] Here the aforementioned problem of anthropological discontinuity distracts faith from its intended direction 'in reference to' transcendence and focuses it instead on the problem of believer's continuity. Faith becomes reflective rather than transcendental in structure. It seems that Barth's self, like idealism's, is trapped in itself.

These three instances of Barth's likeness with being-thinking – that his formal concept of freedom rationalizes God's action, that he threatens to identify God and believer, and that his believer is a reflecting self – are of a different class from Bonhoeffer's observations of the discontinuities in Barth's theology. In pointing out the discontinuities in Barth's theology, Bonhoeffer indicates the failure of Barth's act-theology to solve the problem of historical existence, but he presupposes its success in

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[1] For example, Bonhoeffer accuses Barth of identifying God and the self, but Bonhoeffer hedges his bet with *etwa*/virtually: "This has the further consequence of defining God virtually as the subject of my new existence," Ibid., 125. "Das hat weiter zur Folge, daß etwa Gott als Subjekt meiner neuen Existenz, meines neues theologischen Denkens bestimmt wird," Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein*, 122.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 100.

solving the problem of transcendence. In the set of accusations just presented, however, Bonhoeffer thinks Barth's act-theology also fails to secure transcendence. Barth's attempt to secure the contingency of revelation via an act-concept of revelation, a formal concept of freedom, and a subjective concept of God undermines itself. Such act-thinking draws its own limit, rationalizes God's action.

Limits and the concept of revelation

On the face of it, Bonhoeffer's second criticism of Barth seems fundamentally mistaken. Bonhoeffer argues that Barth sets the limit between humanity and God philosophically (from the side of human thinking), when Barth in fact is abundantly clear that only God's revelation limits humans. This second criticism, then, seems to demonstrate that Bonhoeffer misreads Barth's theology. At the conclusion of the next chapter, I argue (against other interpretations of *Act and Being*) that Bonhoeffer's account of Barth's theology, despite inaccuracies, points to a central difference between Bonhoeffer's Lutheran person-theology and Barth's 'Reformed actualism,' namely, their differing concepts of contingent revelation. Bonhoeffer's second criticism of Barth is instructive in this regard, since, so long as it is read in light of its confessional background and Bonhoeffer's account of philosophy, it points to this genuine difference which Bonhoeffer himself identifies in the disjunction between Barth's subjective, acting God and Bonhoeffer's own person-account of God and revelation.

Because Bonhoeffer's second criticism of Barth draws on his criticism of Kant's limit, the latter discussion serves as the background for evaluating Bonhoeffer's claim that Barth's limit fails. In describing transcendental philosophy's collapse into idealism, Bonhoeffer argues that the self-set nature of Kant's limit reveals Kant's self to be

oriented not to transcendence but to itself. It is this criticism that Bonhoeffer, in effect, applies to Barth, despite the significant differences between Kant's and Barth's notions of limit.

Bonhoeffer's criticism of Kant's limit is opaque because Bonhoeffer rarely finds it necessary to elaborate beyond what he takes to be a straightforward claim – Kant's limit fails. Bonhoeffer does not generally argue for this claim but rather asserts it, often on Hegel's authority. As Hegel has shown, runs Bonhoeffer's thinking, "there are for reason essentially no boundaries."[1] But why is it that there are 'essentially no boundaries'? The key phrase here is 'for reason' – there are *for reason* essentially no boundaries.[2] As Bonhoeffer interprets Hegel, Kant's limit fails because it is a limit *in thought*, and a limit in thought is no limit at all.

This observation raises the further question: What demonstrates that Kant's limit is a limit in thought? The demonstration rests, Bonhoeffer seems to be arguing, in the questionable ontological status of the transcendent which stands, so to speak, beyond Kant's limit.

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[1] Ibid., 45. Bonhoeffer does not cite Hegel here, but he does when he repeats this argument elsewhere, Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 29; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Theologische Psychologie," in *Berlin, 1932-1933*, ed. Carsten Nicolaisen and Ernst-Albert Scharffenorth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke 12 (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1997), 180.

[2] "Der Idealism bestreitet, daß es *im Denken* überhaupt eine Grenze gibt," Ibid. My emphasis. "So Kant's critical philosophy presents itself as the attempt of man to set … limits in order to avoid the boundlessness of his claim, but the fact is that *thinking* can never limit itself; in limiting itself, it establishes itself," Bonhoeffer, "Theology of Crisis," 472. My emphasis.

> What is this transcendent, toward which everything is said to be in orientation? If it can never be objectively knowable, how can reason fix its limits over against something unknown? … This innermost unclarity in Kant's concept of the transcendental leads to the insight that here, too, despite the strenuous attempt to go beyond itself or establish its boundaries, reason remains by itself, understands itself not 'in reference to' that which transcends it, but 'in reference to' itself.[1]

The logic of Bonhoeffer's criticism of Kant therefore runs like this: The 'unclarity' or non-objective status of Kant's transcendent reveals it and the limit that stands before it to be posited in reason by reason. And, as Bonhoeffer takes Hegel to have shown, any limit in reason is a limit set by the self, a limit that can be, and in principle has been, overcome by the self.[2] The Kantian self, therefore, is not in orientation to transcendence but rather to its own self-limiting act.

If Bonhoeffer's criticism of Kant's limit is read in this way, the decisive issue is not the self-set nature of the limit but rather the 'unclarity' of the transcendent that, in Bonhoeffer's logic, reveals the limit to be self-set. By extension, Bonhoeffer's second criticism of Barth is more nuanced than it initially appears. Bonhoeffer does not argue directly that Barth sets the limit from the human side. Such an argument clearly fails. Rather, he argues that Barth's concepts of transcendence, God, and revelation show Barth's limit, despite Barth's objections, to be a self-set limit. From Bonhoeffer's point

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 45.

[2] "[D]iese Grenze (s.o.) muß [das] Ich überschritten haben um sie zu wissen (Hegel)," Bonhoeffer, "Theologische Psychologie," 180.

of view, Barth's subjective concept of God is not a robust enough notion of God to function as what Bonhoeffer calls a 'genuine' limit.

While this argument would not convince Barth to restructure his theology, it does nonetheless gain traction in a way that a direct claim for the self-set nature of Barth's limit does not. Seeing this requires exploring what Bonhoeffer might mean by the 'unclarity' of Kant's transcendent. As Bonhoeffer indicates in the quotation cited above, Kant's transcendent lies beyond the realm of possible experience and, therefore, cannot be known, since possible experience is, for Kant, a precondition of objective knowledge. However, while a transcendent cannot be *known*, it can be *thought* as an idea without empirical content. In this sense, a transcendent is an empty or formal idea to which no object necessarily corresponds. For Kant, the existence or ontological status of a transcendent cannot be determined, since such a determination belongs to knowledge rather than thought. So, as Bonhoeffer says, Kant's transcendent is not an object, and its ontological status remains 'unclear.'

Unlike Kant, who leaves his transcendent 'unclear' in its non-objectivity, Barth clearly defines the ontological status of his non-objective transcendent. For Barth, God is not object but always subject. It is this difference between Kant's 'unclear,' non-objective transcendent and Barth's clearly subjective transcendent that protects Barth from a direct assault on his concept of limit as self-set. For Barth, the subjective God acts to limit humanity. Barth's limit is a theological limit.

Nonetheless, Barth's transcendent remains, like Kant's, a *formal* transcendent. As previously discussed, Barth maintains God's subjectivity through an act- rather than a being-concept of revelation. Because revelation is *deus dixit*, even the statement 'God is'

refers back to the statement 'God spoke.'[1] The being of God is in the act of God. With this, Barth "take[s] issue with the usual distinction between a formal and material principle in the concept of revelation,"[2] arguing that revelation's content is identifical with its form. In "revelation as such we may not distinguish between form and content, that is, between the revealing subject and the revealed object." God "is never revealed object except as revealing subject."[3] For Barth, a subjective concept of God entails a formal concept of revelation. Barth's transcendent is, in a manner that Bonhoeffer finds reminiscent of Kant, pure form.

Here the confessional aspect of Barth's argument comes into view again, since his rejection of revelatory content restates his objection to the Lutheran portrayal of revelation as a 'given' or 'fact.' As Barth understands it, the Lutheran account adds to revelation's form an additional material aspect. Lutherans see revelation as more than God's self-communication; in revelation God communicates specific content, such as, 'Your sins are forgiven.' Barth objects to this with what he calls the "Reformed view": "That God reveals himself means here, apparently formally, not this or that, but primarily that he reveals *himself*."[4] Barth takes his stand with the Reformed tradition against the Lutheran understanding of revelation as both form and content.

It is Barth's formal understanding of transcendence, in these ways both Kantian and Reformed, that Bonhoeffer rejects when he applies the criticism of Kant's limit to Barth. Read with Bonhoeffer's treatment of philosophy and the confessional background

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[1] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 88.

[2] Ibid..

[3] Ibid., 95-6.

[4] Ibid., 171-2.

of Barth's theology in mind, Bonhoeffer's second criticism of Barth is less a frontal assault on Barth's limit than an indirect attack through Barth's understanding of transcendence as reflected in his concepts of God and revelation. Bonhoeffer asks, can God's revelation be a limit on humanity if the content of that revelation is nothing more than 'God reveals'? Is not revelation, so conceived, dangerously close to a limit only in thought? A genuine limit, argues Bonhoeffer, is not a limit in thought, but a limit in history, a limit that addresses the historically existing human from within history. God's word limits only as the word of a God who *is*. God's act limits only as the act of God's historical being. "There is a boundary only for a concrete human being it its entirety, and this boundary is called *Christ*."[1]

On both of Bonhoeffer's criticisms of Barth, then, Barth's original sin is the act-character of his theology. Specifically, Barth's subjective concept of God and act-concept of revelation leave no room for portraying either God or revelation in historical continuity. On the first criticism, this discontinuity on the level of revelation produces further discontinuities on the level of anthropology and epistemology. This is a failure in the face of the problem of historical existence. On the second criticism, the discontinuity on the level of revelation leads directly to the failure in the face of the problem of transcendence. A God who 'is' only in acts of revelation, and therefore only in acts of faith, comes too close to Kant's transcendent which 'is' only in the act of thought. A true limit must have some being independent of the believer's act of belief. On either or both of these criticisms, the perceived failures of Barth's theology push Bonhoeffer onward to an alternative concept of revelation.

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 45.

Chapter 6 : Bonhoeffer's Alternative to Barth

Life in the church

Whether Barth's failure in the face of the problem of historical existence is direct or mediated through his failure to solve the problem of transcendence, this much is clear: Bonhoeffer finds Barth's act-theology, because of its thin concept of revelation, ill equipped to deal with what Bonhoeffer, following Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), calls the 'totality of life.'[1] Barth's act-theology, in the attempt to secure God's transcendence, leaves little room for theorizing the fullness of historical, Christian life.

Bonhoeffer thinks his own person-concept of revelation can better account for the fullness of life because, as this chapter details, the life of the Christian community rests in and is formed by the fact of the person of Christ. Therefore, to understand revelation as the person of Christ, that is, as the coordination of act and being, is to understand the Christian life as one *acted upon* from outside in its historically continuous *being*. Because the Christian life has the form of the person of Christ, a phenomenological analysis of the Christian life articulates the person-concept of revelation. By examining the fullness of life as conditioned by revelation, Bonhoeffer hopes to articulate the person-concept of revelation that suffices for theorizing not only transcendence but also historical existence.

As I present Bonhoeffer's analysis of Christian life in the church – what he calls 'being in Christ' or 'being in the church' – it will be necessary to remember that he operates with three levels of concepts: revelation, anthropology, and epistemology. But it

[1] Ibid., 66, 72, 123.

is equally important to remember that Bonhoeffer arrives at his conceptualizations of these three levels through an examination of the fullness of life, where revelation and human being and knowing are inextricably intertwined. It is unavoidable, then, that an examination of Bonhoeffer's concept of revelation touches on his anthropology and epistemology. I try to present the material hospitably by pointing to the distinctions among these conceptual levels without obscuring the interconnections among them. I hope this reflects what I take to be Bonhoeffer's task: developing adequate theological concepts on these three levels through an examination of being in Christ.

At the foundation of Bonhoeffer's articulation of his theological concepts are two observations about being in Christ. First, Bonhoeffer describes an act-aspect of life in the church. "In order to 'become' members of the church, human beings must believe, this being understood not as a human possibility but as God's gift."[1] This observation points to the act-character of anthropology; the act of belief grounds the believer's being. Moreover, this same observation points to the act-character of revelation, since the act of belief is no 'human possibility' but rather 'God's gift.' Bonhoeffer's analysis of life in the church shows, first, that anthropology and revelation are grounded in act.

Second, Bonhoeffer describes a being-aspect of life in the church. "Faith has, as its presupposition, being in the church." This points to a being-aspect of anthropology, where the believer's act of faith points to the believer's 'already being in the church' as its presupposition. Whenever the believer believes, the believer 'is' already in Christ and the church. Faith "invariably discovers itself already in the church." It is not only that the believing act grounds being in Christ, as the previous insight urges. Being in Christ

[1] Ibid., 117.

grounds the believing act. This being-aspect of the believer's life further implies a being-aspect of revelation. "To believe means much the same as to find God, God's grace, the community of faith of Christ already present."[1] God not only reveals God's self in discrete acts, but is somehow available, present and 'haveable' ('*habbar*'[2]) in the church. God in revelation has the continuity of being, both preceding and following the act of revelation and belief. To the conclusions of the first observation, that anthropology and revelation are grounded in act, Bonhoeffer's second observation adds that anthropology and revelation are also grounded in being.

Theology will not be able to think about the fullness of the life of the church if it gives logical priority either to act or being. Rather, theology must coordinate act and being as mutually grounding. But while both revelation and anthropology manifest the unity of act and being, the act-being unity of revelation grounds the act-being unity of anthropology.[3] If theology hopes to describe the fullness of life, it must give expression both to the coordination of act and being in revelation and anthropology, and to the priority of revelation over anthropology.

The concept of revelation

This raises the question of how to conceive of revelation. Specifically, how can one concept of revelation capture both the act- and being-aspects of the reality of revelation as manifest in 'being in Christ'? From what we have seen so far, act-thinking seems incapable of incorporating being-aspects of reality (hence the problem of historical

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., 91. Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein*, 85.

[3] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 118.

existence), and being-thinking seems incapable of incorporating act-aspects of reality (hence the problem of transcendence). Bonhoeffer offers 'person' as the concept that captures both these aspects of revelation.

Understanding what 'person' means for Bonhoeffer requires locating it within the constellation of other formal concepts in *Act and Being*. First, Bonhoeffer relates person to 'act' and 'being' by understanding person as manifesting the coordination of act- and being-characteristics. In person, act grounds being *and* being grounds act such that a person is "never in being without act, and never in act without being."[1] Because person carries both act- and being-characteristics, it best describes revelation, which encounters human existence as an act while existing in historical continuity.[2] Person is the unity of act and being.

Person can be located, second, in relationship to 'subject' and 'object.' Defined formally as the unity of act and being, person is for Bonhoeffer something other than both subject and object, since an object is being without act, and a subject is essentially act without being. Bonhoeffer therefore recognizes three modes of being: subjective non-being, objective being, and person-being (*Personsein*). Person unites the desiderata of subject and object. A person, unlike a subject, has historically continuous being. A person, unlike an object, escapes the power of the mind and is therefore free to encounter existence.[3] The entire argument of *Act and Being* unfolds by unpacking the implications

[1] Ibid., 159.

[2] Ibid., 114.

[3] Ibid., 114-5.

of the concept of person, defined as the unity of act and being and therefore as a third option beyond subject and object.

It is this concept of person that forms the crux of Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth's theology and the foundation of his alternative to it.

> It is a fateful mistake on Barth's part to have substituted for the concept of creator and lord that of the subject … [T]he ultimate inadequacy of this definition lies in the fact that it finally fails to understand God as person.[1]

The issue of whether to conceive of God as subject or person can be understood as the crucial difference between Barth's and Bonhoeffer's theology only if we recall that Barth and Bonhoeffer differ on their concepts of person, and specifically on their accounts of the christological person.

Because Barth understands the christological person as the incarnate Logos,[2] his christological person is analogous to Kant's transcendental subject. On Kant's anthropology, the human person is a composite of both transcendental and empirical subjectivity. The empirical subject is the subject of the phenomenal realm, a participant in the world of space and time, subject to causation, and knowable by observation. But the empirical subject is no explanation for person-like actions, those that involve freedom and moral agency. The seat of such actions is the transcendental subject, which occupies the noumenal realm, is free from the strictures of space and time, and therefore cannot be known directly. The transcendental subject can be known indirectly, however, since its free actions produce knowable effects in the empirical world. As Kant's transcendental

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[1] Ibid., 125.

[2] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 90.

subject relates to the empirical subject, so Barth's divine person relates to the human nature. Barth's christological person is a subject.[1]

For Bonhoeffer, by contrast, person is a mode-of-being alternative to subject. Unlike a subject, which Bonhoeffer understands as an a-historical non-being that acts, a person is a historical being who acts. Here the philosophical correlate is not Kant's person but Heidegger's *Dasein*, where act and being are both fully in the world. And the theological prototype of this concept of person is the Lutheran person of Christ, the one who so fully enters history that his essence is his historical existence. Only when person is recognized as an alternative to subject can the disjunction of subject or person be seen as the crucial distinction between Bonhoeffer and Barth. The original sin of Barth's theology, from Bonhoeffer's perspective, is failing to understand God as person in Bonhoeffer's sense.

The disjunction is not simply between subject and person, of course, but between two sets of concepts that cluster around these two concepts of God. On the one side is Barth's act-theology, which consists of the act-concept of revelation, the subjective concept of God, and the formal account of freedom. On the other side is Bonhoeffer's person-theology – his person-concept of God, person-concept of revelation, and

[1] Barth can therefore use 'person' and 'subject' in apposition, e.g., Ibid., 156. Bruce McCormack also notes the analogy between Barth's incarnate Logos and Kant's transcendental subject. As he puts it, "the subject of this human life – we may liken this to Kant's conception of an unintuitable, noumenal self – was at every point the Second Person of the Trinity," McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 327.

substantial account of freedom.[1] It must be recalled that while Bonhoeffer's and Barth's theologies are alternatives, they are alternatives only because they share basic commitments. In a sense, they are alternative answers to the same questions. To say Bonhoeffer develops an alternative to Barth, therefore, is to say that he both follows and diverges from Barth's project.

That Bonhoeffer both follows and diverges from Barth is clear, first, insofar as subject and person are alternative accounts of God's non-objectivity.[2] From Bonhoeffer's perspective, Barth chooses a subjective account of God's non-objectivity because, in rejecting an objective account of God, Barth fails to recognize a third option beyond subject or object. Bonhoeffer articulates this third option by distinguishing between 'objective being' and 'person-being' (*Personsein*).[3] Only the former is theologically problematic, since then "the nature of God and the nature of man [are]

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[1] For Bonhoeffer, the concepts of God and revelation are identical – they are both person – because God fully enters history in revelation. For Barth, the concepts of God and revelation are not identical – they are subject and act respectively – because God remains outside of history even as God reveals in history. Put in confessional terms, Bonhoeffer affirms the Lutheran *Logos totus in carne est*, while Barth affirms the Reformed *Logos totus in carne est et totus extra* (i.e., the *extra calvinisticum*).

[2] Bonhoeffer credits Barth with recognizing the need to speak of God in terms of non-objectivity, Bonhoeffer, "Geschichte," 202.

[3] "What is called 'the outside' of personal revelation … is essentially different from the category of 'there is' … There is no God who 'is there'; God 'is' in the relation of persons, and being is God's being person," Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 115. "Einen Gott, den 'es gibt,' gibt es nicht; Gott 'ist' im Personbezug, und das Sein ist sein Personsein," Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein*, 112. As I discuss in the next chapter, Bonhoeffer uses the phrase 'there is' (*es gibt*) to refer to objects.

spoken of in a theoretical and objectifying way."[1] Person-being, however, is historically continuous and, on account of its act-characteristics, resists the power of the mind. Only with person, argues Bonhoeffer, "could the nonobjectivity of God be given clear philosophical expression and could objectivity be repudiated."[2] Subject and person are alternative expressions of the non-objectivity of God.

To say that Bonhoeffer and Barth develop alternative non-objective concepts of God is to say that they develop alternative concepts of contingent revelation. And the problem of contingent revelation, which Barth sees as "more urgent than ever before"[3] and which Bonhoeffer places at the heart of *Act and Being*, relates directly to the issue of God's freedom. Therefore, Bonhoeffer's and Barth's alternative concepts of God and revelation reflect their alternative concepts of God's freedom. The discontinuities in Barth's theology lead Bonhoeffer to ask whether Barth's "formalistic-actualistic understanding of the freedom and contingency of God in revelation is to be made the foundation of theological thought." [4] Bonhoeffer offers instead a 'substantial' account of freedom, where God is not free *from* but rather free *for* humanity. Here God's freedom consists in binding God's self to humanity in revelation. This alternative between formal and substantial freedom is an extension of the alternative between the concepts of God and revelation, since a subjective God acts in formal freedom, while a personal God acts and 'is' in substantial freedom.

