

THE PROBLEM

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. 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.^[1] Friedrich Gogarten^[2] and Rudolf Bultmann^[3] wish to free the human being, in its ‘concrete situation’ or ‘historicity’ [‘Geschichtlichkeit’]^[4] from the delusion of being at its own

[1.] The term *critical reservation* was coined by Eberhard Grisebach’s student Hans Michael Müller in his critique of Karl Barth to characterize the systematic basic process of Barth’s dialectical theology. Müller’s position is spelled out in full in “Credo, ut intelligam,” 173. For the controversy that ensued, see Hermann Diem, “Credo ut intelligam” and Gerhardt Kuhlmann, “Zum theologischen Problem der Existenz,” 37, note 2. Karl Barth comments on Müller’s point of view in his “Bemerkungen zu Hans Michael Müllers Lutherbuch,” 568–70. Bonhoeffer refers to this below, 86, footnote 11.

[2.] Cf. Friedrich Gogarten, particularly his *Ich glaube an den dreieinigen Gott, Theologische Tradition und theologische Arbeit*; and “Das Problem einer theologischen Anthropologie.”

[3.] Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, “The Question of a Dialectic Theology,” “On the Question of Christology,” “The Significance of ‘Dialectical Theology’ for the Scientific Study of the New Testament,” and “The Historicity of Man and Faith.”

[4.] Standard English translations of Bultmann’s works render this term as “historicity,” while standard English translations of Martin Heidegger’s works

disposal. Hans Michael Müller maintains that, in the contingency of temptation, people reach their decision *propter Christum*.^[5] 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.^[6] On the other hand, Paul Althaus wants to salvage a theology of faith from the collapse of the theology of consciousness.^[7] In line with the studies of Luther by Reinhold Seeberg^[8] and Karl Holl,^[9] Emanuel Hirsch seeks to establish the basis of the ‘being’ of Christians in consciousness as conscience, as new intention.^[10] Friedrich Brunstäd brings God and human beings into a unity in the ‘unconditional personality’.^[11] Erich Peterson means to find in pure phenomenology the tools to counter dialectical theology; for him theological concepts portray pure concepts of essence and being.^[12] Yet others consider the ontological-phenomenological analysis of Dasein^[13]

render it as “historicality.” For the sake of consistency, “historicity” has been used throughout the present work. [WF]

[5.] “On account of, or in light of, Christ” [trans. MR]. Cf. Hans Michael Müller, N.B. *Erfahrung und Glaube bei Luther*.

[6.] Cf. Friedrich Karl Schumann, *Der Gottesgedanke und der Zerfall der Moderne*.

[7.] Cf. Paul Althaus, “Theologie des Glaubens.” Bonhoeffer makes no further explicit reference to Althaus in this study. *Act and Being* was published, however, on the recommendation—no longer extant—of this theologian from Erlangen.

[8.] Cf. Reinhold Seeberg, *Luther und Luthertum in der neuesten katholischen Beleuchtung; Textbook of the History of Doctrine*, 3/1; and “Zur Religionsphilosophie Luthers.”

[9.] Cf. Karl Holl, *Luther*.

[10.] Cf. Emanuel Hirsch, *Die idealistische Philosophie und das Christentum*, and *Jesus Christus der Herr*.

[11.] Cf. Friedrich Brunstäd, *Die Idee der Religion*.

[12.] Cf. Erik Peterson, “Zur Theorie der Mystik”; “Der Lobgesang der Engel und der mystische Lobpreis”; and “Über die Forderung einer Theologie des Glaubens,” N.B. 282, 300ff. There is no further explicit discussion of Peterson in Bonhoeffer’s text. Peterson had converted to the Roman Catholic Church at Christmas in 1930. His contact with the circle of Catholic phenomenologists is documented in the obituary he wrote, “Zum Gedächtnis von Max Scheler.”

[13.] In common German usage Dasein means “existence.” But particularly under the influence of Martin Heidegger, whose *Being and Time* had just appeared in the spring of 1927, Bonhoeffer throughout *Act and Being* uses

by Martin Heidegger in terms of *existentia*^[14] and, radically opposite to it, Grisebach's 'critical philosophy' of the contingency of the present.^[15] Finally, there is Erich Przywara, a Roman Catholic and Thomist, who assesses the current theological situation of both camps with astonishing clarity. He sets an ontology of the *analogia entis*^[16] against the disintegration of theology brought about by the concepts of act in dialectical theology. At the heart of the problem is the struggle with the formulation of the question that Kant and idealism have posed for theology. 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

Dasein in a technical sense denoting the qualitatively distinctive mode of the being-there [Da-Sein] of human beings, in contrast to the being of all else that is. The 'there' of Dasein calls attention to human finitude, the fact that we find ourselves always already situated in time. But the finitude of Dasein is also disclosed to human beings; for only Dasein 'ex-ists', stands out, from all that is around it, aware of itself, aware that its being is for itself an issue, a responsibility. The word has been left untranslated, intending to signal, through its foreignness, a whole arena of discourse in *Act and Being* to which we might otherwise be oblivious. The present work uses the translation of *Sein und Zeit* made by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, unless otherwise noted, except that the word "being" [Sein] is not capitalized in English [WF].

[14.] Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 67. However, in this passage Heidegger goes on to stress that with regard to the entity Dasein, "here our ontological task is to show that when we choose to designate the Being of this entity as existence [Existenz], this term does not and cannot have the ontological signification of the traditional term '*existentia*'; ontologically, *existentia* is tantamount to *Being-present-at-hand*, a kind of Being which is essentially inappropriate to entities of Dasein's character. To avoid getting bewildered, we shall always use the interpretative expression '*presence-at-hand*' for the term '*existentia*', while the term 'existence', as a designation of Being, will be allotted solely to Dasein."

[15.] Cf. Eberhard Grisebach, *Die Grenzen des Erziehers und seine Verantwortung: Philosophie und Theologie*"; and "Brunners Verteidigung der Theologie."

[16.] "the analogy of being" [MR]. Cf. particularly Erich Przywara, *Religionsphilosophie katholischer Theologie* and *Ringens der Gegenwart*.

- 23 ‘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?

It is not our intention to apply the paired concepts of act and being as a critical principle to the history of theology, not even the most recent. Nonetheless, our inquiry must of necessity engage questions that are currently debated, seeking to provide a systematic sketch of the significance of the problem of act and being for the whole of theological study [Dogmatik].

The juxtaposition of act and being is not identical with that of consciousness and being, as the latter two concepts are not mutually exclusive. Even to consciousness [Bewußt-Sein], predicates of being apply, precisely as the mode of being of that which is conscious. Act should be thought of as pure intentionality, alien to being. Given that the act takes place in consciousness, we must distinguish between direct consciousness (*actus directus*) and the consciousness of reflection (*actus reflexus*).^[17] 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. It is not as if the act offers no material to reflection, only that reflection cannot ‘find’ the act, because the intentionality that is characteristic of the act is displaced by reflection. This distinction will prove to be of crucial importance in

[17.] One even might say that the distinction between *actus directus* and *actus reflexus* is the central idea with which Bonhoeffer is occupied in the following. Bonhoeffer took over this terminology from Franz Delitzsch, *A System of Biblical Psychology*, 407–17, but related it back to the distinction made by early Protestantism between *fides directa* (direct faith) and *fides reflexa* (reflexive faith), which is itself more exact because it is understood not psychologically but theologically. See below, Section C, pages 158–59, notes 29 and 30. Cf. also “Man in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology,” *NRS* 65ff. (*GS* 3 [1930]:80f.); “The Theology of Crisis,” *NRS* 372 (*GS* 3 [1931]:124); “Concerning the Christian Idea of God,” *GS* 3:102; and “Probleme einer theologischen Anthropologie,” *GS* 5 (1932/33):343, 349 and 353f.

theology. Even as *consciousness* [Bewußt-*sein*], being is not in principle contained within *conscious-ness* [Bewußt-*sein*]. As something taking place in consciousness [Bewußt-*Seiendes*], the act is a temporal, psychic event. But just as one fails to understand the act by ‘explaining’ it as an occurrence in time, so ‘being’ is misunderstood when it is defined as something ‘existing’ (even as something existing in *conscious-ness* [Bewußt-*Seiendes*]). Act can never be ‘explained’ but only ‘understood’ (Dilthey), just as being can never be ‘proved’ but only ‘pointed out’.^[18] It follows that here we are concerned with the transcending of ‘what exists’. Wherever this is not understood, every transcendental beginning and every genuine ontology will founder. 24

At this point only general and preliminary definitions should be given about the nature of act and being in light of which we can raise further questions. On the one hand, act is comprised of relationality, the infinitely-extensive, that which is bound to *consciousness*, discontinuity, and existentiality. (The term ‘existentiality’ here should be taken to designate not the sphere of the ‘there is’ [‘es gibt’],^[19] 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. How the understanding of both manifests itself concretely in philosophy and theology remains to be seen. But it should already be apparent that all of theology, in its teaching concern-

[18.] Wilhelm Dilthey, “Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie,” juxtaposed *understanding* as the method of the human sciences, or humanities [Geisteswissenschaften], with *explanation* as the procedure of the natural sciences [Naturwissenschaften]: “We explain nature, but we understand psychic life” (144). The juxtaposition of proving [erweisen], and pointing out [aufweisen], can be traced back to a common linguistic usage in phenomenology. *Aufweisen* refers to a method of phenomenological demonstration that requires evidence but not logic. For example, cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 79, 250. Further evidence of such usage can be found in Jakob Lanz, “Aufweis(ung)/Ausweis(ung),” 647–49.

[19.] Bonhoeffer here distinguishes the use of the word existentiality, when speaking of the act, from the more technical Heideggerian meaning of existence, the distinctive mode of being of Dasein. For Heidegger, it is Dasein’s openness to being that distinguishes it; thus “only as long as Dasein is, ‘is there’ Being [‘gibt es’ Sein]” (*Being and Time*, 255). For another influence on Bonhoeffer’s use of ‘*es gibt*’, see below, Section B, page 115, editorial note 47). [WF]

ing knowledge of God, of human beings, and of sin and grace, crucially depends on whether it begins with the concept of act or of being.

Arranged systematically, the problem will be examined in the following successive stages:

25 The encounter with the problem of knowledge provides the first clarification of the problem of act and being. The question of whether this knowledge should be interpreted in terms of act or of being becomes acute with the concept of the object. If that concept is entirely act-oriented, this will have intolerable consequences for a scholarly pursuit that insists on the need for concepts of being, and vice versa, for the question of knowledge is the question of the I about the I, about itself. Here, the question of knowledge is the understanding of Dasein trying its wings, seeking in reflection to adapt to a world, that is, to find itself in it. It is, in other words, the question of human beings. Though the latter does not follow from the former, it is their connection that is essential: the meaning of epistemology [Erkenntnistheorie] is anthropology. Wherever the capacity of human beings to know is attacked, nothing less than being human itself is at stake, which is the reason why, ever since Descartes, the passion of philosophy has burnt so strongly here. But because the concept of knowledge comprises in itself the necessity of transcending the known through the process of knowing, and vice versa, the understanding of Dasein in reference to [in bezug auf] transcendence is, in one form or another, part of the question of knowledge. This suggests that the question of God is a part of it, too. This is true (as we shall show) even where the attempt is made to exclude the question of God altogether, or where, as perhaps in Heidegger's ontology, epistemology is allotted an entirely different place in the whole of philosophy than is the case in transcendental philosophy. This is also true because the question concerning being human is hidden in epistemology, whether or not we are dealing with transcendental attempts to interpret act or ontological attempts to interpret 'being' purely in its own terms. These two attempts represent the most sharply antithetical formulations of the two positions under discussion.

Consequently, the critical idea that governs the discussion of Section A below (AB 33–80) must be the possibility of applying the suggested solutions of the act-being-problem to Christian conceptions of God and revelation, from which everything else proceeds. That critical idea is tested against the underlying self-understanding of human beings at any

moment. The purely transcendental or the purely ontological starting points may be useful to theology as compared to other starting points. But even if this is the case, the possibility of constructing theology on only one of these concepts of knowledge still founders on the attendant understanding of the self—which proves to be that of the autonomous I understanding itself only in terms of itself and subject only to itself. The concept of a contingent revelation of God in Christ denies in principle the possibility of the self-understanding of the I apart from the reference to revelation (Christian transcendentalism). The concept of revelation must, therefore, yield an epistemology of its own. But inasmuch as an interpretation of revelation in terms of act or in terms of being yields concepts of understanding that are incapable of bearing the whole weight of revelation, the concept of revelation has to be thought about within the concreteness of the conception of the church, that is to say, in terms of a sociological category in which the interpretation of act and of being meet and are drawn together into one. The dialectic of act and being is understood theologically as the dialectic of faith and the congregation of Christ. Neither is to be thought without the other; each is ‘taken up’ or ‘suspended’ [‘aufgehoben’]^[20] in the other. The theological concepts of object and knowledge are shown to be determined by the sociological concept of the person and must be recast accordingly. The sphere of what exists, of what ‘is given’ [‘es gibt’],^[21] of reified concepts

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[20.] The terms *Aufheben* and *Aufhebung* are not usually used in *Act and Being* in the straightforward sense of the ‘abolition’ or ‘abrogation’ of one thing by another, but with a Hegelian, dialectical meaning: bringing into being the unity of negating (overcoming) and preserving (sustaining). Cf. for example G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline*. par. 96, Addendum. Throughout the present work, Bonhoeffer employs the crucial Hegelian term *aufheben* (verb) or *Aufhebung* (noun), which in the idealist tradition denotes the dual occurrence of something being surpassed and sustained, at one and the same time, in a dialectical process moving toward an ultimate synthesis of apparent opposites. But Bonhoeffer’s own use of the term, rather than seeing this as a temporal process toward synthesis, however, invokes a tension—a ‘suspension’ or ‘between’. Despite the frequent use in Hegel scholarship of the word “sublate” to translate *aufheben*, here words such as “subvert” or “subversion” have been used when the more ‘negative’ connotation is emphasized, while “suspend” and “suspension” have been used to connote the tensile, unresolved dialectical state of human existence as Bonhoeffer portrays it philosophically. [WF]

[21.] Here, Bonhoeffer uses the phrase ‘*es gibt*’ in the more mundane sense of ‘what is’. [WF]

of being, is brought into motion through the sociological category. Concepts of being, insofar as they are acquired from revelation, are always determined by the concepts of sin and grace, 'Adam' and Christ. There are in theology no ontological categories that are primarily based in creation and divorced from those latter concepts.^[22] The idea of this 'being'—of sin and of human beings in sin, of grace and of human beings in grace—is developed within the wider concreteness of the thought of the church in our final chapter. The study concludes with an interpretation of 'being in Christ' as determined by past and future, reflection and intentionality. The past is 'taken up' or suspended in the future, reflection in intentionality. Out of the human being of conscience grows the child.

This entire study is an attempt to unify the concern of true transcendentalism and the concern of true ontology in an 'ecclesiological form of thinking'.

