

EVERYDAY AESTHETIC EXISTENCE AND DISCIPLESHIP

Exploring the Connections between Aesthetics, Faith and Ethics
in Being Human and Becoming Christian

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this project is to provide a theological basis for the practice of discipleship in the world as a form of aesthetic existence. The study is framed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's cryptic call for a recovery of Søren Kierkegaard's notion of aesthetic existence in being Christian, set against the backdrop of their mutual concern for the captivity of the church to Christendom. In addition to the contribution by Kierkegaard (discipleship as poetic living) and Bonhoeffer (Christian living as polyphonous this-worldly celebration of Christological reality), three further key intellectuals have been selected, each of whom contributes an important dimension to understanding everyday aesthetic existence as discipleship. Drawing from contemporary neuropsychological findings, Iain McGilchrist's research points to the fundamental role that aesthetic existence plays in being human and relating to the world. Graham Ward's work builds on this by highlighting that embodied and affective engagement with the world both plays a significant role in faith formation and concomitantly frames ethical life by conjoining praxis and poesis through incarnational living. Aesthetics is not to be disconnected from action, as Nicholas Wolterstorff elucidates, but is best understood in light of social practice, playing a narrational role toward specific teloi, however implicit this may be. Ultimately, this study concludes that a liturgical orientation to all of life rightly orders the formative power of aesthetic existence in service to the Word and world, thereby contributing to discipleship, as opposed to the aestheticized creation and sustenance of virtuality.

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I would also like to honour the five key intellectuals that I have engaged in this project: Søren Kierkegaard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Iain McGilchrist, Graham Ward and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Their work and lives model rigorous intellectual pursuit, yet never disconnecting theoretical abstraction from the reality of life as lived. Our world is the richer for it.

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Soli Deo gloria.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION — EVERYDAY AESTHETIC EXISTENCE AND DISCIPLESHIP	1
1.1 Rationale: The persistence of discipleship as cheap grace	2
1.2 A Key Term: “Aesthetic Existence”	6
1.3 Dialogue as Method	6
1.4 Locating the Thesis in Contemporary Debate	8
1.5 Synopsis	15
CHAPTER 2: KIERKEGAARD & THE NATURE OF AESTHETIC EXISTENCE ...	18
2.1 Kierkegaard’s Context: Calling for true discipleship amidst aestheticism	19
2.1.1 A Reaction to Romantic Self-creation	20
2.1.2 A Reaction to Danish Christendom and “Cheap Grace”	22
2.2 Kierkegaard’s Stages of Existence	27
2.2.1 Interpreting the “Stages”: The complexity of Kierkegaard’s authorship	28
2.2.2 Aesthetic Existence as a Stage of Life: Kierkegaard’s rejection of aestheticism	29
2.2.3 Aesthetic Existence & Poetic Living: A clarification of terms	33
2.3 Christian Poetic Living: The role of mature aesthetic existence in discipleship	37
2.3.1 The Continuity of the Aesthetic in Ethico-Religious Existence	38
2.3.2 Poetic Living as Discipleship	40
2.3.3 Imitating Christ: The unification of the infinite with finite aesthetic existence	43
2.3.4 Second Immediacy	46
2.3.5 The Imagination	47
2.4 Summary: Christian existence amidst the sensory immediacy of Deer Park	50
2.5 Spotlight on Music: Music as archetypal sensory immediacy	55
2.6 Conclusion	58
CHAPTER 3: BONHOEFFER & THE CELEBRATION OF AESTHETIC EXISTENCE	60
3.1 Bonhoeffer’s Call for a Recovery of Aesthetic Existence	60
3.2 The Christological Affirmation of Worldly Reality	63
3.2.1 Bonhoeffer’s Description of Reality	63
3.2.2 Bonhoeffer’s Embrace of This-Worldly Reality	65
3.2.3 Ultimate and Penultimate Reality	70
3.3 Discipleship as <i>Seeing</i> and Partaking in Reality	74
3.3.1 Imagining Reality	74

3.3.2	Participating in Reality	76
3.4	Implications for Everyday Aesthetic Existence	77
3.5	Spotlight on Music: Sensory immediacy generates “living” metaphors	79
3.5.1	Bonhoeffer’s Personal Embrace of Music	79
3.5.2	Bonhoeffer’s Musical Metaphors	81
3.5.3	Music as Paradigm-Forming	84
3.5.4	Summary	89
3.6	Conclusion	90
CHAPTER 4: MCGILCHRIST & AESTHETIC EXISTENCE AS		
FUNDAMENTAL TO BEING HUMAN		
4.1	Apollonian and Dionysian Perception of Reality	93
4.1.1	Apollo and Dionysus	93
4.1.2	Nietzsche’s Modern Cult of Dionysus	94
4.1.3	Bonhoeffer’s Response to Nietzsche	97
4.1.4	McGilchrist: The human brain is inherently both Apollonian and Dionysian	99
4.2	Brain Lateralisation and the Hemispheric Differences in Attention	102
4.2.1	The (Temporal) Hierarchy of Attention	104
4.2.2	Explicit Certainty Versus Implicit Fluidity	107
4.2.3	Embodiment Versus Disembodied Abstraction	109
4.3	Implications for the Formative Nature of Aesthetic Existence	111
4.3.1	Knowing Reality through Everyday Aesthetic Existence	112
4.3.2	Meaning-Making Metaphor	114
4.3.3	Spotlight on Music: Metaphor and the musical origins of language	115
4.3.4	The Paradigmatic Imagination	121
4.3.5	Left-Hemisphere “Dionysian” Sensationalism	123
4.3.6	The Dionysian and Apollonian Revisited	125
4.4	Conclusion	126
CHAPTER 5: GRAHAM WARD & AESTHETIC EXISTENCE AS		
FUNDAMENTAL TO BECOMING CHRISTIAN		
5.1	Understanding Belief in Relation to Aesthetic Existence	128
5.1.1	McGilchrist’s Anthropology of Belief as Sensory, Imaginative Existence	128
5.1.2	Ward Affirms McGilchrist: Belief as an embodied, relational disposition	131
5.1.3	Dispositional Belief: Aesthetic existence informs “anticipation” and “projection”	134
5.1.4	Ward’s Critique of McGilchrist: The existential “seeing as” of belief	138
5.1.5	Spotlight on Music: Aesthetic existence as propulsive, mythic sensibility	142
5.2	Relating Dispositional Belief to the Formation of Faith	145

5.2.1	This-Worldly Existence and Faith: Projecting the invisible as (religious) belief.....	145
5.2.2	Connecting Embodiment with Transcendence: The analogical worldview	146
5.2.3	Two Forms of Belief: Faith & Virtuality	151
5.3	Implications: Everyday Aesthetic Existence as Discipleship.....	155
5.3.1	Imagination: the bridge between aesthetic existence and faith.....	155
5.3.2	Poiesis as Faithful (Ethical) Practice	156
5.3.3	Mature Aesthetic Existence as Lived: Sacramental participation.....	158
5.3.4	Discerning Mature Aesthetic Existence: Embodied attunement	159
5.3.5	Liturgical Aesthetic Existence: Uniting aesthetics, ethics and faith.....	161
CHAPTER 6: WOLTERSTORFF & THE LITURGICAL ORIENTATION OF		
MATURE AESTHETIC EXISTENCE		163
6.1	Christian Action as Liturgy.....	165
6.2	Liturgical Existence as Practice	168
6.2.1	Wolterstorff's Model: Liturgy as performative	171
6.2.2	Applying the Model: Liturgy as lived in the everyday	175
6.3	Aesthetic Engagement as Practice	183
6.3.1	Severing Aesthetics from Action: Modern disinterested contemplation	183
6.3.2	Uniting Aesthetics and Action as Social Practice.....	185
6.4	Aesthetic Practices Sustain a Vision of the Good Life	187
6.4.1	Aesthetic Engagement Towards a Telos.....	187
6.4.2	Mature Aesthetic Existence as Fitting Shalom	188
6.5	Spotlight on Music: Sung work as enhancement towards shalom.....	192
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION.....		194
7.1	Summation of Findings.....	194
7.2	Implications and Fruitful Trajectories for Practical Theology to Take	199
7.2.1	The Feral Nature of Aesthetic Existence	199
7.2.2	A Second Immediacy Revisited.....	200
7.2.3	An Ecclesial Embrace of Everyday Aesthetic Existence.....	201
7.2.4	A Liturgical Embrace Guided by Love.....	202

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

EVERYDAY AESTHETIC EXISTENCE AND DISCIPLESHIP

The aim of this project is to provide a theological basis for the practice of discipleship in light of embodied existence in the world. The understanding of both discipleship and the “world” that we will be working with will be correlated with Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s articulation, particularly in relation to his cryptic remarks on aesthetic existence.¹ The primary research question driving this project thus asks whether aesthetic existence is fundamental to being human, and therefore to being a Christian, bodily engaged in the life of the world? If the answer to this question is yes, then two further sub-questions emerge. Firstly, what are the implications for the formation of being Christian (discipleship)? Secondly, what are the implications for being Christian, embodied in the world? The former question probes implications for what is often perceived to be the life of faith, while the latter explores implications for that which is typically considered the life of the world, or ethics, even though the ultimate aim of this project is to challenge this very dichotomy.

In order to investigate the role of aesthetic existence in discipleship, five key intellectuals have been selected, each of whom adds an important dimension to understanding Bonhoeffer’s description of aesthetic existence as discipleship. We begin with Søren Kierkegaard, not only because Kierkegaard’s initial framing of the term is pivotal to our understanding, but because in many respects, Bonhoeffer’s perspective on discipleship echoes Kierkegaard’s in their mutual response to the problem of Christendom. Both challenge the church of their day with the question of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, amidst the church’s captivity to Christendom, a challenge that continues to have relevance today. As we shall see, there are points of correspondence in Kierkegaard’s own journey from aestheticism, through the primacy of ethics, to discipleship, as costly discipleship. Kierkegaard thus provides the foundation from which to examine Bonhoeffer’s use of the phrase “aesthetic existence,” which comes late in Bonhoeffer’s theological development, but which is rooted in his theology from early on. As we turn to Bonhoeffer’s understanding of discipleship, read

¹ The term “aesthetic existence,” as used in this project, will be initially defined in the methodology section and further developed in chapters two and three. At this point however, it may be helpful to note that the framing of the phrase is drawn from Bonhoeffer’s reflection on Søren Kierkegaard’s stages of human existence. Consequently, aesthetics is considered here in the broadest, classical sense of the term, encompassing aesthetic experience as sensory immediacy in everyday life, rather than being limited to beauty and the arts.

through the lens of his comments on aesthetic existence in his prison letters, we will see that aesthetic existence is not only a fitting celebration of Christological this-worldliness, but that it plays a formative role in human development and the perception of reality which undergirds such formation.

It is evident that this formative role corresponds to current neuropsychological understandings regarding what it means to be human, specifically as elucidated by findings from affective neuroscience and brain modality. It therefore becomes important to incorporate these findings through the terms we are discussing in relation to aesthetic existence and the current debate about being human. Here we draw from the work of Iain McGilchrist, who shows that brain lateralisation teaches us a fundamental truth about what it means to be human. The predominantly affective and embodied nature of right-hemisphere attention needs to be integrated with abstract and detailed left-hemisphere attention to accurately apprehend the relational nature of reality.

In order to integrate McGilchrist's argument with theology we draw from the work of Graham Ward, who engages with McGilchrist and builds on the findings of neuroscience in light of contemporary theological reflection. Ward shows aesthetic existence plays a formative role in belief formation and the consequent development of faith. His understanding of discipleship, as integrated with aesthetic existence, in many ways leads us back to Kierkegaard; discipleship is about commitment and lived experience in light of embodied existence in the world.

Finally, to develop this in terms of practical theology today, we need to relate it to the life of the church as liturgy, as service of the Word and world. Nicholas Wolterstorff's rigorous analysis helps us to not only understand liturgy as action, but liturgy's integral relationship to all aesthetic engagement, as action. Such an understanding of liturgy integrates discipleship and aesthetic existence through engagement with the life of the world.

1.1 Rationale: The persistence of discipleship as cheap grace

Kierkegaard's Christendom model has perennial significance and continues to resonate with where Christianity finds itself today. The conflation of Christianity with empire remains problematic, as recent political events in the United States have once again highlighted. Amidst the aestheticization of everyday life, the concomitant rise of consumerism and the political manifestation of these realities and economies of desire in the life of the church,

discipleship is all too often void of costly grace. The proposal here is that exploring the relationship between aesthetic existence and discipleship opens up perspectives on this dynamic that would otherwise not be understood.

In Kierkegaard's historical context, Christian discipleship had been sacrificed on the altar of comfortable Christendom. For Kierkegaard and for many others, this has always been the dangerous tendency for the life of the church. It is this tendency that ultimately led Bonhoeffer to write about cheap grace and costly discipleship. However, for Kierkegaard, to highlight costly discipleship meant a critical stance against aesthetic existence (not a rejection of it), but a movement beyond aesthetic existence. Whereas Bonhoeffer suggests that aesthetic existence takes his writings about discipleship in a fresh direction, in which aesthetic existence becomes integrated into discipleship rather than being swept aside. The goal of this project is to recover Kierkegaard's critique of cheap discipleship and aestheticism, not by rejecting aesthetic existence, but by building upon Bonhoeffer's attempt to integrate costly discipleship and aesthetic existence. The key to the success of such an enterprise is a careful understanding of the nature of the aesthetic, particularly in relationship to the rational, and their mutual role in the nature of being human and becoming Christian.

The recent rise in interest of theological aesthetics, as a field of study in its own right, has raised important epistemological and anthropological questions. Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen, by way of introducing her theological aesthetics reader, points out that it is only in the last three decades or so that the field of theological aesthetics has become a major focus in theology.² She describes the "aestheticization of everyday life in postmodern society" as playing a catalytic role in this interest. From an academic perspective, the postmodern context has cultivated a renewed interest in aesthetics by questioning the ratiocentrism that marked modernity. Michael Lacewing argues that, "The central claim of ratiocentrism is that the good life can be understood in terms of and attained by reason and strength of will."³ The subject-oriented paradigm of postmodernity challenges this claim, opening new lines of thought around what it means to be human, and consequently, the basis of meaning, belief and ultimately, action.

² Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen, *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 1.

³ Michael Lacewing, 'What Reason Can't Do', in *The Moral Life: Essays in Honour of John Cottingham*, ed. Nafsika Athanassoulis and Samantha Vice (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 140.

This postmodern critique of ratiocentrism opens a door for richer epistemological dialogue in the area of theological aesthetics. In the field, traditionally, human experience of the transcendent nature of beauty and the sublime has been seen to have something to offer the quest for knowledge of the divine, of the mysterious Other, and therefore, the life of faith. In the latter half of the 20th century, Hans Urs von Balthasar exemplified this through his seminal work which sought to ground theology in aesthetics. Along with the other voices of the *Nouvelle Théologie* movement, Balthasar sought a *ressourcement*, which fuelled his Platonic response to the modern understanding of beauty, thus reaffirming, and integrating the transcendental ideals of Beauty, Goodness and Truth (in that order). While there is no doubt that Balthasar made an extremely valuable contribution to the field, his emphasis on the *transcendent* value of aesthetics became paradigmatic for explorations in theological aesthetics.⁴ The danger of such an approach is that aesthetics becomes again dis-integrated from rationality. Here, aesthetic experience is seen primarily as a way of knowing beyond that which rationality can access. Whilst this represents a commendable reappropriation of the epistemic value of aesthetic experience, it still pits aesthetics against rationality. It also positions the primary value of aesthetic experience as oriented toward the transcendent, as opposed to a life of faith lived in this world, with the concomitant ethical implications.⁵ From this perspective, aesthetic experience that has epistemic value is limited to explicitly transformative, transcendent sensory encounters that shape consciousness. But do *everyday* aesthetic experiences shape our understanding, our beliefs and the way we act in the world? In order to explore this question, we need to ask how we come to believe, and subsequently act in the first place, from an anthropological point of view.

The postmodern critique of ratiocentrism is fundamentally an anthropological critique. As James Smith points out, the Cartesian perspective of the human person as *homo rationale* seems inadequate, and certainly at odds with a holistic Christian anthropology.⁶ Smith goes on to point out that the Reformed tradition would describe humans as essentially *believing*

⁴ As Graham Ward notes, “Balthasar’s work breathes in a certain rarefied atmosphere, a post-resurrection perspective, as if the work was composed on the frosted heights of Thomas Mann’s magic mountain.” Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 205.

⁵ For a helpful recent exposition from the field of theological aesthetics on the problematic nature of the postmodern tendency to disconnect this-worldly, incarnational reality from transcendence, see Jeremy Begbie, *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts: Bearing Witness to the Triune God* (London: SCM Press, 2018).

⁶ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 40.

beings. Smith rightly questions what this means, offering two critiques. Firstly, does understanding humans as fundamentally *believing* beings not still leave us in the realm of *homo rationale*, preoccupied with propositions and ideas? Consequently and secondly, is the brain not still in the vat here, this being a disembodied and individualistic picture of the human person? The core question is, how do human beings come to hold particular beliefs? Drawing from neuroscience, and an analysis of the distinctive roles of the two hemispheres of the brain in particular, Iain McGilchrist argues that belief is first and foremost *relational*, not rational.⁷ While rationality does indeed have a role to play in belief, belief operates from a broader, integrated and embodied orientation toward the world. In this sense, belief (acting “as if”) and the imagination (“seeing as”) are not only inextricably connected, but fundamental to being human.⁸

If this assertion holds true, then it becomes important to consider the way in which the imagination is formed, and what role aesthetic experiences play in this formation. For the purposes of this research project then, aesthetic experience encompasses far more than encounters with the fine arts, or even the broader arts. As the emerging philosophical sub-discipline of everyday aesthetics illustrates, aesthetic experience is a part of our day-to-day lives. Aesthetics is for every person. Further, if aesthetic existence is fundamental to being human, then, as Yuriko Saito argues, our aesthetic experiences in everyday life have “moral, social, political and environmental” ramifications.⁹ For the same reasons, there are also significant implications for the life of faith, and the embodiment of that faith in the world as ethical action. The consequences for understanding the role of aesthetics in personal formation are, therefore, significant.

Thus, the question driving this project is whether aesthetic existence is indeed fundamental to being human, and becoming Christian, and if so, in what way? This research will make a contribution by taking the approach of engaging theological aesthetics through an existential lens, with the concomitant focus on the everyday, for the purpose of shedding further light on a theological anthropology, ultimately highlighting the consequences of this for the nature of discipleship. This question is important because it has significance for the understanding of

⁷ Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁸ McGilchrist, 155–56.

⁹ Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2.

faith formation, and consequently, for practice within the life of the church as embodied in the world.

1.2 A Key Term: “Aesthetic Existence”

The key term in the project is “aesthetic existence,” which will be further clarified in chapters 2 and 3. While originating in the work of Kierkegaard as sensory immediacy, the use of the term in this project is further shaped by Bonhoeffer’s taxonomy of the phrase. Bonhoeffer locates aesthetic existence in the realm of freedom, unpacking it as art, play, friendship and *Bildung* (formation).¹⁰

As a result, the definition of “aesthetic,” for the purposes of this project, will be a broad one that draws from the classical use of the term as “sense perception.” Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, the founder of aesthetics as a subject of study, initially defined aesthetics as “a science of how things are to be known by means of the senses.”¹¹ Mark Johnson, writing on the basis of meaning being fundamentally embodied, describes aesthetics simply as “the study of how humans make and experience meaning.”¹² While these perspectives will form the backdrop for the approach to aesthetics taken in this project, the fundamental articulation is taken from Frank Burch Brown’s definition,

Aesthetics should perhaps be nothing less than basic theoretical reflection regarding all aesthetic phenomena ... The coherence of the field of aesthetics so conceived would derive from its central interest in aesthetica ... all those things employing a medium in such a way that its perceptible form and ‘felt’ qualities become essential to what is appreciable and meaningful.¹³

1.3 Dialogue as Method

The project is a philosophical and theological enquiry, anchored in dialogue with a selection of seminal texts and framed by the formulated research question. There is no empirical component to the project. The method will be to put the research question to five seminal thinkers, engaging them on their terms, in order to evaluate what their contribution is to the

¹⁰ See John de Gruchy’s exploration of Bonhoeffer’s taxonomy in *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 147–158.

¹¹ As quoted in Peter Kivy, *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics* (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 15.

¹² Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 209.

¹³ Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 22.

enquiry. As we engage each, their contributions are interpreted and woven together in a cohesive argument that responds to the research question.

Each thinker has been selected due to the unique contribution they bring to the project. There is a specific logic to the order in which they will be introduced. We will begin by engaging Kierkegaard, and subsequently Bonhoeffer, through the question. They will contribute to setting up the question, and thereby frame the project through the lens of human existence, the nature of being human and becoming Christian.

We then proceed to Iain McGilchrist, who engages the question by dealing with the relationship between embodiment, affect, imagination and rationality. Here, the question is not only the nature of this relationship, but the implications thereof for being human. McGilchrist draws from neuropsychology, responding to the question of human existence from a physiological point of view. McGilchrist is selected here since his field takes embodiment seriously, while he is still working towards a broader, integrated and interdisciplinary understanding of aesthetic existence in being human.

We then turn to the theologian, Graham Ward, with a view to the question of the integration of aesthetic existence with ethics and faith. Ward responds to the postmodern context by seeking a recovery of the sacramental and analogical nature of Christian life, and thereby reframing human meaning. Ward's engagement with McGilchrist, amidst his work on an archaeology and anthropology of belief, allows for an integration of the physiological approach to the question within a theological understanding of being. The practical implications of this are extrapolated through Ward's work on integrating the ethical and religious.

The discussion then returns to the question of aesthetic existence and Christian formation through the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff on aesthetics and liturgy. Wolterstorff identifies aesthetic action as fundamental to being human, while also investigating liturgy as action. His work will form the basis for exploring aesthetic existence as a liturgical orientation to all of life.

Finally, the concluding chapter will offer a summation of the argument presented. A critique of this method may be the potential for cobbling together disparate and fragmentary elements in a haphazard manner. While the challenges of dealing with a diverse range of sources are acknowledged, at the forefront of the study is not a selection of thinkers, but a particular

problem. It is the problem that unifies the project in that all of these thinkers share an integrated understanding of human existence. These thinkers are not the subjects of the study themselves; they are the resources that will be used to engage the problem.