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 101.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 94.

[3] Barth, "The Doctrinal Task of the Reformed Churches," 260.

[4] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 90-1.

As both Barth and Bonhoeffer express on multiple occasions, these alternative concepts of freedom and contingency are Reformed and Lutheran alternatives. Barth finds it worthwhile to visit the old debates between the Reformed and Lutherans precisely because they bring the problem of God's contingency in revelation to clear expression. For his part, Barth defends the Reformed emphasis on God's transcendence, while accusing Lutheran theology of discounting God's transcendence.[1] And when Bonhoeffer objects to Barth's formal account of freedom, he does so on Lutheran grounds. God's honor rests not in transcendence from history but rather, as Luther put it, "in giving the divine self for our sake in deepest condescension."[2] The alternative between a formal and substantial account of freedom repeats the polemics of the classical debates.

In these and other ways, Bonhoeffer develops an alternative answer to a question posed by Barth's theology: How can theology respect in its basic concepts the freedom and non-objectivity of God? Barth's act-theology seeks to protect God's transcendence

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[1] Barth, "The Doctrinal Task of the Reformed Churches," 257.

[2] Immediately after introducing Barth's formal account of freedom, Bonhoeffer footnotes Luther's account of freedom as an alternative. Citing Luther, "It is the honor of our God, however, that, in giving the divine self for our sake in deepest condescension, entering into flesh and bread, into out mouth, heart and bowel and suffering for our sake, God be dishonorably handled, both on the altar and cross," Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 82; Martin Luther, "That These Words of Christ, 'This is my Body,' etc., Still Stand Firm against the Fanatics," in *Word and Sacrament III*, Luther's Works 37 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 72. Bonhoeffer presents this alternative between the Barthian and Lutheran concepts of God's freedom again in the history lectures. After introducing Barth's "radical concept of God's freedom," Bonhoeffer alludes to the same passage from Luther, "Over against this stands the Lutheran position: it is God's freedom and honor to have bound himself entirely to the word. Not freedom from but freedom for," Bonhoeffer, "Geschichte," 211.

even in revelation. Bonhoeffer's person-theology seeks to portray God's transcendence as transcendence fully in history, setting the foundation for a theology oriented both to God and to the world, a theology that solves the problem of act and being.

The problem of act and being

Revelation as person

Bonhoeffer's solution to the problem of act and being develops from the concept of revelation outward through anthropology and epistemology. Because person coordinates act and being, Bonhoeffer finds it uniquely suited to describe revelation, which encounters humanity from outside (revelation's act-aspect) while existing in historical continuity (its being-aspect). In this way, person overcomes the problems inherent in act-concepts of revelation, which offer existential encounter without continuity, and being-concepts of revelation, which offer continuity without existential encounter. "The being of revelation must, therefore, have a kind of being that satisfies the two indicated claims [existential encounter and continuity]. We understand the person … to be such a kind of being."[1] Person, as a concept of contingent revelation in continuity, is the conceptual foundation for a theology that solves the problem of act and being.

One might wonder whether person solves the problem of act and being too neatly. Bonhoeffer's portrayal of the problem of act and being as a stubborn one seems to rest on

[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 122.

the notion that act and being are mutually exclusive,[1] for only then does an act-theology struggle to account for being-aspects of reality, as a being-theology struggles to portray the act-aspects of realty. In light of this apparent mutual exclusion, can Bonhoeffer simply define act and being together in person? Does he not, in essence, arbitrarily define the problem away? Given the apparent mutual-exclusivity of act and being, does not Bonhoeffer owe some account of 'how' act and being cohere in person?[2]

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[1] Bonhoeffer describes act as "alien to being," Ibid., 28. Cf., Tietz-Steiding, *Bonhoeffers Kritik*, 302.

[2] The following paragraphs can be read as a response to Christiane Tietz, who devotes some attention to the incoherence of Bonhoeffer's concept of person. Tietz argues that Bonhoeffer has two, incompatible accounts of how act and being relate in person. In some instances, Bonhoeffer presents person as '*both* act *and* being,' in other instances, as a third category that is '*neither* act *nor* being,' Ibid., 255-71, 301-2. I think that Bonhoeffer is more consistent that Tietz indicates. I read *Act and Being* with a distinction between two kinds of concepts: formal characteristics and modes of being. In chapter two, I defined act and being above all as formal characteristics. 'Act' and 'being' refer not primarily to 'acts' and 'beings,' but to act-characteristics (such as existentiality) and being-characteristics (such as continuity). On my reading, 'act' and 'being' are conceptually of a different class than 'subject' and 'object,' which are not primarily formal characteristics but rather modes of being. Given this distinction between formal characteristics and modes of being, 'person' (itself a mode of being) relates to 'act' and 'being' differently than to 'subject' and 'object.' As I have argued in the present chapter, person is a mode of being that unites act- and being- characteristics. Strictly speaking, then, person is *both* act *and* being, insofar as person unites act- and being-characteristics, while person is *neither* subject *nor* object, since it is a third mode of being. Reading *Act and Being* with this distinction between formal characteristics and modes of being rescues from incoherence some, though not all, of the passages to which Tietz points. But for a project like the present dissertation, which aims more at locating *Act and Being* in its argumentative context than at testing it for coherence, the generative question is not whether Bonhoeffer's solution is coherent, but rather

These problems with Bonhoeffer's understanding of person can be reframed if not eliminated when we remember the theological character of Bonhoeffer's argument. The purpose of the problem of act and being is not primarily to set up a general philosophical problem in search of a philosophical concept that brings a solution. Rather, the problem serves Bonhoeffer in his articulation of the proper concept of revelation. A theology that fails to solve the problem of act and being fails to reflect in its concept of revelation what Bonhoeffer understands to be the reality of revelation. Put otherwise, the problem of act and being is the criterion of criticism Bonhoeffer establishes for the proper description of revelation.

Therefore, if it seems that person implausibly reconciles apparently irreconcilable opposites, this may not be an error in Bonhoeffer's argument but rather its point. With person, Bonhoeffer points to revelation as that which alone unites irreconcilable opposites. The implausibility of person is a pointer to the miracle of revelation. Conversely, the very plausibility of act and being, with their distinguished philosophical pedigrees, counts against them as concepts of revelation, since they threaten to import this philosophical baggage onto the concept of revelation. It is this danger that Bonhoeffer points to when he associates act-theology and being-theology with act-philosophy and being-philosophy. Instead, the reality of revelation must yield categories of its own.[1]

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which intellectual tradition would nurture such a (even if incoherent) solution? For this reason, I focus here on the Lutheran provenance of Bonhoeffer's 'person.'

[1] I allude to Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 31. There Bonhoeffer says, "The concept of revelation must, therefore, yield an epistemology of its own" since "as interpretation of revelation in terms of act or in

Remembering the theological character of Bonhoeffer's argument in *Act and Being* requires more than distinguishing it from a philosophical argument; it requires recalling the confessional character of that theological argument. For while theologians of many stripes might agree on the miraculous character of revelation, they would disagree as to the most salient feature of that miracle. For example, labeling revelation an act asserts that the miracle of revelation consists primarily in its alterity, in its coming from outside as something radically new. An act-concept of revelation is appropriate for Reformed theology's emphasis on God's sovereignty. In contrast, labeling revelation as person asserts that the miracle of revelation is the reconciliation of otherwise irreconcilable opposites. With the Lutheran tradition, revelation is the person of Christ, the *simul* who unites all contradictions.[1] It is to be expected that, on the latter account of revelation, the philosophical incoherence (or theological mystery, depending on the perspective) would accumulate around the question of 'how' act and being come together in person. It may be that some of this incoherence rests in Bonhoeffer's inconsistent use

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terms of being yields concepts of understanding that are incapable of bearing the whole weight of revelation."

[1] Lienhard writes this of Luther's portrayal of Christ in his first commentary on the Psalms: "It is in him that all the opposites find their unity. The Commentary teems with dualism and paradox: spiritual/carnal; hidden/manifest; invisible/visible; heavenly/terrestrial; interior/exterior. All these paradoxes and tensions find their unity, and, from the point of view of eschatology, their solution in Jesus Christ: '*Fere omnis contradictio hic conciliator in Christo,*' Christ is the *simul* who unites all contradictions: God and humanity, judgment and grace, etc. And he is that, not only as an image or figure of an ultimate unity that lies beyond him. But he is in truth that place where all these things and contradictions have found their unity!" Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 43.

of terms or inattention to relevant distinctions. But it is also the case that he aligns himself with a theological tradition that contents itself with asserting rather than explaining the conjunction of opposites in the person of Christ.

On this point, the argumentative parallels between *Act and Being* and "Christology" are instructive. In both cases, Bonhoeffer reads the definition of person off revelation. In both cases, the result is a coordination of what otherwise might be conceived as opposites: divine and human, transcendence and historical existence, act and being. In both cases, the person of Christ is the starting point of theological reflection behind which one cannot go. From an intellectual historical perspective, then, the productive response to the incoherence in Bonhoeffer's position is to ask, 'In which theological tradition would such a philosophical incoherence be theologically justified?' The answer is the Lutheran tradition, which asserts the fact of the historical person of Christ as the mysterious union of opposites beyond which theological thinking must not venture. Bonhoeffer rests his theology on this 'Who?,' leaving aside any account of 'How?' act and being cohere in person.

Revelation, Christ, and the church

Since, as the above preliminary analysis of the church indicates, the church is the place where revelation meets humans, Bonhoeffer's understanding of the church must receive consideration under both the category of revelation and the category of anthropology. In thinking about revelation in the church, attention shifts from the formal structure of revelation to the concrete instantiation of that form in the person of Christ existing as the church.

As Bonhoeffer argues in "Christology," the definition of person derives from the fact or reality of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the 'Ur-person' who provides the definition of both person and revelation. As the logos narrative of "Christology" shows, it is in the encounter with the person of Jesus Christ, the one who encounters in history, that sinners first meet revelation. Jesus Christ is the original, concrete person.

In locating revelation above all in the person of Christ, Bonhoeffer distinguishes his position from 'I-thou' thinking, which he reads as locating revelation primarily in the human neighbor. Bonhoeffer learns to appreciate 'personalism' through Eberhard Grisebach (1880-1945), Friedrich Gogarten and Hinrich Knittermeyer (1891-1958), but he criticizes these thinkers for absolutizing the claim of the 'thou,' for simply transferring the power of the idealist subject to the 'thou.' In other words, the 'thou' functions as another limit set by the subject itself, and therefore is susceptible to the criticism against all such limits. In place of this generic, neighborly philosophy of encounter, Bonhoeffer advocates a specifically christological one: "The meaning of the gospel is that the claim of the neighbor has been fulfilled once and for all in Christ."[1] Only in the divine other does a 'thou' genuinely encounter an 'I.'

The person of Christ, continues Bonhoeffer, exists as the church.[2] Christ binds himself personally to the church, especially in the sermon and sacraments. Bonhoeffer, retrieving the ecclesio-sociological categories he develops in *Sanctorum Communio,* describes Christ as "the corporate person [Gesamtperson] of the Christian community of

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 88.

[2] "Christ exists as community," (*Christus als Gemeinde existierend*); "God reveals the divine self in the church as person," Ibid., 112. "Christ, as person, is present in the church," Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 43.

faith."[1] The same unity of act- and being-characteristics of the person of Christ – that he encounters as act from outside while remaining 'haveable' in continuity – transfers to Christ-as-community. The church too is an act-being unity (*Akt-Seinseinheit*[2]). On the one hand, the being-aspect of revelation is maintained in the church because Christ binds himself to the church as a person (rather than in acts) and therefore in historical continuity.[3] On the other hand, because Christ binds himself to the church as person rather than as being, the church has the capacity to encounter as an act.[4] The church is revelation, the unity of act and being.

Anthropology

Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology, which follows from his analysis of the church, delivers a solution to the problem of act and being on the anthropological level. Recall that the first insight of this analysis is an actualist one, showing redeemed human being to be grounded in the divine act of revelation and the corresponding human act of faith. The second insight adds, "Faith always comes upon a being that is prior to the act."[5] Being also grounds act. These two insights taken together show the structure of

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 111. Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein*, 108.

[2] Ibid., 105.

[3] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 111.

[4] Ibid., 114. "Only through the person of Christ can the existence of human being be encountered … But as the person of Christ has been revealed in the community of faith, the existence of human beings can be encountered only through the community of faith." In the church, "other persons themselves even become Christ for us."

[5] Ibid., 117.

redeemed human existence to be a coordination of act and being. Human being in the church exists in "existentiality and continuity"[1]; human being has the structure of person.

Based on this, Bonhoeffer portrays the communal new I, the individual new I, and the total I in existentiality and continuity. First, Bonhoeffer portrays the communal new I as the unity of act and being. Just as Christ's binding himself to the church in word and sacrament guarantees the existentiality and continuity of revelation, so the reception of word and sacrament by the church guarantees its continuity as the encountered communal I. "If the individual were the hearer of the sermon, the continuity would be in danger. But it is the church itself that hears the word of the church, even if I did not hear in each instance. In this manner, preaching is always heard."[2] Because revelation is always heard, the community is constantly acted upon and thereby maintains its structural unity of act and being.

Second, the new I's continuity is guaranteed by virtue of its participation in the church. There "I am encountered (*pati*), therefore I am (*esse*), therefore I believe (*agere*)."[3] By mediating the continuity of the individual new I through the continuity of the communal I, Bonhoeffer puts his specifically Christian sociology, developed in *Sanctorum Communio*, to work in solving the problem of historical existence at the level of the new I. From this vantage point, the failure of act- and being-theologies on this count rests on their individualistic orientation: they "pointed to the individual human being and for that reason failed."[4]

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[1] Ibid., 121.

[2] Ibid., 113.

[3] Ibid., 121. Translation altered.

[4] Ibid., 113.

Third, the total I's continuity is guaranteed by the church. Recall that Bonhoeffer accuses Barth of failing to deliver the continuity of the total I, since Barth's 'faith' is oriented away from revelation and toward reflection on the new I's identity with the old I. For Bonhoeffer, by contrast, faith need not direct itself to the self's disunity, since faith finds itself already grounded in the unity of the self. Bonhoeffer's 'faith' avoids the dynamics of reflection to which Barth's is condemned.[1] Expanding on Bonhoeffer's account of faith leads into his epistemology.

Epistemology

Bonhoeffer undertakes a phenomenological analysis of the church to articulate his theological concepts because the concept of revelation is available only to theological thinking,[2] and because theological thinking is only possible for those who exist in revelation.[3] Therefore, the concept of revelation that is decisive for theology comes only through an examination of those who exist under revelation. Presupposed in this strategy is an epistemological distinction between an implicit, existential knowledge of revelation and an explicit, objective or propositional knowledge of revelation. Implicit knowledge of revelation belongs to believers by virtue of their existence in revelation. Reflection on this implicit knowledge produces explicit knowledge of revelation. To this distinction between implicit, existential knowledge and explicit, objective knowledge corresponds Bonhoeffer's distinction between 'faith' and 'theology.' Faith and theology each have their own epistemological characteristics and require separate analyses.

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[1] Ibid., 100.

[2] Ibid., 79.

[3] "[O]nly those who have been placed into the truth can understand themselves in truth," Ibid., 81.

Bonhoeffer's account of faith and theology employs two overlapping distinctions. The first is the distinction among "three distinct ways of knowing" in the Christian life: "the *believing,* the *preaching,* and the *theological* ways of knowing."[1] In making the second distinction, Bonhoeffer borrows from classical Protestant dogmatics the contrast between *actus directus* and *actus reflectus*[2]: "In the former, consciousness is purely 'outwardly directed,' whereas in the latter, consciousness has the power to become its own object of attention, conscious of its own self in reflection."[3] The two distinctions map onto each other in the following way: *actus directus* operates in believing knowing while *actus reflectus* governs preaching and theological knowing. Faith, then, is believing knowing characterized by *actus directus,* and theology is theological knowing characterized by *actus reflectus*.

With these distinctions, Bonhoeffer portrays faith as a temporal and continuous mode of existential knowing that does not bring revelation under the power of the human mind. The relevant contrast here is with Barth, who, since objective knowledge occurs in

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[1] Ibid., 126.

[2] Bonhoeffer seems to have discovered this distinction in, Franz Delitzsch, *A System of Biblical Psychology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890), 407-17. Delitzsch's main source was the Danish theologian Erik Pontoppidan (1698-1764), Tietz-Steiding, *Bonhoeffers Kritik,* 280, fn. 55. Bonhoeffer cites Pontoppidan, Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being,* 160, fn. 31. Consistent with his rejection of psychologism, Bonhoeffer is careful to recapture what he sees as the original theological definition of the terms in contrast to Delitzsch's psychological interpretation, saying, "a theological interpretation has to take the place of a psychological one," Ibid., 160.

[3] Ibid., 28. See also: "*Actus directus* is the form of consciousness in which the intentionality directed by Christ is directed toward Christ." *Actus reflectus* is "the form of consciousness in which I make my faith discoverable [*vorfindlich*] to myself," Bonhoeffer, "Theologische Psychologie," 185.

time, protects revelation from objectification through the timelessness of both revelation and faith. For Barth, revelation is the non-objective act of God, with the necessary consequence that human reception of that revelation in faith, however we might talk about it, also occurs outside of time.[1] For Bonhoeffer, both revelation (the person of Jesus Christ) and faith are fully in time. Whereas Barth protects revelation from entrapment in human cognition through the timelessness of faith, Bonhoeffer protects it through the intentionality of faith as *actus directus*. Revelation escapes the power of the reflecting I, because revelation is known in the intentionality of faith, and this intentionality is not accessible to reflection.[2] Reflection's displacement of the intentionality of faith does not compromise the continuity of faith, however, since faith continues as implicit or unconscious faith.[3] Faith is an existential, historical mode of knowing that protects revelation from the dynamics of reflection.

The introduction of reflection, in other words, marks the transition from believing, existential knowing to theological, objective knowing. In the shift from intentional believing knowing to reflective theological knowing, the object of knowledge shifts from the present person of Christ to the past words of Christ. Theology's "object is all the happenings held in remembrance in the Christian community of faith; in the Bible; in preaching and sacrament, prayer, confession; in the word of the person of Christ, which is

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 99-100.

[2] Ibid., 100.

[3] This is especially clear in Bonhoeffer's comments on infant baptism, where he describes the child as having faith without consciousness of it, Ibid., 159.

preserved as something that exists in the historical church."[1] Theology's object is not person-being but objective being.

In contrast to Barth, then, Bonhoeffer's 'theology' knows objects in the same way that other disciplines know objects. Theology makes non-dialectical, propositional assertions about its objects and incorporates these assertions into a system. "Dogmatic knowledge is positive knowledge reflecting on entities [*Seiendes*] and is, therefore, to be understood as fundamentally systematic." [2] In these regards – the reflective mode of knowledge, the 'existing' objects of knowledge, and the systematic structure of knowledge – theology is no different from philosophy, history, or other academic disciplines.[3] This is in contrast to Barth, for whom, as we have seen, even dogmatics has a dialectical structure out of respect for the act of revelation. For Barth faith and theology share the same object of knowledge: the subjective act of God revealed in objects. Faith knows this revelatory act in faith's own act, and theology respects the freedom of this act in a dialectical thought-form. For Bonhoeffer, faith and theology have different objects of knowledge. Faith is directed toward a person while theology is directed toward objects, incorporating them into a system.

Bonhoeffer's motivation for portraying faith as existential knowledge is clear. He aims to succeed where he thinks Barth fails, solving the problem of historical existence on the level of faith by treating both revelation and faith as historically continuous. But

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[1] Ibid., 130.

[2] Ibid., 130-1. Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein*, 128. The next chapter attends to the concept of 'entity' or 'existing thing.'

[3] "[T]heological thinking is in principle indistinguishable from profane thinking," Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 130.

does not this account of faith generate a problematic by-product, namely a concept of theology as objective, systematic knowledge? It is precisely this problem that Barth seeks to avoid through a dialectical thought-form. Dialectic is theology's expression of its own humility in the face of God's freedom. Through dialectic, theology both reminds itself and announces that it cannot grasp its object as other disciplines grasp theirs. We can imagine Barth asking Bonhoeffer, What happens to theology's humility if theology becomes a system?

Bonhoeffer argues that theology should express its humility not through a dialectical thought-form but through its proximity to the present person of Christ. Theology distinguishes itself from other disciplines not by the ontological status of its object or by the mode or structure of its knowing. Rather, it distinguishes itself by its 'obedience,' understood as its proximity to the present person of Christ in preaching.

