THE PHILOSOPHIC FOUNDATION OF LUTHER'S ETHICS

by

The Reverend William Henry Lehmann, Jr.

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
Of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

May, 1968
PREFACE

The original idea for this book was conceived in the winter of 1952. I had consulted Richard McKeon, my advisor in the philosophy department at the University of Chicago, about my forthcoming Master's dissertation. He, knowing my particular religious background, suggested that I aim eventually at attempting to state Luther's philosophic position and that my Master's work be a preliminary for it. As nearly as I can summarize his remarks he said, "Luther needs to be looked at from a philosopher's standpoint. I think there is a fresh viewpoint there which has been hidden under the debris of the past few centuries. So far as I know, no one, at least recently, has tried to get at the philosophic Luther. The trouble with him is that everything he wrote is wordy. You have to dig through a lot of rhetoric to get at his thought. He's a very unsystematic fellow. The most fruitful place to look will probably be his De Servo Arbitrio.

Fourteen years later, I took up the task in earnest. Whether what follows satisfies the demands of the task laid down a decade and a half ago, I am not in a position to judge. If it does, much of the credit belongs to Richard McKeon, who not only set the task, but, to a great extent equipped me intellectually to undertake it. If it fails to meet the demands of the task, the fault is mine.

The claim has often been made that Luther was opposed to
philosophy. Certainly there are passages in his writings which can be cited to support such a position. "Philosophy is the theology of heathen and of rationalists."¹ Philosophy is "a study of futility and perdition. ... Do not attempt to support and defend philosophy; rather study it as we study evil arts and mistaken positions, to destroy and to refute them."²

Luther's sharpest criticisms are reserved for Aristotle. "I am heartsick that this damned, cocky mischievous heathen has deluded and fooled so many of the best Christians with his false ideas. He has been sent as a plague to God because of our sins. ... His book on ethics is the worst of all books. ... Away with such books. Keep them away from Christians. ... I have lectured and heard lectures on him, and I understand him better than did St. Thomas or Scotus."³

Twelve years later, on the other hand, Luther told a friend, Veit Dietrich, "Aristotle is very good in the area of moral philosophy."⁴

Cicero is frequently praised by Luther. "If anyone wants

¹D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe), Tischreden V, tr. A. Freitag, Weimar: Herman Böhlau Nachfolger, 1908, no. 5557. Subsequent references to the Weimar edition will be noted as "WA", followed by volume number in Roman Numerals and page reference or item citation in arabic.

²Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, WA LVI, p. 372.


⁴WA, Tischreden I, no. 411.
real philosophy he ought to read Cicero."⁵ "Cicero was an excellent philosopher; ... . I hope our Lord God will be gracious to him and his kind ... ."⁶ Finally, "Cicero wrote and taught brilliantly about virtues, prudence and other matters; likewise Aristotle about ethics, brilliantly and learnedly. The books of both are certainly very useful and very necessary for the conduct of this life."⁷

How can these seemingly contradictory remarks be reconciled? Luther's criticism of philosophy is not a criticism of the philosophic discipline itself, but of the attempt to use philosophy as a substitute for theology. "We must carefully distinguish between philosophy and theology."⁸ "Aristotle depicts for us a god of this sort: who is sleeping and permits anyone to use or abuse his longsuffering and chastening at will."⁹ Rational discovery and Christian revelation are mutually exclusive. The need for both theology and philosophy in the discovery of truth is not thereby excluded. While for Luther philosophy cannot discover the way to God or provide the truth about Him and the human condition relative to Him, it is necessary for the conduct of this

⁵ WA Tischreden II, no. 2412b.
⁶ WA Tischreden III, nos. 3904, 3925.
⁷ Commentary on Chapter Nine of Isaiah, WA XXXX, III, p. 608.
⁸ Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, WA XXXX, I, p. 410.
⁹ On Bound Choice, WA XVIII, p. 706.
present life.  

My suspicion that there could be found in Luther's writings at least the rudiments of a philosophic position was aroused by the fact that in the De Servo Arbitrio, there are found a number of philosophic questions, issues raised by Erasmus, to which Luther gives philosophic answers. He argues on philosophic grounds to a given position, makes philosophic distinctions, opts for a particular philosophic position to the exclusion of others, and proceeds dialectically in his examination of materials.

Both he and Erasmus purport to be arguing their respective cases on "scripture alone". Yet, when they divide on the meaning and import of a particular passage, of necessity they move beyond "scripture alone" to grammatical analysis to get at the meaning, and philosophical analysis to get at the import of the passage or to expose fallacies in the other's reasoning or assumptions.

A philosophical debate, however, might yield only bits and pieces which, interesting as they might be historically, would have little if any philosophic value, since they could not be linked up into a coherent body of thought, the implications of which might profitably be developed.

The next clue to Luther's thinking was provided by his insistence on describing divine activity in terms of liberum.

---

10 See citation 7. Cicero and Aristotle are "necessary for the conduct of this life."
That kind of approach had its precedents in Scotus, Ockham and Biel. The tradition of the latter two had shaped Luther's educational experiences. Contrary to that tradition, however, Luther argues that divine liberum arbitrium excludes the possibility of human liberum arbitrium. An analysis of this concept of liberum arbitrium, distinguishing the characteristics entailed by it, and what it implied about the nature of human action as affected by it led to the isolation and relating of the materials found in Part A of Chapter II.

From an ethical standpoint, then, Luther had presented a philosophic explanation for the existence of goodness, namely, the activity of an entity exercising liberum arbitrium. But what about the existence of evil? The available material in Luther was scanty, but adequate to the task. It necessitated to some extent going outside the De Servo Arbitrio. These materials are found in the latter portion of Chapter II. What they reveal is three additional kinds of activity within the over-riding activity of divine liberum arbitrium, Satanic opposition (a principle of destruction), divine recreative activity (reconciling the opposition back into conformity to the divine intent) and

---

I have used the expression liberum arbitrium as a technical expression, usually untranslated, since it would often appear clumsy or artificial in English translation and sometimes would be confused with voluntas.
human existential activity.

With respect to the last activity, the problem with which I wrestled for some time was this: if, as Luther claims, everything can be explained in terms of ontological determination by divine free activity, how is it possible for man to exercise choice over "the things which are beneath him", a claim which Luther also makes? 12

The problem was resolved by isolating what it is in human action which is accounted for by the first three kinds of activity. Whatever was left over is the uniquely human contribution. The first activity accounts for man's being. The second and third account for his inner impulses to action, his urges and adventitious ideas. What is left is the capacity to deliberate over these urges and ideas prior to action.

The four kinds of activities resolve themselves into a three level hierarchy of relationships to which I gave the names: ontological, manichaean and existential. What was necessary next was to test the hierarchy for consistency. Since it was a hierarchy of activities, as opposed, for instance, to a hierarchy of ideas, the problem reduced to justifying the activities in relation to one another. This task occupies Chapter III.

Finally, I moved beyond the structure which had been created to an examination of what it implied about the nature of human

12 See quotation 34 and footnote 36 of Chapter II.
action, to the question of the relation between inner motivation (quite literally "being moved") and outer action. Chapter IV exhibits the results of that examination. Given then that explanation of human action, it was a simple task to exhibit the nature of human ethical problems and the approach to ethics which follows from it.

Briefly, then, this recapitulates the process of analysis of which the chapters which follow are a synthesis. I have attempted to set forth as simply and, at the same time, in as organized a fashion as I could, the philosophic foundation of Luther's ethics. Consequently, I have tried to keep to a minimum commentary on his words, letting them speak for themselves as much as possible. Occasionally I have departed from this resolve to comment in a footnote on a point which I thought was interesting in the light of subsequent philosophic history. Needless to say, much more could have been said.

The first chapter provides Luther's educational background, functioning as an intellectual frame to set off the image within it. Chapter II is largely an effort to sort out the pieces of Luther's thought and to connect them to one another in a coherent whole. Where a logical argument is lacking to relate the ideas, I have supplied what I felt was appropriate. The task, in a sense, was similar to that of an art restorer, attempting to fit together the bits and pieces of a statue long ago shattered. Sometimes, where there is a piece missing, he must fashion a
substitute piece. Hopefully, my little pieces of plaster of Paris blend with Luther's marble. Fortunately, there are not many of them. I have indicated where they occur.

Chapter III functions as the test for consistency of the thought structure which emerges after all the pieces of Luther's thought had been put together. The test items were developed by Erasmus; the responses by Luther.

Chapter IV initiates a departure from the explicit expression of Luther's thought to the implications of his position. I use a distinction for which he is famous, law/gospel, and apply it to the entire structure of his thought. The result exhibits the possible directions in which his thought can be extended, only a few of which he himself developed in print. His professional career was devoted almost exclusively to exploring what I have labeled the manichaean level of activity.

The final chapter exhibits Luther's approach in contrast to three other kinds of approaches to action. Apart from the reasons stated in the text for handling the matter in this fashion, I felt that it was necessary somewhere in these pages to exhibit structural incompatibilities with other kinds of philosophic approaches, particularly since Luther's approach has been confused at times by Lutherans with at least two of the contrasting approaches. For instance, after Luther's death Melanchthon became the leading Lutheran theologian. Melanchthon by that time had become a thoroughgoing Aristotelian and, unconsciously I am
sure, attempted to formulate Luther's thought teleologically.

Again, for a variety of reasons, usually non-theological, Lutherans and Calvinists have often found themselves in a common camp, first in Europe and later in America. The Calvinistic approach is essentially deontic. The subtle effect of this association with European Calvinism and American Puritanism has tended to modify the original Lutheran approach. Part of the task of isolating Luther's philosophic approach, as a result, has been to remove the Calvinistic deontic patina and, beneath that the Melanchthonian telic patina, in order that the original metal shaped by Luther can be exposed and examined on its own merits.

Except where indicated the translations are mine. I have used the Weimar Edition of Luther wherever possible. My second critical resource has been the St. Louis German Edition. The primary text for Luther's position has been his *De Servo Arbitrio*. I have gone outside that work only where necessary to supplement or to clarify ideas that that work contains.

Several passages from Melanchthon's *Loci Communes of 1521*, are cited as Luther's position because Luther himself in the *De Servo Arbitrio* gave that book his highest praise and unqualified approval. I have also quoted upon occasion from the confessional documents of the Lutheran Church, but only such documents as Luther is known to have read and approved. These quotations from sources outside Luther constitute only a minor portion of the material on which the book is based.
I am indebted to Mr. Robert Coburn of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Chicago for the technique of the antilogism used in Chapter III. The second antilogism in that chapter was developed in another context while I was working as a student under him about nine years ago.

Finally, I am indebted to Dr. F. Torrens Hecht S.J., former chairman of the Philosophy Department of Loyola University, for encouraging me in this undertaking and for making my work possible, and to Dr. Francis Catania, the present chairman, who suggested the possibility of a wider readership than I envisioned and gently guided me in that direction, pointing out and helping me to remove the philosophic boulders which stood in the way of completing the task.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PREFACE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter I.</strong></td>
<td>THE SETTING OF LUTHER'S THOUGHT</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter II.</strong></td>
<td><strong>LIBERUM ARBITRIUM</strong>--THE PROBLEM OF GOOD AND EVIL</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ontological Determinism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Manichaean Dialectic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Existential Implication: Human Freedom and Action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter III.</strong></td>
<td>DETERMINISM AND ACTION--THE PROBLEM OF JUSTICE</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge One: The Justice of God</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge Two: Divine Word and Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge Three: Validity of the Ethical &quot;Ought&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge Four: Human Action and Divine Response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter IV.</strong></td>
<td>ACTION AND MOTIVATION--THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LUTHER'S ETHIC</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Action and Motivation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivation and Action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter V.</strong></td>
<td>MOTIVATION AND LIFE--THE DIRECTION OF LUTHER'S ETHIC</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Anti-Hedonic Principle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Anti-Telic Principle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Anti-Deontic Principle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Religion deals existentially with the meaning of being; philosophy deals theoretically with the structure of being. But religion can express itself only through the ontological elements and categories with which philosophy deals, while philosophy can discover the structure of being only to the degree to which being-itself has become manifest in an existential experience.

Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, I*
CHAPTER I

THE SETTING OF LUTHER'S THOUGHT

Martin Luther's reputation as a great thinker in the tradition of the western world rests largely on his contributions to theology and his effect on political affairs. He is not noted as a philosopher; certainly he did not found a new school of philosophy as did Descartes or Kant. Yet, one can with profit examine Luther the Philosopher in contrast to Luther the Theologian, Luther the Politician and Luther the Educator, even as one can profitably study in similar contrast Augustine the Philosopher or Thomas Aquinas the Philosopher.

The great churchmen, beginning with Augustine, were both philosophers and theologians. Augustine and Aquinas never produced a system of philosophy, collected in one or a set of volumes in clear logical order; so also Luther, though he wrote much on many topics, never gathered the body of his thought in a simple distillate of philosophic concentration to give order and integrity to the vast range of his thought. Yet, the foundations are there, the germinal ideas scattered liberally in his writings, waiting to be gathered up and arranged in systematic order.

Luther did not fancy himself a philosopher. Though a lecturer in philosophy for a time at Erfurt and Wittenberg, he preferred the rich contents of theology to the formal structures which passed for philosophy in his day. He wanted to feast on
the meat of theology; let someone else gnaw on the bones of philosophy. Yet, for all that, he was philosophic, an original thinker, laying out for himself a new pathway of thought in an age struggling out of the middle ages into the modern. He gained no philosophic disciples. Those who followed him in thought followed for theological or political reasons. And when he died his philosophic insights were lost sight of—if they had ever been seen—so that when German philosophy rose to the ascendancy in Europe a century later, it was a different kind of philosophy which was produced by the Lutherans, Leibniz, Wolff and Kant.

Yet Luther's philosophic thought has survived, buried in his theology, unnoticed and unheeded, waiting to be separated out so it can be organized and expanded. The living body of his theology, still practiced and believed, retains within itself the skeleton of his philosophic thought.

There have been attempts ever and again to formulate Luther's ethic and politic—a relatively easy task since he wrote so copiously on both subjects—but these are but the outcomes of his philosophic thought, not the foundations. They describe the steps which a person rightly takes, the actions which he properly performs, but they are not meaningful until one first has identified the person and isolated the spirit which shapes the actions, causes the steps and gives them meaning—as Luther was always wont to insist. Thus, one inevitably must get back to Luther the Philosopher to understand Luther the Theologian, Luther the
Ethicist and Politician and, what is more significant today, to understand the genius of Lutheranism which distinguishes it from the genius of Catholicism or Calvinism. To understand Lutheranism one must read the mind of Luther, for Lutheranism has, by and large, remained faithful to him and his thought has survived 450 eventful years in surprisingly vital fashion. Calvin has grown archaic; he has not worn well. But Luther is still alive. Yet, Luther the Philosopher remains relatively unknown and unrecognized.

The reasons for the lack of recognition of the philosophic side of Luther are many. Luther, if he thought of himself as anything, thought of himself as a Bible interpreter and preacher, not a philosopher. The theological curriculum of his day was structured in such a way that the epitome of scholarly attainment, the Doctor of Divinity degree, entitled one officially to comment independently on Scripture itself. Prior to that attainment one made his scholarly contributions within the relatively safe confines of the *Sentences*.¹ One noted the insights implicit in

¹ *The Four Books of Sentences* was compiled by Peter Lombard (c 1100-1160/64). It was probably the most influential book in education and in the development of philosophical and theological thought from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. According to Richard McKeon it was virtually the center of the university curriculum by the middle of the thirteenth century. *Selections from Medieval Philosophers*, I, ed. & tr. Richard McKeon, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929, p. 185. The four books cover the chief problems of theology according to the following structure. The question is introduced, after which pertinent scripture passages are cited, followed by quotations
the compendium of great men's ideas about the fundamental issues of mankind. But the Doctor of Divinity interpreted the thoughts of God to his fellowmen. Luther attained that degree and devoted himself assiduously to that task both by way of commentary, translation, and sermon. The bulk of his academic output:

from the church fathers and more recent theologians on the topic. Lombard did not attempt to reconcile apparent contradictions in the authorities cited. The book is a handy compendium of the best thinking in the church to his time on the topics treated. Some of the leading theologians in the medieval church after his time wrote commentaries on the Sentences. See also Stanley J. Curtis, "Peter Lombard, a Pioneer in Educational Method", Miscellanea Lombardiana, Novara, 1957, pp. 265-273. A new critical edition of the Book of Sentences will be published shortly by Quaracchi in Florence, Italy.

Luther received the Doctorate in Divinity on October 19, 1512 from Wittenberg University. On the 22nd he was inducted into office as a member of the Theological Faculty. On the 25th he began a series of lectures on Genesis (1512-1513). He lectured on the Psalms (1513-1515), Romans (1515-1516), Galatians (1516-1517) and Hebrews (1517-1518). He was involved with matters having to do with his public protest against indulgence sales for several years. When he returned to the classroom he began exegetical lectures again. Between 1512 and 1546 he delivered a series of sixteen lectures on 13 books of the Bible. He translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into vernacular German for the benefit of his countrymen. Beginning in 1514 he preached frequently, first at Wittenberg as chaplain to the university and the community, and later in many parts of Germany. His early lectures exhibit great dependence on traditional commentaries and follow typical methods of exposition followed at his time. Later lectures, beginning with those on Romans, are freer and exhibit an approach which depends on grammatical analysis of the original language of the texts and interprets the text in a literal fashion (thereby departing from the traditional four-fold manner of interpretation: literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical). For an extended treatment of Luther's early lectures see Mackinnon, James, Luther and the Reformation, I, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1925, chapters V and VI, and Schwiebert, E. G., Luther and his times, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950, chapter 9.
commentaries, sermons, the translation of the Old and New Testament, flow from that function. And yet, near the end of his life, he valued most highly of all that he had produced, the De Servo Arbitrio, the most philosophic of his works. ³

Much of his formal education was shaped in the via moderna tradition of Ockham and Biel. ⁴ And, though he departed from them

³ In 1537 Luther wrote to Wolfgang Capito who wished to publish Luther's complete works, that he did not care what happened to his books. The only works with which he was satisfied were his De Servo Arbitrio and his catechism. WA Briefe VIII, no. 3162.

⁴ The via moderna, a name espoused by the nominalists, Ockham, Biel and others, to distinguish themselves from the realistic tradition of Thomas and his disciples which they called the via antiqua, is an approach to philosophy which actually begins with Duns Scotus (1266/74-1308). Scotus taught, in opposition to the thomistic position, that the soul of man is a self-contained reality, a will, rather than the instantiation of a generic idea, a mind. Ockham (c 1285-1349), like Scotus an English Franciscan, followed the direction of Scotus' thought and developed a thoroughgoing nominalist position. Knowledge arises from the inner experience of external individual things. He rejected the metaphysical and epistemological assumptions of medieval realism. The evidential basis of all knowledge is the direct experience of individual things and particular events. The human mind intuitively apprehends existent individuals, their sensible qualities and its own acts. It understands them by means of cognitive language. Language has a semantic structure and contains within it an ontological commitment. One must, therefore, distinguish between things and their characteristics and signs and their ontological commitments. Universality is a characteristic of signs, not things. Whatever is not self-contradictory is possible. What is actual cannot be established by reason alone but depends upon experience. Since God is not experienced, His nature can be described by negative signs, but cannot be demonstrated. He is known only by revelation. There is a sharp cleavage between reason and revelation, knowledge and faith. Hence, reason cannot help solve problems of faith. Ockham's most productive years were spent at the University of Paris and in southern Germany. Among his disciples was Gabriel Biel, (c 1410-1495) the German nominalist, who achieved fame at
to a form of Christian Platonism which approximates Augustine's, he shared with them the belief in the distinction between revelation and reason, between theology and philosophy. To that belief must be credited his many remarks attacking and belittling the philosophers, notably Aristotle, as a hindrance to theology. Philosophy and theology tread separate paths.

