

HANNAH O'BRIEN

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer's
Necessary Shattering
of the Wheel*



KEY POINTS ON TIMELINE

-1906: BORN

-1923-1927: THEOLOGICAL STUDY

-1928-1930: PASTORAL ASSISTANT AND ACADEMIC ASSISTANT

-1930-1931: UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

-1931: ADJUNCT LECTURER AND ORDAINED LUTHERAN PASTOR

-1933: PUBLISHES "THE CHURCH AND THE JEWISH QUESTION"

-1933-1935: PASTOR IN LONDON

-1935-1937: CONFESSING CHURCH SEMINARY

-1940: MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

* BEGINS WRITING *ETHICS*

-1943: ARRESTED AND IMPRISONED

-1945: EXECUTED

Four Types of Resistance:

- *Individual is to accuse the state if an offense against humanity has been committed.*
- *Church is to question the character of the state's actions.*
- *Church is to serve the victims of the state's actions.*
- *Church is to "seize the wheel itself" (directly addressing the state's actions).*

"The Church and the Jewish Question"



BONHOEFFER'S ETHICAL STARTING POINT

"Those who wish even to focus on the problem of a Christian ethic are faced with an outrageous demand--from the outset they must give up, as inappropriate to this topic, the very two questions that led them to deal with the ethical problem: 'How can I be good?' and 'How can I do something good?' Instead they must ask the wholly other, completely different question: what is the will of God?"

(Ethics: DBWE 6:47)

"WILL OF GOD"

- Presupposition of faith
- Ultimate reality:
 - God as Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer
- "Will of God" has already been fulfilled in Christ
 - Lord of reality
 - Christology
- Context of the penultimate
- Faith demands "costly grace"



Relationship between obedience and freedom
"In responsibility both obedience and freedom become real...Responsibility has this inner tension, any attempt to make one independent of the other would be the end of responsibility." (*Ethics*: DBWE 6: 288).

INTRODUCTION TO RESPONSIBLE ACTION

RESPONSIBLE ACTION

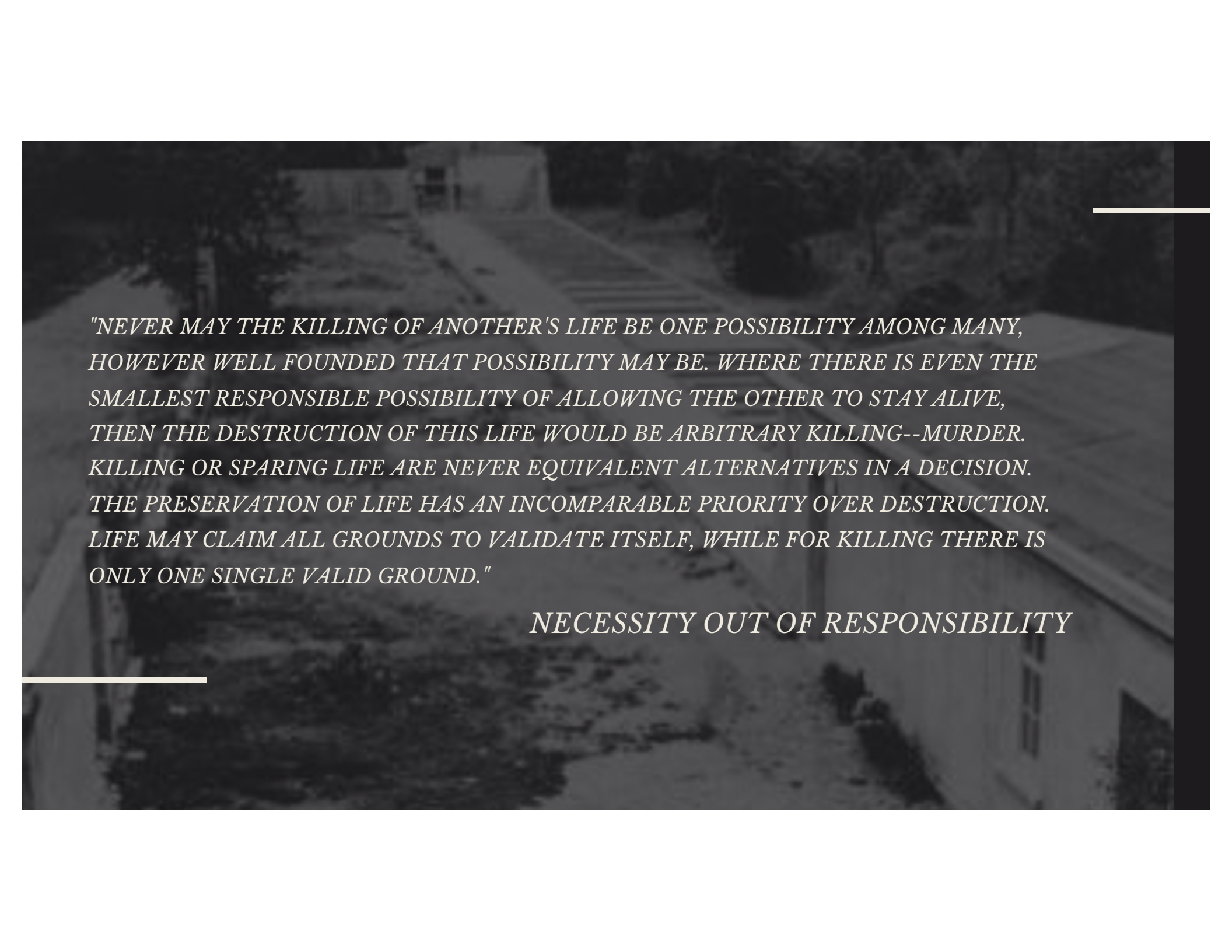
- Consideration of situation
- Not based on principles or “absolute good”
- Relational commandments
- Willingness to incur guilt
- Dismissal of self-justification

“Responsible action must decide not simply between right and wrong, good and evil, but between right and right, wrong and wrong.”

(Ethics: DBWE 6: 284)

What about Pacifism?

- *Principled-ethic*
- *Violence as sin*
 - *Not inconceivable in sinful world*
 - *Context of repentance*



"NEVER MAY THE KILLING OF ANOTHER'S LIFE BE ONE POSSIBILITY AMONG MANY, HOWEVER WELL FOUNDED THAT POSSIBILITY MAY BE. WHERE THERE IS EVEN THE SMALLEST RESPONSIBLE POSSIBILITY OF ALLOWING THE OTHER TO STAY ALIVE, THEN THE DESTRUCTION OF THIS LIFE WOULD BE ARBITRARY KILLING--MURDER. KILLING OR SPARING LIFE ARE NEVER EQUIVALENT ALTERNATIVES IN A DECISION. THE PRESERVATION OF LIFE HAS AN INCOMPARABLE PRIORITY OVER DESTRUCTION. LIFE MAY CLAIM ALL GROUNDS TO VALIDATE ITSELF, WHILE FOR KILLING THERE IS ONLY ONE SINGLE VALID GROUND."

NECESSITY OUT OF RESPONSIBILITY

CONCLUSION:

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S NECESSARY SHATTERING OF THE WHEEL
