

A Study of the Significance of Trust in Ethics

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I. Trust as an Ethical Foundation in Everyday Life and Some Implicit Awareness of its Significance in Theological Ethics

1. Trust as the Fundamental Basis of Human Relations in Everyday Life

Dante in *The Divine Comedy* placed traitors at the bottom of hell. In the Comedy traitors to their kindred, country, guests, and lords were thrown into the lowest layer of Hell.^① Dante thus treated the sin of treason most seriously among various sins. Dante was doubtlessly aware of the significance of "trust" when he thus regarded treason as the gravest sin. This is not the place, however, to examine the reason why Dante regarded trust as the most significant. My intention in this paper is to demonstrate the significance of "trust" in human relation and ethics.

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① Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. I, trans. by Dorothy L. Sayers (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1955), pp. 264~91.

First of all, let us examine the significance of trust in everyday life. It seems that the fundamental ground or basis which makes it possible to hold all human relations together is trust. It seems doubtful that human relations in general can be maintained without the presupposition of trust. Trust underlies the human relations of our everyday life even before we reflect and realize it. To state the matter precisely, trust is the fundamental basis of human relation in everyday life. This may be illustrated well by treating a concrete case out of our everyday life. For instance, a student cannot learn from a teacher apart from trust. For it is quite clear that a student who does not trust his teacher cannot learn anything from him. We can make a number of good cases for trust as the fundamental basis of human relation. Passengers cannot take a bus without trusting the bus driver. Suppose he were not skillful enough to drive the bus safely. Or suppose he were an insane man who might attempt suicide while driving, by crashing against other cars. Furthermore, when one trusts the driver he at the same time trusts the authorities who issue the licence of the driver. These facts evidently show that our ordinary lives are grounded on some degree of trust.

One may contend that a breach of trust happens too frequently every day and everywhere around us. Without doubt we have to admit this. However, it should be realized that every breach of trust can only occur in an atmosphere of trust. In other words, a breach of trust does not occur where there is no trust to begin with. This may be illustrated well by treating the relationship between the truth and a lie. A cannot tell a lie to B when the latter does not trust the former. To put the matter in the reversed way, A can tell a lie only when B trusts A. Suppose I told a friend of mine that I was going to tell a lie to him, then he would never be deceived by me because he knows already that I am going to tell a lie to him. This situation reveals a significant relation between the truth and a lie. That is to say, a lie does not have its own existence; and it can exist only by disguising itself as the truth. This relation between the truth and a lie is explicated most clearly by Friedrich Gogarten. In his *Politische Ethik* Gogarten asserts that a lie is a provisional truth which disguises itself as the truth. He writes:

If one is accused of having stolen and he asserts he has not stolen, then naturally both cannot be true. Either the accuser or the assertion of the accused is innocent. If the accused denies unreasonably the deed, then he hides the truth by a lie. But he gives out this lie as the truth. That is to say, he lets another truth, a provisional truth take the place of the truth. A lie is always a provisional truth; it claims to be the truth.²

²Friedrich Gogarten, *Politische Ethik* (Jena: Eugen Diedrich verlag, 1932), p. 41.

Then he continues to say that a lie presupposes the truth.

A lie is always possible only in struggle with the truth. Where there is no truth, a lie also cannot exist . . . Therefore, the happening of the truth is the presupposition for the happening of a lie.^③

Thus telling a lie presupposes the happening of the truth since “a lie has not its own existence at all.”^④

The relation between the truth and a lie applies to the relation between trust and a breach of trust or more specifically telling a lie. In other words, a breach of trust presupposes trust. To state the matter in another way, there remains no possibility of telling a lie when trust is totally destroyed. This is what Kant suggests in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* when he argues about the relation between belief and telling a lie. Kant’s intention in this argument is to prove that only an action performed from duty can be regarded as essentially good.

In this arguments, however, he indirectly refers to the relation between belief or trust and telling a lie. He states:

And could I say to myself that everyone may make a false promise when he is in a difficulty from which he otherwise cannot escape? I immediately see that I could will the lie but not a universal law to lie. For with such a law there would be no promise at all, in as much as it would be futile to make a pretence of my intention in regard to future actions to those who would not believe this pretence . . .^⑤

The words above apparently imply that a lie presupposes belief, that is, trust. To cite Gogarten’s words again, “the happening of truth is the presupposition of the happening of a lie.” Accordingly we can conclude that human relations in general are possible on the grounds of trust, and even a breach of trust presupposes trust.

In Western ethics little attention has been given to the significance of trust. The significance of trust was left untouched even when there was some vague awareness of it. For instance, it seems that Kant was unconsciously aware of the significance of trust as the fundamental basis of society in his treatise “On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives.” The treatise was written as kind of reply to Benjamin Constant who

^③ *Ibid.*

^④ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

^⑤ Immanuel Kant, *Foundatnios of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Lewis White Beck (New York: Bobbs-Merril Co., 1959), p. 19.

was identified with a French philosopher. Constant accepts a duty to tell the truth, but he argues a limitation upon this duty. Constant writes:

The moral principle, "It is a duty to tell the truth," would make any society impossible if it were taken singly and unconditionally. We have proof of this in the very direct consequences which a German philosopher has drawn from this principle. This philosopher goes so far as to assert that it would be a crime to lie to a murderer who asked whether our friend who is pursued by him had taken refuge in our house.^⑥

Kant sets out to prove the falsity of this contention by asserting that it is an unconditional duty which holds in all circumstances to tell the truth.^⑦ The point which Kant makes is that if the duty to tell the truth cannot be regarded as an unconditional one, all declarations lose their credence, all contracts become insecure; and then there is not a basis for society, for society depends upon the inviolability of contracts.^⑧ By asserting so, Kant does not seem to realize that these contracts themselves presuppose trust. Kant adopts the term "truthfulness" to express the basis of the unconditional duty to tell the truth in all circumstances. But it should be noted that "truthfulness" is in its essence related to "trust" as Wilhelm Herrmann in his *Ethik* points out. With regard to the relation between truthfulness and trust, we shall discuss this in greater detail later on. The term "credence" which Kant uses in the treatise seems to suggest that he is vaguely aware of the significance of trust. In any case he does not devote any serious attention to trust in his ethics. It seems to me that Kant could have dealt better with the problem of telling the truth if he had taken trust into serious consideration. With regard to the impact of trust upon the problem of telling the truth, we shall discuss it in greater detail later on when we attempt a critical examination of relativistic approach in current theological ethics with reference to trust.