It is not surprising, then, that he developed no systematic treatment of his thought. Here and there one finds fragmentary pieces, sometimes in surprising places: a lengthy aside in the body of a commentary, a paragraph extemporized in the midst of a sermon, or arguments sprinkled liberally in the work which forms the basis for this study of his philosophic thought, the *De Servo Arbitrio*. One cannot help but feel, reading the *De Servo Arbitrio*, that underlying it is a complete philosophic structure, fully thought out, whose most prominent parts alone find expression in his writings. Not too surprisingly one finds that as a student at Erfurt University his intimates thought of him as

Tübingen University. A number of Luther's professors at Erfurt studied under Biel, among them Johann Staupitz, (1459-1524) the Preceptor of the Augustinian order at Erfurt which Luther entered, and Nathin. Luther studied Biel's *Canon of the Mass* with Staupitz. He studied Biel's commentary on the *Book of Sentences* with Nathin in preparation for the *Sententiarius* diploma. For a more detailed treatment of the via moderna at Erfurt University, see Fife, Robert Herndon, *The Revolt of Martin Luther*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1957, chapter 4. For an examination of Ockham's epistemology see McKeon, op. cit., II, pp. 351-421.
the philosopher of their group.\(^5\) He was the clear and careful thinker, the one with the original ideas and careful arguments.

Like Augustine, he underwent a time of psychological testing which had both its spiritual and intellectual sides. We have no Lutheran Confession to compare with that of Augustine. There are comments made to companions at table, preserved in second hand sources,\(^6\) asides in various of his works, a brief autobiographic sketch prefacing the first edition of his Latin works,\(^7\) but no psychological timetable to show the stages of the development of his thought. Undoubtedly the key which unlocked the puzzle of theology for Luther was the concept of \textit{iustitia}. When he understood it in a certain way, suddenly everything fell into place and was clear for him.\(^8\) He never doubted his theology again. No

\(^5\) Crotus Rubeanus, Luther's roommate at Erfurt wrote to a friend that Luther was regarded as an "erudite philosopher" by fellow students. Schwiebert, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 133.


\(^7\) The \textit{Opera Latina} I, published in 1545.

\(^8\) Luther himself indicated that the key concept which was unclear for many years was \textit{iustitia}. He kept thinking of it in terms of a condition of God which so far removes Him from human unrighteousness that He cannot but punish them in His wrath. When he conceived of it as also imputed to men by faith so that they are saved by it, he, to use his words, "felt as though I had been born again". The moment of insight, referred to many times later by Luther, has been called the \textit{Turmerlebnis}, "Tower Discovery", since Luther was studying in his Tower office at Wittenberg University when he had the experience. For an
less important philosophically for him must have been the concept of *liberum arbitrium*. His entire philosophic outlook flows from this concept. Given the free choosing of God, what follows about everything else? Until 1516 he accepted the nominalist doctrine of human free choice. After that he openly challenged its compatibility with divine freedom. Augustine states in his *Confessions* that though he could not for many years understand God in any way except as material he never doubted that God exists. When he learned from the Platonists to think of God as immaterial, then his intellectual difficulties began to dissipate. 9 Similarly Luther might have said that though he never doubted that God acted freely he was not able to think of human beings other than as freely acting. When however, he learned from Augustine and St. Paul to think of human behavior as largely determined by forces beyond man, then his philosophic (and for that matter his theological) uncertainties began to dissipate.

Beyond a doubt the formative years after he had forsaken the law school for the monastery were years during which first his philosophic outlook changed and then his theological thought crystalized. The seeds for that crystallization were planted many years before. To them, then, we must first turn to understand

---

9 Book 7, Chapter 20.

extended treatment of Luther's psychological struggle leading to this experience see Schwiebert, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-289, and Mackinnon, *op. cit.*, chapters IV and V; in particular chapter V, section III.
Luther the Philosopher.

Luther's formal elementary and secondary training followed the traditional basic liberal arts curriculum, the trivium of grammar, rhetoric and logic. It aimed at the assimilation and sharpening of the use of the basic intellectual tool of the middle ages, Latin. Luther attended first the Trivialschule at Mansfeldt. On the primary level he studied the Latin primer, together with religion and music for Sunday worship. The middle grade experiences centered on the Latin grammar of Donatus together with extracts from Aesop, Cato and other classical moralists, for the moral training of the young. The upper level focused on advanced grammar and syntax.

Luther received his secondary education in Magdeburg and Eisenach. The curriculum was divided into grammar, rhetoric and logic, which in those days, involved the reading and writing of poetry, the study and practice of composition and the improvement of discourse, particularly of argumentative discourse. He also broadened his study of the Latin classics. A portion of the curriculum was devoted to improvement in spiritual exercises.

While in Liberal Arts studies at the University of Erfurt, Luther made the acquaintance both of scholastic and humanistic approaches to learning. Like many another university at the

---

10 For a discussion of the medieval educational system and Luther's academic career, see Mackinnon, op. cit., I, chapter II, ii, "School and University Career."
time, in the midst of a variety of schools of thought boasting their adherents in the faculty and student body, one school tended to dominate. At Erfurt the dominant approach was the nominalist approach of Ockham and Biel. It followed the via moderna and was open to the epistemological insights and psychological interests which, at least as far back as Grosseteste, had marked the English approach to knowledge.11 A lesser English influence at Erfurt was exercised by Scotus.12 Paris and Louvain were represented on the faculty by certain persons still teaching the via antiqua, the traditional Aristotelian approach to knowledge. Finally, the latest intellectual movement, humanism, filtering up from Italy and given new momentum by persons like Valla and Erasmus, also had its effect.13 Judging by the time in

11 Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln (c 1175-1253), was interested in the application of mathematics to experience. He with his disciple, Adam of Marsh, was one of the first scientists in the modern tradition and an early precursor of Newton. He was particularly interested in the study of perspective, contributing an early treatise on the properties of light. His basic philosophic outlook is Platonic. The standard Grosseteste biography is F. S. Stevenson, Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln (London 1899). A recent treatment is A. C. Crombie's Robert Grosseteste and the Origins of Experimental Science, (Oxford, 1953).

12 The Gabrielist nominalists at Erfurt tended to identify the Scotists with the Thomists as both committed to the via antiqua. Hence, even though Duns Scotus was the philosophical forebear of Biel through Ockham, the German nominalists and scotists considered themselves as disciples of different traditions. Of the three schools of thought at Erfurt, the scotist group represented the smallest number on the faculty.

13 During the time Luther studied at Erfurt there was no permanent faculty representing the humanistic outlook. Both faculty and students were, however, aware of the movement,
residence of well known humanists at Erfurt, Luther was not subjected to much of their influence. Yet, Luther's later career and the effect which he had upon the curriculum offered at the University of Wittenberg, shows that their influence on Luther far outweighed the time they spent at Erfurt. Yet, who is to say? Humanism was the new darling of the students and the young intellectuals of northern Europe when Luther began to teach. It was in the air. Only the older, settled professors were immune to its charm. Its primary appeal was to the young.

Be that as it may, Luther's undergraduate year and a half was devoted to a study of Aristotelian grammar, rhetoric, logic, physics and metaphysics. He participated in the required exercises and disputations which accompanied the lectures and was active in the student club which met to discuss philosophy.

The baccalaureate was followed by a two-year masters program involving tutoring the undergraduate students (a sort of graduate assistantship), studying advanced classes in Aristotle, plus mathematics and ethics. The mathematical curriculum was divided into the quadrivium of music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy. Luther studied, in addition to Aristotle (read in Latin), Cicero, particularly as Erasmus became famous. By contrast with the difficulty of content and aridity of style of all three scholastic schools, the clarity and richness of humanistic writings had a natural appeal for students. And, of course, humanistic iconoclasm was not lost on those young minds.
Vergil, Livy and Plautus, among others, and read some scholastic theology. The awarding of the Master of Arts degree carried with it the requirement of remaining for two years to teach at the university. With this in mind, Luther enrolled in the school of Law at Erfurt to continue his studies while teaching, but three months later suddenly entered the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt. 14

At the conclusion of his novitiate, on instruction of his order, he prepared for ordination to the priesthood by studying Biel's Canon of the Mass. Thus, he continued under the Ockhamite influence even in the monastery. Though an ordained priest, his primary training was in liberal arts. Three years after entering the monastery, and a year and a half after entering the priesthood, Luther was transferred by his order to the young University of Wittenberg to teach Aristotle's *Nicomachaean Ethics*. The Augustinian monastery at Wittenberg was closely related to the University. At the time of Luther's arrival it filled two chairs:

14 He began the study of law in May of 1505. Having completed his liberal education with the terminal master's degree, Luther was beginning professional training in the field of law. He suddenly entered the Augustinian monastery on the 17th of July, 1505. There has been much speculation about the "real" reason for this sudden change. In the dedication to his father of his work *On Monastic Vows*, 1521, he states that he was called to the vocation by the terrors of heaven, and in fear of immanent death, he swore an irrevocable vow. The reference is apparently to a thunderstorm in which he was caught in the summer of 1505 when lightning struck nearby. For a perceptive analysis of the problem see Mackinnon, *op. cit.*., chapter II, section I.
Biblical Theology, taught by the head of the order, John Staupitz, and Moral Philosophy, now taught by Luther. Later, he also taught Aristotle's *Physics* to the monks at Wittenberg.

While teaching at Wittenberg, Luther began his theological studies to prepare himself to lecture on theology. After six months he received the Bachelor of Bible degree and began to lecture on biblical exegesis as well as on ethics. He began studying the *Book of Sentences* in preparation for his examination for the degree of *Sententiarius*. He passed the examination about six months later and was beginning to prepare for lecturing on the Sentences when he was reassigned back to Erfurt to complete requirements for the awarding of the degree. The University of Erfurt was understandably reluctant to comply on several counts: their young Master a few years before had forsaken the classroom for the monastery. He had taken up studies elsewhere and completed a portion of his degree requirements there rather than at Erfurt. Wittenberg's requirements were much less stringent than those of Erfurt. However, the University finally complied.

Luther was next persuaded by Staupitz to study for the Doctor of Divinity Degree, no doubt with the thought in mind that Luther should replace Staupitz at Wittenberg. Luther began, for the first time, a serious study of Augustine. Upon the reception of the doctorate Luther returned to Wittenberg as professor of Biblical Theology.

For better than a century the battle of the *via moderna*
against the *via antiqua* had been raging in the universities of Europe. In recent years the new voice of humanism, particularly Biblical humanism, had been raised against both ways. The oldest voice, the *via antiqua*, the logical tradition, had stoutly opposed the rhetorical tradition of the *via moderna*. Now humanism, espousing a grammatical tradition, opposed both. Luther gave little evidence of which direction he would go. For all practical purposes he seemed to share the rhetorical approach of the Ockhamites. Yet within four years he rejected nominalism as an approach to theology and influenced the change of the curriculum away from Aristotle to a more humanistic approach.

Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, had founded Wittenberg University in 1502. It was six years old when Luther taught ethics there, and ten when he returned as Professor of Theology. At its inception the university was thoroughly scholastic. The largest segment of the faculty, led by Andreas Carlstadt, was thomistic in outlook. The second largest segment, led by Nicolas Amsdorf, was scotist. In 1507 Trutvetter was imported from Erfurt to introduce the nominalist position.

The curriculum resembled that which Luther himself had encountered at Erfurt, the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, based on Aristotle in Latin translation. The theological curriculum centered around the study of the *Book of Sentences*. But by 1516, largely due to Luther's influence, the old curriculum was gone. The new curriculum was based on the study of languages, Greek,
Hebrew, and classical and church Latin. Advanced courses offered studies in the great writings of antiquity, pagan and Christian. The theological curriculum centered on exegetical Bible studies, based on Hebrew and Greek texts. The new university had developed a decidedly linguistic character. The key to successful university work was no longer logic, but rather language.

The effect of the curriculum change on the education offered by the university was more profound than is immediately apparent. Of course the language faculty increased rapidly, bringing, among others, the man who after Luther would be the university's brightest star, Philip Melanchthon. The library began to gather texts in a variety of languages. But these were the most obvious changes.

Students and faculty, with the aid of the new languages were now able to study primary source materials in the original languages. They were not limited to secondary sources or explicated and expurgated Latin translations. Whatever manuscripts and books their library contained they could read. More and more critical editions of Latin and Greek classics were being printed in Europe and the librarian began assiduously to gather in short order a respectable library. What formerly were known only by name, the whole ancient world of the pagan philosophers and poets and early Greek Church Fathers, were now available and could be read. It was possible now to compare original with Latin
translation or with commentary to judge the accuracy and adequacy of the interpretation. In the process many time-honored reputations fell. The situation was somewhat similar to the rediscovery of Aristotle in the 13th century when the new logic (of Aristotle, ironically enough) replaced the old logic which for centuries had passed for Aristotle's thought. With the appearance of Moerbecke's translations, and others, men like Aquinas were freed to develop the full implications of Aristotle's thought, locked in a foreign tongue since before Augustine with the exception of what was available in Boethius. Now, at Wittenberg, the Greek world of the ancient poets, dramatists and philosophers was rapidly being unlocked as well as the Greek and Hebrew world of the Bible.

With language emphasis, inevitably the shift took place in basic methodology from syllogistic to semiotic considerations. The art of the exegete took precedence over the art of the logician. Subtleties of meaning replaced subtleties of argument as the primary focus of class lectures. The direction of the university changed from the preservation and perpetuation of the ancient tradition to the getting back to primitive meanings. The authorities began to lose their authority, some because it was now apparent that they didn't know what they were talking about; the rest because they were not so necessary as before to connect the present with the ancient past. Greek and Hebrew now bridged the gap.
What of Luther himself? It is always difficult to distinguish cause from effect. To what extent is a man affected by his times? To what extent do some elements of his time affect him because they are compatible with what he is? One cannot with certainty say. We shall hazard only a few remarks about his basic philosophic outlook. To what extent it was shaped by the tradition of Ockham and by the humanists one can only guess.

The Ockham tradition, wed to Aristotle, was inevitably bound to fail; for even with the greatest latitude of interpretation Aristotle was not a nominalist. By Luther's time this was becoming evident. But the Ockham tradition, wed to Plato, had a greater chance to survive. Augustine falls in the Platonic tradition. St. John, one of the two great scriptural influences on Luther, has a philosophic outlook more compatible with Plato than with Aristotle. To a lesser extent the same is true of the other great influence, St. Paul. What all of these have in common, nominalism, Augustine, St. John and St. Paul, is dialectic. The basic tool of Aristotle and Aquinas is syllogistic. Dialectic is useful only in those disciplines where syllogistic cannot be used: ethics and the establishment of first principles.

Understandably enough, then, Luther, as he reached his own philosophic maturity and began to teach with less and less dependence on his own teachers, began to take exception to the trust of the church in Aristotle: Aristotle is inconsistent with Christian theology: his god is asleep, a cause which is ignorant
of the world of man and effects it strictly as a final cause; the
unmoved movers in the metaphysics are incompatible with human
choice in the Ethics; Aristotle's system requires the eternality
of matter.

In 1516 Luther publically broke with the nominalist tra-
dition over the role of grace in conversion and denied the capac-
ity of the human will, "ex puris naturalibus", to act freely in
spiritual matters prior to conversion. In 1517 he attacked all
of "scholastic theology", including the three old traditions,
Thomism, Scotism and Ockhamism. He attacked nominalism in a set
of 97 theses which he offered to defend. In 1518, at the Con-
ference of the Augustinian monasteries of northern Europe, he
offered his Heidelberg Theses as a program of educational reform
to replace Aristotelian nominalism. These same ideas are
reflected in his 1524 treatise, A Letter to the German Nobility,
in his proposals for change in the educational system of Germany.

For the most part Luther's philosophic development had taken
place in a generally Aristotelian setting. For about two cen-
turies the philosophic outlook of Thomas Aquinas had been the
accepted outlook of the church. It had proved fruitful in
resolving doctrinal and practical issues and had made possible
within the academic world the development of a unified body of
disciplines. In central Europe by Luther's time the Ockham
variety of Aristotelianism had taken precedence over Thomism.
But Luther was at heart a Platonist. He found in Augustine a
compatibility he did not find in Aristotle. From a philosophic standpoint he was an idealist in a realistic intellectual environment. One can, then, understand, on purely intellectual grounds, why he found pragmatic accommodation to the economic necessities of the operational church incompatible with what he felt was right. For a Platonic idealist, knowledge and practice are inseparable.15

In a second way his philosophic inclination was incompatible with his age. For his age was dominated by the logical tradition, refined and crystalized into that gem of medieval methodology, the scholastic method. Luther was a rhetorician. In this he found himself in agreement with the nominalist tradition and Augustine, but quite out of sympathy with the pure Aristotelians. They hedged him in, were "logic choppers"; they inhibited the free flow of ideas which dialectic fostered with its discursive methods of distinction and combination. To the extent that the nominalists were rhetorical logicians Luther felt companionable to them. To the extent that they sought to fit their logic to the Aristotelian mold he rejected them and called them sophists.

It is no surprise that from a methodological standpoint Luther felt at home with the great Church rhetoricians Augustine and Ambrose, or, for that matter, with the greatest of the pagan

15 Or, as Plato put it, "Knowledge is virtue." For Aristotle, however, there is a distinction between the theoretic, the practical and the productive.
Latin rhetoricians, Cicero and Quintillian. He had a natural sympathy for the classical poets and the Weltanschauung of the tragic Greek mind. He gained an early reputation as preacher and was an immediate and continuing success as a pamphleteer and polemicist. Most of his non-exegetical works are rhetorical: polemics, exhortations, refutations, etc. And when one examines his exegetical works, the rhetorical impress is there again in the obvious concern to make the meaning of the text lively and vivid for the hearer and reader. He was a great classroom lecturer, attracting and exciting the young students with his dynamic presentations.

Unlike the humanists with their concern for style and polish, for the elegant phrase and the clever saying, Luther is rough-hewn, often coarse. He seldom rewrites a paragraph. His language is vivid and striking. His is a language which is primarily a spoken language and only derivatively written. He is not a logician, as he knew logicians. He is unsystematic. The method he finds most compatible with his own philosophic inclinations is the method of common-places, Aristotle's Topics, dialectical logic. Yet he feels more at home in Aristotle's Rhetoric than in his logic, although he is familiar with both.

His view of man is voluntaristic, the view of a rhetorician. The Aristotelian view of man was rationalistic. Tradition saw

---

16 Like many a polemicist in his day, he was not above an earthy image or expression if it suited his fancy.
man as a mind in the body of an animal. What was peculiarly
human was intellect. The passions belonged to the animal nature
and tended to intrude upon and disrupt the calm reasonable
operation of the human organism. Ockham was a voluntarist, as
was Biel. This side of the nominalists Luther never forsook,
although he parted from them on the subject of human freedom.
For Luther, then, man is a will, a moving force, subject to
stimulus, moved by persuasion. He is motivated to act and can be
carried away by impulse and caprice. His rational capacities are
the tools of his will to discover means whereby the urgings of
the will can be satisfied. His passions are the expressions of
his very nature and are both good and bad.