[22.] In his subsequent writings, Bonhoeffer will clarify the dual reason for the inability of theology to be based in creation alone: (1) the fundamental difference between creator and creature, and (2) the creature's sinful refusal to live within the limits of creatureliness. See *CF* 35–40, 69–72, on the creator-creature distinction, as well as *C*, 102–6, 106–13, where this is related to the difference between the incarnation and humiliation of Christ. Contrary to broad trends within his own time (and ours) Bonhoeffer refused to dispense with the theological concept of 'sin' altogether, despite his strong confidence in the human capacities of knowledge and will. Thus, there is no 'innocent' vision of creation to which Bonhoeffer can appeal, 'before' or 'apart from' human brokenness. Rather, he must speak of creation, and all created human capacities, only in terms of a fallen Adam and a redemptive Christ—as 'being in Adam' or 'being in Christ'. This was at the root of the conflict later over the efficacy in theology of any appeal to 'orders of creation' in formulating a theological ethics. See *NRS* 162: "Creation and sin are so bound up together [that] each human order is an order of the fallen world and not an order of creation. . . . [Thus] there is no longer any possibility of regarding any features per se as orders of creation and of perceiving the will of God directly in them." [WF]

A. THE PROBLEM OF ACT AND BEING, PORTRAYED IN A PREPARATORY MANNER AS THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF AN AUTONOMOUS UNDERSTANDING OF DASEIN IN PHILOSOPHY

1. The Transcendental Attempt

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Epistemology is the attempt of the I to understand itself. I reflect on myself; I and myself move apart and come together again. This is the basic posture of transcendental philosophers. And in this attitude of reflection the self-understanding of the I is, in one way or another, closed within itself. The I intends to understand itself by regarding itself. Here the common basis of transcendental philosophy and idealism is clear.

Two things are to be kept in mind in what follows. Genuine transcendental philosophy, such as that which Kant¹ tried to develop by rejoining a long conceptual development from the time of scholastic theology,²

1. The entire interpretation of Kant, as well as of idealism, presented here is stylized. For that reason, quotations are dispensed with. Kant is depicted as a pure transcendental philosopher, which he never was entirely, even though in our view he intended to be. The substance of the discussion concerns systematic and not historical questions.^[1]

2. Cf. H. Knittermeyer, "Die Transzendentalphilosophie und die Theologie." *Christl. Welt* 1924, N.B. col. 222.^[2]

[1.] In *SC* Bonhoeffer did not distinguish between Kant's transcendental philosophy and idealism as sharply as he does in this study. See *SC* 211, note 5.

[2.] Hinrich Knittermeyer's article was written for the two hundredth anniversary of Kant's birth. As a countermeasure against neo-Kantianism and its predominance in the understanding of Kant in contemporary theology, Knittermeyer proposed what he called "the trinitarian root of transcendental philosophy" (col. 222) of which Kant himself had remained ever mindful, albeit for reasons of critique. Bonhoeffer's own stylized presenta-

must be distinguished from the concept of transcendentalist philosophy as understood by post-Kantian idealism.^[3] Further, we must consider the question whether Kant's transcendental critique of reason is at all identical with the crisis into which reason is placed in Luther and Protestant orthodoxy. We need to ask whether Kant did not proceed to place reason within its rights precisely by defining its limits³ and whether, for that reason, he is not to be given from the outset the title of the epistemologist *par excellence*^[4] of Protestantism.^[5]

It is integral to the concept of genuine transcendentalism that thinking refers to something transcendent which, however, is not at its disposal. All thinking always refers to something transcendent in two ways: retrospectively and prospectively. It is *retrospective* in that thinking, *qua* thinking, lays claim to a meaning which it cannot give to itself—in that such meaning is in reference to the logos of transcendence. The reference is *prospective* in that thinking, *qua* relation, is in reference to objects, coming up against something transcendent, provided that they are truly objects—standing over against thought. (It makes no difference which

3. Cf. W. Lütgert's interpretation in *Religion des Idealismus*, 1, 3ff.

tion of 'genuine transcendentalism' actually follows Knittermeyer's attempt to mediate Heidegger through Kant in such a manner as to prevent the establishment of the relation of philosophy to Dasein at the expense of the primary qualification of Dasein by means of the categories of cognition. Cf. Knittermeyer, "Philosophie der praktischen Vernunft": "The ontological approach does not seem to be in error when it links philosophy to Dasein as human Dasein. Difficulties arise only when Dasein itself lays claim to an ontic dignity, instead of being seen primarily as Dasein being tempted by cognition" (352f.). Cf. Bonhoeffer, "The Theology of Crisis," *NRS* 369f.

[3.] While genuine transcendental philosophy, in Bonhoeffer's schema, may indeed still prove of service to theology, transcendentalist philosophy—by which he means a specific development of the transcendental tradition in the direction of systematic philosophies of totality—is seen by Bonhoeffer as the greatest danger to all forms of critical rationality, including theology. [WF]

[4.] Bonhoeffer draws on the assertion of Wilhelm Lütgert that, as Kant had noted, "the mind is unable to know God, not because knowledge of the mind is restricted to matters of the world, but because it restricts itself to consciousness. . . . For Kant reason is without power outside the house it has built for itself, while it is all powerful inside it. It is all powerful because it rests always at home, that is to say, it remains within itself" (*Die Religion des deutschen Idealismus*, 11f.).

[5.] The previous English edition of the text mistranslated this sentence in such a way that Bonhoeffer was left saying that it is 'impermissible' to understand Kant in precisely the way that Bonhoeffer indeed wishes us to understand him: as potentially the "epistemologist *par excellence* of Protestantism." See *AB* 20.[WF]

concept of object, from Kant to [Heinrich] Rickert, is applied here.) One may speak of genuine transcendentalism so long as the resistance of transcendence to thinking is upheld, that is to say, so long as the thing-in-itself and transcendental apperception are understood as pure limiting concepts, neither of which is entangled with the other. In knowing, human Dasein knows itself to be suspended between [eingespannt zwischen]^[6] two poles that transcend it. This 'being between' that which is transcendent is 'Dasein'.⁴ But this acquires another, special meaning through thinking. All existing things, in the midst of which human Dasein may find itself, are by virtue of thinking 'in reference to' human Dasein. They are so by virtue of that same thinking (that understands itself in just this way) which enables Dasein to understand itself as being between that which is transcendent [zwischen Transzendente[m] seiend].^[8] This is how human Dasein acquires a mode of being which distinguishes it from all else that exists. For in that mode the world of all else that exists is being transcended; indeed, that world has existence only in reference to thought. Whether it exists only *by virtue* of thinking is another question. For genuine transcendentalism the mode of being of human Dasein that has this remarkable characteristic is the pure *act*. This is a surprising, albeit necessary, conclusion. 'Being' is being amidst transcendence [Sein zwischen Transzendenz]. But this is so only by virtue of that will to self-understanding which is itself oriented towards transcendence. To know oneself to be oriented towards transcendence and, consequently, to be the world's reference point is what, in transcendentalism, constitutes human Dasein. From this delimitation of the self-understanding-human-being—that is, of reason—now breaks forth the radical critique of reason. Here, reason is given back its original or primordial legitimacy, because it is reason itself that causes the crisis of rea-

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4. The concept of Dasein as the mode of being of human beings as distinct from other existing things is taken over from the terminology of Heidegger: *Being and Time*, 1962 [1927].^[7]

[6.] Bonhoeffer repeatedly employs a quasi-spatial metaphor to describe human-existence as a 'between'—a 'space' or opening—within which can occur the encounter with that which is other than ourselves. [WF]

[7.] Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32: "As ways in which man behaves, sciences have the manner of Being which this entity [Seiendes]—man himself—possesses. This entity [Seiende] we denote terminologically as 'Dasein'."

[8.] Again, one sees the tensile imagery with which Bonhoeffer conveys his dialectical approach. [WF]

son. In other words, human beings understand themselves, in the last resort, not from the transcendent but from themselves, from reason—or, to be precise, from the limits that reason has set for itself, whether the limits are rational or ethical in kind. Every transcendental epistemology or corresponding understanding of Dasein must end up in this internal contradiction. This failure or breach, which resides in the heart of the matter itself, has to be taken more seriously than the immediately ensuing attempts to restore inner unity. Such attempts are always at the expense of the transcendental point of departure.

First of all, what has to be kept in mind and explained is this: the human being is Dasein as pure act—Dasein that understands itself from within its self-imposed limits, that is, from itself. Transcendentalism is not phenomenism.^[9] The issue that distinguishes Kant from phenomenism makes clear that even though one encounters in Kant ideas that are strongly reminiscent of phenomenism, they are, nonetheless, contrary to his project. This is made clear by the question that distinguishes Kant from phenomenism. Phenomenism asked how the I comes upon the object, then rendered the question moot by means of the pure phenomenality of objects in the consciousness. Kant, on the other hand, accepted the customary reference of the I towards the object and now asked how knowledge was possible at all, or what the meaning of that customarily accepted reference was. His question differs from that of phenomenism in the same way that a question about the commonly accepted reference differs from a question about being. Genuine transcendentalism knows no question of being pure and simple. It cannot

[9.] Phenomenism is a term that was introduced by nineteenth-century Kantians. It designated positions within the theory of knowledge that, on one hand, explained the knowledge of entities in terms of the relation of individual subjects of cognition to the conceptions presented to them and, on the other, left undecided the reality of entities outside of the activity of conceptualization. Bonhoeffer clearly does not wish to limit himself to interpretations of Kant at this point such as that of Wilhelm Windelband, to whose history of philosophy he refers later in the present work. According to Windelband, the theoretical philosophy of Kant's transcendental aesthetics and logic is to be understood as a "completely consistent phenomenism," as a "transcendental phenomenism," yes, even as an "absolute phenomenism" (*Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* 2:63–94, esp. 67, 82, 91). Rather, Bonhoeffer identifies his own position with relation to Friedrich Brunstäd's description of phenomenism, "which declares that we can know appearances only and not things in themselves [Dinge an sich]" (*Idee der Religion*, 72). Bonhoeffer follows Brunstäd in stressing the sharp difference between Kant and phenomenism (cf. Brunstäd, *Idee der Religion*, 90f.).

know such a question precisely because its very meaning is to go beyond the ‘dogmatism’^[10] of the question of being. Knowing is not possible as a duplication of reality, a process in which there are no criteria for the question of truth. Instead, knowing is made possible only by a synthesis that is originally founded, and then brought to fulfillment, in the knowing subject in the unity of transcendental apperception. This synthesis must be understood as having logical precedence over the empirical, over experience. It must, in other words, be thought a priori. But this must be a synthesis with its own inner necessity and legitimacy, wherein it demonstrates its truth and validity. Knowledge is not validated through the congruence of knowledge with the object of knowledge, however their correspondence is construed, but through the necessity of the a priori synthesis.^[11] Truth is only in the pure act. Thus, the concept of being is resolved into the concept of act. Being ‘is’ only in reference to knowing. This ‘in reference to’ of the original form of transcendentalism opens the space for the orientation of thinking towards transcendence, whereas the substitution of ‘through’ for ‘in reference to’ would express the full power of reason over transcendence. Consequently, the understanding of Dasein is characterized as it is for Kant as self-knowing ‘in reference to’. It has the sense of *being deeply called into question* by

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[10.] It was Kant who defined his ‘critical philosophy’ vis-à-vis both ‘dogmatism’, “the presumption that it is possible to make progress with pure knowledge, according to principles, from concepts alone,” and ‘scepticism’, “which makes short work with all metaphysics.” Kant’s proposed ‘criticism’, to the contrary, “is the necessary preparation for a thoroughly grounded metaphysics” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxxv–xxxvi, 32). Hegel, then, defined ‘dogmatism’ as “the opinion that the True consists in a proposition which is a fixed result, or which is immediately known” (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, par. 40, 23). Kant’s search for the transcendental conditions of the possibility of knowledge thus turns into the idealistic proposal that knowing is a process, not fixed, in which the knower mediates all that is known. Finally, according to Johann Gottlieb Fichte, a full-blown idealism does away with any enduring ‘otherness’ to the knowing-I whatsoever, for any philosophy “which equates the I in itself with something else and sets something else in opposition to it” is ‘dogmatic’ (J. G. Fichte, “Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre” [1794/1802], in *Sämmtliche Werke*, 1:119.). [WF]

[11.] With this epistemological critique, Bonhoeffer shows himself to be part of the twentieth century’s enduring philosophical struggle over the nature of Kant’s epistemological turn to the subject. Here Bonhoeffer shows himself to be reacting against two philosophical reactions to Kant from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, idealism and positivism, the former of which is clearly for Bonhoeffer at this time the greater enemy. [WF]

knowledge,⁵ of never being able to rest in itself without surrendering itself. It has the sense of pure act. But as such, the understanding of Dasein must always transcend itself.⁶ 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 pure act. The attempt to understand oneself purely from oneself must come to nothing because Dasein, by nature, is not in itself self-subsistent but precisely ‘in reference to’. The consummation of this attempt cannot be attained. For when I come to know myself, the ‘myself’ is already something completed, but no longer the ‘I’, for the attainment of the self, too, is completed. There is no longer ‘in reference to’. The ‘I’, thought of as something in process, must, instead, become something completed. ‘I’ cannot be thought, because it is the precondition for thinking itself—that is to say, the I ‘is’ always there, never as an object, but always as a priori synthesis; it precedes the object.

32 A profound contradiction comes into view now: the I is being-already-there. It is both the very process of attainment and its precondition, and as such the I logically *precedes* thinking. But inasmuch as everything about the I is constituted by thought, *thinking precedes the I*. This means that thinking lies on the brink of the ‘nonobjective’, without which, just because it is the condition of the conditional, there is nothing objective. Thinking is the boundary of existence out of which human beings live; it is a boundary in that the unconditional, that is human existence, is always out in front of human beings, but already behind them every time Dasein sets out to understand its own existence as Dasein. The impossibility of Dasein is proven by its understanding itself as an accomplishment, even while it is really the performance of an act.

Now two postures are possible in the face of the scandal of the limits in the concept of the I and in thinking. By attempting to comprehend the I, thinking suspends itself [hebt es sich selbst auf]. By limiting itself through a self-subversion [Selbstaufhebung] of its power, however—con-

5. Knittermeyer: *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 1929, no. 4, 352f.^[12]

6. It is necessary, in relation to what follows, to state specifically that this is only one side of the historical Kant. But from the days of Fichte until now, ever-new attempts have had to be made to understand Kant better than he understood himself.

[12.] Bonhoeffer cites this as *Zwischen den Zeiten* 1929, no. 4, but the correct volume no. is 7. [WF]

trusting what is objective with the I as the condition of objectivity—thinking sets itself into power once again as that which makes the separation possible at all. One possibility is that thinking can submit to this self-limitation, in the manner of genuine transcendental thinking. This response, it seems to me, is in accord with Kant's original proposal even though, admittedly, it is linked with phenomenalist and idealistic elements in the historical Kant that are open to dangerous misinterpretation.