1.4 Locating the Thesis in Contemporary Debate

The starting point for the project is Kierkegaard's work on human existence, and in particular, the relationship of aesthetic to ethical and religious existence. A superficial reading of Kierkegaard seems to suggest that he proposed his three spheres of life as distinct stages, one replacing the other, as a person progresses in their existential journey. The very title of *Either/Or* appears to reflect a dualistic understanding of the aesthetic as opposed to the ethical.¹⁴ Not only does Kierkegaard seem to claim the mutually exclusive nature of the aesthetic, as opposed to the ethical stage, he apparently ascribes value to the ethical over the aesthetic. It is hardly surprising then, that Kierkegaard is often seen to have very little regard for the aesthetic. Hans Urs von Balthasar, for example, laments Kierkegaard's "tearing apart of the aesthetic and ethical-religious dimensions,"¹⁵ describing this as "banishment of the aesthetic from the realm of theology," a natural consequence of separating logic and ethics from aesthetics.¹⁶

However, such narrow readings of Kierkegaard fail to take the complexity of his engagement with the aesthetic into account. As with all of the subject matter Kierkegaard engages, his treatment of aesthetics is not systematic. He engages the subject through various pseudonyms, contributing to the complexity of his stance. While some see Kierkegaard stressing the negative implications of the aesthetic,¹⁷ others read him as an aesthetic ironist.¹⁸ What does not seem to be fully appreciated by all, are the various iterations of the aesthetic with which Kierkegaard deals. There is no doubt that he has a negative attitude toward aestheticism, defined by John de Gruchy as making "aesthetic value an absolute."¹⁹ But while he rejects

¹⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or Part I*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, vol. 3, Kierkegaard's Writings (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

¹⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 38.

¹⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Seeing the Form*, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 50.

¹⁷ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious* (London: SCM, 1999).

¹⁸ Joakim Garff, 'The Eyes of Argus: The Point of View and Points of View with Respect to Kierkegaard's "Activity as an Author"', *Kierkegaardiana* 15 (1991): 29–54; Sylviane Agacinski, *Aparte: Conceptions and Deaths of Søren Kierkegaard*, trans. Kevin Newmark (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1988).

¹⁹ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 83.

aestheticism, as Sylvia Walsh convincingly argues, “living poetically” is at the core of Christian existence for Kierkegaard.²⁰ Walsh points out that he is reacting against the aestheticism of the German Romantics, and that the nature of the poetic he embraces is the aesthetic grounded in the ethical and religious. Thus, as Wessel Stoker suggests, it is probably more accurate to distinguish Kierkegaard’s critique of Romantic aesthetics, from his “ethical aesthetics” and “theological aesthetics.”²¹ Stoker further shows, in agreement with David Gouwens and Jamie Ferreira, that imagination, as a faculty of the aesthetic life, is a core concept for all of Kierkegaard’s spheres of existence.²² Recently, Peder Jothen has gone as far as to argue that Kierkegaard’s notions of selfhood are inextricably connected to the aesthetic,²³ in resonance with the statement from one of Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms, Johannes Climacus, “To exist is an art.”²⁴

At the very least then, according to Kierkegaard, some *form* of aesthetic existence appears to remain integral to the ethical and religious life. The question that follows is regarding the nature of it. In a letter from prison, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflected on this question, in the context of Nazi Germany, suggesting a recovery of aesthetic existence in the life of the church.²⁵ As John de Gruchy shows, Bonhoeffer’s reflection on, or perhaps even reappropriation of, Kierkegaard’s aesthetic existence highlights an interesting correlation between Kierkegaard’s “stages” of life and Bonhoeffer’s life and work.²⁶ While it is too simplistic to say that Bonhoeffer inverts the stages (beginning with the religious, moving to the ethical, and finally the aesthetic), Bonhoeffer does appear to reflect more deeply on the aesthetic towards the end of his life journey. Bonhoeffer shares Kierkegaard’s rejection of aestheticism, his understanding of costly discipleship and rejection of “cheap grace,”

²⁰ Sylvia Walsh, *Living Poetically: Kierkegaard’s Existential Aesthetics* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

²¹ Wessel Stoker, ‘The Place of Art in Kierkegaard’s Existential Aesthetics’, *Bijdragen, International Journal in Philosophy and Theology* 71, no. 2 (2010): 181.

²² Stoker, 181; M. Jamie Ferreira, *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); David Gouwens, *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of the Imagination* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1989).

²³ Peder Jothen, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood: The Art of Subjectivity* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 3.

²⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, vol. 12, *Kierkegaard’s Writings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 351.

²⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John de Gruchy, vol. 8, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 268.

²⁶ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 147–68.

reflecting Kierkegaard's own stance on discipleship. But for Bonhoeffer, this marks the beginning, not the final stage of life. This religious commitment then, demands ethical action, which Bonhoeffer not only reflected upon extensively, but also practiced himself. Thus for Bonhoeffer, as de Gruchy points out, while "this-worldliness" remained an important value, it was a "this-worldliness" marked by discipline and sacrifice rather than self-seeking comfort and pleasure.²⁷ For Bonhoeffer, it is not a disinterested, contemplative aesthetic, but a fully integrated "polyphony of life," incorporating the religious, ethical and the aesthetic, thereby expressing the totality of being Christian, anchored in the *cantus firmus* of Christ.²⁸ Larry Rasmussen observes that, "Together with the *cantus firmus* of the love of God, passion for earthly existence is the rhythm of the Christian life itself ... For Bonhoeffer a Christian aesthetic is profoundly earthy and the Christian life utterly worldly."²⁹ Thus, as de Gruchy shows, there is an inherent connection between Bonhoeffer's "aesthetic existence" and "mature worldliness." His portrait of being "fully human," encompasses not only the aesthetic, but also being "truly of the earth."³⁰

While the richness of the interaction between Bonhoeffer and Kierkegaard's thought offers a helpful framing of the enquiry, as noted earlier, the question of the role of aesthetic existence in being human and becoming Christian has come to the fore afresh in the postmodern context. The rise not only of the existential paradigm, but also a phenomenological approach to anthropology, has enriched the field of aesthetics. James K. A. Smith illustrates that the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty has significant implications for understanding the aesthetic dimension of being an embodied human. In particular Smith points to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* to remind us of the basic truth that perception occurs through existing as a body in the world. Further, that bodily perception does not simply provide the raw data, which is then intellectually engaged as a distinct disembodied process; rather, perception is a "way of intending the world, of *meaning* the world *with* the body."³¹ There is distinct resonance here with the burgeoning field of embodied cognition. Shaun Gallagher, drawing from a wide variety of interdisciplinary research, argues that it is clear that

²⁷ De Gruchy, 150.

²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:393–94.

²⁹ Larry Rasmussen, 'The Whole of Earthly Life', in *Theology in Dialogue: The Impact of the Arts, Humanities, and Science on Contemporary Religious Thought*, ed. Lyn Holness and Ralf K. Wüstenberg (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 69.

³⁰ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 167.

³¹ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 72.

embodiment not only shapes the way we think, but shapes the mind itself. “It may even be possible to say that bodily movement, transformed into the level of action, is the very thing that constitutes the self.”³² While naturally, an emerging field such as this is marked by lack of definition, and some of the claims remain contentious, there is no doubt sufficient evidence to justify the claim that embodiment profoundly shapes consciousness.³³ Further, there are arguments which suggest that the aesthetic nature of experience, in particular, shapes meaning. Mark Johnson and George Lakoff produced the classic work, *Metaphors We Live By*, which speaks to the formative nature of aesthetic existence, Johnson building on this with an aesthetic approach to embodied cognition.³⁴ Johnson argues that “image schemata” (which we will later consider as the paradigmatic production of the imagination) are shaped through bodily experience, and that consequently, “human rationality is imaginative through and through, insofar as it involves image-schematic structures that can be metaphorically projected from concrete to more abstract domains of understanding.”³⁵ Embodied cognition thus has obvious implications for the life of faith, underscoring the need to further explore how environmental experience shapes belief, through the formation of paradigmatic religious frameworks.³⁶

In chapter four, we will therefore engage this physiological understanding of the integration between aesthetic, ethical and religious existence in being human. Neuroscience points toward a holistic understanding of human faculties. Sense and sensibility, imagination and reason are not poles of opposites as they are often portrayed.³⁷ Drawing from the evidence of neuroscience, particularly research into the lateralisation of brain function, Iain McGilchrist, in his groundbreaking work, *The Master and His Emissary*, provides an argument for the fundamental integration of embodiment, imagination and rationality in a holistic

³² Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 9.

³³ Lawrence Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

³⁴ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

³⁵ Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, 194.

³⁶ Lawrence W. Barsalou et al., ‘Embodiment in Religious Knowledge’, *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 5, no. 1 (2005): 14–57.

³⁷ On their integration, see in particular the work of eminent neuroscientists Jaak Panksepp and Antonio Damasio. For example, Jaak Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling Of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness* (London: Vintage Books, 2000); Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (London: Vintage Books, 2006).

understanding of the human person.³⁸ In resonance with Damasio and Panksepp, McGilchrist shows that aesthetic existence is not only an *expression* of being human, but more significantly, aesthetic existence plays a key role in the making of meaning, with consequences for ethical and religious life.

The fifth chapter will explore the integrative work of the theologian Graham Ward, who responds to McGilchrist and provides interdisciplinary evidence to argue for the link between aesthetic existence, meaning, belief and ethics. He identifies the imagination as critical in this relational dynamic, as have many others.³⁹ Ward sees the imagination lying somewhere between primitive awareness and cognition, “often functioning sub-consciously and instinctively,” and yet also clearly a function of the mind, and itself a form of consciousness.⁴⁰ Ward shows that reading, for example, is not a mode of perception, but a form of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and feeling that takes place through the work of the imagination, thereby creating a sense of belief in a narrative, a process reflecting the workings of imagination in the narratives of daily life.⁴¹ He reminds us that this is what “phenomenologists from Edmund Husserl onwards have recognised, human beings perceive intentionally. They see meaning.”⁴² Ward points out that the imagination, which undergirds cognitive thought, is shaped and framed by embodied experience in the world. But it goes further than this, since modern neuroscience has illustrated that the imagination has the power to activate mirror neurones which “create simulation in the brain’s body maps, of a body state that is not actually taking place... belief is not only embodied but inseparable from the capacity to imagine.”⁴³

³⁸ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*.

³⁹ See, for example, Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol, and Myth in Religion and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999); David J. Bryant, *Faith and the Play of Imagination: On the Role of Imagination in Religion* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989); Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁴⁰ Graham Ward, ‘Theology as Literature and Ideology’ (28 September 2015); Graham Ward, ‘Metaphor in Bone’, *Modern Theology* 31, no. 4 (October 2015): 618–24.

⁴¹ Graham Ward, ‘Narrative and Ethics: The Structures of Believing and the Practices of Hope’, *Literature and Theology* 20, no. 4 (1 December 2006): 438–61; Graham Ward, ‘Why Literature Can Never Be Entirely Secular’, *Religion & Literature* 41, no. 2 (1 July 2009): 21–27; Graham Ward, ‘How Literature Resists Secularity’, *Literature & Theology* 24, no. 1 (March 2010): 73–88.

⁴² Graham Ward, *Unbelievable: Why We Believe and Why We Don’t* (London: IB Tauris, 2014), 51.

⁴³ Ward, 96.

If the aesthetic dimension of human existence plays a pivotal role in consciousness, then the emerging field of everyday aesthetics, marked by a phenomenological approach to aesthetics, provides fruitful lines of thought for exploring this dimension of being human.⁴⁴ Again, as an emerging and dynamic field, it faces lack of clear definition and focus,⁴⁵ but as Christian Hainic remarks, “The mere aesthetic experience of understanding one’s being-in-the-world as made up by everyday phenomena is in itself overwhelmingly sufficient to constitute a foundation for an aesthetics of everyday life.”⁴⁶ John Dewey’s *Art as Experience* has had a strong influence on the movement.⁴⁷ As Kalle Puolakka shows, Dewey’s approach has its flaws as a systematic foundation, but it remains helpful in that it locates aesthetic experience as a fluid imaginative existence within a continuum of time, rather than disconnected aesthetic moments strung across memory.⁴⁸ Everyday aesthetics, since it is not located in the realm of disinterested contemplation, has a natural ethical application, the imagination “a central focus in ethical theorizing.”⁴⁹

Locating aesthetics in the everyday foregrounds its relationship to both the imagination and daily practices. As Charles Taylor and others have shown by conceptualising a social imaginary, the imagination not only has an impact on personal formation, but on the corporate formation of communities and cultures.⁵⁰ Further, social practices embed these imaginaries in everyday life as normative, as has been argued by Alasdair MacIntyre.⁵¹ In chapter six, Nicholas Wolterstorff helps us, firstly, to understand aesthetic engagement not primarily

⁴⁴ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*; Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2012).

⁴⁵ Kevin Melchionne, ‘The Definition of Everyday Aesthetics’, *Contemporary Aesthetics* 11 (2013), <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=663>; Kevin Melchionne, ‘The Point of Everyday Aesthetics’, *Contemporary Aesthetics* 12 (2014), <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=700>; Ossi Naukkarinen, ‘What Is “Everyday” in Everyday Aesthetics?’, *Contemporary Aesthetics* 11 (2013), <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=675>; Thomas Leddy, ‘Defending Everyday Aesthetics and the Concept of “Pretty”’, *Contemporary Aesthetics* 10 (2012), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0010.008>.

⁴⁶ Cristian Hainic, ‘The Heideggerian Roots of Everyday Aesthetics: A Hermeneutical Approach to Art’, *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics* 4 (2012): 247.

⁴⁷ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, 2005).

⁴⁸ Kalle Puolakka, ‘Dewey and Everyday Aesthetics - A New Look’ 14 (2014), <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=699>.

⁴⁹ Steven Fesmire, *John Dewey and Moral Imagination: Pragmatism in Ethics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 60.

⁵⁰ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (London: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁵¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 187ff.

through the traditional lens of disinterested contemplation, but as social practice; and secondly, to consider the ways in which such social practices inform or “script” liturgy.⁵²

Notwithstanding the work of Wolterstorff, the field of theological aesthetics has not yet grappled in much detail with an existential approach to aesthetic experience in everyday life. On the surface it may seem that significant work has been done in locating the nature of human being within the aesthetic realm. Daniël Louw, for example, finds his ethic, and basis for human dignity in his notion of *homo aestheticus*, the application of *imago Dei* to the aesthetic, rather than the ethical nature of humankind.⁵³ But as helpful as it is to anchor theological aesthetics in the *imago Dei*,⁵⁴ the application of this for an exploration of aesthetic existence is only as rich as the resultant theological anthropology is embodied. While William Dyrness, along with Calvin Seerveld, have concerns about locating aesthetic existence in the *imago Dei*,⁵⁵ both Dyrness and Seerveld have made contributions to the notion of aesthetic obedience in the everyday.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, for the most part, the field of theological aesthetics has not taken an existential approach to theological anthropology. Although there have been brief and peripheral forays into the question, much remains to be explored.⁵⁷ This is particularly the case at present, considering the wealth of interdisciplinary resources from which to draw, particularly recent research in neuroscience, embodied cognition and everyday

⁵² As Smith has argued, such “liturgies” are not confined to ecclesial settings. Human beings, as desiring beings, *will* worship, the question is merely how and where such ecclesial or “cultural liturgies” are formed. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*; Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*.

⁵³ Daniël Louw, ‘Identity and Dignity within the Human Rights Discourse: An Anthropological and Praxis Approach’, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35, no. 2 (2014). See also Daniël Louw, “‘Spiritual Humanism’ Within the Realm of Christian Aesthetics: Toward the Meaning and Value of Our Being Human within the Theological Framework of an Aesthetics of Compassion’, *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal* 53, Supplement 3 (2012); Daniël Louw, ‘Theopoiesis and the Aesthetics of Human Dignity: Towards a Pneumatological Approach’, *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal* 54, no. 3–4 (2013); Daniël Louw, ‘Creative Hope and Imagination in a Practical Theology of Aesthetic (Artistic) Reason’, *Religion and Theology* 8, no. 3 (2001): 327–44.

⁵⁴ An approach adopted by Dorothy Sayers as well. See Dorothy Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970).

⁵⁵ William A. Dyrness, ‘The Imago Dei and Christian Aesthetics’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 15, no. 3 (Summer 1972): 161–72.

⁵⁶ William A. Dyrness, *Poetic Theology: God and the Poetics of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Calvin Seerveld, *Rainbows for the Fallen World: Aesthetic Life and Artistic Task* (Toronto: Tuppence Press, 1980).

⁵⁷ As an example of a peripheral, but relevant contribution to the question, see Birgit Meyer, ‘Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism’s Sensational Forms’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 4 (2010): 741–63.

aesthetics. The implications for the life of the church are significant. Recently, Gordon Mikoski posed the challenge,

To consider practical theology in terms of category like beauty, the sublime, and the underlying aesthetic character of all cognitive and social awareness might open up fresh lines of thought. Of course, we probably wouldn't want to end with Kant even if we might begin with him on this matter. We might want to push forward from Kant into Dewey's *Art as Experience* and Bourdieu's *Distinction*. My larger question remains: what would be possible for the field of practical theology if it were framed and practiced in the mode of aesthetics?⁵⁸

This research project aims to provide a theological prolegomenon for such an exploration.

1.5 Synopsis

Following this introductory chapter, in chapter two we begin by delineating Kierkegaard's limited and qualified endorsement of aesthetic existence as poetic living. Kierkegaard rejects the aestheticized Romantic notion of poetic living as self-creation, located in sensory immediacy amidst the play of unending freedom. In particular, he attacks the potent combination of aestheticism and comfortable Christendom. However, he embraces the formative role of the imagination and the concept of a second immediacy, or an "immediacy after reflection" in the Christian life, pointing toward the co-poeticising role that one plays, in relationship with Christ, as one becomes Christian. Right at the outset of the project, therefore, we are confronted by a theme that we will follow throughout: not all modes of aesthetic existence are equal in relation to discipleship. While the aestheticized self-creation of Romantic aesthetic existence creates a fantastical and illusory sense of reality, there does appear to be a formational role for *mature* aesthetic existence in discipleship, in coming to apprehend Christological reality.

Bonhoeffer helps us to further discover this role in chapter three by locating aesthetic existence firmly within the Christian life, even amidst the self-same challenge Kierkegaard faced of Christendom and the consequent call for costly discipleship. His basis for doing so is his embrace of this-worldly existence as an incarnational response to imitating Christ. As already alluded to by Kierkegaard, it is important to distinguish between, on the one hand, mature aesthetic existence, which is a polyphonous celebration of Christological reality in the penultimate, and on the other, an aesthetic existence as ultimate, which is simply aestheticism.

⁵⁸ Gordon Mikoski, 'Practical Theology and Aesthetics', *The Association of Practical Theology* (blog), 5 March 2011, <http://practicaltheology.org/2011/03/practical-theology-aesthetics/>.

Further, even though Bonhoeffer does not offer a systematic treatment, his personal embrace of aesthetic existence in his own life, particularly in the form of his engagement with music from a young age, offers a significant pointer to its formational significance, as seen through the impact of musical metaphors on his theology.

In chapter four, drawing on Iain McGilchrist and his neuropsychological research, we explore this formational significance of aesthetic existence as a fundamental aspect of being human. McGilchrist argues that the lateralisation of brain function indicates that there are two primary ways of attending to the world: abstract, detailed left-hemisphere attention and relational, contextual right-hemisphere attention. While both are vital to healthy apprehension of reality, the modern world prioritises the former, thereby neglecting the latter. Aesthetic existence plays a significant, partially preconscious role in the formation of contextual paradigms, or “metaphors we live by,” through embodied and affective interaction with the world, grounded in right-hemisphere attention.⁵⁹ Significantly, however, sensory engagement with the world dominated by left-hemisphere attention simply creates self-contained virtualities, the “formation” of simulacra.

We then turn to Graham Ward in chapter five to elucidate the implications of McGilchrist’s findings for a life of faith. Ward affirms McGilchrist’s argument that belief is not a weak form of knowledge, but a relational disposition, informed, partially on a preconscious level, by aesthetic existence. Belief, therefore, is fundamentally connected to embodied action in the world, challenging the boundaries between aesthetics, ethics and faith. *Making sense*, as a function of embodied action in relationship to the imagination, brings together both poiesis and praxis, aesthetics and ethics. Such formation, or *making* of belief is universal, not limited to religious belief, but again, it can serve either faith-formation or virtualisation. Here we note that the vital connection between embodied aesthetic existence and divine reality is analogical, discipleship thus demanding a liturgical orientation to all of life, including everyday aesthetic experience.

Using Nicholas Wolterstorff’s analysis of liturgy and art, in chapter six we then consider mature aesthetic existence as everyday liturgy. Wolterstorff shows that aesthetic engagement does not predominantly belong to the domain of disinterested contemplation, as the modern narrative suggests, but that it is essentially action, and is best understood as social practice. By integrating this analysis with his exposition of liturgy as informed by social practice, it

⁵⁹ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

becomes clear that aesthetic existence has both an expressive and formative role to play in a liturgical orientation to all of life. That it is expressive was pre-empted by Bonhoeffer's suggestion that mature aesthetic existence is an incarnational celebration of this-worldliness, rightly oriented to God. Wolterstorff adds that such celebration is not merely ornamental, but *enhances* the ordinary as action in the world, thereby furthering *shalom*. But as with all liturgy, there is a circularity that should be noted here. Such expression functions as a practice, which is in turn formative, operating as a partially preconscious "script" for the liturgy of the everyday. To repeat the theme once more, such "scripting" does not automatically play a positive role in faith formation. Aesthetic existence is both an expression of worship, and formative for worship, but the object, or orientation of worship is dependant upon the mode of aesthetic existence.

CHAPTER 2: KIERKEGAARD & THE NATURE OF AESTHETIC EXISTENCE

Introduction

The research question that drives this project asks whether aesthetic existence is fundamental to being human, and becoming Christian, bodily engaged in the life of the world. It is a question with implications both for the nature of discipleship and consequently also ethics. The question is framed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's interaction with the work of Søren Kierkegaard, specifically Bonhoeffer's call for a recovery of Kierkegaard's "aesthetic existence" within the life of the church. At first glance, this appears to be a fundamentally contradictory notion, for is it not precisely aesthetic existence which Kierkegaard is suggesting needs to be rejected in order to embrace religious existence? In the next chapter, we will look more closely at Bonhoeffer's perspective, which emanates from his affirmation of this-worldliness, as a penultimate expression of Christological reality. But before we can do so, in this chapter we need to clarify Kierkegaard's perspective on aesthetic existence. As noted in the introductory chapter, neither Kierkegaard nor Bonhoeffer (or their interaction for that matter) are the focus of this research project. But Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer together frame the question that we are working with. In other words, while it is Bonhoeffer's engagement with Kierkegaard's aesthetic existence that poses, and offers boundaries around the question, we will need to move beyond both Bonhoeffer and Kierkegaard to provide a robust response.

This chapter then has two objectives: Firstly, to clarify the research question through exploring Kierkegaard's notion of aesthetic existence. In order to do so, we will need to contextualise the concept within Kierkegaard's reaction to both Romanticism and Danish Lutheran Christendom. Kierkegaard's concern was not constructing a systematic theory of aesthetics, but the question of what it meant to become Christian within his cultural context (which continues to have relevance to our own cultural context). In other words, to offer an accurate understanding of Kierkegaard's aesthetic existence requires understanding it within his larger exploration of genuine Christian formation and living. This therefore offers a foundation for the fundamental task of this project as a whole: understanding the role of aesthetic existence in discipleship.