Luther does not see man as Aristotle, Aquinas and others see
him, an intellect whose highest function is speculation. Man is
a calculating creature who follows his peculiar bents, moved this
way and that by what strikes his fancy. He is restless, a moving
spirit, active, passionate and vital. To be a man is to be
active and doing things in the world.

Finally, by philosophic bent at odds with the general
philosophic climate of his day, the methodology of his age, and
its accepted view of man, Luther's philosophic inclination is
oriented to change, to the real, the original, the primitive.
For this reason he was open to humanistic innovations, though not
a humanist. In Platonic fashion he sees a universe in flux, but
as a rhetorical Platonist he finds change compatible to him. In
this, he is perhaps more Heraclitean than Platonic. His theology is dynamic. He tends to focus upon the uniqueness of individuals and their independences, not upon their commonalities and dependencies. Hence, for him what holds men together, laws and societies, are positivities, artificial conventions arrived at for commonly accepted ends. Every man is his own priest. The organized church with its ecclesiastical structure is a human convention, not a divinely ordained way of carrying out the function of God's men in the world. And if something better can be found to do that task it ought properly to take the place of that structure. The individual conscience is sacred and must not be abused. Is it any wonder that the revolutionary forces organizing the peasant rebellion saw in Luther in the early 1520's their intellectual leader? He stands in sharp contrast to his age in what he taught; and what he accomplished must be understood in the light of that contrast. Because he stands in sharp contrast, he is not the product of any of the forces of his times, nor even the result of the accidental intersection of many forces. He is a new voice.

Four voices vied for attention when Luther came upon the intellectual scene. The oldest and most venerable of the traditional voices, Thomism, affected him the least; for it was of all, the most incompatible with his philosophic inclinations and the one least clearly and distinctly spoken to him.

The second voice from the via antiqua, Scotism, was not
altogether clear in his day. Luther heard this Oxonian voice echoing in Wittenberg when he came, if not before at Erfurt; but he found it an uncertain voice. 17

The third voice, again originally a British voice, but one which spoke with the German tongue of the Gabrielites, Luther heard during his formative undergraduate and graduate days, but this voice of the via moderna, though it was in many ways compatible to his own outlook, he rejected because it resembled too greatly the former voices. 18

Finally, from the southern Italian renaissance there had come a voice which found a sympathetic echo in the European low-lands, the voice of humanism, the echo of Erasmus. It did not espouse a particular worldview; it advocated an attitude and a method. Luther declined the attitude and incorporated the method in his own approach. 19 The method led him back to Augustine and from Augustine to St. John and St. Paul.

From the west and Thomas' Paris, the north and Scotus' Oxford, the surrounding German lands and Biel's Tübingen, from

17 Duns Scotus was not very well represented by the Scotists there. They tended to be dominated by the Thomists.

18 In its Aristotelian structure and its acceptance of human free will, it was, for him, just another brand of Scholasticism.

19 The attitude of confidence in mankind and his capacity to cope with life is diametrically opposed to Luther's position. He did take, from the humanists, however, their method of linguistic studies and their emphasis on primary sources as the foundation for education.
the south and north, Valla's Florence and Erasmus' Louvain, the voices came. There was no eastern voice, for to the east lay the lands oppressed by the "Turk". The voices reverberated first at Erfurt, then at Wittenberg for the young Luther. When he raised his own voice he spoke first from the Ockham-Biel tradition. But as his voice gathered confidence it moved apart from them to utter a new sound. What he proposed called the academic world away from a tradition steeped in Aristotle to an older tradition steeped in Augustine's Platonism. If the voice needs a name, call it Lutheranism. That fifth voice and the philosophic implications of what it said constitute the remainder of this book.
The "free will problem" very likely dates as far back as the first serious reflection on the nature of human action. For the conditions which--even today--compel us to re-examine our previous explanations of how human beings act, tend often to be the same conditions which raise the "free will problem" again.

It is a peculiar kind of problem. First of all, it has persisted with a strange tenacity throughout the entire history of philosophic investigation, sometimes looming menacingly in the forefront of the philosophic spectrum and commanding the attention of the best thinkers of an era; at other times lying in the background relatively unimportant, lacking in philosophic vigor, even though unresolved--another of the chestnuts which philosophers are wont, upon occasion, to roll out and roast when they have nothing better to do. In this peculiarity, however, the "free will problem" is not unique. For other classical philosophic problems have had similar careers.

Secondly, the "free will problem"--one hesitates to call it "the" problem, since every time it arises it seems to assume a different form--unlike most philosophic problems, is interdisciplinary, arising from a discontinuity between the implications for human action of two or more intellectual disciplines as one or the other develops. One of the disciplines is invariably
ethics or psychology. The resolution of the "free will problem" then, whether recognized or not, involves an effort somehow to harmonize the two conflicting disciplines with one another.

The source of the problem, to some extent, lies in the varying natures of the theoretic and the practical disciplines. Practical sciences require freedom in some fashion or other as a condition for action. Consequently, it is to their interest to preserve within the theoretic sciences an area of chance, uncertainty, unpredictability, unexplainability--call it what you will--which will leave room for decision making.

On the other hand, theoretic sciences naturally aim at developing a closed system of explanation, admitting no exceptions, in order by means of it to describe and to predict. Randomness in any sector of the system limits its predictive adequacy and accuracy. From a temporal standpoint a theoretic science tends to require a closed future (or none at all) while a practical science requires an open future.

When, then, a scientific theory which represents an advance over previous theories in closing the future and limiting the area of unpredictability, begins to achieve acceptance, it undercuts the foundations on which the practical sciences of the time are based. The "free will problem" emerges as an inter-disciplinary discontinuity.

Because the "free will problem" involves interdisciplinary considerations, one must somehow deal with it working with a
"foot in each discipline"; or, since the problem must be solved in an interdisciplinary way—each discipline stoutly resisting change in its own formulations—if possible, some neutral ground of common meeting must be found wherein the problem can be interpreted and, if possible, resolved. Such a common ground has usually been wholly, or in part, philosophical. For, belonging properly in no single discipline, since it is interdisciplinary in character, and defying resolution, the problem naturally comes sooner or later to the attention of the thinker who deals with such problems, the philosopher.

Luther's "free will problem" in its initial form involves purely theological considerations. For Luther it is the classical question of the cause of conversion, a question which exercised the Christian church even before Augustine and was still debated at Luther's time. Is conversion the result of human

---

1 The question of conversion involves the "free will problem", for it is concerned with whether or not there is any human choice in the act of conversion. Augustine arguing that conversion is a divine act, opposed the doctrine of Pelagius, a British monk, that the conversion from opposition to God to faith in God is an act of human choice. The Pelagian view was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431. A few years later another group attempted to find a middle ground between Augustine and Pelagius, semi-pelagianism, explaining conversion as a combination of human activity and divine grace. This sort of approach tended to persist through the middle ages. It was opposed by John Wycliff (1320-1384) and John Hus (1369-1415) before Luther. Luther in his debate with John Eck at Leipzig defended Hus on this doctrine and defended Wycliff inter alios in his argument with Erasmus.
choice, of divine decision, or of joint divine-human activity? In order to answer these questions one must previously arrive at conclusions about states of affairs which fall outside the discipline of theology. The answers to these sorts of questions involve interdisciplinary considerations. Decisions have to be made concerning the nature of human choice, the scope and limits of choice, the limits of human responsibility, the possibility of independent human activity, the nature of willing, etc., questions involving, at a minimum, psychology and ethics.

Since, then, the theological question has existential significance, if the theological answer which is given denies the existential capacity to act, the free will question both arises and becomes a vital issue. For the theological answer intrudes upon and apparently contradicts some of the basic presuppositions necessary for a viable ethic, human freedom and responsibility.

Luther argues on theological grounds for an absence of human activity in conversion. He is concerned at all costs to preserve the complete freedom of God to act. As a result, he must in some way reconcile that divine freedom with the minimal conditions for a human ethic. Otherwise his theology has no existential value. A theology which lacks existential implication for a practical ethic, lacks the reason or the substance for survival; and, since it lacks existential implications, it cannot but either turn back upon itself as a curious but wholly irrelevant creation of human thought which may be analyzed and enjoyed in fashion as a painting
or a game or a pure mathematical construct are enjoyed; or be taken seriously, frustrate the development of an ethic and hang over the civilization it dominates like a deadly miasma, suffocating all its efforts to act. Neither condition is tolerable.

Luther himself saw his problem as somewhat the reverse of that we have just described, for he seems to have feared that the development of an ethic of human freedom would come into conflict with and suppress the vitality of any theology which purported to have existential significance and involvement. If God enters into our experience and has anything to do with it, then there must be a role for God to play. He cannot simply be an idea, a spectator or a slave. If God is not fully God, then He is unnecessary.

This concern of Luther's about the relative relationships of the divine and the human in human action is surprisingly modern. One needs go no further back in philosophic history than Sartre to note the same initial concern. For both begin with the same postulate. If God exists, then man is not free. They differ in the minor premise they accept; and, as a result, the conclusion each reaches is radically different. For Sartre,

\[\text{Note in particular chapter Two of Part IV, Being and Nothingness, entitled "Existential Psychoanalysis", New York: Philosophical Library, 1956, pp. 566-568. This chapter is also published separately by Philosophical Library under the title Existential Psychoanalysis. The question of divine versus human freedom is also examined in the early paragraphs of Sartre's Essay, "Existentialism is a Humanism."}\]
existential human freedom is a prime fact of existence, perhaps the only prime fact. Its facticity militates against any ontological significance for God. Therefore, God does not exist. Luther, on the other hand, finds freedom ontologically necessary. But ontological freedom is a characteristic of which only God is capable. Thus, human freedom is a chimera.

Somehow or other a metaphysical doctrine must make existential sense. A doctrine such as human unfreedom is particularly difficult to interpret in a manner which results in existential consequences that jibe with our everyday experience. One can always argue that our naive experience is mistaken and thereby solve the problem. This is the easy way. It is, however, one thing to argue for the mistakenness of our experience; but another task—unfortunately one seldom undertaken—to explain then why it is that naive experience maintains such a persistent hold on our credibility.

The much more difficult alternative is to attempt to resolve the metaphysical problem of human unfreedom in a way which is consistent with our naive experience. Luther's is one of the few efforts to attempt such a resolution.

**ONTOLOGICAL DETERMINISM**

According to Luther the expression *liberum arbitrium* is

---

3One must carefully distinguish three different levels of thought in Luther's conception of *liberum arbitrium*. He
significant in its fullest sense only on the ontological level where it refers to the activity of the divine will creating and preserving the being of the objects of its intent. "It is a divine name and signifies a divine strength (virtus)."4

**Definition**

Luther nowhere explicity in an organized fashion examines what is meant by "freely choosing". Perhaps, since the expression essentially characterizes an activity of which God alone is capable 5 it is beyond definition. Luther does at one place offer a description of _liberum arbitrium_ which he attributes to popular thought: "a force (vis) which is able freely (libere) to turn itself to anything whatsoever, and such a force would not yield or submit itself to any."6

himself does not make the distinction--although he consistently observes them--nor does he identify them by names. For purposes of clarity I have labeled them: the ontological level, the manichaean level and the existential level. More neutral expressions like level 1, 2 and 3 or X, Y and Z might have been used, but these were chosen because each has some descriptive significance for the level it identifies and has the further value of relating these three aspects of Luther's thought to their historical antecedents and descendents in other philosophical systems. The first level ontologically is prior to the other two. The second is temporally as well as ontologically prior to the third.

4WA XVIII, p. 664.
5Ibid., p. 662.
6Ibid., p. 637. The description as a definition contains a slight inelegance since _liberum_ is defined in part by _libere_. What Luther perhaps had in mind by the term "libere" is "facilly, without limitation". If this phrase is substituted for the expression in the description, the apparent circularity is removed.
The description contains three characteristics: liberum arbitrium is 1) a power (vis), 2) of self-turning to anything whatsoever, and 3) unyielding and superior to anything else. The study of liberum arbitrium, then, is the study of the activity of God, His energy, His dynamic. The activity is self-energized. The power is under the direction of God and can be directed by God to move Himself to anything whatsoever. God cannot, however, be moved or overpowered by another being. He has active and middle capacities but not passivity.

Characteristics

Scattered throughout De Servo Arbitrio are passages containing or hinting at other characteristics of liberum arbitrium or of a will possessed of this capacity. There is a sort of loose logic which relates these characteristics to one another, some of which Luther indicates. We shall attempt to supply that which he omits.

Predetermination

Speaking on the topic of divine foresight and the doctrine of predestination, Luther says that if God did not have elective ability "what would He be but chance under whose influence everything would be random happening."\(^7\) The exercise of liberum arbitrium, obviously, is the opposite of chance as a principle of explanation of what happens. Some of the typical characteristics

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 706.
of a chance situation are: randomness, spontaneity, accidental occurrence, uncontrolled motion, etc. Opposed to this is activity which is organized, considered, deliberate, purposeful, effective, etc. Because Luther replaces the traditional opposition of freedom and determinism by the opposition of freedom and chance, predetermination is entailed by freedom as a necessary condition. The exclusion of chance requires that an entity possessing _liberum arbitrium_ not only have the capacity to examine all possible options and to act on any alternative, but also that it successfully complete its options, and that nothing unexpected occur. What it predetermines and only what it predetermines must occur; otherwise it is not free.

Omnipotence

The capacity to exercise any option, entailed also by _liberum arbitrium_, is more familiarly identifiable by the expression "omnipotence". Luther defines it as:

not the potency (potentiam) by which He (God) does not make many things He has the capacity to make, but that actuality, by which He powerfully makes everything, in that sense that Scripture calls Him omnipotent.\(^8\)

For choice to be possible there must be options other than that actually made. God has alternatives other than those He exercises. They are possible because He thinks them, for He creates their possibility by thinking them. Otherwise, they

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 718.
would have no being. But when He acts, no actions other than those God performs are possible for His action excludes their existence. He creates all that can be. From an ontological standpoint, then, everything is done by God. This is what is meant by omnipotence, "doing everything", not, as in the scholastic sense Luther opposed, "capable of doing anything". Apart from the ontological action of God there is no action. He does it all. Since God is impassive no state of affairs can be explained or accounted for on the grounds of divine permissiveness or toleration. God knows everything and does everything. 

Necessity

"If God foreknows, the thing happens necessarily ... . God neither errs nor makes mistakes." Necessity of which Luther

\[9\]
\[10\]

\[9\]Since nothing is independent of God, nothing is possible unless God causes it to be possible, at a minimum, by thinking of it. Whatever at one time or another is humanly conceived as possible comprises but a portion of divine possibility. There is another body of possibles which, from a human standpoint are inconceivable since they do not fall within the scope of reality of which humanity is a part. At the same time these latter possibles are conceivable for God by virtue of the sheer fact that He does conceive them even though He gives them no being in any other form than His thought. The ontological level of reality as Luther conceives it embraces the entire activity of God acting freely--to an infinitesimal portion of which we with our limited intelligence are privy. The major portion is hidden. Whence Luther speaks of this as Deus absconditus, the hidden side of God. It may well be that because we are privy to only a portion we think experience is contingent, whereas if we knew the rationale of the whole we would recognize and understand how it is a completely predetermined pattern of events.

\[10\]WA XVIII, p. 717.
speaks holds for the relation between the will of God and the event, not for God Himself. The capacity perfectly to preplan, eliminates the possibility of error.

Unchangeability

There is a sort of necessity which holds for the divine will, the necessity of changelessness.

I would wish that there could be given a better word ... than the usual term "necessity", which is not rightly used either in describing the divine or the human will. For it is much too graceless and incongruous in signification for this topic, as though there were a sort of compulsion, something going against the will, forcing the mind ... . For the will, be it divine or human, does freely what it does under no coercion as it wants or pleases, whether good or bad; yet, however, the will of God which governs our changeable will is changeless and infallible, as Boethius sings: "Stable and permanent, you give movement to all." 11

Infallibility

Fallibility is possible when an agent's power exceeds his understanding or his knowledge, his capacity, or when both are equal to the other, but limited. Since God is not limited in any way He cannot fail.

Would you believe that God unwillingly foresees what will happen or expresses His will ignorantly? If He foresees events willingly His will is eternal and immovable (such is His nature) and if He expresses His will with foresight, His knowledge is eternal and immovable (such is His nature). From which it follows irrefragably that all which we do, all things that happen, although they seem mutable to us are in

11 Ibid., p. 616, footnote 1.
accordance with the will of God. For the will of God is effective and cannot be impeded since power is the very nature of God; indeed His wisdom is such that He cannot be impeded, but is done in the place, time, manner and amount that He Himself both foresees and wills.  

Foresight and omnipotence, i.e., perfect planning and execution are, thus, entailed by liberum arbitrium.

Eternality

"... God foreknows nothing contingently, but both foresees, proposes and does everything by His unchanging, eternal and infallible will." These three characteristics follow, the one from the other. A will with the capacity of liberum arbitrium, lacking the capacity to err and superior to any other will is of necessity infallible in its choice. If it is infallible then it is also unchanging; for there is no reason for it to change. Since, then, it expresses itself infallibly and unchangingly, the will persists, i.e., is eternal, there being nothing which can interrupt it.

Primacy

If the will of God is free, it follows that God is prior to any rule or standard. He is the primal being. Luther describes God in such fashion:

God is He for Whose will there is no cause (caussa [sic]) or rationale (ratio) which prescribes for Him

\[\text{12 Ibid., pp. 615, 616.} \]
\[\text{13 Ibid., p. 615.} \]
any sort of rule (regula) or measurement (mensura), since there is nothing equal or superior to Him, but rather He Himself is the rule for everything. For if there would be any rule or measurement or cause or rationale for His will it could no longer be the will of God. For it is not because He ought or is bound to will in such a fashion that He wills as He does. On the contrary, it is because He Himself wills it in such a fashion that what does happen is obliged to be right. The cause and the rationale of the creature's will are prescribed, but not that of the Creator—unless you would put another creator over Him.\textsuperscript{14}

Of course, to posit a creator for the Creator would be unnecessary and would lead to an infinite regress. As primal entity, then, God is not bound by rules and values but is rather their source. Because He is not bound by any rules, He is not accountable for His actions. He brings into being whatever He wills.

God in His own nature and majesty, then, is all by Himself and, in this respect, we have nothing to do with Him, nor is He interested in having us deal with Him. We deal with Him clothed and revealed in His Word, by means of which He presents Himself to us. \ldots And He has not set limits for Himself by His Word, but keeps Himself free over all things.\textsuperscript{15}

In conclusion, if the various characteristics which make up the notion of liberum arbitrium are gathered together, Luther's conception is that of a primal ontological entity possessed of

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 712. Note also: "Natural reason is forced to confess that the living and true God must be one if by His own liberty He imposes necessity on us. \ldots He would be ridiculous if He could not and did not do everything or if, apart from Him, anything were done." Ibid., p. 718.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 685.
the capacity to act without limitation either by itself or others. It acts, with complete consciousness, knowledge and power, bringing into being and preserving in its being whatever is, achieving its own satisfaction. It is eternal, immutable, infallible, irresistible and changeless. Whatever else there is is the expression of this power. It is superior to all else for if there were its equal or superior it would be limited by the other. Man cannot possess liberum arbitrium; for his capacities are inferior to its characteristics. Everything happens necessarily according to the divine will for it is the necessary and sufficient reason for all things.