The other possibility, the great temptation for all genuine philosophy, is for thinking to raise itself to the position of lord over what is nonobjective by taking the process of attainment, the I, into itself in the act of thinking. Here, the I, now thinking itself, simply becomes the *point of departure* instead of the limit-point of philosophy.^[13] But thinking cannot do this without losing two very different things, reality and transcendence, that is, *the one through the other*. Philosophy, thinking, the I, all come under the power of themselves, rather than transcendence. The boundlessness of the claim of thinking turns into its exact opposite. Thinking languishes in itself; precisely where it is free from the transcendent, from reality, there it is imprisoned in itself.^[14] From the originally transcendental project develops a system of pure self-transcendence on the part of thinking or, which comes to the same thing, a monism unaffected by reality. It matters little whether it now is called a system of pure transcendence or one of pure immanence, as the end product is materially the same. Kierkegaard said, not without justification, that such philosophizing obviously forgets that we ourselves exist.^[15] This second possibility was taken up and elaborated as much in the transition from Socrates to Plato as it was in the turn from Kant to

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[13.] Here Bonhoeffer challenges all readings of the Kantian turn to the subject that interpret it as necessarily a turn toward the sovereign self, toward a self that wills and chooses, and sees itself as the point of departure for all understanding. Rather, Bonhoeffer emphasizes precisely the 'critical' turn of the Kantian revolution, which sustained an ontological reserve, or agnosticism, in its judgments about the power of the subject—a reserve that Hegel and Fichte then, in Bonhoeffer's view, exploited. [WF]

[14.] Thus, for the proto-deconstructionist Bonhoeffer, an irony lies at the heart of all late-modern and postmodern attempts to free the subject from any encumbrances of transcendence; for in attempting to free the subject from heteronomy, they actually leave the subject imprisoned with only itself, unable to allow the approach of that which is genuinely other. [WF]

[15.] This is, in essence, the basic point of Kierkegaard's critique of idealism. Cf. especially Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 118–25, 189–208, 301–18.

idealism—though, of course, in an entirely different sense. Only the second of these two general possibilities conceals within itself the claim of the system, and that is its secret power.

Whether thinking is modest about itself—that is to say remains genuine transcendental thinking—or whether it lays violent hands on the unconditional and becomes idealistic thinking, is no longer a question of theoretical philosophy, which, as we saw, holds up both possibilities for the choosing. It is a decision of practical reason. Nothing can oblige thinking, precisely as free thinking, not to draw the unconditional into itself and to take control of its I. But it is no less an act of free thinking when, precisely to remain free, it contents itself with its orientation towards transcendence and does not take control of its I, simply because it is always ‘in reference to’. Here at the apogee of thinking—though not to avoid the need for thinking—there comes clearly to light the decision-character⁷ of thinking that is no longer held within the strictures of internal logic, the character of which Fichte spoke when he said that the kind of philosophy one has depends on what kind of human being one is.⁸

34 Idealism deprives self-understanding Dasein of its transcendental orientation, for it understands itself without it. That is to say, in freeing Dasein from ‘being amidst transcendentals’, from being entwined by the transcendent, idealism seems to have resolved the concept of being—which in pure transcendental philosophy still perhaps appeared to be encumbered by the transcendent—entirely into the concept of act. Idealism has radicalized Kant’s discovery. To be is to be comprehended by the I in the a priori synthesis.⁹ Without the I, there is no being. The I is

7. The third possibility is genuine ontology. Cf. further below.

8. Cf. [Fichte]. *Werke*, I, 434.^[16]

9. Cf. Brunstäd: *Idee der Religion*, 1922. In this work Kant and idealism are brought into immediate relation; the presentation of idealism there treats with exemplary clarity the basic theme, the a priori synthesis, in the idealist interpretation.^[17]

[16.] “One’s choice of philosophy depends on what kind of human being one is, for a philosophical system is not an inert household effect to be taken up or abandoned as desired; the system, rather, is animated by the soul of the human being who has embraced it” (J. G. Fichte, “Erste Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre” [1797], in *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:434).

[17.] Friedrich Brunstäd, *Idee der Religion*, 90–107. Brunstäd does away with “the phenomenalist obscuring of Kant” and the “objective-idealistic one of Hegel,” thereby establishing the unity of the “critical-idealistic concept of knowledge” (91). On the “clarity

creative; it alone is efficacious, going out of and returning to itself. If being were not the object of understanding, but were thought absolutely, it would lead immediately to materialism. Idealism is neighbor to materialism (Hegel–Marx). Dasein is the contemplation by the eternal I of itself; it is its coming home. Understood as eternal act, Dasein is self-understanding out of itself. Yet if the I is the creator of its world, what is there outside itself from which it might derive knowledge of itself? Spirit understands spirit [Geist].^[18] Therefore, I can understand myself from myself—one may even say ‘from God’, to the extent to which God is in me, and to the extent that God is the unconditional personality, which I am.¹⁰ It would appear that thereby all concepts of being have fallen by the wayside, and that a purified concept of act governs epistemology and anthropology. 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 transcendence [eingespannt zwischen Transzendenz] 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* [reason turned in upon itself].¹¹ Spirit has, in principle, come to rest. Only in the

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10. Cf. Brunstād’s idea of the unconditional personality in which God and I are one.^[19]

11. [Luther,] *Lectures on Romans*, 291 [trans. altered, MR].^[20]

of presentation” with which Brunstād has presented the essence of idealism, see further Emanuel Hirsch, *Die idealistische Philosophie und das Christentum*, 40, note 1.

[18.] Bonhoeffer uses ‘Geist’ to mean “spirit” in a broad range of ways—including mind; the ethos or ‘spirit’ of a time; as well as the religious sense of the term. The present work translates ‘Geist’ as “spirit,” ‘geistlich’ as “spiritual” (religious), and ‘geistig’ as “intellectual.” When the context does not make clear the sense in which a term is used, a brief note may be employed to remind the reader. [WF]

[19.] Cf. Brunstād, *Idee der Religion*, 99f. A distinction is made here, however, between a general I (I, awareness [Bewußtheit], personality) and a particular I (self, consciousness [Bewußtsein], person); cf. below, 51, note 22.

[20.] “Ratio est quia natura nostra vitio primi peccati tam profunda est in se ipsam incurva, ut non solum optima dona Dei sibi inflectat ipsisque fruatur (ut patet in iustitiariis et hypocritis), immo et ipso Deo utatur ad illa consequenda, verum etiam hoc ipsum ignoret, quod tam inique, curve et prave omnia, etiam Deum, propter se ipsam querat. Sicut propheta Hiere. 17: ‘Pravum est cor hominis et inscrutabile, quis cognoscat illud?’ i.e. ita curvum in se, ut nullus hominum, quantum libet sanctus (seclusa tentatione), scire possit.” [“The reason for this is that our nature, on account of the defilement of the first sin, is so turned in on itself beyond measure that not only does it twist God’s best gifts to

power of remaining in itself is spirit enabled to step outside of itself. Accordingly, the spirit remains fully in control of itself in this movement and never gets into the embarrassing position of merely 'being in reference to transcendence'. But, spirit at rest in itself, even if in a dialectically unreal movement, is substance, that is, absolute being. So Hegel could well say that essentially the one thing he felt obliged to hold against Spinoza was that he did not define substance as subjectivity.¹² Idealism, especially Hegel, actually appears to have reached or attained a synopsis of act and being that would be capable of satisfying the demands of the problem, if only those doing the philosophizing themselves did not founder on the resistance of their own reality to this philosophy. Hegel wrote a philosophy of angels, but not of human beings as Dasein [menschliches Dasein].^[22] Even the philosopher simply is not in full possession of the spirit. All who countenance that they need only to come to themselves, in order to be in God, are doomed to hideous disillusion in the experience of being-, persisting-, and ending-up-turned-in-upon-themselves utterly—the experience of utmost loneliness in its tormenting desolation and sterility. Such people see themselves placed in a contingent here-and-there. As people who are questioning, thinking, and acting, they have to find their way in the midst of it, and have to relate every given situation to themselves so that they can decide 'in

12. [G. W. F. Hegel]. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 3:330–31.^[21] Cited by Hirsch: *Die idealistische Philosophie und das Christentum*, 1926, 61, n. 4.

its own purposes and seek self-enjoyment—something that is obvious among both the just and hypocrites—but it even uses God for those purposes. And then it misunderstands that it falsely, crookedly and perversely desires everything, including God, for selfish reasons only. In the seventeenth chapter of Jeremiah it says: 'devious is the human heart and inscrutable, who can fathom it?' This means that it is so turned in on itself that no one, however saintly—subject to temptation or not—can understand it."] Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 291.

[21.] Bonhoeffer quotes here Hegel's *Werke*, 15, 409, cited in Hirsch: *Die idealistische Philosophie und das Christentum*, 1926, 61, note 4; although this section does mention Spinoza in contrast to the philosophy of Leibnitz, it does not directly raise the complaint against Spinoza that Bonhoeffer claims.

[22.] Bonhoeffer generally uses Dasein in a Heideggerian sense, to speak of the existence of human beings in particular. At times he seems to lapse back to a more generic usage of Dasein simply to mean "existence" in general, in which case he often will qualify it, when speaking of human existence in particular, by saying "human Dasein"—a formulation that is, speaking strictly in the Heideggerian sense, redundant. [WF]

reference to it'.^[23] And the violation that people thereby themselves do suffer at being 'in reference to' an other, at being in reference to a transcendent which 'is already there', is something fundamentally different from the certainty of bearing within themselves the possibility of mastering the world. In other words, in the purely transcendental understanding of Dasein even the character of the act is expressed more purely than in the conflation of act and being in idealism. Only where Dasein cannot understand itself in abiding transcendental orientation or, to put it another way, is able to understand that it does not understand itself, is the true meaning of act brought to expression: act as an 'in reference to' that never comes to rest, as intentionality pure and simple, as giving proof of itself in the psychic process but as understandable only on the far side of it, act as 'direct' consciousness (*actus directus*). Here philosophizing itself is essentially related to Dasein, because it places itself within the responsibilities of human Dasein and raises its questions only from within that context. Accordingly, the questions themselves belong to Dasein and so do not involve the answer in advance. Thus, philosophizing partakes of the act-character of Dasein and does not make its case on the basis of a trait, a having [Haben] that is grounded in a being [Sein].

To be sure, the transcendental starting point seems to have prevailed in idealism also insofar as the reality of the external world is to be understood in it only from the I. Kant's a priori synthesis and Fichte's intellectual perception appear to be identical, as far as the founding of the reality of the external world in the I is concerned. And yet, even here genuine transcendentalism must judge more circumspectly than idealism, because for the former there is no knowledge capable of going beyond the proposition that phenomena, the external world, are 'in reference to' the I and are, consequently, knowable only via the I. It does not lie within the competence of a purely transcendental thinking to draw from this a subsequent judgment about being, negative or positive. If idealism sees a need to complete transcendentalism by replacing the transcendental reference with the ontological judgment concerning the creative power of the I, it distorts the meaning of transcendentalism by radicalizing it. It is no coincidence that idealism, beginning as it does

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[23.] Bonhoeffer's indictment of late modernity's solipsism and narcissism is nowhere more strongly stated than here. [WF]

with an ontological judgment, ends up, as shown, close to having a new concept of substance. Thus the pure concept of act belongs, after all, to transcendentalism. It is a transcendental judgment to say that the objects of my knowledge, the world, are ‘in reference to me’, whereas in idealism the world comes about ‘through me’. We should not let this distinction be disregarded in systematic theology simply because it remains blurred in the history of philosophy. On the contrary, it is not hard to see its importance for theology as well as for the philosophical understanding of God at a given time. The reason why Kant could not take Fichte’s side in the dispute over atheism^[24] was that, at bottom, Kant understood himself even better than Fichte thought he had understood Kant. If the world comes to be through the I, then the I and God the creator exchange roles. God no longer can be the object of knowledge, but—since God is inconceivable as the creature of the I—somehow is brought into unity with the I itself. Thus, for idealism God ‘is’ only to the extent to which I think, only insofar as in thinking, I end up with myself.

Transcendentalism distinguishes itself from this position in that it does not make the I into a creator but thinks of the I only as something to which the world must be thought of as related. In this way, to be sure, the decisive boundary of the Creator’s integrity is honored in principle, that is, to the extent to which this is at all possible in philosophy. Certainly, here, too, God cannot be the object of knowledge. Were that possible, God would be oriented with the phenomena of the world as God is towards the I and, consequently, would be thought of as essentially for the I. Given the transcendental point of departure, the objectivity of God is an impossibility, since all being is understood as something existing [Seiende], as what ‘there is’ in the a priori synthesis. The objectivity of God is translated into act, and absolute being becomes an unfulfillable thought, because it is not objective. Thus, the concept of God, as
 38 the basis of possibility for Dasein and thinking, remains nonobjective. Transcendental thinking can never say ‘God is’, for that would be objectifying, finitizing, ‘dogmatizing’. Truth ‘is’ only in the act itself, the act in reference to transcendence. Only in the execution of the act, in Dasein seeking to understand itself, ‘is’ God in existence as condition, possibil-

[24.] A controversy about atheism followed the publication of Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s article “Über den Grund unseres Glaubens an eine göttliche Weltregierung” (*Sämtliche Werke*, 5:177ff.). In the article Fichte had maintained that there was no reason to postulate a ‘particular being’ beyond the divinity of the moral order of the world as the ‘cause’ of this order (186). This led to his dismissal from the University of Jena in 1799.

ity, always in process and never completed. Thus, God always remains at the back of human beings, no matter which way human beings may turn.

We should not conceal how close God and the I come together here. Still, both remain limit-concepts ‘in reference to’ which thinking, or Dasein, permanently ‘is’. But while this presentation of transcendentalism is noticeably uncertain here, we can scarcely refrain from directing to it a broader question: What is this transcendent, towards 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? Even if this is a free decision of practical reason, it remains the self-chosen limit by reason of itself, by which reason once again legitimates itself as that which put the boundaries in place. 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. The miscarriage of the endeavor to ascertain the boundaries of reason is due to the fact that there 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: the obedience of speculation, the obedience to Christ, or however else one may name it. There is a boundary only for a concrete human being in his or her entirety, and this boundary is called *Christ*.

It remains to be said that in Kantian transcendentalism as in idealism, reason gets entangled in itself. ‘To understand oneself’ consequently can mean only ‘to understand oneself from or out of oneself’. ‘I am’, therefore, means: I think (*cogito, sum*).^[25] Similarly, ‘God is’ means: spirit comes to itself, it knows in the unity of consciousness. A genuine belief in God finds that the ground seems to crumble beneath its desire to be able to assert the being of God outside the I, for there is only reason alone with itself. It is clear now that, on its own, the I cannot move beyond itself. It is imprisoned in itself, it sees only itself, even when it sees another, even when it wants to see God. It understands itself out of itself, which really means, however, that it basically does not understand itself. Indeed it does not understand itself until this I has been encountered and overwhelmed in its existence by an other. The I believes itself

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[25.] “Cogito, ergo sum” (“I think, therefore I am”) is the foundational assertion of the philosophy of René Descartes’s *Discourse on Method*, 4:101.

free and is captive; it has all power and has only itself as a vassal: that is what Protestant theology means by the corruption of reason. It is the ontic inversion into the self, the *cor curvum in se*.¹³ [26] If Kant suspected this, as we may surmise from what he had to say about radical evil,^[27] he nevertheless finally struggled in vain to overcome the difficulty by means of the transcendental point of departure, whereas idealism, in the course of its development, at this very point allowed the I to celebrate untroubled the triumph of its liberation.

Everything converges in the decisive question that must be put to transcendentalism and idealism alike: Can the I understand itself out of itself? Or must fundamental objections be raised already at this point?