There is another case for the implicit awareness of the significance of trust. In his essay "Obedience and Fidelity" Gabriel Marcel strongly emphasizes the importance of "fidelity" by asserting that "the immense work of moral reconstruction which is necessary" should be based on "fidelity."^⑨ He insists that "the only true fidelity is fidelity to myself."^⑩ For Marcel, true fidelity is not a static relationship, a mere external conformity with contracts or set agreements but alive or creative fidelity which is open to new shapes and forms of

^⑥ Immanuel Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives," *On Being Responsible*, ed. by James M. Gustafson and James T. Laney (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 120.

^⑦ *Ibid.*, pp. 123~4.

^⑧ Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 127.

^⑨ Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*, trans. by Emma Graufurd (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 125.

^⑩ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

life, to new possibilities for human fulfillment.^① According to Marcel, faithfulness to others also is grounded in faithfulness or fidelity to oneself. Marcel does not employ the term “trust” or “trustworthiness.” But “faithfulness” or “fidelity” implicitly implies dependability, reliability, or trustworthiness.^② For persons faithful to oneself and others are those who can be trusted. “They are worthy of trust.”^③ However, Marcel’s argument in this treatise centers on fidelity and faithfulness while leaving trust untouched.

Unlike Western ethics the significance of trust is quite explicitly recognized in Confucian ethics. These words from *The Analects of Confucius* evidently show that Confucian ethics are fully aware of the importance of trust:

Tzu-kung asked about statecraft. The Master said, sufficient food, sufficient weapons, and the trust of the common people. Tzu-kung said, Suppose you had no choice but to dispense with one of these three, which would you forgo? The Master said, Weapons. Tzu-kung said, Suppose you were forced to dispense with one of the two that were left, which would you forgo? The Master said, Food. For all have died since immemorial times, but a state cannot stand without the trust of a people to its rulers.^④

Thus Confucius regards trust as the fundamental principle of statecraft. Elsewhere Confucius compared trust to the yoke-bar of a wagon or the collar-bar of a carriage.

The Master said, I do not see what use a man can be put to, whose word cannot be trusted. How can a wagon be made to go if it has no yoke-bar or a carriage, if it has no collar-bar.^⑤

The significance of trust is more explicitly expressed in one of the five cardinal moral codes of Confucian ethics than anywhere else. The code states: “There must be trust among friends.” To state the code in terms of its implication, “Friends must trust each other.” It is generally accepted among Confucian scholars that here “friends” implies not merely the relationship among friends but also human relation in general. Thus one can conclude that in Confucian ethics trust is regarded as the principle of human relation in general.

^① Gustafson and Laney, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

^② *Ibid.*

^③ *Ibid.*

^④ Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. by Arthur Waley (New York: Random House, 1938), p. 164. (*The Analects*, Book XII, 7). I changed some parts of Waley’s translation.

^⑤ *Ibid.*, p. 93 (*The Analects*, Book 11, 22).

2. Some Implicit Awareness of the Significance of Trust in Theological Ethics

Theological ethics also is inclined to show little concern for trust. It seems that theological ethics has paid more attention to trust compared to philosophical ethics. There are some theologians who are implicitly aware of the importance of trust. Moreover, there are some theologians who fully recognize the significance of trust in their ethics. We will discuss first the implicit awareness of trust. The explicit recognition will be discussed in the next chapter.

In his *Ethics in a Christian Context* Paul Lehmann deals with Bonhöffer's treatise "What Does It Mean to Talk the Truth?" Bonhöffer in this treatise defines telling the truth as a matter of saying "the right word" or "the living word" to use Lehmann's translation. In his exposition of the implication of Bonhöffer's phrase "living word," Lehmann states:

What is the *living word*? It is the verbal expression of the full complexity and totality of the existing, concrete situation. And what is *ethical* about the existing, concrete situation is that which holds it together. And what, it may be asked, holds the concrete situation together. The answer is: that which makes it possible for human beings to be open *for* one another and *to* one another. In so far as the *right* word, or the *living* word, is instrumental to such an openness of human beings to each other, telling the truth is ethically real.^⑯

It seems that the words "that which makes it possible for human beings to be open for one another and to one another" or "an openness of human beings to each other" imply trust. This is somewhat evident from the statement which follows the words cited above. He states:

It is this *human* factor in the interrelationships of men which is the definitely *ethical* factor. A Christian ethics seeks to show that the *human* in us all can be rightly discerned and adhered to only in and through the reality of a climate of trust established by the divine humanity of Jesus Christ.^⑰

Thus for Lehmann what is the definitely ethical factor in the interrelationships of men is the human; and the ground of the human is the trust established by Jesus' true humanity. Considered thus one can conclude that for Lehmann telling the truth is nothing else than the verbal expression of trust as that which holds the concrete situation together. In short,

^⑯ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

^⑰ *Ibid.*

trust is the fundamental basis of the interrelationship of men. He, however, does not pay any further attention to trust although he is thus aware of the significance of trust.

We have already referred to Bonhöffer's treatise "What Does It Mean to Talk the Truth?" And we mentioned that Bonhöffer defines telling the truth as a matter of saying "the right word". In other words, for Bonhöffer telling the truth is not a matter of a general principle but telling the right word according to the particular situation in a living life. Although he thus emphasizes that "our speech must be truthful, not in principle, but concretely," he does not deny that truthfulness is an absolute requirement. He writes:

It is precisely this which is determined by the way in which, in my actual concrete life with all its manifold relationships, I give effect to the truthfulness which I owe to God. The truthfulness which we owe to God must assume a concrete form in the world.¹⁸

Thus for Bonhöffer "the right word" is discerned only in and through the truthfulness which we owe to God. That is to say, the ground of telling the truth is truthfulness to God. This is well expressed in these words of Bonhöffer regarding a lie:

The lie is a contradiction of the word of God, which God has spoken in Christ, and upon which creation is founded. Consequently the lie is the denial, the negation and the conscious and deliberate destruction of the reality which is created by God and which consists in God.¹⁹

Bonhöffer does not refer directly to trust in the treatise. His discussion centers on truthfulness which we owe to God through Christ. But his concept of truthfulness seems to imply trust, especially when it is understood in terms of the interrelationship of men. Furthermore, the statement "the reality which is created by God and which consists in God" seems to imply the reality of trust which is created by God and which consists in God. Lehmann's phrase, "the reality of a climate of trust established by the divine humanity of Jesus Christ" is apparently the interpretation of Bonhöffer's idea, "the reality which is created by God and which consists in God." If this understanding of Bonhöffer is right, then he also was aware of the significance of trust though he did not fully deal with it in his ethics.

