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Being Together: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Human Being and Theological Ethics [1]

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Is it meaningful to speak about existence as ethical at all? If it is, how does one speak of a Christian ethic? This article proposes to offer a theological understanding of human being and doing in order to create a space for theological ethical reflection, discourse and action. Throughout his life as a scholar and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrestled with the question of a Christian ethic and its relation to the life of the church. In our contemporary milieu of individualism the question of articulating an ethic within the framework of our theological tradition is both challenging and important. It is challenging because the image of an autonomous, independent, self-creating human being does not immediately suggest a life lived in responsible relationships with others. It is important because reflection upon our life together reveals a profound connection among humans and with all creation.

Bonhoeffer begins his discourse on ethics from within the experience of a breakdown of existing possible alternatives: "One may ask whether there have ever before in human history been people with so little ground under their feet—people to whom every available alternative seemed equally intolerable, repugnant, and futile." [2] Bonhoeffer refers to what he calls the "rusty swords", [3] the ethical alternatives of the past. They are reason, fanaticism, conscience, duty, absolute freedom and private virtuousness. [4] In articulating a specifically theological ethic Bonhoeffer addresses the hidden assumption behind each of these repugnant alternatives. In other words, to open up a new space for ethical reflection in the place of these futile options of the past he must begin with a theological analysis of human being and doing. Through such an investigation

both the problematic of the old alternatives as well as a new approach can be investigated.

Theological reflection on human being engages in a polemic against the Enlightenment understanding of the human as autonomous. Human autonomy means that human beings as selves understand themselves to be the source of their own existence. This notion of autonomy also suggests a self-enclosed individual who is independent of the world and the "others" who coexist in that world. Autonomy carries with it a certain notion of freedom. Freedom is an innate quality of human being and, therefore, is the basis of the human as a self-determined volitional being. Autonomous freedom means that humans are the source of their own possibilities. Given this notion of autonomy, human identity is constructed through the subject's concretized possibilities—his or her actions. Who one is is disclosed through the manner in which one concretizes one's freedom. Human autonomy understands "being" to be derivative of doing. My being is achieved through my doing. This is what it means to be self-constituted. Consequently, theological reflection on human being has to address the themes of self as its own source, the relation of this self to the various "others" with whom it lives, and the relation between being and doing.

To show the key issues regarding the understanding of human being as autonomous Bonhoeffer turns to the transcendental philosophy of Immanuel Kant. For Kant reality is understood in terms of two spheres: the phenomenal and the noumenal. The following quotation from *The Critique of Practical Reason* expresses this understanding and its relation to human being:

> A rational being, as belonging to the sensuous world [i.e., the phenomenal world], recognizes itself to be, like all other efficient causes, necessarily subject to the laws of causality, while in practical matters, in its other aspect as a being in itself, it is conscious of its existence as determinable in an intelligible order of things [i.e., the noumenal world]. It is conscious of this not by virtue of a particular intuition of itself but because of certain dynamic laws which determine its causality in the world of sense, for it has been sufficiently proved...that if freedom is attributed to us, it transfers us into an intelligible order of things...[This] supersensuous nature of [human beings]...is their existence according to laws which are independent of all empirical conditions and which therefore belong to the autonomy of pure reason.[5]

Kant's two-fold understanding of reality is the result of his conviction that reality is best understood in terms of causality. Yet, given this starting point, he runs into a problem: strict causality leaves no room for human freedom. In order that humans do not simply become the pawns of nature and her laws, Kant develops an understanding of freedom and reason that locates the self in an intelligible (but not directly knowable) supersensuous nature. Time, as a form of phenomenal intuition, does not exist within the noumenal realm. The self within the noumenal realm is a-temporal—and therefore free—because it is outside of the causally conditioned phenomenal world. Freedom is a transcendental quality of the noumenal self. The self in the noumenal realm is related to the transcendental through the "moral law". This "moral law" is the legislative form that reason achieves when an individual maxim is given universal significance. Kant explains, "[A] rational being either cannot think of his subjectively practical principles (maxims) as at the same time universal laws, or he must suppose that their mere form, through which they are fitted for being given as *universal* laws, is alone that which makes them a practical law."[6] The self is free because it is not conditioned by causality. Therefore, it "can" do what the moral law prescribes that it "ought" to do.[7] Its response to this moral law is one of "duty".[8] In considering this it is important to remember that this transcendental always lies behind cognition and cannot be objectively known. It can only be assumed as the condition for the possibility of reason as either pure reason (what Kant understands as speculative reason)[9] or practical reason (knowledge of the moral law).[10]