‘Understanding’ [‘Verstehen’]^[28] (as distinct from explanation [Erklären])^[29] extends to mental states of affairs and includes the immediate consciousness of evidence. Such consciousness is only possible in the case of that potential productivity aimed at something to be understood, be it a deed, a thought, or an artistic composition. To understand means to be creative in one way or another; at this point, the technical abilities
 40 required are of no consequence. The object of understanding here should be Dasein itself—that is, Dasein in its unity—for there is no ‘understanding’ save on the basis of unity. If Dasein is so structured that the will-to-understand-itself belongs to its essence, the problem arises of how the unity of Dasein can be gained by means of self-understanding from, or out of, the self [Sich-aus-sich-selbst-verstehen]. The eye does not see itself.^[30] If unity were to be gained in that manner, the self-under-

13. Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 291 [trans. altered, MR].

[26.] “the heart turned in on itself.” Cf. above, 41–42, editorial note 20. [WF]

[27.] Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Book I, “Concerning the Indwelling of the Evil Principle with the Good, or, On the Radical Evil in Human Nature” (15–49).

[28.] The hermeneutical significance of ‘understanding’ would have been evident to Bonhoeffer from his reading of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (e.g., 182ff. and 385ff.). [WF]

[29.] This distinction refers to Wilhelm Dilthey’s attempt to distinguish the ‘natural’ sciences from the ‘human’ sciences on the basis of the goals of their methods: explanation and understanding, respectively. See above, “The Problem,” page 29, editorial note 18. [WF]

[30.] This allusion to the metaphor of the eye and the sun goes back to Plato (*Republic*, 508 a 4ff.). Also see Bonhoeffer’s sermon on Matthew 5:8, where he cites the first two lines of Goethe’s “Xenia”: “if the eye were not like the sun, it could never see the sun; if god’s own power did not lie in us, how could we delight in the divine?” (*GS* 5 [1928]:448). In the

standing Dasein therefore would have to be able to think of itself as the creator of itself in its entirety. This would have to include its self-understanding, even its own existence, in which this creator *must* live, now as one who has or does not have self-understanding. This is self-contradictory inasmuch the 'I' must already be there in order to be able to create. Aware of this situation, the I of idealist reason¹⁴ can pass itself off as the ultimate entity—the 'I am who I am',^[31] which is ontologically meaningful only with regard to the concept of God. The I, by a paradox beyond possible meaning, makes itself its own creator. Alternatively, human beings perceive this existentiality of theirs in its full mind-body configuration as a 'being between' ['Sein zwischen'], 'in reference to' something to which even Dasein is an as yet uncomprehended pointer. Of course, the understanding of the self given here signifies no real understanding of existence. Rather, it characterizes only the final possible position human thinking and self-understanding can assume. In the final analysis, a new problematic of act and being must be disclosed.

Neo-Kantianism tried to carry through the transcendental approach anew, in order to resolve the problem of thinking and being. But by doing away with the thing-in-itself, neo-Kantianism expresses an ontological judgment in the place of a relational one and follows the path of Fichte by making thinking the foundation of being.^[32] It remains problematic how, say, [Hermann] Cohen's concept of method, derived from the transcendental approach, is linked with Fichte's substantially similar concept of the creative mind.¹⁵ Although [Paul] Natorp here initially follows Cohen, he later, while trying again to master the problem of being, worked out the idea of a 'universal logic'.¹⁶ The logos lies beyond think-

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14. And, in the final analysis, also Kant's transcendental I.

15. Cf. H. Cohen: *System der Philosophie*, 1. *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, 1902.

16. Cf. particularly P. Natorp's last work: *Praktische Philosophie*, 1925, 1–27.

original version Goethe had written "how could we see the light?" instead of "it could never see the sun." Emanuel Hirsch cites a sonnet by Johann Gottlieb Fichte that has a very similar theme (Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, 8:46f.) in Hirsch's *Die idealistische Philosophie*, 58.

[31.] Bonhoeffer alludes here to the meaning of the tetragrammaton, the name of God given in Exodus 3:14.

[32.] Here Bonhoeffer turns to the contrast that is fundamental to his argument, that between genuine transcendentalism's recognition that reality is always, but only, 'in reference to' the subject, and idealism's (and neo-Kantianism's) misguided ontological judgment that 'through me' as thinking subject, reality has its being. [WF]

ing and being as that through which both are possible in the first place. Neither can be transposed into [aufgehoben], and thereby reduced to, the other. Thinking is 'thinking-in-being' and being is 'being-in-thinking'. Clearly, with this speculation we approach Hegel, as is evidenced by the interrelationship of act and being.

What, in sum, results for the problem of act and being from the transcendental and idealistic attempts? Common to both is the attempt to "raise substance to the subject,"¹⁷ which Hegel had worked out most completely in his logic, namely the understanding of the object as an a priori synthesis in transcendental apperception. Here, being becomes the knowing consciousness. But this assertion is by no means unequivocal. Its positive or negative interpretation leads in totally opposite directions. The thesis that being is given in the knowing consciousness is certainly not identical with the converse, that where there is no knowing consciousness, there is also no being. The difference we have noted comes to the fore here. In the positive phrasing the relatedness of consciousness and being that is transcendent is expressed, while in the negative phrasing, the dissolving of the latter into the former is expressed. Unquestionably both interpretations are urgently interested in focusing on the mental act of the person. There is a person only in consciousness. In his phenomenology Hegel described step by step how the I becomes a
42 real person, a goal which in the last resort is attainable only by philosophizing. If anything is to manifest itself to me as being, the thinking spirit must be able to apprehend it; consequently, the person is apprehended only where matters of logic are under consideration—that is to say, the existence of the person is attained through 'meaning'. An exceptional place is allotted to the 'word' here, as the only material means of communicating matters of logic clearly. The person is cradled in freedom. In freedom comes knowledge; in freedom alone can the existence of human beings apprehend itself and change. Act, meaning, and freedom belong together. Thus, the essence of the person is freedom, autonomy, coming-to-itself or being-with-itself.

If they are at one at this point, transcendentalism and idealism part company when they define the character of act. Transcendentalism succeeds in preserving the purity of the act by regarding Dasein only as

17. Windelband: *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*,^[33] 337.

[33.] Bonhoeffer refers to vol. 2.

'being in reference to' something transcendent. But since according to Kant this something transcendent cannot prove itself to be genuinely transcendent, Kant's original conception comes to naught. Hence it is that idealism draws the transcendent into itself, uniting being and act within itself, with all the consequences that arise for anthropology. This indicates that concepts of being cannot be dispensed with in the orientation towards transcendence, which marks Kantian philosophy, any more than in the profusion of transcendence that marks idealistic philosophy. This conclusion, however, is at variance with the original intention of both.¹⁸

Now, if theology espouses this transcendentalist-idealist epistemology, it forfeits a certain right by necessity. (Transcendentalist, as distinct from transcendental, is the term which denotes that manner of transcendental philosophy which, on the basis of the transcendental approach, develops a system of reason.) The *raison d'être* of transcendentalist-idealist epistemology is the claim that it involves an understanding of existence and, hence, of the world and God. Were this epistemology to forget this claim, it would forfeit its legitimacy. Epistemology is the turning of spirit to spirit. In the unity of the spirit beyond the subject-object dichotomy, the fulcrum for the understanding of Dasein, world, and God was discovered. If theology wished to call itself transcendentalist-idealist, it would have to accommodate this claim. This imposes very rigid limits on its own concept of knowledge. Furthermore, such a theology would have to locate all being in consciousness. The object, reality, is an *a priori* synthesis. A judgment is no longer true as a judgment about a reality transcending consciousness, but rather in the

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18. In the history of philosophy one could seek a parallel between idealism's attempted dissolution of the concepts of being and the project of nominalism. There is no absolute being, not even of concepts, for they 'are' only in the act of being comprehended. To conclude from this that reality resides only in individual things, as was done most radically by Roscelin de Compiègne,^[34] is to present idealistic philosophy with a proposition wholly alien to it. Individual things are for that philosophy merely objects of cognition by means of the application of general thought-forms and concepts.

[34.] Roscelin de Compiègne died in 1120. He is regarded as a typical representative of early scholastic nominalism. His characterization of universal concepts as *flatus vocis*—empty formulae—is known only from the writings of his opponents; nearly all of his writings have been lost.

“unconditional unity of experience of the personality.”¹⁹ This must hold true even for statements about God. Correspondingly, as we have already shown, such a theology may espouse no objective concept of God, since the object ‘is’ only in the transcendental unity of apperception; God ‘is’ in this unity, never conceivable, but only acting in the process of the conscious spirit. The identity of my not objective I with God is stated here in what is called the ‘unconditional personality’.²⁰ This puts theology in the dilemma either of making the objective God the content of consciousness, that is to say, an object of the I-subject, or
 44 of letting the I discover God in its non-objective selfhood [Ichheit] , in its coming to itself.

God ‘is’ not outside the spirit coming to itself. “The ultimate, true reality is that which is attested in our self-activity, in our selfhood.”²¹ But if we take nonobjectivity seriously, then God is indeed only in the act of the self-knowing spirit. In philosophical reflection God is not an objective existent but is only in the execution of that philosophizing. While genuine transcendental philosophizing is in reference to transcendence—that is, basically not self-contained—idealistic philosophical reflection implies the system in which God’s own self resides. The philosophical reflection of idealism manifests itself in this as a phantom movement within self-contained repose. I discover God in my coming to myself; I become aware of myself. I find myself—that is, I find God. The perspective is introspective. In the genuinely transcendental act God remains nonobjective in the process; even though inaccessible to the reflection of consciousness on itself, the existential act of thinking God takes its course in consciousness. The idealistic act, on the other hand, is

19. Brunstäd, 154.

20. Brunstäd, 217: “*revelatio specialis* [*special revelation*]^[35] is the disclosure of the unconditionally synthetic personality as such. It is being grasped by God as this unconditional personality—the founding, effected by God, of the oneness of the consciousness of God and of the self.”

21. Hirsch, *Philosophie des Idealismus*, 54.^[36]

[35.] ‘Special revelation’ refers to the revelation that comes about by means of the history of redemption and God’s Word.

[36.] The actual title of Hirsch’s book is *Die idealistische Philosophie und das Christentum*.

quite capable of finding God in the reflection of conscious-ness [Bewußt-sein].²²

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 was God to be found but in my consciousness? Even though I can never go beyond it, consciousness is nonetheless constitutive for being in general. God is the God of my consciousness. Only in my religious consciousness 'is' God. Philosophically speaking, however, this was jumping to conclusions. For if the philosophical system of idealism is the explicit form of the pure spirit coming to itself, then an analogous theology would have to be the explicit form of the self-consciousness of the reborn [Wiedergeborene]. As a complex measure, the latter is essentially different from pure self-consciousness (which brings together in the I the absolutely individual and the absolutely general); it is bound up with experiences of particular content, and if God is indeed to be found in this reborn consciousness, God must be extracted from these experiences. But this means that God once again becomes 'objectified' in consciousness and is thereby taken into the unity of transcendental apperception, becoming the prisoner of the consciousness. Unintentionally, God, who was to be thought of solely as the functional correlate of the mental act, has become a reified object.^[38]

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22. Brunstäd's distinction between individual consciousness and general awareness—of which the former is the symbol—both of which, however, come together in the I, does not change anything (*Idee der Religion*, 89ff., 92). Brunstäd's attempt to reduce the interrelation of being-conscious [Bewußtsein] and aware-ness [Bewußtheit] to that of the part to the whole, in order to ensure for conscious-ness a being independent of individual consciousness (cf. 112f.), is arbitrary and leads directly back to realistic concepts.^[37]

[37.] The references indicated are not precise. The passage on 'awareness' and 'consciousness', as well as that on the symbolic interpretation of the relation of the part to the whole, is found in Brunstäd, *Idee der Religion*, 101–4.

[38.] Here Bonhoeffer shows a keen sense of the dynamics of much popular religiosity, as well as academic theology, particularly its emphasis on the endless self-referentiality of intention, motive, and experience. [WF]

There are two ways of recovering from this setback. (1) The first is to radicalize the long-established initial position on the basis of idealism in such a way that the experience of God becomes the very experience of the self on the part of the transcendental I that is the foundation for all other experiences. This course, as far as I know, has been decisively and expansively adopted and developed in theology only once, namely in Friedrich Brunstäd's *Die Idee der Religion*. Here the point of identity of God and humankind is the concept of the unconditional personality. The experience of God must be the experience of this unconditional personality in myself.²³ Consequently, the certainty of the experience of God lies nowhere but in my experience of the unity of the I. And just as the transcendental unity of the I is the foundation of all truth, religion demonstrates its truth only by the fact that—precisely in its character as experience of the unconditional personality—it itself becomes the ground of the possibility of all truth.²⁴ How the I now can enter into communion [Verkehr]^[39] with God is unfathomable; obviously, here again God is posited behind the I as the ground of its possibility, for if God could stand over against the I, God would be an object. The I can never say 'God is' without at the same time saying 'God is not'—that is to say, not like anything else is as an object, but rather never objectifiable, always wholly subjective. It is just the same with the I itself, so that wherever I really say 'I', I also could say 'God'. But just as I can have no communion with my transcendental I, I can have none with God. The I remains fixed in itself; its looking into itself, its innermost depths, is religion, but also the revelation of the divine spirit. Revelation is no more than that. What reason can perceive from itself (as Hegel puts it)^[40] is

23. Brunstäd, 151f: "Religion as experience, as being grasped by the unconditional personality, by the unconditional value-reality of personal life, is the condition of the possibility of all truth and validity."

24. [Brunstäd,] 154f.: "The truth of religion does not lie in the fact that science arrives at conclusions which are in accord with affirmations of faith but that religious insight [Erfahrung], religious experience [Erlebnis], are a necessary precondition of all truth. Religious insight has its certainty wholly through itself. . . . Religion has truth, is truth, because it comprises the basis of all possible truth in the experience of the unconditional synthetic unity of the I."

[39.] This is an allusion to Wilhelm Herrmann's *The Communion* [Verkehr] of the Christian with God.

[40.] Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*: "Philosophy seeks to know the substance of the reality of the idea of God and to justify disdained reality. For reason [Vernunft] is the perception of the divine work," 36, trans. altered.

revelation, and so God is completely locked into consciousness.²⁵ In the living reflection on itself, the I understands itself from itself. It relates itself to itself, and consequently to God, in unmediated reflection. That is why religion = revelation; there is no room for faith and word, if they are seen as entities contrary to reason. Yet *Deus non potest apprehendi nisi per verbum*, A.C. 2, 67.^[41] 47

Here, as in the whole of idealism, the inmost identity of I and God, which underlies everything, is merely an expression of the proposition that like is known only through like.^[42] If God is to come to human beings, they essentially must already be like God. If theology is to grasp the relationship of God and humankind, it can do so only by presupposing a profound likeness of one to the other and finding precisely here the unity between God and human beings. One is like the very God one comprehends.^[43]

25. Brunstäd would contest this (cf. 214). But: “It (the unity of experience) is revelation, is the effect of revelation; revelation is through this subjectivity, by entering into and by going through this inwardness” (216). “We know God insofar as we are ‘I’, insofar as we experience. The limits of our knowledge of God lie in the limited nature of the content of our consciousness” (218). (!)

[41.] “God does not let the divine self be known or grasped save in and through the Word alone” (“Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” *The Book of Concord*, 116, trans altered MR).