¹⁸ Dietrich Bonhöffer, *Ethics*, trans. by Neville Horton Smith (New York: Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 364.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 369.

II. Theological Interpretations of Trust as an Ethical Foundation

1. Trust as the Ground of Truthfulness: Wilhelm Herrmann

It is Wilhelm Herrmann who gives serious attention to trust. His ethics is basically grounded in "truthfulness" (*Wahrhaftigkeit*). Truthfulness is, according to Herrmann, not to be identified with intellectual truth. But at the heart of the matter, the problem of truthfulness is an ethical one.²⁰ To put it more precisely, for Herrmann truthfulness is the moral "disposition" (*Gesinnung*) which is the fundamental basis of moral conduct. What is worth noticing in his ethics is that he regards "trust" (*Vertrauen*) as the origin of the truthful moral disposition. Thus he puts trust in the center of his ethics. Let us consider his ethics in greater detail centering our discussion on the relation between truthfulness and trust.

For Herrmann, truthfulness is not just one virtue beside others, but it is "the root of all virtues."²¹ He formulates "the fundamental moral demand" in terms of truthfulness as "Be truthful in your will (*Wollen*) not just superficially but really,"²² or "You ought to be inwardly autonomous and thereby truthful in livingness (*wahrhaft lebendig*)."²³

Now what does it mean "to be truthful?" To be truthful means to comply with that which incontrovertibly demonstrates reality. This can be explained from two sides: with regard to the ethical subject and the world in which the subject stands and with which he must deal. In other words, man experiences his reality in a twofold way: as "nature" and "history." Nature is the given (*des Gegebenen*) which binds man and makes him dependent either from without in the form of conditions of the external world or from within in the form of inborn qualities, traits, and drives. Despite the validity of laws which determine the world of experience and man himself, he, at the same time, experiences himself as such, as called to a unique, free, independent life, as a steward over the world. Truthfulness is thus the acknowledgment of reality in its twofold form.²⁴

Let us now consider what truthfulness as the recognition of reality in its twofold form means in ethics. In ethics truthfulness means "the command to transcend in each given moment the given in each case (*das jeweils Gegebene*), 'nature', and at the same time even ourselves in our *Sosein* in each case."²⁵ In other words, truthful human life means interior

²⁰ Dietz Lange, "Wahrhaftigkeit als sittliche Forderung und als theologisches Prinzip bei Wilhelm Herrmann," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, April, 1969, p. 78.

²¹ Wilhelm Herrmann, *Ethik*, der 3. Aufl. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr Verlag, 1904), p. 208.

²² *Ibid.*, p.41.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Lange, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

independence or moral autonomy. Truthfulness, therefore, is nothing other than to live an inwardly independent life, which only man as an autonomous being can have. This is what Herrmann means when he declares the ethical demand thus: "You ought to be inwardly autonomous and thereby truthful in livingness" as quoted already.

Now to be truthful has further meaning. It means truthful "disposition" as the unity of inward life which enables man to be true to himself. The ethical task of man is to acquire this moral disposition. Herrmann states: "The ethical task of man is also in each case this, that he acquires the real unity of will (*Wollen*) or disposition."²⁶ Herrmann regards the moral disposition alone as to be universally good in the sense of the Kantian categorical imperative. In the treatise quoted often already, Lange summarizes Herrmann's concept of "disposition" as follows:

To be truthful, to be man himself means further: to be true to self, to strive irrevocably for the goal of moral will (*Wollen*), the highest good. This is the truthful disposition. It alone can be called good; it alone can be the content of the universally valid moral imperative, complete and unreservedly in the sense of the Kantian categorical imperative.²⁷

As our consideration so far shows, there is evident kinship between Herrmann and Kant. But Herrmann distinguishes himself from Kant. In distinction from Kant, Herrmann lays great worth on the question of the *origin* (*Entstehung*) of the moral disposition.²⁸ This leads us to consider Herrmann's concept of "trust". Herrmann deals with the relation between moral authority and moral autonomy in terms of trust. According to Herrmann, when a truthful, and therefore, trustworthy man wins my trust he can become an authority to me and help me to understand myself ethically. In other words, only when the truthfulness of another man makes impression upon me the will for truthful life can arise in me. Herrmann writes:

We can relate the living only to the living. Through men who were already moral in livingness (*lebendig*), we ourselves also must be put into moral conduct in so far as we find us in it. Through the peculiar impression of men movement must arise in us. . . .²⁹

When Herrmann thus emphasizes trust as the source of truthful disposition he, on the

²⁶ Herrmann, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

²⁷ Lange, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 80~81.

²⁹ Herrmann, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

one hand, guards against heteronomy and on the other hand overcomes the naive assumption of an autonomous morality relying merely on the dictates of conscience. Furthermore, by insisting that only personal life can enflame other personal life he, unlike Kant, anchors ethics in the relation of men to one another not in the relation between reason and nature. In a sense Herrmann shifts the place of ethics from "the relation of man to nature" to "the relation of men to one another" to use Gogarten's words. These words express it succinctly: "In this event truthful human life or history (*Geschichte*) arises always anew."³⁰ In fact, trust, according to Herrmann, originates from history, namely encounter with other man.

Now in the reality of human life, the relation of man to the given world is stronger than moral demand. Furthermore, man is always tempted to persist in the respective reached stage. This is what Herrmann calls "laziness" (*Trägheit*). Laziness brings man into contradiction with his recognition of the moral command to transcend his respective situation in the world. This laziness, in which all men find themselves is "the fundamental form of sin"³¹ or the fundamental sin. Thus the will which strives for truthful life against laziness leads inevitably to "the feeling of guilt" (*Schuldgefühl*) and at the same time to the consciousness that one cannot overcome this sin.³² At the end of moral striving we come to face "moral distress" (*sittliche Not*), that is, the consciousness that we do not possess a truthful life for which we have longed in our moral conduct and the insight that only God is truthful in livingness. Truthfulness remains an unfulfilled demand. Thus truthfulness is here finally nothing other than the confession of one's own untruthfulness.³³

How can man overcome this self-contradiction? For Herrmann it is possible only through "transformation" (*Umwandlung*) or "rebirth" (*Wiedergeburt*).³⁴ This transformation is "a miraculous experience" (*ein wunderbares Erlebnis*) or "miracle" (*Wunder*) which occurs "beyond and contrary to nature" (*supra et contra naturum*).³⁵ That is to say, a complete transformation of existence is achieved by a power outside ourselves. Thus Herrmann's ethics leads us to religion. He writes:

The transformation of such a man in a powerful and joyful way, the origin of an autonomous and personal life in this world is Christianity. How a man who becomes Christian is transformed is expressed with most strict words in

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 74.