The second objective of this chapter is to articulate Kierkegaard's perspective, as a preliminary response to the question of the relation between aesthetic existence and discipleship. Kierkegaard's view is complex and defies reductionist readings, which either point exclusively to his vilification of the aesthetic on the one hand, or lean towards the temptation to massage his embrace of "poetic living" into an unreserved endorsement of the aesthetic. However, on close examination it is clear that there is not only an "either/or" but also a both/and in his approach to aesthetics.¹ While offering a scathing rejection of the Romantic notion of self-creation, as a process defined by aestheticism (the either/or), he also embraces (his own qualified view of) existence as art, living poetically, and consequently the significant role the imagination plays in formation, even religious formation (the both/and). Again, his response to the faculty of imagination is complex. While he rejects the Romantic, imaginative creation of the ideal (which is disconnected from actuality), he acknowledges the role of the imagination in generating possibility for self-development. This healthy use of the imagination is anchored in the reality of Christ and his promise.² Even if Kierkegaard does not explicitly take us that far, arguably, the implication that this raises is that everyday aesthetic existence is inherently connected, through our very bodies, to incarnational living as imitation of Christ. While we will need to go beyond Kierkegaard to explore this more deeply, he offers an important entryway into our exploration of aesthetic existence and discipleship.

2.1 Kierkegaard's Context: Calling for true discipleship amidst aestheticism

In order to understand Kierkegaard's perspective on aesthetic existence we need to briefly situate his work within the context to which he was responding. In particular, for our purposes, it is his reaction to Romanticism and Danish Christendom (and their interaction) that informs his polemic on genuine Christian living.

¹ Despite this, as we shall see, the perception persists that Kierkegaard drove a wedge between aesthetics on the one hand, and the ethico-religious on the other. Hans Urs von Balthasar recounts the story of Kierkegaard appearing before the queen for commendation, the queen misnaming his work *Either/Or* as "Either and Or," a title which Balthasar suggests ironically highlights the problematic disjunction in Kierkegaard's work. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'Revelation and the Beautiful', in *Explorations in Theology, Vol. 1: The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 95–96.

² A point which is further developed by Bonhoeffer, as we shall see in the next chapter.

2.1.1 A Reaction to Romantic Self-creation

At the heart of Kierkegaard's critique of Romanticism is the inability of the Romantic ideal to be integrated with reality.³ While there is ample evidence of his engagement with Romanticism in his early papers and journal entries, it is in his academic dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*, where he deals extensively with the Romantic ideal of living poetically.⁴ The fragmentary and varied nature of his early papers and journals has led to a diversity of interpretations as to Kierkegaard's initial stance toward Romanticism. While some (Nelly Viallaneix and Søren Holm, for instance) see this early work as a manifestation of Romantic youth in Kierkegaard, others (David Gouwens and George Pattison, for example) argue that it represents reflections on Romanticism rather than an embrace of it.⁵ Regardless, for our purposes the relevant point is that Romanticism, with its conception of the aesthetic self, was at the forefront of Kierkegaard's thinking and writing from early on. Romantics with which Kierkegaard engaged, Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich Schiller for instance, espoused the emergence of selfhood through freedom in an "aesthetic state," while Danish Romantic poets, such as Adam Oehlenschläger and Henrik Steffens, "used poetic means to master the expression of human truth and freedom ... [claiming] it is poetic expression that best reveals human freedom as the ideal to which humans should aim."⁶ This is the essential demand that Kierkegaard understood Romanticism to be making – that one should "live poetically" – and which consequently became the principle point of his critique.⁷

While there are aspects to the notion of living poetically that Kierkegaard wishes to recover (which we will later explore), he rejects aestheticism, as the absolutisation of the aesthetic and consequent disconnect from actuality, which lies at the heart of the Romantic version of living poetically. As Walsh notes, Kierkegaard's claim is that the Romantics

attempt to create themselves by imaginatively playing or experimenting with various poetic possibilities in life ... But because the romantic ironists flit from possibility to possibility, living, in his opinion, in a "totally hypothetical and subjunctive way," their lives lose continuity and lapse under the sway of moods and feelings that are themselves subject to sudden and drastic change (*Concept of Irony*, 284).⁸

³ Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 49.

⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, vol. 2, Kierkegaard's Writings (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁵ Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, 44.

⁶ Jøthen, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood*, 15.

⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 2:295–99; cf. Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 43.

⁸ Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 51.

The pursuit of “endless possibility” leads to immersion in the fantastical imagination, severed from finitude and actuality.⁹ While it claims pursuit of the ideal, “every ideal is instantly nothing but an allegory hiding a higher ideal within itself, and so on into infinity.”¹⁰ It is precisely because of this that Kierkegaard “concludes that the romantic cannot be ‘captured in a definition’ ... that ‘the romantic lies essentially in flowing over all boundaries’ (*Journals and Papers*, 3:3796).”¹¹ Behind the illusion of the ideal, Kierkegaard alludes to the ultimate bankruptcy of Romanticism by describing it as

restless (JP, 3806),¹² lacking integration (JP, 16), incapable of being given a permanent stable form (JP, 3815) ... a constantly self-surpassing striving (JP, 5131), “a continual grasping after something which eludes one.” (JP, 3816) No single image or expression can satisfy the Romantic consciousness for the “whole idea cannot rest and be contained in the actual expression,” (JP, 3807) since the expression gives only “the image of the shadow.” (JP, 3816)¹³

For Kierkegaard, there is no substance, “consistent principle of form” or “lifeview” that ultimately holds together the Romantic ideal in a sense of wholeness.¹⁴ It is, therefore, the vacuity of this illusory self-creation that Kierkegaard wishes to confront. But herein lies the complexity of Kierkegaard’s aesthetics: on the one hand he wishes to reject Romantic aestheticism, while on the other, to show that imaginative possibility and actuality can, and should, cohere in development of the self. He wants to affirm “a sense of our historical situatedness and finite limitations as well as freedom, and the construction of human personality through a process of self-development, rather than self-creation, in relation to the infinite or divine.”¹⁵ In other words, as Peder Jothen puts it, “his aesthetics is always intertwined with becoming a Christian.”¹⁶ Or, to put it in the terms of this project, to rightly understand his construal of “aesthetic existence” we need to consider it in light of his perspective on discipleship.

⁹ Gouwens, *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of the Imagination*, 54.

¹⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 2:306.

¹¹ Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 46.

¹² Pattison is referencing *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, ed. Edna Hong and Howard Hong, 6 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967-78). Unless otherwise indicated, all in-text references to Kierkegaard’s work are to the Hong’s translations.

¹³ Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, 49.

¹⁴ Gouwens, *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of the Imagination*, 70–71.

¹⁵ Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 2.

¹⁶ Jothen, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood*, 8.

2.1.2 *A Reaction to Danish Christendom and “Cheap Grace”*

Kierkegaard’s aesthetic critique was not merely directed at Romantic philosophers, his concern was with *existence*, lived reality, and the flourishing of aestheticism in the everyday. It is the manner in which these ideas affected Danish culture and the church, mutually coalescing in Christendom, which particularly provoked his ire. If, on the one hand, Kierkegaard is offering a critique of everyday bourgeois Danish aestheticism as expressed on the buzzing streets like Østergade,¹⁷ the spectacle of the Theatre Royal and ultimately the amusement park, Tivoli Gardens.¹⁸ On the other, he is deeply troubled by the everyday apathy of the Danish church. In his estimation, these two existential realities overlap in the “*haute bourgeois* aestheticism” of leading clerical figures such as Bishop Jacob Peter Mynster, who bore the brunt of his “attack on Christendom.”¹⁹ In fact, Kierkegaard goes as far as equating Danish church leaders with the entertainers of Tivoli, their empty baptisms and confirmations being compared to “picnics” and “family delights.”²⁰

This is the highly respected activity of the pastor, a livelihood that prevents people from entering into God’s kingdom. In return, “the pastor” does his best by way of performances (for which producer Carstensen [the founder of Tivoli] has a decided talent in grand style), beautiful, glorious festivities with – just as a little wine tastes

¹⁷ The streets of Copenhagen are prominent in “The Seducer’s Diary,” particularly symbolic is Østergade (East Street). See George Pattison, *Poor Paris!': Kierkegaard's Critique of the Spectacular City* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 65.

Østergade was described in 1852 by a British visitor as “the street where everyone walks one time of the day or other, where all the ‘shopping’ is done, for it contains the best shops in town, where youths go to saunter and smoke, ladies to gossip ...” From Andrew Hamilton, *Sixteen Months in the Danish Isles* (London: Richard Bentley, 1852), p. 183, as quoted in George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life: Between Romanticism and Modernism: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13.

¹⁸ Tivoli Gardens, an amusement park, “opened, with nice irony, in the year that saw the publication of *Either/Or* (1843). Tivoli was not simply an empirical fact: it was a cultural product, imbued with the means given to it by its founder, George Carstensen... its architect... collaborators *and* by its devotees and critics.” Both the name and concept of Tivoli was taken by Carstensen “from pleasure gardens of the same name in Paris, ‘Tivolis’.” In its first year, “it attracted 372,237 visitors – over three times the population of Copenhagen itself.” It contained “a range of attractions,” including “a steam roundabout, a roller-coaster... music... theatre... fireworks” etc., “which created another world in which, for an afternoon or an evening, visitors could slip off their everyday identity and become tourists in some vaguely defined land... promenading up and down the allées, seeing and being seen.” Pattison, *Poor Paris!*, 2.

¹⁹ Alastair Hannay and Gordon Daniel Marino, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 27.

²⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Moment' and Late Writings*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, vol. 23, *Kierkegaard's Writings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 249.

good in lemonade – a little religion added, something Carstensen cannot do... but perhaps he could be ordained.²¹

Similarly, Kierkegaard equates the role of the clergy with “coachmen, hired to take visitors out to the Deer Park,²² (implying, further, that the sacraments and offices of the Church are themselves no more than Deer Park entertainments).”²³ Later, after Carstensen had left Tivoli in 1848, “In the journals [Kierkegaard] notes under the heading ‘Protestantism in Denmark’ that, ‘It is a shame that Carstensen has left us and that now Bournonville [Director of the Royal Ballet] is leaving us: these two would be best suited to serve and manage religion in Denmark.”²⁴ This ecclesial connection with the carnival and Tivoli is telling if one correlates it with *Either/Or*’s aesthete “A” and his aspiration of “Copenhagen becom[ing] another Athens” as “the greatest artists, actors and dancers... stream to Copenhagen,” to create a fantasia wherein, as Pattison puts it, “the fantastic [becomes] the factual and the factual [becomes] the fantastic.”²⁵ It is a “fantasia” that is both self-perpetuating and economically sustainable since it not only creates a “reality,” but sustains it through the commodification of leisure (Tivoli becoming “one of the most successful leisure ‘products’ of the nineteenth century”).²⁶ A key point here, which we shall further explore in later chapters, is that the religious realm is not immune to the virtualisation of reality that accompanies aestheticism.

It is the combination of the influence of Romantic aestheticism, alongside the apathy and comfort of Danish Christendom, which led Kierkegaard to call for true discipleship and a rejection of cheap grace. The church had become aligned with culture for all the wrong reasons, succumbing to it rather than critically engaging it. It had become a “culture-religion.”²⁷ As Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Johannes Climacus reflects, if a Dane were to question whether they should call themselves a Christian, his wife would say, “Hubby,

²¹ Kierkegaard, 23:249.

²² An annual, rural fair, described in 1857 as “all that the senses could desire. A motley chaos for ear and eye: tents and booths... swings... carousels... equestrian artistes and menageries, wheels of fortune and panoramas, wax figures and waffle-sellers, public marionette theaters... [and] fire-eaters – in short: shrieking, noise, trumpet-blasts and shouting, as everyone seems to want to outbid all others in the art of working miracles and providing spectacles.” C. Rosenhoff, *København* (Copenhagen: Rittendorf and Aagaard, 1857), 207, as quoted in Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life*, 51.

²³ Pattison, 52. In reference to Kierkegaard, *The Moment’ and Late Writings*, 23:348.

²⁴ Pattison, *Poor Paris!*, 24.

²⁵ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 1987, 3:287; Pattison, *Poor Paris!*, 64.

²⁶ Pattison, *Poor Paris!*, 64.

²⁷ Howard A. Johnson in Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard’s Attack Upon Christendom 1854-1855*, ed. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), xxii.

darling, where did you ever pick up such a notion? How can you not be a Christian? You are Danish, aren't you? ... Aren't you a good subject in a Christian nation, in a Lutheran-Christian state? So of course you are a Christian."²⁸ Central to Kierkegaard's frustration was the "marriage of convenience wherein the government was more than willing to pay clerical stipends and provide for the maintenance of church fabrics out of the public treasury in return for the modest, reciprocal favor that, on political and social issues, the Church remain irrelevant and confine itself to 'Quiet Hours.'"²⁹ Contrary to Schleiermacher, whose theology paved the way for affirming the relation between faith and nationality (and thus the established church), Kierkegaard saw the "whole phenomenon of established Christendom [as] a monstrous error."³⁰ "Christendom has done away with Christianity," Kierkegaard proclaimed, and he therefore saw the task before him to "introduce Christianity to Christendom."³¹

Kierkegaard launched his "attack on Christendom" through pieces published in the periodicals *Fatherland* and *Moment* (or *Instant*), although, as Walter Lowrie notes, his journals contain far more, "ten times as much material as he needed."³² The initial catalyst for the attack was an address by Professor Martensen, at the above-mentioned Bishop Mynster's memorial service, where Martensen named Mynster a "witness to the truth." Kierkegaard responded that he was nothing of the sort, but in fact the complete opposite,

that Bishop Mynster's proclamation of Christianity (to take just one thing) tones down, veils, suppresses, omits some of what is most decisively Christian, what is too inconvenient for us human beings, what would make our lives strenuous, prevent us from enjoying life – this about dying to the world, about voluntary renunciation, about hating one-self, about suffering for the doctrine, etc.³³

To the contrary, Kierkegaard proclaims, there is a cost to discipleship, and a genuine understanding of "a truth-witness is a person whose life from first to last is unfamiliar with everything called enjoyment ..."³⁴

²⁸ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1992, 12:50.

²⁹ Howard A. Johnson in Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Attack Upon Christendom 1854-1855*, xxii.

³⁰ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century: The Paradox and the 'Point of Contact'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 6.

³¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton University Press, 2015), 39.

³² Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Attack Upon Christendom 1854-1855*, xiii.

³³ Kierkegaard, *The Moment' and Late Writings*, 23:3–4.

³⁴ Kierkegaard, 23:5–6.

Kierkegaard explored these themes at length, his parable of the geese an example, wherein the geese are content to stay within the comforts of home, only talking of flying on Sundays (“Christendom’s worship services”), but never actually flying. All the while becoming “plump, fat and delicate” (a sign of God’s grace), ridiculing the geese that actually fly, who look “poorly and thin” (clearly not enjoying God’s grace).³⁵

While the “cost of discipleship,” with its rejection of cheap grace, has come to be associated with Dietrich Bonhoeffer (as we shall further explore in the next chapter), Bonhoeffer was clearly influenced by his engagement with Kierkegaard’s work, amidst their common concern with the problem of Christendom. In calling attention to this mutual concern, Geoffrey Kelly describes Bonhoeffer’s experience of Christendom as “the seductive lure of a comfortable Christianity, gliding along with an all-powerful ideology that promised law and order, stability and security, state-bestowed benefits that appealed to clerical interests and the churches’ passion for survival as an institution enjoying civil privileges.”³⁶ It is a description that could be equally applied to Kierkegaard’s context.³⁷ In their mutual frustration, they share the rejection of “cheap grace” and the call to a Christian life that comes at a cost. While both Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer may have been aware of Luther’s reference to the abuse of Christ’s grace being described as “cheap,” there is a strong argument that Bonhoeffer’s use of the phrase came from Kierkegaard.³⁸ Kierkegaard’s study of Luther, translated and published in German as *Der Einzelne und die Kirche: Über Luther und den Protestantismus*, “served as a direct source for several sections” of Bonhoeffer’s *Discipleship* (previously published as

³⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, vol. 3 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 391.

³⁶ Geoffrey B. Kelly, ‘Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer’, in *Bonhoeffer’s Intellectual Formation: Theology and Philosophy in His Thought*, ed. Peter Frick (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 147.

³⁷ Here we should remember the revolutionary European milieu, culminating in 1848, which in Denmark saw a bloodless revolution that, for Kierkegaard “was a cataclysmic event for the spiritual health of the nation.” Kierkegaard knew this was not the revolution that Denmark needed, and the apathy the church showed in its failure to protect the “common man” from being used and abused by the revolutionaries angered him. Matthew D. Kirkpatrick and Geoffrey B. Kelly, *Attacks on Christendom in a World Come of Age: Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and the Question of ‘Religionless Christianity’* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 30–33. See Kirkpatrick’s text for an account of the interaction between Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer, in their mutual response to Christendom, which is both comprehensive and insightful.

³⁸ In Luther’s *Rationis Latominae Confutatio* of 1521, as pointed out in Kelly, ‘Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer’, 149.

The Cost of Discipleship).³⁹ In his text, Kierkegaard uses the terms “cheap grace” and “costly grace,” these being amongst the sections underlined by Bonhoeffer in his own copy of the book.⁴⁰ It is not merely a phrase that they share, but the concern that lies behind it. For both Bonhoeffer and Kierkegaard, the story of the rich young man in the gospels speaks directly to the problem of comfortable Christendom.⁴¹ And again, for both, the solution is simple, Bonhoeffer later echoing Kierkegaard’s injunction that “if the gospel demands that we renounce this world ... then the simple thing to do is: do it.”⁴² But for Kierkegaard, the church is so caught up in the concerns of comfortable Christendom that it has lost sight of true Christianity, as he laments in *For Self-Examination*,

Ah, we who still call ourselves Christians are from the Christian point of view so pampered, so far from being what Christianity does indeed require of those who want to call themselves Christians, dead to the world, that we hardly even have any idea of that kind of earnestness; we are as yet unable to do without, to give up the artistic and its mitigation, cannot bear the true impact of actuality – well then, let us at least be honest and admit it.⁴³

Kierkegaard’s allusion here, resonating with his rejection of aestheticism, is that “the artistic and its mitigation,”⁴⁴ the fantastical virtualisation of reality, is an imaginative mechanism to escape (Christological) actuality. Later, in his “attack,” he again emphasises the disconnect

³⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, vol. 4, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 11. Another point of commonality worth noting for our project is the mimetic nature of discipleship. Kierkegaard commented that in Luther’s context “... as soon as ‘imitation’ is taken away ‘grace’ is essentially [the sale of] indulgences,” or as Bonhoeffer would put it, “Gospel = cheap indulgence.” See Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 56 note 25. “Bonhoeffer’s use of ‘discipleship,’ ‘following Christ’ (*Nachfolge*), was heavily influenced by Kierkegaard’s extensive use of *Efterfølgelsen* (following-after). English translators of Kierkegaard’s original Danish translate *Efterfølgelsen* as ‘imitation.’” Bonhoeffer, 4: note 3, 40. This relation of *mimesis* to discipleship has significant implications for the role of the imagination, aesthetic engagement with reality, and the significance of “mirror neurones” as we shall explore in chapter four. See also Brian Gregor, ‘Following-After and Becoming Human: A Study of Bonhoeffer and Kierkegaard’, in *Being Human, Becoming Human: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Social Thought*, ed. Brian Gregor and Jens Zimmermann (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2012), 152–75.

⁴⁰ Kelly, ‘Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer’, 149–50.

⁴¹ Kelly, 152.

⁴² *Journals*, vol. 3: 93-95 and Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English (DBWE) vol. 4: 77, as quoted in Kelly, 152.

⁴³ Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination/Judge For Yourself!*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, vol. 21, Kierkegaard’s Writings (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 11–12.

⁴⁴ Or, in Walter Lowrie’s translation, “the artistic presentation and its soothing effect,” Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination & Judge for Yourself! & Three Discourses, 1851*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), 37.

between, on the one hand, the “unreality” of existence within finite, aestheticized Christendom, and, on the other, discipleship as the embrace of Christological reality,

“Christendom” is by no means Christ’s Church... The kind of existences manifested by the millions in Christendom has absolutely no relation to the New Testament, is an unreality that has no claim to Christ’s promise concerning the believers; yes an unreality, since true reality is present only when a person has ventured decisively in this way, as Christ requires... But “Christendom” is this nauseating dalliance, to want to remain completely and totally in finiteness and then – to make off with the promises of Christianity.⁴⁵

Kirkpatrick succinctly sums up Kierkegaard’s perspective,

In the face of the absolute paradox [of Christ] and its offensiveness, of the extreme rigorousness of imitation, the secular world has converted Christianity into the palatable affirmation of life in all its peace, comfort, and security. Using a phrase that appears through his journals, in the face of anxiety, the fear and trembling of Christianity, “The world wants to be deceived” (cf. *Judge for Yourself* 139; *Journals and Papers* 50)⁴⁶

2.2 Kierkegaard’s Stages of Existence

This backdrop helps us to understand the motivation behind Kierkegaard’s apparent rejection of aesthetic existence. If the Christian life is one that faces up to Christological reality, embracing sacrifice and suffering, and “unfamiliarity with enjoyment,” then the proliferation of Romantic aestheticism, intermingled with comfortable Christendom, needs to be rejected in order to embrace religious existence. But is the equation as simple as this? In the terms of this project, this would seem to imply that aesthetic existence plays no part in discipleship, and therefore simply needs to be rejected on the path to becoming Christian. In some ways, Kierkegaard is indeed saying this, as we shall shortly consider. But there is a danger in reading his apparent rejection of aesthetic existence too superficially, and thereby drawing erroneous sweeping conclusions, such as equating aestheticism with aesthetic existence. The critical point to note here is that Kierkegaard was responding to a particular context, as was Luther, and Bonhoeffer.⁴⁷ The task therefore befalls us to read Kierkegaard’s perspective on

⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Moment’ and Late Writings*, 23:215.

⁴⁶ Kirkpatrick and Kelly, *Attacks on Christendom in a World Come of Age*, 154.

⁴⁷ In fact, Kierkegaard himself highlights the significance of such contextualisation by suggesting that Luther’s message would have been quite different had he delivered it in Kierkegaard’s time, a point later affirmed by Bonhoeffer, “Already one hundred years ago Kierkegaard said that Luther today would say the opposite of what he said back then. I think this is true – *cum grano salis* [within certain limits].” Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination/Judge For Yourself!*, 21:24. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:173.

aesthetic existence carefully, taking into account the rhetoric he employs, as he reacts to what he sees as the dangers of his context.

In doing so, it will become apparent that while Kierkegaard rejects aestheticism, he wishes to recover a sense of “poetic living,” which includes aesthetic experience and the subsequent role of the imagination in formation (*Bildung*). In other words, there is a qualified sense of aesthetic existence, or a *mature* aesthetic existence, which is not rejected, but contributes to the formation of religious existence. The complexity of such an understanding is vital to this project. A binary, reductionist view concerning the role of everyday aesthetic existence in faith formation is neither accurate nor helpful.

It is for this reason that exploring the question of aesthetic existence’s relation to discipleship, as framed by Bonhoeffer and Kierkegaard, is particularly fruitful. Rather than engaging the question through the entryway of an unreserved embrace of the aesthetic (Romantic theology, for example), both Bonhoeffer and Kierkegaard’s starting point of a critique of aestheticism, as well as the call to costly discipleship, allows for a sober evaluation of both the positive and negative aspects that aesthetic existence contribute to faith formation. The challenges, which both Christendom and aestheticism bring, have not disappeared from society. As such, it is both Kierkegaard’s critique of aesthetic existence and his subtler embrace thereof, which demarcates fruitful terrain for us to explore further.