[42.] This is a principle of the psychology of knowledge, dating back to pre-Socratic philosophers such as Empedocles. See Hermann Diels and Walter Kranz, eds., *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, chap. 31, no. 109:63, passim. Aristotle formulated it in the concept of ἡ γνώσις τοῦ ὁμοίου τῷ ὁμοίῳ, “the knowledge of the like through the like.” Erich Seeberg believes that the Thomistic doctrine of the knowledge of God was shaped by this Greek philosophical dictum, as was the system of mysticism (cf. *Luthers Theologie*, 1:3). Karl Barth made this formula the basic principle of his theological doctrine of knowledge; see “Das Schriftprinzip der reformierten Kirche,” where Barth expressed this understanding for the first time (220). Bonhoeffer takes this up in “Lässt sich eine historische und pneumatische Auslegung der Schrift unterscheiden” (Is it permissible to distinguish between a historical and a spiritual interpretation of Scripture?), from the summer semester of 1925, and “Luthers Anschauungen vom Heiligen Geist” (Luther’s views on the Holy Spirit), from the winter semester of 1925/26 (*DBW* 9:312f., 370, 393, and 396). Bonhoeffer in *SC* already has spoken of the basic social relation in Stoicism as always “thought of as that of like to like,” as in the basic social relation of idealism (24), in which like is bound only to like, excluding the possibility of encounter by any genuine ‘Other’ (31). [WF]

[43.] Cf. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, 1, lines 512ff.:16. Also, God must be conceived only as fundamentally like the one who does the conceiving. Idealism, and all its heirs, according to Bonhoeffer are unable to appreciate any genuine Otherness, especially God’s. Everything is to be conceived according to its inner push toward identity. [WF]

That such assertions are theologically intolerable becomes apparent when they are stated with such sharpness. It is not because human beings are like God that God comes to them—on the contrary, God then would not need to come—but precisely because human beings are utterly unlike God and never know God from themselves. That is why God comes to them, that they may know God. Then, but only then, do they indeed know God. This idea has to find a place in Christian epistemology. But that subverts the presuppositions of all that has gone before. It seems that everything depends on the transformation of the concepts of being into those of act. In the first instance, there is no other place for God in this operation than the I that is in the process of completion of the spiritual act, or in what makes the process possible. In that case, the

48 I becomes the creator of the world. This causes the understanding of human beings, who in their concreteness of spirit and flesh are the very ones with whom Christian theology is crucially concerned and who invariably find themselves already present in their given worlds, to be entirely lost. This resolution of ontological concepts had become possible in idealism only on the basis of an unexpressed ontological judgment and is, for that reason, without legitimacy. The negative judgment—that this ‘is’ not, or that this is only through me—remains in every instance an ontological judgment that does not lie within the confines of the transcendental approach but represents, rather, a violation of limits with most grave consequences.

(2) The second way of recovering from this setback is to pull back to the purely transcendental approach. God is not objective. In this context, that means that God is no longer accessible even to the reflection of consciousness on itself. God ‘is’ in the pure process of completion of the act of consciousness but evades every attempt on the part of reflection to grasp God. God ‘is’ as *actus directus*. Act is always ‘in reference to’ transcendence. Therefore, ‘being’ that is independent of the I is rendered possible by the transcendental approach, even if it is not a given fact, whereas in idealism being and I were merged into one. If the transcendental approach is not to end once again in the system of reason, it clearly requires a new formulation of the ‘limits’ of reason—that is, of the concept of being and that of the act which is ‘in reference to’ this being. It was here where the first attempt had failed.

It is not the problem of a ‘real external world’, let alone its proof, that

is the issue for us in relation to being.²⁶ It is, rather, the sort of being of God's revelation. The meaning of conceptions of transcendence, of the 'external', of being, is expressed far more clearly in this context than in connection with the problem of the external world, particularly since idealism merges both into one. The implications of the Christian idea of God for, let us say, the reality of the external world, are to be discussed, in outline, in the positive section of our study. 49

The conceptual world of Karl Barth has affinity with the transcendental approach.²⁷ Still, the encroachment of idealism on negative judgments of being (see above) and their incompatibility with the idea of God have almost always somehow been felt and often have come clearly to expression.

Likewise, the epistemology of Reinhold Seeberg²⁸—in unmistakable contrast to that of Brunstäd—may be far more correctly denoted as Kant-

26. If, to give an example, A. Riehl^[44] seeks in his work *Der philosophische Kritizismus* (2, 1ff. and 172)^[45] to provide proof for the reality of the external world by means of the dependence of consciousness on sensations, the logical-epistemological problematic of idealism remains quite unaffected. Even idealism does not doubt the existence of an empirical external world; the argument is insufficient for the epistemological way of thinking because it confuses supporting evidence from psychology and epistemology. The same is to be said about the inference from 'social feelings' to the external world. W. Dilthey's inquiry into the reality of the external world, which at first sight seems very traditional in form, is based in the experience of the will and the resistance it offers and attempts fundamentally to overcome the whole of the idealistic theory of knowledge in favor of a philosophy of life shaped by history. Thus interpreted, Dilthey's work is of decisive significance for current philosophy of history, especially as it has recently acquired influence on theology. Cf. W. Dilthey, "Beiträge zur Lösung der Frage vom Ursprung unseres Glaubens an die Realität der Aussenwelt und seinem Recht" 1890, in *Ges. Schrift.*, 5, 1st half, 90ff., N.B. 134.

27. On this point see the chapter [below] on "The Interpretation of Revelation in Terms of the Concept of Act."

28. [R. Seeberg,] *Dogmatik*, 1, N.B. 70–110, 257–84.

[44.] Alois Riehl (1844–1924) was a precursor of Marburg Neo-Kantianism and a representative of a theory of science of 'Critical Realism'. For Bonhoeffer's counterargument see below, pages 127–28.

[45.] The actual reference is Alois Riehl, *Kritizismus*, 2/2:172.

ian-transcendental than as idealist; the same may be said of Seeberg's concept of religious transcendentalism. The struggle of theology with transcendental epistemology becomes apparent in the entire nexus of his thought. Underlying it is an idea of God conceived of as *actus purus*.^[46] There is no potentiality in God, only actuality, a notion that leads Seeberg to pure voluntarism. As primal will, God operates as act on human beings, encountering them as beings whose nature is conscious spirit in their will. Epistemology now tries to comprehend transcendently this encounter of God and human beings. Even though

50 human beings are both potentiality and act, while God is pure act, their encounter is possible only in the act of consciousness; therefore, the essence of human beings resides in the spiritual act [geistiger Akt]. It is noteworthy, however, that the notion of potentiality is clearly intended to depict human beings in their concreteness, something that Seeberg believed himself unable to grasp in the pure notion of act. Now if the encounter of human beings with God can take place only in consciousness—that is, in full spiritual clarity about the meaning of the procedure and in complete freedom²⁹—then for Seeberg here is given the point of departure for his transcendentalism.³⁰ As the consciousness 'has' God, so God 'is'; if it has not God, God 'is' not. What counts as real is what the subject thinks of necessity.³¹ Being appears to be merging into act (perhaps in Brunstäd's sense). Precisely at this point, however, Seeberg refuses to take the step into idealism. Instead, a number of statements

29. [R. Seeberg, *Dogmatik*, 1]: "If this is to be a spiritual encounter, then it cannot persist for one moment without entering consciousness or becoming thought" (103). (The encounter of God with human beings takes place in such a manner that the latter), "conscious of their freedom, consciously and willingly perform the movement which the Spirit of God has accomplished in them" (91).

30. [R. Seeberg, *Dogmatik*, 1]: "Inasmuch as this spiritual entity [dies Geistige] shows itself to be real in a particular disposition of people, and can be known by us to be real only in the form given by this disposition, we have to term the sensation and knowledge under consideration here transcendental" (87).

31. [R. Seeberg, *Dogmatik*, 1]: "For transcendentalism the necessity of subjective knowledge is the demonstration of the objective reality of what is known" (279).

[46.] "pure act" Cf. Reinhold Seeberg, *Dogmatik*, 1:342. "By *actus purus* we mean an activity that occurs uninterrupted, yet without alternating between this and a state of potentiality. Accordingly, God knows no rhythm of rest and activity, has no need for relaxation and makes no distinction in will and thought between beginning and completion."

abruptly follow one upon the other that locate the existence of the supramundane, as well as that of concepts, in the human spirit alone, as well as those that acknowledge without reservation an ‘objective being’—that is, a being of the supramundane that clearly transcends consciousness.³²

In this manner the danger of identifying God and the I is averted.³³ 51
 God is the supramundane reality transcending consciousness, the creator and lord. This sentence is an unconditional requirement of Christian theology and is elaborated by Seeberg throughout his dogmatics. But, on the other hand, it can also be said that God is existent only in, or for, the consciousness of human beings. This is where Seeberg’s theory of the religious a priori comes into play; there is in human beings a ‘compelling ability’ to “come to an unmediated awareness of pure spirit.”³⁴[47] By means of this ability, human beings can receive God into themselves, that is, experience God’s immediate contiguity in feeling and intuition. On these premises it is now a thoroughly justified inference of transcendental thinking to attribute being to God only insofar as a conceptualization of God corresponds to it. At the same time, it is genuinely transcendental to refrain from making an absolute negative judgment about being, such as occurs here. But then we read about an unmediated perception of, or contact with, God on the part of human beings. The religious a priori is supposed to be fundamentally open to the divine will; there is, it is said, a mold in human beings into which the divine content of revelation, too, may pour.³⁵ In other words, revelation

32. [R. Seeberg, *Dogmatik*, 1]: “And so, just as concepts as such are not in the objective world but exist only in the mind of people, the supramundane [Überweltliche] has no other existence but that which it has in the religious movement of the will and intuition of the human mind. In this sense, here, too, it is a matter of transcendental perception and vision. But just as transcendentalism does not cast doubt on the objective being of the world, so the objective being of the supramundane is not made doubtful by the ideas expressed here. Only it should be said that the supramundane is perceptible to the human mind—which is to say, existent—in no other form than that of a specific, spiritual perception” (105).

33. [R. Seeberg, *Dogmatik*, 1,] 93.

34. Cf. Seeberg’s distancing himself from idealism (81).

35. [R. Seeberg, *Dogmatik*, 1]: “As a formal spiritual disposition, the religious a priori has no content of its own. [. . .] The positive content of faith is given by

[47.] Seeberg, *Dogmatik*, 1:105.

52 must become religion; that is its essence. Revelation is religion. But that is a turning away from pure transcendentalism toward idealism in that the absolute, to use Seeberg's terminology, enters again into 'immediate' contact, into union, with the I; my will is subjected to the primal will and God's will is active in me. The difficulty lies in the concept of the religious a priori, in spite of the latitude Seeberg accords it. If we are to assume that the compelling ability to receive revelation and, by implication, to believe, is given with this a priori, we have already said too much. The natural human being has a *cor curvum in se*.^[49] Natural religion, too, remains flesh and seeks after flesh. If revelation is to come to human beings, they need to be changed entirely. Faith itself must be created in them. In this matter, there is no ability to hear before the hearing. These are thoughts that Seeberg has expressed himself and supported with reference to Luther.³⁶ Having been wrought by God, faith runs counter to natural religiosity, for which the religious a priori noted by Seeberg certainly holds good. According to Luther, revelation and faith are bound to the concrete, preached word, and the word is the mediator of the contact between God and human beings, allowing no other 'immediateness'. But then the concept of the religious a priori can be understood only to imply that certain mental or spiritual forms are presupposed for the formal understanding of the word, in which case a specifically religious a priori makes no more sense. All that pertains to personal appropriation of the fact of Christ is not a priori, but God's contingent action on human beings. This holds true also for what Seeberg calls feeling and intuition, for the purely formal understanding of the word needs no other forms of thought than are supplied by the pure a priori of thought itself.

In Seeberg's outline of epistemology the two great concerns of theology clearly come together: first, to affirm being transcendent of consciousness and to make possible the formation of concepts of being; second, to show that the reference of revelation to human consciousness

revelation; the a priori is merely the inner capacity, in this context, by which we are able to become aware of the being and activity of the supramundane God and, accordingly, to receive the content of divine revelation, as divine, into the soul" (104).^[48]

36. [R. Seeberg,] *Dogmatik* 2, 506ff.

[48.] In Seeberg's text the given citation reads "formal disposition of the spirit" at the beginning and "... and, accordingly, to receive the content of revelation, as divine, into the soul" at the end.

[49.] "heart turned in upon itself" [MR]

is, in character, an act. It is a corollary of these concerns that the necessary philosophical concepts for their solution are provided not by the transcendentalist-idealist position but only by that of the genuinely transcendental approach. It will become apparent later that even transcendentalism is in need of radical completion and inner transformation.

53

2. The Ontological Attempt

Act pointed to being. Hegel again honored the ontology Kant had dethroned.³⁷ Kant's thing-in-itself had been transformed into the concept of substance that Hegel found indispensable in defining spirit.

It is the concern of *true* ontology to demonstrate the primacy of being over against consciousness and to uncover this being. Ontology initially wishes to say no more than that there is “a real being outside consciousness, outside the sphere of logic and the limits of ratio”—that “the knowledge of objects is in relation to this something that exists [Seiende] . . . but is not coincident with it.”³⁸ [52] The real problematic of

37. Cf. [G. W. F. Hegel,] *Encyclopedia*, par. 33.^[50]

38. N. Hartmann, *Grundlagen*^[51] *einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, 1925, 180ff. “Something that exists” [Seiendes] means the same thing here that Sein does in our terminology.

[50.] On first reading, one might be inclined to see par. 33 of Hegel's *Encyclopedia*, to which Bonhoeffer refers here, as unsuitable to support the claim he wishes to make. Indeed, in pars. 26ff., Hegel discusses ontology as the “teaching of the abstract determination of Being” and depicts it as the first part of an earlier metaphysics “as it existed among us before Kantian philosophy” and as a “mere perspective of understanding [Verstand] on the objects of reason [Vernunft]” that is always extant. A careful reading, however, makes clear that the ‘ontology’ Hegel describes in this passage was merely the first part of the older project of metaphysics that Hegel is claiming has been superseded by logic (par. 18). Thus, when Bonhoeffer speaks of Hegel's ‘ontology’, he is not claiming that Hegel has reverted to this older metaphysics, but that despite his ‘Logic’, Hegel is still making ontological claims. Such a closer reading of the context of par. 33 shows Hegel to be claiming with respect to Kant's critical philosophy just the sort of *Aufhebung* that Bonhoeffer says. For in par. 31 Hegel argues against Kant's having reduced reason [Vernunft] to a regulative role alone; in par. 32 Hegel argues that Kant has had to use reason itself in order to critique it; and in par. 34 Hegel criticizes Kant's reduction of the *Ding an sich* (thing-in-itself) to a limit-role, arguing instead for a more comprehensive, dialectical form of ontology (which in par. 36 Hegel reminds his reader he has described in full in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). [WF]

[51.] The correct term in the title is *Grundzüge*, not *Grundlage*.