³³ Lange, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

³⁴ Herrmann, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

³⁵ Wilhelm Herrmann, *Schriften zur Grundlegung der Theologie* Teil II (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1966), p. 182.

the New Testament. What happens to him is called rebirth, that is, he himself is called a new creature of God.³⁶

However, it should be noted that Herrmann's idea of transformation does not violate human freedom. He insists: "We can devote ourselves fully only to a power whose authority over us permits our will to fulfill its freedom."³⁷ Lange rightly puts it this way:

This power must thus be, on the one hand, personal; on the other hand, man must be able to discover it to be not only super-worldly, but also as an "undeniable fact" in his own reality, his lived experience.³⁸

Now this transformation is achieved only through the encounter with Jesus' personality. Only when the historical man Jesus conquers man's heart the transformation of human existence happens. Herrmann calls this encounter with Jesus "trust in Christ" (*das Vertrauen zu Christus*).³⁹ Thus for Herrmann, faith and trust are synonymous. In faith, "trust in Christ", the truthfulness of Christ affects the human heart so that man becomes free and independent to be truthful to himself and others. As we have mentioned already, our trust primarily goes to the man who makes an impression upon us of intrinsic independence and truthfulness to himself and others. But this trust to the personality of another man goes beyond him to the ultimate ground of his truthfulness, that is, the personality of Jesus Christ. Thus Christ is the final and ultimate ground of trust.

In summary, Herrmann regards truthfulness as the fundamental moral demand. The truthfulness originates from one's trust to truthful and therefore, trustworthy man. But the ultimate ground of trust is the person of Jesus Christ who is the source of the transformation of human existence. Only through this transformation it is possible for man to be truthful, and therefore, trustworthy. Thus one could say that Herrmann's ethics is "ethics of trust".

Finally let us consider briefly the defects of Herrmann's ethics. His ethics tremendously contributes to calling our attention to the significance of trust in ethics. As we have mentioned already, Herrmann in a sense shifts the place of ethics from the relation between reason and nature to the relation of men to one another. Furthermore, he stresses the significance of community. Trustworthiness through a truthful disposition has as its goal the free and spiritual community with other men. This is clearly expressed in these words: Will (*wolle*) for yourself nothing other than community."⁴⁰ Although Herrmann shows

³⁶ Herrmann, *Ethik*, p. 83.

³⁷ Herrmann, *Schriften zur Grundlegung der Theologie* II, p. 59.

³⁸ Lange, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

³⁹ Herrmann, *Ethik*, p. 134.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

thus his concern for the significance of human relation and community, his ethics on the whole is based on man's interior autonomy, that is, the self-assertion of human life over against nature as Gogarten points out in his *Politische Ethik*. Gogarten writes: "Herrmann understands this autonomy as the self-assertion of man over against nature. But this self which gains its meaning out of its opposition to nature is . . . without history (*geschichtslos*)."⁴¹ Gogarten continues to say that Herrmann's trust "is not understood as direct relation between two men."⁴² In any case it is evident that Herrmann's ethics centers on man's autonomy or self-assertion over against nature rather than human relation and community. It is H. R. Niebuhr who emphasizes human relation as well as trust.

2. Trust as the Ground of Responsible Self: H. R. Niebuhr

Niebuhr stresses the importance of the idea of "response" in responsibility. He finds the key to moral life in the concept of responsibility which implies responsibility to others. Since his concept of responsibility thus implies responsibility to others, his notion of selfhood involves man in interaction with others. Thus for Niebuhr self is a "responsible self" who responds to the actions of others upon him. In order to denote this notion of self, Niebuhr uses the symbol of "man-the-answerer." This is expressed well in these words: "What is implicit in the idea of responsibility is the image of man-the-answerer, man engaged in dialogue, man acting in response to action upon him."⁴³

This kind of self-understanding is by no means new. In our age attention has often been directed to the interpersonal character of self. In the long tradition of the philosophy of idealism, self has generally been understood as an individualistic being. That is to say, self on the one hand has been understood as a rational being which exists primarily in relation to ideas and ideals, on the other, as the thinking subject which perceives the objects in the external world. This is the reason why ethics based on idealism on the whole has been understood in terms of the relation of man to nature. In distinction from this individualistic self-understanding, the interpersonal view of man or social character of selfhood has taken place in many areas of modern man's thinking. Let us give a brief attention to some good cases of the new exploration of this dimension of self-existence. We will consider the cases to which Niebuhr refers in *The Responsible Self*.

Harry Stack Sullivan known as the creator of the "interpersonal theory of psychiatry", insists that personality or self is the product of social interactions. For Sullivan "person-

⁴¹ Gogarten, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 56.

ality is a hypothetical entity which cannot be isolated from interpersonal situations.”⁴⁴ Sullivan writes: “Personality is the relatively enduring pattern of recurrent interpersonal situations which characterize a human life.”⁴⁵

The social philosopher, George Herbert Mead, is one of chief influences on Sullivan. Traditionally it has been regarded as the distinguishing characteristic of self that it can make itself an object to itself. Mead contends that what makes self an object is dialogue with other selves.⁴⁶ Self becomes an object to itself “only as I take toward myself the attitude of other selves, see myself as seen, hear as heard, speak to myself as spoken to.”⁴⁷ Thus for Mead self arises from social experiences or interactions. Mead writes:

The self as that which can be an object to itself is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience. After a self has arisen, it in a certain sense provides for itself its social experiences, and we can conceive of an absolutely solitary self. But it is impossible to conceive of a self arising outside of social experience.⁴⁸

Martin Buber, widely known as the author of *I and Thou*, also has made a tremendous contribution to the exploration of the dimension of self-existence as a man in relation to other selves. In his *I and Thou* Buber exposes the distinctive interpersonal character of self by making the distinction between “I-Thou” and “I-It” relation. Both “I-Thou” and “I-It” imply that man is not atomic being but a being in relation. But for Buber, the difference between “I-Thou” and “I-It” relation is a significant one. I-Thou relation implies man’s relation to other selves while I-It relation implies man’s relation to objects in the external world. Buber regards the I of I-Thou as whole being whereas he regards the I of I-It as a part of man as a whole.⁴⁹ For Buber, man’s true self, whole being, or real existence lies only in his living encounter with other selves. Buber states: “I become through my relation to the Thou; as I become I, I say Thou. All real living is meeting.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, man’s not stepping into living relation with other selves with his whole being is regarded as “the primordial sin” (*das ursprüngliche Schuldigsein*). “The primordial sin consists in remaining in onself.”⁵¹

⁴⁴ Calvin S. Hall and Gardner Lindzey, *Theories of Personality* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1967), p. 134.