For all men find this proposition written in their hearts and recognize it and agree (albeit unwillingly) when they hear it propounded. First: that God is omnipotent, not only in potency, but also in act, (as I have said); were it not so God would be ridiculous. Secondly: that He Himself knows and plans all things, neither being able to make a mistake or to fail. These two propositions being conceded by all hearts and senses, all are compelled to admit by inevitable consequences: we are not made by our own will but by necessity; thus we do not make whatsoever we make by the right of free choice, but instead God plans out and acts with an infallible and unchanging counsel and power. Whence, at the same time, men find written in all their hearts: there is no such thing as a (human) free choice. Granted that it is much obscured by so much disputing to the contrary and by the great authority of men through the ages who have taught otherwise.16

16 Ibid., p. 719. Pagan sources to which Luther refers in support of his contention for a natural knowledge of divine omnipotence and determinism are Virgil, Horace, Roman and Greek mythology, all of which make reference to fate and predestination, pp. 617-618.
Satanic Defection

Thus far our analysis of Luther's philosophy has concerned itself with one pole of a bipolar, that is dialectical, view of reality, the activity of God, accounting for perfection, order, metaphysical goodness, unity, etc. The problem at this point is the possibility that he has so polarized his approach at one extreme of the philosophic spectrum that he will be unable to account for the opposite extreme: imperfection, disorder, evil, disunity, etc. He posits a God completely free. The danger is that this complete freedom will make any other freedom impossible. If all of reality is reducible to divine ontological activity, it may imply the impossibility of human practical activity. If it does, it will come into contradiction with the facts of everyday experience as we know them.

A universe which is the product of *liberum arbitrium* will function orderly and efficiently. All will be perfect initially and consistently fulfill its appointed function in accordance with the preplanned program laid down by God. Such a universe, however, perfect as it may be, contains no contingency, deficiency, error or evil. Yet, we think we find all of these characteristics in our everyday experience. Luther is unwilling to claim that we are mistaken about our experience. How can they occur in a universe, the operation of which follows by strict necessity from the activity of a perfectly free being? To resolve
this problem we must shift from the ontological to the manichaean level of meaning. 17

Luther provides scanty help to account for the manner in which evil originated. The cause is identified as Satan who first fell from grace, then tempted man to fall. 18 How is such a fall possible? Luther gives no answer. The doctrine is a part of Christian belief. We can, however, suggest a philosophic answer consistent with what has already been established as Luther's position and supported by one comment of Luther. To be of philosophic value, rather than of merely historic or theological interest, let us pose the question in the most general terms and apply the answer to the particular case. How is evil possible in a universe created by an entity possessing liberum

17 I call it the manichaean level because it is the level of opposition of super-human forces of good and evil, accounting for the origin of evil in the world, traditionally associated with the teachings of Mani; and because this level of explanation, as found in Augustine and in Luther was mistakenly attacked as Manichaean by their opponents. In historic Manichaeanism there are at least two basic differences: 1) the forces are of roughly equal power and of equal majesty and 2) this level is primary in Manichaeanism, not secondary as in Augustine and Luther.

18 "It is uncertain on what day the fall of the angels occurred, whether on the second or on the third [day of creation]. Only this much can be shown from the gospel, that Satan fell from heaven, inasmuch as Christ declares that He saw him fall from heaven. [Luke 10:18]" Luther's Works, I, Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5. tr. George V. Schick, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958, p. 150. Bracketed material mine.
Evil is possible where there are thinking entities which can be moved and where two or more possible objects exist toward which or against which such entities can be moved. Under such conditions motivations can shift from their proper objects to improper objects. Such entities can think of what is not the case and want it to be the case. Since, in a universe where what is the case is produced by *liberum arbitrium*, what is the case is what ought to be the case for entities in that universe. To desire what is not the case is to desire what ought not to be to exist. This is the essence of evil.

Luther's position presupposes the existence of at least one created entity, Satan, having the opportunity (both God and it existed as possible objects of its affection) and the capacity (it could feel affection for either) of changing the object of its motivation. It moved itself away from its proper end, God, to a lesser end, itself, and thereby became deficient in its future operation: it acted as though it were God.

There exists in Luther's writings only one attempt to describe Satan's fall. It is found in a sermon preached in Wittenberg on Monday of Easter week, April 2, 1526.

For this reason Satan lost his godlike power, in that because of the Son [of God] he was thrown out of heaven to the outer reaches of Hell, Is. 14:12, Luke 10:18, because Satan stood beneath the Son in honor,
but wanted to be like Him. This God could not tolerate.\textsuperscript{19}

With the notion of a satanic entity, there is now posited in Luther's thought a second, a destructive principle of action, counterposed to the original creative principle, God. It is a principle preserved in its being by the original principle, and superior to human power, constantly perverting the nature of whatever it can control.\textsuperscript{20}


\textsuperscript{20}In several passages Luther vividly describes the nature, attitude and actions of this satanic power. "... in whom there is even greater enmity against God, greater hatred and fury, than in man, in spite of the fact that he was not created evil but had a will in conformity with the will of God. This will he has lost; he has also lost his very beautiful and very excellent intellect and has been turned into an awful spirit which rages against his Creator." \textit{Luther's Works}, op. \textit{cit.}, p. 143. It will become apparent that for Luther, to become defective, an entity must not only be affected volitionally, but also intellectually. It becomes both perverse and stupid. To borrow an image from physics, its motion becomes eccentric. An entity becomes increasingly deficient as it continues its wayward way. If only its volitional faculties were affected it would be obstinate and might be increasingly stubborn in persisting in its mistake, but this would be simply a matter of degree or intensity. If, however, the rational capacity is also affected, then, it becomes incapable of knowing that it is in error and is capable of more grievous delusions. "... the devil everlastingly hates, accuses and damns God but exonerates himself; and it is not possible for him to say from his heart: 'Lord, I have sinned, forgive me.'" \textit{Ibid.}, p. 179. "... just as he lacks the promise of grace, so he cannot put an end to his transgressions, blasphemies and hatred of God." \textit{Ibid.}, p. 180. These latter two quotations exhibit the permanence of the Satanic personality. Since it is incapable of renovation, it is a persistent principle of destruction. "If it were not for the Son of God Satan would put an end to every living thing and choke it off from existence." \textit{Ibid.}, p. 189. It robs existents of their being.
Satanic Domination: The Human Predicament

Luther accounts for the origin of human evil differently than for the origin of evil itself. Whereas evil originated in a perfect universe because of the turning of a created will from its proper object to itself, human evil arose from the limitedness of human knowledge and a temptation which capitalized on that limitation.

In his commentary on Genesis, Luther says that the command of God not to eat of the tree of good and evil surpassed Adam's power to understand. Nothing in his experience singled that tree out as different or dangerous. He had to believe the command simply because God had given it. He had to take it on faith. This, then, gave Satan his opportunity to call into question something man could not possibly examine, the will of God. Satan could create doubt and thereby distrust of the divine command. 21

In the human case, as contrasted with the case of Satan, the fall was occasioned, not by a self-engendered change of motivation, but by external motivation, for man can be motivated; he cannot motivate himself. 22

21 Luther's Works, op. cit., p. 154. It is interesting to note, then, that Luther suggests that limited human intelligence provided the opportunity for evil. This could not have been the cause of the fall of Satan, since, as the foremost of the angels, he was always in the presence of God.

22 Luther never wrote a treatise on human psychology. Some insight into his thinking, however, can be afforded by examining what Melanchthon, his associate, said in the Loci Communnes of 1521, a little book highly praised and completely
Since man does not determine his motivations, he is susceptible to persuasion. Luther interprets the fall of man as a deliberate misleading of the will of man by an unscrupulous Satan.

Luther upon occasion talks about the "liberum arbitrium" of original man, lost in the fall from grace. He interprets the expression differently, however, than he does when applying it strictly to God. The expression is contrasted with servum approved of by Luther.

"... in giving a description of the nature of man, I shall have no need of the many divisions employed by the philosophers, but shall use only a few. In fact, man is divided into two parts only. For in man are the faculty of cognition (vis cognoscendi) and the faculty by which he either follows up or shuns those things which he has learned. The faculty of cognition is that by which we perceive or understand; by which we reason and mutually compare things and deduce conclusions, one after the other. The second part, or the faculty from which the affections take origin, is that by which we either resist or follow after the things known. This faculty is sometimes denominated will (voluntas), sometimes affection (affectum), sometimes appetite (appetitum)." The Loci Communes of Philip Melanchthon, tr. Charles Leander Hill, Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1944, p. 71. "... internal affections are not within our power. For by experience and practice we have found out that the will of its own accord cannot assume love, hate, or the like affection; but that one affection is conquered by another ... . But what is the will if not the fountain of the affections." Ibid., p. 76. "If you refer the will to the affections [as opposed to actions], even from the point of view of natural judgment there is plainly no liberty. Now when an affection has begun to rage and to burn, it cannot be restrained from bursting forth." Ibid., p. 81.
arbitrium, an idea which he got from Augustine.23 The contrast is not between freedom and chance—the ontological contrast, but between freedom and bondage—the manichaean contrast. Freedom is defined as obedience to God. Inability to obey God, then, is bondage, the inability to perform the functions prescribed by divine will. The fall of man rendered him incapable of free service to God, for both his cognitive and volitional faculties became defective.

"Free will after the fall of Adam (or after the commission of sin), is an empty name; when he [man] does things for himself, he sins to the death."24

Now Satan and man, being fallen and abandoned by God, cannot will good (that is, things that please God, or that God wills), but are ever turned in the direction of their own desires, so that they cannot but seek their own. This will and nature of theirs, thus turned from God, cannot be nothing, nor are Satan and ungodly man nothing; nor have they a nature and will that is nothing, though they certainly have a nature that is corrupt and turned from God. So that which we call the remnant of nature in the ungodly and in Satan, as being a

---

23 In Article 36 of his pamphlet "Wider die Bulle des Endchristens", Latin title "Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri, per bullam Leonis, X. novissima damnatorum.", written in response to the bull of excommunication in November, 1520, Luther quotes Augustine "contra Jul. book 2" as calling the "free will" of man servum arbitrium, because it is enslaved to Satan. This treatise served as the basis for Erasmus' attack upon Luther in his Diatribe. Luther responded with the treatise De Servo Arbitrio. Luther's Sämmtliche Schriften, XV, p. 1560.

24 Ibid., p. 1559
creature and a work of God, is no less subject to Divine omnipotence and action than all the rest of God's creatures and works. Since God moves and works all in all, He moves and works of necessity even in Satan and the ungodly. But He works according to what they are and what He finds them to be: which means, since they are evil and perverted themselves, that though they are impelled to action by this movement of Divine omnipotence they do only that which is perverted and evil.\textsuperscript{25}

The perversion of human nature, then, as indicated by Luther in this passage, involves a shifting of orientation of the entire personality from God-centeredness to self-centeredness. [We have already noted in Luther's interpretation of the fall of Satan the shift from God-centeredness to Satan himself as god. In a sense, on the human level Luther interprets the fall of man in essence as the same shift.] Eve set herself above the command of God. She made herself to be the judge of God, imposing her standards on Him.

If a human being is self-centered, there is no way whereby he can by his own effort escape continuing to be self-centered, for every act is an expression of self-centeredness. He is born that way and lives that way because he is not able to be anything other than what he is. His appropriate nature is to respond to the will of God, to be responsive to the activity of God. Since he cannot at the same time respond to God and to himself and, since all his actions are self-centered, he lives in continual

\textsuperscript{25}WA XVIII, p. 709.
opposition to God. 26

Luther refers to this bondage of self-involvement as the
"necessity of immutability".

This is what we mean by necessity of immutability:
that the will cannot change itself, nor give it­
self another bent, but, rather, is the more pro­
voked to crave the more it is opposed, as its
chafing proves; for this would not occur, were
it free or had liberum arbitrium. 27

Thus, one of the aspects of the human predicament is that it
"sese mutare non possit", is not able to change itself. Perhaps
even more devastating is a second aspect of this "necessity of
immutability".

26 Luther, for instance, quotes Augustine in The Spirit
and the Letter to the effect that "free will" without grace is
worth nothing except to sin. Luther's Sämmtliche Schriften, XV,
p. 1559. If man is turned from God, whether he knows it or not,
his under the domination of Satan. Apparently, what Luther
also wants to argue is that the human being does not simply pay
the consequences of his perversion by continuing to be what he
is, but he becomes progressively worse. Luther dramatically
declains in a sermon: "Satan is the hellish rider, of whom the
poets have spoken, who rides the poor soul and mind as his horse,
and guides them wherever he wants, from one sin to another."
Luther's Sämmtliche Schriften, XII, Sermon "Von den Besessenen" on
Matt. 8:28-34, pp. 1562-1563. This sermon was delivered sometime
in the year 1537. Luther is lamenting the plight of the man who
wants to be a good man, but in his inability to be good becomes
progressively tormented and tortured in soul and confused in mind
at the disparity between his ethical standards and his actions.
Luther concludes, "Where is then free will, a thing which is the
prisoner of Satan. It isn't anything because it doesn't do any­
things, but rather does everything according to the devil's will."
Luther's Sämmtliche Schriften, XV, pp. 1559-1560.

27 WA XVIII, p. 634.
I said, "of necessity"; I did not say "of compulsion"; I meant, by a necessity, not of compulsion, but of what they call immutability. That is to say; a man without the Spirit of God does not do evil against his will, under pressure, as though he were taken by the scruff of the neck and dragged off against his will to punishment; but he does it spontaneously and voluntarily.\(^{28}\)

Luther concludes, that since human beings are both unwilling and unable to be anything other than what they are, therefore,

... liberum arbitrium is an empty term whose reality is lost. A lost freedom, to my way of speaking, is no freedom at all, and to give the name freedom to something that has no freedom is to apply to it a term that is empty of meaning.\(^{29}\)

We, thus, have encountered, in a second sense, the notion of human liberum arbitrium as an empty term. For, if the human will is not able to will to be what it as a will ought to be, it is not free. It has no choice. It cannot and does not will to be different than it is. Hence, 1) because the omnipotence of God

---

\(^{28}\)Idem. Underlining mine. Note also Luther's comment: "Scripture indeed sets forth man in such fashion that he not only is bound, miserable, confined, sick and dead, but he adds to his other miseries, through the operation of his ruler Satan, this misery of blindness: he believes that he is free, blessed, whole, powerful, healthy and alive. For if man were to know his miserable condition, Satan knows that he could not keep him in his rule. God could not fail to pity and to help misery which knew itself and cried out for help for He is proclaimed through all of scripture with great praise as being near those of contrite heart, ... . Hence, the task of Satan is to maintain such a hold on men that they never recognize their misery, but assume that they can do all things which they are claimed [to be able to do]. WA XVIII, p. 679.

\(^{29}\)Luther's \textit{Sammtliche Schriften}, XV, p. 1561.
is the sole and sufficient explanation of all that is, human beings cannot effectively will themselves to be, to continue to be or to cease to be and, 2) because of satanic domination, they cannot and do not will their wills to be different than they are.

Divine Counter-Action

Such a state of affairs, of course, God could not ignore, for, to permit it to continue unchecked would have resulted in the frustration of creative activity and the passing from existence of all that is. Divine omnipotence would be manipulated by the satanic powers to bring about the destruction of the divine creation, for the omnipotence of God, as primary principle of all that is, maintains the existence of Satan. Such moving of the divine nature into opposition to itself is ontologically impossible.

The opposite extreme to complete permissiveness is to remove this destructive power from existence. In discussing the question why evil actions occur when God is all powerful, Luther comments,

God cannot suspend His omnipotence on account of man's perversion, ... In all this Satan continues to reign in peace; under this movement of Divine omnipotence he keeps his palace undisturbed.30

I take Luther's comment here to mean this. For God to cause some entity to cease to be would be action contrary to God's

---

30 WA XVIII, p. 710.
creative nature: to give being to things. Satan is the cause of the destruction of being. God cannot act demonically. Therefore, evil beings, having come into existence, the problem they constitute cannot simply be solved by causing them not to exist. The divine response to the destructive satanic principle must fall between the extremes of complete permissiveness—which would lead to the complete frustration of divine creativeness—and the cessation of divine creativeness i.e., ceasing to preserve His creation, which is contrary to the divine nature. The middle role is creative intervention, divine action counter to the destructive activities of Satan, by a new continuous creation. Thus, a third principle of explanation for the operation of the universe, divine counter-action to the destructive operation of satanic forces, is proposed by Luther. God both preserves the defective operation of Satan and counter-acts it. On the one hand, everything which happens, both good and evil, continues to be done by God ontologically, for God causes some things to happen by the deficient instrumentation of satanic forces. On the other hand, on the manichaean level, good is done by God, while evil is done by Satan. On the ontological level God is the cause of evil since He continues to pursue His course with means which have become defective. On the manichaean level Satan is responsible for evil as he endeavors to rob creation of its being. Meanwhile, God counteracts this influence by creating new being.
...When God works in us, the will is changed under the sweet influence of the Spirit of God. Once more it desires and acts, not of compulsion, but of its own desires and spontaneous inclinations. Its bent cannot be altered by any oppositions; it cannot be mastered or prevailed upon even by the gates of hell; but it goes on willing, desiring and loving good, just as once it willed, desired and loved evil.31

Since the nature of God is such that He cannot destroy what He has made, the divine counteractive influence is brought to bear on man, not by changing the motivations which are already there, but by creating additional motivations which are centered on God as the good. Thus, the human being who is influenced by God experiences new feelings he has not experienced before and has in mind a new object to which to devote himself. The old objects and motivations remain, but they are not the primary objects and motivations. Luther describes such a human being as simul iustus et peccator.32 He is capable of good and of evil for he feels both motivations. Since, then, he experiences conflicting emotions, he can act on either. Yet, since choice is determined by the stronger emotion and emotions are stirred up by God or Satan, the choice is not free.

31 WA XVIII, pp. 634-635.
32 For instance in the passage: "Therefore, everyone who is justified [by God] is still a sinner." Luther's SMmmtliche Schriften, XIX, "Fünf Disputationen über Röm. 3, 28.", "Die dritte Disputation", 24, p. 1452. Compare also: "So a Christian is both righteous and a sinner at the same time, saint and pervert, opponent and son of God." Commentary on Galatians, WA XXXX, I, p. 368.
On the manichaean level, as on the ontological level, there is no function for human liberum arbitrium. Everything relative to human action is motivated either as the result of divine activity or of satanic activity. In a famous quotation, Luther says,

Man's will is like a beast standing between two riders. If God rides, it wills and goes where God wills; as the Psalm says, 'I am become as a beast before thee, and I am ever with thee' [Ps. 73.22-3]. If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. Nor may it choose to which rider it will run, or which it will seek; but the riders themselves fight to decide who shall have and hold it.33

The ethical role of the man of God is a special kind of problem, for, unlike man in his original condition, strictly motivated by God and unlike man after the fall, strictly motivated by Satan, the man of God experiences the effect of both divine and satanic influence. He is two persons, the old and the new. He does not stand neutrally between the two, able to go either way indiscriminately, but rather is, by grace naturally reoriented again toward God. He identifies himself with his better nature, so that to act evilly would, as in the original act of human evil, be a turning away, an actus aversus from God.