[52.] The second part of the citation from Nicolai Hartmann, reads: “. . . the knowledge of objects is in relation to this being [Seiendes] and reflects a piece of it, however incomprehensible the possibility of this reflection may be; but the concept formed from cogni-

ontology lies in its concept. Two equally major claims meet in its combining of logos and *ȫv*.^[53] The *ȫv*, which is in itself free, resists the claim of the logos as presented in the previous chapter. How then is a scholarly activity called ontology possible? Clearly it is possible only if one of the two—in this instance it must be logos—surrenders its claim, or if one adapts itself to the other. But this can take place only in the movement of thought, in such a way that the movement of thought itself, in one way or another, essentially belongs to being. Here the step from Husserl-Scheler to Heidegger is foreshadowed.

If the logos really surrenders its claim, it abandons its system of immanence. The question is whether the logos *per se* can possibly carry this out. There is also a cunning of logos, by which it can give itself up only to recover in greater strength. As long as being is a matter of thought, it remains an ‘existing’ object. The attempt to think of thought itself as being is the critical juncture at which transcendental philosophy, idealism, and ontology diverge on account of decisions made by each that are no longer generally applicable to one another. Transcendental philosophy regards thinking to be ‘in reference to’ transcendence; idealism takes transcendent being into thinking; and, finally, ontology leaves being fully independent of thinking and accords being priority over thinking. Genuine ontology, therefore, must always remain a *critical* scholarly pursuit that does not cause being itself to be seen as a given, but rather thinks of itself as always already something existing only within the logos, in self-understanding. For being, of course—which also includes Dasein and being there in thought [Denksein]—transcends the given, what exists. Ontology must be the pursuit that ponders this fact of ‘always already existing’^[54] and is itself mindful of this correlation; thinking must again and again be ‘suspended’ [‘aufgehoben’] in being.

Here, the logos must refrain from usurping the power of the creator; whether it does so in genuine *kenosis*^[55] or *krypsis*^[56] remains to be seen.

tion is not congruent with what is (das Seiende), for the image is neither complete (adequate) nor similar to what is.

[53.] Here *ȫv* is the Greek word for “being”; logos means “speech,” “word,” “account,” or “reason.” The word logos will not be italicized in the present text unless Bonhoeffer himself did so.

[54.] See Heidegger, *Being and Time*: “Dasein’s totality of being as care means: ahead-of-itself-already-being-in (a world), as being-alongside (entitites encountered within-the-world)” (375). [WF]

[55.] “the giving up of something” [MR]

[56.] “secrecy, hiddenness” [MR]

For the sake of the freedom of being, spontaneity must become receptivity—that is, creative thinking must become a viewing, pure intuition (*intueri* = to look upon, to take into consideration). It is but one step from here to *systematic* ontology that opens being itself to viewing. But this clearly represents an endeavor to go behind the way transcendentalism and idealism put their questions. Wherever thinking or viewing stands over against an object without mediation, there is no genuine ontology, for in such ontology thinking is again and again ‘suspended’ [‘aufgehoben’] in being and, therefore, critically involved in the process of knowledge. 55

Systematic ontology seeks to present pure being as transcending consciousness. If, however, being is obscured by something that exists, it becomes the task of thinking to uncover or ‘clear the way’^[57] to this being. There are different ways of regarding this task of clearing the way to ‘the essence’. But in principle people have eyes to see; they bear within themselves the potential to arrive at the eternal essentials. In Platonic terms, people have beheld the ideas, and now they eternally bear the *anamnesis*^[58] within themselves until they attain pure vision once again. Human beings understand their nature from what they have beheld—that is, they see themselves disclosed in their eternal core. That is naive, systematic ontology and is maintained in such unbroken form among more recent philosophers only by [Nicole] Malebranche, in his theory of the participation of all knowledge in the idea of God, and, later, by Vincenzo Gioberti in his ontologism.^[59]

As in the preceding chapter, the following presentation is structured systematically-typologically, using several outstanding examples of recent ontologies.^[60]

[57.] Although Bonhoeffer has encountered the notion of ontology’s task as ‘clearing’ in his reading of *Being and Time* (171), Heidegger’s word there is *lichten*, which is used in German normally to mean the thinning of trees, the creation of a “clearing.” Bonhoeffer’s term here is *freilegen*, meaning “to uncover,” to “clear off.” [WF]

[58.] “recollection”; cf. Plato, *Meno*, 81d 4f, 36b 1.

[59.] Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–1852) referred to ‘ontologism’, the philosophical position that he championed, as “anti-psychologistic.” According to him, true knowledge is grounded in the a priori, nonconceptual, and intuitive knowledge of the presence of the absolute being in the finite intellect. Gioberti’s ontologism derives from the doctrine of illumination of the Augustinian-Franciscan tradition, which Nicole Malebranche (1638–1715) had elaborated into a systematic epistemology. In 1861 a decree of the Holy Office condemned the major ontological teachings (see cf. Heinrich Denzinger and Adolph Schönmetzer, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, nos. 2841–47.

[60.] The following typology of the ontological approach, as manifested by Edmund

The ontology of the Husserlian school, though it has an intense pre-occupation with ontology, is in a way still under the spell of idealism. The consequences will be briefly elaborated. For Husserl, phenomenology³⁹ is the science of the phenomena of pure consciousness. Phenomenology is concerned only with such phenomena given to consciousness. The question of existence is ‘bracketed out’ from the outset. Creatures of fantasy and reality are ranked in the same order, next to each other. As a result, a rift appears between essence and reality (*essentia* and *existentia*). Every act, indeed, intends an object; consciousness is always ‘consciousness of’ some entity. But whether this ‘intentional object’ envisaged by consciousness is also a real object is quite irrelevant to the question of pure essentiality. *Noesis* refers to *noema*, but the ‘noetic-noematic parallel structure’^[61] remains immanent in consciousness. This follows necessarily from the concept of what is given to transcendental consciousness. For example, an empirical tree is not yet ‘given’ in ‘simple perception’. For it, or anything else, to become a given, a method of ‘bracketing’—that is, of ‘phenomenological and eidetic reduction’—must be brought into operation. This is a preliminary step, namely, the way through theory to the pre-theoretic givenness. All interpretation spoils simple givenness, and everything real is already an interpretation, since reality is constituted by consciousness,⁴⁰ and so everything real must be utterly ‘ruled out of bounds’.⁴¹ The task of phenomenological-eidetic reduction, therefore, is to eliminate what is empirical-factual from the *eidos*, from the essence, so that pure transcendental consciousness, no longer engaged in interpretation, and essence face each other in simple givenness. In these two reductions the specifically phenomenological method of knowledge, the perception of essence [Wesens-

39. E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 1922; vols. 1 and 2 are particularly relevant. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, 1922.

40. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, [par. 86:] 230ff., [pars. 47–56:]133–55.

41. *Ibid.*, [par. 31:] 96ff.

Husserl, Max Scheler, and Martin Heidegger, shows the influence on Bonhoeffer of Erich Przywara’s study, “Drei Richtungen der Phänomenologie.”

[61.] See Robert Winkler, *Phänomenologie und Religion*, 41, which Bonhoeffer quotes in support of his interpretation of Husserl. Cf. Husserl, *Ideas*, par. 97. Here *noesis* means the act of the intellect; *noema* means the intended object of knowledge. [WF]

schau], comes into play. Just as there is a purely sensory perception, so there is a purely conceptual perception [geistige Anschauung]. “The beholding of essence, too, is perception, just as the eidetic object is object. . . . Thus, the beholding of essence *is* perception; it is beholding in the most meaningful sense and not a simple, and perhaps vague, calling to mind. It is, therefore, a perception giving data *at first hand*, grasping the essence in its ‘bodily’ selfhood.”⁴²

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Here two trains of thought seem to intersect in Husserl.⁴³ The concept of the perception of essence seems to imply that over against the beholding subject there stands an independent, self-contained being, the concept of which the subject forms in the beholding,⁴⁴ that is, without interpretation or inventive production. What meaning could there be in reduction to the *eidōs*, if in the end that too were to be seen as a product of consciousness? We might say that a transcendental realism corresponds to this train of thought. Against this stands the assertion that consciousness is the constituent of all that is—that is to say, the insistence on the immanence of all being in consciousness. To speak of that which transcends consciousness is only a rule that consciousness projects beyond itself so as to order reality within it.⁴⁵ No longer can the process of cognition be understood as the perception that reproduces the *eidōs* in ‘ideation’—even Husserl rejects the realistic epistemology of the mirroring of being by consciousness⁴⁶—but must be represented as creative, as ‘generating’ the object (Cohen), as spontaneity.⁴⁷ In other words, the a priori belongs not on the side of the object but on that of consciousness. In this way Husserl moves over to the side of pure idealism which, it would seem, is contrary to his original intentions. One would quite rightly expect systematic phenomenology to develop an idea of God that

42. *Ibid.*, [par. 3:] 49.

43. Attention has already been drawn to this, especially by R. Winkler, *Phänomenologie und Religion*, 1921, 63ff.; J. Geysler, *Neue und alte Wege der Philosophie*; Max Schelers *Phänomenologie der Religion*, 1924; and W. Ehrlich, *Kant und Husserl*, 1923.

44. [Husserl] *Ideas*, par. 22, par. 24.

45. See for example Husserl, *Ideas*, [par. 51:] 142: [Nature] “*is* only in so far as it constitutes itself within ordered organizations of consciousness.”

46. *Ibid.*, [par. 90:] 241ff.

47. *Ibid.*, par. 23: 82.

58 resembles the Platonic idea of God;⁴⁸ Husserl, however, in his demand that the transcendence of God be bracketed out, teaches something else.⁴⁹ Phenomenology poses no questions of being, only of essence. Yet Husserl finds room in the question of God at least for an aside or footnote about the possibility of a somehow unique, ‘intuitive’ intimation of God, which would require not a ‘mundane’ concept of God but a special kind of transcendence.⁵⁰ Even if Husserl does not achieve real clarity here, his phenomenology rests on the belief in the possibility of grasping intellectually, out of pure consciousness, the absolute as something given—whether by means of an originally given intuition or in some spontaneous manner. But 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. The human logos has overcome the *ö*v, preventing any clear grasp of the concepts of being and God. Being as *existentia* has been dissolved into *essentia*, and with that the transition to idealism is sealed.

What Husserl had confined to pure logic strives, as can be seen in Scheler,^[63] to embrace the ‘totality of life’. Scheler evidently noticed the idealistic character of Husserl’s phenomenology and adopted only his genuinely phenomenological position in order, first, to rid it of every idealistic notion and, second, to develop it consistently in the fields of ethics and philosophy of religion. While Husserl still gave a noticeable priority to the logos over the *ö*v—despite his intention of securing the freedom of the latter from the former—Scheler, however, reverses this position by lucidly working out the priority of the *ö*v over against consciousness. A decisive step was taken when he transferred the a priori from the formal, from what pertains to consciousness, to the material, to

48. Cf. *Logical Investigations*, 1/2, par. 64: 168.^[62]

49. *Ideas*, par. 58.

50. *Ibid.*, par. 51, “Note”:142–43.

[62.] Bonhoeffer’s reference here to the 1922 German edition of Husserl is itself unclear. Bonhoeffer’s footnote, therefore, simply has been reproduced as given; in the English edition of the *Logical Investigations* there is no paragraph 64 in volume one, section two.

[63.] In relation to Scheler, also see Bonhoeffer’s inaugural lecture at Berlin in 1930, “Man [*sic*] in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology,” *NRS* 53f., 56 (*GS* 3:65ff.).

what belongs to the domain of value, to the given.⁵¹ This is a proper development of the phenomenological position. The object of inquiry is no longer how anything can possibly be given, but what it is that is given.⁵² Clearly, a being transcending consciousness is presupposed here; otherwise, there would be no philosophizing at all. The Kantian-idealistic question is dismissed as formalistic, and thus wrongly framed, because it was burdened with unwarranted presuppositions. To be beheld is that which is given in values in the rich fullness of every living thing, from the least up to the highest values of the good and holy.⁵³ But those values are predicates of being—that is, such predicates as are connected with, or belong to, a being logically independent of consciousness. They lie exposed to the consciousness just as consciousness, *being* conscious [Bewußtsein], lies exposed to the *consciousness*, being *conscious* [Bewußtsein]. But this has profound significance, as we shall see, for the doctrines of guilt, original sin, and grace.

In relation to the idea of God, the priority of being preserves God's transcendence of consciousness. God and I do not finally coalesce, become one. Still, two difficulties arise. *First*, Scheler's way of thinking about the positing of God's reality, God's existence [Dasein Gottes], remains as problematic in his "material ethics of value" as in "the eternal in human beings."^[66] It would appear that the object of Scheler's investigation is the essence of the idea of God, rather than the existence of God [Dasein Gottes], and that he does not proceed to the positing of the reality of God.⁵⁴ Scheler is not prepared to accept as a proof of God's

51. M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*, 48–89.^[64]

52. *Ibid.*, 55.

53. Cf. Przywara: "Drei Richtungen der Phänomenologie," *Stimmen der Zeit*, 1928, and the previously cited work by J. Geysler.^[65]

54. Cf. the discussion of this in J. Geysler, 35ff. and in E. Przywara, *Religionsbegründung*. Also relevant to this is [M. Scheler,] *Formalism in Ethics*, 396, esp. note 34, and *On the Eternal in Man*, 255ff.

[64.] Presumably the reference is to Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*, 48–81 ("The A Priori and the Formal in General").

[65.] The reference here and in Bonhoeffer's footnote 54 is to Johannes Geysler, *Max Schelers Phänomenologie der Religion*.

[66.] Bonhoeffer is alluding here to Max Scheler's two books, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values* and *On the Eternal in Man*. [WF]

60 existence that belief in the reality of God is given as part of the religious phenomenon. Such reticence in making assertions about existence is of a piece with Husserl's bracketing of reality. When Scheler declares that the demand for a proof for God outside the basic religious experience "is tantamount to demanding that the existence of colors should be rationally demonstrated before they are seen, or of sounds before they^[67] are heard,"⁵⁵ his readiness to posit reality is clearly manifest. But so is the failure of the undertaking in the manner of Cartesian demonstration. Be that as it may, Scheler has difficulties with the problem of reality. This is because he had readily made the transcendence of consciousness on the part of *essentia* the presupposition of his philosophy without doing the same for *existentia*; the consequence is that now Scheler cannot find his way back to the latter.

The *second* difficulty stems from the question of the interrelation of human logos—under the concept of which may be included what Scheler calls 'the feeling of values'—and being. No doubt, a sphere transcending the logos, yes, even a priority, is reserved for being, that is, for the 'essence'. Nevertheless, according to Scheler, in this 'feeling of values' the beholding I is capable of taking into itself the whole world, the fullness of life, the good and the very deity; being person, the I bears within itself that which enables it to behold the highest value, to understand God and itself. In this way the being of God, the world, and the I have once again been delivered into the hands of the person understanding itself from, and remaining in, itself. It is not as if the person produced being, only as if being were accessible to the I from itself,⁵⁶ as if human beings had the power to to make righteous, or to 'justify', themselves and the world. Although Husserl leaves room for a transcendence of God, without probing further, Scheler's vision, however, particularly in his last literary period, does violence to God, first ascending to God in love and
61 then pulling God down to its level.^[68] The all is closed in by the I, and in this all God, too, is found.

55. [M. Scheler,] *On the Eternal*, 263.

56. [M. Scheler,] *Formalism in Ethics*, 294, bottom.

[67.] The cited text in Scheler reads "of sounds before they — are heard."