⁴⁵ Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1953), pp. 110~111.

⁴⁶ Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. by Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), p. 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵¹ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. by Maurice Friedman (New York: Macmillan Co., 1966), p. 166.

Josiah Royce's philosophy of loyalty most deeply influenced Niebuhr's ethical thought in *The Responsible Self*. According to Royce, man comes to selfhood only by virtue of committing himself to a *cause*. Niebuhr states it this way: "When a person is able to say 'For this cause was I born and therefore came I into the world' he has arrived at mature selfhood."⁵² Autonomy also is understood in terms of one's loyalty to this cause. "The only way to be practically autonomous is to be freely loyal."⁵³ Thus it is in the measure that I choose this cause that I am autonomous.

But what is a cause? "This cause . . . is some sort of unity whereby many persons are joined in one common life."⁵⁴ Thus a cause is that which binds many individuals into one common life. Loyalty is one's commitment to this cause. "Loyalty shall mean . . . the willing and practical and throughgoing devotion of a person to a cause."⁵⁵ As Niebuhr points out, a loyal man finds himself associated with other loyalists to the same cause.⁵⁶ Royce writes:

Loyalty is social. . . . You can love an individual. But you can be loyal only to a tie that binds you and others into some sort of unity, and loyal to individuals only through the tie. . . . It binds many individuals into one service.⁵⁷

A loyal man then is tied in loyalty on the one hand to a cause, and on the other to "the fellow-servants" of the cause.

In his book *The Problem of Christianity*, Royce deals with Christianity in terms of his concept of loyalty. "The core of the faith is the Spirit, the Beloved Community, the work of grace, the atoning deed, and the saving power of the loyal life."⁵⁸ Christ is also understood in terms of loyalty. That is to say, Christ is the symbol of loyal life. "The name of Christ has always been, for the Christian believers, the symbol for the Spirit in whom the faithful—that is to say the loyal—always are and have been one."⁵⁹ Furthermore, Royce contends that Christ must be understood in such a way that Christians devote to the cause of the divine universal community. He writes:

⁵² Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁵³ Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1908), p. 95.

⁵⁴ Josiah Royce, *William James and Other Essays*, quoted by Gabriel Marcel, *Royce's Metaphysics*, trans. by Virginia and Gordon Ringer (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1956), p. 111.

⁵⁵ Royce *Philosophy of Loyalty*, pp. 16~17.

⁵⁶ Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁵⁷ Royce, *Philosophy of Loyalty*, p. 20.

⁵⁸ Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, Vol. II (New York: Macmillan Co., 1913), p. 429.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

Whatever Christology Paul, or any later leader of Christian faith taught, and whatever religious experience has been used by the historical Church, or by any of its sects or of its visible forms, as giving warrant for the Christological opinions, *the liberal and historical fact has always been this, that in some fashion and degree those who have thus believed in the being whom they called Christ, were united in a community of the faithful, were in love with that community, were hopefully and practically devoted to the cause of the still invisible, but perfectly real and divine Universal Community.*⁶⁰

Royce insists that all human endeavors should be evaluated by whether they contribute to the realization of this universal community or not. "Judge every social device, every proposed-reform, every national and every local enterprise by the one test: Does this help toward, *the universal community.*"⁶¹

Love is also understood in terms of loyalty. Royce states: "In Christ's love for the Church Paul finds the proof that both the community, and the individual members, are the objects of an infinite concern which glorifies them both, and thereby unites them."⁶² Royce continues to say, "Christian love, as Paul conceives it, takes on the form of loyalty."⁶³

Let us now consider Niebuhr's ethics of responsibility. He not merely puts these thoughts into his ethics but develops his own unique view of man and ethics based on it going beyond them. Niebuhr understands self-existence in terms of "the triadic form of our life." He illustrates the triadic situation of human existence in two ways. First, he deals with it in terms of communication about interpreted natural events. He states:

When I respond to natural events I do so as a social being; on the other hand, when I respond to my companions I do so as one who is in response-relations to nature. I do not exist as responsible self in two separate spheres or in two distinct encounters—with the Thou on the one hand, with the It on the other; with society on the other hand, with nature on the other, I engage rather in a continuous dialogue in which there are at least these three partners—the self, the social companion, and natural events.⁶⁴

Secondly, he deals with it in terms of the dialectical interaction of self, other selves, and the third reality that transcends them or to which they refer, Niebuhr mentions Royce's

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 425.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 430~431.

⁶² Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, Vol. I, p. 98.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

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⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 425.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 430~431.

⁶² Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, Vol. I, p. 98.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

impinge upon me, I am in the presence of the One beyond all the many.”⁶⁹ This implies that man’s trust in God is the ground of his trust in other persons. My trust in and response to the One qualify each of my particular roles as: responsible citizen; responsible businessman; responsible educator; responsible parent, etc. This is expressed well in these words of Niebuhr: “God is acting in all actions upon you. So respond to all actions upon you as to respond to his action.”⁷⁰

For Niebuhr it is through Christ as the symbol of trust or responsibility to God that the Christian becomes a responsible self in trust in God. Christ is the symbol of universal responsibility who encounters all acts upon him as a sign of the action of God as the universal One.

He [Christ] is the responsible man who in all his responses to alteractions did what fitted into the divine action. He interpreted every alteration that he encountered as a sign of the action of God, of the universal, omniscient One, whom he called Father.⁷¹

Thus for the Christian for whom Christ is the symbol of trust and responsibility, ethics ultimately becomes an ethics of universal responsibility grounded in universal trust in God, the universal One.

When I respond to the One creative power, I place my companions, human and subhuman, in the one universal society which has its center neither in me nor in any finite cause but in the Transcendent One.⁷²

3. Trust as the Fundamental Basis of Human Relation

What we have considered so far presents us three significant facts. (1) A fundamental change of man’s self-understanding from an individual to an interpersonal view of man; (2) A radical shift of the place of ethics from the relation of man to nature to the relation of men to one another; (3) The significance of trust in ethics. We will consider these issues in turn.