THE EXISTENTIAL IMPLICATION: HUMAN FREEDOM AND ACTION

Is there any sense in which human action can be spoken of

33 WA XVIII, p. 635.
as arising from free choice?

If we do not want to drop this term altogether [liberum arbitrium]—which would really be the safest and most Christian thing to do—we may still in good faith teach people to use it to credit man with liberum arbitrium in respect, not of what is above him but of what is below him. That is to say, man should realize that in regard to his money and possessions he has a right to use them, to do or leave undone, according to his own "free will"—though that very "free will" is over-ruled by the liberum arbitrium of God alone, according to His own pleasure.34

And though I should grant that liberum arbitrium by its endeavors can advance in some direction, namely, in the direction of good works, or the righteousness of the civil or moral law, yet it does not advance toward God's righteousness, nor does God deem its efforts in any respect worthy to gain His righteousness; for He says that His righteousness stands without law.35

On this third level, then, finally we encounter a sense of

34 Ibid., p. 638. Bracketed material mine.
35 Ibid., pp. 767-768. Note also this remark by Luther: "... man falls under two kingdoms. In one he is guided by his own choice and counsel apart from precepts and mandates of God, that is with respect to things inferior to himself. Here he rules and is Lord, left in the hands of his own counsel. Not that God deserts him there in the sense that He does not cooperate in all things. But that He leaves to him a freedom for choosing and does not hem him in with any laws and prescriptions. And if you would use a paraphrase: The gospel leaves us in the hands of our own counsel that we may rule over things and use them as we wish, ... . In the other kingdom, however, [in relations with other persons and with God] man is not left in the hands of his own counsel, but is led and guided by the will and counsel of God, so that, just as in his own kingdom he is led by his own choice apart from the commands of another, so in the kingdom of God he is led by the precepts of another apart from his own choosing." Ibid., p. 672. Bracketed material mine.
liberum arbitrium which, however limited it may be, is not empty. 36

36 To clarify what Luther has in mind here, it may be of use to cite other quotations from works not directly the product of Luther himself but accepted by him. "If you estimate the power of the human will as touches its natural capacities according to human reason, it cannot be denied but that there is in it a certain kind of liberty in things external. These are matters which you yourself might experience to be within your power, such as: to greet or not to greet a man; to put on certain attire or not to put it on; to eat meat or not to eat it as you will. Upon this contingency of external works those philosophers who attributed freedom to the will, have fastened their eyes. In truth, however, because God does not look upon external works but upon the inner motions of the heart, Scripture has recorded nothing about such freedom. Those who do fashion their character by an external and affected affability teach this sort of freedom, especially the philosophers and the more recent theologians." Melanchthon, op. cit., pp. 75-76. "Of Free Will [sic] they [the Lutherans] teach that man's will has some liberty to choose civil righteousness, and to work things subject to reason ... . These things are said in as many words by Augustine in his Hypognosticon, Book III: 'We grant that all men have a free will, free inasmuch as it has the judgment of reason; not that it is thereby capable without God, either to begin, or, at least, to complete aught in things pertaining to God, but only in works of this life, whether good or evil. "Good" I call those works which spring from the good in nature, such as, willing to labor in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to clothe oneself, to build a house, to marry a wife, to raise cattle, to learn divers useful arts, or whatever good pertains to this life. For all of these things are not without dependence on the providence of God; yea, of Him and through Him they are and have their beginning. "Evil" I call such works as willing to worship an idol, to commit murder, etc." "Article XVIII: Of Free Will", Augsburg Confession, Concordia Triglot, The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, ed. F. Bente, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1917, pp. 50-53. "The human will has liberty in choice of works and things which reason comprehends by itself. It can to a certain extent render civil righteousness or the righteousness of works; it can speak of God, offer to God a certain service by an outward work, obey magistrates, parents; in the choice of an outward work it can restrain the hands from murder, from adultery, from theft. Since there is left in human nature reason and judgment concerning objects subjected to the senses, choice between things and the
There is a kind of human liberum arbitrium, not because the human will is free, but because human powers of cognition are free. Man is able to summon up images, to make deductions, to determine implications, etc., to which he himself responds. He is able to hold in his consciousness more than one alternative which interests him. He can use his strength and imagination to subdue the earth. He is limited in imagination and cognition, since the fall. He can be stirred up to act against his better judgment. He can enter into whatsoever external relationship he wills with his fellows. He is limited only by his ingenuity and interests. He cannot terminate his own being nor can he summon up any emotions other than those that of their own accord rise up within him. And even if he takes steps by the development of good habits and a regular life to control and direct his impulses, he has no guarantee that at any time, often when least expected, there will not rise up within him impulses alien to what he liberty and power to render civil righteousness are also left. For Scripture calls this the righteousness of the flesh which the carnal nature, i.e., reason, renders by itself, without the Holy Ghost, although the power of concupiscence is such that men more frequently obey evil dispositions than sound judgment. And the devil, who is efficacious in the godless, as Paul says, Eph. 2,2 does not cease to incite this feeble nature to various offenses. These are the reasons why even civil righteousness is rare among men, as we see that not even the philosophers themselves, who seem to have aspired after this righteousness, attained it." "Article XVIII: Of Free Will", Apology of Augsburg Confession, Concordia Triglot, pp. 334-335.
wishes to be or to do. 37

An elaboration of the capacity of this limited notion of human liberum arbitrium constitutes the bulk of chapter IV and is interwoven into chapter V.
CHAPTER III

DETERMINISM AND ACTION--THE PROBLEM OF JUSTICE

In the development of a thought structure, be it the formulation of a political constitution, a social procedure, a game or a philosophic worldview such as occupies these pages, the theorist, if he is to do an adequate job must at minimum 1) set forth the structure clearly, exhibiting its essential elements and their relationships and 2) test the structure for internal contradictions and inconsistencies. The former activity occupies chapter II. The latter is the task of chapter III.

Since Luther views reality as activity occurring on three levels, but comprehended in and determined by the first level, God exercising the power of liberum arbitrium, Luther's task, set forth in this chapter, is to justify that activity in relation to what occurs on the other levels. Inasmuch as the approach culminates in the development of an ethical structure, as opposed to a scientific structure, chapter II centers on the origin of good and evil; this chapter centers on the justice of divine determinism particularly as it relates to human action. For purposes of order in the chapter Luther's arguments are grouped under four heads, each representing a separate challenge to the adequacy of Luther's approach. The first challenge limits itself to the ontological level (but in so doing treats all the levels universally, since they can be reduced to the first level),
claiming simply that God is unjust. The second challenge proposes that there is an inconsistency between the ontological activity of God and the view of God as loving man revealed by God in His activity on the manichaean level: in brief that what God claims He is and what He does are not in agreement. The third challenge proposes that there is an inconsistency between the manichaean and the existential levels. The demands which God makes upon man in His law exceed man's capacity to fulfill them. The fourth challenge proposes an inconsistency between the existential and the ontological levels. Human action does not consistently receive its just consequences in rewards and punishments from God. Good is not always rewarded with good and evil with evil.

Since these four challenges exhaust the number of relationships which the activity of divine liberum arbitrium has in the structure of Luther's thought and since the structure is reducible to that activity, if each challenge is successfully refuted, the structure is internally consistent.

**CHALLENGE ONE: THE JUSTICE OF GOD**

So many men of great ability who have stood the test of time ... demand that God should act according to human right [iure humano] and do what seems right to them or He should cease to be God. The secrets of His majesty shall profit Him nothing; let Him render a reason why He should be God or why He wills what has no appearance of justice—as if you would ask Mr. Shoemaker or Mr. Beltmaker to sit in judgment! Flesh does not dignify God with so much glory as to believe that He is just and good when He speaks and
acts above and beyond what the Justinian Code has laid down or the fifth book of Aristotle. Let the majesty, Creator of all things, submit Himself to one of His creatures.¹

The questioning of the justice of divine action presupposes that human standards hold for God. Since God is above all rules and is Himself the rule for all, the presupposition is fallacious.² "If His justice would be such that it could be judged just by human reckoning, clearly it would not be divine and would differ in no way from human justice."³

Secondly, a challenge to the justice of God in a particular case assumes that one knows the mind of God, that one knows God's intent. "Since He is the one and true God, therefore totally incomprehensible and inaccessible to human reason, it follows, yea, it is necessary that also His justice be incomprehensible ... ."⁴ Again, the challenge rests on a fallacious assumption.⁵

¹WA XVIII, p. 729.
²Compare the passage cited in Chapter II, pages 36-37. "God is He for Whose will there is no cause or rationale which prescribes for Him any sort of rule or measurement, since there is nothing equal or superior to Him, but rather He Himself is the rule for everything. Ibid., p. 712.
³Ibid., p. 784.
⁴Idem.
⁵Compare also: "... concerning that secret will of Majesty there can be no debate and human temerity must be recalled and restrained, which, in continual preversity, ignoring necessary matters, always seeks after and assails it, nor should it occupy itself with the scrutiny of that secret majesty which cannot be reached, inasmuch as it dwells in inaccessible light, by the testimony of Paul." [I Tim. 6:16] Ibid., p. 689.
Questions like "Does God act justly?" or its opposite "Does God act unjustly?" have the appearance of meaningfulness. If, however, we substitute for the term "God" in each question an expression which for Luther would be equivalent "He Who always acts justly", the questions are, respectively, tautological and self-contradictory, for the former asks "Does He Who always acts justly act justly?" while the latter asks "Does He Who always acts justly act unjustly?"

In summary, then, challenges to the justice of God involve fallacious assumptions, and arise from an inadvertent mislocation of the ontological level of divine activity, reducing it to the existentiel level.

CHALLENGE TWO: DIVINE WORD AND WORK

A second challenge to the justice of God arises from the apparent inconsistency between God's revelation of Himself in Scripture and in the incarnation of Jesus as concerned for people and loving all of them, and the deliberate damnation of some people to eternal torment. The inconsistency is epitomized by Christ's weeping over Jerusalem. "It is the will of the same God incarnate to weep, deplore and groan over the lost state of the impious as that of the divine Majesty which on purpose leaves and rejects some so that they perish." 6 God purports both

6Ibid., pp. 689-690.
to abandon some deliberately and at the same time to mourn their loss.

No doubt this offends to the highest degree common sense of natural reason, that God wilfully [mēra voluntate sua] should desert, harden and damn people, as though He delighted in sins and such great and eternal torment of wretches, He Who is publicly proclaimed as full of mercy and goodness, etc. It seems iniquitous, cruel, and intolerable so to think of God. This has been a great offense to so many great men through the ages ... . For this reason such sweating and labor has been devoted to exonerate the goodness of God by blaming the will of man, ... 7

The effort to which Luther alludes in the last sentence can be expressed simply by the following formal argument.

Proposition 1: The just will of God is the cause of all that happens.

Proposition 2: Some men suffer the evil of eternal damnation. In order to preserve the justice of God and to keep Him blameless of the damnation of the reprobate a third proposition is proposed:

Proposition 3: Men do good and evil of their own free will.

Luther argues that this set of three propositions is not consistent. It is an antilogism. The third proposition is inconsistent with the first. For if men act freely, those acts are a limitation on the freedom of God, which is impossible. 8 It follows, then, that an appeal to human free will is inadequate to resolve the problem. Because proposition 1 is true, 3 has to

---

7 Ibid., p. 719.
8 See quotation 14, chapter II, pp. 36-37.
be false. 9

The question of the apparent inconsistency between 1 and 2 is resolved by Luther in this fashion. We have no claims on God, since we are His creatures, but He has full rights against us to demand whatsoever He pleases. "No injury is done to us since God owes us nothing. He has received nothing from us and He has promised us nothing except as much as He has willed and pleased." 10 Damnation follows as a natural consequence of the condition of the impious. The only escape from damnation is by divine intervention, but no one has a right to this. Hence, whatever God does, His actions are righteous. 11

Since God has rights relative to man but man has no rights relative to God, God is not limited by the principles of reciprocal and distributive justice. The principle of equality, however, is not nullified by the fact that there are no human rights relative to God. Does one have a right to expect equal treatment from God as someone else? If no one is any more or

---

9 John Calvin was influenced by Luther's argument in the development of his own theology. He attempted to remove the force of the apparent inconsistency between 1 and 2 by arguing that the damnation of the impious contributes to the glory of God. Unlike Luther, he developed a double predestination theory to explain justification and damnation. Like Luther he denied the truth of 3. Cf. Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, in particular Book II, chapter v and Book III, chapter XXI.

10 WA XVIII, p. 717.

11 God is bound by His promises and can be held to them. These, of course, are rights bestowed by God rather than arising from the nature of the divine/human relationship.
less deserving of grace than anyone else, why does God save some and not others? Why does He deal unequally with men?

The issue is legitimate. The questions are reasonable, but, under present conditions, unanswerable to human satisfaction. What is at issue is divine consistency. If X and Y are two individuals between whom, before God, there is no difference, since both lack rights, if God acts in manner m toward X why does He not act in manner m toward Y? To claim that God ought to act in manner m toward Y would be presumptuous, for it would assume that Y has a right to be treated in manner m by God (which right Y does not have) or that God is duty bound to treat all men alike. Since God can act however He pleases, the latter alternative is patently false. He cannot, however, act arbitrarily. God is bound by the necessity of unchangeability.

Luther distinguishes between God's hidden and revealed will to resolve the issue. The distinction is roughly between the will of God operative on the ontological level and on the manichaean level. Only the operation on the manichaean level is revealed by God. God exhibits Himself as loving men, as hating and overcoming evil, etc. He does not, however, reveal His overarching ontological order whereby He reconciles good and evil and unifies in purposeful fashion the creative and destructive
principles in the universe. The attempt to learn why some are saved and not others transcends the limits of human competence and comprehension and results in confusion. One is faced with the sheer will of God, with pure divine impulses, which will be understood first in eternity when God is seen face to face.

CHALLENGE THREE: VALIDITY OF THE ETHICAL "OUGHT"

Insofar as divine determinism relates to the manichaean and existential levels of Luther's thought structure, the problem of justice revolves primarily around the question of human moral responsibility. Implicit in the argument counter to Luther's position is the principle that moral obligation implies the

12 "... God works evil in us, that is, through us, not as a fault (culpa) of God, but because of our defectiveness, who, since we are by nature evil, but God is truly good, impelling (rapiens) us to action by his own action according to the nature of His omnipotence, is not able to do anything other than that He Himself as good does evil because of an evil instrument, granted that He by means of His wisdom uses this evil well for His glory and our salvation." WA XVIII, p. 711.

13 Anticipating the natural impulse to reject limits to human competence, Luther remarks, "Indeed, here Reason will say in her nosy and talkative fashion, 'That's a nice escape hatch we've invented for ourself, that whenever we are hard pressed by the force of arguments we run back to that awe-inspiring will of Majesty and where our adversary has been troublesome we reduce him to silence no differently than the astrologers who with the invention of their "epicycles" elude all questions about the motion of the entire heavens.' We answer that it not our invention, but a precept founded on the divine scriptures." Ibid., p. 690.
ability to do what is necessary to discharge the obligation. There is an inconsistency between the demands which God makes of man in divine law, revealed as part of the recreative activity of God on the manichaean level, and the human capacity to act, exhibited on the existential level. Men are commanded by God to love Him and one another. They are incapable of such motivation in their fallen condition. Is God justified in laying such an obligation upon them? Or does their inability to discharge the obligation excuse them from it? Luther argues that inability does not excuse. His argument rests on an analysis of linguistic usage.

Both grammarians and boys on street corners are aware that nothing more is signified by words in the imperative mood than that which ought to be done. What,

---

14 Augustine, to whom both free-will and anti-free-will advocates have appealed at various times in the history of the Church, is ambiguous on the topic treated in this section. He says, for instance, in the treatise On Grace and Free Will, "Now God has revealed through His Holy Scriptures that there is liberum arbitrium in man. How He has revealed this I cannot recount in human language, but in divine. First of all, God's commands would be useless to man unless he had liberum arbitrium, so that by executing them [the commands] he would obtain the promised rewards." This passage appears to be in opposition to Luther. On the other hand, in the same treatise Augustine says, "There is a liberum arbitrium always within us, but it is not always good, for it is either free from righteousness when it is in bondage to sin--then it is wicked--or else it is free from sin when it is in bondage to righteousness--then it is good." This passage appears to support Luther. A readily available English translation of Augustine's treatise is found in Volume I of Whitney J. Oates' Basic Writings of Saint Augustine, New York: Random House, Inc., 1948. The passages cited are found on pages 734 and 758.
however is done or is able to be done must be treated by indicative verbs. How does it happen, then, that you theologians are twice as inept as boys, in that as soon as you catch hold of one imperative verb you proceed to infer an indicative, as though as soon as something is commanded it necessarily is done or can be done.15

Hume several centuries later argued the impossibility of deducing an imperative from an indicative.16 Luther is arguing against the possibility of deducing an indicative from the legitimacy of an imperative. Capacity to act does not follow necessarily from obligation to act. Therefore, it is not unjust for God to impose obligations which cannot be fulfilled.

On what does the "obligation implies ability" principle rest? On the function of language: it would be foolish or absurd to issue commands if those who heard them would not be able to

15 WA XVIII, p. 677. Luther is referring here to Erasmus’ argument that scripture passages containing divine commands prove that men have liberum arbitrium. For if men have the obligation, then they must have the ability to discharge what God commands.

16 "In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the copulations of propositions, "is" and "is not", I meet with no propositions that is not connected with an "ought" or an "ought not". This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this "ought" or "ought not", expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it." Book III, section i, of A Treatise of Human Nature. The passage is found on page 469 of the L. A. Selby-Bigge edition, Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1951.
obey them. The mistaken assumption of this argument, however, is that command-type language has only one function, to secure the fulfillment of its content. Luther argues that imperatives have a variety of functions.

Do we not very frequently make evident impotence and impossibility by such ways of speaking? As, for instance, "If you want to equal Virgil in singing, my Maevius, other songs are needed." "If you want to surpass Cicero, Scotus, you need to replace your cunning with the highest eloquence." "If you want to be compared with David, you need to give birth to similar psalms." Here clearly are indicated things impossible for average abilities, granted that they all can be accomplished by divine powers. The same holds true in scriptural matters: by such assertions is pointed out what can be done in us by the power of God, but we cannot do it ourselves. 17

The apparent inconsistency between the manichaean and the existential levels of activity resulting in a state of apparent injustice can be exhibited by the following antilogism. From the manichaean level comes the command of God to man: Love! The existential fact of the matter is that one cannot just turn particular emotions on and off. Emotions are not under our direct control Divine love, such as is commanded by God, over and beyond this, must be generated in us by God. These two states of affairs are represented by the following propositions:

17 WA XVIII, p. 691. Compare also: "For this reason the words of the law are spoken [by God], not to affirm a power of the will, but to illuminate blind reason, that it may see that its own light is nothing and that there is no strength [virtus] of will. 'By the law is the knowledge of sin', says Paul; he does not say the abolition or avoidance of sin." Ibid., p. 677.
Proposition 1: Men are to love God and their neighbor.
Proposition 2: Emotions are not subject to human control.

Because of the opposition between the two propositions a third is sometimes suggested:

Proposition 3: Obligation implies the ability to discharge it.