[68.] Cf. E. Przywara, "Drei Richtungen der Phänomenologie," concerning Scheler: "once, at the outset, an exuberant rush into God's blessedness of love but then, at the end, a desperate and raging tearing of God down into the world's misery" (258).

This accords with the ‘will to have a system’^{57 [69]} which, at first glance, seemed incompatible with the phenomenological approach, but which is there in Husserl no less than in Scheler. The goal of philosophy is not a ‘picture-book phenomenology’ but a system. A system is made possible, however, only by an immanent idea of God or, rather, by the exclusion of the idea of God from the context of philosophy altogether, assuming that this were possible in practice, which we would, of course, deny. In the system lies the mastery of being by the knowing I, hence its claim to divinity, “the path to the usurpation of divine beholding.”⁵⁸

Earlier, the mode of God’s being stood in question; here it is determined, by the force of the beholding I, to be that of something which exists, over against which stands the I in freedom of vision. The being that transcends what exists, and whose mode of being thinking and beholding know themselves to be, has been lost to sight. And the result is the system of pure immanence.

Phenomenology since Husserl has itself done violence to a problem, the clarification of which would have been indispensable for its very presuppositions: the problem of being itself. Not until the arbitrarily bracketed existence, or ‘reality’, is put on a new ontological foundation can we expect a clarification of the problem of act and being, which neither Husserl nor Scheler offers.

Here the most recent and encompassing phenomenological investigation comes onto the scene, taking ontology itself for its object: Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*.^[70] In what appears to be the bluntest reversal of phenomenology thus far, *existentia* is made the *essentia* of *esse*.^{59 [71]} Precisely where Husserl ‘brackets’, Heidegger discloses being itself. Correspondingly, where Husserl and Scheler speak of timeless essences and

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57. [Husserl,] *Logical Investigations*, 1/[1], chap. 11; [M. Scheler,] *Formalism*, xix.

58. Przywara, *Drei Richtungen der Phänomenologie*, 262.

59. [M. Heidegger,] *Being and Time*, 67.

[69.] Bonhoeffer appears to refer here to Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations* 1/1, chap. 11, pars. 62–64:225–31. Philosophical systems are satirized by Kierkegaard in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (117–22); and Nietzsche says “the will to a system is a lack of integrity” (“Twilight of the Idols,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, 470). [WF]

[70.] Cf. on Heidegger “Man [*sic*] in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology,” *NRS*, 55ff. (*GS* 3:68ff.) and “Karl Heim’s *Glaube und Denken*,” *GS* 3:140.

[71.] Existence [existentia] is made the essence [essentia] of being [esse].

values as the being of what exists (insofar as this distinction is made at all!), Heidegger interprets being essentially in terms of temporality. This is possible only because the place of Husserl's 'pure transcendental consciousness' is taken by those who concretely ask the question of being, who themselves are something existing in the specificity of their manner of being as 'Dasein'. An understanding of being can be gained in principle only on the basis of a "hermeneutic of Dasein"⁶⁰ which is an "analysis of the existentiality [of]^[72] existence." Being is understood from Dasein, since Dasein^[73] at all times already "is in such a way as to be something which understands something like being."⁶¹ Dasein is, in every instance, my Dasein. "Understanding of being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's being."⁶² Dasein is "'being in such a way that one has an understanding of being'. That kind of being towards which Dasein can comport itself in one way or another, and always does comport itself somehow, we call existence [Existenz]."⁶³ This existence is not mere 'being-at-hand' ['Vorhandensein'], a manner of being that is not proper to Dasein but only to the *res*, to things. Existence is, rather, what at that point is an already taken, real decision of Dasein's 'ability to be'. "Dasein is not something present-at-hand [ein Vorhandenes] which possesses its competence for something by way of an extra; it is primarily being-possible. Dasein is in every case what it can be, and in the way in which it is its possibility."^[74] We need to be aware of the fact that the concept of possibility has a dual meaning for Heidegger. His main concern is the ontological analysis of the existentiality of existence, that is, the "analysis of what constitutes existence."⁶⁴ Here the existential, ontological possibilities of Dasein are uncovered; they are to be distinguished from the ontic-existential possibilities about which philosophy is silent. Neither kind of possibility can be called absolute possibility, since each is precisely concerned with the existentiality of historical existence. "But the roots of the existential analytic, on its part, are ultimately *existentiell*,

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60. *Ibid.*, 62.61. *Ibid.*, 39.62. *Ibid.*, 32.63. *Ibid.*64. *Ibid.*, 33.

[72.] "Of" is missing in Bonhoeffer.

[73.] Bonhoeffer's text has 'das Sein' here, not 'Dasein' as in Heidegger.

[74.] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 183.

that is, *ontical*.⁶⁵ [75] “Yet [humanity’s] ‘*substance*’ is existence.”⁶⁶ Dasein always finds itself already in a world. It is ‘to be in the world’ existential-ontologically.⁶⁷ [76] Dasein is in ‘being with others’,⁶⁸ in ‘being fallen into captivity to the anonymous’ [im Verfallensein an das Man],⁶⁹ to a day-in, day-out sameness [Alltäglichkeit]. Dasein understands its ‘being in the world’ as its ‘having been thrown’ [‘Geworfenheit’] into that world. Dasein is the being in the world of Dasein; its being, as the ability to be, is epitomized in the sentence: Dasein is ‘care’ [‘Sorge’],⁷⁰ understood also in strictly ontological-existential terms. As temporal Dasein within historicity, it must order itself upon its own end so as to attain its original wholeness. And this end is death.⁷¹ In the most proper sense, Dasein is ‘being towards death’. But instead of living in the ‘resoluteness [Entschlossenheit] to death’, in this its authenticity, Dasein always finds itself already ‘fallen into captivity’ to the ‘anonymous’. But the call of conscience⁷² summons Dasein out of that captivity and into “its ownmost potentiality-for-being.”⁷³ But Dasein itself is the caller, “which, in its thrownness . . . is anxious about its potentiality-for-being.”⁷⁴ Dasein seeks to return to itself from the world’s ‘uncanniness’ [‘Unheimlichkeit’], which offers no home anywhere.^[77] In the call of conscience Dasein experiences itself as guilty in its fallenness to the world, in its nul-

65. *Ibid.*, 34.

66. *Ibid.*, 153.

67. *Ibid.*, 78ff.

68. *Ibid.*, 149ff.

69. *Ibid.*, 163ff.

70. *Ibid.*, 225ff.

71. *Ibid.*, 279ff.

72. *Ibid.*, 315ff.

73. *Ibid.*, 322.

74. *Ibid.*

[75.] Philosophy’s inquiry into the most primordial, underived, level of questioning is what Heidegger called the inquiry into *Sein*, being, as opposed to inquiries into an object of ordinary experience, *das Seiende*. The first sort of inquiry is what is called ontological questioning; the latter is what is called ontic. The sort of human self-awareness necessary for ontological questioning is what Heidegger called *existential* self-awareness; that for the inquiry into the ontic realm he termed *existentiell*. Since otherwise we would miss a crucial distinction being made by Heidegger, the present work renders the German *existenzial* as the English “existential” and leaves the German *existentiell* as “existentiell” in English [WF]

[76.] Heidegger’s way of writing this phrase is *In-der-Welt- Sein*: being-in-the-world.

[77.] The German word *unheimlich* has both a literal sense of “not being at home” and a more common sense of “uncanniness.” [WF]

64 lity, and enters into its most authentic possibility: the decision unto death. It does so not by withdrawing from this world but by accepting its fallenness in the world as its guilt. Insofar as Dasein lays hold of the possibility, the existence, most authentic to it, Dasein grasps its own wholeness.

What is important for our inquiry here is the unconditional priority given to the question of being over that of thought. It had been the basic mistake of Descartes and all his followers that, in explicating the *cogito sum*,^[78] they neglected to put the question of being to the *sum*.⁷⁵ But this question cannot be raised unless there “*is* something like an understanding of being.”⁷⁶ All thought is but a determination of the being of Dasein. Thought does not, therefore, produce its world for itself. Rather, it finds itself, as Dasein, in the world; in every instance, it is already in a world just as, in every instance, it is already itself. Dasein is already its possibility,⁷⁷ in authenticity or inauthenticity.⁷⁸ It is capable both of choosing itself in authenticity and of losing itself in inauthenticity. The decisive point is, however, that it already ‘is’ in every instance what it understands and determines itself to be. This helps make sense of a leaning toward philosophical realism.⁷⁹ It is evident that Dasein, which is in the world, is in fact in a real external world. In this, realism is right; it is wrong when it tries to supply a proof for that external world. “The ‘scandal of philosophy’ is not that this proof has yet to be given, but that such proofs are expected and attempted again and again. . . . If Dasein is understood correctly, it defies such proofs, because, in its being, it already *is* what subsequent proofs deem necessary to demonstrate for it.”⁸⁰ The attempt to supply proof presupposes an isolated subject, on the one side, and an isolated existing thing [Seiendes] on the
65 other. But being can never be elucidated by means of what exists [Seiendes], but can only be understood within Dasein (in the reflection of idealism on the I!). Here, too, idealism receives its due. Being is essen-

75. Ibid., 44ff. and 254.

76. Ibid., 244.

77. Ibid., 69.

78. Ibid., 68.

79. Ibid., par. 43:244ff.

80. Ibid., 249.

[78.] “think therefore am” [MR]

tially Dasein, but Dasein is spirit⁸¹ in its historicity. This Dasein must go beyond idealism and inquire about its ontological structure, for in this way only can light be shed on the meaning of being in general.⁸² Therefore being has priority over thought, and yet being equals Dasein, equals understanding of being, equals spirit. This completes the picture of Heidegger's ontology for us. Being understands itself in Dasein, in spirit. But Dasein is the existence of human beings in their historicity, in the momentariness of the decisions that they, in every instance, have already taken.

From the perspective of the problem of act and being, it would seem that here a genuine coordination of the two has been reached. The priority of being turned out to be the priority of spirit-being in which the spirit does not annihilate being, but 'is' and understands it. This solution, though reminiscent of Hegel, is fundamentally different from Hegel's theory, in that being is Dasein, 'being in the world', existing in temporality. Thus, pure consciousness in Husserl's sense does not dominate; neither does the material a priori in Scheler's sense. Heidegger has succeeded in forcing together act and being in the concept of Dasein; both what Dasein itself decides, and the fact that it is itself determined, are brought into one here. In not deciding there is already determination. Dasein does not have an absolute ability to be. The ontological-existential structure cannot be entirely separated from the ontic one. Dasein is neither a discontinuous succession of individual acts nor the continuity of a being that transcends time. Dasein is constant decision-making and, in every instance, already being determined.

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Two factors enabled Heidegger to reach this conclusion. The *first* is that 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,

81. Cf. Przywara, 259. In relation to Heidegger he writes: "The spiritual being (of human beings) is the essence of being altogether. . . . What Heidegger calls 'being', however much he talks of the reduction from truth to being, is actually nothing other than the being of consciousness."^[79]

82. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 251: "If what the term 'idealism' says, amounts to the understanding that being can never be explained by entities but is already that which is 'transcendental' for every entity, then idealism affords the only correct possibility for a philosophical problematic."

[79.] "Drei Richtungen der Phänomenologie."

have to be thought of as having been drawn into time.⁸³ Thus, Dasein always already 'is' whenever it makes a decision. If it were functioning out of a time-transcendent sphere, it would always have to constitute itself anew. 'Being' just cannot be statically comprehended as something that exists [Seiendes]. It is interpreted in reference to the understanding of being, and thereby drawn into the movement of decision-making existence, that Dilthey calls the 'totality of life'.

The *second* factor is that, in making its decisions, temporal Dasein is always directed upon itself so as to be able to decide, even though this 'itself' already 'is'. It is able to seize what its existence offers to it: its ownmost possibility. It can come to itself, for it is able to understand itself, but this means that Dasein is contained in the world or, better, the world is contained in Dasein.

It is the basic thesis of this ontological metaphysics that Dasein in temporality already possesses in every instance an understanding of being, that it is, so to speak, 'open' to itself and in this way that Dasein is the window on being. The genuine ontological accomplishment of the 'suspension' ['Aufhebung']^[80] of thought in being is conditioned by the view that human beings, *qua* Dasein, have the understanding of being systematically at their disposal. Still, it must be highly instructive for theology to see worked out in philosophy a metaphysical definition of the interrelationship of act and being. In this definition, it is true, the concept of being remains self-contained, notwithstanding the high degree of internal consistency. Heidegger's philosophy is a consciously atheistic philosophy of finitude. Everything in it is related to the fact that finitude is enclosed in itself through Dasein. It is decisive for the existential analysis of Dasein that finitude is conceived to be closed in. *Being enclosed* is something that can no longer be separated from finitude. Like all other existential characteristics [Existentialien] of Dasein, the existential ability to be does not become disclosed as a general existential characteristic of finite Dasein but as something essentially determined by the fact that finitude is closed in. In its essence the philosophical concept of finitude is that of closed-in finitude. Here, then, no

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83. *Being and Time*, 499, note xiii.

[80.] 'Suspension' is used here in the sense it might be used by a chemist to speak of one substance that is mixed with, but not dissolved in, another—but not in the sense of a temporary withholding from, or abrogation of, the one by the other. [WF]

room has been left for the concept of revelation. With the knowledge, gained in revelation, that finitude is creatureliness—that is, open for God—all concepts of being must be formed anew. It follows that Heidegger's concept of being, despite its enormous expansion through the discovery of the existential sphere, remains unsuitable for theology.⁸⁴

Building on the anti-idealistic presupposition of the unconditional priority of being over consciousness, Catholic-Thomistic philosophy demolishes the fundamentally closed concept of being in order to open it up for the transcendence of God. *Esse* and *essentia* are rent apart within being.⁸⁵ In human beings the two are separate, whereas in God they coincide so that one might wonder whether 'that God is' [Dasein] incorporates 'how God is' [Sosein] into itself or vice versa,⁸⁶ seeing that God essentially is always what God should be. The *essentia* of human beings is related always to their *esse*. But it is always different from the *esse*, because human beings are in 'becoming' while God is in 'being'. God is the eternal 'is' that abides in all 'was' and 'will be',⁸⁷ yet also infinitely beyond them. It is not that the *esse* of human beings is divine and the *essentia* nondivine, or the reverse, but the ontological relationship of human beings to God lies in the entirety of the *essentia-esse* difference of human beings and the *essentia-esse* identity of God. The relation between God and human beings takes the form neither of pure exclusivity, even if only partial, nor of pure identity, again even if only partial; both wholes can be considered, rather, in a relation of 'likeness' to one another, as being is like becoming. That is the Thomist principle of the *analogia entis*, which Przywara especially has restored in our time with methodical brilliance to the center of Roman Catholic philosophy of religion and dogmatics.^[81] On this ontological foundation Thomas—

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84. Cf. below, footnote 89.

85. Cf. Thomas Aquinas: *On Being and Essence*.

86. Przywara: *Religionsphilosophie katholischer Theologie*, 1927, 24.

87. Przywara: *Ringen der Gegenwart*, vol. 2: 923ff.

[81.] The term *analogia entis*, or "analogy of being," which Bonhoeffer's reading of Erich Przywara introduced into the discussion (see "The Problem" above, page 27, editorial note 16), is not to be found in Thomas Aquinas. It was used first, on several occasions, by Francisco de Suarez (1548–1619) (see *Opera Omnia*, 26:14, 16, 21 and 320–22). Initially, Przywara used the term as an element of the church's traditional teaching (*Schriften*, 2:7). This aspect is examined in detail by Bernhard Gertz, *Glaubenswelt als Analogie*, 235ff.