(1) There is one thing common to all explorations of the new dimension of self-existence considered above. That is to say, all of them are concerned alike with the significance of the interpersonal character of self-existence. Traditionally the rationalistic view of man

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 122~3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 123~4.

tended to understand man in relation to himself and nature while neglecting the fundamental fact of human existence—that man can exist as a man only insofar as he is in relation to others. It is true that the rationalistic view of man rightly emphasizes the significance of the dignity, freedom, and autonomy of the individual by asserting that man is independent of nature. Despite this merit and contribution, we cannot but mention that the rationalistic understanding of man as an autonomous individual being is no more than a half-truth of the understanding of man as a whole. Without doubt, the individual can obtain his independence from nature and autonomy only through the negation of his dependence upon nature. But at the same time, it is also true that the isolated individual being cut off from others is nothing but an abstraction. The awareness of the autonomy of man as an individual being is merely a half-step towards the total understanding of man as a whole. As Martin Buber rightly points out, “the individual is a fact of existence insofar as he steps into a living relation with another individual.”⁷³

There is another significant aspect of the exploration of the new dimension of self-existence. It is emphasis upon man as a responsible being. Niebuhr’s important contribution lies in his emphasis upon man as a responsible self. As we have considered already, Buber tremendously emphasizes that all real life consists in real meeting or encounter with others. This kind of true relationship to others can be realized only when one responds as a responsible self to others. One could say that for the responsibility to others was I born and therefore came I into the world. In short, man is “man-the-answerer” to use Niebuhr’s word. The concept of man as man-the-answerer is most clearly expressed in these words of F. H. Heinemann:

I respond, therefore I am (*Respondeo, ergo sum*). . . . I am insofar as I respond (*antworten*). I originate (*entstehe*) in all layers of my being (body, sense-organs, soul and mind) only insofar as I respond. Man comes into being through an act of response; his development is built in the complicated and mutually bound act of response.⁷⁴

(2) When man is understood as an individualistic rational being independent of nature, the place of ethics is confined to the relation of man to nature. Consequently main emphasis is placed on man’s self-assertion over against nature. This is the distinctive characteristic of ethics based on the rationalistic view of man which has predominated the main trend of the history of Western ethics. In distinction from this individualistic ethics, the place

⁷³ Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 203.

⁷⁴ Frederick Henry Heinemann, *Existenzphilosophie Lebendig Oder Tot?* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1963), p. 193.

of ethics becomes the relation of men to one another when man is understood as an interpersonal being. When stress is placed on the “inter-subjectivity” of man, the attention is directed to the realization of true human relation rather than man’s autonomy or his independence of nature. However, man’s self-assertion over against nature has been the main theme of ethics throughout the history of Western ethics.

In good contrast with Western ethics, Confucian ethics is basically “ethics of human relation.” Let us consider briefly the main characteristic of Confucian ethics. The Chinese character for the “Man” is “In-Gan” (人間). Literally *In* means “man,” and *Gan* means “between”. So, the literal translation of “In-Gan” is „man-between”. One could say that Oriental (Chinese, Korean, Japanese) culture is an ethical culture, and its ethics is primarily based on interpersonal relationships. The Chinese character for the ethics is “Yun-Ri” (倫理). *Yun* means “aggregate” or “a group of people” and *Ri* means “norm” or “way”, etc. Thus in Confucian ethics, man is by no means understood as an individualistic being, but always as a being in relation with others. Accordingly ethics is nothing other than the norm or principle of the interpersonal relationship. This can be easily understood if we see “the five cardinal moral codes” of Confucian ethics. They state:

- (1) There must be respect between the parents and the son.
- (2) There must be loyalty between the king and the subject.
- (3) There must be distinction between the husband and the wife.
- (4) There must be order between the young and the old.
- (5) There must be trust among friends.

In Confucian ethics the fundamental reality of human existence is not the individualistic being but man-in-relation. At the same time, the reality of human existence is directly related to morality. That is to say, morality is nothing else than the authentic way of human existence as man-in-relation. In any case, the awareness of the significance of human relation in ethics seems to point to a new direction of ethics in future.

(3) When the place of ethics is shifted from the relation of man to nature to the relation of men to one another, responsibility and trust becomes extremely important. To state the matter in some detail, when man is understood as an interpersonal being responsibility is regarded as the essential quality of self-existence. To use Niebuhr’s word again, man is regarded as “man-the-answerer.” Now responsibility, according to Niebuhr, is grounded in trust. And the ultimate ground of trust is faith or trust in God. For the Christian for whom Christ is the determiner of destiny, Christ becomes the symbol of total trust and universal responsibility to God, the universal One. In short, ethics becomes an ethics of universal responsibility grounded in trust. From this it follows that trust is the fundamental basis of responsible human relation. To state otherwise, trust is the fundamental basis of

authentic human relation.

It seems to me that Niebuhr's main concern is to demonstrate that trust is ultimately grounded in faith or trust in God. Niebuhr of course does not neglect the significance of trust in human relation. The point which I wish to make is that his argument on the whole is centered on the ground of trust rather than the significance of trust in human relation. From this it follows that both aspects of trust should be equally stressed. This may be illustrated by treating the good contrast between Niebuhrian and Confucian ethics with regard to the aspect of emphasis on trust. In Confucian ethics emphasis is placed on the significance of trust in human relation. With regard to the ground of trust, it seems that Confucian ethics presupposes trust as self-evident matter. Or otherwise stated, the significance of trust seems to be postulated as the necessary presupposition of the constitution of morality. In contrast with this, Niebuhr's ethics places its emphasis on the ground of trust as we have mentioned above. Thus the point of the matter is how to arrive at the adequate combination of these two aspects of trust. The elaboration of such ethics is the work of years, perhaps of a lifetime. In the present paper, I will simply attempt to demonstrate what impact trust has upon relativistic approaches in current theological ethics, and at the same time, I will try to show the significance of trust for the ethics which is concerned seriously with the realization of true human relation.

III. The Impact of Trust on Relativistic Approaches in Current Theological Ethics

Let us consider briefly the situation which requires the critical investigation of the concept of the validity of moral rules in the new approaches in current theological ethics. In ethical thinking there has emerged a keen awareness of moral ambiguity and the decline of absolutism. As a result of this awareness, some relativistic approaches have emerged in current theological ethics. These approaches can be divided roughly into two trends. One is the approach which defends the usefulness of ethical norms or rules despite its heavy emphasis on the relativistic character of ethics. The other is the approach which exclusively emphasizes the relativistic character of ethics and neglects the significance of moral rules. John A. T. Robinson belongs to the former, and Paul Lehmann and Joseph Fletcher belong to the latter.