2.2.1 *Interpreting the “Stages”*: The complexity of Kierkegaard’s authorship

A superficial reading of Kierkegaard would conclude that aesthetic existence is an immature stage of life to be passed through, in a linear and progressive manner, as one matures to ethical and ultimately religious existence. It is rather obvious how one can come to such a conclusion based on reading selected passages and works from his corpus (as we shall shortly see). However, such a reductionist reading does not take seriously the complexity of Kierkegaard’s authorship. There are a number of aspects to take into account in this regard. The most obvious is the pseudonymous nature of much of his work. A critical point here is that Kierkegaard’s views cannot be strictly equated with that of any of his pseudonyms. His suggestion that “in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me” should be taken seriously.⁴⁸ But the pseudonyms point to a deeper complexity: his extensive use of irony and Socratic method as a means of communicating indirectly, “without authority.”

⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1992, 12:626.

Rather than presenting his argument systematically, he uses “poet-communication.”⁴⁹ His method reflects his objective, which is not merely to engage the intellect, but to affectively and imaginatively provoke the reader toward existential reflection and action.⁵⁰ While this should immediately, in itself, point to the fact that he values the formative role of the aesthetic, it also makes the systematising of his work a challenging task. Although the words of a pseudonym (Johannes Climacus), describing the work *Either/Or*, the following quote succinctly reflects the existential nature and goal of Kierkegaard’s indirect communication: “That there is no conclusion and no final decision is an indirect expression for truth as inwardness and in this way perhaps a polemic against truth as knowledge.”⁵¹ Nevertheless, despite this complexity, by acknowledging his method and through careful reading, it is possible to discern a level of continuity in his thought through contextually engaging his work in light of his corpus as a whole, approaching his pseudonymous work alongside his non-pseudonymous, direct communication.⁵²

2.2.2 *Aesthetic Existence as a Stage of Life: Kierkegaard’s rejection of aestheticism*

While we ultimately need to move toward a layered, complex understanding of Kierkegaard’s approach to aesthetic existence, it is nevertheless helpful for us to begin with the obvious, by encountering his apparent antipathy for aesthetic existence as the initial stage of life, which is significant because it points toward his rejection of aestheticism. For Kierkegaard, the central aspect of aesthetic existence as a stage of life is immediacy, living in the moment. This is to be superseded in the journey towards ethical and then ultimately religious existence. The initial stages are explicated at length in the two-part work, *Either/Or* (the first concentrates on the aesthetic and the second on the ethical), and also in *Stages on Life’s Way* (which refers to “spheres” of existence rather than stages). The pseudonym, Frater Taciturnus, outlines the stages,

⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers, Volume 6*, 6:248.

⁵⁰ Jothan, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood*, 46.

⁵¹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1992, 12:252.

⁵² This is not to say that rigorous scholarship will result in consensus regarding the interpretation of Kierkegaard (this is clearly not the case as even a cursory exploration of Kierkegaardian scholarship will reveal), merely to point to the necessity of such interpretation taking place within the narrative of his broader corpus. As such, Sylvia Walsh’s *Living Poetically* provides the research foundation and hermeneutical lens for this chapter, particularly as it is further developed by Joel Rasmussen’s *Between Irony and Witness* and Peder Jothan’s *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics and Selfhood*.

There are three existence-spheres: the esthetic, the ethical, the religious. ... The esthetic sphere is the sphere of immediacy, the ethical the sphere of requirement (and this requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt), the religious the sphere of fulfillment, but, please note, not a fulfillment such as when one fills an alms box or a sack with gold, for repentance has specifically created a boundless space, and as a consequence the religious contradiction: simultaneously to be out on 70,000 fathoms of water and yet be joyful.⁵³

In *Either/Or* II, another pseudonym, Judge William, further clarifies the distinction between the aesthetic stage and the ethical stage by locating ethical existence in the realm of volitional formation; in the ethical one chooses what one becomes, “to choose is an intrinsic and stringent term for the ethical.”⁵⁴ By contrast, aesthetic existence is captive to the immediacy of moods, passions and circumstances.

But what does it mean to live esthetically, and what does it mean to live ethically? To that I would respond: the esthetic in a person is that by which he spontaneously and immediately is what he is; the ethical is that by which he becomes what he becomes.⁵⁵

We need to once again situate these comments in the context, and larger Kierkegaardian project, of self-development and concomitant rejection of Romantic self-creation. While the aesthete defines the self through the momentary gratification of desire, the ethical person *chooses* to embrace social responsibility. Existence in the aesthetic stage is simply a collection of moments, holding no coherence, as portrayed in *Either/Or*, through the figure of Don Giovanni. He “can become epic only by continually finishing and continually being able to begin all over again, for his life is the sum of *repellerende* [discreet] moments that have no coherence, and his life as the moment is the sum of moments and as a sum of moments is the moment.”⁵⁶

Not only is the immediate paramount, but the aesthetic stage of existence is a mode of freedom that aims to create the self by playful experimentation,

In connection with Tivoli entertainments and literary New Year’s presents it holds true for the catch-penny artists and those who are caught by them, that *variety is the highest law of life*. But in connection with the truth as inwardness in existence, in connection with a more incorruptible joy of life, which has nothing in common with the craving of the life-weary for diversion, the opposite holds true; the law is the same and yet changed, and still the same. That is why lovers of Tivoli are so little interested in eternity, for it is the nature of eternity always to be the same, and the sobriety of the

⁵³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life’s Way*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, vol. 11, Kierkegaard’s Writings (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 476–77.

⁵⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or Part II*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, vol. 4, Kierkegaard’s Writings (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 166.

⁵⁵ Kierkegaard, 4:178.

⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 1987, 3:96.

spirit is recognizable in the knowledge that a change in externalities is mere diversion, while change in the same is inwardness.⁵⁷ [Italics added]

In the aesthete's effort to bring coherence to these discrete and diverse moments, a fantastical world is created, "It is a fantasy-existence in esthetic passion"⁵⁸ The attempt to reflectively create such a fantastical reality delineates the two types of aesthetic existence. While the more primitive mode of aesthetic existence dwells solely in the momentary hedonistic experience, the intellect too can be seized by aesthetic existence thereby creating an ideality of ceaseless aesthetic reflection. In *Either/Or* this is most clearly seen in the "The Seducer's Diary." As George Connell puts it, "It is here that the seducer, the very embodiment of unalleviated reflectivity and absolute artfulness, and Cordelia, the unplucked flower of pure immediacy, are shown to complement each other perfectly."⁵⁹ These two senses of existence in the aesthetic stage are explored in the introduction to the diary,

In the first instance he enjoyed the aesthetic personally, in the second instance he enjoyed his own aesthetic personality. In the first instance the point was that he enjoyed egoistically and personally what in part was reality's gift to him and in part was that with which he himself had impregnated reality; in the second instance his personality was effaced, and he enjoyed the situation. In the first instance he constantly needed reality as occasion, as factor: in the second instance, reality was submerged in the poetic.⁶⁰

In other words, reality disappears amidst the fantastical ideality created by the reflective aesthete. Or perhaps more accurately, a pseudo-reality replaces actuality as this "second level of enjoyment wins an autonomy for the resulting poetic world that allows it to forget itself as poetic so that its writer becomes unselfconsciously his own character and, thus, myth."⁶¹ At its most developed, therefore, the life stage of aesthetic existence is not merely a preoccupation with momentary, sensory pleasure, but the reflective creation (incorporating both intellect and affect) of "reality" which absolutises the aesthetic.

It is *this* conception of aesthetic existence, as aestheticism, which Kierkegaard argues should be rejected and left behind on the path to becoming Christian. *Concluding Unscientific*

⁵⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Walter Lowrie and David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 254–55. For the Hong translation see Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1992, 12:286.

⁵⁸ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1992, 12:253.

⁵⁹ George Connell, *To Be One Thing: Personal Unity in Kierkegaard's Thought* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 83. See *Either/Or*, 1:380

⁶⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life Volume 1*, ed. Walter Lowrie, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian M. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), 253. For the Hong translation, see Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 1987, 3:305.

⁶¹ Connell, *To Be One Thing*, 99.

Postscript to Philosophical Fragments and *Practice in Christianity* (both pseudonymous works, the former attributed to Johannes Climacus and the latter Anti-Climacus) clearly express this view by arguing that a self wholly devoted to God is not concerned with the aesthetic. Anti-Climacus argues that Christendom is full of “admirers” who “will make no sacrifices, renounce nothing, give up nothing earthly, will not transform [their lives].”⁶² But being a disciple of Christ requires “imitators,” who are willing to “die to the world, to surrender the earthly,” to deny the self, for here lies the transformation of a life, and its reality.⁶³ There is no place here for aesthetic simulacra amidst this Christological reality, even “admiring” artistic depictions of Christ himself.⁶⁴ In fact, Johannes Climacus, resonating with the problematic nature of being an “admirer,” goes as far as to suggest that not only does art and the aesthetic have no place in Christian formation, but its “disinterested” nature means that it is not fundamentally a necessary aspect of human existence,

Poetry and art have been called an anticipation of the eternal. If one wants to call them that, one must nevertheless be aware that *poetry and art are not essentially related to an existing person*, since the contemplation of poetry and art, “joy over the beautiful,” is disinterested, and the observer is contemplatively outside himself *qua* existing person.⁶⁵ [Italics added]

Little wonder then that Kierkegaard has been perceived to drive a wedge between the aesthetic and the ethico-religious.⁶⁶ As Frank Burch Brown comments on Kierkegaard’s perspective, “the religious as such is supposedly irrelevant to the aims of art, which are aesthetic. Religion calls for a change of life, he believes, whereas art calls for disinterested appreciation, or what later theorists would call aesthetic distance.”⁶⁷

A cursory reading of Kierkegaard’s aesthetic, therefore, offers two conclusions relevant for this project. Firstly, Kierkegaard *appears* to reject any role for aesthetic existence in becoming Christian. While we want to acknowledge that our engagement with Kierkegaard in

⁶² Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, vol. 20, Kierkegaard’s Writings (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 252.

⁶³ Kierkegaard, 20:252.

⁶⁴ “I do not comprehend how the artist would maintain his calm, that he would not notice Christ’s displeasure, would not throw it all out, brushes and paints, far, far away, just as Judas did with the thirty pieces of silver, because he suddenly understood that Christ has required only imitators ...” Kierkegaard, 20:255.

⁶⁵ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1992, 12:313.

⁶⁶ For a comprehensive overview of the schools of thought regarding Kierkegaard’s various approaches to aesthetics, including his apparent rejection of art, see Jothen, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood*, 7–46.

⁶⁷ Frank Burch Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste, & Christian Taste: Aesthetics in Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 31.

this section (including all of the quotations above) is via pseudonyms, and therefore needs to be understood through the lens of rhetorical irony, Kierkegaard clearly had strong views on the dangers of aestheticism for Christian formation (particularly when situated amidst apathetic Christendom). Secondly, we will need to read Kierkegaard more carefully, particularly alongside his direct communication, to ascertain if he does indeed allow aesthetic existence a role in becoming Christian. But even in so doing, we will do well to bear in mind the clarity and strength of the first point: his rejection of aestheticism and the virtual reality it creates.

2.2.3 *Aesthetic Existence & Poetic Living: A clarification of terms*

In order to appreciate the complexity of Kierkegaard's perspective on the role of aesthetic existence in becoming Christian, it is helpful for us to delineate his multi-faceted approach to aesthetics. Clarifying the terminology he uses is important, since it informs the terms, and consequent framework we will be working with for the remainder of this project. As already noted, Kierkegaard's engagement with aesthetics is not systematic, resulting in multiple interpretations that accentuate particular aspects of his work. The most obvious of these selective readings is that which we outlined in the previous section: equating Kierkegaard's aesthetic solely with aesthetic existence as a stage of life, which is superseded on the path to ethical and then religious existence. But, as Jøthen shows, this is only one of four "fragments" of Kierkegaard's aesthetic that we need to piece together to provide an accurate picture of his perspective. In addition to a stage of existence, his aesthetic also includes: an explicit critique of art; his authorship style as poet-communicator; and his endorsement of formative "poetic living."⁶⁸ Interpreters focussing on any one of these four elements in isolation lose sight of the "ontological moorings that tie his fragmentary aesthetics together": the formation of the human self.⁶⁹ As Jøthen notes, "These fragments are all part of a rich, tactical method that seeks to provoke, awaken and enliven each reader. But to do so, Kierkegaard develops a conception of the self built upon the importance of the imagination, will, and passion as means to enact human becoming."⁷⁰ In other words, as we have already mentioned, we cannot approach Kierkegaard's understanding of aesthetics other than through the lens of self-formation; his aesthetic is inseparable from his anthropology.

⁶⁸ Jøthen, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood*, 2.

⁶⁹ Jøthen, 5.

⁷⁰ Jøthen, 46.

2.2.3.1 The “*Aesthetic*” as the Lived Dimension of Sensory Experience

For Kierkegaard, therefore, “aesthetics” is fundamentally existential. As Terry Eagleton argues, “For [Kierkegaard], as for the originators of the discourse, aesthetics refers not in the first place to art but to the whole lived dimension of sensory experience, denoting a phenomenology of daily life before it comes to signify cultural production.”⁷¹ This is a helpful starting point, not only as a lens through which to interpret Kierkegaard, but also as the definition of aesthetics that we will be working with throughout the project.

However, we need to exercise caution as to how we proceed. For Eagleton, “cultural production” is the nexus of thought and action. Aesthetic existence is therefore a mode of existence that precedes “cultural production” either due to the immediacy that marks the first type of aesthete, such as Don Juan (action alone), or the reflectivity of the second, such as the Seducer (thought alone). The aesthetic self, devoid of “cultural production,” is then lost either through “flattening it out into external reality or plunging it fruitlessly into its own vertiginous depths.”⁷² While these two modes of aesthetic existence may seem polar opposites, Eagleton points out that, “Reflectiveness negates immediacy, but thereby shatters it to an infinite indeterminacy not wholly untypical of immediacy itself.”⁷³ Either way, the end result is the “radically empty” self.⁷⁴ The danger however, is equating one of the “fragments” of Kierkegaard’s aesthetic with his aesthetic as a whole. While Eagleton is offering an accurate analysis of Kierkegaard’s critique of the *life stage* of aesthetic existence, as aestheticism, which Kierkegaard certainly sees as hindering self-formation, does it necessarily follow that the *entire* “lived dimension of sensory experience,” (as “phenomenology of daily life” which precedes “cultural production”) is vacuous, making no contribution to self-formation? This is both a question we need to put to Kierkegaard, as well as a question at the heart of this entire project. Clearly, aestheticism, aesthetic existence as absolute, is problematic for Kierkegaard. But are the stages of existence mutually exclusive? Or, does he see formative value in a qualified, or mature aesthetic existence, as a subset of Christian existence?⁷⁵

⁷¹ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 173.

⁷² Eagleton, 175.

⁷³ Eagleton, 174.

⁷⁴ Eagleton, 174.

⁷⁵ In chapter four and five we will probe this question further by challenging whether it is indeed feasible to separate such “cultural production” from preconscious aesthetic existence. The actions of immediacy, preconscious though they may be, influence formation of self and thereby play a role in discipleship.

2.2.3.2 “Existence” as Lived Reality of Self-Formation

In order to appreciate the relationship between the stages of existence we need to approach Kierkegaard’s work as he intended it to be read, as provocative discourse to be lived rather than a systematic treatise. Eagleton’s error, along with others who reduce Kierkegaard’s aesthetic to the life stage of aesthetic existence, is a reductionist approach in the interests of systematic neatness.⁷⁶ This fails to take into account both the nature of his “poet-communication” and the way in which Kierkegaard’s indirect communication was an effort to deflect focus from himself to the reader, provoking participation (ideally formation) as a living subject. Jothan succinctly notes that, “The stages are about living and breathing, about choosing and willing, rather than merely how a self thinks and organizes thought into a conclusive system. And by describing the aesthetic as a system, merely one of the stages, the aesthetic is thereby reduced in its complexity, relegated to the world of logic and thought.”⁷⁷

This is why “existence” is a key term for Kierkegaard, pointing to the fact that reality is first and foremost lived. While seen as the father of existentialism, we should be cautious of reading anachronistically into his work. As Walsh points out, for Kierkegaard,

the term “existential” always connotes the concrete or historical actualization of those factors that are essential to the formation of human personality or the qualitative life of the individual (*Journals and Papers* 1:1054, 1059, 1060, 1062, 1063). These factors are to be realized in the individual’s own being and personal relations, not merely in the form of a conceptual, or ideal, actuality envisioned by the imagination and represented in external products of art.⁷⁸

For the purposes of our project therefore, we are not exploring existentialism as further developed in the twentieth century by the likes of Jean-Paul Sartre, but limiting discussion of “existence” to the concrete and historical lived reality of self-formation amidst the everyday. This is the subjective lens through which Kierkegaard’s aesthetic needs to be read. He is not engaging an objective, disinterested approach, as is the case with traditional aesthetics. Even his treatment of aesthetic phenomena, from the everyday experience of Deer Park or Tivoli to

⁷⁶ For another example of this approach, see Stephen Dunning, *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness: A Structural Analysis of the Theory of Stages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁷⁷ Jothan, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood*, 22.

⁷⁸ Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 5.

the products of “literary, plastic and musical art,” is subject to “an existential aesthetics that has as its object the edification, or upbuilding and fulfillment, of the human subject.”⁷⁹

2.2.3.3 The “*Poetic*” as an Existential Aesthetic Category

A key term for understanding Kierkegaard’s existential aesthetic is the “poetic,” which he uses in an attempt to recover and rehabilitate the Romantic notion of “poetic living.” He uses “poetry” not simply as a literary genre, or even in relation to the classical notion of *making* an external artistic product. But for Kierkegaard, the “poetic” “and its synonym ‘poetry’ are generally used in a very broad sense to encompass all forms and expressions of the creative or artistic imagination.”⁸⁰ In a sense, he *is* alluding back to classical usage, but the *poiesis* (producing, or making) that he is referring to is that of self-formation. In other words, his use of *digtning* (“poeticizing”) “describes the act of becoming a self as a creative, and thus an aesthetic, act.”⁸¹ There is therefore an obvious overlap in Kierkegaard’s use of the “aesthetic” and “poetic” and often they are employed interchangeably.⁸² Because of the nature of Kierkegaard’s authorship, caution should therefore be shown in imposing an artificial, systematic distinction, but it may nevertheless be fair to suggest that for the most part, “the aesthetic refers to those elements that are constitutive of the immediate, sensate life, whereas the poetic connotes sensate representation of an idea or ideal in works of art and in human life.”⁸³

The key point to note is that both his usage of “aesthetic” and “poetic” are inextricably bound up within the existential formation of the self, particularly in relation to the human faculty of imagination. Kierkegaard’s authorship, as a self-proclaimed poet-communicator, expresses precisely this sense of formative “poeticizing,” as opposed to the understanding of a poet who is primarily concerned with creating an external artistic product – poetry. While his authorship is sometimes divided into an initial aesthetic phase and a subsequent religious phase, Kierkegaard himself refutes this.⁸⁴ “Again and again he declares in the later journals that he is essentially a poet, and in several entries he describes himself more specifically as a ‘poet of the religious’ and even more narrowly as a ‘Christian poet and thinker’ (*Journals and*

⁷⁹ Walsh, 6.

⁸⁰ Walsh, 18.

⁸¹ Jøthen, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood*, 8.

⁸² Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 20.

⁸³ Walsh, 20.

⁸⁴ Walsh, 224–25.

Papers, 6:6511, 6521, 6391).”⁸⁵ His concern to qualify the type of poet he is reflects his rejection of Romantic poeticizing, which cannot integrate the ideal with the real. But he nevertheless believes that God has ordained him to imaginatively stir “a ‘poetic awakening’ in his readers (*Journals and Papers*, 6:6337, 6528, 6727)” by introducing the productive possibility of true Christian existence.⁸⁶ His pseudonym, Vigilius Haufniensis, suggests that psychological development requires “poetic originality” in the imaginative ability “to create the totality and the invariable from what in the individual is always partially and variably present.”⁸⁷

It is Kierkegaard’s framing of the poetic that will offer an on-going contribution for the remainder of this project. If the aesthetic, as sensory immediacy, plays any role in becoming Christian, then this connection cannot be explored without explicating the creative and formative (poetic) role of the imagination therein. *Poiesis* here is the imaginative production of existential possibility in symbiotic relationship with aesthetic existence. The crucial question is whether such *poiesis* leads solely to fantastical ideality, or whether it can contribute to a perception, and living, of Christological reality, or Christian existence. Before taking this question beyond Kierkegaard, we will briefly survey his concern around the danger of the former option, and outline his limited and qualified endorsement of the latter.

2.3 Christian Poetic Living: The role of mature aesthetic existence in discipleship

Kierkegaard’s positive affirmation of the aesthetic is reserved for, and situated firmly within, the stability, continuity and unity of the absolute paradox of Christological reality. He contrasts this Christian mode of poetic living with the vacuous and illusory Romantic alternative of perpetual, aesthetic self-experimentation. Failure to take this complex

⁸⁵ Walsh, 224.

⁸⁶ Walsh, 239.

⁸⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, ed. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 55.

Vigilius Haufniensis is here pointing to a fundamental component of both Kierkegaard’s affirmation of the aesthetic, as well as his rejection of Romantic aestheticism: The imagination, along with its necessary relationship to the aesthetic, has the ability to either fragment a fantastical ideal from actuality, or, to provide a cohesive and consistent understanding of reality and the aesthetic phenomenon encountered therein. We will discuss this further as the paradigmatic nature of the imagination in chapters four and five, but here this emanates from Kierkegaard’s aesthetic concern for unity or wholeness, which we shall shortly discuss.

relationship with the aesthetic into account is what lies behind the perception that Kierkegaard rejects the aesthetic in the life stages of ethical and ultimately religious existence.

2.3.1 *The Continuity of the Aesthetic in Ethico-Religious Existence*

As we have already seen, a cursory reading provides ample evidence for Kierkegaard's apparent stance that the aesthetic and poetic play no positive role in Christian existence. On the surface, and without the broader context of his work, we can point, for instance, to his claims that,

a union between the aesthetic and the ethical is a "misalliance" (*Stages on Life's Way*, 442); that a poetic relation to actuality is a "misunderstanding" and a "retrogression" (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1:388) ... that the poet cannot help one to understand life (*Works of Love*, 63); and that one must move away from the poetical to a religious, more specifically a Christian, mode of life (*The Point of View*, 74 [Lowrie translation]).⁸⁸

But, on the other hand, Kierkegaard also claims, seemingly paradoxically, that the aesthetic and poetic continue to play a productive role throughout the life stages or spheres. In *Either/Or II*, for example, depicting the ethical stage, Judge William sets out to show that one can "preserve the aesthetic even in everyday life."⁸⁹ The titles of two long letters from that work vividly point toward this end: "The Esthetic Validity of Marriage" and "The Balance Between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality." Continuity is a logical necessity between the stages since "it is the total esthetic self that is chosen ethically."⁹⁰ Further he expresses the point differently, "the ethical is posited by the absolute choice, but it by no means follows that the esthetic is excluded. In the ethical, the personality is brought into a focus in itself; consequently, the esthetic is absolutely excluded or it is excluded as the absolute, but relatively it is continually present."⁹¹

It becomes clear on closer inspection that Romantic aestheticism is the problem for Kierkegaard, not the aesthetic in its entirety. In fact, the poetic and aesthetic are "continually reinterpreted in an ethical-religious manner as essential elements in that sphere."⁹²

Kierkegaard's Judge William suggests that ethico-religious existence reorients the aesthetic; it "does not want to destroy the esthetic but transfigure it."⁹³ Even when rhetorically portraying the pinnacle of Christian existence in *Works of Love*, a direct work published under

⁸⁸ Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 167.