To get to the heart of the Kantian understanding of human being and doing one must consider the precise nature of the "transcendental". Bonhoeffer asks, "[W]hat in fact is this 'transcendental' to which everything is supposed to refer? If it can never be objectively knowable, how can reason determine its own limits against this unknown? Even if it is to exercise a free decision of practical reason, the outcome is nevertheless reason's self-chosen limitation, whereby it reinstates its own authority—as the reason which performed this very limitation."[11] Thus, in the realm of moral action, if one is in duty obligated to the moral law which one creates by one's own power, then one is not obligated to any but the self. The I is its

own law-giver and its own judge. If Bonhoeffer is correct, and the transcendental—particularly the moral law—is only a cover for the elevated reason of human beings, the result for transcendental philosophy is the human as ultimate reality. Bonhoeffer continues by asking what it means that the I, who is to understand itself from within itself, *can* in fact do so. He suggests that to understand entails creativity. Thus, for the self to understand itself from within itself it has to have created itself in its understanding.[12] According to Bonhoeffer, this idea is exactly what ends up being asserted as transcendental philosophy slips toward idealism. By drawing out Kant's thought to its extreme conclusion, idealism asserts that "Without I there is no being; I is creative, the sole efficient; I goes out from itself, and to itself returns...[I]dealism pronounces: the world is in being through me."[13] Bonhoeffer concludes, "Thus the essence of the person is freedom, autonomy, coming-to-itself or being-by-itself."[14] The picture that Kant and the Idealists paint of human being is one of individual autonomous freedom. The contingency of temporality cannot intrude upon my noumenal being, the claims of the "other" are of no importance in a world that has come into being through my understanding, and my destiny lies unrestricted ahead of me in my freedom. As an autonomous self, the I of transcendental and idealist philosophy is left alone in a timeless world that, through its own reason, it has created.

In order to suggest an alternative view of human being Bonhoeffer turns to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. By examining Heidegger's understanding of *Dasein* as "being-in-the-world" Bonhoeffer raises the issue of temporality and the relation of the self to its world. Later, by looking at Bonhoeffer's and Heidegger's understanding of death, the ultimate limit upon human existence will be considered and a specifically theological articulation of human being will be offered.

In order to counter Kant's noumenal a-temporality Bonhoeffer turns to Heidegger for whom "Being is essentially interpreted in terms of temporality."[15] Human being is always already in a world and therefore in time. Bonhoeffer argues that "we are set objectively in a definite nexus of experiences, responsibilities and decisions from which we cannot free ourselves again except by abstraction. We live, in fact, within this nexus, whether or not we are in every respect aware of it."[16]

The self understood as being outside of the world is a pure abstraction. As beings in the world we experience existence as having a temporal character. That is, we experience past, present and future as having a constitutive role in our being human. As we reflect upon our own experience we do not find ourselves to be timeless. On the contrary, we experience existence as being between the past and the future. The past is experienced as the "no-longer" and is reflected upon through memory. The future (*adventum*) is experienced as the "not-yet" that breaks into our existence with the force of negation. This temporality can be more concretely understood in its relationship to social existence and the understanding of death.

Given the fact that we no longer understand human being as being alone in a timeless world, the social nature of human existence can be addressed. Because it is in the world, responsibility—human being as response-able[17]—is always a temporal experience. Bonhoeffer states that, "At the moment when he is addressed the person is responsible, or, in other words, faced with a decision...[and therefore he enters] into the reality of time by relating [his] concrete person in time in all its particularities to this obligation, by making [himself] morally responsible."[18] Humans experience temporality through their social life in the world. The contingency of the future is experienced in the "unexpected" claim of the "other" whom I meet in time. The situation itself where I and Thou meet is a product of the past becoming present. Through the notion of temporal sociality another approach to ethical responsibility is being formed that is very different from Kant's notion of duty. The I is not obligated to itself in its abstract, timeless reason. Rather it is obligated to the "other" who makes a claim upon it in time. Or, in other words, from Kant's system "...it followed, as the necessary consequence of a one-sided epistemological philosophy, that the reasoning person had command of his own ethical value, entered by his own strength into the ethical sphere, and bore his ethical motives within himself, as a person equipped with mind. The real barrier was not acknowledged."[19] This "real barrier" is the other whose claim upon the self in sociality calls the self out of itself and into the world of responsibility. Bonhoeffer continues, "...the individual cannot be spoken of without the 'other' also being thought who has set the individual in the ethical sphere."[20] Human being