> Because theology turns revelation into something that exists [*etwas Seiendem*], it may be practiced only where the living person of Christ is itself present and can destroy this existing [*Seiende*] knowledge or acknowledge it. Therefore, theology must be in immediate reference to preaching, helping its preparation, all the while humbly submitting to its 'judgment.'[1]

Theology becomes an ecclesial discipline through its relationship to the preached, present person of Christ.

This point leads to consideration of what Bonhoeffer calls 'preaching knowing.' Preaching knowledge, like theological knowledge, involves reflection. In that sense, preachers are theologians, and preaching depends on theology. What preachers know

[1] Ibid., 131.

theologically, however, are only assertions and words taken from the memory of the church – the dead words that do not encounter or create faith. Preaching rises above theology to deliver a living word because Christ binds himself to the community that imbues the office of preaching with its authority. "Preaching, as an office of the community of faith, has been given the promise that when preachers faithfully utter the 'words' and 'assertions' (pure doctrine! *recte docetur*), the living person of Christ declares itself in them by disclosing itself to the hearer."[1] Christ binds himself as person to the preacher's words. As a mode of knowledge by individuals, "the way of knowing of preachers, too, is reflexive; but as borne by the office, preaching is productive and authoritative."[2] The preacher's reflective knowledge, by virtue of its official function in the communal body of Christ, carries the living word, a word that lives because it is born in the person of Christ.

Preaching therefore occupies a middle place between believing and theological knowing. On the one hand, preaching stands in a reciprocal relationship to theology, both depending on it and judging it. While depending on theology, preaching has as its object the already spoken word. While judging theology, preaching has as its object the promised word carried in the person of Christ. On the other hand, preaching both rests on and supports believing knowing. Since preaching's authority rests in its office in the believing community, preaching rests on believing knowing. And since preaching delivers the present Christ to the believing community, preaching supports belief.

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[1] Ibid., 130.

[2] Ibid., 133.

In light of this, Barth's and Bonhoeffer's different accounts of theology's humility depend on their different accounts of God's freedom. For Barth, God's formal freedom as an acting subject requires a dialectical thought-form. But from Bonhoeffer's point of view, a dialectical thought-form denies the reality of the incarnation in which God becomes 'haveable' as person. Dialectical thinking, therefore, is another self-set limit characteristic of Barth's act-theology. A substantial account of God's freedom means God as person is 'haveable' in faith. Theology does not set its own limits through a dialectical thought-form but in its proximity to the real limit, the person of Christ.

Lutheran Heideggerianism

Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth's dialectic has surfaced at several points by now with reference to both *Act and Being* and "Christology." In place of Barth's dialectic, Bonhoeffer works with what I call a hermeneutical thought form, a form of thinking both indebted to Heidegger and tuned to a Lutheran account of the person of Christ.

We can think of two different philosophical approaches to thinking about parts and wholes. Speaking in broad strokes, Kant and the Kantian tradition are combinatory, joining individual parts into wholes, whereas, again speaking in broad strokes, Dilthey and the hermeneutical tradition are holistic, interpreting individual parts in terms of the whole.[1] Dilthey argued that Kant's synthetic model of thinking was inadequate for

[1] This contrast is apparent, for example, in Kant's and Dilthey's differing accounts of 'understanding.' "According to Kant, our experience of nature involves a discursive faculty of understanding (*Verstand*) that proceeds synthetically from partial representations to construct objective wholes … When Dilthey speaks of understanding, he means a very different process of *Verstehen*, which is concrete and develops historically. In so far as the *Verstehen* (understanding) of psychic life is based on

dealing with the historically continuous aspects of reality. On Kant's account, temporal continuity arises in experience synthetically, as the mind links discrete instances of experience together to create the experience of temporal continuity. Dilthey proposed an alternative account that incorporated temporality not by cobbling together discrete experiences, but by beginning with continuity as an essential feature of life and defining basic experience as a segment of life. Dilthey was able to define basic experience as essentially temporal because he worked analytically from the whole (life) to the part (experience).[1] Dilthey argued that a deep understanding of historical reality could not result from synthetic thought. Rather, historical thinking must proceed in a hermeneutical circle, working back and forth between the whole and its parts.

Barth's dialectic belongs in the Kantian combinatory or synthetic tradition, but with an important caveat – Barth's dialectic is an open synthesis. In contrast to what Barth considers philosophical dialectic, which synthesizes parts according to a rule of human thinking, theological dialectic maintains the distinction of parts in an effort to point to revelation as that which alone synthesizes those parts into a whole.[2] Barth's theology generally proceeds in this way, as the image of the Gothic vault from *Göttingen Dogmatics* illustrates.[3] In particular, Barth's christology is also synthetic, since it thinks

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lived experience it can be intuitive and proceed from the whole to the parts," Rudolf A. Makkreel, "Dilthey, Wilhelm," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London: Routledge, 1998), http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/DC020.

[1] Rudolf A. Makkreel, *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 8-9.

[2] Barth, "Fate and Idea in Theology," 51-60.

[3] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 320-1.

about the 'parts' (God and humanity) as distinct, coming together under God's act into a 'whole' (Jesus Christ).

Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth parallels Dilthey's criticism of Kant. Barth's open synthetic thought-form cannot account for what Bonhoeffer considers the basic fact of theological thinking, that God and humanity are together in Jesus Christ. Of course, Barth would counter that God and humanity 'are' not together in Jesus Christ; rather, they come together in an act. But Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth suggests that there is something wrong with such an account of Jesus Christ and such a concept of revelation, since they cannot make sense of the historical aspects of Christian existence. Bonhoeffer offers an alternative in which theology begins with the unity of God and humanity in Christ and proceeds to unpack the implications of that fact. In this way, Bonhoeffer thinks hermeneutically rather than dialectically.

In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer does refer several times to Dilthey but is far more indebted to another member of the hermeneutical tradition, Martin Heidegger.[1] In much of *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer makes Heidegger's philosophy fruitful for Lutheran theology. In asking the question of revelation through an examination of those who exist in revelation, Bonhoeffer's path of inquiry parallels Heidegger's inquiry into being via an analysis of *Dasein*. But Bonhoeffer's strategy for articulating the nature of revelation also reflects his negative evaluation of Heidegger. Because Heidegger conceives of *Dasein* in a theologically unacceptable way, an examination of *Dasein* cannot point to

[1] As Ralf Wüstenberg has shown, Bonhoeffer would later interact intensely with Dilthey's thought, Ralf K. Wüstenberg, *A Theology of Life: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Religionless Christianity*, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

revelation. In order for Bonhoeffer's examination of human existence to point to revelation, he will need to begin with those who exist in revelation, those who have their being in Christ.

This introduces a hermeneutical circle. Revelation is accessible only through those who exist in revelation, but the mode of existence in revelation can be articulated only in terms of revelation. A way into this circle is available, however, through the implicit knowledge of revelation that is an aspect of existence in revelation. Those who exist in revelation know, in some way, the nature of revelation. The process of articulating the nature of revelation involves circling hermeneutically between revelation and those who exist in it, gradually making explicit the latter's implicit knowledge of revelation.

This hermeneutical circle accounts for some of the difficulty in following the argument of *Act and Being*. The concept of revelation, the articulation of which is central to the argument, is presupposed before it is fully articulated. For example, Bonhoeffer's criticism of philosophy demonstrates that philosophy cannot arrive at a proper concept of revelation as something that, at a minimum, encounters from outside as an act. But that very criticism of philosophy's inability is possible only if Bonhoeffer already has some idea that revelation is something which encounters from outside as an act. Hence the circle: Bonhoeffer undertakes a criticism of philosophy based on a concept of revelation, and that criticism of philosophy aids in the articulation of that same concept of revelation.

The circuitous route by which Bonhoeffer articulates his concept of revelation is necessary in light of the problem of transcendence. One cannot know revelation as one knows an object of knowledge, for such knowing would blunt revelation's

transcendence.[1] Those who feel the weight of the problem of transcendence must develop elaborate strategies for uncovering the nature of revelation. Barth follows a transcendental approach, arriving at the nature of revelation by examining its conditions. Bonhoeffer follows a Heideggerian approach, uncovering the nature of revelation through an existential analysis of those who exist in revelation.

In this process, Bonhoeffer develops his own anthropology by theologically modifying Heidegger's on two counts. First, Bonhoeffer opens up Heidegger's closed-in anthropology toward transcendence. "Heidegger's philosophy is a consciously atheistic philosophy of finitude," where "finitude is conceived to be closed in."[2] Heidegger's finitude is, from a theological perspective, the wrong sort: a closed-in, self-referential finitude where *Dasein* has within itself the possibility to summon its own authentic existence. Opening up this finitude to transcendence requires incorporating the insights of Kant's transcendental anthropology into Heidegger's existential framework. *Dasein* must be portrayed not only as a unity of act and being (Heidegger's 'suspension'), but also in reference to a transcendent (Kant's 'reference').[3]

Transcendental and ontological anthropology co-exist only on the basis of revelation, however. Therefore, it is not so much that Bonhoeffer modifies Heidegger via Kant. Rather, he uses Heidegger's and Kant's concepts to express a theological, and specifically a Lutheran, anthropology. That is, Bonhoeffer in effect transports

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[1] Put otherwise, such elaborate approaches to describing the nature of revelation are necessary when revelation is understood to be self-authenticating.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 72-3.

[3] These are the two philosophical concepts that Bonhoeffer modifies theologically in order to solve the theological problem of transcendence, Ibid., 79.

Heidegger's *Dasein*, which is a two-term, act/being structure, into a three-term framework indicated by this dictum from Luther's *Lectures on Romans*: "being possesses priority over acting; however, being-acted-upon is before being. Therefore, being-created, being, [and] acting follow one on the other."[1] Human unity of act and being, to which Heidegger correctly points, must be understood not in reference to an empty or formal transcendent, as Kant has it, but in relationship to the one who creates it. Humans are a *created* act-being unity.

Humans are never simply creatures, however, but are always either creatures under sin or creatures under grace. This leads to Bonhoeffer's second modification of Heidegger's concept of 'being in,' namely the bifurcation of human being into two fundamental modes of being – 'being in Adam' and 'being in Christ.' For Bonhoeffer, these two modes of being are fundamentally determinative, rendering meaningless any talk of creatures independent of these qualifications. Creatures cannot simply 'be in the world,' since 'being in the world' is always already 'being in Adam' or 'being in Christ.' Human being is determined always by the contingencies of sin and grace. This 'being in

[1] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans, Glosses, and Scholia*, Luther's Works 25 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 105. Hyphens and '[and]' added for clarification. Luther's Latin and German terms for 'being acted upon,' 'being created,' 'being,' and 'acting' are *pati, fieri, esse, operari* and *Erleiden, Geschaffenwerden, Sein, Wirken.* Cited in, Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 116. The Luther quotation on its own seems to place priority on being before act. Bonhoeffer does not quote it to that effect, however, since that would undermine his claim that act and being are equiprimordial. Rather, the force of the Luther quotation for him is that being-created precedes the unity of act and being, i.e., that God's act of creation initiates the structure of human existence. In other words, Bonhoeffer's use of the Luther dictum should be seen against the background of his criticism of Heidegger, who affirms the unity of act and being but understands that unity as self-created, Ibid., 72-3.

Christ' is the mode of existence that Bonhoeffer examines to arrive at the basic concepts of his theology.

With this second modification, too, Bonhoeffer pushes Heidegger in a Lutheran direction. Luther understood the Genesis creation narrative to involve two moments of creation – one in which God creates formless matter, a second in which God forms that matter. In a similar way, Bonhoeffer understands humanity, first, as creature, and, second, as formed either toward Adam or toward Christ.[1] In this way, Bonhoeffer's terms 'being in Adam' and 'being in Christ' restate Luther's anthropology; they are more pointed ontological and more biblically based designations for this second aspect of human createdness, which Luther labeled *esse peccator* and *esse justus*.[2]

Bonhoeffer's Lutheran Heideggerianism is apparent not just in anthropology, but also in the concept of revelation, where the person-structure of Bonhoeffer's understanding of revelation mirrors the person-structure of Heidegger's *Dasein*. As Bonhoeffer sees it, Heidegger is able to coordinate act and being in *Dasein*, and therefore solve the philosophical version of the problem of act and being, because he "interprets being so much in terms of time that even God's eternity, if it could be at all philosophically conceived, would, in principle, have to be thought of as having been

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[1] In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer calls these two aspects of human createdness *Da-Sein* and *Wie-Sein*, Ibid., 136f., e.g. In *Creation and Fall*, he calls them *Dasein* and *Sosein*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas W. Stott, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 25, 38. It is in this latter work that Bonhoeffer follows Luther's account of creation. See, Ibid., 25, fn. 1

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 136.

drawn into time."[1] Heidegger interprets being in time, bringing together essence and existence. Bonhoeffer follows Heidegger's cues theologically by interpreting God as a person; God's being is in time. This decisive move sets the stage for Bonhoeffer to solve the *theological* version of the problem of act and being.

When put this way, the Lutheran provenance of Bonhoeffer's person-concept of revelation comes into view again. The person of Christ names the God whose being has been drawn into time through the incarnation. If God is to be understood from the person of Christ outward, there can be no reference to God's being outside of the temporal incarnation; there can be no Reformed *extra calvinisticum*. It is no coincidence, then, that Bonhoeffer uses the same terms to describe the 'person' in *Act and Being* and the 'person of Christ' in "Christology." Both are persons, unities of act and being. It is through this Lutheran Heideggerianism that Bonhoeffer delivers on one of the major goals of *Act and Being*, "to unify the concern of true transcendentalism and the concern of true ontology in an 'ecclesiological form of thinking.'"[2]

Bonhoeffer's theology is in part a response to Barth's charge that Lutheran thinking lacks the resources to portray God in transcendence. Bonhoeffer replies that Lutheran theology, rightly interpreted, does in fact solve the problem of transcendence and does so in a way that also solves the problem of historical existence. The Lutheran understanding of person provides a concept of revelation that not only portrays God as free from the power of the human mind but also grounds theological thinking about the historical aspects of Christian life. In other words, Bonhoeffer argues that the theological

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[1] Ibid., 71-2.

[2] Ibid., 32.

errors against which both Bonhoeffer and Barth define their theologies – those of being-theology or liberal theology – are better overcome through Bonhoeffer's Lutheran person-theology than through Barth's Reformed actualism. Based on this Lutheran person-thinking, Bonhoeffer criticizes being-theology (chapter seven) without sacrificing liberal theology's emphasis on concrete ethics (chapter eight).

Evaluating Bonhoeffer's alternative to Barth

The question inevitably arises as to whether Bonhoeffer's account of Barth's theology is accurate and whether his criticism is fair. On this count, the current consensus, as I discuss below, is this: Bonhoeffer's criticism in *Act and Being* of Barth is inaccurate to such a degree that it fails to point to the relevant differences between Bonhoeffer's and Barth's thought at that time. In contrast, I argue that while certain aspects of Bonhoeffer's account of Barth's theology are indeed inaccurate, the deeper logic of his argument nonetheless points to a significant difference between his thought, as Lutheran person-theology, and Barth's thought, as Reformed act-theology.[1] From an intellectual historical perspective, this difference is a genuine one, aiding in understanding the character, motivation, and goal of Bonhoeffer's theology as an alternative to Barth's. I can articulate my interpretation of Bonhoeffer's theological relationship to Barth at the time of *Act and Being* by contrasting it with two other recent interpretations by Charles Marsh and Christiane Tietz, both of which, I argue, mischaracterize both Barth's theology and Bonhoeffer's criticism of it.

[1] My treatment (in chapter five) of Bonhoeffer's second criticism of Barth's theology began to argue toward this conclusion.

Charles Marsh

According to Marsh, "Bonhoeffer's criticisms of [Barth's] dialectical writings" focus on this point: "if God is in revelation strictly as act, then the question arises of how one can speak of divine and human continuity." Marsh specifies four continuities in particular: "(1) God in himself (*a se*); (2) God in relation to the world (*ad extra*); (3) human community, or the continuity of the self and its others; and (4) human subjectivity in itself."[1]

Marsh argues that Barth could concede that Bonhoeffer's criticisms apply to Barth's pre-1931 theology, but that the developments in his theology after 1931 absorb these criticisms.[2] Barth's 1931 "discovery of Anselm led to the recognition that ontological language – concepts of being – need no longer be dismissed in the theological task." As marked by the axiom "God's being is in act," Barth now uses "the language of being within the movement of God's prevenient acting."[3] Barth's new ontological thinking, argues Marsh, absorbs Bonhoeffer's criticisms in these two ways:

> First, the reality of God is no longer conceived in dialectical suspension from the world. The event of God is not deracinated from the being of the world, but brings the latter into itself. Second, Barth has taken seriously the problem [of continuity] endemic to dialectical theology … To the extent that continuities (2), (3), and (4) are determined within the context of continuity (1), that is, to the extent that all relationships outside of God are secured solely on the basis of the

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[1] Marsh, *Reclaiming Bonhoeffer*, 9.

[2] Ibid., 15.

[3] Ibid., 17.

internal relationality of the trinitarian God, Barth gives a compelling response to Bonhoeffer's objections.[1]

In making this case, Marsh relies on Hans Urs von Balthasar's influential thesis that Barth's 1931 study of Anselm marks a decisive turning point in Barth's development, a turn from 'dialectic' to 'analogy.'[2] But Balthasar's thesis does not enjoy the support of current Barth scholars. Bruce McCormack, a recent and particularly persuasive opponent of Balthasar's thesis, demonstrates that, in Barth's work on Anselm, "there is no new starting point, and no new thought-form," and that Barth never abandons his "early commitment to 'dialectical theology.'" In short, "There was no such turn."[3] I raise this point not to quibble about Barth interpretation, but because Balthasar's thesis leads down a false trail in the interpretation of Bonhoeffer's thought vis-à-vis Barth's. Specifically, Balthasar's thesis encourages consideration of *whether* and *when* in his intellectual development Barth uses ontological language. But this is the key neither to Barth's development nor to Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth.

Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth centers on 'person.' It is Barth's "fateful mistake" to understand God as subject and revelation as act.[4] Far better, argues Bonhoeffer, to think of both God and revelation as person. When the issue is framed in this way, the critical question addressed to Barth's theology is not whether and when but rather *how* and *where* in his theology Barth incorporates concepts of being into his

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[1] Ibid., 20.

[2] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Communio Books/Ignatius Press, 1992).

[3] McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 441, ix, vii.

[4] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 125.

theology. Put otherwise, how and where does Barth attempt to reconcile act and being? Posing the critical question to Barth's theology in these terms opens the way for the recognition that Barth and Bonhoeffer employ alternative strategies for incorporating ontology into theology, that these alternative strategies draw on differing traditions of Protestant theology, and that these alternatives carry with them different implications for the task of ethics.

Where and how, then, do Bonhoeffer and Barth incorporate ontology into their theologies? Barth grounds being in the inner-trinitarian life of God and Bonhoeffer grounds it in the historical person of Jesus Christ. Seeing these as genuinely alternative strategies requires correcting Marsh's attempt to locate Bonhoeffer's christological thinking within Barth's trinitarian thought. Central to Marsh's interpretation of Bonhoeffer is the claim that Bonhoeffer's christocentric thinking is an investigation into what Barth calls the secondary objectivity of God (God *ad extra*), and that this investigation presupposes as its background what Barth calls the primary objectivity of God (God *a se*, i.e., the immanent trinity).[1]

[1] "Barth's distinction between the primary and secondary objectivity of revelation, driven by the trinitarian logic of his advanced dogmatics reflections, provided Bonhoeffer with the theological framework within which to think [the continuities (1)-(4)] in reference to their christological coherence … Bonhoeffer pursues the inquiry of the secondary objectivity of revelation within the presupposition of Barth's narration of God's primary trinitarian self-identity. The failure of even the most sympathetic interpreters to situate Bonhoeffer's christocentric, 'christomorphic,' or 'christocratic' theology in a deeper trinitarian ground has the ironic effect of eviscerating Bonhoeffer of much of his theological sophistication and power," Marsh, *Reclaiming Bonhoeffer*, viii-ix.

Christiane Tietz decisively rejects Marsh's claim, rightly arguing that Bonhoeffer simply does not concern himself with the trinitarian being of God in itself; for Bonhoeffer, the locus of the unity of act and being is not the trinity but Christ.[1] As Bonhoeffer makes clear in "Christology," the person of Christ as the reconciliation of act and being is the starting point of theological reflection that precludes discussion of God abstracted from the person of Christ.