⁸⁹ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or II*, 4:9.

⁹⁰ Kierkegaard, 4:222.

⁹¹ Kierkegaard, 4:177.

⁹² Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 15.

⁹³ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or II*, 4:253.

Kierkegaard's own name, the immediate inclinations and desires are not to be left behind or destroyed but to be "dethroned" and "transformed" as they are subsumed into Christian living.⁹⁴

George Price suggests that one way of articulating this continuity between the life stages, or spheres, is to describe them as "existential attitudes," the respective ways in which one can respond to self-same sensory stimuli. Kierkegaard

himself answers it clearly. He says *Nothing is ever lost. Nothing that we have experienced, loved and treasured is ever thrown away.* What is discarded in the Leap from one level to another is not the content of experience but the mood, the existential attitude, in which we hold it. What is changed is the quality, not the content of the self. For example, the aesthetic as an attitude towards life must inevitably disappear, but the ethical, which replaces it, does not annihilate its content, it simply transforms it, gathers it up and redirects it.⁹⁵

The continuity of the aesthetic throughout the stages of existence is most clearly seen in Kierkegaard's affirmation that existence itself, as an art, is aesthetic formation. It is important to note that it is a qualified aesthetic formation, or *mature* aesthetic existence, as subsumed within ethico-religious existence, but it nevertheless remains a fundamental aspect of being human and becoming Christian. Contrary to the earlier quote, which taken out of context in pseudonymous isolation, seems to question whether the aesthetic is fundamental to being human, his corpus as a whole clearly points to existence being an aesthetic category, with faith itself considered a "work of art."⁹⁶ Interestingly and significantly, it is amidst a phase of authorship particularly marked by a critique of the aesthetic and poetic that the pseudonym Johannes Climacus affirms existence as aesthetic formation, even while crystallising Kierkegaard's rejection of Romantic poetic creation.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, vol. 16, Kierkegaard's Writings (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 45, 61–62, 139.

⁹⁵ George H. Price, *The Narrow Pass: A Study of Kierkegaard's Concept of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 159.

To clarify, as we move beyond Kierkegaard, this larger project is concerned with asking the question of whether aesthetic existence, per se (as lived sensory immediacy), plays a role in becoming Christian. In other words, when discussing "aesthetic existence" for the remainder of this project we are not referring to the "life attitude" of aesthetic existence in the immature life stage, which can be equated with Romantic aestheticism. This will only be considered as one possible mode of engaging aesthetic existence as sensory immediacy.

⁹⁶ Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 3. This point is a central thesis, comprehensively argued, in both Walsh's *Living Poetically*, as well as Jøthen's, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood: The Art of Subjectivity*.

⁹⁷ Walsh, 167, 195–221.

All existence-issues are passionate, because existence, if one becomes conscious of it, involves passion. To think about them so as to leave out passion is not to think about them at all, is to forget the point that one indeed is oneself an existing person. Yet the subjective thinker is not a poet even if he is also a poet... but is also a dialectician and is himself essentially existing, whereas the poet's existence is inessential in relation to the poem... The subjective thinker is not a scientist-scholar; he is an artist. *To exist is an art*. The subjective thinker is esthetic enough for his life to have esthetic content, ethical enough to regulate it, dialectical enough in thinking to master it.⁹⁸ [Italics added]

This expression – of being a poet, even while not being a poet – points to Kierkegaard's dual perspective on "poetic living," capturing his stance on existence as art.

2.3.2 *Poetic Living as Discipleship*

A key to understanding Kierkegaard's approach to "poetic living" is the Romantic notion of *Bildung*, a significant concept, not only in framing Kierkegaard's argument, but also for our continuing exploration beyond Kierkegaard.⁹⁹ *Bildung* can be understood as "self-cultivation," in the sense used within German neoclassicism, which focussed on *Bildung* "and the achievement of wholeness of the individual personality as the goal of life and art."¹⁰⁰ The concept is theoretically articulated in Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, and artistically in *Bildungsromane*, "novels of individual development."¹⁰¹ While on the one hand critiquing Romantic "poetic living," with its perception of *Bildung* as self-creation, Kierkegaard nevertheless does not reject the concept, but rather wishes to recover it by arguing that *Bildung*, as self-development, is an integral part of becoming Christian.¹⁰²

While Romantic "poetic living" may be problematic, Kierkegaard still sees the poetic as an important aspect of becoming Christian to the extent that it is grounded in actuality, as informed by the absolute reality of Christ. Here it is worth quoting him at length as he articulates the essence of this Christian approach to living poetically in contradistinction to the poetic living of the Romantic ironists.

[B]y "living poetically" irony understood... something more than what any sensible person... understands by this phrase. It did not take this to mean *the artistic earnestness that comes to the aid of the divine in man, that mutely and quietly listens*

⁹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1992, 12:351.

⁹⁹ Bonhoeffer, in particular, will pick up on the relationship between aesthetic existence and *Bildung* in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁰ Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 31.

¹⁰¹ Walsh, 31.

¹⁰² In fact, understanding *Either/Or* as an intentional *Bildungsroman* offers an insightful cohesion to the work, which otherwise appears somewhat fragmentary. See Walsh, 63-64 footnote 1.

to the voice of what is distinctive in individuality, detects its movements in order to let it really be available in the individual and to let the whole individuality develop harmoniously into a pliable form rounded off in itself. It did not understand it to be what the pious Christian thinks of when he becomes aware that *life is an upbringing, an education, which ... is specifically supposed to develop the seeds God himself has placed in man,* since the Christian knows himself as that which has reality for God. Here, in fact, the Christian comes to the aid of God, becomes, so to speak, his *co-worker in completing the good work God himself has begun.*¹⁰³ [Italics added]

This passage explicates the core of Kierkegaard's perspective on the role of poetic living, or mature aesthetic existence, in discipleship. Becoming Christian by "completing the good work" of God, certainly does not reject the aesthetic. To the contrary, it is precisely here where the poetic finds its true and most meaningful expression as "artistic earnestness" working "harmoniously" with God in the process of formation, as an act of existential co-poeticization. The crucial point here is the *co-poeticizing*. Aesthetic existence becomes problematic when it plays out in individualistic isolation. However, "life as an upbringing, an education," *life as discipleship, is stewarding aesthetic existence,* "earnestly" taking this mode of living seriously, by both submissively and attentively "quietly listening" to that which God has already deposited in both the self and the environment, and subsequently nurturing these "seeds" through mature aesthetic existence, thereby co-poeticising with Christ.

By contrast, the Romantic attempts to create a sense of self through playful experimentation, as an expression of freedom, thinking, "everything is possible. Our God is in heaven and does whatever he pleases; the ironist is on earth and does whatever he desires."¹⁰⁴ But for Kierkegaard, this is ultimately vacuous, and precisely the opposite of true poetic living, since the self is lost in virtuality, disconnected from reality. "As the ironist poetically composes himself and his environment with the greatest possible poetic license, as he lives in this totally hypothetical and subjunctive way, his life loses all continuity. He succumbs completely to mood. His life is nothing but moods ..."¹⁰⁵ In other words, the "reality" which the Romantic has created holds no relation to actuality. It is simply the product of aesthetic immediacy in isolation, "At times he is a god, at times a grain of sand... He poetizes everything, poetizes his moods, too. In order to be genuinely free, he must have control of his moods; therefore one mood must instantly be succeeded by another."¹⁰⁶ This is not to say that "moods" are the problem. To the contrary, they play a role in "a sound and healthy life" as "an intensification

¹⁰³ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 2:280.

¹⁰⁴ Kierkegaard, 2:282.

¹⁰⁵ Kierkegaard, 2:284.

¹⁰⁶ Kierkegaard, 2:284.

of ... life that ... stirs and moves within a person.” For the Christian they are grounded in the “continuity” of Christ.¹⁰⁷ But for the Romantic, moods are disconnected from any grounding reality. Amidst this aesthetic immediacy, to sustain the illusion of self-creation requires being severed from the givenness of one’s actual material environment, “In so doing, he continually collides with the actuality to which he belongs. Therefore it becomes important for him to suspend what is constitutive in actuality, that which orders and supports it: that is, morality and ethics.”¹⁰⁸ Hence Kierkegaard’s depiction of the life stage of aesthetic existence; Romantic “poetic living” is here disconnected from ethico-religious existence.

However, Kierkegaard wishes to show that Christian existence is true poetic living, since self-development occurs not by disconnecting ideality and actuality, but by uniting the finite and infinite in the absolute paradox of Christ, as the true Poet.¹⁰⁹ “Romanticism ... thinks it is living poetically, but ... the poetic is the very thing it misses, because true inward infinity comes only through resignation, and only this inner infinity is truly infinite and truly poetic.”¹¹⁰ Rather than attempting to “compose oneself poetically ... the Christian lets himself be poetically composed, and in this respect a simple Christian lives far more poetically than many a brilliant intellectual.”¹¹¹ The key difference in the Christian sense of poetic living is the submission of aesthetic existence to both the sovereignty of God and the concomitant givenness of material actuality. “An individual who lets himself be poetically composed does have a definite given context into which he has to fit and thus does not become a word without meaning because it is wrenched out of its associations.”¹¹² While the Romantic seeks, but fails, to unite the ideal and the actual, merely offering “an emigration from actuality [rather] than a continuance in it ... only the religious is able to bring about the true reconciliation, because it infinitizes actuality ...”¹¹³ Existential freedom then, is not found in fantastical aesthetic experimentation, but through embracing the paradox of the “infinite” reality of Christ, as grounded in the historical actuality of material givenness. Anchored in this “inner infinity,” one “lives poetically only when [one] is oriented and thus integrated in

¹⁰⁷ Kierkegaard, 2:284.

¹⁰⁸ Kierkegaard, 2:283.

¹⁰⁹ For the theme of God as poet throughout Kierkegaard’s work, see Joel D. S. Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness: Kierkegaard’s Poetics of Faith, Hope, and Love* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 55–84.

¹¹⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 2:289.

¹¹¹ Kierkegaard, 2:280.

¹¹² Kierkegaard, 2:283.

¹¹³ Kierkegaard, 2:297.

the age in which [one] lives, [being] positively free in the actuality to which [one] belongs.”¹¹⁴

2.3.3 *Imitating Christ: The unification of the infinite with finite aesthetic existence*

The “art of living,” therefore, is to subsume aesthetic existence within Christian existence, thereby integrating the material actuality of finite immediacy with infinite Reality in a cohesive whole. Here, existence is an art because, for Kierkegaard, as influenced by the Romantics, “every true work of art is an essential unity.”¹¹⁵ It is a theme that is central throughout Kierkegaard’s work, as seen in his “‘quest for unambiguous life’, a life figured ... as involving a sense for ‘the whole’ and which is to be sought not only in isolated moments of ecstasy but in ‘every moment’ so as to bring about a lasting and productive inner unification of the self.”¹¹⁶ As Connell expounds at length, this is the Kierkegaardian quest “to be one thing,” bringing cohesion to the immediacy of life that is an inevitable consequence of being historical, sensate beings. “As temporal, the self is forced to live moment by moment. If it would exist in such a way as to deserve the description “one,” it must gather all the discrete moments of its life into a unity.”¹¹⁷ As the pseudonym Johannes Climacus puts it, “In the life of the Individual the task is to achieve an ennoblement of the successive within the simultaneous.”¹¹⁸

Kierkegaard, therefore, wishes on the one hand to reject aestheticism, which may seem to be taking material existence seriously, but really devalues material actuality by escaping into a fantastical ideal, and ultimately, virtuality.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, he affirms that religious existence is embedded in everyday aesthetic engagement with physical actuality. Genuine religious existence needs to be integrated with concrete and material daily reality, by being

¹¹⁴ Kierkegaard, 2:326.

¹¹⁵ Connell, *To Be One Thing*, 19. Connell notes that “For some time, this world [Denmark, as influenced by German philosophy and culture] had been dominated, perhaps even possessed, by the idea of unity ... The idea was already at work as an aesthetic principle in the writings of Goethe and Herder ...” then “asserting itself as absolute” in the “joint literary and philosophical movement of romanticism.” Connell, 11.

¹¹⁶ Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life*, 4.

¹¹⁷ Connell, *To Be One Thing*, xii.

¹¹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1941, 311. As in the Lowrie translation, for the Hong translation, see page 348.

¹¹⁹ William Cavanaugh affirms the same point in a different context, by arguing that consumerism is not fundamentally about material attachment, but in fact quite the opposite: consumerism is a product of *detachment* from material reality driven by hunger for the novel. See William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 33–58.

Christian “in the actuality of daily life... here in Copenhagen, in the market on Amagerstorv [Amager Square], in the middle of the daily bustle of weekday life!”¹²⁰ Religious “loftiness” needs to be integrated with everyday actuality. Recall Kierkegaard’s parable of the geese, a scathing critique of Danish Christendom as an expression of Romantic aestheticism, wherein the “poet or orator illustrates this loftiness,” affectively moving people for “only one hour” on a Sunday – a reflective ideal bearing no connection to everyday reality.¹²¹ The consequence is a neutering of the Christian message, disconnected from sensory existence in everyday life. Such “loftiness” of the gospel is removed from daily life so that “people are not so familiar with loftiness that they really dare to believe in it.”¹²² By contrast, the “absolute paradox” of the incarnation points to the essential affirmation of material actuality in Christian existence. “It is indeed an enormous contradiction – that the loftiest of all has become the everyday!”¹²³

As with his aesthetic, Kierkegaard offers no systematic account of his Christology, but as Joel Rasmussen puts it, the latter infuses the former through Kierkegaard’s “Christomorphic poetics.”¹²⁴ If we cannot understand the “aesthetic” in Kierkegaard without situating it in the context of “existence,” then equally, we cannot approach his perspective of aesthetic existence and poetics without situating it, in turn, within Christian existence as the imitation of Christ. “God’s initiative in Christ is paradigmatic for Kierkegaard’s many explorations of the possibility or impossibility of human fulfilment through artistic creativity.”¹²⁵ Only in Christ is it possible to unite the ideal and actual. It is logically necessary that the discreet moments of everyday aesthetic existence can only cohere in the eternal. But as Kierkegaard shows, romantic attempts to unite the finite and infinite result unavoidably either in the proliferation of sensory immediacy (Don Juan) or fantastical idealism (the Seducer). For it is solely within Christ that the finite and infinite cohere since, “Only the eternal can be and

¹²⁰ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 20:59.

¹²¹ Kierkegaard, 20:59, 60.

¹²² Kierkegaard, 20:60. Kierkegaard is here pointing to the fundamental connection between belief and embodiment that we will explore in chapter five. “Belief,” disconnected from embodied and affective everyday aesthetic existence, simply becomes a weak form of knowledge, holding no existential traction in self-actualisation and consequent action in the world.

¹²³ Kierkegaard, 20:60.

¹²⁴ “Kierkegaard’s theological poetics has a specifically ‘Christomorphic’ character because he believes it is God’s incarnation in Christ, a self-introduction of the poet into the poem, that warrants the claim that God ‘fulfills’ in actuality what every other poet only achieves in imagination, namely, a ‘reconciliation’ between the actual world and the divine ideal.”

Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness*, 3, 55.

¹²⁵ Rasmussen, 4.

become and remain contemporaneous with every age; temporality, on the other hand divides within itself, and the present cannot become contemporaneous with the future, or the future with the past, or the past with the present.”¹²⁶

While Romantic aestheticism, wedded to Danish Christendom, fails to integrate the ideal with the actual, it is in imitating Christ, as the prototypical “witness to truth,” that both poetic ideal and poetic action are united. Kierkegaard’s attack on Christendom may appear to be a critique of the church’s apathy and materialism, as it prioritised this-worldly comfort. In this sense, his call to costly discipleship seems to entail a rejection of the aesthetic in favour of the “spiritual.” To be sure, he is indeed critical of materialism and aestheticism, but even amidst the rhetorical urgency needed to deal with the crisis of his day, it is important to note that imitating Christ does not equate to rejecting this-worldly reality, and consequently the aesthetic. To the contrary, it is precisely in Christ where the poetic and aesthetic find their rightful place.

In Kierkegaard's Christomorphic poetics the divine poet proclaims true love and also manifests it existentially, such that Word and flesh, imagination and will, ideality and actuality, all accord perfectly with one another in a reconciliation that, for Christian faith, unites truth and art in “true art.”¹²⁷

Discipleship, therefore, as the “imitation” of Christ (as opposed to Christendom’s “admiration” of Christ), is true poetic living. “By believing in, by becoming contemporaneous with, by following and imitating Christ, the self repeats this incarnation within itself ... [allowing] the self to relate to itself properly and truly, to exist as it was created to exist: simultaneously finite and infinite, temporal and eternal ...”¹²⁸ It is only here, in imitating Christ, that existence is truly poetic, truly formative, that self-development truly occurs, since Christ is the “criterion,” the prototypical human being.¹²⁹

In sum, it is only through the incarnation of Christ that the actual and ideal cohere, and thus only to the extent that the disciple is “in Christ” that the self is truly living poetically, both present in the discreet moments of everyday, this-worldly actuality, but also existing in a sense of ultimate coherence through the infinite and eternal grace of God. In this sense, aesthetic existence, or sensory immediacy, matters because this is a fundamental aspect of

¹²⁶ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 16:31.

¹²⁷ Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness*, 173.

¹²⁸ Connell, *To Be One Thing*, 185–86.

¹²⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, vol. 19, Kierkegaard’s Writings (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 113–14.

being historical, finite beings; an aspect of being human affirmed by the incarnation. Kierkegaard is clear that the everyday, “in the market on Amager Square,” is a fundamental aspect of Christian existence. This affirmation is significant, but the question that remains unresolved at this point is whether aesthetic existence is formative. What role, if any, does sensory immediacy play in faith formation? Kierkegaard does not directly answer this question. His focus is on exposing Romantic sensory immediacy as problematic. However, there are two concepts that he deals with which offer pointers to the positive role that aesthetic existence may play in discipleship. The first is his limited treatment of the notion of a “second immediacy,” as an attribute of faith. The second is his more robust engagement with the formative role of the imagination. We will delineate his perspective on both briefly here, before moving beyond Kierkegaard to explore them more deeply.

2.3.4 *Second Immediacy*

Kierkegaard refers to a “second immediacy” as an attribute of faith, pointing to the passionate and aesthetic nature of life in Christ. Yet, precisely what he means here, and the nature of its relation to sensory immediacy, is difficult to interpret, due both to his fragmentary treatment of the concept and the rhetorical context within which he employs the term. In a number of places in his journals he describes faith as a second immediacy; faith being an “immediacy or spontaneity after reflection.”¹³⁰ Some of the pseudonyms also discuss this second immediacy, although, unsurprisingly, they do not all concur on the role of immediacy and the aesthetic in faith formation. For Judge William, “the poetic is given a higher and more authentic expression in the second immediacy of the ethical-religious.”¹³¹ For Johannes de Silentio, in *Fear and Trembling*, “Faith is not an ‘esthetic emotion’ or a ‘spontaneous inclination of the heart,’ he says, but rather a ‘new interiority’ and a ‘later immediacy,’ that is, a form of immediacy or spontaneity that Kierkegaard describes elsewhere as being acquired after reflection by virtue of a relation to God (*Fear and Trembling* 47, 69, 82; *Journals and Papers*, 5:6135).”¹³² In other works, Kierkegaard offers clues as to the nature of this second immediacy, as an expression of the “infinite task” of imitating Christ’s love in material actuality, in the here and now, as Connell shows,

¹³⁰ *Journals and Papers*: 1:9, 49, 84, 85, 214, 235, 972, 1032; 2:1101, 1123, 1215, 1335, 1942, 1943; 3:3560, 3561; 5:6135; cf. Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 139.

¹³¹ Walsh, 184.

¹³² Walsh, 140.

Anti-Climacus writes that the more the self accepts the infinite task, “the more personally present and contemporaneous it becomes in the small part of the task that can be carried out at once.” [*Sickness unto Death*, 32] ... the Christian self lives as an eternal being within time, as the Paradox writ small. Presence and its corresponding concept, the moment, are the common denominators of time and eternity ... [*Concept of Anxiety*, 86].¹³³

While it is difficult to build a conceptual framework on his fragmentary exploration of this “second immediacy,” two conclusions are fairly clear. Firstly, Kierkegaard is quite obviously keen to rhetorically distinguish the immediacy of Christian existence from that of aestheticism, labelling the former a “first immediacy” as opposed to the latter “second immediacy.”¹³⁴ Secondly, however, in spite of this rhetorical agenda, his exploration of faith as second immediacy points to the “fundamentally aesthetic nature of faith insofar as it is a passion or a form of immediacy.”¹³⁵ Of course it would be speculation to hypothesize about whether Kierkegaard would have explored the notion of a “second immediacy” differently had he been writing in a different time, responding to different contextual challenges. But the precise nature of this second immediacy, and particularly its connection to aesthetic existence, is an important question for us to note as we move beyond Kierkegaard.¹³⁶

2.3.5 *The Imagination*

The formative role of the poetic and aesthetic in becoming Christian is arguably most clearly seen in Kierkegaard’s affirmation of the imagination.¹³⁷ At the outset though, it needs to be

¹³³ Connell, *To Be One Thing*, 189–90.

¹³⁴ Kierkegaard, by articulating this second immediacy as an “inner” immediacy is also here responding to Hegel, “who holds that the outer is higher than the inner.” Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 140.

¹³⁵ Walsh, 140.

¹³⁶ In particular, we will be exploring the relationship between sensory immediacy and reflection in the formation of faith. Kierkegaard seems to be arguing that a “second immediacy” is, firstly, internal, rather than external, and secondly, temporally subsequent to conscious reflection. The question we need to put to him here is whether this is an anthropological possibility. Is conscious reflection completely distinct from sensory immediacy? Is there both a chronological and epistemological hierarchy, or, is there, to an extent at least, a coherence that needs to be taken into account? We will do this in chapters four and five, through exploring the integrated nature of embodiment, affect and belief.