as "being-in-the-world" is called out of itself by its relation to the "others" who also *are* in the world. "Sociality" character- izes our existence. Bonhoeffer considers human being from this social perspective and by examining the activities of thinking, self-conscious willing and feeling he concludes that "...man's entire spirituality is interwoven with sociality, and rests upon the basic relation of I and Thou. 'Man's whole spirituality becomes evident only along with others: the essence of spirit is that the self *is* through being in the other.'"[21] Human be- ing cannot be understood outside of its relation to others in its world. Thus, Kant's lonely noumenal self is shown to be an abstraction that does not adequately account for the way humans experience reality.

Until this point Bonhoeffer has argued that human being *is* temporal and human being *is* in the relationship of social- ity. The Enlightenment understanding of human being as a- temporal and fundamentally alone has been sufficiently chal- lenged. Along with this new understanding of human being as "being-in-the-world" comes a new understanding of freedom. Freedom will have to be freedom in relation. This will be dis- cussed in the final section. So, while Bonhoeffer has appropri- ated much of Heidegger's philosophy to suggest this different proposal he does not accept Heidegger's thought without crit- icism. His criticism particularly centers on Heidegger's under- standing of death.

The Kantian and idealist understanding of human being has within itself glimpses of infinitude because of the I's role as self-creator, law giver and self-judge, but this understand- ing is avoided in Bonhoeffer's use of Heidegger. *Dasein* is al- ways already in a world that it did not create. It participates in this world as a finite, temporal being who, while always being understood as potentiality, can never be absolute po- tential because existence is always historical finite existence.[22] Bonhoeffer takes issue with Heidegger, however, precisely in his understanding of finitude. He writes that for Heidegger "the philosophical concept of finitude is that of *incapsulated* finitude".[23] This accusation becomes clear as one examines Heidegger's understanding of death. Both agree that human being, as temporal, experiences the future as that which is "not yet". Bonhoeffer states, in his introduction to *Creation and Fall*, that the church "lives from the end, it thinks from

the end, it acts from the end, [and] it proclaims its message from the end."[24] Heidegger writes, "The 'ahead-of-itself,' as an item in the structure of care, tells us unambiguously that in Dasein there is always something *still outstanding*, which, as a potentiality-for-Being for Dasein itself, has not yet become 'actual'. It is essential to the basic constitution of Dasein that there is *constantly something still to be settled*."[25] However, Bonhoeffer and Heidegger differ in the way they understand the experience of death as the final "not yet" of the future. The problem begins when Heidegger states that "Any Dasein exists in just such a manner that its 'not yet' *belongs* to it."[26] The future as "not yet" introduces contingency through negation. Yet, if the "not yet" belongs to existence—that is, does not confront it from outside of itself—that contingency has always already been overcome by the enclosed Being of Dasein. Death is that final "not yet" that is "impending" in that it "stands before us".[27] However, because even this "not yet" belongs to the becoming[28] nature of Dasein, death is understood as a possibility.[29] Dasein, as a "being-towards-death", experiences death as that which discloses Dasein's utmost possibility: anticipation of death as a way of seeing Dasein as a whole. Bonhoeffer summarizes Heidegger's position:

> As temporal *Dasein* within historicity (Geschichtlichkeit), it must order itself upon its own final end, in order to attain its original wholeness. And this end is death. In the most proper sense *Dasein* is "being-towards-death"...[and] in the call of conscience it understands that it is guilty in its gravitation to the world, its futility, and enters into the possibility most proper to it—commitment to death.[30]

Bonhoeffer and Heidegger share a common beginning in their understanding of death. Dasein, as temporal, experiences the future and, therefore, experiences the "not yet" of existence as that which stands before it. For both thinkers death is disclosive. However, death discloses something different for each. Because Heidegger works out of what Bonhoeffer calls an "incapsulated finitude" death can only disclose possibilities that lie within existence as it is experienced between "birth and death".[31] That is, because death is the final "not yet" which nevertheless belongs to the ontological-existential structure of existence, the possibilities it can disclose do not go beyond the limits of the existence of Dasein—i.e., birth and death. For