I go beyond Tietz, however, in arguing that this alternative between Barth's trinitarian thinking and Bonhoeffer's christocentric thinking ought to be read also in confessional-theological terms. Marsh can assert that Bonhoeffer's christocentrism operates within Barth's trinitarian structure in part because he largely dismisses the confessional aspect of the relationship between Bonhoeffer and Barth. Marsh is correct to move beyond what he calls "overly simplistic and reductionistic schemes" for interpreting this relationship, many of which carry confessional weight: "Lutheran versus Reformed, *theologia crucis* versus *theologia gloriae*, *finitum capax infiniti* versus *finitum non capax infiniti*, theologian of divine promeity versus theologian of divine aseity." Marsh wishes instead "to attend to the conversation between Bonhoeffer and Barth in a way that preserves its intricacy and narrative drama."[2] But attention to the intricacy of this conversation requires heeding not only its philosophical aspects (Marsh's focus[3]) but its confessional tone as well. Barth explicitly frames the trinitarian structure of his

[1] Tietz-Steiding, *Bonhoeffers Kritik*, 304-6.

[2] Marsh, *Reclaiming Bonhoeffer*, vii.

[3] Ibid., iv-vi.

theology as a strategy for avoiding "the exclusive 'Jesus Christ'-pit of the Lutherans."[1] Bonhoeffer in effect responds to Barth's trinitarian, Reformed thinking, first seriously articulated in *Göttingen Dogmatics*, by doubling down on 'the exclusive "Jesus Christ"-pit of the Lutherans,' arguing that it better funds a theological response to the problem of transcendence. So while it is correct that a simplistic reading of Barth and Bonhoeffer in 'Reformed versus Lutheran' terms reduces the complexity of their theological relationship, that confessional background is indispensible for any attempt to preserve that relationship's intricacy.

The Lutheran character of Bonhoeffer's christocentrism and the Reformed character of Barth's trinitarianism reverberate into their alternative christologies. Attention to the concept of person brings these christological differences to the foreground. For Barth, the person of christology is the Logos, the second person of the trinity. For Bonhoeffer, the person of christology is the historical God-man, Jesus Christ. So while Barth and Bonhoeffer both deploy traditional, Chalcedonian language about the unity of God and humanity in the person of Christ, they understand this 'unity' and 'person' in different ways. Barth speaks of two unities: the indirect union of the divine nature and human nature is mediated through the direct union of divine person (the Logos) and human nature. The unity of divine and human natures in the historical Jesus Christ, therefore, is a unity in act[2] and, for this reason, must be described dialectically.[1]

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[1] Barth's letter to Thurneyson, 20 April 1924, in Barth, *Barth - Thurneysen, II*, 245. Cf. McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 350f.

[2] Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil III*, 44.

Bonhoeffer, with what Barth would consider characteristically Lutheran disregard for the distinction between divine nature and divine person,[2] posits one immediate union in the person of the God-man. For this reason, christological thinking does not proceed dialectically (to maintain the distinction of God and humanity in Christ) but hermeneutically (by beginning with the unity of God and humanity in Christ).

These christological differences are not mere technicalities but rather go right to the heart of Bonhoeffer's dissatisfaction with Barth's theology, its inability to solve the problem of historical existence or, put more sharply, it inability to ground a concrete ethic. By locating the reconciliation of act and being and the reconciliation of God and humanity in the person of the Logos, Bonhoeffer would say, Barth defers this reconciliation to the other side of eternity. For this reason, Barth's ethics are shot through with eschatological reserve. From Bonhoeffer's perspective, such reserve betrays the reality of the reconciliation of God and humanity here and now in the historical person of Jesus Christ. The ground of Bonhoeffer's ethics is an understanding of the person of Jesus Christ that Barth rejects. Barth would not agree, as Marsh asserts, with this statement from Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*: "Whoever confesses the reality of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God confesses in the same breath the reality of God and the reality of the world, for they find God and the world reconciled in Christ."[3] By 'Christ,'

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[1] Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character," 132. Here again reliance on Balthasar's thesis can mislead. As Hunsinger demonstrates, dialectic (here understood as a mode of thinking) persists into Barth's *Church Dogmatics.*

[2] Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil III,* 37. For Barth's criticism of the Lutheran account of the personal union, see McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 363f.

[3] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 62. Marsh, *Reclaiming Bonhoeffer*, 22.

Bonhoeffer means the historical person of Jesus Christ. But for Barth, the reconciliation of God and world does not occur – except in an act, dialectically – in Jesus Christ, but in the person of the Logos. The reality of Jesus Christ does not admit of confession in one 'breath,' as the Lutherans claim, but rather requires "two human words."[1]

Given these confessional differences, it is too simple to say, as Marsh does, that Barth would concede Bonhoeffer's criticisms. For neither Bonhoeffer's criticisms of Barth nor Barth's theological development should be reduced to the question of whether Barth incorporates being-language and overcomes problems of continuity. Barth could very well concede Bonhoeffer's criticisms on the issues of being-language and continuity. But he would still see lurking in Bonhoeffer's own strategies for securing being-language and continuity the Lutheran errors against which Barth fortified his theology. To take just one of many possible examples, Barth would see in Bonhoeffer's rejection of a dialectical christology the old Lutheran error of "tear[ing] down that thin but real wall between God and the world which God both razes and reestablishes in Christ." Barth himself grounds being and continuity in the trinity, elaborating the Reformed counter-notion, the "notorious *Extra Calvinisticum.*"[2] On the other side, Bonhoeffer could very well concede that Barth's theology makes significant gains in deploying being-language and securing continuity. But he would likely remain dissatisfied that Barth grounds these gains elsewhere than the historical person of Christ. Bonhoeffer, with Luther, would find Barth's persistent appeal to God *a se* an affront to the incarnation, a human attempt to get back behind the God-man. Barth's reservations

[1] Barth, "The Doctrinal Task of the Reformed Churches," 256.

[2] Ibid., 256-7.

not withstanding, Bonhoeffer remains firm: "The starting point is given: the man Jesus *is* the Christ, *is* God."[1] In these ways, Barth and Bonhoeffer develop alternative strategies for incorporating being-language and continuity into theology.

Christiane Tietz

Christiane Tietz too mistakenly thinks Barth's supposed turn to analogy softens Bonhoeffer's criticism. According to Tietz, Bonhoeffer in *Act and Being* criticizes Barth as if Barth's theology were dialectical and purely act-oriented when in fact Barth has by that time moved beyond such a position. By the end of the 1920s, says Tietz, Barth portrays revelation itself as non-dialectical and therefore ascribes to it both act- and being-characteristics. Tietz treats the issue of non-dialectical revelation primarily with reference to Barth's essay "Church and Theology" (1926) and the issue of the act- and

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 98. To this one statement from "Christology," which captures so much of the theological pathos of *Act and Being*, Barth would protest in numerous ways. One way to put Barth's objection is in terms of 'the given.' Bonhoeffer here posits Jesus Christ as the given starting point [*Gegebenheit*] of theology, Bonhoeffer, "Christologie," 336. Barth, however, insists on the Reformed e*xtra Calvinisticum* to counter the Lutheran interpretation of revelation as *Gegebenheit*, Barth, "Reformierte Lehre," 235. And his trinitarian dogmatics draws a clear line between the given and its transcendental condition, which is always only indirectly revealed in that given. For example, human words about God are 'the given' [*das Faktum, das Gegebene*], and revelation is its transcendental precondition which stands on the other side of the boundary between time and eternity, Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 45, 319/Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil I*, 53, Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil II*, 3. Bonhoeffer, for his part, hopes to avoid the problems of treating revelation as a given by distinguishing between things given as objects (objective being) and revelation, which is given as person (person-being). Jesus Christ is a personal fact. Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 115.

being-characteristics of revelation primarily with reference to "Fate and Idea in Theology" (1929).[1]

By interpreting "Church and Theology" as a turning point in Barth's development, Tietz follows Eberhard Jüngel. Jüngel identifies a dialectical phase in Barth's thought that begins with Barth's identification of an 'inner dialectic of the thing' in the second edition of *Romans* and ends with the assertion of the non-dialectical character of revelation in "Church and Theology." Jüngel sees this dialectical phase of Barth's thought as characterized by a 'dialectic in the thing to be known,' i.e., what I, following Beintker, call a real dialectic.[2] On McCormack's reading, Barth does indeed abandon the claim in *Romans* that revelation itself is a dialectic, but this turn occurs earlier that Jüngel recognizes. The Reformed christology that Barth develops in *Göttingen Dogmatics* a year before "Church and Theology" requires him to abandon the claim that Christ is a paradox.[3]

But what is the significance of this change? Jüngel and Tietz think this constitutes some transition to analogy that softens the various diastases of Barth's theology. Tietz notes that where Barth operates in *Romans* with the diastases of 'God and world' and 'gospel and church,' he treats the church as a mediating third between

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[1] Tietz-Steiding, *Bonhoeffers Kritik*, 167-72.

[2] Eberhard Jüngel, "Von der Dialektik zur Analogie: Die Schule Kierkegaards und der Einspruch Petersons," in *Barth-Studien*, ed. Eberhard Jüngel (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 1982), 127-79.

[3] McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 370.

God and world in "Church and Theology."[1] What Tietz does not discuss is the character of the church as a mediating third. The church in "Church and Theology" is a mediating, real-dialectical third that does not set aside the diastasis of God and world. Barth establishes the paradigm of such indirect mediation in the christology of *Göttingen Dogmatics* (as developed in chapter three of the present work). There, just as in "Church and Theology," revelation itself (the person of the Logos) is non-dialectical in structure, but the mediator (Jesus Christ) is. The person of the Logos is an "undialectical point of unity" who triumphs over the antithesis of God and world without eliminating it.[2] Barth does not eliminate the diastasis between God and humanity but rather attends with increasing sophistication to the real-dialectical mediating structure that makes indirect revelation possible. In "Church and Theology," just as in *Göttingen Dogmatics,* Barth's assertion of non-dialectical revelation does not entail that the diastasis between God and humanity is overcome on earth.

That said, it is not clear to me how Barth's claim that revelation is not dialectical would in any way invalidate or soften Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth in *Act and Being.* Bonhoeffer does not describe Barth's revelation as a dialectic but as an act, and an act in itself is clearly not dialectical in structure. What Bonhoeffer does describe as dialectical is the thought-form that Barth thinks best respects an act-concept revelation. According to Bonhoeffer in *Act and Being*, Barth has an act-account (i.e., non-dialectical account) of

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[1] Tietz-Steiding, *Bonhoeffers Kritik*, 169-70. She refers to Karl Barth, "Church and Theology," in *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings, 1920-1928*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1962), 297-8.

[2] Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil III*, 56.

revelation and a dialectical thought-form. Bonhoeffer's description of Barth is born out by "Church and Theology" itself, where Barth writes,

> The revelation of which theology speaks is not dialectical, is not paradox. That hardly needs to be said. But when theology begins, when we men think, speak, or write … on the basis of revelation, then there is dialectic.[1]

So Barth's claim that revelation is non-dialectical, which Tietz cites as evidence that Bonhoeffer misreads Barth's position, actually conforms with Bonhoeffer's account of Barth's theology as a dialectical form of thinking in response to the act-character of God's revelation.

Neither does any appeal to Barth's supposed turn from dialectic to analogy soften Bonhoeffer's criticism, primarily because no such turn took place. Tietz appeals to this turn when she cites Barth's claim that theology rests on God's own speech.[2] Barth certainly does ground theology in the analogy between God's words and human words, but this analogy is itself dialectical in structure and realized in an act. Yes, human words participate in divine words,[3] but they do so according to the strictures of indirect revelation as realized in God's act.[4] The analogy of God's words and human words is itself a real dialectic.[5] Nor does Barth completely abandon dialectic as a thought-form

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[1] Barth, "Church and Theology," 299.

[2] She cites in this connection Jüngel, "Von der Dialektik zur Analogie," 178. Tietz-Steiding, *Bonhoeffers Kritik*, 169.

[3] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 212.

[4] Ibid., 215.

[5] This points to a central problem in the 'turn from dialectic to analogy' thesis, namely that analogy itself is inherently a dialectical structure, McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 16f.

after he begins employing analogies like these; as discussed, Barth speaks dialectically of Jesus Christ well into *Church Dogmatics.* "Church and Theology," interpreted as either Barth's introduction of non-dialectical revelation or as evidence of a turn from dialectic to analogy, does nothing to invalidate or soften Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth in *Act and Being*.

Tietz points to "Fate and Idea in Theology" for evidence that Barth speaks of revelation not only in terms of non-objectivity and non-givenness, but also in terms of objectivity and givenness. Evaluating Tietz's claim brings the discussion back to the issue of *how* Barth brings together non-objectivity and objectivity or act and being in theology.

With the terms 'fate' and 'idea,' Barth names the two limits of human thought. Human thinking, be it philosophical or theological, must reflect "upon the problem of how these two boundaries are related to one another, upon the question of their priority, and upon the problem of their higher unity." With this, Barth points to the same problem that concerns Bonhoeffer in *Act and Being*, since 'fate' and 'idea' are Barth's idiosyncratic terms for what could be described otherwise as "the objective and the non-objective" or "the conditioned and the unconditioned."[1] 'Fate' and 'idea' are 'being' and 'act.'[2]

And as Bonhoeffer later would do in *Act and Being*, Barth discusses two types of thinking that privilege one side of this conceptual pair over the other. From Barth's discussion of medieval realism and modern romanticism, which place priority on fate or

[1] Barth, "Fate and Idea in Theology," 25.

[2] Ibid., 36.

being, and medieval nominalism and modern idealism, which place priority on idea or act, it emerges that thinking requires both fate and idea. If theology asks where or who or what God is, it must proceed at least some distance down the realist path and somehow speak of God's objectivity and givenness.[1] However, if theology is to remember that all human statements about where or who or what God is are inadequate, then it must in some way also take the idealist path and somehow speak of God in terms of non-givenness and non-being.[2] So Tietz is entirely correct to say that Barth recognizes the need to speak, and himself does speak, of both God's givenness and non-givenness. Barth recognizes the need to bring together being and act.

But this recognition is little more than the presupposition for asking the question that drives the logic of "Fate and Idea": *How* should theology bring together being and act? This is in fact for Barth the decisive question of theology, since whether theology "is good theology or not depends on how this inclusion is brought about, not on the inclusion itself."[3] In answering this question, Barth draws a contrast between philosophy and theology. All philosophy, whether it privileges being or act, brings being and act together "by advancing a synthesis, a superior and reconciling principle."[4] Theology, on the other hand, "must refrain from all reaching … for a synthesis … because this contradiction [of being and act] has been placed in the world of thought and existence by

[1] Ibid., 35.

[2] Ibid., 44.

[3] Ibid., 52.

[4] Ibid., 53.

God's Word as something it and only it resolves."[1] Theology brings together act and being only when God brings together act and being in revelation.

Here too, it must be said, Bonhoeffer and Barth are in general agreement. For both of them, philosophy's error is its use of thought to join what only God's revelation can join. However, this agreement points directly to their fundamental disagreement on the concept of revelation. How, in "Fate and Idea," does Barth understand revelation? As he says, the unity of act and being "occurs only in God's Word."[2] And as he specifies shortly thereafter, "God's Word means God's election."[3] In "Fate and Idea," Barth does not elaborate on the doctrine of election or predestination; he simply points to it as a focus of a theology that maintains God's revelation as that which brings together act and being. Nonetheless, the details of Barth's doctrine of election at this time are available in *Göttingen Dogmatics*.

In *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth outlines his doctrine of election as a reiteration of what he considers the traditional position common to Reformed, Lutheran, and Catholic theologians: "eternal, unconditional, twofold predestination." In eternity, God freely elects and rejects. But Barth breaks from the tradition in a radically actualist direction by re-interpreting the 'eternity' of God's predestination. God's predestining act does not occur in the eternity that stands before time, so to speak, as the act that once and for all determines the course of time. Rather, "as eternal predestination, predestination is the divine decree in *act*, the divine *deciding* concerning us in which at every moment God is

[1] Ibid., 54.

[2] Ibid., 58.

[3] Ibid., 59.

free in relation to us and goes forward with us from decision to decision."[1] Barth interprets predestination as an act that, according to his redefinition of 'eternal,' God is free to revisit and revise.

Barth modifies the doctrine of predestination in this actualist direction to make room for God's freedom: "Predestination precisely as eternal predestination must not be confused with determination, with a decision regarding us whereby God has fixed his action for all time and is now the prisoner of his own decision …" In this decision, "divine freedom triumphs."[2] Barth rejects an understanding of predestination as determination (as 'fate,' i.e., as being!) in favor of an act-interpretation that better protects God's freedom. (Here one is tempted, with Bonhoeffer, to say 'formal freedom.') What little Barth says about predestination in "Fate and Idea" is consistent with the account from *Göttingen Dogmatics*.[3] Because God's Word is "free divine election," "no triumph will ever be mine. It will be God's alone … God's Word is not bound, nor ever will be bound."[4]

In "Fate and Idea," then, as in many other places, Barth discusses both act and being. He talks about both the truth of God and the reality of God, the freedom of God

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[1] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 454. Translation altered to reflect Barth's emphases: "Prädestination ist gerade als ewige Prädestination der göttliche Beschluß im *Akt*, das göttliche *Beschließen*," Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil II*, 184.

[2] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 454.

[3] According to McCormack, Barth's understanding of election as developed in *Göttingen Dogmatics* remains basically unchanged until 1936, when Barth recasts it christocentrically, McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 455f.

[4] Barth, "Fate and Idea in Theology," 58-9.

and the boundedness of God. To attempt to discuss both sides puts theology in the situation of all thinking: against its limits. Unlike philosophy, which oversteps its limits by synthesizing act and being in human thought, theology respects its limit: God's revelation as that which brings act and being together. But the decisive question, if we are to draw a contrast between Bonhoeffer and Barth, is *how* act and being come together. Put otherwise, what is the concept of this revelation in which act and being come together? Barth is unequivocal – this revelation is act.

At this point, we can return to Bonhoeffer's interpretation and presentation of Barth in *Act and Being*. It is true, as Tietz points out, that Bonhoeffer picks and chooses his citations from "Fate and Idea," giving the impression that Barth talks there only in terms of act.[1] But Bonhoeffer's selective presentation of Barth in terms of act is still open to interpretation. We could say, as Tietz does, that Bonhoeffer does not recognize that Barth speaks of both act and being, and does not recognize that Barth is moving from dialectic to analogy. This interpretation not only presupposes that Barth in fact was on the way from dialectic to analogy, it also attributes to Bonhoeffer either some very shoddy or willfully misleading interpretation of "Fate and Idea," since the necessity of both act and being in theology is virtually Barth's presupposition in that essay.

In contrast, I argue that Bonhoeffer, despite his occasional misreading of Barth, has put his finger, however clumsily, on the decisive difference between his theological project and Barth's: *how* theology ought to think of both act and being under a contingent concept of revelation. In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer presents Barth's answer to this question as resting in his act-theology. Granted, Bonhoeffer's account of Barth's act-

[1] Tietz-Steiding, *Bonhoeffers Kritik*, 170.

theology is on some counts mistaken.[1] But if we take as the main features of Barth's act-theology these concepts that Bonhoeffer identifies – an act-concept of revelation, a subjective concept of God, a formal concept of God's freedom, and a dialectical thought-form – how does his description hold up? "Fate and Idea" does in fact trade on each of these concepts. God is a subject, insofar as God's agency is in eternity rather than history. As the Word of God in predestination, revelation is an act. God's subjectivity entails a formal account of freedom. And theology operates with an open dialectic because "it serves the freedom of God's Word." [2]

Moreover, it is not difficult to see how Barth's act-theology might lead Bonhoeffer to identify in Barth's theology the problem of historical existence. As Bonhoeffer points out, Barth's act-theology leaves the continuity of the believer's existence in question. This is the case in Barth's own account of predestination, which, in contrast to traditional accounts, leaves "God free not only to elect and reject different people but also to elect or reject a particular individual at different times."[3]

Therefore, Bonhoeffer develops his theology in *Act and Being* not based on a misreading of Barth's theology but rather as an alternative to it. To interpret *Act and Being* as Bonhoeffer's articulation of an alternative to Barth does not minimize either Bonhoeffer's theological dependence on or affinity with Barth. Rather, to reiterate, Bonhoeffer develops his alternative to Barth on the very road that Barth clears. With regard to the themes considered here, Bonhoeffer follows Barth, first, in recognizing the

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[1] For example, Barth's account of human knowledge of revelation is understood better as indirect knowing than, as Bonhoeffer portrays it, unknowing.

[2] Barth, "Fate and Idea in Theology," 59.

[3] Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 454.

implications of the problem of transcendence and, second, by reckoning with them through a theology based on a concept of contingent revelation. But Bonhoeffer breaks from Barth by articulating a Lutheran understanding of contingency through a person-concept rather than act-concept of revelation and through a person-concept of God rather than a subjective one.