Fletcher and Lehmann on the whole exclusively emphasize the relativistic aspect of ethics and accordingly ignore the significance of the ethical rules. Robinson is more concerned for the usefulness of ethical rules than Fletcher and Lehmann. Robinson defends

the usefulness of moral rules although he also emphasizes the relativistic character of ethics. However, there is an absence of a clear definition of the function of the moral rules in Robinson's ethics. Consequently this is attended with ambiguous statements regarding moral rules. The neglect of or insufficient attention to the significance of the validity of moral rules has brought about controversial disputes and even considerable confusion in ethical thinking. There is some confusion and even serious misunderstanding of the new morality, situation ethics, and contextual ethics. It seems to me that this confusion or misunderstanding is mainly created by the neglect of or insufficient attention to the significance of the validity of moral rules. And this neglect or insufficient attention seems to be basically due to some ambiguous ethical terms and a relative absence of clear statements. The conceptual clarification of ambiguous terms and the logical clarification of ambiguous statements will greatly contribute to diminishing the confusion and misunderstanding of relativistic approaches in current theological ethics. Furthermore, they may provide a way for a constructive development of these new approaches.

The prime intention of this chapter is to clarify the concept of "situation" and the "validity of rules" with the aid of the concept of trust.

1. An Analysis of Situation by Means of Trust

It seems somewhat curious that relativistic approaches in current theological ethics, which started from considering the significance of the situation, do not take the situation seriously enough. As Roger L. Shinn rightly points out, "there is a curious strain in situation ethics that seems to assume that situation is self-defining."⁷⁵ Neither Robinson nor Fleccher nor Lehmann shows his serious concern for the analysis of situation. I strongly feel that prudent and constructive ethics should take the situation seriously.

Let us now examine the implication of the situation with the aid of the concept of trust. First of all, I propose to distinguish the "ordinary situation" from the "non-ethical or extraordinary situation." My adoption of these terms is largely due to the want of an adequate terminology although I do not think they denote exactly what I mean to say by them. Let us consider these two kinds of situation in detail.

What I mean to say by the ordinary situation is the situation in which our everyday lives are maintained normally in trust or which allows trust to function smoothly as a basis for everyday action. We have already mentioned that our everyday or ordinary lives are grounded on some degree of trust, and that responsible human relation is possible only on the ground of trust. Although there always exists the possibility to break trust, human

⁷⁵ Roger L. Shinn, "The New Wave in Christian Thought," *Encounter*, Vol. 28. No. 3, 1967, p. 253.

relation, especially responsible human relation can be maintained only on the ground of trust. The extent to which responsible relation can be achieved depends on the degree to which trust exists. To push the matter to the extreme, where trust is totally destroyed, human relation can be no longer maintained. Thus trust is always postulated as the presupposition of the constitution of human relation. And a higher extent of responsible human relation necessarily requires a higher degree of trust.

What I mean to say by non-ethical or extraordinary situation is the situation in which trust is seriously threatened or totally destroyed. Of course, there is considerable difficulty when we try to decide whether a given situation is to be defined as non-ethical or not. However, we can point out many good cases of such situations. First of all, the so-called "boundary situation" should be regarded as belonging to this category. Beside boundary situation, such situations as life under extreme dictatorial government, wartime—especially a battle-field in which hot fighting is going on—, illegal threat of death and so on may be regarded as the non-ethical situation.

Let us consider some concrete cases of the non-ethical situation in which trust is totally destroyed in order to make clear what I intend to mean by the non-ethical situation. First, the case of the Negro woman on the wilderness road going West who killed her crying baby in Fletcher's *Situation Ethics*, is apparently the situation in which trust is destroyed totally insofar as the given situation is concerned.^⑥ Secondly, similar situations to this actually happened in Korea when people were coming to the South from North Korea, crossing the sea by ship near the borderline area. Many women threw their crying babies into the sea to save the lives of the group of people in the same ship when they were crossing the sea at night. There exists no trust at all between the people trying to cross the border and the Communist guards who seek to arrest or kill them. They are just enemies to each other. It does not make any sense at all to talk about trust in this situation.

From what we have considered so far, we could draw the conclusion that despite considerable difficulty it may be possible to distinguish the ordinary situation from the non-ethical situation. If we admit this possibility, then we can push our argument a step further. That is to say, it is in the ordinary situation that we talk about the validity of moral rules or principles. If this assertion is acceptable, it seems to me that the distinction between the ordinary situation and the non-ethical situation will considerably contribute to the clarification of the ambiguity or confusion regarding the validity of moral rules in relativistic approaches in current theological ethics.

^⑥ Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 125.

2. An Analysis of the Valid of Moral Rules by Means of Trust

As we have considered already, relativistic approaches in current theological ethics tend to ignore or weaken the significance of moral rules by over-emphasizing the relativistic character of ethics. I regard this as the weakness of these approaches. I fully realize the importance of these approaches which attempt to treat dynamically and relativistically ethical problems according to changing situations. I am also fully aware of the situation today in which we are confronted with almost total ineptness of the traditional ethics. We, no doubt, stand in need of creating a new ethics in order to face this situation. Despite the merits of these approaches, I still insist that the weakness of these approaches needs to be examined for the constructive development of these new trends. But in the present paper, I will confine my discussion to a rough examination of the validity of moral rules with the aid of the distinction which I made in terms of trust.

Let us now consider the validity of moral rules with the aid of the distinction between the ordinary situation and the non-ethical situation. It seems that most moral rules are generally valid in the situation in which trust operates without difficulty and is expected to work normally in human relation in general. In other words, rules are and must be valid under the ordinary situation in terms of my definition of situation. To push the matter to the extreme, it no longer makes any sense to talk about moral rules in the situation in which trust is totally destroyed. What is needed is the restoration of trust. This definition of the validity of rules gives us a clue to the reinterpretation of the concept of rules in ethical legalism and at the same time, a more useful understanding of the problem of exceptional cases to which the new trends of current theological ethics give serious attention. These two problems will be considered in order.

The absolute rules which ethical legalism or absolutism regards as absolutely valid seem to presuppose unwittingly the ordinary situation. The regard for rules as absolutely valid seems to be correct only if one presupposes the ordinary situation as the pre-condition for the validity of rules. Absolutist ethics fails to deal properly with the validity of rules because it is not aware of this presupposition. This may be the case with Kant too. In the First Chapter, we referred to Kant's treatise "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives." As we have seen earlier, Kant asserts that the duty to tell the truth is unconditionally valid. Kant's assertion would be right if he confined the validity of the duty to tell the truth to the ordinary situation—in terms of my definition of situation—presupposing it as the pre-condition for the validity of moral rules.

Let us consider exceptional cases or exceptions in the light of what we have discussed

so far. I propose that these exceptional cases happen in the non-ethical situation in which trust is totally destroyed in order to (1) save life or lives and (2) restore trust or the ordinary situation—in terms of my definition of situation. These two problems need to be treated in more detail.