Bonhoeffer, however, death is disclosive of something else. He writes, "The Christian account [of death] is very different: in death to which man has forfeited himself, and into which he has always lapsed, existence finds its real end, its terminus, not its wholeness, completion, perfection; here 'end' *qua* finish and 'end' *qua* fulfillment are identifiable only in the metaphysical system. Death is eternal death."[32] For Bonhoeffer death lies outside of the structure of human being. It is the final "not yet", the contingency of all contingency, the negation at the end of all negations. Death is the abyss, it is oblivion. This experience of death, precisely because it is experienced as coming from outside of us, is experienced as the self in judgment: "[I]n death, man must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ—II Cor. 5, 10."[33] Because death is experienced as the final end which meets the self from outside of itself, the possibility it discloses is experienced as the self is put into question. It is important to note that both Heidegger and Bonhoeffer make use of the Augustinian phrase: "I have become a question to myself."[34] However, because the "not yet" in Heidegger's philosophy already belongs to the existence of Dasein so, finally, does the answer to the question that the self becomes. Bonhoeffer, in his Inaugural Lecture of 1930, writes, "Heidegger certainly fully understands the man questioning himself to be the basic problem, but in the end, in his writings also, the question becomes the answer, man in fact has knowledge of himself, the question has no ultimate seriousness."[35] However, for Bonhoeffer, because the self meets a finality which in no way belongs to it, the question is experienced differently. In Heidegger's thought the anticipation of death throws one back upon existence and the possibilities inherent within it. For Bonhoeffer the anticipation of death throws the self back *before* existence and the question of existence becomes one of the self's source. Because the self anticipates the creator as judge in death it is thrown back upon the question of this creator as the source of its being. Or, in other words, once the self finds itself not to be its own creator and judge through the realization that death is beyond its control—that death is something totally outside of itself—the self asks the question of its relationship to the creator, source and judge of its existence. The self is disclosed as having a primordial source from whence it came.

Given the self's confrontation with death and with its creator, autonomy comes to be understood in a new light. Autonomy is the creature of God trying to be independent of God. It is the self's attempt at its own Godhood. Bonhoeffer states, "As the image of God man draws his life entirely from his origin in God, but the man who has become like God has forgotten how he was at his origin and has made himself his own creator and judge."[36] In the above analysis of human autonomy it has been suggested that the human individual understood as a self-constituting source of its own existence is the ultimate reality. If the I is creator of itself and its world through reason, its identity—its answer to the question: "Who are you?"—must come from within itself. Its "being" is established and created through its doing. The action of the autonomous self will always already be an attempt to create its own identity. This is so because in the illusion that I am the ultimate reality *my* doing will attempt to disclose the unity of *my* being. Death, as the final limit upon my self-determined doing, will continually show my action to be futile. Because my "doing" cannot point to a source that lies both before and after the contingency of existence the question of my identity in "doing" will always be fragmented. Bonhoeffer suggests that the I's choice between good and evil is precisely the disclosure of this fragmentation, this disunity. He writes,

> [A]lready in the possibility of the knowledge of good and evil Christian ethics discerns a falling away from the origin...The knowledge of good and evil shows that he is no longer at one with this origin...[because]...in the knowledge of good and evil man does not understand himself in the reality of the destiny appointed in his origin [i.e., his source before and after existence], *but rather in his own possibilities, his possibility of being good or evil.*[37]

Bonhoeffer continues, "Man knows good and evil, against God, against his origin, godlessly and of his own choice, understanding himself according to his own contrary possibilities; and he is cut off from the unifying reconciling life in God, and is delivered over to death."[38] Thus, human life is in disunion. What began as autonomy has come to be understood as sin, or as Bonhoeffer often calls it, "being-in-Adam".[39]