¹³⁷ Admittedly, interpretations vary on his treatment of the imagination (as with interpretations of Kierkegaard’s aesthetic in general), but it is difficult to deny that he affirmed a positive role for the imagination in faith formation. This thesis is comprehensively argued by both David Gouwens, *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of the Imagination*, and Ferreira, *Transforming Vision*. Even where George Pattison is critical of Gouwens’ positive treatment, for example, the issue appears to be largely semantic. Pattison wishes to “speak of ‘the image’ rather than of ‘the imagination’ and of rhetoric instead of poetry,” both to distance

clear that Kierkegaard wants to make a distinction between the imagination (“*Phantasien*”) and the Romantic employment of the imagination as the fantastic (“*det Phantastiske*”).¹³⁸ On the one hand, he wishes to reject the fantastical imagination of poetic Romanticism, wherein the imagination creates a self through playful experimentation, ultimately leading to virtuality.¹³⁹ Here the imagination is simply revelling in the freedom of ideal possibility, without any relationship to actuality. However, on the other hand, Kierkegaard shows that, rightly employed, the imagination can do the complete opposite: it allows one to see the ideal of Christ as Reality, and consequently opens one’s eyes to the possibility of life as imitation of Christ.¹⁴⁰ For Kierkegaard then, the power of the imagination in faith-formation is its ability to move one from the ideal to action. As he writes in a journal entry from 1854 (not during his early, so-called “aesthetic phase,” but amidst the “attack on Christendom,” the year before he died), “Imagination is what providence uses to take men captive in actuality, in existence, in order to get them far enough out, or within, or down into actuality. And when imagination has helped them get as far out as they should be – then actuality genuinely begins.”¹⁴¹

The power of the imagination, thus construed, leads the pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, to proclaim that the human faculty of imagination is “the capacity *instar omnium* [for all capacities]. When all is said and done, whatever of feeling, knowing and willing a person has depends upon what imagination he has.”¹⁴² Peder Jothen points out here that readings of Kierkegaard that prioritise the will in the formation of self are “overly reductionistic.”

Kierkegaard from the Romantic use of the imagination and also to argue for a communal approach to imagination, as in a social imaginary, rather than contributing to the perspective that, for Kierkegaard, faith is “intra-individual.” While Pattison’s reservations are valid, (both of which we will explore further in the project, when we move beyond Kierkegaard), his critique merely argues for different terminology, while in a sense only further affirming in Kierkegaard the role of the imagination in faith formation, by locating it within communal Christian existence. Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, x.

¹³⁸ Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 231.

¹³⁹ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 20:185–88.

¹⁴⁰ It should be noted here that Kierkegaard is not suggesting that it is possible to literally imitate Christ, or be like Christ, as was the case in the medieval conception of Christ as prototype. The whole purpose for imitating Christ is to realise how far short of Christ we fall, thus relying on his grace for redemption. In this sense, the imaginative possibility of imitating Christ and the consequent action it inspires is to be understood as the “penultimate,” to lend a term from Bonhoeffer, which we will further explore in the next chapter. It is a possibility that one cannot in oneself complete. See Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 237.

¹⁴¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, vol. 2 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), 313–14.

¹⁴² Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, 19:31.

Imagination, as the *instar omnium*, provides the paradigmatic perception of reality within which choices are made. The role of volition, then, in self-formation can only be understood alongside the imagination and another prominent Kierkegaardian theme, passion.

“Aesthetically, the imagination can create images of how to exist as well as store images received from culture, experience, and education. Passion, a form of desire, moves a self towards sensual beauty and images as well as ideas of selfhood.”¹⁴³ Such a notion of existence coheres with contemporary constructions of being human and creating meaning within the context of a presiding narrative, as elucidated by the likes of Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas, Charles Taylor, Sallie McFague, William Cavanaugh, and Paul Ricoeur. Kierkegaard’s conception of the imagination, therefore, is “poetic” not in the sense of Romantic “poetic living,” fantastical self-creation, but in the sense of “poetry as act, ‘living poetically,’ [that] not only provides narrative but also testifies to an imaginative ideal by putting it to work in real life.”¹⁴⁴

For our purposes, the critical question is the nature of the relation between everyday aesthetic experience and the shaping of the imagination. If it is true, as Jothan stated above, that the imagination holds a store of images received from culture and experience, then implicitly, by acknowledging the role of the imagination in faith formation, Kierkegaard is also thereby affirming the role of everyday sensory immediacy in faith formation (or deformation). This is a suggestive implication that we will have to further probe and test in moving beyond Kierkegaard, for he does not offer any explicit indication that this relation exists, at least in a positive sense. However, he certainly holds the inverse to be true: the Romantic imagination, as shaped by sensory immediacy creates a virtual reality. Such “free play of fantasy ... makes life a dream,” thereby “exhaust[ing] and anesthetiz[ing] the soul.”¹⁴⁵ Sensory life in Tivoli, and the magic of the theatre blurs the boundaries, “the make-believe of masks, disguises, and possibilities spills over into real relationships.”¹⁴⁶

While Kierkegaard, then, clearly shows that everyday aesthetic experience shapes the imagination in a negative sense, we will have to move beyond his work to enquire more deeply into whether it is also possible in a positive sense; whether aesthetic existence can indeed not only coexist with imitating Christ, but productively shape such Christian

¹⁴³ Jothan, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood*, 4.

¹⁴⁴ Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness*, 173.

¹⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 2:292.

¹⁴⁶ Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life*, 20. See also “Life in the Magic Theatre” in Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, 95–124.

formation. However, before we do so, we will consider two specific examples, or snapshots, of aesthetic existence in Kierkegaard's work: an outing to the amusement of Deer Park and listening to a piece of music. The former will help to offer a summary, crystallising Kierkegaard's response to the question of the relationship between aesthetic existence and Christian living, while the latter will provide a point of concretion for our on-going discussion throughout the project.

2.4 Summary: Christian existence amidst the sensory immediacy of Deer Park

The question we have put to Kierkegaard is whether aesthetic existence, as sensory immediacy, plays a role in Christian living. His answer is difficult to discern, since his focus is on the destructive nature of Romantic sensory immediacy, but nevertheless, the argument here is that he offers a tentative and qualified, "yes." To crystallise his perspective and by way of summary, we can consider a helpful passage in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.¹⁴⁷ It is significant that the author, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus, is not a Christian, and is therefore considering religious existence from the outside, an important point to which we shall return.

Climacus considers how religious existence could be lived in the everyday, and not merely on a Sunday, in church, or amidst the more earnest moments of life.¹⁴⁸

Nowadays the religious address, although it preaches against the monastery, observes the most strict monastic propriety and distances itself from actuality just as much as the monastery and thereby indirectly betrays quite adequately that everyday existence is actually in other categories, or that the religious does not assimilate daily life.¹⁴⁹

As such, he proposes a thought experiment: how would "Christians" from the different stages of life (aesthetic, ethical and religious) respond to the prospect of an outing to enjoy the amusements of Deer Park?¹⁵⁰ How does the Christian relate to the sensory immediacy of

¹⁴⁷ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1992, 12:470–503.

¹⁴⁸ For the purpose of this summary a distinction is not made here between Climacus' "religiousness A" (immanent religiousness) and "religiousness B" (the paradox of Christian religiousness), but under consideration here is religious existence as Christian life.

¹⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1992, 12:481.

¹⁵⁰ Here we need to bring to mind Kierkegaard's context of Christendom, wherein Climacus is working from the assumption that the subjects of his thought experiment are church-going, Christians by name. Thus, not only the subject in the religious stage of life would self-describe as Christian, but equally the subject in the aesthetic and ethical stage would self-describe as Christian. The thought experiment therefore has obvious relevance and implications for contemporary Christendom, which too, for Kierkegaard, would consist of subjects labeled the Aesthete, the Ethical and Religious.

everyday entertainment, such as Deer Park, the “most trivial of trivialities”?¹⁵¹ For the aesthete, this is a non-issue. By living entirely in the moment, it matters not whether this is in church, for an hour on Sunday, enjoying the idealistic oration of the pastor, or whether it is revelling in the sensory thrills of Deer Park. There is no contradiction since these discreet, existential moments are entirely distinct. The consequence, however, is a fragmentation of self, a complete absence of “poetic living,” as Kierkegaard employs the term. Consumed by the individual’s fragmentary enjoyment of the moment, it is an existence entirely void of the cohesion offered by “being poetically composed” by Christ, the ultimate poet.

The subject in the ethical stage also finds no contradiction, embracing an equally fragmented perspective, but for different reasons. Ethically, the key question is whether it is permissible. Does it contravene moral bounds? If not, it is harmless fun. “To go out to the amusement park – if one can afford it, if one's business affairs allow it, if one takes along wife and children, yes, and the servants, and comes home at a decent time – is an innocent joy and one ought to participate in the innocent joys ...”¹⁵² The joy is “innocent” because, as spontaneous sensory immediacy, it defies ethical evaluation. A theme found both in *Either/Or* II and *Stages on Life's Way* is that, “Spontaneity lies within the realm of immediacy and, strictly speaking, cannot be ethically judged.”¹⁵³ Due to this fundamental rift in these two modes of existence, the ethical person states that, “It never occurs to me to bring such trifles as going out to the amusement park into connection with the thought of God – indeed to me it seems to be an insult to God, and I know that it does not occur to a single one of the many people I know, either.”¹⁵⁴ For Kierkegaard this too represents the self-same problematic fragmentation of self.

Climacus spends the bulk of his time on the religious person, wrestling with the challenge of reconciling the absolute with the immediate, in the unity of true poetic living. While the *principle* of embracing everyday actuality may be laudable, “in the concretion of daily life ... practicing it is so very difficult. Nowadays a pastor hardly dares to speak in church about going to the amusement park or even mention the word – so difficult is it even in a godly discourse to join an amusement park and the thought of God.”¹⁵⁵ But Climacus suggests that this is precisely the test of Christian existence, “the absoluteness of the religious placed

¹⁵¹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1992, 12:481.

¹⁵² Kierkegaard, 12:476.

¹⁵³ Connell, *To Be One Thing*, 178.

¹⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1992, 12:477.

¹⁵⁵ Kierkegaard, 12:481.

together with the specific.”¹⁵⁶ The pastor, therefore, should be able “to transform even speaking about this into an upbuilding discourse. If he is unable to do that, if he thinks it cannot be done, he must warn against it.”¹⁵⁷ While such integration may be a worthy goal in theory, Climacus finds navigating the paradox a weighty task. On the one hand, God consumes one “like the fire of the summer sun when it refuses to set,” thereby obliterating the “relativity of immediacy.”¹⁵⁸ External sensory immediacy ceases to hold traction due to this inner, second immediacy. Yet paradoxically, it is in the trivial everyday, in the apparently unimportant that “the relationship with God will be known.”¹⁵⁹ A rejection of everyday materiality is therefore a rejection of given humanness. “The monastic movement is an attempt at wanting to be more than a human being, an enthusiastic, perhaps pious attempt to be like God.”¹⁶⁰ So where does this leave the religious person as he approaches the outing to Deer Park, attempting to navigate this paradoxical tension?

“So he goes out there. ‘But he does not enjoy himself,’ someone may say. Yes, he does indeed. And why does he enjoy himself? *Because the humblest expression for the relationship with God is to acknowledge one's humanness, and it is human to enjoy oneself.*”¹⁶¹ [Italics added]

So far, so good: Despite the paradox – embracing the infinite, being consumed by God, while living concretely in the finite – everyday Christian existence is possible because of life *in* Christ, the “paradox writ small.”

Yet, it is here where Climacus falters, as he analytically considers faith from the outside. He cannot conceive how it is rationally possible for the religious person to enjoy Deer Park. He concedes that it may be possible for someone else, but personally, he would not be able to enjoy it. His first problem is a core question for this project: how does one distinguish between aestheticism (making the aesthetic absolute) and mature aesthetic experience (a valid expression of sensory immediacy in Christian living)? How can he “ascertain that it is not a momentary inclination, a fancy of immediacy, that determines him?”¹⁶² The only way to know with certainty is to delay the outing, thereby proving that his motives are pure. The process perpetually repeats itself and the outing to Deer Park never materializes. Even if he *were* in the amusement park, as a religious, Climacus cannot conceive the possibility of

¹⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, 12:483.

¹⁵⁷ Kierkegaard, 12:481.

¹⁵⁸ Kierkegaard, 12:485.

¹⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, 12:487.

¹⁶⁰ Kierkegaard, 12:492.

¹⁶¹ Kierkegaard, 12:493.

¹⁶² Kierkegaard, 12:495.

enjoying the outing within the absolute conception of God.¹⁶³ The paradox is too much for him to compute.

Through Climacus, Kierkegaard shows the challenge of incorporating mature aesthetic existence into Christian living. In a sense, it is a logical impossibility. It is the attempt to unify the absolute and the specific, infinite and finite, divine and human. It is only in the absolute paradox of Christ, through an incarnational understanding of existence that this is possible. Living in Christ, by grace, allows human momentary immediacy to cohere in Christ's eternal being.

In sum, Kierkegaard, in principle, affirms being human and the divine givenness of material reality that it entails. Based on the absolute paradox of Christ, becoming Christian is not merely a "spiritual" exercise, but to be played out in the actuality of daily life, amidst even the "most trivial of trivialities." Faith-formation is here the co-poeticizing of gathering up the concrete moments of incarnate living, while attentively and "harmoniously" aligning these with the work of Christ in oneself, as an act of aesthetic stewardship.¹⁶⁴ But even though such everyday discipleship necessarily encompasses sensory immediacy, in practice Kierkegaard appears reluctant to fully endorse even mature aesthetic existence as an aspect of Christian living.

As Climacus illustrated above, Kierkegaard's reticence may be related to the crucial question of how one distinguishes between aesthetic existence as aestheticism, and mature aesthetic existence, which is a valid expression of Christian living. The impetus of Kierkegaard's rhetorical task (reacting to the problematic nature of Romantic sensory immediacy, particularly as it expressed itself in Christendom) clouds his response to this question and the clarity of his affirmation of the material world in general. For instance, while, as Pattison argues, he "had a very well developed theology of creation," which is particularly evident in his early work, this is often missed amidst his later emphasis on "imitation of the suffering Christ."¹⁶⁵ Possibly, Kierkegaard's attempt to distinguish between aestheticism and mature aesthetic existence, thereby validating a mode of aesthetic existence in Christian life, can be found in his relatively underdeveloped notion of a second immediacy – immediacy after

¹⁶³ Kierkegaard, 12:498.

¹⁶⁴ Again, also acknowledging that such alignment of one's life does not equate to being Christian; this is merely a penultimate process. Being Christian is ultimately a gift of grace by Christ, as divine poet.

¹⁶⁵ Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life*, 25, footnote 35. See also Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, 80–123.

reflection – but this appears to relate to an “inner” immediacy, again he seems reluctant to fully endorse *sensory* immediacy.

This leaves us with two questions to take beyond Kierkegaard. Firstly, is it possible to be fully immersed in the humanity of sensory immediacy as an expression of being Christian? For example, *is* it possible for a Christian to enjoy an outing to Deer Park? Or to use another example from Kierkegaard’s work, can a Christian delight in aesthetic literary immediacy? In an early journal entry (1837), Kierkegaard reflects,

Why does the reading of fairy tales provide such fortifying relaxation for the soul? When I am weary of everything and ‘full of days,’ fairy tales are always a refreshing, renewing bath for me. *There* all earthly, finite cares vanish; joy, yes, even sorrow, are infinite (and for this reason are so enlarging and beneficial).¹⁶⁶

Pattison labels this an example of “immediate aesthetic reading,” characteristic of how Kierkegaard later suggested we *not* read.¹⁶⁷ Granted, there is resonance in this passage with the Romantic notion of creating a fantastical aesthetic reality. However, does it follow that the experience of aesthetic immediacy in reading is incongruous with Christian living? Does such an aesthetic experience of “fortifying relaxation for the soul” have a place in being Christian? Secondly, if it does, what are the implications for the formation of faith? As Climacus notes, this is not an ethical question; it is not a question of permissibility. Rather, the question is related to imitating Christ. Does the celebration of sensory immediacy, in every instance, detract from becoming Christian, or are there times when it contributes to discipleship? If it can offer a positive contribution to faith-formation, how do we distinguish between these two modes of sensory immediacy? Here, we will want to recall Kierkegaard’s distinction between first and second immediacy, but we will need to move beyond his rudimentary notion of a second immediacy to a more fully developed notion of mature aesthetic existence.

As a practical example, to crystallise not only these questions which Kierkegaard raises for our project, but also to act as an on-going point of concretion in the coming chapters, we will consider the aesthetic experience of listening to music.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, vol. 5 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 112 #5287.

¹⁶⁷ Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, 224–25.

¹⁶⁸ As explained in the introduction, the aim of this project is to function as something of a theological prolegomenon to practical theology. In this sense, while the argument put forward here has implications for practical theology, it is beyond the scope of the thesis to explore these in depth. The hope, however, in briefly highlighting music, as a specimen of aesthetic

2.5 Spotlight on Music: Music as archetypal sensory immediacy

In *Either/Or I*, Kierkegaard's pseudonym, the aesthete "A," offers a lengthy exposition on music in the form of an essay titled 'The Immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical-Erotic.' The focus of the essay is Mozart's opera, *Don Giovanni*, wherein the character Don Giovanni (based on the legend of Don Juan), is portrayed as the ultimate aesthete, the pinnacle of sensory-erotic immediacy. As is always the case with his pseudonymous work, interpretations abound as to Kierkegaard's intention with this essay. While we will briefly consider the significance of these perspectives below, our primary concern is not the possible interpretation linking the aesthetic and religious, but a fundamental premise of the essay: A's observation that the aesthetic medium of music best represents sensory immediacy. If this project is concerned with the question of the relation between aesthetic existence and discipleship, then the ideal point of concretion to return to at regular intervals, as the argument develops, is, therefore, its application to music as an instance of everyday aesthetic existence.¹⁶⁹

"A" holds that no other art form exhibits sensory immediacy to the extent that music does. This is because, on the one hand, the literary arts are too closely related to language, thereby associating them with conscious reflection.¹⁷⁰ On the other hand, the visual, plastic and spatial arts (architecture, sculpture and painting, for example), are manifest as continuity over time. Our engagement with them is, therefore, not strictly "momentary," as is the case with a note or chord of music.¹⁷¹ While these notes strung together provide an aesthetic experience of "epic character," music is not truly epic, because it nevertheless represents temporal impermanence.¹⁷² While music itself "has an element of time... it cannot express the historical in time."¹⁷³ Hence the connection to the erotic, since "sensuous love is disappearance in time ... [and] the medium that expresses this is indeed music."¹⁷⁴ It is therefore, "only through music ... that the sensuous in its elemental originality ... [is]

existence at regular intervals throughout the project, is to both crystallise aspects of the argument and to allude to trajectories such a practical theology might take.

¹⁶⁹ It should be noted here that to explore the role of music, per se, in discipleship is a research project on its own. This is not the intention here, where we are simply using music as an example of everyday aesthetic existence, in order to elucidate and crystalize the salient points of the broader argument that otherwise might remain somewhat opaque.

¹⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 1987, 3:56.

¹⁷¹ Kierkegaard, 3:56–57.

¹⁷² Kierkegaard, 3:57.

¹⁷³ Kierkegaard, 3:57.

¹⁷⁴ Kierkegaard, 3:95.

presented.”¹⁷⁵ If music is the ultimate aesthetic medium of sensory immediacy, then the crystallising question, which we will periodically return to in the coming chapters, is the relation of music to being human and becoming Christian. We begin here by putting this question to Kierkegaard.

The rhetoric that Kierkegaard employs through this pseudonymous essay is clearly evident, although the end to which it is aimed (possibly including an acknowledgement that the aesthetic immediacy of music and religious existence can cohere) is not as certain. By locating his discussion of music within the context of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, A combines both the ideal medium of immediacy and the ideal character of immediacy. He is therefore, “dealing with the immediate in its total immediacy.”¹⁷⁶ In fact, his rhetorical emphasis is so clearly on exploring musical sensory immediacy as aesthetic existence that he deliberately misrepresents Mozart’s opera. While his characterisation of *Don Giovanni* as the archetypal aesthete resonates with Mozart’s intention, the same cannot be said of A’s rendering of the aesthete in isolation, devoid of the intended broader aesthetic–religious context, both in relation to Mozart’s other works, as well as within the narrative arc of *Don Giovanni*.¹⁷⁷ “A” deliberately marginalises the religious Commendatore figure in the opera – the character who is, by A’s own admission, the only character over whom *Don Giovanni* “cannot exercise any power.”¹⁷⁸ This heroic framing of the aesthete, *Don Giovanni*, is variously interpreted, as reflected in the respective readings of Kierkegaard’s objective in A’s essay.

The heart of the interpretative question is the extent to which the views of A and Kierkegaard align. A simplistic, and unlikely, reading aligns Kierkegaard with A’s views on music, arguing that Kierkegaard is here ‘against himself,’ that passion and desire for the sensory immediacy of music persist in Kierkegaard, despite these being incongruous with his larger philosophical project (the religious rejection of the aesthetic).¹⁷⁹ A reading more consistent with Kierkegaard’s larger project is that A and Kierkegaard’s views do not align, but Kierkegaard is rhetorically presenting the perspective of the aesthetic stage of life through A.

¹⁷⁵ Kierkegaard, 3:56.

¹⁷⁶ Kierkegaard, 3:74.

¹⁷⁷ Bernard Zelechow, ‘Kierkegaard, the Aesthetic and Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*’, in *Kierkegaard on Art and Communication*, ed. George Pattison (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 67.

¹⁷⁸ Shao Kai Tseng, ‘Kierkegaard and Music in Paradox? Bringing Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* to Terms with Kierkegaard’s Religious Life-View’, *Literature and Theology* 28, no. 4 (1 December 2014): 420. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 1987, 3:125.

¹⁷⁹ Daniel Herwitz, ‘Kierkegaard Writes His Opera’, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2008* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter): 127.

In this case, one could argue, as Bernard Zelechow does, that Kierkegaard is again driving a wedge between the religious and aesthetic, suggesting “the exclusion of the sensuous from religious embodiment.”¹⁸⁰ Or, as Petr Osolsobe does, that since sensory immediacy is not moral or religious, as “pre-ethical” it is “morally neutral.”¹⁸¹ Either way, these interpretations do not see Kierkegaard as locating sensory immediacy within religious life. Shao Kai Tseng, however, does offer such a reading.

Tseng’s cogent position is that the essay needs to be understood as a work of satire. He bases his argument on evidence of Kierkegaard’s musical literacy and the fact that, through A, Kierkegaard is deliberately misrepresenting *Don Giovanni*, offering a musical treatment which is consonant with Romantic composition (in the work of Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt, and Richard Wagner, for example). Kierkegaard’s intentional distortion, then, of *Don Giovanni* through A’s essay, is a satirical tool to provoke reflection on the nature of Romantic musical composition, and the relationship between music and religious life. The objective being that the omission of the significant religious theme in A’s reading of the opera should be startlingly obvious to a musically literate reader, thereby provoking the reader to consider the role of the religious in not only the opera *Don Giovanni*, but in music more generally, and sensory immediacy as a whole.

Tseng’s suggestion is that Kierkegaard may here be alluding to the fact that there are two types of immediacy and that a “first immediacy” does not have a monopoly on music.¹⁸² “A” himself refers to these two types of immediacy in relation to music: sensuous erotic immediacy and the Christian embrace of immediacy “qualified by spirit.”¹⁸³ For A, that which is excluded from immediacy, as “qualified by the spirit,” is sensuous immediacy. Tseng posits that Kierkegaard makes A’s argument intentionally weak here in order to show that there is no valid reason for excluding music from immediacy within religious life. To the contrary, as we have seen, when considering his broader work, Kierkegaard does not reject immediacy per se, but argues for a second, or later immediacy. The question thus raised, which Kierkegaard never resolves, is whether music can be a valid expression of such a second immediacy.