(1) Such case as killing and lying in war, the Negro woman's killing her crying baby in *Situation Ethics*, or legitimate self-defense, all belong to this category. In such cases, people are forced to tell a lie or commit even murder. These cases cannot be an object of ordinary ethical judgment. It seems that such cases are out of the context of ordinary morality. If one considers morality only in terms of the group to which the Negro woman belongs, her killing her crying baby serves the embodiment of love, because her deed saves the lives of the group. However, there does not exist trust at all in the relation between the group of people to which she belongs on the one hand and the Indians who seek to kill them on the other. Otherwise stated, the ordinary ethical functioning is suspended in this situation.

(2) There are exceptional cases in which people intentionally break the law or moral rules in order to restore trust or the normal functioning of trust. In other words, people break moral rules or the law in order to destroy the situation which threatens or totally destroys the normal functioning of the law or rules. Bonhöffer's attempt to assassinate Hitler may be regarded as a model case. Bonhöffer attempted to assassinate Hitler to eliminate the situation which did not allow a normal human relation of trust and love to work. It is noteworthy that Bonhöffer does not allow a breach of the law to deny the validity of it. Rather, he regards a breach of the law as necessary for the restoration of the law. He writes:

Here there arises once again in its most acute form the problem of law and liberty . . . For the sake of God and of our neighbor, and that means for the sake of Christ, there is a freedom from the keeping holy of the Sabbath, from the honouring of our parents, and indeed from the whole of the divine law, a freedom which breaks this law, but only in order to give effect to it anew. The suspension of the law can only serve the true fulfillment of it. In war, for example, there is killing of life, lying and expropriation solely in order that the authority of life, truth and property may be restored. A breach of the law must be recognized in all its gravity.[Ⓣ]

Thus he admits a breach of the law only when it "serves the true fulfillment of the law" and "gives effect to it anew." If we understand him in terms of our analysis of situation,

[Ⓣ] Bonhöffer, *Ethics*, p. 261.

he does admit a breach of the law in order to bring an exceptional situation back to an ordinary situation.

Let us push our discussion further by examining Fletcher's position to deal with exceptional cases. I will confine my discussion to his dealing with telling the truth in his *Situation Ethics*. He writes:

But for the situationist what makes the lie right is its loving purpose; he is not hypnotized by some abstract law, "Thou shalt not lie." He refuses to evaluate "white lies" told out of pity and espionage in wartime as *ipso jure* wrong . . . But what if you have to tell a lie to keep a promise secret? Maybe you lie, and if so, good for you if you follow love's lead.[®]

Here Fletcher presents three cases of telling a lie, that is, telling a lie out of pity, espionage, and keeping a promised secret. Let us examine these cases in the light of the distinction between the ordinary situation and the non-ethical situation.

First, telling a lie out of pity does not seem to be lying in its essence. For the essence of telling the truth lies in one's earnest response to trust. Otherwise stated, telling a lie is nothing other than giving a false answer to one who expects to get an earnest response in trust. In short, the essence of telling a lie is treason. Thus telling a lie is simply not a matter of verbal truth. The reason why telling a lie is regarded as seriously immoral is because it is treason which destroys trust as the basis of responsible human relation in general. This may be an answer to the question as to why Dante took so seriously the sin of treason in his *Divine Comedy*. In this light, telling a lie out of pity may not be a lie in its essence. It may be regarded as a way of corresponding to trust. If this is acceptable, telling a lie out of pity does not affect the validity of the moral rule to tell the truth under the ordinary situation.

Secondly, as for telling a lie in wartime, I have already pointed out that trust is seriously threatened or totally destroyed in wartime, especially in a battle-field. In this light, telling a lie in wartime does not affect the validity of the moral rule to tell the truth in the ordinary situation. I feel that here the chief task of ethics lies in not justifying exceptional cases, but in bringing back the exceptional situation to the ordinary situation and providing the ground on which trust functions normally and is required as a proper demand.

Thirdly, as for telling a lie to keep a promise secret, it is inhuman to force one to disclose that promised secret because this means to force one to betray trust. It should be regarded as seriously immoral to force treason. For this means to destroy the ground of ethics. Thus considered, telling a lie to keep a promise secret is not a lie but a way of keeping trust.

[®] Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

Fletcher frequently tries to justify exceptional cases without saying a word regarding the significance of moral rules in ordinary human relations. In other words, he tends to ignore the significance of moral rules in order to justify exceptional cases. I fully realize the importance of exceptional cases which are increasing more and more in our age. However, it seems to me that the chief responsibility of ethicists in doing ethics does not lie in justifying exceptional cases as Fletcher seems to do, but in fighting the situation which does not allow the normal functioning of law and moral rules and therefore trust as the ground of their realization.

Finally, let us consider briefly Lehmann's concept of the validity of moral rules. Lehmann's contextual ethics, on the whole, places emphasis upon context and functions rather than upon principles and precepts. He states: "A *koinonia ethic is concerned with relations and functions, not with principles and precepts.*"⁷⁹ He at times betrays this basic position when he enunciates a kind of principle. We have considered earlier that Lehmann, in his discussion regarding Bonhöffer's treatise "What Does It Mean to Talk the Truth?" refers to "that which makes it possible for human being to each other" or "an openness of human beings to each other." As Paul Ramsey points out, this may be regarded as "the Truth that can and may and must be told unconditionally."⁸⁰ We can mention another such case. As Roger L. Shinn points out, Lehmann enunciates a principle when he regards promiscuity and prostitution as wrong "*ab initio.*"⁸¹ Lehmann writes: "In such a context, promiscuity and prostitution simply have no place. They are *ab initio* sexual deviations."⁸² However, Lehmann on the whole ignores the significance of moral principles and precepts. It may be that Lehmann could emphasize more the significance of moral principles if he paid sufficient attention to the importance of trust. In other words, he could take more seriously the validity of moral principles if he paid attention to the fact that moral principles can have their validity only in the ordinary situation.

There is one more important problem which should be mentioned before I close this paper. When I insist that moral rules or principles have their validity in the ordinary situation, I don't mean to say that they cannot be modified or changed at all. According to the situation, some of the rules may be modified or even abolished if necessary. The full clarification of this matter requires us to deal with the validity of moral rules or principles in greater detail. This work requires the classification of moral rules in terms of their validity. This task is beyond the scope of this paper. Here I do not deal with the issue. I simply mention that I do not ignore the complicated and controversial issues with regard to the

⁷⁹ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁸⁰ Paul Ramsey, *Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p. 82.

⁸¹ Shinn, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

⁸² Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

validity of moral rules.

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