The experience of this disunity is shame. "Shame is man's ineffaceable recollection of his estrangement from the origin; it is grief for this estrangement, and the powerless longing to

return to unity with the origin."[40] As the "futural" subject projects itself towards the nullity of death and is thrown back upon its creator "it is the memory of the disunion from the Creator, and of the robbery from the Creator", which is disclosed in shame.[41] From the experience of shame comes the necessity of conscience. Conscience "...is the voice of the apostate life which desires to at least remain one with itself."[42] The self in shame sets up God as the voice of conscience as an attempt to recover the origin that has been lost. I believe that by establishing a right relationship to myself I can establish a right relationship to God. The essence of conscience is that I become my own judge because I still assume that I have the freedom to make the right choices. I believe that by standing in judgment between my own possibilities of good and evil I can choose the good and thus gather myself back together and return to my origin. I remain my own judge and the creator of my own possibilities—even the possibility of being restored to my origin. The Old Adam, the autonomous self, still has control over self. However, by maintaining this control the self exists forever in the conflict of its conscience between good and evil. As judge and creator of my existence I stand alone in judgment of myself. In other words, as one in shame employing conscience I believe that each and every word and deed—each choice between good and evil—that comes from within me will create the totality of who I am. Therefore, as my own judge my action and speech are paralyzed. As I bear the "Atlas-burden" of judgment I cannot purposefully act because each moment of my existence is plagued by an overwhelming indecisiveness as I stand between an infinite variety of possibilities. In "exalting himself to be his own final judge", writes Bonhoeffer, the autonomous self "proceeds to his own indictment".[43] Conscience tells me that I must restore myself to unity with my source. I can do this through my active choice of good and evil. However, because I know that my existence depends on each decision I am driven to fear my own actions. Therefore, my decision is always not to decide. Thus, my "action" becomes an action that is no action at all. I actively decide not to act. In my concern always to chose the good my attention is focused on myself and my choices. Once again I am turned back into myself (Luther) and therefore removed from life in sociality.

At this point two conclusions can be reached and the ensuing problematic can be noted. First, the understanding of human autonomy was sufficiently challenged by an appeal to the experience of the self in community. That is, it was asserted that reality is experienced socially and that to be at all is always to be already in a world of sociality. Thus, our "doing" is always already within a world. While it "creates" in the sense that others experience my action as an "unexpected" possibility, it does not constitute the world. My doing is always derivative of "being-in-the-world". Secondly, the understanding of human autonomy was sufficiently challenged by reflecting upon the human experience of death and disunity with its source. By showing that our "being-in-disunity" precedes our doing it can be stated that while our "doing" is always disclosive of our being—it does not constitute it. Two relationships, and their resultant temporalizing of existence through the "other" and through death, stand as evidence against human autonomy. Also, through sociality and death the relation of "doing" and "being" has been explored. "Being-in-the-world" and "being-in-disunity" have been shown always to precede "doing".

Now that we have re-opened a space for ethical reflection by suggesting an alternative to human autonomy another problem presents itself. Human being as "being-in-the-world" calls one's attention to the (horizontal) relationship with the world. Human being as being-in-disunity-with-its-source calls one's attention to the (vertical) relationship with God. This presents a challenge to ethical reflection. We began by asking whether ethical reflection was possible given the understanding of human being as autonomous. Through an examination of that autonomy it was concluded that it would be unnecessary for the human being as an autonomous being to enter into ethical reflection. This is so because ethical reflection is only necessary and meaningful if the "other" makes some sort of a claim upon our existence. Thus ethical life has to do with the relations between the self and the various "others"[44] that it experiences in its world. The challenge to human autonomy through sociality certainly opens up a space for ethical reflection. However, it does not advance the case for a specifically *theological* ethical reflection. The challenge to human autonomy through an understanding of human as disunited with its source seems to leave the human in only a vertical relationship with God.[45]

This leaves us with the question: Can Christian ethics be possible at all? Or, in other words, can a theological interpretation of being mediate between the human as "being-in-the-world" and as "being-in-disunity"?