The three propositions form an antilogism. At least one is false. Given the truth of 3, proposition 1 is false.\(^{18}\)

If propositions 1 and 3 are taken as true, 2 is false.

Erasmus, at least in the fashion Luther interpreted his argument, opted for this approach in the famous debate between the two men. The approach is faced with extreme difficulties. It is workable so long as divine commands are interpretable as requiring particular actions, or if, in divine commands involving personal motivation, terms denoting emotions can be replaced with terms denoting actions, e.g., if "love" can be defined in behavioral terms. But if this cannot be done, the approach must directly oppose the meaning and implications of proposition 2 and assert, contrary to generally accepted psychological fact, that one can at will summon up particular motivations.

---

Luther accepted the truth of propositions 1 and 2. Consequently, he, of necessity, rejected 3 as false. The implications of his approach are at least twofold: the scope of the ethical "ought" covers both action and motivation and, because men apart from the activity of God cannot be properly motivated, they cannot fulfill their obligations to God, of and by themselves. The practical function of the ethical "ought", then, is not to prescribe behavior, but to reveal the incapacity of men to act as they ought. Luther, thus, is committed to a motivational ethic, the demands of which require divine involvement.

What of the apparent inconsistency between propositions 1 and 2. They are inconsistent only if 3 is assumed to be true. If obligation is not limited by the ability to fulfill it, then there is no inconsistency.

CHALLENGE FOUR: HUMAN ACTION AND DIVINE RESPONSE

The final relationship which needs examination is that between the existential and the ontological, the divine rewarding and punishing of humans acts which are good and bad. The general rationale of the ontological operation of the universe follows this pattern. Actions have their appropriate consequences which follow naturally and necessarily. "If you sink in water you will suffocate; if you swim out you will be saved." In contrast to these are what might be called moral consequences. Here a

\[19^{WA XVIII, p. 693.}\]
distinction must be made between the worthiness of the actor and the worth of the act. Since the worthiness of the actor is determined by his motivation and, since he has no control over his motives, but is motivated either by God or Satan, there is no worth which is earned by the actor. We are, thus, limited to the consequences of actions. Actions are done either under compulsion or not under compulsion. There is neither reward or punishment for acts done under compulsion. Of acts not done under compulsion, if they are done willingly, reward or punishment follows, depending on whether they are good or bad acts. The fact that one cannot change the nature of his will is irrelevant. In the determination of temporal rewards and punishments, then, God is guided by the goodness or evilness of the act whether it was done willingly or not. He is not guided by the motivation of the actor. The reward or punishment is meted out in this present life. In contrast to this, the relationship which obtains in eternity between God and men is determined by the motivational relationship which obtains between God and men at the time of exit from this life. Moral consequences follow with the same necessity as natural consequences.  

It does not take much experience of life to discover that there is an inconsistency between this rationale and what happens.

---

20 Ibid., pp. 693-694.
as a consequence of human behavior. The lament about the prospering of the wicked and the suffering of the innocent is an ancient and oft repeated refrain. Luther reconciles the inconsistency by an appeal to the life to come. "There is a life after this life, in which, whatever is not punished and remunerated here will be punished and remunerated there, for this life is nothing but a precursor or rather a beginning of a future life." \(^2\)

In this fashion Luther justifies the structure of his system, reconciling the levels of activity with one another. He argues that much of what happens in life requires divine enlightenment for us to reconcile it with what we experience. Even then there is that which transcends our comprehension and, as a result must be taken on faith.

Three lights are behind me: the light of nature, the light of grace, the light of glory. In the light of nature it cannot be resolved how it is just for the good to be afflicted and the evil to fare well. But the light of grace has resolved it. In the light of grace it cannot be resolved how God can damn him who is not able with any of his powers but to sin and to be a prisoner. Here both the light of nature and the light of grace say that the fault is not that of the miserable man, but the injustice of God for they are not able to judge otherwise of a God who crowns the impious man freely, without merit and does not crown another but damned him who is perhaps less, certainly not more, impious. But the light of glory tells a

\(^{21}\text{Ibid.}, p. 785.$
different story and someday will point out God, whose judgment alone is of incomprehensible justice, as a God manifestly the justest of the just, provided that in the meantime we believe it, warned and strengthened by the example of how the light of grace in similar fashion explains that which is a mystery for the light of nature.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{22} Idem
CHAPTER IV

ACTIONS AND MOTIVATION--THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LUTHER'S ETHICS

The isolation in Chapter II of a sense of human liberum arbitrium which is not empty demonstrates the possibility of an ethic. Its morphology has not yet been exhibited. Since Luther's ontological thought structure has developed theocentrically, it is necessary at this point to reapproach it anthropocentrically in order to expose the principles which underlie Luther's ethic.

Luther's view of reality is structured by the ruler/ruled relationship. Man stands in the midst of the hierarchy of beings. Superior to him are God and the good and evil angels. Inferior to him are animals, plants and inanimate things. According to the original order of perfection a descending order of command coupled with an ascending order of obedience would guarantee the peaceful and harmonious operation of the whole realm of creation. This perfection is marred by the demonic interference with the ontological operation of the universe and exhibits itself by the manichaean dialectic.

While man modifies that which lies beneath him by imposing his force externally upon it, he himself is modified both externally and internally by those forces which are above him. Because the connection between divine activity and human ethical
behavior is found in inner motivation\(^1\) the transition from
ontology to ethics can be made in two stages: 1) from ontology to
psychology by an examination of the relation of divine activity
to human motivation and 2) from psychology to ethics by an exami-
nation the relation of divine motivating to human ethical action.

**ACTION AND MOTIVATION**

God acts in two distinctive ways: creatively and prescrip-
tively. The creative activity of God, as we have previously
indicated, is also of two sorts: original ontological creativity
whereby entities are brought into being and preserved in their
being, and re-creative activity to counteract demonic damage.
Luther speaks of the two expressions of the will of God, partic-
ularly exhibited in His verbal revelation of Himself, as law and
gospel.\(^2\) In the narrow sense, gospel tends to be restricted to
re-creative activity and is, thus, properly restricted to the
manichaean level of meaning. If, however, one interprets the
notion of gospel more broadly as the expression of divine good-
ness, i.e., all divine creative activity, it becomes apparent

\(^1\)Luther uses the two verbs, *agere* and *rapere* to des-
cribe this activity of inner "moving". The former verb is used
most frequently in the active voice to describe divine or demonic
activity. The latter verb is usually used passively to describe,
from a human experiential standpoint "being moved". For Luther's
interpretation of the relation of these two verbs see footnote 5
of this chapter. Note than he says: *agi=rapi*.

\(^2\)For Luther's treatment of the topic see WA XVIII,
pp. 680-684.
that on all three levels of Luther's view of reality, the ontological, the manichaean and the existential, God expresses Himself both in the form of law and of gospel. Since God relates Himself to man both externally and internally, there are, thus, six distinguishable ways whereby God expresses Himself as law and six as gospel, two of each on each of three levels. 3

The Activity of God as Law

On the ontological level the outer expression of the will of God is evident in the apparent purposefulness, order and regularity of the operation of the universe. While it is not possible rationally to apprehend God as the operator nor his ends, it is possible to derive from experience patterns of regularity in the universe and to express them in the form of natural laws and to develop natural sciences. Since the will of God, functioning as liberum arbitrium, is unknowable, whatever is discovered as

---

3 Viewed in theological terms the three levels of divine activity correspond to the distinctive activities of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit of the Trinity. Due to the nature of the theological problems with which Luther found himself forced to deal, his theological formulations developed in greatest detail matters having to do with the manichaean level, the activity of the Son. Subsequent Lutheran theology has tended to follow in the same pattern. Hence, the ontological level and the existential level of Luther's philosophic world view remain to this day relatively undeveloped, although in recent years, since World War II, due to the influence of existentialism on Lutheran thought there has been some exploration of these areas by Barth, Tillich and others.
natural law is not identical with God's expression of His will as law but follows from the fact that He does so express it. That is to say, regularities are apprehended because God acts consistently.

The inner ontological expression of the will of God is exhibited by the existence of a sense of right and wrong and the activity of conscience. We have natural feelings of disapproval and guilt. These arise from what Luther and Melanchthon call lex naturae, laws of our nature.4

On the manichaean level, part of the activity of God as law is the clear expression of His will in Scripture, notably in the ten commandments. God also presents Himself in the consciousness of people who have encountered His revelation of Himself in Scripture as one to be loved or as a reason for loving one's fellows. Because He rises up into consciousness as an alternative to self-love He is naturally resisted and hated, or, at best is modified to serve, not as an ultimate object of affection

4From these natural sources come what men naturally feel about morality. Of the duty to love God there is just a trace of awareness. Because of it societies tend to produce religions. They feel a need to have a deity. The demands of the second table of the law are more clearly sensed. Luther claims that one tends not to find a society where killing is permitted within the society, adultery is sanctioned, disobedience to authority is permitted or theft tolerated. They are inimical to the existence of a viable society. Men seem spontaneously to "know" that such behavior is wrong. The actions bother, exercise or anger them. See also Melanchthon, op. cit., "On Law", pp. 110-117.
but as a pattern of action. He is reduced to a purely paradigmatic function, a moral example.

Finally, on the existential level God expresses Himself as law externally by the goodness of the lives of the converted and internally in their consciousness and in their expression of His motivation towards others.

The Activity of God as Gospel

The creative ontological activity of God is expressed by the dynamic persistence of the universe and the integrity and order which it exhibits. Internally it is experienced in the sense of well-being, harmony, health, pleasure and contentment. On the manichaean level the re-creative activity of God has been expressed historically and is retained in verbal form in the salvation history of the Old and New Testament, culminating in the incarnation of God Himself in history, leaving behind Himself through history the verbal and sacramental records and revelations of Himself. Internally He presents Himself to men's consciousnesses as the Holy One of God. Finally, on the existential level God expresses His goodness externally in the continual creation and preservation of the Church, Whose presence is detected in certain outward ways, by the use of Word and sacraments, and the expression of divine motivation in behavior. Inwardly one is aware of the testimony of the Spirit in moving
one to act. Thus, in multiform ways God makes His presence known in motivating His creation to activity.

The Demonic Motivation of Men

Since human beings are divinely created, they are creatures of purpose. Inasmuch, however, as they are born ignorant of God, incapable of loving God and directed toward evil, they lack the purpose of their existence. Hence, consciously or not, each, from infancy attempts to make sense out of his existence in order that he can achieve a purpose, for he cannot live a meaningless existence. Lacking the knowledge of his subjection to God, he unconsciously becomes his own god, blindly aping the example of Satan his master, in seeking to be a self to which all else is subject. The image is that of a spoiled child. "... man is captive and corrupt, at the same time conceitedly having a very high opinion of himself and ignorant of his own corruption and captivity."

5 Note Luther's comment, "Christian, indeed are moved (aguntur) not by liberum arbitrium but by the Spirit of God, Romans 8. To be moved (ari) indeed is not to move (agere) but to be impelled (rapi) just as a saw or an axe is moved by a carpenter." WA XVIII, p. 699. Since, of course, man possesses choice over those things beneath him, unlike saws and axes, the analogy extends only to the notion of being moved.

6 Ibid., p. 674. Compare also: "The ungodly man (as we have said), like his prince Satan, is totally turned to himself and to his own things. He doesn't look for God, nor does he care for the things of God; he seeks his own riches, his own glories, his own works, his own wisdom, his own power, his own kingdom, completely his own--and he wants to enjoy it in peace. But if someone opposes him or wants to lessen any of them in the least, by that same perverted drive [aversione] by which he seeks those
By nature his existence rests on demonic foundations, for he is incapable of loving God. Hence, his inner nature is irrational, impulsive and quixotic, infantile and belligerent. He is at odds with himself and his world, emotional and subjective. His springs of action arise to consciousness from demonic sources. Although he does not create his springs of action he can use his cognitive powers to interpret them, to select the means and manner of carrying out the courses of action to which they impel him or to examine the implications of the actions to which he is drawn. The structure of the situation can be exhibited by the Aristotelian practical syllogism. The end and the impetus to the act, the major term, comes into consciousness either from satanic or divine sources. The present situation is the minor term. Man mediates the situation, using his liberum arbitrium, by discovering the practical middle term, the means of getting from the present situation to the desired end. If he is torn between conflicting impulses he can weigh the alternatives and assemble the relevant factors; other alternatives may occur to him. Finally, either one alternative carries the field and is acted upon or he is frozen between things, he is also moved and irritated and he rages against his adversary. And he is no more capable of ceasing to rage than he is of ceasing to desire or seek those things. And he can no more cease to desire things for himself than he can cause himself not to exist since he is still a creature of God, albeit a spoiled one." p. 710.
opposed and equal inner forces.

Any impulse which rises to consciousness is either directly or indirectly satisfied or it is frustrated. But neither drive satisfaction or drive frustration provide satisfactory solutions to the total human situation. Since natural human impulses are defective, rising from a demonic source and directed to inferior ends, the satisfying of the drive simply results in the attainment of ends which are inadequate. The perverted condition is reinforced by the success of the act.

If in some way the drive is frustrated, reinforcement of the perverted condition is avoided, but no remedy for the condition out of which the perverted drive arose is achieved. In addition, the future capacity to act may be endangered and unwanted side effects of unpredictable behavior stemming from drive frustration may occur. Thus, although one may be able to achieve an orderly and meaningful outward pattern of behavior, one cannot by oneself resolve the internal problems of one's natural perverted condition.

The Divine Motivation of Men

God must intervene to solve the human predicament, both to become the source of movement and the end of human existence. Such intervention, as we have previously indicated, is resisted. Since the advances of God encounter increased perversity [Luther
describes it as hardness of heart,\textsuperscript{7} God cannot merely present Himself in consciousness as a possible object of affection or exhibit therein the idea of an action pleasing to Him, for such objects and ideas will be rejected. He must move the psyche itself in order that it will respond positively to such impulses and ideas, i.e., He must convert the psyche itself to Himself.

Since God creates being but does not destroy it, the former human nature remains after God gives the psyche a new nature, although the new nature dominates the old. The manichaean conflict which prior to conversion is external to the individual (since he is totally under demonic control) is now internalized. The converted human being experiences impulses both from God and Satan and is attracted to each, according to his separate natures. Whereas previously if he experienced both sorts of impulses he was attracted to the one and repelled by the other and, in this respect, experienced no problems, now divine ideas rise to his consciousness, clothed in attractiveness; but, for that matter, so do satanic. He acts on both sorts, depending on which gains the ascendancy. While his prime mover is divine and he accordingly searches for ways he can give expression to this motivation, he still retains his old perverted habit patterns and can return to his old ways of acting.

\textsuperscript{7}Note in particular Luther's explanation of hardness of heart in the case of Pharaoh. WA XVIII, p. 711.
One would expect a deterministic ontology to entail a closed psychology. Because of the manichaean level in Luther's worldview, there is a surprising openness on the psychological level. Man not only is plastic, developing and changing as a personality, he is also unpredictable. Novel springs of action can well up within him in surprising and unexpected ways. He is capable of abrupt personality change, e.g., in conversion. Hence, one who is responsive both to divine and satanic influences finds himself upon occasion confronted in consciousness with novel ideas and courses of action attractively presented which are shocking, abhorrent, or thrillingly exciting. From this well-spring of originality flow great ideas and original art. Even human beings of supposed limited capacity are capable under ordinary circumstances of sudden changes of temperament, radical modification of living, of acts of great goodness or profound depravity. Beneath the placid monotony of daily living with its predictibility of behavior patterns there is a fluid uncertainty in the inner world, capable at any moment of spewing forth a radical act.

Whereas classical psychology praised the rational and castigated the passionate, Luther sees the rational as itself ethically neutral. It is the servant of the passions. The conflict

---

8Note how the passage cited in quotation 16, chapter III on page 66 refers to artistic gifts as divinely given.
is not between the rational and irrational, but within the irrational itself. God and evil have passionate foundations. For the good man the conflict goes on continually since he is never free in this lifetime of his lesser nature. But though he is not free, that is to say, rid of it, he need not thereby be in bondage to it.

MOTIVATION AND ACTION

Luther's conception of man, departing from the traditional view laid down by Aristotle, related to the Christian faith by Aquinas and adulterated by succeeding generations of Thomists and Ockhamites, required also a new approach to human action. According to the traditional approach man's character is formed under environmental influences by habituation. His primary ethical task is to develop good habits, by judicious use of reason (or by following the example of good guides), coupled with the gracious intervention of God in the formation of the spiritual virtues revealed and commanded by God. Virtue emerges by the doing of the good.

For Luther, however, good habits--or good works--are not enough. One can reduce his outer life of action to a regulum. His inner life remains fluid and under tension. The fact that there are two moving forces independent of human control which intrude upon man's consciousness, stimulating him to action, one good and the other evil, requires that he give attention, not only
to what he does—for his actions reinforce and shape the general pattern of his life and modify his external relationships—but also to determine what moves him.

Since men are of two sorts, those whose motivation is satanic in origin and those who are moved by the divine, each sort has a different kind of ethical problem. The former are separated from the ontological source of their existence and are unable to achieve satisfaction with their lives because they lack the proper end. The latter are related to their proper end and motivated by Him, but they are also subject to alien motivations. The latter need to sort out and to distinguish the divine from the demonic sources of motion in order not to act from demonic motivation. The ways that such sorting can occur can simply be exhibited by the following logical models.

The investigation of the character of a given piece of inner experience, an impulse to act—together with its motivational source—follows the hypothetico-deductive method, the logical form of which is the hypothetical syllogism. The major premise contains the rationale of the investigation. The minor premise exhibits what is established by investigation. The conclusion, then, reveals what is entailed by that knowledge in the light of the rationale. There are four possible figures of the hypothetical syllogism. We shall examine each in turn in the context of the problem at issue to determine what can and cannot be learned about a given act and its motivation.
Take as true the following propositions: "If a motivation is not divine it is demonic and vice-versa." and "If an action is divinely motivated it is not contrary to the law of God." The former principle functions for the purpose of our model somewhat like the principle of contradiction. We shall examine the four figures of the hypothetical syllogism in terms of divine motivation. By application of the former principle above we could, simply, make the same determinations about demonic motivation.

The second principle will serve as the major premise for each hypothetical syllogism. For simplicity's sake we shall symbolize it as: If M then not A, letting M=divine motivation and A=action contrary to the law of God.

**Self-analysis**

**Figure I** If M then not A.

\[
\begin{align*}
M & \\
\therefore & \text{not } A.
\end{align*}
\]

The minor premise indicates one sort of investigation which one might undertake, to determine whether in a given piece of inner experience the impulse to act comes from God. If one can establish it, the conclusion follows from it and the major premise that the act is not contrary to the law of God. Since the problem of the examination is to determine what the motivation for the intended action is, the impulse to act must be traced to its source. If the source is God, then the action will not be contrary to the will of God and it can properly be done. It is no easy task.
One cannot simply take an objective stance toward oneself in order coolly and analytically to dissect one's psyche. The movement to self-analysis is itself motivated. One has an attitude toward oneself, be it love or hate, which cannot but color the undertaking. Under the influence of personal emotion one is seldom a good judge of oneself.

Human beings naturally are loathe to confront themselves. Ever since the first parents sought to hide themselves when they had done wrong, it has been easier to dissemble than to confront and exhibit oneself, even to oneself, whatever the cause, shame, fear, uncertainty, in the cold light of reality.