¹⁸⁰ George Pattison, ed., *Kierkegaard on Art and Communication* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), xv.

¹⁸¹ Petr Osolsobe, ‘Kierkegaard’s Aesthetics of Music: A Concept of the Musical Erotic’, *Sbornik Praci Filozoficke Fakulty Brnenske Univerzity*, nos. 27–28 (1992-93): 106.

¹⁸² Tseng, ‘Kierkegaard and Music in Paradox?’, 422.

¹⁸³ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 1987, 3:70–71.

Since Kierkegaard does not bring closure to this question, we will need to take it beyond his work. However, while his fragmentary treatment of music proves difficult to piece together into a coherent whole, it is worth noting the two senses in which he refers to music (perhaps representing two modes of aesthetic immediacy). While A's essay appears to argue for musical sensory immediacy as elemental baseness, rejected by a higher religious existence, a fascinating quote from Kierkegaard's journals inverts this hierarchy,

Everything ends with hearing—the rules of grammar end with hearing—the command of the law with hearing—the figured bass ends with hearing—the philosophical system ends with hearing—therefore *the next life is also represented as pure music, as a great harmony*—would that the dissonance of my life would soon be resolved in it.¹⁸⁴ [Italics added]

2.6 Conclusion

The primary contribution that Kierkegaard makes to this project is his framing of the research question. In this chapter, through Kierkegaard's work, we have delineated the term “aesthetic existence” as sensory immediacy lived in the context of self-formation. The question we are asking, which we put to Kierkegaard, is what role, if any, does aesthetic existence play in becoming Christian? His response is both negative and positive. For Kierkegaard, Romantic aestheticism and Danish Christendom provided a fertile context within which a pseudo-reality could be created through the fantastical creation of the self. Such an illusory self-creation feeds off both the immediacy and reflectivity of unqualified aesthetic existence, as an immature life stage, hence his rejection of this mode of living aesthetically in religious existence. Since both aestheticism and Christendom continue to flourish today, Kierkegaard's warning here remains all too relevant. This is particularly notable in relation to postmodern deconstruction, which as Walsh suggests “bears a close resemblance to the early German romantic mode of living poetically ... in the assertion of an endless process of experimentation and play with a multiplicity of interpretations and roles in language, or writing.”¹⁸⁵ But it is the application in the everyday, amidst contemporary expressions of Christendom and consumerism, which particularly calls for further analysis.

On the positive side, Kierkegaard embraces the aesthetic in the life of faith through his recovery of poetic living. This points to the integral role the imagination plays in the relationship between aesthetic existence and self-development, a relationship we will explore more deeply as the project unfolds. Self-development as discipleship, for Kierkegaard, is the

¹⁸⁴ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers, Volume 5*, 5:74, #5161.

¹⁸⁵ Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 245.

imitation of the absolute paradox of Christ in one's life, thereby embracing life in Christ as both finite material givenness and, through the grace of God, the infinite. This entails an embrace of faith as a passion to be exercised in embodied actuality, amidst the everyday. There is, therefore, a sense of immediacy and embodiment inextricably bound up within Christian living.

However, as is evident in the examples of an outing to Deer Park and engagement with music above, while a close reading provides evidence of Kierkegaard's embrace of the aesthetic in Christian living, he does not *explicitly* endorse sensory immediacy as a fundamental aspect of becoming Christian. While it is difficult to discern the extent to which his reticence is: a genuine reservation he held; a result of his method of indirect communication; or the consequence of the rhetoric he employed in response to his context, it has produced scholarly dissonance regarding the interpretation of Kierkegaard's stance on the matter. Even in arguing, as we have here, that Kierkegaard held a qualified and limited endorsement of aesthetic existence in Christian living, it is clear that we will need to move beyond Kierkegaard to explore whether such a relation is valid, and if so, what the implications are for discipleship. It is therefore to Bonhoeffer's call for a recovery of aesthetic existence in the life of the church that we now turn.

CHAPTER 3: BONHOEFFER & THE CELEBRATION OF AESTHETIC EXISTENCE

Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was not only familiar with Kierkegaard's work, but drew from and built upon Kierkegaardian concepts that emanated from a mutual concern regarding the nature of discipleship amidst Christendom. In this chapter, therefore, we will use Bonhoeffer's work to further frame the concept of aesthetic existence, as it will be used for the remainder of this project. Further, we will explore Bonhoeffer's positive understanding of the relation between aesthetic existence and Christian living, grounded in his Christological perspective of this-worldliness and his consequent affirmation of penultimate reality.

It may not seem immediately obvious why Bonhoeffer can contribute to the question of aesthetic existence. After all, his discussion of aesthetics is limited, and he certainly did not develop a systematic perspective of theological aesthetics.¹ However, in this chapter we will see that Bonhoeffer's theology, in particular his perspective of reality, undergirds his view of aesthetic existence, thereby pointing to the fundamental role that aesthetic existence plays in being human and becoming Christian. While the contribution that Bonhoeffer explicitly makes is primarily limited to the *celebration* of aesthetic existence in being Christian, implicitly, through his embrace of aesthetic existence in his own life, its *formative* role in becoming Christian is clear. This can be seen through the formative role that his experience of music played in his theology, by way of the musical metaphors he engaged.

3.1 Bonhoeffer's Call for a Recovery of Aesthetic Existence

In a letter written while in prison, dated 23 January 1944, Bonhoeffer discusses the nature of friendship with his close friend, Eberhard Bethge. Bonhoeffer considers under which mandate friendship falls: marriage and family, work, state or church.² His conclusion is that it is

¹ For an overview of Bonhoeffer's treatment of aesthetics, see, De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 147–68.

² Bonhoeffer initially spoke of "communities" or "orders" before finally settling on the term "mandates" to express a "divinely imposed task" within a particular realm of society. A "mandate" is a "concrete form of life commissioned by God for all people." See John de Gruchy, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 128, 199.

probably best to consider friendship within the realms of culture and education (*Bildung*).³ However, the natures of culture and *Bildung* do not fit neatly within any of the mandates. If this is so, where do they belong? For Bonhoeffer, the response is that they belong within the sphere of freedom (*Spielraum*) rather than the sphere of obedience.⁴

I wonder whether – it almost seems so today – it is only from the concept of the church that we can regain the understanding of the sphere of freedom (art, education [*Bildung*], friendship, play). *This means that “aesthetic existence” (Kierkegaard) is not to be banished from the church’s sphere; rather, it is precisely within the church that it would be founded anew...* Who in our time could, for example, lightheartedly make music, nurture friendship, play, and be happy? Certainly not the “ethical” person, but only the Christian. Precisely because friendship belongs within the scope of this freedom (“of the Christian person”!), we must defend it confidently against all “ethical” existences that may frown upon it – certainly without claiming for it the “necessitas” of a divine command, but by claiming the “necessitas” of freedom!⁵
[Italics added]

This conversation offers a helpful anchor-point for our discussion of Bonhoeffer’s perspective on aesthetic existence. There are a few important observations for us to make, pointing to questions that we will need to explore in Bonhoeffer’s thought for resolution.

Firstly, and perhaps most fundamentally, why does Bonhoeffer seem so concerned to regain space for aesthetic existence? On the surface it would seem a strange call from a theologian who has become popularly known for his rejection of “cheap grace,” which it could be argued, would equally be a rejection of aestheticism, and would hardly seem to resonate with his endorsement of the “endless manifold struggle of the spirit against the flesh.”⁶ It appears that this call for aesthetic existence goes against the essence of what he stood for. Does this represent a reversal of Bonhoeffer’s position, or is there more to it than this superficial reading would suggest? How can Bonhoeffer, with integrity, suggest that aesthetic existence is an integral part of being Christian? And consequently, what are the implications for this understanding of aesthetic existence in the everyday?

³ Bonhoeffer refers to *Bildung*, translated as “education,” which we should recall was a pivotal concept in Kierkegaard’s recovery of poetic living. *Bildung* is thus closely connected to the aesthetic and formative process of poeticising (as conceived by Kierkegaard), a point to which we will later return.

⁴ John de Gruchy notes, “*Spielraum* literally means ‘room to play’ or ‘leeway.’ The ‘sphere of freedom’ thus means a space in which one can be creative, take risks, experiment, in other words where ‘aesthetic existence’ becomes possible.” Again, this has a clear relation to Kierkegaard’s framing of aesthetic existence as a mode of playful experimentation. See footnote 23 in Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:268.

⁵ Bonhoeffer, 8:268.

⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 2003, 4:160.

Secondly, and partly in response to these questions, the relationship between the sphere of freedom and the sphere of obedience is critical to our discussion. For the moment, it will suffice to note that for Bonhoeffer, friendship is justified through the “*necessitas*” of freedom. Bonhoeffer’s reasoning as to the basis of this “*necessitas*” is anchored in what it means to be fully human, and fully Christian, “Someone who doesn’t know anything of this sphere of freedom can be a good parent, citizen, and worker, and probably also be a Christian, but whether such a person is a full human being (and thus also a Christian in the fullest sense) is questionable to me.”⁷ To understand why Bonhoeffer would claim that the sphere of freedom, and consequently aesthetic existence, plays a humanising role in life, we need to explore his description of reality, to which we shall momentarily turn.

Thirdly, this raises the question of the relationship between aesthetic existence and ethical existence. Bonhoeffer’s use of quotation marks regarding “ethical” existences indicates that he is here referring to a caricature of the “ethical” person, as described by Kierkegaard’s life stages. We need to work towards uncovering Bonhoeffer’s perspective of the truly integrated ethico-religious person, as opposed to an ethical caricature based on a reductionist reading of Kierkegaard, in order to discern what, if any, contribution aesthetic existence offers ethics. Again, starting with Bonhoeffer’s description of reality will help us to do this.

Finally, Bonhoeffer offers a description (if not definition) of aesthetic existence, which we can use to further develop our framing of the term for this project. Understanding aesthetic existence within the sphere of *Spielraum* is a helpful starting point, with expressions of aesthetic existence being play, friendship, art and *Bildung*.⁸ If Kierkegaard refers to aesthetic existence in relation to enjoying life, the “play of unending freedom,” and sensory existence purely in the moment, then Bonhoeffer appears to be suggesting that such immediacy should be taken up into Christian living. A narrow reading of Kierkegaard (in which aesthetic existence is rejected by the more mature stages of ethical and then religious existence) is therefore at odds with Bonhoeffer’s position here. As argued in the previous chapter, even though a more nuanced reading of Kierkegaard shows that he does indeed embrace the aesthetic and poetic in religious existence, it is a qualified and limited affirmation of aesthetic existence in Christian living, wherein he appears particularly reticent to explicitly suggest that sensory immediacy can play a role in becoming Christian. It can be argued, therefore, that

⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:268.

⁸ John de Gruchy offers a translation of *Bildung* as “the formation of character through upbringing and education.” See footnote 10, Bonhoeffer, 8:510.

even though Bonhoeffer here is not directly contradicting this nuanced Kierkegaardian reading, he appears to be more positive about sensory immediacy in the life of faith. Further, by connecting aesthetic existence with not only play and art, but also with friendship and *Bildung*, Bonhoeffer seems to be suggesting that sensory immediacy can be positively integrated with formative and relational poetic categories.⁹ In doing so, he appears to be challenging Kierkegaard's distinction between immature aesthetic existence as a first immediacy (outer) and mature aesthetic existence as a second immediacy (inner). Bonhoeffer may here be suggesting that mature aesthetic existence in the life of faith is not only inner immediacy, but also integrates and embraces outer sensory immediacy.¹⁰ This is a hypothesis that we will need to test as we further explore his perspective, grounded in his conception of reality.

3.2 The Christological Affirmation of Worldly Reality

The objective of exploring Bonhoeffer's conception of reality is twofold: Firstly, to articulate his description of reality, which will clarify the role of everyday aesthetic existence in being human and becoming Christian. Secondly, to explore Bonhoeffer's perspective on the *process* of how we come to understand reality and the implications this may have for the formative role of aesthetic existence in discipleship.

3.2.1 Bonhoeffer's Description of Reality

In resonance with an objective that underlies Kierkegaard's rejection of both Romantic aestheticism and comfortable Christendom, John de Gruchy notes that the challenge of overcoming the gulf between idealism and reality underlies much of Bonhoeffer's theology.¹¹ As with Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer's response to this question is fundamentally Christological. To Bonhoeffer, any discussion of reality must inevitably begin with ultimate reality – God. Any quest to uncover reality necessarily faces the challenge of distinguishing between reality and appearance, and for Bonhoeffer the ability to discern the difference is the essence of

⁹ “Poetic” is here used as we framed the term in the previous chapter through Kierkegaard's conception of poetic living, thus relating to the imaginative and existentially formative task of divine-human co-creation.

¹⁰ Recall Kierkegaard's conception of music as the aesthetic experience that most aptly represents sensory immediacy, in conjunction with Bonhoeffer's endorsement here of “lightheartedly making music” as an expression of Christian living. We will return to this point when considering the spotlight on music at the end of the chapter.

¹¹ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 163.

discipleship.¹² Knowing reality is not knowing *about* reality, but rather seeing into the essence of things, seeing ultimate reality.¹³ The only way to know ultimate reality is through revelation, in particular, revelation of the Living Word, Jesus Christ. The key point here is that this revelation is not doctrine *about* God, but is itself the essence of all existence: Jesus' word creates existence anew.¹⁴

It then follows that all attempts to comprehend reality must necessarily start with recognition of *ultimate* reality. All else is abstraction.¹⁵ This resonates with a common claim in the field of theological aesthetics: if we are to understand the world in light of ultimate reality, it demands a greater appreciation of the aesthetic sphere of existence.¹⁶ This is so because ultimate reality lies beyond the finitude of rational comprehension. In other words, ultimate reality lies beyond the propositional, within the realm of mystery. As Calvin Seerveld puts it, aesthetic experience can offer us allusive pointers to what lies beyond; these aesthetic pointers function as signposts for navigating this world.¹⁷ Such is the nature of the human experience of wonder. Once again, the challenge lies here with the gulf between idealism (that which lies beyond) and reality (of this world). If ultimate reality is true reality, but somehow removed from us in the pale here and now, how and where do these two worlds, or realities, meet? While Bonhoeffer agrees with the fundamental importance of starting with ultimate reality, his argument for the revelation of ultimate reality is not nearly as platonic. It is not about creating some sense, or image, of ultimate reality as the ideal, removed, but significant for the way in which we live. He rejects any notion of idealism as a means of navigating reality. Rather, it is "in Jesus Christ that the reality of God has entered into the reality of the world." The disparity between "ought" and "is" is eradicated in Christ.¹⁸ Critically, reality can only be known by *participating* in the reality of Christ. Through the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ the two worlds have been united, and by participating in the reality of Christ, one participates not only in the ultimate reality of God, but also in the reality of the world. If this is the description of reality, then reality and goodness are intertwined. This is

¹² Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 2003, 4:178.

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, vol. 6, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 81.

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, 6:62.

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, 6:54.

¹⁶ As argued, for instance, in Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol, and Myth in Religion and Theology*.

¹⁷ See Begbie's discussion of Seerveld's concept of allusiveness in Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 135ff.

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 6:54.

the basis of Bonhoeffer's ethics. "The question of the good becomes the question of participating in God's reality revealed in Christ."¹⁹

3.2.2 *Bonhoeffer's Embrace of This-Worldly Reality*

Participation in becoming fully human, as Christ became human, provides the impetus behind Bonhoeffer's encouragement to embrace "this-worldliness." The Christian life is not defined by religion, but rather a mature worldliness. It is "living fully in the midst of life's tasks, questions, successes and failures, experiences, and perplexities."²⁰ It is only here, participating with God in this-worldly, incarnational experiences, located within a particular time and a particular place that true faith is learned. "This is how one becomes a human being, a Christian."²¹ To Bonhoeffer, faith, and how this is lived out in the world, is not a matter of systematic doctrine, which is first and foremost articulated through a conceptual framework. Rather, faith takes seriously the finitude and fragility of being human within this world. Claiming that action is always in response to a carefully considered principle, conceptual ideal or ultimate duty "is a misjudgement of historical human existence in which everything has its time (Ecclesiastes 3) – eating, drinking, sleeping, as well as conscious decision making and acting, working and resting, serving a purpose and just being without purpose, meeting obligations and following inclinations, striving and playing, abstaining and rejoicing."²² It is particularly important for us to note here the value that Bonhoeffer places on the non-utilitarian expressions of human life. For Bonhoeffer, moments of rest, play, enjoyment, and "just being without a purpose" are an important part of what it means to be human, and therefore a fundamental aspect of being Christian. Aesthetic existence is thus not distinguished from religious existence; rather, they cohere in the life of the Christian. The life of the world matters because there is simply no dichotomy between the reality of God and the reality of the world, which come together in the reality of Christ; thus Bonhoeffer's comment, for example, that the best "Christological" interpretation of the Song of Solomon is to "read it as a song about earthly love."²³

¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, 6:50.

²⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:486.

²¹ Bonhoeffer, 8:486.

²² Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 6:365.

²³ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:410.

3.2.2.1 Embracing Both Aesthetic Existence *and* Costly Discipleship

The objection may be raised at this point that there seems to be a lack of consistency in Bonhoeffer's thinking regarding the value of aesthetic existence. While he clearly does embrace the aesthetic in his later writings, particularly *Letters and Papers from Prison*, in some of his earlier writing he appears to be distinctly opposed to the aesthetic life. For example, in *Discipleship* there is an apparent dichotomy between the Christian and the world. Christians are "to engage the world in a frontal assault ... in order that their 'unworldliness' might become fully visible."²⁴ "The world celebrates, and they stand apart. The world shrieks 'Enjoy life', and they grieve."²⁵ It would seem difficult to integrate Bonhoeffer's later embrace of aesthetic existence with this apparent rejection of the life of the world. However, a more careful examination will show that there is continuity in Bonhoeffer's thought, even while there is indeed a significant theological development. This can be illustrated by briefly considering: the consistency of his personal aesthetic appreciation across his lifetime; the context and style of the respective writings; and the trajectory of his theology.

While it does indeed appear that Bonhoeffer, through his later writing, *expressed* greater appreciation for the aesthetic, arguably Bonhoeffer always embraced an implicit sense of aesthetic appreciation. From a young age, as part of a family with significant social standing, Bonhoeffer was exposed to the arts. In particular, Bonhoeffer flourished as a musician, his father hoping that Bonhoeffer would choose the career path of concert pianist. Throughout Bonhoeffer's life, his love for music never waned, as evidenced by his regular references to music, and his discovery and adoption of African-American "spirituals." As de Gruchy points out, while the earlier years of Bonhoeffer's life did not include theological reflection on the aesthetic, the aesthetic was constantly present as an important part of Bonhoeffer's life, and references to art and aesthetics are scattered throughout his writings.²⁶ De Gruchy therefore suggests that "aesthetic existence was an essential part of [Bonhoeffer's] own education and cultural formation (*Bildung*)."²⁷ The point is confirmed by Bonhoeffer's niece, Renate Bethge, who affirms de Gruchy's claim, noting that it "was so normal for us and for him, as we played music often, even games sometimes, that I did not see that there was much new

²⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geoffrey B Kelly and John D Godsey, vol. 4, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 244.

²⁵ Bonhoeffer, 4:103.

²⁶ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 138.

²⁷ De Gruchy, 150.

like a ‘turn to the aesthetic.’²⁸ There is no doubt that during his time in prison Bonhoeffer explored the aesthetic more intentionally than before, writing a novel, a play and expressing himself through poetry. Nevertheless, there is no discontinuity in Bonhoeffer’s appreciation of the aesthetic, but rather explicit reflection and engagement with that which had hitherto been largely implicit.²⁹

Secondly, it is helpful to identify differences in the style of Bonhoeffer’s writing, as dictated by context. The context of prison (and all that accompanied this phase of Bonhoeffer’s life: separation from fiancé, friends and family; the failed assassination attempt; the war drawing to a close, etc.) proved catalytic for a reflective, even at times effusive style.³⁰ By contrast, the rhetoric that Bonhoeffer employs in *Discipleship* makes it clear that he is here concerned with “struggle” writing. At the time of its writing, Bonhoeffer would not have identified himself with the broader German resistance struggle, but he is writing as an *ecclesial* activist, working to challenge the church to greater faithfulness. The urgency of the task at hand – the health of the church amidst the destructive turmoil of Nazi Germany – demanded a stark, binary description of the options moving forward. Resonating with the task that befell Kierkegaard in his “attack on Christendom,” this was a matter of ultimate concern, with no room for compromise.

Thirdly, theologically, we find both a consistent trajectory as well as a significant new development. Bonhoeffer’s close friend, Eberhard Bethge, has insightfully shown that Bonhoeffer’s action and thought can be organized around three phases of his life.³¹ Popular works in the middle period, such as *Discipleship* (previously published as *The Cost of Discipleship*) and *Life Together*, have been contrasted (as we did above) with writing from his

²⁸ De Gruchy, 150 footnote 59. Eberhard Bethge also affirms that even during the years of the Finkenwalde Seminary (which provided much of the impetus for the writing of *Discipleship*), Bonhoeffer loved playing games, and “nobody in Finkenwalde was more eager for plays and music than he.” See Eberhard Bethge, ‘The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Life and Theology’, *The Alden-Tuthill Lectures, The Chicago Theological Seminary Register* LI, no. 2 (February 1961): 24.

²⁹ The formative impact of this implicit engagement with the aesthetic should not be underestimated, as will be argued in the next two chapters in particular. Even in Bonhoeffer’s life it is notable that his everyday engagement with music, for example, significantly shaped his explicit theological thinking. This is a point we will consider more closely at the end of this chapter.

³⁰ We would also do well to bear in mind the genre of writing that we are dealing with, *Letters and Papers from Prison* accentuating this difference by virtue of the nature of these documents.

³¹ Bethge, ‘The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Life and Theology’.

final phase, thereby arguing for an aesthetic turn.³² However, Bethge shows that there is clear continuity between the first and third phase, the second phase being a reaction necessitated by the Church Struggle, as noted above. Bethge points out that right from the start, as a student, Bonhoeffer was immersed in the antirationalistic trend of the German Youth Movement with its terminology of the philosophy of life.³³ “This-worldliness” was therefore not a late discovery for Bonhoeffer, even though he may not have used the term at this point. In this first phase, a driving concern was the “concrete nature of the message.”³⁴

If Christology is the consistent core of Bonhoeffer’s theology, then the incarnation is at the heart of this from the start.³⁵ To illustrate Bonhoeffer’s this-worldly Christology, even in this early phase, Bethge quotes Bonhoeffer, “The community of Christ is not the meeting place of those apart from life, but the center of life; the center of men ‘who persevere together in the midst of the world, in the depths of it, in its trivialities and bondages.’ This reads like a quotation from one of the prisoner letters, but it was said [more than ten years prior to his imprisonment] in November, 1932.”³⁶ It is for this reason that the second phase, a necessary response to Nazism, is sometimes considered an interruption, a detour from the trajectory of Bonhoeffer’s this-worldly theology. Amidst the horrors of the time, “the world becomes the threatening jungle which must be passed through.”³⁷ While still Christological in focus, the circumstances demanded exposition through the lens of eschatology rather than creation theology. Bethge shows that in the third phase, it is not Bonhoeffer’s Christology that changes, but rather the conceptual backdrop of “the world come of age.”³⁸ This leads to a critique of religion, since it is religion that separates the practice of Christianity from the world. Firstly, this is due to the individualistic inwardness of religion (a critique that lies at the heart of Bonhoeffer’s rejection of Kierkegaard’s distinction between an “inner” second immediacy in the life of faith, as opposed to the “outer” first immediacy of the aesthete). Secondly, the metaphysical nature of religion necessarily creates two realms of existence,

³² For examples arguing for an aesthetic turn, see Scott Holland, ‘First We Take Manhattan, Then We Take Berlin: Bonhoeffer’s New York’, *CrossCurrents* 50, no. 3 (2000): 377; Carolyn M. Jones, ‘Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s “Letters and Papers from Prison”’: Rethinking the Relationship of Theology and Arts, Literature and Religion’, *Literature and Theology* 9, no. 3 (1995): 243–59.