Bonhoeffer answers this question by suggesting that all ontological discourse must be carried on within the specifically theological categories of "being-in-Adam" and "being-in-Christ".[46] He writes, "The reality of sin...places the individual in the utmost loneliness, in a state of radical separation from God and man."[47] Therefore, because disunion with the source of our existence is also disunion with the "others" I experience in the world, ethical reflection must take sin into account. This has already been suggested in the above analysis. It was stated that the human in disunity is captured by its own conscience and turned in upon itself to consider its own possibility of being good. The "being-in-Adam", in shameful disunity, employs conscience and in so doing turns in upon its own possibilities in search of the right action that will reunite it with the source of its existence. Only through the eyes of one who is in Adam are the world and God separated. Ironically, it is freedom—the hallmark of the autonomous self—that is the reason for this. Freedom as an innate quality of human being allows the self to choose between good and evil and in so doing leaves the self in paralysis. This is so because every choice is always already in bondage to that choice. The autonomous sinner, whose existence depends upon its right choices, is forever stalled by its very own freedom. A choice for the world can never happen because it may be the wrong choice and, therefore, endanger the self's quest back to the creator. Thus, the futility of life is disclosed. I am alienated from the source of my existence and in attempting to overcome this through my freedom I am enslaved to myself and alienated from the rest of the world. The human is left alone in a world of "things" that can be used in an attempt to make right the fragmented relationship with God.[48] "Being-in-Adam" is being that is separated from both God and world.

Bonhoeffer's claim is that it is only in Christ that one can be related to reality (the horizontal) and God (the vertical) at the same time. In making this assertion Bonhoeffer opens up a new understanding of freedom. He writes, "God in Christ is free for man. Because he does not retain his freedom for himself the

concept of freedom only exists for us as 'being free for'."[49] God freely enters into relationship with his sinful creation and takes upon himself the fragmentation and disunity that characterizes the existence of his creatures. It is because God joins together "in Christ" what human being has split apart "in Adam" that one can live in both the vertical relationship (creature and creator) and the horizontal relationship (creature to creature in community). Bonhoeffer writes,

> In a manner which passes all comprehension God reverses the judgment of justice and piety, declares Himself guilty towards the world, and thereby wipes out the world's guilt. God himself sets out on the path of humiliation and atonement, and thereby absolves the world. God is willing to be guilty of our guilt. He takes upon himself the punishment and the suffering which this guilt has brought on us. God Himself answers for godlessness, love for hatred, the saint for the sinner. Now there is no more godlessness, no more hatred, no more sin which God has not taken upon Himself, suffered for and expiated. Now there is no more reality, nor more world, but it is reconciled with God and at peace. God did this in his dear Son Jesus Christ. *Ecce homo!*[50]

Through the "glorious exchange" God has entered into a new unity with the creation. The problem rested in the illusion of the autonomous subject who believed that it was responsible for restoring this unity through its freedom. Through the soteriological focus Bonhoeffer makes his final move to show the freedom of the autonomous I to be bondage. The source, not the alienated creature, is the one who must make the constitutive change at the level of being and give freedom. Because all human doing lacks the power to mediate the gap between "being-in-Adam" and "being-in-Christ" it is only God who can put our "being-in" *into a different space*. Freedom as *my* freedom leaves me alone and in bondage to myself and my possibilities. It is only by a restored relationship with the "other", both God and the other, that we can be put in the space or relationship of freedom. This means that freedom-in-Adam— the freedom of the noumenal self alone with itself—is simply an illusion. And, given what has been said about conscience, this illusive freedom is disclosed in the end as bondage.

Now, "being-in-Christ" means always seeing the world and God as mediated by the creative redemption of Christ. And now, because of this, Christian ethics is a reality. Bonhoeffer writes,

No man can look with undivided vision at God and at the world
of reality so long as God and the world are torn asunder. Try as
he may, he can only let his eyes wander distractedly from one to
the other. But there is a place at which God and the cosmos are
reconciled, a place at which God and man have become one. That
and that alone is what enables man to set his eyes upon God and
upon the world at the same time. [This place] lies in Jesus Christ,
the Reconciler of the world...Whoever sees Jesus Christ does indeed
see God and the world in one. He can henceforward no longer see
God without the world or the world without God.[51]

Because through Christ God is always already seen with the
world and the world is seen with God, the purpose of Christian
ethics is "participation in the reality of God and of the world
in Jesus Christ today, and this participation must be such that
I never experience the reality of God without the reality of the
world or the reality of the world without the reality of God."[52]

Human being as "being-in-Christ" is always already an eth-
ical being. This is so because the activity of God in Christ has
re-located us into a space of relationships. We are in relation-
ship with others because we are in relationship with God, the
source, judge and reconciler of our existence. No longer can
Christian theology retreat into a one-sided vertical relation-
ship with the divine. Freedom—as it is given us in Christ—is
always freedom for the "other". Human being is free "only by
means of the Word of God [i.e., Jesus the Reconciler]...Freedom
is not a quality which can be revealed—it is not a possession, a
presence, an object...but a relationship and nothing else...Being
free means 'being free for the other'."[53] Therefore, Christian
existence is existence located in freedom and is therefore re-
lated, ethical existence. Because of this a Christian ethic is
both possible and necessary.