Framing Bonhoeffer's criticism in this way requires allowing the terms 'act' and 'being' to recede into the background. It is true that Bonhoeffer relies on the language of 'act' and 'being' in his criticism of Barth. But the force of this criticism emerges only in following the logic of 'act' and 'being' to the fundamental issue: person rather than acting subject. And reading Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth on this conceptual level, I argue, points more precisely to the significance of *Act and Being*'s argument for Bonhoeffer's intellectual development. Reading Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth on the conceptual level of 'act' and 'being' seems to raise the question *whether* Barth brings together 'act' and 'being.' And to this, the answer is clearly, 'Yes, with increasingly impressive sophistication.' But reading the criticism on the level of person versus acting subject, as the logic of *Act and Being* encourages, raises the questions *where* and *how* Barth and Bonhoeffer unite 'act' and 'being.' And these questions point to enduring differences in Barth's and Bonhoeffer's theologies, among which the following is central: Barth sees act and being together in the inner-trinitarian, subjective life of God, while Bonhoeffer sees act and being together in the historical person of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 7 : Bonhoeffer's Criticism of Being-Theology

The conclusion to Bonhoeffer's history lectures indicates that Catholic "substance-thinking" provides the counter-pole to "Reformed actualism," and that Bonhoeffer cultivates his Lutheran person-theology between these poles.[1] Indeed, Catholic theology is, in *Act and Being*, the archetypal being-theology. As typified by Thomas's priority of being over acting (*esse* over *agere*),[2] and as updated in the twentieth century by Erich Przywara's doctrine of the analogy of being (*analogia entis*),[3] Catholic theology relates God and humanity through being. But the conclusion of the history lectures also hints at what is confirmed in *Act and Being*, namely, that Bonhoeffer's chief concern is not with Catholic thought, but with pseudo-Lutheran thinking that fails to distinguish itself from Catholic being-theology. As Bonhoeffer puts it, contemporary Lutheran thinking fails where Barth's Reformed actualism succeeds – setting itself apart from Catholic theology. Therefore, while Bonhoeffer portrays Catholic theology as the archetypal being-theology, he is much more concerned with the encroachment of being-thinking into Lutheran theology. Especially important for Bonhoeffer is the being-thinking at work in his teacher Karl Holl's theology of conscience.

In order to understand how Bonhoeffer could group such apparently disparate theologians as Thomas and Holl under the category of being-theology, it is necessary to recall the close connection in Bonhoeffer's thought between 'being' and 'possibility.'

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[1] Bonhoeffer, "Geschichte," 212.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 103.

[3] Ibid., 73f.

Bonhoeffer's preliminary definitions of 'act' and 'being' indicate that the modality of act is contingency while the modality of being is possibility.[1] The result of being-thinking in theology is the reduction of God's revelation to a human possibility. The logic governing the association of Holl with Catholic thought, therefore, is not that they both understand revelation substantially or ontologically. Rather, they both, in differing ways, reduce revelation to a human possibility.

It is because of this reduction of revelation to a human possibility that being-theology encounters the problem of transcendence. In charging Holl and others with running aground on the problem of transcendence, Bonhoeffer reiterates Barth's indictment of liberal theology. But Bonhoeffer wants to overcome that tradition's possibility-thinking without the loss of orientation to the world that Bonhoeffer sees as the consequence of Barth's act-theology. For this reason, Bonhoeffer criticizes being-theology not from an act-understanding of revelation but from the person-concept of revelation and its concomitant personal understanding of sin.

Sin: Being and Thinking in Adam

Being-theology's reduction of God's revelation to a human possibility can be expressed in traditional theological language as an inadequate doctrine of sin. Being-theology treats revelation, faith, and relatedness to God as human possibilities when, for sinful humans, they are not. In this way, Bonhoeffer's criticism of being-theology rests logically on his own doctrine of sin, which Bonhoeffer explores under the category of 'being in Adam,' the human mode of being under sin that stands in contrast with the

[1] Ibid., 29. Bonhoeffer, "Inaugural Lecture," 389, 391.

human mode of being under grace, 'being in Christ.' I present Bonhoeffer's 'being in Adam' with reference to his *Creation and Fall,* which helpfully expands on Bonhoeffer's account of sin in *Act and Being*.

In *Creation and Fall,* Bonhoeffer sheds light on the human mode of sinful being through a theological commentary on the Genesis account of Adam's[1] transition from a sinless, primal state to a sinful, fallen state. In the primal state, Adam's existence is creaturely and whole, bounded and free in sociality. The *creatureliness* and *wholeness* of Adam's existence are indicated by his relationship to the tree of life, which stands at the center of the garden and bestows life. God's life flows outward from the center toward Adam, who revolves around this center without taking possession of it. Adam's life is creaturely life, since its essence is outside itself in God. And Adam's life is a coherent or whole life, since it is organized around this divine center.[2]

The *boundedness* and *freedom* of Adam's existence are indicated by his relationship to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree of knowledge, which

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[1] In *Creation and Fall,* Bonhoeffer uses 'Adam' to refer to humanity both before and after the fall, whereas in *Act and Being,* 'Adam' refers exclusively to post-lapsarian humanity. Bonhoeffer does not intend 'Adam' to be taken in a gender-restricted sense, referring only to males. 'Adam' refers to humanity as individuals and as a whole. In that sense, Bonhoeffer intends to describe the features of Adamic existence in which both men and women participate. When Bonhoeffer introduces Eve into the discussion, he is concerned primarily with human sociality, with the introduction of a second person, although he does not ignore the fact that Eve's creation introduces a second gender, Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 94f.

[2] "Adam has life in the unity of unbroken obedience to the Creator – has life just because Adam lives from the center of life, and is oriented toward the center of life, without placing Adam's own life at the center," Ibid., 84.

God forbids Adam to touch, stands at the center of the garden as a genuine limit[1] on Adam's existence. Adam's creaturely existence is whole precisely in its boundedness. Adam's center is also his limit.[2] Adam's limit is also his freedom; it frees him to be a creature. In instituting the prohibition against touching the tree of knowledge, God says to Adam, "you are who you are because of me, your Creator; so now be what you are. You are a free creature, so now be that."[3] By virtue of his relationship to the two trees at the center of the garden, Adam exists as creature, exists as whole, bounded, and free.

The *social* character of Adam's whole, bounded, free, creaturely existence is indicated by his relationship to Eve. By creating Eve, God makes the limit on Adam's existence concrete. Before Eve's creation, "Adam lived his life, to be sure, within this boundary, but Adam could still not really love this life in its boundedness." Eve becomes "the embodiment of Adam's limit and the object of Adam's love."[4] Adam's sinless existence is therefore defined in relationship to the tree of life, to the tree of knowledge, and to Eve as a creaturely existence that is whole, bounded, and free in sociality.

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[1] This limit is a genuine limit in the sense that Adam does not know what lies beyond it. Bonhoeffer implicitly draws a contrast between the genuine limit God places on Adam and reason's self-chosen limit. "[T]here are for reason essentially no boundaries, for even the boundaries are thought away until they are no longer genuine boundaries. Reason can only be brought into obedience …," Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 45.

[2] Cf. Bonhoeffer's christology, where Christ is center and limit, Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 27f., 59f.

[3] Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 85.

[4] Ibid., 98.

Adam's fall into sin changes the structure of his existence. First, Adam's existence is no longer creaturely but rather *sicut deus* – like God. In sinlessness, Adam lived out of the center without grasping the center; in sin, he lives in the center while grasping it for himself. To claim the center is to usurp God's place in an attempt to be like God. Adam's existence "now lives out of its own resources, creates its own life, is its own creator … Thereby its creatureliness is eliminated, destroyed."[1]

Adam's life, now in the center, is one of contradiction and paradox: Adam, the created one, acts as the creator. Adam's existence loses its created coherence or wholeness as it falls from unity into an ultimate split between *tob* and *ra*. As Bonhoeffer interprets them, the Hebrew terms *tob* and *ra* refer not only to moral 'good' and 'evil' but also to a more basic level of opposition between pleasure and pain. Because this split is basic, *tob* and *ra* are always distinct from each other but always accompany each other. Pain involves pleasure, and good involves evil. Adam's *sicut deus* existence proves the truth both of God's warning – 'do not eat of the tree or you will surely die' – and the serpent's promise – 'you will not surely die but will be like God.' Both statements are true, since they together point to the truth of Adam's fragmented *sicut deus* existence.

To say that Adam grasps at the center is to say that he transgresses the limit of his existence. "Now humankind stands in the middle with no limit."[2] And because Adam's freedom is the flipside of his boundedness as a creature, his transgression of that limit is the end of his freedom. For Bonhoeffer, freedom is a function of the unity of existence.[3]

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[1] Ibid., 115.

[2] Ibid.

[3] As the afterword to *Creation and Fall* aptly puts it, "Bonhoeffer knew freedom as a relationship in which one could abandon oneself without reserve. Plato had expressed this state of affairs in his image

When Adam knows his limit and his center, he is free to be creature. *Sicut deus* Adam, torn between *tob* and *ra*, is unbound and unfree.

Adam at the center can no longer interpret the limit on his existence as grace and gift. He understands the limit only as a challenge to his power. For *sicut deus* Adam, therefore, Eve ceases to be a person and becomes instead an object to be mastered, possessed, and destroyed. "[O]ne person claims a right to the other, claims to be entitled to possess the other, and thereby denies and destroys the creaturely nature of the other person."[1] Sin destroys the fabric of sociality. Adam as *sicut deus* is alone.[2]

In the transition from a sinless, primal state to a sinful, fallen state, therefore, Adam's being undergoes a fundamental change. Adam had lived from the center that both bounded him and freed him toward creaturely wholeness in community. Fallen Adam lives from the center and resists all limits, unfree in his split, isolated existence.

Given Bonhoeffer's Heideggerian emphasis on the intimate connection of being and thinking, it follows that Adam's fall into sin effects a fundamental change not only in his mode of being, but in his mode of thinking as well. In *Creation and Fall*, Bonhoeffer describes sinful Adam's mode of thinking in ways that recall his description of philosophical thinking in *Act and Being*. This confirms what was noted in chapter two, that Bonhoeffer understands philosophical thinking as the thinking of sinful Adam.

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of the puppet pulled in opposite directions by unyielding strings: it escapes the effects of being pulled like this only when it keeps its hold on a single string, a golden cord, and yields to it," Ibid., 162. I return to the theme of the unity of life in Christ in chapter eight.

[1] Ibid., 123.

[2] Ibid., 115.

Adam's thinking reflects his occupation of the center; Adam thinks from the self. In this way, Adam's thinking parallels philosophical thinking, which understands self, God, and world from the self.[1] Philosophy interprets this self-oriented knowledge as the triumph of thought, the completion of the modern goal of philosophical autonomy: the scientific comprehension of the world in accord with the subjective conditions of knowledge. But theologically described, fallen thinking's self-orientation reflects its original sin, the decision to be *sicut deus.*[2] Philosophical thinking is Adam's thinking. Adam, having transgressed the boundary, now thinks from the self enthroned at the center.

As Adam exists in isolation from God and others, so Adam's thinking fails to reach beyond itself. "When Adam seeks God, when Adam seeks life, Adam seeks only Adam."[3] In more technical terms, Bonhoeffer describes how "thinking looks to itself as the beginning, it posits itself as an object, as an entity over against itself, and … finds itself in every instance before the object it is positing."[4] Such language recalls Bonhoeffer's description of idealism in *Act and Being*, where thinking relates every given

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 27, 31, 45, et al.

[2] "The Hegelian question [of] how we are to make a beginning in philosophy can therefore be answered only by the bold and violent action of enthroning reason in the place of God," Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 27. While Bonhoeffer does not use the phrase *sicut deus* in *Act and Being*, he does use the image of the I usurping Christ's role, Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 77-8.

[3] Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 143.

[4] Ibid., 27.

situation to itself.[1] The problem of transcendence, philosophy's tendency to find itself when it seeks the other, is a problem Adam creates by usurping God's place in the center.

Adam's split existence leads to split thinking. "Because we do not exist in a state of unity, our thinking is torn apart as well."[2] To seek knowledge only to find oneself is to be split into subject and object. In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer points to the transition from transcendental philosophy to idealism as the origin of this split. "Here, the I, now thinking itself, simply becomes the *point of departure* instead of the limit-point of philosophy."[3] Bonhoeffer maintains this analysis in *Creation and Fall*, describing the self's positing of itself as an object, but goes on to place that analysis of idealism's epistemological structure into the Genesis narrative. The epistemological elevation and splitting of the self is of a piece with Adam's commandeering of God's place in the center, and Adam's subsequent loss of otherness.

For the most part, Bonhoeffer's criticisms of being-theology in *Act and Being* trade on the philosophical language of the problem of transcendence. But because Bonhoeffer understands philosophical thinking as thinking in Adam, his analysis of being in Adam (in both *Act and Being* and *Creation and Fall*) serves as helpful background for his criticism of being-theology.

Being-theology

It is Bonhoeffer's association of 'being' with 'possibility' that allows him to present various, disparate theological orientations under the general category of 'being-

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 42.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 92.

[3] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 39.

theology.' Bonhoeffer himself does not distinguish between the various kinds of being-theology, but they can be presented in a tripartite typology organized according to the way each sub-type of being-theology understands revelation. The first type of being-theology associates revelation with an object of knowledge or consciousness; the second associates revelation with being that is beyond consciousness (being *per se*); and the third with a process of knowledge or consciousness. These three concepts of revelation – object, being *per se,* and process – belong together under being-concepts of revelation because they, in one way or another, reduce the relationship between God and humanity to a human possibility.

Revelation as an object

According to the organization of *Act and Being*, the treatment of being-theology belongs in the second section of Part B, under the heading "The Interpretation of Revelation in Terms of Being."[1] What we find there, however, is only Bonhoeffer's terse dismissal of the first and crudest type of being-theology, that which associates revelation with an object of knowledge or consciousness. Understanding why Bonhoeffer is able to dismiss this type so quickly requires reckoning with the objective mode of being that this type of theology attributes to revelation.

Bonhoeffer mentions three examples of this first type of being-theology: theologies that treat revelation as doctrine, as an institution (be it the Catholic church or Protestant orthodoxy's verbally inspired bible), and as a psychic experience.[2] These three examples belong together because "they all understand the revealed God as

[1] Ibid., 103.

[2] Ibid., 103-4.

something existing."[1] This type of theology treats revelation as having the mode of being proper to 'an existing thing' (*Seiendes*[2]), in distinction from, for example, the mode of being proper to being itself (*Sein*). This distinction, grammatically expressed as that between the substantive participle and the infinitive, parallels the Latin scholastic distinction between *ens* and *esse*. The distinction comes into the philosophical foreground for Bonhoeffer through Heidegger's 'ontological difference,' which discriminates between the ontic (*Seiende*) and ontological (*Sein*) levels in order to redirect attention to the latter.[3] From Bonhoeffer's point of view, when theology treats revelation as doctrine, institution, or experience, it attributes to revelation the mode of being of existing things.

Throughout *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer also uses *es gibt* ('there is/are') to refer to 'existing things.' Existing things 'are there.' Bonhoeffer's use of *es gibt* as a technical term likely is mediated through a debate between Erich Peterson and Barth. Peterson, in his criticism of Barth and the other dialectical theologians, argues that theology ought to rest on authority, in particular the authority of dogma.[4] Barth responds by arguing that

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[1] Ibid., 105.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein*, 102.

[3] "As what is asked about, being thus requires its own kind of demonstration which is essentially different from the discovery of beings. Hence what is to be *ascertained*, the meaning of being, will require its own conceptualization, which again is essentially distinct from the concept in which beings receive their determination of meaning," Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 5. 'Being' and 'beings' translate *Sein* and *Seiendes* respectively. Macquarrie and Robinson render them 'Being' and 'entities' in Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 26.

[4] Erik Peterson, *Was ist Theologie?* (Bonn: Friedrich Cohen, 1925), 9.

all concrete authorities – not only dogma, but also piety, history, and church – are subordinate to the one true authority of God. In making this case, Barth points beyond Peterson's 'given' authorities to the one who gives:

> Therefore Peterson's often-repeated formula 'there is' ('there is given,' *es gibt*) this and that dogma, sacrament and theology, etc., requires at least a very cautious or (if you will pardon the term) a 'dialectical' use. What 'is there' in this context of which it is not essentially true that it 'is there' only as God's gift? And that God gives it not once and for all, but keeps giving it repeatedly?[1]

Barth questions the authority of existing things, things in the category of *es gibt*, as an authority for theology. Bonhoeffer imports this technical usage of *es gibt* into *Act and Being*, using it to refer to 'existing things.'[2]

'Something existing' or 'given' is problematic as a mode of revelation's being because it is liable to objectification. According to Kantian epistemology, a precondition of knowledge of an object is that objects "are given to us" through the faculty of sensibility.[3] And insofar as sensibility applies to its input the forms of space and time,

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[1] Barth, "Church and Theology," 294. Barth's own interpretation of theology's authority is typically act-oriented. Theological authority is not something 'there' but God's serial act.

[2] When Bonhoeffer uses *es gibt* in this technical way, he sets it off with quotation marks, Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein*, 24, 112, 116, 120, 125, 144, 150. Rumscheidt follows Bonhoeffer's usage by setting off 'there is' in single quotation marks in the English translation, Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 31, 115, 119, 122, 145, 151.

[3] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A15/B29, p. 152.

only something 'existing' in space and time can be 'given to us.' An existing or given thing is a potential object of knowledge.

Further, to say that 'something existing' or 'given' is potentially an object is to say that it falls under the power of the knowing subject. Objectivity is not primarily a feature of reality outside the self; as Bonhoeffer says in allusion to Kant, "The object, reality, is an *a priori* synthesis"[1] under the conditions of transcendental subjectivity. The ultimate precondition of objective knowledge is the self. 'Something existing' or 'given,' therefore, can never challenge the structure or power of the subject, because an object by definition conforms to the conditions of knowability dictated by subjectivity. The only sort of object we know is the sort that conforms to the mind. Any other sort of 'object' – whatever that would be – could not challenge the mind's authority to know and determine reality, for such an object would not even encounter the mind. It would simply be unknown.

All of this is to say that objective knowledge is incapable of bringing anything to the subject that is radically new or other. The growing realization of this implication contributes to the rise of the problem of transcendence in early twentieth-century theology. As Friedrich Gogarten puts it in his watershed essay "Between the Times," "We are so deeply immersed in humanity that we have lost God. Lost him. Yes really lost him; there is no longer any thought of ours which reaches him. None of our thoughts reach beyond the human sphere. Not a single one."[2] The inability of thoughts to reach

[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 49.

[2] Gogarten, "Historicism," 279.

beyond the human sphere is on display most clearly in objective knowledge, the knowledge of 'existing things.'

It is because Bonhoeffer himself recognizes the constraints of the problem of transcendence, and indeed elaborates his own account of it in *Act and Being,* that he can dismiss this first type of being-theology so quickly.

> The reason the three possible interpretations of the being of revelation that we have discussed [doctrine, institution, and psychic experience] fail to do justice to the Christian idea of revelation is that they understand the revealed God as something existing . . . Human beings take all that exists into their transcendental I, which means that what exists cannot be genuinely ob-jective [gegen-ständlich], nor encounter human existence.[1]

Bonhoeffer inserts a hyphen into *gegenständlich* ('objective') to play with its literal meaning: standing-against. Something that exists becomes an object of knowledge, is pulled into the transcendental I, and therefore cannot be ob-jective, cannot stand against the self to challenge it. Revelation, when understood as an object of knowledge, is assimilated into the self and its world. Revelation becomes a possibility of the self.

We gain a deeper understanding of the inadequacies of objective concepts of revelation by reading Bonhoeffer's criticism against the background of his account of sin, since Bonhoeffer's narration of Adam usurping God's place at the center of the garden is, in part, an allegory of Bonhoeffer's criticism of objective knowledge. The attempt to understand God and God's revelation as object is characteristic of *sicut deus* Adam. When Adam claims the center for himself, he reduces Eve from a person to an object.

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 105-6.

When Adam installs himself as the beginning and end of knowledge, the gift and boundary of revelation becomes an object under his control. Treating the other as an object is an essential tactic in Adam's strategy to maintain his place in the center of the garden. Theologies that construe revelation as object participate in the thinking of fallen Adam.

Reading Bonhoeffer's criticism of objective concepts of revelation against the background of his understanding of sin reminds us that an adequate concept of revelation must do more than deliver knowledge of God. Revelation must also encounter and transform sinful Adam in order to open up the possibility of such knowledge. An objective concept of revelation cannot deliver these results.