Przywara^[82] seems, indeed, to have succeeded in opening the concept of being to the transcendent. God is not enclosed in Dasein nor Dasein in God, but just as God is imagined to exist in absolute originality, so human beings are thought of as existing in their relative but authentic reality before God (*causae secundae*).^[83] The concept of likeness requires two substances that stand over against, yet in relative independence from, each other. According to Przywara, 'is' stands 'in-over' becoming, and the latter 'comes from the former'. Therefore, God is not divorced from the creature but is in it to the degree to which God grants it relative but authentic reality. (Here arise the inferences of all-efficacy [Allwirksamkeit] vis-à-vis sole-efficacy [Alleinwirksamkeit], the doctrines of nature-supernature and grace.) This is how Thomas succeeds in interpreting Dasein in terms of temporality without sealing it in itself. The question remains whether the transcendence of God's 'is', or the analogy of divine being, is really adequate to express God's transcendence as Christians understand it, or whether a metaphysics of immanence still lurks behind the scene. Thomistic ontology is valid in relation to the being of human beings *qua* creatures, inasmuch as the being of human beings is determined, according to Thomas, essentially by creatureliness. This includes a continuity of the mode of being in *status corruptio-*
nis and *status gratiae*.^[84] With the continuity of their own ontological condition there is also guaranteed to human beings by the *analogia entis* a continuity of the ontological condition of God. Thus their being, whether in the original state of Adam or in Christ, may always be certain
 69 of its analogy to God's being. God remains 'in-over' human beings; but if that is to make any concrete theological sense and not remain purely formalistic-metaphysical, the modes of being 'in Adam' or 'in Christ' must be understood and interpreted in their own right. We must ask, in other words, whether there is in fact a being of human beings in general that is not already determined in every instance as their 'being-in-Adam' or 'being-in-Christ', as their being-guilty or being-pardoned, and only as such could lead to an understanding of the being of human beings. But

[82.] This awkward construction is Bonhoeffer's; he apparently took Przywara's position to be akin to, and representative of, that of Thomas Aquinas himself, indeed Thomism in general. [WF]

[83.] 'Secondary causes', that is to say, causes which in relation to the first mover are of a second order. Scholastic thought uses the term to depict the work of the creature as distinct from that of the creator. Cf. Erich Przywara, *Religionsphilosophie*, 39.

[84.] 'The status of the human being after the fall' and 'the state of grace.'

then, a priori, the possibility of a guarantee of the divine continuity of being loses any basis. The eternal 'is' remains a speculative notion which is continuously 'in-over' becoming, and which even admits of being broadened into an a priori system of the natural insight of reason, but which is inadequate for a theological ontology. God is not primarily the sheer 'is'. Rather God 'is' the righteous one; God 'is' the holy one; God 'is' love. The ontological foundation for theological concepts of being must remain precisely the realization that this 'is' can in no way be detached from the concrete definition. A formalistic retreat to something 'more general' behind that kind of specificity fundamentally destroys the Christian idea of revelation. The contingency of God's revelation in law and gospel is twisted into a general theory of being with requisite modifications, thereby blocking the road to a genuinely theological concept of sin and grace. Only general attributes can be deduced from the concept of the analogy of being; the two like-unlike images of being are fixed in their interrelation. But from this point of view, neither human nor divine contingent activity—thus neither sin nor grace—is conceivable; everything must already be patterned, in principle, on the ontological concept of analogy. But this brings us to the concept of existence in Thomas-Przywara.^[85] 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. It follows from this, however, that in this concept of existence one regards as implicitly already 'present' ['vorhanden'] what can only be made explicit in the ways God is related to human beings (and vice versa) that are possible within the limits of the *analogia entis*. But now, human existence is, once again, comprehensible through itself and also has access to God. This is the inevitable consequence of all systematic metaphysics. And so the attempt to open the concept of being to the transcendent also ends up with an illusory transcendence. The basic features of the ontological proof of God's existence come into view; if there is in the creature a tension between *essentia* and *esse*, then there must be, underlying that tension and making it possible, an identity of the two beyond that: the divine being as *essentia* and *esse*. Just as Anselm surely arrived at a being⁸⁸ but not God, and thus remained in the closed

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88. Cf. R. Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 150, note 3.

[85.] See above, page 74, editorial note 82.

world,^[86] the Thomistic ontological concept of God cannot go beyond a metaphysics locked in the closed world. This is the case as long as it discovers in the existence of human beings possibilities to understand themselves and, therefore, God—in other words, to “project themselves on the lines of their most authentic ability to be,” as Heidegger puts it.^[87] This is the case as long as the world together with its idea of God are combined in the I—but this means that one cannot successfully make room for a revelation, that is, one cannot form theological concepts of being and act.

Does this prove that every ontological approach is of no use for theology? It proves this with regard to an ontological approach just as little as it does with relation to a transcendental approach. Insofar as both, the foundation of being in act and of act in being, become a system confined in the I, a system in which the I understands itself through itself and can
71 place itself into the truth, they are of no help in the understanding of the concept of revelation. This occurs, on the one side, even if the genuinely transcendental approach sets free a being transcendent of consciousness, a being ‘in reference to which’ Dasein is conceived—while remaining itself nonobjective. And this occurs even if, on the other side, genuine ontology really intends to conceive of being as the a priori of thought in such a way that such thought suspends itself in being. For the inevitable conclusion must be that, in the first place, reason itself determines the limits and that, in the second place, being somehow falls into the power of the thinking I, so that in both instances, the I understands itself from itself within a closed system. *Per se*, a philosophy can concede

[86.] This is an allusion to the proof of God’s existence of Anselm of Canterbury (ca. 1034–1109), found in the work *Proslogion* (*Anselm of Canterbury*, 1:89–112). Bonhoeffer’s formulation ‘a being’ is somewhat confusing, since Anselm’s ontological proof, put forth in terms of the concept of *id quo maius cogitari nequit*, “that than which a greater cannot be thought” (94), sets God forth as absolute being, encompassing concept and reality. The part of Seeberg’s work to which Bonhoeffer refers cites the key statements of Anselm’s *Proslogion*, chap. 2, in order to guard against all misinterpretation of Anselm’s argument as an expression of metaphysical realism. Karl Barth agrees with Reinhold Seeberg’s correction of the prevailing, traditional reading of Anselm; at the same time he goes further in his interpretation when, in the context of his theological program, he places the proof within the context of the form and language of prayer. Cf. Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*.

[87.] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, par. 31.

no room for revelation⁸⁹ unless it knows revelation and confesses itself

89. If Paul Tillich^[88] believes that there is no possibility of distinguishing between philosophical and theological anthropology (*Religiöse Verwirklichung*, Berlin 1930, 300), one need only refer to the concept of revelation. If, from the viewpoint of revelation, theological anthropology sees human existence as essentially determined by guilt or by grace—and not merely as ‘under threat in an unconditional sense’—then philosophical anthropology is able to adopt such concepts from theology only at the expense of bursting its own framework. For in doing so, philosophical anthropology turns its analysis of human existence, too, into an analysis of humanity’s attempt to lay hold of itself; that is to say, it can do so only at the expense of becoming theological anthropology. This leaves the question of truth untouched. It is to be tested only in conjunction with the concept of contingency inherent in revelation. Cf. relevant passages below, as well as Fr. Gogarten, “Das Problem einer theologischen Anthropologie,” *Zwischen den Zeiten*, no. 6, 1929.^[89] In a recent article, “The Historicity of Man and Faith” [which Bonhoeffer knew from *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1930, no. 5, 339–64], R. Bultmann formulated the relation of philosophy to theology in such a way that it is the task of philosophy to examine phenomenologically those structures of Dasein which represent the existential-ontological possibilities (as distinct from ontic ones, of course) for believing and unbelieving Dasein: “Philosophy sees that Dasein is in every case a concrete Dasein, characterized by a definite ‘how’ [Wie]; philosophy speaks of the ‘actual fact’ of this ‘how’, but not of the ‘how’ itself” (Bultmann, “The Historicity of Man and Faith,” in *Existence and Faith*, 94, trans. altered). The theme of philosophy is existentiality [Existentialität], whereas the theme of theology is concrete (believing) existence [Existenz]. The same line is followed by the following statements on the concept of revelation: Believers can state no more accurately or completely than unbelievers what revelation is. “What ‘more’ do believers know? Just this, that revelation has touched them, that they are in life, that they have received grace and are forgiven” [Bultmann,] 100). The event-character of revelation and the event-character of faith can be thought within the existential-ontological possibilities of Dasein. The presupposition for all this is to be found in Bultmann’s

[88.] Bonhoeffer is referring to Paul Tillich’s *Religiöse Verwirklichung*, chap. 9, “Klassenkampf und Religiöser Sozialismus” (Class struggle and religious socialism), 300. Concerning Tillich, see also “Man in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology,” *NRS* 58f. (*GS* 3:71f.). Bonhoeffer’s footnote 89 in its entirety leaves the impression that it was an excursus that Bonhoeffer wrote after the completion of the manuscript of *Act and Being* and inserted here. The articles by Tillich, Bultmann, and Löwith indeed appeared just at the time when Bonhoeffer was completing his *Habilitationsschrift*, the deadline for which was February 1930. [WF]

[89.] Bonhoeffer mistakenly cites Gogarten’s “Das Problem einer theologischen Anthropologie” as appearing in *Zwischen den Zeiten* 6 (1929); it is actually found in volume 7 (1929).

72 to be Christian philosophy in full recognition that the place it wanted to usurp *is* already occupied by another—namely, by Christ.

assertion, which he does not further substantiate: “believing Dasein is still Dasein, in every instance” ([“The Historicity of Man and Faith,”] 94, trans. altered). But this leads to further questions, for here is the root of the unbounded claim of philosophy. It must be asked whether one can assert this [unity of Dasein],^[90] even only of its existential-ontological possibilities, apart from revelation without making revelation impossible. If the answer is yes, then believers do in fact know nothing ‘more’ about revelation than unbelievers. From the perspective of revelation the matter appears differently: believers know everything about revelation and unbelievers know nothing. The reason for this is that the essence of revelation lies in its event-character. For the existential-ontological analysis, revelation can be thought within the static possibilities of Dasein; but then it no longer has the essential character of an event, one that comes from God’s freedom. Only where forgiveness of sins is an event do I know of revelation as a believer. And where this event does not take place, the forgiveness of sins of which I ‘know’ is no longer the forgiveness of sins attested by revelation. Were it not so, the doctrine of justification would be in jeopardy. But if revelation is essentially an event of God’s free activity, then it supersedes and challenges also the existential-ontological possibilities of Dasein. Then Dasein is no longer essentially identical with itself on account of itself, whether revelation is event or not. Then revelation claims to be the initiator of the unity of Dasein and have the sole right to do so; then the deepest root of philosophy, the one from which it derives its claims, is cut. The letting go of the ontic by retreat into the ontological [unity of Dasein] is considered futile by revelation. In the existentiell event of revelation, the existential structure of Dasein is touched and changed. There is no second mediator, not even the existential structure of Dasein. For revelation, the ontic-existentiell and ontological-existential structures coincide. From the perspective of revelation—inasmuch as they are consistently regarded apart from the event of revelation—the phenomenological definition of Dasein (according to its existential structure as historical, as ‘care’, as ‘being-towards-death’) is as much an abstraction and a postulate as is the biological definition of human beings. That is why, finally, this interpretation of Dasein is also irrelevant for theology. Cf. especially Kurt^[91] Löwith, “Phänomenologische Ontologie und protestantische Theologie,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1930, no. 5, 365–99. I am in substantial agreement with Löwith’s comments against Bultmann and the ‘ideal of existence’ which is at the base of existential analysis, and which opens up the concept of existential analysis to criticism. I have learned much from this article.

[90.] “Unity of Dasein” does not appear in the two German manuscripts consulted for the critical edition; the phrase is conjecture.

[91.] Löwith’s correct first name is Karl.

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. That is so for two reasons. The first is that genuine transcendental philosophy and genuine ontology have thoroughly grasped and thought through the philosophical problem of act and being. The second is that questions concerning the interpretation of act and being can be put to revelation in the sharpest possible manner because of their view that not only are human beings pure act ‘in reference to’ but also that thought is ontologically ‘suspended’ in being. The concept of revelation itself will restore an entirely new form to those questions and it will become clear in the process that, on the basis of that concept, the ‘in reference to’ [‘in bezug auf’] and the ‘suspension’ [‘Aufgehobensein’] of the act in being are basically amenable to a theological interpretation and, therefore, of help in the understanding of the concept of revelation. We shall see that in the concept of revelation both are brought together, surmounted, and transcended [aufgehoben] in an original fashion.

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The offense against Christian thinking in any autonomous self-understanding is that it believes human beings to be capable of giving truth to themselves, of transporting themselves into the truth by themselves, since the ‘ground’ of existence must somehow surely be in the truth, in the likeness to God. But here, truth means only that reference to God which Christian theology does not hold possible save in the *word* of God that is spoken about and to human beings in the revelation of law and gospel. It is in this sense that formal validity may be granted to the assertion, common to the transcendental-idealist position, that knowledge of the self and of God is no “possession without context”⁹⁰ but is one that places the knower in an immediate ‘possessing’ relation to what is known. In a terminology to be further explained later on, knowledge in

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90. Cf. F. K. Schumann, *Gottesgedanke und Zerfall der Moderne*, 1929, final chapter.^[92]

[92.] Schumann in *Der Gottesgedanke und der Zerfall der Moderne* (333f.) follows Johannes Rehmke and his study *Logik oder Philosophie als Wissenslehre* (39ff.) in defending the thesis, critical of idealism, that knowledge is a final, most simple, primordial datum that is to be seen as a *having* of what is known *without any other relationships*, rather than as an activity of one kind or another *in relation to* what is known.

truth about oneself, as well as about God, is already 'being in . . . ', whether in 'Adam' or 'Christ'.

It is never possible for a systematic metaphysics to know that "one cannot give oneself truth," for such knowledge would already signify a placing of oneself into truth. But neither is such knowledge a possibility of 'critical philosophy'.⁹¹ A philosophy with such an expectation of itself would be uncritical in the strongest sense. Thinking is as little able as good works to deliver the *cor curvum in se* from itself. Is it merely a coincidence that the most profound German philosophy resulted in the enclosing of the all in the I? Even this realization is a matter of placing oneself into truth—seeing that the world of the I without grace is locked in the I—albeit not the truth of the divine word, because it 'is' not in that truth. If it were in the truth of the divine word it could not celebrate the triumph of the I, of the spirit, but would have to recognize in its eternal loneliness the curse of lost community with God [Gottesgemeinschaft]. Only a way of thinking that, bound in obedience to Christ, 'is' from the truth can place into the truth. We are sent onward to revelation itself, yet we cannot understand this step 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.

This is something that recently a group of theologians and philosophers, whose reflections have a common focus on the central problem of existence, has understood and accepted. It remains to be seen whether they have succeeded in interpreting appropriately the concept of revelation from the perspective of the problem of act and being.

91. Cf. the passage on Grisebach in Section B below.