Psychology in the last fifty years has made us sensitive to unconscious motivation. The very word "unconscious" suggests the unknowability of certain levels of motivation. Hence, even when we are being quite honest with ourselves we may not always know the real source of our actions. Sometimes we have ulterior motives. Frequently we act on several levels of meaning which need to be sorted out and ranked.

Because urges which lead to action are sufficiently powerful of themselves to result in action, it is easier to rationalize, i.e., create a self-satisfying rationale for the impulses, than to attempt to analyze its source prior to acting on it. Unless our impulses are personally revolting we tend to take them on faith and act on them. And, having acted on them, it is seldom difficult for us to convince ourselves that what we have done is
right, simply because we want to believe in our own good intentions. Or perhaps the strength of the urge itself persuades us of the rightness of the act. We feel so strongly about what we did that we could not be wrong.

But let us suppose that these subjective problems are overcome. Let us suppose that by careful reflection, introspection and examination one has gotten back to the foundations on which one's life rests, to what Luther calls one's "god". The crucial question now becomes "Is my god God?" Is it God that I love beyond all else? Is He my primary source of motivation? This is the ultimate Kierkegaardian question. Kierkegaard supposes that at this point one can be guided only by the purity and the singlemindedness of the emotion. If the heart is pure, i.e., is honestly willing in all sincerity, then the action which ensues is also pure and proper. Luther's position argues that

\[9\]

A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress. So that to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him from the whole heart. As I have often said, the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. ... That now, I say, upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god. Luther's Large Catechism, Triglot Concordia, The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, ed. F. Bente, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921, pp. 580-581. Again, "... to have a god is to have something in which the heart entirely trusts." Ibid., pp. 582-583.

\[10\]

Cf. Kierkegaard's Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing. It is also a key question in contemporary religious situation ethics.
honesty is not enough. Since there are two possible sources of movement one can in all honesty serve Satan as well as God. It makes a difference from which source the motivation comes.

Purity of motivation can be understood in two senses. In the one sense, Kierkegaard's, the purity is a characteristic of the relationship of the individual to the source of his motivation. He relates faithfully to the source of his motivation, be it what it may. In the other sense, Luther's, purity refers to the source of the motivation, is it God or Satan? No amount of faithful drinking from a polluted stream can make it pure. Hence, the steadfastness and dedication of the individual to his source does not make unnecessary an examination of the source.

How does one get at the source of one's motivation? Ultimately it becomes a process of negative dialectic, the systematic exclusion of sources which are not primary. One weighs the relative values of those things to which one gives oneself. That which is the object of primary trust, for the sake of which one is willing to give up all else, and on which one ultimately depends, is one's source. If it is anything or anyone but God it is satanic. How can one tell if one's god is God? By comparing it with God's expression of Himself as gospel. 11

11 See pages 77 and 78.
Comparison of Acts

Figure II

If M then not A.
A
therefore: not M.

The second figure of the hypothetical syllogism indicates that a second kind of investigation can be undertaken. The intended act can be examined and compared with the will of God to determine whether it is or is not contrary to that will. For if the act is contrary to the will of God, the motivation is not divine. If it is not divine, it is demonic and the act ought not be performed.

The will of God is expressed by His law. In his interpretation of the ten commandments Luther claimed that the first commandment contains implicitly within it all the commandments, for if one is loving God with his whole person the expression of that love fulfills the other nine. Hence, in his explanation of each of the commandments after the first he follows the following pattern: "We ought to be fearing and loving God so that we are not doing ..........., but rather are doing ............ ." Love for God entails love for one's fellowman. The latter is motivated by the former, or, as St. John said, one cannot claim to be loving God and at the same time be hating his brother. I John 3, 4:20.

12 See pages 75, 76 and 77.
13 Luther's Large Catechism, op. cit., pp. 581-677. For the formula see Luther's Small Catechism, op. cit., pp. 539-543.
Certain sorts of actions, then, naturally follow if one is moved by God. Certain other sorts of action are inconsistent with love for God. If one is motivated by God the former will occur spontaneously and the latter will not occur.

Since, however, one is not always motivated by God, there is a diagnostic function for the law of God, to exhibit which sorts of actions are inconsistent with the will of God, since they follow on demonic motivation and cannot properly be done. 14

Social Limitations

Figure III

If M then not A.
Not M.
therefore, A or not A. 15

The third figure exhibits the fact that a non-divine, i.e., demonic source of movement can consistently motivate to actions which qua acts, are the same as acts consistent with the law of God (e.g., one can be moved not to kill someone both by God and Satan.) or to actions which are opposed (one can be motivated by

14 Certain sorts of actions which are neither commanded nor forbidden by God are not contrary to the will of God. Because there are such actions and because they would appear to be prohibited if the consequent of the major premise above were stated in positive terms, it has been stated in the negative.

15 Figures III and IV are derived from the illicit figures of the hypothetical syllogism. The form of the syllogism is legitimate since the conclusion is tautological exhibiting in an alternation all possible conclusions.
Satan to steal). Because of this relationship between demonic motivation and action it is possible for pagans to lead outwardly good lives and for supposed people of God to be hypocrites.  

What of the motivation of persons other than oneself? According to Luther, none of us is privy to another's thoughts and feelings. The problems attendant upon self-analysis are all present in the situation. In addition, since experiences are private, the data on the basis of which an observer of another arrives at an estimate of the other's motivation differ from those on the basis of which one arrives at one's own motivation. In the former case one is guided by the other's behavior, including reports of his experience (which are unverifiable). In the latter case, one remembers his own experience to the best of his ability. He cannot both have an experience and be a spectator to it at the same time. He can get at it in a spectator sort of fashion only by memory. And even there, he is not spectator to himself having an experience in time past. He "relives" the experience.

Because of this dual direction of the demonic impulse, in social ethics a distinction has to be made between the worth of the action and the worth of the actor, and credit must be given—even as God does—to the goodness of the act apart from the character of the actor, even though the actor was not or is not motivated by God. This is the area of ethics to which Luther refers as civic righteousness.

He says, for instance, that the Spirit of God keeps the saints hidden so the wicked cannot see the glory of God. WA XVIII, p. 651.
There are some situations where it is necessary for one to attempt to assess the motivations of another: the clergyman hearing confession, perhaps the psychiatrist, the judge or the parent. Each of us has the tendency to want to pass judgment not only on the actions, but on the motives of others. What can one do? If one attempts to remain objective and impartial, keeping oneself uninvolved with the other, viewing the other as though one were constructing the other's conscious experience to view it as a spectator, one fails to achieve empathy. On the other hand, if one enters subjectively into a common effort at rapport to achieve maximum communication, one loses objectivity. One's own feelings and actions intrude upon the experience to color it. It is similar to attempting to study some form of wild life by taking up residence in the midst of it. One's presence pollutes the data.

Luther offers a rule of thumb solution to the problem of evaluating others. Wherever possible don't evaluate the motives of others and where it is necessary to evaluate, put the best construction on what people do.  

\[ An interesting exhibition of Luther's approach is found in his discussion of sainthood in the De Servo Arbitrio. "I call them [those whom the church has identified as saints] saints and so regard them; I call them Church and so judge them—but by the rule of charity not by the rule of faith. By which I mean that charity which always thinks the best of everyone and is not suspicious, but believes and assumes all good of its neighbor—calls every baptized person a saint. There is no danger involved if she is wrong; it is the way of charity to be deceived for she is open to all the uses and abuses of every man as being \]
Hypocrisy

Figure IV

If $M$ then not $A$.
Not $A$.
therefore, $M$ or not $M$.

The fourth and final figure exhibits the fact that the source of a motivation cannot be determined from the character of the act if the act itself is not contrary to the law of God. One cannot conclude that because the acts to which one is impelled are not contrary to the law of God, therefore, the impulses come from God; they might just as well have a demonic source. In a peaceful, contented society during conventional times most impulses tend toward actions consistent with those in agreement with the law of God. Because of the difficulty of self-examination (figure I) it is easy to content oneself with conventional conformity to the form of God's law, ignoring the conclusion of the fourth figure, that the motivation for such action can just as easily be demonic as divine. Hence, one can quite easily gradually slip from active involvement with God to quiet hypocrisy.

In summary, then, two fruitful avenues of self-examination obtain, the first involving comparison of one's god with the handmaid of all, good and bad, believing and unbelieving, true and false. Faith, however, calls none a saint but him who is proclaimed such by divine sentence; for the way of faith is not to be deceived. Therefore, though we should look on each other as saints as a matter of charity, none should be declared a saint as a matter of faith, as if it were an article of faith that so and so is a saint." Ibid., pp. 651-652. Bracketed material mine.
gospel revelation of God; the second involving the testing of our actions by the law revelation of God. The former examination is positive and, if successful, can result in proper activity. The latter is negative and ought to result in resistance to the impulse. If the source of movement is demonic, the resultant actions themselves may be good or evil qua action. Finally, the goodness of the source of motivation cannot be determined from the goodness of the act. If one limits his consideration of good and evil to actions he cannot separate divine from demonic activity.

In conclusion, while on the ontological level the divine/human relationship is impersonal as God relates Himself indirectly to men through His ontological operation of the universe and moves them as part of His overall creative plan, on the other two levels--and at the same time--there is a personal relationship. For God approaches men individually from within on the manichaean level and confronts them with Himself that He might move them on the existential level to activity. Hence, there occurs on different levels at the same time a transcendent relationship and an immanent association; an outer encounter and an inner rapport; a duality of difference and a community of operation.

If good is whatever happens when God moves, a great deal of what passes our notice in everyday life, the common ordinary tasks of workaday living, are ethically valuable. Unlike many ethics, Luther's is not an ethics of crisis, involving agonizing
deliberations over crucial decisions. But then, life is not like that for the most of us anyway. As Kierkegaard once pointed out, the "knight of faith" looks like an ordinary tax collector.\textsuperscript{19} This is not to say that men of God are never called upon to make difficult decisions. Some have been rulers. Some have been martyrs. But rulers and martyrs have seldom constituted a majority of the population of the world. To construe Christian ethics in crisis terms, then, is to overdramatize and to generalize the experiences of a few exciting historical personages as typical of the Christian calling and to mislocate the ethical arena of the human heart in the external world of human affairs. The latter arena is always more sensational. In the long light of eternity, though, it may well be considerably less significant.

\textsuperscript{19}In \textit{Fear and Trembling}
Roughly speaking, an action has four aspects which more or less clearly can be distinguished: the end in view, i.e., the object of the action, the motivation, the act itself and the emotion or condition of mind which accompanies the act or ensues upon its completion. A typical ethical approach has developed centering around each of these parts and basing itself upon it as primary.

Teleological ethical approaches are based upon the consideration of ends or objects of action. The basic question teleologists attempt to answer is: what is worth achieving by human action? The question may get phrased in different sorts of ways, e.g., What is man's proper end? or What is good in itself? or What things or thing have or has intrinsic value? The successful answering of the first question gives rise to a natural second question: How can that which is worth achieving be achieved? Whereas the former question concerned itself with the end of existence, the latter concerns itself with means to that end: what sort or sorts of behavior will bring about the worthwhile state of affairs?¹

¹I have in mind as examples of teleological ethics, Aristotle's Nicomachaen Ethics and G. E. Moore's Principia Ethica. I cite these examples with great hesitancy since no instance can be equated with a type of approach.
While teleological ethical systems may vary in their content, depending on what is taken to be good or valuable, they share a common agreement that ethics concerns itself properly with determining the sort of life necessary to bring into being and to preserve that which is most worthwhile. The sorts of lives recommended by the differing systems depend upon the ends espoused; for as soon as the ends are determined, the determination of what sort of life is right follows with little difficulty: that life which will realize those ends. Different ends require different kinds of lives. Therefore, ends determine actions and ethics properly begins its consideration with ends men entertain as worthwhile.

The deontological ethical approach by way of contrast, bases its considerations on actions themselves irrespective of ends. The basic concept is "right" rather than "good". Certain sorts of actions are right whereas others are wrong or ethically indifferent. The ethical life is defined as living rightly. The task of the ethicist according to this approach is to arrive at maxims of action which in some way or other can be authenticated as right, to formulate law-like propositions holding for all of mankind, organized into a canon of ethical prescription. The goal of the ethicist is to arrive at principles for formulating or testing the rightness of actions and to develop practical procedures for determining the appropriate performance of possible permissible acts which ought to be performed in specific
situations. There is only one basic ethical question: What ought I do?²

A third kind of approach focuses on the concomitant of action, the emotion which is attendant upon it or, more broadly, the condition of mind which ensues upon the action, to which the action is intended to give rise. While there are certainly other alternatives, in the history of philosophy two varieties of this kind of ethic have developed, hedonism, both egoistic and altruistic, and utilitarianism, or the greatest happiness principle.³ This third kind of approach begins with the rather obvious point that people have likes and dislikes. The function of ethics then is to achieve a state of affairs which the actor himself, or as many people as possible, will like. A simple ethical system of this sort in one way or another canvasses the likes and dislikes of mankind (or however large a segment of mankind the ethicist considers significant) and proposes a system whereby likes and dislikes can be quantified. This achieved, the ethical agent needs simply to determine what action will maximize the likeable and minimize the dislikeable results of his behavior and to

²I have Kant particularly in mind as an example of deontology. Cf. his Critique of Practical Reason
³Epicurus is the standard of hedonism. The utilitarians of the last century were notably, Bentham and the Mills, James and John Stuart. Cf. particularly the latter's Utilitarianism.
perform that act.

More sophisticated ethicists, recognizing the fact that people disagree in their likes and dislikes, attempt to develop principles for the ranking of likeables and dislikeables, since some things liked are more worth liking than others. Such an ethicist undertakes a double task: not simply to provide a mathematical formula whereby the most appropriate actions can be calculated, but also to convince his clientele that certain things are more worth liking than others, or that the things which certain persons like are worth more than those liked by others.

Finally, there is a fourth approach to ethics, the motivational approach, which Luther espoused. It focuses upon what moves the actor to do what he does. The rightness or wrongness of the actor's action is determined by the motive which gives rise to the act. The intent of the ethic is to produce actions arising from pure motives. Rather than asking what ought to be done or achieved, the motivational ethicist attempts to develop a procedure for self-examination and a method for evaluating motives.  

4 Abelard comes first to mind as a voluntarist. See his *Scito te Ipsum*; then also Kierkegaard, various writings, but particularly *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*. The influence of existentialism has been widespread and has produced a whole host of voluntarists, notably in psychology, philosophy and theology. Note, for instance, Rollo May, Freud and the freudian school by way of Nietzsche's philosophy, Sartre, Jaspers and Marcel, Barth and Tillich, to mention just a few.
Each of these four approaches to ethics, thus, develop its own peculiar pattern and structure. Each has its separate vision of a perfect ethical world. The telic vision contemplates a world of goodness and moderation; the deontic seer visualizes a world order brought into being by law-abiding people living peaceably with one another in mutual respect for law and authority; the hedonic view projects a host of happy untroubled people; while the voluntarist anticipates a straightforward and honest world where men communicate with one another in purity of heart without deception or deceit.

Certainly it would be interesting and profitable to pursue further and in greater detail the contrasts between these general approaches to ethics, but the concern of this book is to exhibit the unique type of motivational ethics which Luther developed.

As soon as he began with the concept of Liberum arbitrium as an attribute peculiar to God the foundations for Luther's ethics began to be laid. When he conceived of ultimate human reality as subjective forces shaping the human psyche and confronting it in inner experience, inevitably metaphysical questions led to theological and psychological questions. These questions, for a complete explanation of human behavior, led to an examination not only of the role of super-human formative agencies, but also of the human response to them, i.e., to the subject of ethics. Since the area of ethical experience for Luther is the inner life, that place where the human encounters
the divine and the demonic immediately, the ethics is motivational.

The problem which Luther poses in this chapter for the author is somewhat different, and considerably more difficult than that in previous chapters. For while in chapters two and three the problem of Luther the philosopher was to organize in systematic fashion the metaphysical position he espoused, a position worked out and expressed by Luther, but in random rather than organized form, here the problem is to develop the ethical direction entailed by Luther's metaphysical position, an ethical direction which he himself did not work out, although in his writings of an ethical character he assumed it.

In his works the philosophic materials available are the fragments of a thought-out metaphysic, the rudiments of a psychology, and a multitude of practical maxims with supporting arguments. The ethical rationale which fills the gap between the psychology and the maxims is missing, remaining to be explicitly deduced from the psychology and the metaphysics. Thus, when we talk of Luther's ethic in this chapter we refer and can refer only to that which needed to be rendered explicit to complete the philosophic structure of his thought and to give foundation and significance to his particular statements on ethical topics.

Lacking, then, an explicit Lutheran ethical system, we have attempted only the propaedeutic to it by using the three contrasting approaches to ethics as foils to exhibit how the
structure of Luther's ethics differs from them and the rationale which underlies that difference. In this fashion certain basic principles for a Lutheran ethic can be isolated. Each of these oppositions is epitomized by a concept central to Luther's thought, which gives direction and focus to his ethical position. Thus, at least a foundation is laid for the development of an explicit Lutheran ethic which, whatever its content, can remain true to the formal structure of Luther's thought.

THE ANTI-HEDONIC PRINCIPLE

Hedonic and associated approaches to ethics lack what in Luther's metaphysic has been identified as an ontological level of meaning. The foundation of meaning and value, understandably then, in hedonic ethics is manichaean, a dichotomy of opposed ethically significant inner experiences: pleasure and pain. These function as the ultimate values. The existential level of

---

5 In what follows I have attempted to reduce the rationale of each of the contrasting ethical approaches to a principle set into opposition to Luther's position. This sort of approach carries with it certain dangers. Inevitably it is simplistic, failing to come to grips with the various subtleties and sophistications which only the careful analysis of a particular fully developed ethical system can hope to achieve. And yet, often it is only when we see a structure from a distance, when the various particularities blend into a simple and unified whole, that we are able to see its basic dissimilarity to another structure which in many details it resembles. Since the concern of the chapter is to clarify the distinctive difference of Luther's ethical approach, this emphasis on basic difference in principle lends itself well to the undertaking.
conscious human activity is devoted to calculation, the weighing of probable pleasures and pains involved in alternative courses of action in the pursuit of the elusive elixir, happiness.

The Good and the Pleasant

Luther's ethical approach is incompatible with the hedonic primarily for material reasons. The hedonic approach ultimately reduces the good to the pleasant, but for Luther an identity of the good and the pleasant is achieved only by the free activity of God. Ideally a completely good life ought to be a completely pleasant life. Hence, for a hedonist to say that the good life is pleasant is either to utter a proposition which is true by definition (ostensibly true, perhaps) or to use language in some non-assertive fashion, for the linguistic utterance, though apparently synthetic, is for him actually a tautology.

For Luther, on the other hand, such a remark is a factual type statement about experience which may or may not be true, depending on what is meant by the term "pleasant". For instance, if the remark means that the good life is one in which one can take pleasure, or from which one can derive pleasure, then it is true. If it means that the good life invariably is accompanied by feelings of pleasure then, as a generalization it is false. The demonic interference with the ontological operation of the universe causes the association of good and pleasure on the existential level always to be contingent.
The Value of Pleasure and Pain

For Luther pleasure and pain arise from both divine and demonic sources. Since both demonic and divine influences give rise to the pleasures and pains we experience one cannot simply accept pain as evil and pleasure as good. Pleasure is completely unreliable as a moral criterion. One can take a fiendish or a saintly pleasure in certain events. The expected pleasure in a possible experience can delude us into doing wrong. The joy of naughtiness is often its most formidable source of attractiveness.