Revelation as Being per se

The second type of being-theology Bonhoeffer considers portrays God and revelation not in terms of objective being (*Seiendes*), but in terms of being *per se* (*Sein*). Bonhoeffer takes as a representative of this type of theology the Jesuit theologian Erich Przywara. According to the Thomist tradition, in which Bonhoeffer locates Przywara, both God and humans participate in being (*esse*) but do so in different ways. For God, *essentia* and *esse* are identical; God's essence is being. In humans, by contrast, essence and being are not identical but related to each other. This Thomist ontology forms the background for Przywara's doctrine of the analogy of being (*analogia entis*), which he articulates against dialectical theology's excessively Protestant emphasis on the otherness of God. God and humanity are not wholly other, argues Przywara, since they share an *esse* of one kind. But neither are God and humanity identical, since God is a being-essence identity, and humanity is a being-essence difference. The relationship of God

and humanity is neither pure identity nor pure difference but rather likeness or analogy. The mystery of God's distinction from *and* unity with humanity are both to be explained, therefore, with reference to the analogy of being.[1]

Bonhoeffer presents Przywara's analogy of being immediately after concluding that Heidegger's ontology, despite its merits, is closed off to transcendence. Przywara's theology attempts, with the tools of Thomist ontology, to open up Heidegger's closed-in ontology toward revelation: "Catholic-Thomistic philosophy demolishes the fundamentally closed concept of being in order to open it up for the transcendence of God."[2]

Bonhoeffer judges Przywara's theology a failure since it remains on the level of what Bonhoeffer calls a general ontology. At most, the category of analogy provides only general ontological definitions of God and humanity – God as a sheer 'is' and humans as beings dependent on God as sheer 'is.' Bonhoeffer judges such definitions inadequate because they fail to capture the act-aspect of the relationship between God and humanity; God and humanity relate not simply by virtue of being, but through the divine and human contingent acts of sin and grace. Przywara's method of analogy cannot

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[1] Ibid., 73. Bonhoeffer cites the following of Przywara's works: Erich Przywara, *Religionsphilosophie katholischer Theologie* (München/Berlin, 1927); Erich Przywara, *Ringen der Gegenwart. Gesammelte Aufsätze 1922-1927* (Augsburg, 1929). Bonhoeffer does not cite but seems to be familiar with Przywara's criticism of dialectical theology: Erich Przywara, "Gott in uns oder Gott über uns? (Immanenz und Transzendenz im heutigen Geistesleben)," *Stimmen der Zeit*, no. 105 (1923): 343-362. Przywara's criticism did not convince the dialectical theologians; Barth later famously described the doctrine of the analogy of being as an "invention of the antichrist," Barth, *Church Dogmatics, I/1*, xiii.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 73.

provide definitions of God and humanity that incorporate "human [or] divine contingent activity" and therefore cannot describe God as self-giving or humans as under sin and grace.[1]

If Przywara's ontology cannot account for the contingency of acts, it is an ontology of pure being and, therefore, of possibility. "Human beings, existing in the tension of *esse-essentia*, must already bear within themselves, as a possibility of existence, the possibility of beholding the 'is' – that is, the *esse-essentia* identity." Przywara reduces the connection between God and humanity to a human possibility. His attempt to open ontology toward transcendence ends in "illusory transcendence."[2] Despite their considerable differences, the second type of being-theology shares in the fate of the first: the problem of transcendence.

Revelation as a process of consciousness

The third type of being-theology, which associates God and revelation with a process of knowledge or consciousness, emerges against the background of philosophical idealism. According to Bonhoeffer, the spell of idealism leads theology to locate God and revelation in consciousness.

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[1] Ibid., 74-5. In a lengthy footnote, Bonhoeffer accuses Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich too of a general anthropology, since they see no need to distinguish between philosophical and theological anthropology. In contrast, Bonhoeffer says, since "from the viewpoint of revelation, theological anthropology sees human existence as essentially determined by guilt or grace[,] philosophical anthropology is able to adopt such concepts only at the expense of bursting its own framework," Ibid., 77.

[2] Ibid., 75. See also: "Just as Anselm surely arrived at a being but not God, and thus remained in the closed world, the Thomistic ontological concept of God cannot go beyond a metaphysics locked in the closed world," Ibid., 75-6.

> The language of idealism about the spirit that finds itself in God, and God in itself, was so enchanting that theology could not resist it; unhesitatingly, it concluded that if being is essentially consciousness, then God must be in religious experiences, and the reborn I has to find God in the reflection on itself. Where else can God be found but in my consciousness?[1]

Theology has two options for locating God in consciousness. First, it can make "God the content of consciousness, that is to say, an object of the I-subject." Such a theology falls under the first type of being-theology, since it treats God and revelation as psychic objects of consciousness, and is therefore subject to Bonhoeffer's criticism of objective concepts of revelation. Second, theology can let "the I discover God in its non-objective selfhood [*Ichheit*], in its coming to itself."[2] Here the I discovers God in its coming to itself. With this, we encounter the third type of being-theology, which locates God and revelation in a process of consciousness.

As an extreme example of this theology Bonhoeffer presents Friedrich Brunstäd's *Die Idee der Religion.*[3] Brunstäd radicalizes idealism's identity of God and the I such that "the experience of God becomes the very experience of the self on the part of the transcendental I." In the experience of the self, I experience God. Bonhoeffer rejects Brunstäd's account, since how "the I can enter into communion with God is unfathomable." The self remains fixed in itself, and revelation is no more that than the

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[1] Ibid., 51.

[2] Ibid., 50.

[3] Friedrich Brunstäd, *Die Idee der Religion: Prinzipien der Religionsphilosophie* (Halle, 1922).

self's turning to itself. Brunstäd's is a being-theology to the extreme: its God is a God in the self, not one who encounters from outside.[1]

Karl Holl's theology of conscience

Of the theologians in this third type, Bonhoeffer is most concerned with Karl Holl. From our contemporary position, it is difficult to imagine the influence Holl had on the German theological scene of the 1920s in general and on young Bonhoeffer in particular. Unlike Karl Barth, Holl inspires no contemporary constructive theology and draws little historical attention outside of Germany. But his 'Luther Book,' the collection of essays that launched the 'Luther Renaissance,' appeared with Barth's second edition of *Romans* in December of 1921 and made as big a splash.[2] Harnack later said that Holl's 'Luther Book' "affected us like a sudden, powerful revelation" and predicted that its significance would "remain as long as theological scholarship and evangelical faith exist, and that its author would carry the honor of having become a renovator of Lutheranism."[3] While the importance of Barth's theology has certainly outstripped that of Holl's in the long run, Holl's renovation of Lutheranism was as at least as influential as dialectical theology in shaping the German academic landscape of the 1920s.[4]

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 52-3.

[2] Johannes Wallman, "Karl Holl und seine Schule," in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, ed. Eberhard Jüngel, vol. 4 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1978), 1.

[3] From Harnack's speech at the memorial service for Holl held on 12 June 1926 at the University of Berlin, Karl Holl, *Briefwechsel mit Adolf von Harnack*, ed. Heinrich Karpp (Tübingen: Mohr, 1966), 83. Cited in, Wallman, "Karl Holl und seine Schule," 2.

[4] Leppin, "Lutherforschung," 21: "Der Zeitpunkt des Erscheinens war fast derselbe, zu dem Karl Barth die zweite Auflage seines *Römerbrief[s]* vorlegte. In der Realität der Theologie der Weimarer

It is from Karl Holl, among others, that Bonhoeffer learned Luther. Bonhoeffer attended Holl's seminars in 1925-1926, writing long and detailed historical papers on Luther's evaluation of himself and on Luther's understanding of the Holy Spirit.[1] Bonhoeffer also considered writing his dissertation under Holl until these deliberations were cut short by the master's untimely death in May 1926.[2] But Holl remained influential for Bonhoeffer, primarily because he guided Bonhoeffer through his initial explorations of Luther, the theologian who would sustain Bonhoeffer throughout his career.

Holl taught Bonhoeffer Luther's claim that justification by grace alone is the doctrine on which the church stands or falls. Holl defended the historical centrality of justification against its recent detractors, including Wilhelm Dilthey, Paul de Lagarde (1827-1891), and Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), who saw little continuity between Protestant understanding of justification and Paul's, and even less between Paul's understanding and Jesus' gospel message. In contrast, Holl argued that Luther's vision of the graciously justifying God "reaches back to Paul and Jesus."[3] This argument helped

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Republic dürfte die Hollsche Luther-Deutung eine mindestens ebenso große Bedeutung gehabt haben wie die erst von späteren Generationen als dominierender Neuansatz herausgestrichene Dialektische Theologie …"

[1] Bonhoeffer, "Luther's Feelings about His Work." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Luther's Views of the Holy Spirit according to the Disputationen of 1535-1545 edited by Drews," in *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, ed. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 9 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 325-370.

[2] Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 68-9.

[3] Karl Holl, *Die Rechtfertigungslehre im Licht der Geschichte des Protestantismus: Vortrag gehalten auf der Versammlung der Freunde der Christlichen Welt am 17. Oktober 1905* (Tübingen, 1906),

set the agenda of Luther studies, which Holl himself advanced by arguing for the systematic centrality of justification in Luther's thought.

Central to Holl's work on justification was his declaration of Luther's religion as a "religion of conscience,"[1] so called because the dynamics of judgment and forgiveness that comprise justification unfurl in the theater of the conscience. Conscience is the locus of revelation; in it, the unconditional divine will meets the human sense of moral obligation. In conscience, God reveals God's nature as both judging and gracious, for conscience demonstrates how far short of God's unconditional moral standards the person falls, and how God declares that person righteous nonetheless. In this way, the three elements that Holl identified as together constituting the challenge of Christian theology and piety – moral obligation, divine judgment, and divine grace[2] – converge for Luther in conscience. Holl identifies the center of Luther's thought in justification, and understands justification in terms of conscience.

10-11. Cited and translated in, James M. Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour: German Evangelical Theological Factions and Interpretations of Luther, 1917-1933* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 23.

[1] Holl, *What did Luther Understand by Religion?*, 48: "Luther's religion is a 'religion of conscience' in the most pronounced sense of the word, with all the urgency and the personal character belonging to it. It issues from a particular kind of conscientious experience – namely, his unique experience of the conflict between a keen sense of responsibility and the unconditional, absolute validity of the divine will – and rests on the conviction that in the sense of obligation (*sollen*), which impresses its demands so irresistibly upon the human will, divinity reveals itself most clearly; and the more profoundly a person is touched by the obligation and the more sharply it contrasts with one's 'natural' desires, the more lucid and unambiguous is the revelation."

[2] Ibid., 17.

Bonhoeffer's criticism of Holl

Bonhoeffer accepted the centrality of justification but even as a student doubted whether conscience could carry the theoretical load Holl required it to. Already in his seminar paper on Luther's understanding of the Holy Spirit, Bonhoeffer points to the "genuinely ambiguous nature" of conscience; conscience cannot unequivocally indicate "that it is really not the individual but instead the Holy Spirit that works in the person."[1] Is conscience the work of God in the Holy Spirit, as Holl claims, or is it the work of the human? Even early in his student days, Bonhoeffer was suspicious of 'psychologism,'[2] the attempt to ground theological arguments on psychologically observable phenomena. From Bonhoeffer's perspective, Holl takes a false step in tying the all-important doctrine of justification to a psychological analysis of conscience.

Bonhoeffer maintains his suspicion of psychologism in *Act and Being*, noting, "psychologically we remain opaque to ourselves."[3] Holl's understanding of Luther's doctrine of justification relies on an analysis of Luther's autobiographical accounts of his *Anfechtungen* (temptations, inner conflicts or spiritual trials).[4] But Bonhoeffer questions whether such experiences are perspicuous enough to serve as the starting point for theology: "Even temptation, which leads to death, is the work of Christ … In principle it

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[1] Bonhoeffer, "Luther's Views of the Holy Spirit," 354.

[2] An undated note from his student days found in his copy of Luther's lectures on Romans reads, "Theological Logic intends to set itself free from psychologism. It does not speak of sin and revelation as contents of consciousness. Instead, it speaks of them as realities of revelation: acknowledgment of what is spoken in revelation and by the authorities. *Believe* in sin," Bonhoeffer, *Young Bonhoeffer*, 300.

[3] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 142.

[4] For Holl's analysis, see, for example, Holl, *What did Luther Understand by Religion?*, 80f.

is impossible to draw the distinction between real temptation by Christ and temptation as the final grasp for oneself …"[1] In his later lectures on theological psychology, Bonhoeffer repeats this criticism of Holl and goes further: "Not ambiguous temptation but the word of God brings Luther self-understanding."[2] Bonhoeffer, while granting the centrality of justification by grace, insists on the doctrine's basis in revelation rather than psychological observation.

It is crucial to see that while Bonhoeffer's criticism of Holl points to the *psychological* ambiguity of conscience, the criticism itself is *theological*. The criticism rests not on the ambiguity of conscience as a psychological phenomenon, but on a theological insight that accounts for this psychological ambiguity. Marshaling Luther against the leader of the Luther Renaissance, Bonhoeffer reminds Holl of Luther's distinction between *esse peccator* and *esse justus*, which Bonhoeffer develops as 'being in Adam' and 'being in Christ.' (This distinction between sinful and justified humanity is a theological one, available only through faith; one must "*Believe* in sin."[3]) Being in Adam and being in Christ constitute two distinct modes of existence, each with its own mode of conscience. Psychologically, the operations of sinful and redeemed conscience are indistinguishable, but theology knows conscience in Adam to function differently than conscience in Christ.[4]

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 142.

[2] Bonhoeffer, "Theologische Psychologie," 182.

[3] Bonhoeffer, *Young Bonhoeffer*, 300.

[4] Bonhoeffer distinguishes between sinful and redeemed conscience in several places: Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 155-6; Bonhoeffer, "Theologische Psychologie," 196; Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 276-9.

Conscience in Adam, according to Bonhoeffer, is a self-justification that aims at both maintaining and covering over the distance between Adam and God introduced by the fall. Adam's postlapsarian existence is a flight and a hiding from God,[1] an evasion of the true source of life in an attempt to install the self as the source of life. But precisely because God is the true source of life, this flight is impossible. God finds and judges Adam. Adam responds to God's judgment with conscience, a form of self-judgment and self-justification that aims to make Adam's situation under God's judgment tolerable. "Here, far away from God [*in der Gottesferne*], humankind itself plays the role of being judge and in this way seeks to evade God's judgment."[2] Conscience is Adam's attempt to have it both ways; he seeks to maintain his position of power while convincing himself that he has atoned for usurping God's place at the center. In this way, conscience in Adam is shot through with the dynamics of sin.

Conscience in Adam also replicates the form of the mind found in idealism. Conscience operating in this kind of sinful structure proves not to be a conversation between God and the sinner but a conversation between the parts of the sinner's self. The sinful part of the self repents to the purportedly sinless part, in an "appeal to their better selves,"[3] so that, in the whole process, the sinner "is simultaneously accuser, accused, and judge."[4] Not God but humans themselves "arise and declare themselves their own

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[1] "This flight, Adam's hiding away from God, we call conscience." "[C]onscience also lets human beings, in fleeing from God, feel secure in their hiding place," Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 128.

[2] Ibid. Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 138.

[3] Ibid., 139.

[4] Bonhoeffer, "Inaugural Lecture," 406.

final judges and proceed to their own indictment—couched in the language of conscience."[1] In sinful conscience, the autonomous, isolated self reflects on itself.[2]

The only way out of the self-deception of sin and conscience is through the present person of Christ. The very God from whom Adam flees says, "Adam, stand before me." In this way, "God slays the conscience."[3] Christ breaks through "the solitude of human beings,"[4] re-establishing himself as their center and limit.[5] With this, Christ transposes humans from being in Adam to being in Christ; Christ becomes the center (*Mitte*) of existence and the mediator (*Mittler*) of conscience. The dynamics of conscience are transported out of self-reflection and into the direct intentionality of faith (*actus directus*) toward Christ. Here, "reflection on the self … is included within the intention towards Christ." It is the 'look of sin' within faith." In redeemed conscience, the sinner looks to Christ and sees sin as it is, to quote Luther, "overcome and swallowed up in Christ."[6] Through Christ, the conscience is redeemed.

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 139.

[2] "The call of conscience has its origin and goal in the *autonomy* of one's own ego," Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 277. "The conscience and repentance of human beings in Adam are their final grasp at themselves, the confirmation and justification of their self-glorifying solitude." Conscience is the "final perseverance of the I in itself," Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 139, 148.

[3] Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 129.

[4] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 141.

[5] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 60-1.

[6] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 156.

Bonhoeffer's distinction between these forms of conscience, which correspond to *esse peccator* and *esse justus*, sets the stage for his criticism of Holl.[1] Bonhoeffer argues that while Holl intends to portray conscience as the voice of God, he in fact portrays conscience as the voice of sinful, self-justifying humanity. The irony of this charge is rich, since Holl's theory of conscience is a central tenet of his effort to demonstrate the superiority of Luther's religion over against a medieval piety characterized by a self-justificatory system of indulgences and pilgrimages.[2] Against the background of this system, says Holl, Luther stands out for "grasp[ing] the concept of judgment in a deeper, purer, and more personal sense than was customary among his peers."[3] Holl's Luther recognizes the absolute character of God's command and the inescapability of God's judgment.

Holl's attempt to portray conscience as the voice of God fails, according to Bonhoeffer, because Holl conceives of sin in terms of act. Holl's act-concept of sin reflects Holl's attempt to take sin seriously, for it "does not seem otherwise possible to maintain the guilt-character of sin; the experiential base for this definition is the verdict

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[1] Bonhoeffer, not without reason, treats Holl's interpretation of Luther and Holl's own theology as identical. James Stayer discusses Holl's remarkable tendency to identify himself with Luther, Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour*, 28f. In fairness, identifying oneself with Luther was a feature of German-language theology at the time in general, not a quirk unique to Holl. Barth's Luther was dialectic, Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 70f. Bonhoeffer's Luther was – in almost direct contrast to Barth's – fully in the world, Bonhoeffer, "Geschichte," 213. Theologians of the period fashioned their images of Luther in light of their own theology and vice versa.

[2] Holl, *What did Luther Understand by Religion?*, 17f.

[3] Ibid., 35.

of conscience, according to which one is responsible only for decisions of the self against God taken willfully." The distinctive Lutheran emphasis on the inescapable, personal weight of sin before the judgment of God leads Holl to conclude, "Sin therefore is act."[1] By restricting sin to act, however, Holl presupposes a sinless human 'being' that perdures during sinful acts. Sin is the act of a sinless being. This splitting of the sinner into act and being condemns conscience to operate according to the sinful dynamics of self-reflection. Conscience is no conversation between God and the sinner, but a conversation between parts of the sinner's self. The sinful part of the self repents to the purportedly sinless part, in an "appeal to their better selves,"[2] so that the sinner "is simultaneously accuser, accused, and judge."[3] Not God but humans themselves "arise and declare themselves their own final judges and proceed to their own indictment—couched in the language of conscience."[4] When sin is act, "Conscience primarily is not God's but the human being's own voice."[5]

Conscience thus leaves Adam in solitude, leaves the self isolated in itself. In conscience "desperation and solitude become-conscious-of-themselves, seek[ing] thereby to overcome them."[6] Where Holl paints conscience as the transition to a new moral and religious life, Bonhoeffer portrays it as the nadir of sin: "The conscience and repentance

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 144. Bonhoeffer also discusses the dangers of splitting act and being in the doctrine of sin here: Bonhoeffer, "Theologische Psychologie," 194f.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 139.

[3] Bonhoeffer, "Inaugural Lecture," 406.

[4] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 139.

[5] Ibid., 155.

[6] Ibid., 148.

of human beings in Adam are their final grasp at themselves, the confirmation and justification of their self-glorifying solitude."[1] Conscience cannot be the beginning of religion and morality, since it connects the self neither to God nor to neighbor. Conscience is "final perseverance of the I in itself."[2]

Thus the tragedy of Holl's theology: having emphasized justification as the doctrine by which the church stands or falls, he ties justification to the dynamics of conscience and thereby renders it *self*-justification. Holl says all the right things about Luther and justification – that all striving after salvation is a mistake, and that God gifts are free.[3] But by locating justification in the conscience, he quickly undermines what he hopes to emphasize. In the conscience, on Bonhoeffer's reading, the sinner justifies himself[4] in striving, active repentance (*contritio activa*).[5]

Holl's act-concept of sin seals his fate as a being-theologian. On Holl's act-account of sin, "Being in Adam would, consequently, have to be regarded as a potentiality of a more profound 'possibility of being in the truth,'" based on "a being untouched by sin."[6] Holl does not understand sin (here 'being in Adam') as an inescapable condition but merely as the *possibility* to escape sin. Holl treats sin as a state of possibility that, when realized, becomes a state of grace. This logic of possibility thereby justifies Bonhoeffer's counter-intuitive classification of Holl as a being-

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[1] Ibid., 139.

[2] Ibid., 148.

[3] Holl, *What did Luther Understand by Religion?*, 41-2.

[4] Bonhoeffer, "Inaugural Lecture," 401.