Is it meaningful to speak about existence as ethical at all?
The conclusion is that it is. Ethical reflection understood tem-
porally and theologically is necessary and meaningful because
we are located by God through Christ within a community of
brothers and sisters. Within this community we are made "free
for" each other because in Christ we were made "free from"
ourselves. The illusion of the autonomous human individual
who is alone and self-constituting presents a challenge that
Bonhoeffer's theological understanding has been able to over-
come. The groundwork has been accomplished and the task of
ethical reflection within the Body of Christ can begin.[54]

Notes

1   I would like to thank Michael N. Poellet, my professor at the Lutheran Theological Seminary and more recently at St. Thomas More College, for both his critical comments and conversations on this project and the incredible breadth and depth of his thought that has very much formed me as a student of theology.

2   Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*. 3rd Edition. Eberhard Bethge, ed. (London: SCM, 1967) 26.

3   Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*. Eberhard Bethge, ed. (London: SCM, 1955) 6–7.

4   Ibid. 4–6. Also *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 26–27.

5   Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. by Lewis White Beck. 3rd Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1993) 43–44.

6   Ibid. 26.

7   Ibid. 30.

8   Ibid. 33.

9   For this side of the argument see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963).

10 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 141–142.

11 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, trans. by Bernard Noble (New York: Harper & Row, 1961) 31.

12 Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 33.

13 Ibid. 26, 29.

14 Ibid. 36.

15 Ibid. 59.

16 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 24.

17 I agree with H. Richard Niebuhr that both ethical models, human as "maker" (teleological model) and human as "legislator" (deontological model), have to do with the individual alone in relation to some sort of an ideal. Human as "answerer" recognizes the location of human being within a "world" and, therefore, recognizes the primordial nature of sociality. See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy*, introduction by James Gustafson (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

18 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Dogmatic Inquiry into the Sociology of the Church* (London: Collins, 1963) 30.

19 Ibid. 29.

20 Ibid. 32.

21 Ibid. 44–47, 48 (italics mine).

22 Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 60–61.

23 Ibid. 65.

24 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall/Temptation: Two Biblical Studies*, trans. by Kathleen Downham (London: SCM, 1959) 11.

25   Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962) 279.
26   Ibid. 287.
27   Ibid. 295.
28   Ibid. 287.
29   Ibid. 294.
30   Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 61–62.
31   Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 276.
32   Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 67, n. 1.
33   Ibid. 166.
34   See Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X.
35   Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures, and Notes 1928–1936 from the Collected Words*. Vol. 1. Edited and introduced by Edwin H. Robertson, trans. by John Bowden in conjunction with Pastor Bethge (London: William Collins Sons, 1965) 53.
36   Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 143.
37   Ibid. 142 (Italics mine).
38   Ibid. 144.
39   Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 155.
40   Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 145.
41   Ibid. 147.
42   Ibid. 148.
43   Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 157.
44   I am using "others" instead of "people" or "neighbours" to leave open a space for ethical reflection upon the "extra-human" life on the planet. Creation in its most inclusive sense makes ethical claims upon us all the time. See especially James Gustafson's *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, vol. I/II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981/1984).
45   I am indebted to Hannah Arendt for clearly showing this argument in Augustine's thought. See her newly translated and published dissertation: Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*. Edited with an Interpretative Essay by Joanna Vecchiarelli and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 93–97. My thanks also to Michael N. Poellet and Eric Krushel for their insights into this matter as they were expressed in our reading group.
46   Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 67–68.
47   Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communion*, 106.
48   Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 156.
49   Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 37.
50   Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 9.
51   Ibid. 8.
52   Ibid. 62.
53   Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 37.
54   Obviously, much more could be said concerning Bonhoeffer's constructive proposal. His themes of "discipleship" and "obedience" from *The*

Cost of Discipleship as well as his themes of "conformation", "command", along with various others from the *Ethics* could each be given an article of their own. I have merely attempted to establish his starting point that makes these various constructive proposals possible.