Pain, on the other hand, is a consistent guide, for pain is always evidence of something wrong. Insofar as pain is an indicator of something wrong in the situation, it is ethically good and practically valuable. But it does not follow from the fact that pain is good that it is good to be in pain. This is false conversion.

One can be pained under two conditions, either because there is something evil about the situation with which one, a good man, is involved, or because one himself is, at least for the moment, evilly motivated. A situation or a contemplated course of action cannot be identified as evil simply because one is pained by it; one can, however, with surety conclude that evil is involved in the situation when pain is experienced. Whether the evil be in the actor, the situation or the act--some or all of them--is not
discoverable from the feeling of pain.

Relation of the Inner and the Outer Life

Luther's ethic is also incompatible with an hedonic ethic because the hedonic ethic subordinates the outer life to the inner. A hedonist acts for the sake of the pleasure which attends and results from the action. The act is for the sake of the feelings which arise from it. In Luther's ethic the outer life is the expression of the inner life. Neither is for the sake of the other. Hence, Luther's ethic is outgoing rather than introverted.

Happiness

The conflict of Luther with the hedonic approach is epitomized by the role of happiness in their ethics. Whereas hedonism arrives at happiness as the goal of existence, Luther's ethic begins with happiness. Mankind began in the happiness of Eden. Conversion returns a man to that happy pristine psychic condition. Happiness, for Luther, is the pleasure of God's acquaintance, a psychic activity which originates temporally although it transcends the temporal in its duration.

If then, happiness is the original natural activity of man--and therefore good--and if by conversion, God returns that lost condition to a man, then, the hedonic problem of the man of God is not, as the hedonist views it, to achieve happiness, but rather, to avoid losing it. The good life is the retention of happiness, not the means of attaining it.
Happiness which begins as a gift of God is sustained and renewed through the cathartic action of self-examination by the law of God, repentance, and the practice of the sacraments. When the motivational impulses from God are, thus, freed from the demonic and strengthened, what then occurs as a natural course will by its very nature be good and pleasing both to God and to oneself. Hence, the anti-hedonic principle of Luther's ethic is: The function of the ethical life is to retain, not to attain happiness.

THE ANTI-TELIC PRINCIPLE

Teleological approaches to ethics tend not to develop a manichaean level of meaning since they need only an ontological level of value and an existential level of action. The ontological concern is expressed by the question: What is good in itself? or What is worth existing? The concern is satisfied by the development of a sumnum bonum or a constellation of goods. Once goods have been determined there remains only the practical problem of discovering what sorts of habits need to be engendered or what sort of way of life needs to be pursued in order to achieve and retain the good. No dialectical or limiting level is necessary in order to complete the system. Failure to achieve the good can be explained either in terms of ignorance or weakness of will.

Luther's approach to ethics is inconsistent with a teleological approach primarily for formal reasons, differing on the
source of the goodness of a life. Teleology assumes that a life's good is determined by its end or ends, in contrast to Luther who traces its good to life's beginnings, the motivations for its actions.

**Differing Psychologies**

The basis for this disagreement may lie in the differing psychologies of action assumed by the two approaches. A telic type of ethics works with a psychology which assumes that objects, thought or perceived, function as final causes for agents, moving them to action. Repetition of action produces habit. The peculiar shape or character a life has is determined by its habit patterns. Hence, it is the end or ends of action which finally determine the character of the life, whether good or not.

In Luther's psychology, on the other hand, an impulse to action rises to consciousness, clothed with meaning and achieving the possibility of overt expression by focusing upon some object, appropriate to the situation or not, as an urge to act. It may or may not find expression, depending on the self-control of the actor and the options available to him to expend his energies productively. Since the impulse may arise from a divine or a demonic source and focus upon the same end, it is not the end, but the source of the impulse which determines what is done. Since a life is the totality of what is done, the sources of motivation determine whether the life is good or not. It is not what a man has in mind that makes him what he is, but what comes
from his heart.

The Actor and His Good

In contrast to the criticism of hedonism for subordinating the outer life to the inner, Luther's criticism of a teleological approach would tend to be that it subordinates the inner life to the outer. It externalizes the good. The good becomes that at which a thing aims. If the thing aims at the good, the good must then be external to the thing and is aimed at by the ethical act. The agent, then, in his life comes no closer to the good, except perchance, than external conventional behavior. His actions conform to the good.

Because the telic approach to ethics inevitably tends to emphasize the primacy of the outer life, since it is action that achieves the good, the approach tends inevitably to be social in character. Hence, it tends to assume that man is by nature a social animal and to develop its approach on the basis of that postulate. Problems of the inner life are simply disturbances which in one fashion or another can be overcome or avoided by good habits.

In contrast, Luther's approach to ethics emphasizes the importance of the inner life in giving shape and character to the outer life. What makes an act truly ethical is the commitment of the agent to his act. Habitual behavior is at best conventionally good. The spontaneity, the vitality, the immediacy and the personal devotion to what one does gives actions their particular
character and value. The ethical agent does not gather values from the world about him or rearrange them but rather contributes value to the world.

There is a sort of aesthetic aura about the ethical for Luther. To be ethical is to be creative, to focus one's spiritual energies upon a moment of time to infuse it with goodness. Actions are good because God is acting through men to perform them. A teleological approach inevitably must construe the ethical effort as bringing good into being, in fact where before it existed only in idea (the classical shift from the ideal to the real with all its attendant problems). For Luther good is there to begin with, God, who impels the individual to action. Thus, there is no subordination of the inner to the outer but a co-ordination of the two as good impulses give rise to good actions.

Eternal Life

The end of the man of God is eternal life. For Luther it exists from the beginning of the ethical life. St. John, using this expression "eternal life" as a technical expression, θεός αἰωνίων, defines it as "knowing Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent," an activity which under present conditions is mediated by the Word of God in the expectation of a

---

6 John 17:3.
future immediate relationship of knowing and being known. Hence, eternal life has both a present and a future significance for the ethical life and constitutes the final form this present life will take.

Since, then, the ethical life begins as an eternal life aimed at a greater fulness of that life, the primary concern of the man of God is two-fold, first, not to lose the life, now that he has it, and secondly, to enrich it, that is, to draw closer to the final goal, the perfect knowledge of God. How does one attain a more intimate knowing of God?

God is a person. Hence, a rather simple answer to the question is that one gets to know God better in the same way that one gets to know any person. There are two problems with getting to know God better which do not arise with getting to know people better. We cannot achieve a more intimate knowledge of God by means of His body since He lacks a body. We do, however, possess the gospel, the record of His incarnation, and His physical sacramental presence and by means of these can more intimately know Him.

Secondly, we are presently limited to a mediated knowledge of Him. At the same time our knowledge of other persons is limited by their capacity to reveal themselves, and by ours to be sensitive to their revelations. Such personal revelations, however, are always temporally direct or reasonably direct, whereas the revelation of Himself to us by God is always mediated
historically by His Word, our primary source of Divine knowledge. Even when we have reason to believe that we have evidence of God expressing Himself immediately to us (e.g., when deciding whether a given psychic impulse is of divine origin) such evidence is tested for consistency against the historical expression of God as gospel. Otherwise we open ourselves to delusion by the demonic.

Given then, the primary source of the knowledge of God, we gain further intimacy with God by speaking to Him and by sensitivity to Him in the ideas and impulses which rise to our consciousness from Him; secondly, we gain in intimacy with God through sensitivity to His activity in the lives of others through whom He speaks and acts. Finally, we observe the traces of His activity in the ongoing economy of nature and the course of world history. Each of these forms of evidence, however, is limited by the fact that our knowing of God is mediated by His effects. We confront Him indirectly.

The danger of losing eternal life is to a degree diminished by increasing its intimacy. The qualification is added for this reason. Even though intimacy with God may increase, demonic

7 I have previously identified these sources of knowledge about God as "the action of God as gospel" in chapter IV, pp. 77 and 78.

8 In spite of centuries of Luther research comprising a great volume of material, these vital areas remain relatively unexplored: the mystical side of Luther's thought, Luther's natural theology, Luther's psychology and sociology.
impulses neither cease nor lose their strength so long as the present conditions of existence continue. In fact, such impulses may very well gain in strength. Consequently, a life of existence with God is always accompanied by temptation. The manichaean level of existence does not cease to be a factor. Consequently, the need for renewal of spirituality remains constant, lest life lapse back into control by the demonic.

There seems to be some relationship between the strength of the divine and the demonic. Perhaps because it takes a great deal of strength on the part of God to overcome a powerfully demonic drive in an individual, when conversion occurs and the individual is changed from obedience to the demonic to the divine, a manifest evildoer sometimes becomes a saint. Or perhaps because it takes a very talented person to be a master criminal, when those same talents are devoted to better things, the same outstanding behavior, but of a better sort, occurs.

Again, if the divine impulses determining the volitions of a person increase in strength, the demonic must also increase to continue to be a temptation. Consequently, when the temptation succeeds it may result upon occasion in actions which are gross and violent, exhibiting the nature and intensity of the impulses which had previously been resisted.

The dual side of the ethical life of the sinner/saint exhibits itself, a life both eternal in its character and demonic in the temptations which beset it. To construe eternal life in a
telic fashion is to see life as action for the sake of an eternal life which awaits the successful completion of the proper course of actions. The end awaits the termination of the means and is divorced temporally from its beginning. To see it as Luther sees it is rather to view eternal life as beginning in this life and continuing developmentally in a process of fulfillment, expressing itself by actions peculiar to that kind of life, actions, that is, which are not the means to it, but its products and reinforcements. If that life does not begin in this present life it will not begin in any life to come, for actions do not cause it to be; rather, the actions occur in the fashion and frequency that they do because the life already is. Hence, the anti-telic principle of Luther is: The goodness of life follows from its inner motivation rather than from the end at which it aims.

THE ANTI-DEONTIC PRINCIPLE

The deontic approach to ethics appears to contain all three levels of meaning found in Luther's philosophy. It contains an ontological level which may be developed in a metaphysical form e.g., a notion of a universe operating according to natural principles of justice, as the expression of a social ideal e.g., Kant's kingdom of ends, or perhaps, the idea of a theodicy, as in Calvin's divine kingdom or that of the latter day Mormons. The element common to each of the views is the attempt to reduce the ethical demands of life to a set or canon of prescriptions or a
body of duties which have in some sense or another universal validity. Since the approach aims at universality, the rules or laws which are prescribed of necessity must rest on some sort of absolute or ultimate principle or be testable by some logical principle or device, e.g., the principle of self-consistency, of contradiction, etc.

The ontological level tends not to be the source of value, so much as the context in which the ethical life occurs and which makes it or its product possible. Hence, it functions more to provide the setting, the precondition of ethical behavior rather than the conditions or prescriptions. Because of this characteristic of the deontological ontological level, it is possible to talk in terms of what would be "right" for any possible world—a kind of remark which would tend to make little or no sense to a hedonist or teleologist. Some systems exhibit the ontology as a desirable outcome, a wished for dream which makes the devotion to duty worth all the trouble.\(^9\) This is a hedonic slip which mars the perfection of the approach.

In contrast to the teleological approach, the deontic approach also requires a manichaean level. Since the aim of the ethical law is universal rightness, its natural enemy is

---

\(^9\)One may properly ask, for instance, to what extent Kant's "kingdom of ends" and the "idea of perpetual peace" serve as unconscious substitutionary motivations for duty in Kant's ethics.
individuality, the moral exception. Converted to terms of human psychology, the deontic manichaean dialectic is between rationality, the principle of universality in mind, and inclination, the attachment to the particular. The existential level of ethical action, then, according to the deontic approach, occurs in the overcoming of inclination by respect for law. Duty triumphs over personal desire. Men hold themselves in restraint in obedience to the higher laws of reason.

Because the deontic approach apparently contains all three of Luther's levels of meanings, Lutheran theologians and ethical philosophers often, beginning with the Leibnizian-Wolffian-Kantian tradition, have attempted to structure the Lutheran ethical outlook according to a deontic approach. The result inevitably is legalism, a self-frustrating pseudo-religious ethic, for it is impossible to get a natural existential level of practical action.

Universality and Subjectivity

The deontic approach suffers from psychological difficulties, for the dialectic of the universal versus the personal is resolved by the suppression of the personal and its subsumption to the universal. The dialectic—in Kant, for instance, as Hegel pointed out—is not resolved into a unified existential level of

---

10 The prime example of this sort of approach is found in Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*.
action. Frustration occurs. One acts at the expense of the frustrations of one's natural inclinations. The ethical actor has to deny himself for the sake of duty. While this may appear ethically praiseworthy, it is psychically damaging.

Since action flows naturally from inclination—we follow our natural bents—the deontic life must, of necessity proceed from an unnatural devotion to duty. Artificial springs to action must be developed out of the frustration of the natural springs to action. There is no other possible source of motility. Hence, from a purely psychological standpoint, either no existential level of action can arise from the manichaean dialectic of inner experience or an unnatural drive arises out of the trauma of self-frustration.

Luther's ethical approach differs from the deontic, then, primarily on grounds of efficiency. The deontic approach does not get the ethical job done. It has no natural existential level. In the effort to reduce the ethical life of obedience to law, the deontic approach discounts and destroys the personal and the individual. The deontologist aims at a life of conformity to rational rules. He focuses on the act and, hence, ignores the actor; gains objectivity at the expense of subjectivity, the norm at the expense of the individual difference, the proper at the expense of the natural and the "ought" at the expense of the "is". Something gets frustrated or lost in the process.
The ethical man is depersonalized. He is not free to be a person so long as he is bound to a prescribed life. He can only be a kind of person, a stereotype. Thus, the deontic ethic is a form of servitude. The very language of this kind of ethics exhibits the fact. One has obligations, things to which he is tied. He ought i.e., owes, to do this or that. He has duties, i.e., there are necessary actions he must perform. Each of these betokens a limitation placed upon the individual's freedom to act. Since the deontic approach attempts to define ethical behavior as obedience to law, unique behavior is inimical to that sort of approach.

For Luther actions which are truly ethical flow from the inclinations of a man committed to the service of God. They are freely done, often without thinking. Acts flow spontaneously from a pure heart. Only when actions flow from divine motivation do they have ethical value. Otherwise they are hypocritical or forced.

Prescription Versus Diagnosis

For Luther law has an ethical function in personal ethics, but its function is diagnostic rather than prescriptive. The mistake of the deontic approach is to give law a positive function. As soon as life is prescribed it loses its spontaneity, its creativity, and its vitality. Only when the bondage of the will to law is removed are men capable of free ethical behavior.

Since duty and inclination are incompatible in the deontic
approach, there is an inevitable divorce between the inner and the outer life, between motivation and action. One can act rightly for ulterior motives and lead a life of hypocrisy. One can be a conformist with little or no commitment to what he does or professes. One can, burdened by a sensitive conscience, become immobilized by the tension between what he wants to do and what he feels he ought to do, perhaps breaking down ultimately under the unbearable strain of being put in opposition to himself. The natural flow of energy is from the ontological to the manichaean to the existential level. In the deontic approach, however, this is the direction of the flow of inclination and there is a counter-posed to it a movement from the existential--awareness of the rightness of the act--to the manichaean--devotion to duty rather than inclination. The counter-posed forces meet in the inner life and an irreconcilible conflict is the result.

**Love Versus Duty**

While a deontic approach, having rejected natural impulses to action as ethically unworthy, must create a new motivation for action, duty; in Luther's approach the problem with inclination is not that it is evil, but rather that some impulses are evil and others are not. Hence, if one acts from good impulses, good actions naturally result. No conflict of an individual with himself or any frustration of himself for the sake of principle need occur. Rather, he can freely express himself in a quite
natural and uninhibited fashion so long as his motivation is good.

Luther agrees with the deontic approach that the goodness or evil of a will is determined by its motivation but he disagrees with the approach when it proposes a respect for duty as the motivation, proposing instead, the love of God. His anti-deontic principle is: Love of God, not duty, is the motivation for the good life.

The expression "love of God" is deliberately ambiguous. What is meant by it is both "God loving" [the objective genitive sense of the expression, denoting ontological activity] and "loving God" [the subjective genitive sense, denoting existential activity]. Love is the spring to the ethical act. Whatever flows from it is good. It is natural in that it springs spontaneously into consciousness in the urge to act and moves through conscious deliberation to some form or forms of overt behavior. The direction of the motivation is to return back to God, but since God cannot be affected by action, the impulse is informed on behalf of God in particular ways toward individual persons or states of affairs.

Luther's dialectic does not consist in the conflict between the rational and the passionate, but between divine and demonic impulses. Whichever gains the ascendancy is freely accepted and

---

followed. The problem of generating a motive to act, a key problem in deontology, never arises. Rational capacities are ethically neutral, functioning prudentially for both criminal and saint. They can be used in ancillary fashion to work out the details for the successful achievement of a desired goal or in reflexive fashion to analyze or evaluate oneself. But they cannot stand in opposition to the passionate nature since they have no volitional powers to increase the tension of the situation.

**Subjectivity**

Whereas the deontic approach emphasizes universality and objectivity, the approach of Luther emphasizes individuality and subjectivity. Hence, the final concept which is of primary importance in Luther's ethical approach emphasizes the uniqueness of the ethical life. It is worked out alone by each individual. He is responsible for himself. No one can assume responsibility before God for him. Since the ethical life is worked out in the inner life, exhibiting its presence by outward action, it is of necessity private. Although one can reveal himself to a degree to others and solicit their comfort and advice, one is ultimately alone with himself and his God. Only he experiences his feelings and thinks his thoughts. For this reason Luther argued against judging one another as persons and as ethical beings. One cannot know with certainty another's motivations. One cannot know the ultimate commitment of another or whether his untoward act represents a yielding to temptation or not. Since, then, it is the
mark of charity to err on the side of the good, one must put the best construction on the actions of others.

Luther's ethical view is essentially reconciliatory. He sees the universe as originally ontological and existential. Because of the emergence of the manichaean level the opposing forces must be brought into harmony once again. The divine function which in the former ontologico-existential relationship was purely creative must also be reconstructive that the separation between the ontological and the existential is bridged. That gap can be closed if a coincidence of the existential life with the ontological activity of God is achieved by the neutralization of the motivating influence of the demonic in the inner life. The reconciliation occurs only where God and men become attached to one another by bonds of affection and understanding. Hence, the prerequisite for the ethical life is to know God, to love Him, and to take pleasure in that activity. A hedonic approach leads to idolatry for it deifies a feeling. A telic approach lacks the vitality of the relationship with God. A deontic approach inevitably turns man against himself. Only an ethelic approach is left. Luther argues that this approach can resolve the problem of human existence, but only if that which is desired is the source of the desiring, if the final cause of human existence is also its first cause. God is both the Alpha and the Omega of existence. If activity is to be ethical, it must find its origin in God, feel His promptings in the inner
life and naturally make its unique way through the particularities of the outer life back to God from Whom it came.
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF REFERENCES CITED IN THIS BOOK


The dissertation submitted by The Reverend William Henry Lehmann, Jr. has been read and approved by members of the Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

June 5, 1968
Date

Francis J. Catania
Signature of Adviser