[5] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 139.

[6] Ibid.

theologian. Because Holl portrays sinners as having access to revelation by virtue of the stratum of sinless being within themselves, Holl reduces revelation and faith to possibilities. And, as with all theologies that turn revelation into a possibility, an act-encounter 'from outside' is foreclosed. Holl's improperly grounded effort to take sin seriously leads to the loss of an orientation to transcendence. Although Holl's theology differs from those being-theologies that treat revelation in ontological or objective terms, his, like those, runs aground on the problem of transcendence.

Bonhoeffer argues that escaping Holl's cul-de-sac of conscience requires understanding sin as sinful act *and* sinful being. Human sin extends beyond the occasional sinful act to an essential corruption, such that "'in Adam' means to be in untruth, in culpable perversion of the will, that is, of human essence. It means to be turned inward into one's self, *cor curvum in se*."[1] Only through an act- and being-concept of sin, argues Bonhoeffer, can theology portray both the contingency and inevitability of sin.[2] In searching for the proper understanding of sin's being, however, theology must avoid construing sin as an 'existing thing,' since "sin as entity [*Seiendes*] cannot touch me existentially." Because the person is an act-being unity, sin as a mere entity "is transcended within me" and exonerates me. Bonhoeffer rejects traditional historicized, psychologized, and naturalized doctrines of original sin – here Bonhoeffer judges Holl correct – for failing to take sin seriously enough. But against Holl's act-

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[1] Ibid., 137.

[2] "A mode of being must be ascribed to sin which, on the one hand, expresses the fully unexcusable and contingent character of sin that breaks forth anew in the act and which, on the other hand, makes it possible to understand sin as the master into whose hands human beings are utterly delivered," Ibid., 145.

understanding of sin, Bonhoeffer maintains that it remains "necessary to understand sin in some way as being."[1]

Bonhoeffer suggests, "The New Testament itself provides the concept of being that is sought: Adam as I and as the being-of-the-person-of-humanity."[2] Bonhoeffer understands Adam's sinful nature as somehow structurally both individual and communal. With this, Bonhoeffer reprises a theme from his doctoral dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, which investigates "the significance of the sociological category for theology."[3] Throughout that work, Bonhoeffer maintains the irreducible coordination of individual and community. In this typical passage, Bonhoeffer claims "God does not desire a history of individual human beings, but the history of the human *community*. However, God does not want a community that absorbs the individual into itself, but a community of *human beings*."[4] Individual and community relate to each other in Adam as (a Heideggerian coordination of) act and being. Sin is my individual act: "I made false decisions and … I alone sought to be the master." But in "my fall from God, humanity fell." Sin is my contingent act that at the same time acquires a monstrous, communal significance. "But in this act, for which I hold myself utterly responsible on every occasion, I find myself already in the humanity of Adam … The I 'is' not as an individual, but always in humanity." Sinful act presupposes sinful being; sinful being presupposes sinful act. "Thus, in Adam act is as constitutive for being as being is for act;

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[1] Ibid. Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein*, 144.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 145-6.

[3] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 21.

[4] Ibid., 80.

both act and being enter into judgment as guilty."[1] Sin is the person of Adam, the unity of community and individual, of act and being.

When sin is understood in terms of person, it becomes clear that there is no recourse to sinless being, the loophole of Holl's act-concept of sin. "[B]ecause everyone, as human being, stands within the humanity of Adam, no one can withdraw from the sinful act to a sinless being; no, the whole of one's being a person is in sin."[2] The only possibility for deliverance from sin, then, is the person of Christ who alters the act-being structure of sin. Only after such a structure-transforming encounter does conscience function as the voice of God.

Holl himself rules out such an encounter, however, with a weak christology. Bonhoeffer takes Holl to task for his "peculiarly meager estimation of Christology in Luther."[3] This 'meager estimation' of Christ is most pronounced in Holl's account of Luther's *Anfechtungen*, during the most serious of which Christ actually recedes from view, leaving Luther alone before God the Father with the first commandment.[4] Holl interprets Luther's view of justification (the dynamics of which are reflected in the

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 146. See also, Bonhoeffer, "Theologische Psychologie," 195-6: "Sin as being and as act. Sin as being may not be understood as something existing [*Seiendes*], discoverable [*Vorfindliches*], out of which the act follows. Both in person-being, as humanity and as I."

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 146.

[3] Bonhoeffer, "Inaugural Lecture," 401. Holl consistently practices a 'theocentric' rather than a 'christocentric' reading of Luther. For an example of Holl's tendency to subordinate Christ to God the Father, see: Holl, *What did Luther Understand by Religion?*, 51-3, fn. 28.

[4] Ibid., 79.

experience of *Anfechtung*) as occurring independently of Christ's mediation.[1] Holl's insistence on placing the sinner alone before God and the first commandment is consonant with his desire to take sin and the moral law seriously. But, again, Bonhoeffer finds the attempt misguided, since it circumvents Christ, the only true ground for justification. "It is no coincidence that Holl both defines Luther's religion as a religion of conscience and admits to the possibility of finding God without Christ in the first commandment."[2]

Marshaling Luther against the Luther Renaissance

Bonhoeffer's criticism of Holl is both understated and devastating. The criticism is understated because Bonhoeffer neither announces Holl as a major target nor dwells on Holl's shortcomings. Rather, Bonhoeffer develops his criticism of Holl as he elaborates the shape of the problem of act and being and works toward its solution. Nonetheless, the

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[1] Friedrich Gogarten too accuses Holl of a thin christology, asking, "who saved Luther – Christ or the first commandment?" Friedrich Gogarten, "Theologie und Wissenschaft. Grundsätzliche Bemerkungen zu Karl Holls 'Luther'," *Die Christliche Welt* 38 (1924): 34-42, 71-80. Holl responds by claiming that he merely interprets Luther; those who read Luther christocentrically misread Luther, Holl, *What did Luther Understand by Religion?*, 51, fn. 28. See also his response to Gogarten, where he defends his interpretation of Christ receding in *Anfechtung*, Karl Holl, "Appendix: Gogarten's Understanding of Luther," in *What Did Luther Understand by Religion?*, ed. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 116. This response, included as an appendix to the English publication of *What Did Luther Understand by Religion?*, is a translation of, Karl Holl, "Gogartens Lutherauffassung: Eine Erwiderung," *Die Christliche Welt* 38 (1924): 307-314.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 141, fn. 11. See also, Bonhoeffer, "Geschichte," 185: "The basis for justification is not Christ but the first commandment, which validates itself in my conscience. Because the last instance of certainty is the conscience, he describes Luther's ethic as an ethic of conscience."

criticism that emerges along this way is devastating, since it aims at the very heart of Holl's theological project.

At its heart, Holl's theological project was a mission to rehabilitate the person and theology of Martin Luther. Holl entered Luther research to challenge recent portraits by Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) and Heinrich Denifle (1844-1905) of a Luther deeply imbedded in the medieval Catholic milieu. Troeltsch's essay on the relationship of Protestantism to the modern world presented Protestantism as a middle stage between the middle ages and modernity. Relative to Catholicism, which Troeltsch understood to be a product of the medieval world, Protestantism was more at home in the modern world. Troeltsch went on to divide Protestantism in two: Calvinism, a world-affirming, modern version of Protestantism; and Lutheranism, the conservative and inward version of Protestantism. Relative to Calvinism, then, Lutheranism belonged to the Catholic, medieval world. Imbedded in Troeltsch's preference for a Calvinist socio-religious form was his *apologia* for Anglo-American democratic and pluralistic socio-political form over the Germanic, nationalist model.[1] The nationalist Holl, therefore, found Troeltsch's argument doubly troubling, bristling against Troeltsch's claim that both Lutheranism and German nationalism had seen their best days.

In 1904, the Vatican archivist Heinrich Denifle published a book that in various ways sought to destroy the mythology surrounding Martin Luther. Denifle made critical notes on the new Weimar edition of Luther's works, impugned Luther's character, and challenged the authenticity of Luther's autobiographical accounts. Most important for

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[1] Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress: A Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World* (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1912). Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour*, 15-6.

Holl's research, Denifle claimed Luther's notion of justification offered no innovation beyond the Catholic dogma Luther inherited, since 'justification by works' was simply a Protestant misunderstanding of the Catholic position. Denifle's work often rested on solid scholarship, but the excess of his polemic and the sheer joy with which he attacked Luther and the legends surrounding him certainly cost him the sympathy of some in his audience. Nonetheless, the 'Denifle controversy' took the shine off Luther the Protestant hero to reveal Luther the Catholic monk.[1] Against Troeltsch and Denifle, Holl took up Luther research to restore the image of Luther, the modern, German, and above all Protestant hero.

Bonhoeffer's criticism in effect argues that Holl fails to claim the mantle of authentic Lutheranism. Bonhoeffer levels this charge, first, by repeatedly associating Holl's Luther with Catholic thought, the very tradition from which Holl tried to distance Luther. The most overarching such association is, of course, Bonhoeffer's classification of Holl together with Catholic theology as a being-theology. Bonhoeffer's repeated rhetorical jabs emphasize Holl's proximity to the medieval Catholic system of self-seeking piety, accusing Holl of *contritio activa*, semi-Pelagianism, *analogia entis*, and *causae secundae*.[2] Here Bonhoeffer plays the Lutheran polemicist to the Catholic Holl, arguing that Holl fails to distinguish Lutheranism from Catholicism[3] and fails to discover the true Luther.

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[1] Heinrich Denifle, *Luther und Luthertum in der ersten Entwicklung*, vol. 1 (Mainz: F. Kirchheim, 1904). Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour*, 13-4.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 137-141.

[3] Bonhoeffer, "Geschichte," 212.

Since distinguishing Lutheran thinking from Catholic thinking via the concept of revelation is an important aspect of the project of *Act and Being,* Bonhoeffer in effect takes up what he judges to be Holl's failed project. Bonhoeffer drives this point home by claiming Luther for his own positions even as he criticizes Holl's purportedly Lutheran position. For example, Bonhoeffer challenges Holl's understanding of conscience by appealing to Luther's dictum that conscience, under certain conditions, is "of the devil."[1] And Bonhoeffer takes Holl's own emphases (like the phrase *cor curvum in se* or the doctrine of justification) and turns them against him.[2] But the decisive point at which Bonhoeffer breaks from Holl is his insistence that God meets and justifies humanity not in the reflecting conscience but in the direct apprehension of the person of Christ present in the church.[3] Bonhoeffer accepts Holl's recovery of Luther's claim that the church stands or falls with the doctrine of justification, but he adds to this the insistence that justification presupposes Christ's person-presence in the church.

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 140. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535, Chapters 1-4*, Luther's Works 26 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 26. Luther tends to portray God and the devil as wrestling for control of the conscience (and indeed of the person). Bonhoeffer sees the struggle for control as one between God and the person who refuses to cede control to God.

[2] Bonhoeffer learns from Holl to interpret sin as *cor curvum in se*, Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 68. But Bonhoeffer claims that his own understanding of sin in terms of person better reflects Luther's understanding of the heart turned in on itself, Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 137. And while Holl centers his interpretation of Luther on the doctrine of justification, Bonhoeffer argues that Holl reduces justification to *self*-justification, Bonhoeffer, "Inaugural Lecture," 401; Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 278.

[3] While criticizing the location of revelation in conscience, Bonhoeffer writes, "As long as [human being 'in Adam'] will not allow revelation to drive it into the historical church of Christ, the thinking and philosophizing of human beings in sin is self-glorifying," Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 138.

It is from a theology built on a person-concept of revelation that Bonhoeffer criticizes being-theology's domestication of God's transcendence. Therefore, while Bonhoeffer could agree with Barth about many of the inadequacies of being-theology, he attempts to overcome these from a theology built on a person-concept of revelation. The chief advantage of this strategy, from Bonhoeffer's point of view, is its ability to ground a theology that is also ethical. A person-concept of revelation, better than an act-concept of revelation, grounds a concrete ethics.

Chapter 8 : Concrete Ethics

By solving the problem of act and being, insofar as that problem includes both the problem of transcendence and the problem of historical existence, Bonhoeffer hopes to ground an ethical theology, a form of thinking fully oriented to both God and the world. The barriers to such an ethical theology are, according to Bonhoeffer's diagnosis, forms of thinking that split the reality of revelation into abstract parts. Whether theology focuses on the act-element of revelation, thereby struggling to incorporate the being-aspects of reality, or whether theology focuses on the being-element of revelation, thereby struggling to incorporate the act-aspects of reality, the error is formally similar: both act- and being-theologies introduce in-principle distinctions into revelation. To overcome the barrier to an ethical theology posed by such split-thinking, Bonhoeffer appeals to the unity of revelation that stands behind the split. This, in short, is the form of thinking operative in *Act and Being*. Bonhoeffer appeals to the person of Christ as the unity that precedes the split into act and being, the unity that grounds an ethical theology.

It is clear that, in many ways, Bonhoeffer's thinking shifted after *Act and Being*. In his later works, Bonhoeffer tended to drop the philosophical vocabulary and abstract argumentation characteristic of *Act and Being,* addressing concrete issues with concrete vocabulary. But in doing so, Bonhoeffer continued to rely on the form of argument deployed in *Act and Being.* Specifically, as I demonstrate with reference to *Discipleship* (published 1937) and *Ethics* (written 1940-3, published posthumously), Bonhoeffer continued his polemic against the split-thinking that he found incapable of delivering the coordination of transcendence and historical existence, while he himself argued for that

coordination through a hermeneutical thought-form conceptually grounded in the person of Jesus Christ.

In most of Bonhoeffer's ethical arguments considered below, his chief polemical target is a pseudo-Lutheranism that trades on a distinction between religious and non-religious spheres. Insofar as Bonhoeffer corrects this tradition through his Lutheran account of the person of Jesus Christ, he continues to understand his own ethical position as an authentic expression of the Lutheran tradition. And insofar as Bonhoeffer's own position rests on the thought-form at work in *Act and Being*, his ethics rest on his theological alternative to Barth. *Act and Being* grounds an ethical theology that mediates Barth's Reformed actualism and pseudo-Lutheranism through a Lutheran concept of revelation.

Discipleship

Bonhoeffer argues that a defining feature of discipleship is simple obedience. Simple obedience occurs when there is a "direct relationship between [Jesus'] call and obedience."[1] Bonhoeffer sees this simple obedience on display, for example, when Jesus calls Levi the tax collector: "As Jesus was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him" (Mark 2:14). Jesus calls, and Levi responds immediately with the obedient deed.

But when Bonhoeffer looks at the contemporary Lutheran church, he sees resistance to simple obedience. On the one hand, the church resists seeing simple obedience in the biblical text, preferring to explain away the immediate relationship between call and obedience. Perhaps Levi follows immediately, it is conjectured,

[1] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 57.

because he already knew Jesus and was therefore ready to follow him.[1] On the other hand, the church resists simple obedience in its own life by suggesting that Jesus' call has only limited application. Certainly, the thinking goes, Jesus' commands do not apply to contemporary political circumstances.[2] How has a religious culture developed, asks Bonhoeffer, in which professed Christians disregard the simple obedience so manifest in the bible?

This disregard for simple obedience rests, argues Bonhoeffer, on a misunderstanding of Luther's life and theology. On this pseudo-Lutheran interpretation of Luther's life, Luther entered into the monastery under the conviction of a Catholic understanding of works-righteousness expressed in the formula, 'only the obedient believe.' Luther's search for faith led to the monastery because he thought faith depended on obedience to the law. While in the monastery, the pseudo-Lutheran narrative continues, Luther discovered that faith was not the result of human works but of God's grace. It was not, therefore, that 'only the obedient believe'; rather, 'only the believer is obedient.' Obedience depends on and follows from faith. With this realization, Luther left the legalism of the monastery and re-entered the world. Bolstered by this reading of Luther, pseudo-Lutheranism rejects the legalism of 'only the obedient

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[1] Such an explanation had been offered by Weiss and Neander. Bernhard Weiss, *The Life of Christ*, trans. John Walter Hope, vol. 2 (Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2007), 124. August Neander, *The Life of Jesus Christ in its Historical Connexion and Historical Development*, trans. John McClintock and Charles E. Blumenthal (University of Michigan Library, 2001), 213. Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 57, fn. 1.

[2] More on this below in the discussion of twentieth-century appropriations of Luther's notion of two kingdoms.

believe' and embraces justification by faith as expressed in the principle, 'only the believer is obedient.'[1]

But such an understanding of justification by faith is problematic, argues Bonhoeffer, because it eliminates the need for obedience. If obedience depends on faith, it is only one short step to the conclusion that obedience is peripheral to faith. This elimination of the necessity for obedient action Bonhoeffer calls 'cheap grace.' Here grace functions as "a cheap cover-up for sins, for which [one] shows no remorse and from which [one] has even less desire to be set free."[2] If a theology affirms that 'only the believer obeys,' it teaches cheap grace and the rejection of simple obedience.[3]

The pseudo-Lutheran rejection of simple obedience also divides reality into two spheres. Such thinking creates a false dilemma between faith and works – Should theology ground faith in obedience, or obedience in faith? – rejecting the former alternative as the legalism of works-righteousness, while embracing the latter as justification by grace. But by rejecting legalism in this way, argues Bonhoeffer, such thinking "itself erects the most dangerous law of all, the law of the world and the law of grace."[4] With this, Bonhoeffer alludes to the twentieth-century interpretation of Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms, which, as Bonhoeffer would put it later, divides "the whole of reality into sacred and profane, or Christian and worldly, sectors."[5] Sphere-thinking

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[1] Ibid., 47-8, 63-4.

[2] Ibid., 43.

[3] "In short, the situation is that people have poisoned themselves with cheap grace by the statement that only the believer obeys," Ibid., 69.

[4] Ibid., 81.

[5] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 57.

resists simple obedience by restricting the jurisdiction of Christ's call to the Christian sector, as pseudo-Lutheran interpretations of Jesus' sermon on the mount illustrate.[1] Such interpretations draw a dividing line between Christ and the Old Testament law that precedes him, portraying discipleship as a turning from the law to Christ.

In all of this, sphere-thinking errs, argues Bonhoeffer, in separating what belongs together in the person of Jesus Christ. In the case of interpreting the sermon on the mount, sphere-thinking separates law from divinity:

> Idolizing the law and legalizing God were Israel's sins. Inverted, removing divinity from the law, and separating God from God's law would be the sinful misunderstanding of the disciples. In both cases, God and the law would be separated from each other…[2]

Both legalism and pseudo-Lutheran sphere-thinking separate law from divinity and privilege one over the other. Such split-thinking ignores what Christ announces in the sermon, that he comes not to abolish the law but to fulfill it. "In doing so, Jesus says two things to his disciples: allegiance to the law by itself is not yet discipleship; nor may allegiance to this person of Jesus Christ without the law be called discipleship."[3] Discipleship requires attention to both law *and* divinity, which is impossible apart from

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[1] For example, Karl Holl and his fellow Luther scholar Paul Althaus decried literal interpretations of the sermon on the mount as enthusiastic threats to law and nation. Karl Holl, *The Reconstruction of Morality*, ed. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense, trans. Fred W. Meuser and Walter R. Wietzke (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979), 150, fn. 7; Paul Althaus, *Religiöser Sozialismus: Grundfragen der christlichen Sozialethik* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1921), 32. Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 290.

[2] Ibid., 117.

[3] Ibid., 116.

the call of Christ, in whom law and divinity are united. "Thus it makes sense that at this point in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ speaks of himself for the first time,"[1] describing himself as the one who "fulfils the law, because he alone lives in perfect communion with God."[2] In its resistance to legalism, pseudo-Lutheranism repeats legalism's error, separating what is together in Jesus Christ.

With this argument against pseudo-Lutheranism, Bonhoeffer repeats the argumentative strategy of *Act and Being,* where he mediates the errors of act- and being-theology by locating their errors in a common root – they separate act and being and privilege one over the other. As a result, both theologies struggle to represent the full reality of the Christian life, which rests on the unity of act and being in the person of Christ. Similarly, in *Discipleship,* because both legalism and pseudo-Lutheranism separate law and divinity, they cannot account for the full reality of discipleship that responds to the mutual grounding of law and divinity in the person of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer's own theological thinking works to get back behind this split – whether expressed in terms of act and being, law and divinity, or any other series of pairs – by attention to the person of Christ, where these pairs can be treated hermeneutically, that is, as parts of a logically prior whole.

As this comparison shows, what perdures from *Act and Being* to *Discipleship* is less the vocabulary of 'act' and 'being' than the form of argument deployed to reconcile oppositions. Connections could be drawn between the pairs that Bonhoeffer unites,

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., 118. "Jesus validates anew the law as God's law … There is no fulfillment of the law without communion with God; there is also no communion with God without fulfillment of the law. The first refers to the Jews, the second refers to the misunderstanding that threatened the disciples," Ibid., 117.

perhaps linking 'act' with 'law' and 'being' with 'divinity,' but such connections often prove tenuous. Once attentive to this form of thinking in Bonhoeffer, one notices it reappearing in many disparate contexts to unite all manner of disparate oppositional pairs. This in turn forces attention to the constant element of this argument-form, the form of the person of Christ as the one who reconciles opposites. Christ reconciles all manner of disparate oppositions because he is, as Luther puts it, the *simul* who unites all contradictions.[1]

In the passage of *Discipleship* that perhaps most clearly repeats *Act and Being*'s argument, Bonhoeffer corrects the pseudo-Lutheran interpretation of Luther while addressing the perennial Lutheran question of the relationship of faith to works. Recall the false dilemma that pseudo-Lutheranism erects, which can be stated in various ways: faith or obedient works, cheap grace or legalistic works-righteousness, 'only the believer obeys' or 'only the obedient believes.' Neither side in itself is satisfactory, since legalism reduces faith to the result of humanly possible works while the pseudo-Lutheran alternative eliminates the need for obedient action. Bonhoeffer dissolves this dilemma through what he calls 'the concept of the situation where faith is possible.' About this situation, Bonhoeffer makes four points. First,

> Only the call of Jesus Christ qualifies it as a situation where faith is possible. Second, a situation where faith is possible is never made by humans. Discipleship is not a human offer. The call alone creates the situation. Third, the value of the

[1] Cf. Lienhard, *Luther*, 43.

> situation is never in itself. The call alone justifies it. Finally and most of all, the situation which enables faith can itself happen only in faith.[1]

In order to understand the relationship of 'faith' and 'obedient works,' Bonhoeffer describes the life of obedient faith in terms of 'call,' 'situation' and 'faith.'

With this description, Bonhoeffer has in place an account of discipleship that formally mirrors his account of 'being in Christ' in *Act and Being*.[2] In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer describes being in Christ as the coordination of being in the church and the act of faith; faith is the precondition of being in the church, and being in the church is the precondition of faith. But the possibility of this coordination depends on something outside it: revelation. Therefore, the structure of being in Christ is a coordination of act and being that depends on being acted upon.[3] Similarly in *Discipleship*, Jesus' call (being acted upon) produces a coordination of act and being, i.e., a situation (being) that makes faith (act) possible, which is simultaneously a situation made possible by faith.[4]

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 63.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 117f.

[3] Ibid., 116.

[4] Christiane Tietz also notices the structural parallels between the coordination of act and being in *Act and Being* and the coordination of faith and obedience in *Discipleship*. But her focus is on a novel aspect of this coordination (or 'circle,' as she calls it) in *Discipleship*. In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer portrays the human's entry into the circle as entirely passive. God places the person into the circle. In *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer describes a moment of human action in terms of the 'first step' that humans must take to enter the 'situation.' The 'first step' is only valid as a step into the 'situation,' however, when it is performed in faith, Christiane Tietz, "'Nur der Glaubende ist Gerhorsam, und nur der Gehorsame glaubt.' Beobachtungen zu einem existentiellen Zirkel in Dietrich Bonhoeffers 'Nachfolge'," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

When understood in this way, the 'situation' holds together the principles of works-righteousness and cheap grace.

> The concept of a situation in which faith is possible is only a description of the reality contained in the following two statements, both of which are equally true: *only the believers obey,* and *only the obedient believe.*[1]

Both statements are true, but only if they refer to the "indissoluble unity between faith and obedience" introduced by Jesus' call. The statement 'only the believer obeys' is true if it means, "faith alone justifies us and not deeds of obedience." But the same statement is false if interpreted as introducing a chronological sequence, where obedience temporally follows faith. Such an understanding fails because, in it, "faith and obedience are torn apart." Similarly, the statement 'only the obedient believes' is true if it means obedience is a prerequisite for any faith that "does not become pious self-deception, cheap grace."[2] But the same statement is false if this obedience is understood as a step that precedes and, on its own, makes possible the next step, faith. Both statements are true if read against the background of the unity of faith and obedient works.

With this solution to the problem of faith and works, Bonhoeffer again points to the error of split-thinking. Pseudo-Lutheran theology understands the error of works-righteousness to be the subordination of faith to works, and it responds to this error by subordinating works to faith. From Bonhoeffer's perspective, by contrast, the error of works-righteousness is the separation of faith from works that makes the subordination of

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Jahrbuch 2/Yearbook 2, ed. Christian Gremmels, Hans Pfeifer, and Christiane Tietz (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005), 170-181.

[1] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship,* 63.

[2] Ibid., 63-4.

one to the other possible. Pseudo-Lutheranism repeats this error in cheap grace. The failures of both works-righteousness and cheap grace originate in the introduction of a rigid distinction between faith and works, when both belong together in the simple obedience that responds to the call of the person of Christ

Split-thinking, systematically expressed in the doctrine of two kingdoms, serves to delay, defer, or ignore Jesus' call to discipleship by treating intellectual principles rather than Jesus' call as the guide for action.[1] This in turn introduces the dynamics of reflection, which displace the simple decision to follow Jesus. Bonhoeffer illustrates this point with reference to the biblical account of the rich, young man who does not respond to Jesus' call but "is instead looking at himself again, his problems, his conflicts. He retreats from God's clear commandment back to the interesting, indisputably human situation of 'ethical conflict.'"[2] In 'ethical conflict,' conscience and the knowledge of good and evil replace Jesus' call as the criterion for action.[3] In all these instances, "Double-minded thinking replaces the simple act."[1]

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[1] Ibid., 81. The German editors of *Discipleship* point to several examples (Max Weber, Karl Holl and Paul Althaus) of the Lutheran doctrine of two kingdoms functioning to defer what Bonhoeffer would consider simple obedience, Ibid., 290.

[2] Ibid., 71. Also, "as long as I reflect on myself, Christ is not present," Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 142.

[3] "To invoke ethical conflict is to terminate obedience. It is a retreat from God's reality to human possibility … People are made to decide by the power of their own knowledge of good and evil, by the power of their conscience to know what is good," Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 71. All of this recalls *Creation of Fall.* There the fall from immediate relationship to God introduces a split into human being and thinking, Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 88. Both conscience and the knowledge of good and evil are features of sinful human existence, Ibid., 128, 87.

What, then, makes simple obedience possible? As Bonhoeffer's analysis of the 'situation' makes clear, simple obedience depends on Jesus' call. But more than that, the call leads to simple obedience only because it is the call of Jesus Christ: "there is only one good reason for the proximity of call and deed: *Jesus Christ himself*. It is he who calls."[2] The definitive factor in the life of simple obedience is not an "idea about Christ," since ideas devolve into principle and lead into the cul-de-sac of reflection. Rather, "the call to discipleship is a commitment solely to the person of Jesus Christ."[3] Only Christ can call into unity because only Christ exists in true unity.[4]

The same form of thinking is at work in both *Discipleship* and *Act and Being*. In both cases, Bonhoeffer encounters a pair of intellectual positions that rest on the error of splitting reality into two parts. Act-theology and being-theology privilege act and being respectively, when both belong together in the person of Christ. Works-righteousness and cheap grace privilege works and faith respectively when both belong together in simple obedience, the response to the call of the person of Christ. The thought-form of *Act and Being* repeats in *Discipleship* even as Bonhoeffer sets his sights on questions that are more concrete. This form of thought proves for Bonhoeffer durable and versatile; he relies on it repeatedly in *Ethics* to deal with a series of oppositional pairs.

Ethics

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 71.

[2] Ibid., 57.

[3] Ibid., 59.

[4] Ibid., 117.

When confronted in *Ethics* with oppositional ethical positions, Bonhoeffer invariably argues that both positions are unsatisfactory because they rest on an 'abstract' distinction, a distinction that separates what belongs together in reality, that is, in Christ. In contrast to these abstract ethics, Bonhoeffer develops his own 'concrete' ethic on the foundation of this Christ-reality. The basis of Bonhoeffer's arguments in *Ethics*, both his criticisms of other ethical positions and the development of his own ethic, is Christ's person as the unifying ground of otherwise irreconcilable opposites.

The conceptual foundation of *Ethics* is Bonhoeffer's definition of reality in terms of the person of Christ.[1] The defining characteristic of this Christ-reality is that, in it, God and world are reconciled: "God and the world are enclosed in this name."[2] Reality is Christ, and Christ is the reconciliation of God and world. To define reality as Christ is to say that reality has person-structure; reality is the unity of opposites in history. Just as Bonhoeffer appeals in *Christology* to the person of Christ to foreclose references to God or humanity apart from their unity in Christ, so Bonhoeffer appeals in *Ethics* to the christological, person-structure of reality to foreclose references to God or the world independent of Christ-reality. "From now on we cannot speak rightly of either God or the world without speaking of Jesus Christ."[3]

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[1] "The most fundamental reality is the reality of the God who became human," Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 223.

[2] Ibid., 54. Also 73, 266, et al. In the portions of *Ethics* that Bonhoeffer wrote earlier, he describes the relationship of God and world in Christ as a 'unity.' After 1942, 'reconciliation' replaces 'unity,' Ibid., 266, fn. 71.

[3] Ibid., 54. Also, "Whoever looks at Jesus Christ sees in fact God and the world in one. From then on they can no longer see God without the world, or the world without God," Ibid., 82.

A concrete ethic, by definition, takes into account this reconciled Christ-reality. On the theoretical level, this involves defining the good in conjunction with the real.[1] On the practical level, ethical action, what Bonhoeffer often calls 'responsible action,' is action in accordance with reality.[2] Bonhoeffer's project of a concrete ethic is the attempt to think and act from the reality of the reconciliation of God and the world in Christ.

If a concrete ethic observes the reconciliation of God and world, the various abstract ethics share in the basic error of separating what belongs together in reality. Bonhoeffer sees abstract ethics as littered with distinctions that bifurcate reality into oppositional pairs (e.g. 'ought' and 'is,' 'the good' and 'the real'[3]). Such distinctions produce unworkably abstract concepts that preclude the articulation of a concrete ethic and inhibit responsible action. For example, the distinction between 'individual' and 'society' produces the abstract concept of an 'isolated individual,' which forecloses responsible, concrete action-in-community.[4]

The structure of reality as a reconciliation of opposites means a concrete ethic generally confronts two false, abstract alternatives. In any given situation, there is one way toward a concrete ethic – building on reconciled Christ-reality. But there are two ways toward abstract ethics – systematically privileging one or the other oppositional concept that emerges from the bifurcation of reality. For this reason, Bonhoeffer

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[1] Ibid., 53.

[2] Ibid., 261.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 219f.

frequently refers to the "two grave errors" that compete with his position.[1] Bonhoeffer deals with these often apparently opposed positions first by demonstrating that they rest on the same basic error – the splitting of reality. For example, 'sectarian' and 'secular' ethical orientations appear diametrically opposed, since the first identifies the good with Christian reality and the second identifies the good with the world.[2] But, as Bonhoeffer argues, both positions share in distinguishing between a Christian reality and a worldly reality. Bonhoeffer dissolves the opposition between sectarian and secular ethical orientations by appealing to the person of Christ, in whom God and world are reconciled.

> Just as 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 no longer battle like eternally hostile principles. The action of the Christian instead springs from the unity of God and world brought about in Jesus Christ.[3]

Bonhoeffer consistently responds to such "grave errors" by reasserting the unity of those distinctions in the reality of Christ.

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[1] For examples, the "two grave misunderstandings" of action in accordance with Christ, the "two grave errors" in interpreting the sermon on the mount, and the "two disastrous misunderstandings" of vocation, Ibid., 229, 236, 290-1.

[2] Many of the opposing positions Bonhoeffer considers distinguish themselves from each other according to their attitude toward the world. Secularism affirms the world, while sectarianism denies it. This same dynamic operates in the following pairs Bonhoeffer discusses: pragmatism and idealism, compromise and radicalism, yes and no, affirmation and contradiction, cultural Protestantism and the monasticism, Ibid., 53, 153f., 252-3, 224, 290-1.

[3] Ibid., 238.

Bonhoeffer sees the most serious challenge to concrete ethics coming from the pseudo-Lutheran interpretation of Luther's doctrine of two kingdoms, which relies on the distinction between secular and sacred realms. There, "Reality as a whole splits into two parts, and the concern of ethics becomes the right relation of both parts to each other."[1] Such sphere-thinking "stands like a Colossus obstructing our way"[2] to concrete ethics because its distinction between the sacred and secular, like all abstract distinctions, generates conflict. Abstract distinctions breed conflict on a theoretical level, where the members of the conceptual pairs "fall into an insoluble conflict."[3] Alternatively, the oppositional structure leads to a sort of theoretical vacillation as the poles undermine themselves and evolve into their opposites.[4] On an existential level, the oppositional structure produces conflict by fueling a tragic existence, in which warring principles rend apart ethical being and acting.[5] "[L]iving in abstraction … means living detached from reality and vacillating endlessly" between two conflicting principles.[6] Abstract ethics

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[1] Ibid., 56.

[2] Ibid., 55.

[3] Ibid., 154.

[4] "Every attempt to evade the world will have to be paid for sooner or later with a sinful surrender to the world," Ibid., 61. This recalls *Discipleship*, where the error of monasticism leads to the error of culture Protestantism, Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 47f. For a parallel from *Act and Being*, see the close relationship of idealism and materialism, Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 41.

[5] According to Bonhoeffer, the "essence of Greek tragedy is that human beings are destroyed by the clash of incompatible laws," Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 265.

[6] Ibid., 262. In *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer contrasts the 'ethical conflict' of pseudo-Lutheranism with the 'simple obedience' of the life of discipleship. "Double-minded thinking has replaced the simple act," Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 71.

cannot sustain an ethical life because such opposition proves an insufficiently stable foundation for ethically decisive action.

Sphere-thinking may appear ethically serious, with its tragic clash of mutually irreconcilable laws, but Bonhoeffer argues, "Luther's seriousness is completely different from the seriousness of those classical tragedians." His seriousness lies in the "plain and simple [*einfältig*] life that flows from reconciliation."[1] Life in Christ lifts the believer out of the tragic conflict of opposites, precisely because Christ himself reconciles the opposition between God and world:

> In Christ we are invited to participate in the reality of God and the reality of the world at the same time, the one not without the other. The reality of God is disclosed only as it places me completely into the reality of the world.[2]

As Bonhoeffer argues with reference to Luther and the New Testament, life in Christ is life in God and the world inseparably and simultaneously. Unity and simplicity of action follow from the unity of existence in Christ.

In *Ethics,* Bonhoeffer confronts oppositional ethical positions (like sectarianism and secularism) or ethical positions that trade on such oppositions (like pseudo-Lutheran sphere-thinking) by pointing to their abstract distinctions, distinctions that separate what belong together in Christ. In contrast to these abstract ethics, Bonhoeffer develops his own 'concrete' ethic on the foundation of this Christ-reality. The basis of Bonhoeffer's arguments in *Ethics*, both his criticisms of other ethical positions and the development of

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 265.

[2] Ibid., 55.

his own ethic, is Christ's person as the unifying ground of otherwise irreconcilable opposites.

Barth

It is outside the bounds of this project to compare Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* with Barth's thought from the early 1940s. Nevertheless, *Ethics*, insofar as it deploys the thought-form from *Act and Being*, builds on the theology that the young Bonhoeffer developed against the early Barth. In this sense, Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* can be read as the fruition of Bonhoeffer's attempt to overcome what he considered Barth's inability to ground a concrete ethic. Indeed, Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, resting on a Lutheran christology and proceeding by a hermeneutical thought-form, constitutes an alternative to the ethics implied by Barth's early thought, which rests on a Reformed christology and develops through a dialectical thought-form.

For the young Barth, the greatest ethical danger was not split-thinking but its opposite, the collapse of the distinction between God and world that Barth saw operating in liberal theology and, to a lesser degree, in classical Lutheran theology. It was this elimination of diastasis that Barth diagnosed in his teachers' endorsement of the German war effort.[1] As we have seen, Barth's Reformed actualism broke from liberal theology

[1] Barth put the matter this way in his 14 August 1914 letter to Martin Rade, the editor of *Die Christliche Welt*, where Barth worked as a student. "For me, the saddest thing in these sad times is to see how in all of Germany now, love for the Fatherland, delight in war, and Christian faith are brought together in hopeless confusion … That is the disappointment for us … that we have to see the *Chr. W.*, in this decisive hour, cease to be *Christian*, but rather simply place itself on the same level with *this* world,"

by respecting, through a dialectical thought-form, the distinction between God and humanity, even in Jesus Christ. This Reformed actualism entails an ethic that resists liberal theology's confusion of God's action with human action.

> The whole inspiration and strength of the Reformed idea depends upon the fundamental separation between the heavenly and earthly solutions to the problem of life …; and it depends upon one's courageously looking at the second solution in light of the first and yet (in spite – no, by virtue – of their separation!) taking the second seriously in its own right.[1]

The diastasis requires Christian ethics to look, in alternating moments, at heaven and earth. Christian ethics brings heaven to bear on earth without collapsing the two.[2]

While Bonhoeffer could stand side-by-side with Barth on a variety of particular ethical issues, he tends to reach that stance through a different ethical analysis. Remaining with the example of war, Bonhoeffer too, though initially uncritical,[3] often spoke against theological justifications for war. But for Bonhoeffer, the ethical error of

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Christoph Schwöbel, ed., *Karl Barth-Martin Rade: Ein Briefwechsel* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 1981), 34. Cited and translated in, McCormack, *Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 111.

[1] Barth, "The Doctrinal Task of the Reformed Churches," 268.

[2] Barth first lectured extensively on ethics in 1928 and 1930. These ethics lectures parallel Barth's Göttingen and Münster dogmatics lectures insofar as they have a trinitarian structure built around an act-concept of revelation. Human ethical action is conditioned by the Word of God, which "is the Word of God only in act," and which we hear as the threefold word of the trinity, Karl Barth, *Ethics*, ed. Dietrich Braun, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 50, 52-3.

[3] E.g., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Basic Questions of a Christian Ethic," in *Barcelona, Berlin, New York, 1928-1931*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Douglas W. Stott, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 10 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 371.

war justifications is not the collapse of the distinction between God and world, but rather an introduction of a distinction between religious and political spheres. The distinction between religious and political spheres restricts Christ's calls for peace to the religious sphere while maintaining the option for war in the political sphere.[1] For Bonhoeffer, the greatest obstacle to ethics is the 'Colossus' of split-thinking.

Of course, pseudo-Lutheran sphere-thinking is of a different kind than Barth's distinction between heaven and earth.[2] But if Bonhoeffer understands split-thinking as the ethical error *par excellence*, it is easy to see how he would find Barth's thought inadequate for grounding a concrete ethic, since the diastasis of God and humanity seems

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[1] As we have seen, Bonhoeffer points in *Discipleship* to sphere-thinking as a mechanism for resisting Christ's commands for peace. In his address to the Fanø conference, Bonhoeffer points to war-endorsing sphere-thinking as the heir to the original form of split-thinking introduced by the fall into sin: "Peace on earth is … a commandment given at Christ's coming. There are two ways of reacting to this command from God: the unconditional, blind obedience of action, or the hypocritical question of the Serpent: 'Yea, hath God said …?' This question is the mortal enemy of obedience, and therefore the mortal enemy of all real peace. 'Hath God not said …? Has God not understood human nature well enough to know that wars must occur in this world, like laws of nature? Must God not have meant that we should talk about peace, to be sure, but that it is not to be literally translated into action?' … No, God did not say all that. What He has said is that there shall be peace among men – that we shall obey Him without further question, that is what he means," Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Address to the Fanø Conference: The Church and the Peoples of the World," in *London, 1933-1935*, ed. Keith Clements, trans. Isabel Best and Douglas W. Stott, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 13 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 307-8. Bonhoeffer discusses the serpent's question in, Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 103-10.

[2] Barth himself came to reject the doctrine of the orders of creation that was central to what Bonhoeffer called pseudo-Lutheran sphere-thinking, Paul T. Nimmo, "The Orders of Creation in the Theological Ethics of Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60, no. 1 (2007): 24-35.

to require its own kind of 'double-mindedness.' The structural differences between Barth's and Bonhoeffer's theologies carry over into their ethics. Barth maintains a dialectical distinction of God and world in all media of revelation, including Jesus Christ. Talk about revelation, including christology, must therefore proceed dialectically. Human speech about God's word requires two words. In a similar way, ethics looks in alternate moments to heaven and earth. In contrast, Bonhoeffer maintains a unity of God and world in revelation, in the person of Jesus Christ. Theology proceeds not dialectically but hermeneutically, unpacking the relationship of God to world with reference to their reconciliation in the person of Jesus Christ. In a similar way, Christian action does not proceed from the distinction between heaven and earth; "The action of the Christian instead springs from the unity of God and world brought about in Jesus Christ."[1]

[1] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 238.

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