³³ Bethge, ‘The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Life and Theology’, 4.

³⁴ Bethge, 7.

³⁵ Bethge, 8.

³⁶ Bethge, 13.

³⁷ Bethge, 18.

³⁸ Bethge, 32.

which consequently devalues sensory existence. Thirdly, religion as a “province of life” is relegated to an increasingly isolated and disconnected sphere of life. Finally, religion is entrenched in the *deus ex machine* concept, “God must be there for providing answers, solutions, protection, and help.”³⁹ In this final phase, Bonhoeffer is therefore concerned with recovering the worldliness of Christianity, a trajectory established in the first phase with its incarnational focus.

This leads to a critical point for this project: while it may not be completely accurate to describe this third phase as a turn to the aesthetic, for the first time in this phase, Bonhoeffer begins to *explicitly* explore theology through the lens of aesthetic reflection. In other words, while there is consistency in his thought throughout the three phases, here he approaches the Christian life from a slightly different perspective, using different terminology. Whether he was consciously aware of this development is not clear. While it is difficult to predict exactly how this exploration would have unfolded had he not been executed, it seems reasonable to surmise that it would have gone on to play a significant role in his work from this point onwards. Careful observation of both the trajectory of the three stages, as well as the nature of this new development offers us important clues as to what lay behind Bonhoeffer’s positive theological stance on aesthetic existence.

In light of this, it is most fruitful to explore the phases of Bonhoeffer’s life and thought alongside one another. As Bethge has pointed out, the Christological expansiveness of the first and third phase is most helpfully perceived alongside the exclusiveness of the second phase.⁴⁰ He points to Bonhoeffer’s assertion in *Ethics* affirming that, “The more exclusively we recognize and confess Christ as our Lord, the more will be disclosed to us the breadth of Christ’s lordship.”⁴¹ Even amidst the exclusive and binary context of the second phase, a close reading of *Discipleship* makes it clear that behind the rhetoric there is continuity in Bonhoeffer’s thinking about the Christological, this-worldly nature of reality. Discipleship *is* this-worldly, but it is a mature, disciplined this-worldliness, as opposed to a self-seeking worldliness. This explains apparent oxymorons, such as, “The ‘unworldliness’ of the Christian life is meant to take place in the midst of this world.” It is in “daily life” amidst “secular vocation” that the Christian life is to be played out.⁴² The quote mentioned earlier, encouraging Christians “to engage the world in a frontal assault” goes on to explain that this

³⁹ Bethge, 34.

⁴⁰ Bethge, 28–29.

⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 6:344.

⁴² Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 2003, 4:245.

needs to happen *in* the world, “The world must be contradicted within the world.”⁴³ In other words, an accurate vision of Christological, this-worldly reality needs to be lived out amidst distorted, self-seeking visions of reality. This is consistent with Bonhoeffer’s description of this-worldliness in *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Here, he contrasts the two senses of this-worldliness, “I do not mean the shallow and banal this-worldliness of the enlightened, the bustling, the comfortable, or the lascivious, but the profound this-worldliness that shows discipline and includes the ever-present knowledge of death and resurrection.”⁴⁴

Fundamentally, in *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer is confronting the issue of how to be a Christian in the world, in light of being a Christian *against* the world, while in *Letters and Papers* he is dealing with the issue of being a Christian *in* and *for* the world.

Bonhoeffer’s two senses of this-worldliness are a helpful clue to understanding his endorsement of aesthetic existence. He is clearly arguing for the fact that everyday life in the world is a fundamental part of being human, yet he is also qualifying the claim. It is a *disciplined* life in the world, or mature worldliness, that he is presenting as a vision of the Christian life, in contrast to a self-seeking worldliness. In the terms of our enquiry, this would be Bonhoeffer’s distinction between mature aesthetic existence and aestheticism. Rather than aesthetic existence being ultimate reality itself, mature aesthetic existence is lived in light of ultimate reality. A question follows: How does this distinction play out in practice, in the everyday? What does mature aesthetic existence look like? We shall return to this important query shortly. In order to explore it, we need to first deal with Bonhoeffer’s distinction between the “ultimate” and “penultimate.”

3.2.3 *Ultimate and Penultimate Reality*

As we have seen, although there is continuity in Bonhoeffer’s thinking around worldliness, there is also a maturing process, cultivated by changing circumstances, which leads to a significant shift in his approach. We can see this in the very same letter from prison we referred to above, discussing “this-worldliness.” Here, while standing by the essential message of *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer reflects on the “dangers” of the book, intimating that he would have written it differently had he to write it again. He explains that for a long time he thought he “could learn to have faith by trying to live something like a saintly life,” writing “*Discipleship* at the end of this path.” Later he discovered that “one only learns to have faith

⁴³ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 2003, 4:244.

⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:485.

by living in the full this-worldliness of life.”⁴⁵ Prior to writing *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer had spent much of his energy working within the realm of the church. Following the book, he spent more time collaborating with others, outside of the church, in the resistance movement. Here he engaged with non-Christians committed to the fight for human dignity. This appears to have stimulated his thinking around what it means to be fully human in the world. As noted, his focus was shifting from the binary struggle of being a Christian amidst the war, to envisioning the future of Christianity after the war. Or, using Bonhoeffer’s terminology, it is helpful to consider *Discipleship* as a work dealing primarily with the “ultimate,” while later, particularly when exploring the “sphere of freedom,” Bonhoeffer spends more time on the “penultimate.”

Bonhoeffer describes the “ultimate” as “justification of the sinner by grace alone.”⁴⁶ God’s mercy to a sinner is God’s final word. It is ultimate in two senses. Firstly, it is qualitatively ultimate, “There is no word of God that goes beyond God’s grace.” Secondly, it is temporally ultimate, “Something penultimate always precedes it, some action, suffering, movement, intention, defeat, recovery, pleading, hoping – in short, quite literally a span of time at whose end it stands.”⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer explores the question of what the relationship is between the ultimate and penultimate. He points to two unhelpful responses: Firstly, a radical response can see only the ultimate of value, the ultimate and penultimate being “in mutually exclusive opposition.”⁴⁸ From this perspective “everything penultimate in human behavior is sin and denial.”⁴⁹ Secondly, the compromise response asserts that since the ultimate and penultimate are distinct, “The penultimate retains its inherent rights, but it is not threatened or endangered by the ultimate.”⁵⁰ These are both problematic responses because, “They make the penultimate and the ultimate mutually exclusive... One absolutizes the end, the other absolutizes what exists.”⁵¹

It is helpful to illustrate how this concept has been applied to a theological perspective of politics, and then to draw a parallel to aesthetics. Robin Lovin applies Bonhoeffer’s description of the penultimate in articulating the approach of a Christian realist, a political

⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, 8:486.

⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 6:146.

⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer, 6:150.

⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, 6:153.

⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, 6:153.

⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer, 6:154.

⁵¹ Bonhoeffer, 6:154.

strategy which acknowledges that it is often more helpful to focus on “limitation and balance” than “final victory.”⁵²

Concentration on the penultimate requires, according to Bonhoeffer, a rejection both of the radical politics that is willing to destroy anything and everything for the sake of ultimate truth and of the compromises that, by suspending judgement until ultimate truth is fully present, slip by degrees into relativism. The Christian realist shares the radical’s dissatisfaction with injustice, but focuses on responsible choices among the concrete possibilities now available.⁵³

Lovin is here echoing Reinhold Niebuhr’s suggestion (amidst the context of social and political action in Nazi Germany) that, “An adequate religion is always an ultimate optimism which has entertained all the facts that lead to pessimism.”⁵⁴ Politically then, hope is found by embracing the penultimate in light of the ultimate. The same applies to aesthetics. The ultimate (beauty, as the vision of God) informs the penultimate (aesthetic existence).

If the ultimate and penultimate are both important, Bonhoeffer suggests that the key to their integration is a Christological understanding of reality, incorporating the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. “A Christian ethic built only on the incarnation would lead easily to the compromise solution; an ethic built only on the crucifixion or only on the resurrection of Jesus Christ would fall into radicalism and enthusiasm. The conflict is resolved only in their unity.”⁵⁵ Jesus Christ, the human being, “lets human reality exist as penultimate, neither making it self-sufficient nor destroying it.”⁵⁶ The penultimate matters because it is in Christ that “the reality of God encounters the reality of the world and allows us to take part in this real encounter.”⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer points out that, logically, nothing can be self-referentially penultimate; it is always penultimate in relation to the ultimate. In other words, while the penultimate precedes the ultimate, it “does not determine the ultimate; the ultimate determines the penultimate.”⁵⁸ Concretely, from the perspective of the ultimate, “two things are addressed as penultimate: *being human and being good.*”⁵⁹ A critical assertion necessarily follows this claim: “the penultimate must be preserved for the sake of the ultimate. Arbitrary

⁵² Robin Lovin, *Christian Realism and the New Realities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5.

⁵³ Lovin, 5.

⁵⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940), 182.

⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 6:157.

⁵⁶ Bonhoeffer, 6:158.

⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, 6:159.

⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, 6:159.

⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, 6:159.

destruction of the penultimate seriously harms the ultimate. When, for example, a human life is deprived of the conditions that are part of being human, the justification of such a life by grace and faith is at least seriously hindered, if not made impossible.”⁶⁰ This does not mean that anything done in the penultimate can guarantee, or even initiate the ultimate, but it does mean that preparation can be made for the reception of the word. Herein lies the importance of this concept for our discussion of the role of aesthetic existence in Christian life.

The realm of freedom – encompassing play, friendship, the arts, etc. – is an expression of the penultimate. While the realm of freedom is not the ultimate, it retains significance in light of Bonhoeffer’s Christological view of reality; this affirmation of the penultimate means that aesthetic existence is an important aspect of Christian life. However, as we have noted, it is a qualified endorsement of aesthetic existence. The error lies in making aesthetic existence absolute. Or, in other words, allowing the penultimate to become the ultimate. As long as aesthetic existence is considered penultimate, Bonhoeffer not only affirms it, but calls for its recovery, because it is a celebration of what it means to be human. It is an embodiment of Christological this-worldliness.

We could describe this as Bonhoeffer’s *explicit* affirmation of aesthetic existence.

Bonhoeffer, however, also infers an *implicit* affirmation of everyday aesthetic existence, as an agent in the process of formation [*Bildung*]. The penultimate prepares the way for the ultimate. We cannot control the ultimate, for we engage reality in the penultimate. We cannot bring in the kingdom, but we can act in anticipation of it. We cannot initiate the word of grace, but we can either nurture a receptive environment, or hinder it. In Bonhoeffer’s words, “There are conditions of the heart, of life, and in the world that especially hinder the receiving of grace, that is, which make it infinitely difficult to believe.”⁶¹ Which gives rise to the question, *does everyday aesthetic existence create “conditions of the heart” which nurture or hinder belief?*⁶² In order to explore Bonhoeffer’s implicit response to this question, we will shift from discussing his *description* of reality, to his view on the *process* whereby we comprehend Christological reality and participate in it, in other words “discipleship.”

⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, 6:160.

⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, 6:162.

⁶² Even from what we have covered thus far, it should be apparent that this is a complex question. Beyond a simple “yes” or “no,” this project is seeking to explore *how* this may or may not happen. In subsequent chapters, we will engage the mechanics of the *how*, as we move beyond Bonhoeffer. For the moment, we will limit our focus to the *possibility* of aesthetic existence affecting belief.

3.3 Discipleship as *Seeing* and Partaking in Reality

While *Discipleship* is hardly the first work one would think to turn to in order to consider Bonhoeffer's validation of aesthetic existence, it contains an implicit understanding of the fundamental role that the aesthetic plays in being human and becoming Christian. We will initially consider this in relation to the book as it stands, before exploring how this may have been developed had Bonhoeffer had the opportunity to elaborate further on his thinking regarding aesthetic existence.

3.3.1 *Imagining Reality*

As we have discussed, Bonhoeffer suggests that reality should be *seen* in light of the ultimate. In other words, when confronted by identical this-worldly stimuli, a Christological perception of worldly reality differs from a non-Christological perception. Bonhoeffer describes this as seeing into the essence, or the depth of things, *seeing* reality in God.⁶³ This is significant because what Bonhoeffer is describing here is an imaginative act – the human ability to “see as.”⁶⁴ In *Discipleship*, a repeated theme is sight/image/vision/the eye, etc. For Bonhoeffer, discipleship is the ability to *see* reality in light of Christ, to see beyond appearances, to see the kingdom, which is the real. “The disciples always see only Christ. They do not see Christ *and* the law, Christ *and* piety, Christ *and* the world ... so their vision is simple ... If the eye sees something other than what is real, then the whole body is deceived. If the heart clings to the appearances of the world, to the creatures instead of the creator, then the disciple is lost”⁶⁵ The path of costly discipleship is understanding reality in light of Christ, “no longer seeing oneself, only him who is going ahead...”⁶⁶ Earlier we quoted Bonhoeffer speaking of the world celebrating life, while Christians stand apart, as a potential example of Bonhoeffer's rejection of this-worldliness. But in that passage, as in the other example we considered, Bonhoeffer goes on to illustrate that it is the two senses of this-worldliness that he is contrasting. “The world celebrates, and they stand apart. The world shrieks ‘Enjoy life,’ and they grieve. They *see* that the ship, on which there are festive cheers and celebrating, is already leaking. While the world *imagines* progress, strength, and a grand future, the disciples know about the end, judgment, and the arrival of the kingdom of heaven, for which the world

⁶³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 6:81.

⁶⁴ In the chapters to come, we will explore the nature and workings of this productive function of the imagination in greater detail.

⁶⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 2003, 4:161.

⁶⁶ Bonhoeffer, 4:86.

is not at all ready.”⁶⁷ [Italics added] Faced with the same sensory stimuli, Bonhoeffer is presenting two ways of imagining the world, two ways of “seeing as.”

However, Bonhoeffer wants to make it clear that these are not simply two equally valid perspectives on the way things are, he is contrasting an illusory understanding of the world, which is nothing but appearances, with a perception of the real. Discipleship is learning how to tell the difference.⁶⁸ In other words, again echoing Kierkegaard, the imagination is a human faculty which can either aid our perception of reality or distort it. As we can see in the quote just mentioned above, Bonhoeffer is highly critical of the fantastical use of the imagination when it comes to perception of reality. Even with the noblest intentions of living a good life, if this is not grounded in reality it is the “craziest Don Quixotry.”⁶⁹ It is the equivalent of Don Quixote riding into battle with imaginary armour for “the chosen lady of his heart who doesn’t even exist.”⁷⁰ It is mere fantasy.⁷¹ Disconnecting goodness from Christological reality leads to a distorted vision of what it means to live the good life. In terms of aesthetic existence, aesthetic experience easily becomes the absolute measure of goodness, leading to aestheticism, and the concomitant rift between aesthetics, ethics and faith – with faith relegated to the “spiritual” realm of existence.

If then, on the one hand, the distortion of reality by a fantastical use of the imagination is problematic, on the other, the productive imagination plays an important role in discipleship; seeing Christological reality requires this paradigmatic function of the imagination.⁷² To see the kingdom of God is to see reality through the paradigm of Christ. Seeing this-worldly reality in light of ultimate reality requires a way of seeing that is not limited to finite, rational proposition. In other words, imaginative constructs such as metaphor, symbol, and story become indispensable tools for such envisioning of reality. This is evidenced by Jesus’ use of parables to describe the kingdom of God. For example, to communicate the essence of costly grace, Bonhoeffer draws on the metaphors Jesus employs: It is “the hidden treasure in the field, for the sake of which people go and sell with joy everything they have. It is the costly

⁶⁷ Bonhoeffer, 4:103.

⁶⁸ Bonhoeffer, 4:177.

⁶⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 6:51.

⁷⁰ Bonhoeffer, 6:80.

⁷¹ It is worth noting at this point, again in resonance with Kierkegaard, that the church is not immune to such fantastical illusions of reality, which is exactly the point of Bonhoeffer’s critique of Christendom.

⁷² Garret Green offers a helpful articulation of the paradigmatic imagination in *Imagining God*, 61-82.

pearl, for whose price the merchant sells all that he has...”⁷³ Bonhoeffer’s description of discipleship is founded on the importance of a new way of seeing reality, in which the imagination plays a critical role. It is a vision of reality, fuelled by aesthetic phenomenon such as story, metaphor and symbol, encompassing both this-worldly and divine reality.

3.3.2 *Participating in Reality*

Yet, if Bonhoeffer is arguing for an imaginative way of seeing the world, it would be a mistake to equate this with a conceptual, idealist image disconnected from the earthiness of reality. He is not suggesting that discipleship is the process of moving from idea to action. As previously noted, engaging Christological reality is not a question of proceeding from ideal to realisation, but is about *participation* in such reality.⁷⁴ This participation is, first and foremost, a question of obedience. It is in the act of obedience that perception of reality is shifted. In the act of obedience, as Peter steps out of the boat into the waves – a this-worldly, bodily experience – Peter’s reality changes. Just as Kierkegaard rejected the notion that disciples can be “admirers,” but need to be “imitators” of Christ, Bonhoeffer proclaims that, “Any intended discipleship without this step [of obedience] to which Jesus calls becomes deceptive enthusiasts’ illusion.”⁷⁵ In other words, obedience is not the consequence of seeing rightly, but the precursor. This is not to say that perception of reality cannot change without literal obedience. Bonhoeffer explains this through the story of the rich young man who Jesus commands to give away all his possessions as an expression of faith. The point here is not the giving of possessions, but rather seeing reality through Christ, so that even if we have the possessions, “we have them as if we did not have them.”⁷⁶ As long as we understand that “it would be the infinitely easier way to understand Jesus’ commandment simply and obey it literally,” there is room for a Christological conversion of the imagination that does not entail literal obedience (while acknowledging that such a conversion of the imagination will necessarily involve a consistent form of action in the world). Bonhoeffer therefore describes an organic, symbiotic and two-way relationship between obedience and perception of reality,

⁷³ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 2003, 4:44. Another example is Bonhoeffer’s deployment of the parable of the Good Samaritan to imaginatively challenge the paradigm of the self as the locus of reality. See Bonhoeffer, 4:75–76.

⁷⁴ Bonhoeffer rejects any distinction between inward and outward life, arguing that such a distinction is not biblical. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:457.

⁷⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 2003, 4:62.

⁷⁶ Bonhoeffer, 4:80.

action and imagination.⁷⁷ Such a relationship has clear implications for the connection between ethics and aesthetics. Just as any exercise of the imagination (perception of the kingdom) without obedience is illusion, so too aesthetics disconnected from the ethico-religious is mere aestheticism, having lost all reference to reality.

3.4 Implications for Everyday Aesthetic Existence

During this brief excursus into Bonhoeffer's description of discipleship as a process of coming to perceive Christological reality, we have not yet explicitly considered the role of everyday aesthetic existence. If a conversion of the imagination, grounded in this-worldly obedience is at the core of discipleship, we can return to the question of whether aesthetic existence hinders or nurtures this process. Bonhoeffer does not answer this question. He was just beginning to explore the concept when his life was cut short. What would it have looked like if he had further developed his thinking around aesthetic existence? Of course, we cannot know with certainty, but it may be helpful to further extrapolate the trajectories we have uncovered thus far.

We can start with what is clear: Bonhoeffer affirmed aesthetic existence because he argued for the Christological nature of reality. Jesus Christ, as human, calls us to take our this-worldly humanity seriously. Celebration of being fully human is an important task in the penultimate, as it paves the way for the ultimate. Bonhoeffer argued that aesthetic existence – friendship, play, art, *Bildung* – has a role to play in the affirmation of human dignity.

However, Bonhoeffer is not endorsing this-worldliness unreservedly. As we have seen, it is a mature, disciplined sense of this-worldliness for which he is arguing. It follows that this should therefore apply to aesthetic existence, Bonhoeffer calling for a mature, disciplined aesthetic existence as opposed to mere aestheticism. It is tempting to borrow a phrase from Calvin Seerveld, and suggest that “aesthetic obedience” is what Bonhoeffer is suggesting.⁷⁸ After all, Bonhoeffer's emphasis on obedience is grounded in a distinct sense of this-worldliness. This means that embodiment and the senses are an integral part of this obedience.⁷⁹ But this would be to misrepresent what Bonhoeffer is calling for in a recovery of aesthetic existence. It would be to impose Kierkegaard's ethical life-attitude of permissibility onto a category that should be more fully understood in terms of the relational interactions of

⁷⁷ This complex relationship between action, imagination and cognition will be affirmed by neuroscience in the following two chapters.

⁷⁸ Seerveld, *Rainbows for the Fallen World*, 42ff.

⁷⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 2003, 4:225–26, 232.

becoming and being Christian. It is not the “necessitas” of obedience or divine command that drives Bonhoeffer’s embrace of aesthetic existence, but the “necessitas” of freedom. He is specifically contrasting this realm of freedom with the realm of obedience. The latter is marked by the response to a command or mandate, while the former is an expression of human freedom, not engaged for a particular purpose, outcome, or utility, but for its own sake, purely for the gift of “being in the moment.”⁸⁰

Bonhoeffer offers us a clue as to how he would qualify aesthetic existence by describing his relational understanding of freedom. “[F]reedom is not a quality that can be uncovered; it is not a possession, something to hand, an object ... instead it is a relation and nothing else ... Being free means ‘being-free-for-the-other’, because I am bound to the other. Only by being in relation with the other am I free.”⁸¹ If relationship provides the conceptual framework within which we should understand the realm of freedom, and consequently aesthetic existence, then it follows that a Christological basis of relationship should guide this understanding. The Christian life is a participation in Jesus’s “being-for-others.”⁸² If aestheticism is the end result of self-centred aesthetic existence, perhaps Bonhoeffer would argue that mature aesthetic existence is guided by love. A kenotic approach to aesthetic existence may appear to be an oxymoron, but it is worth exploring whether a selfless approach to aesthetic experience is not more likely to lead to wonder (and an accurate vision of reality), rather than the self-centred titillation of aestheticism (and an illusory perception of the real). In this sense, aesthetic existence is not only a celebration of being human, but it also plays a fundamental role in the revelation of reality. Bonhoeffer suggests that if love is the compass that orients action in the world, such action provides a new vision of reality, “love makes the disciple able to see.”⁸³ Drawing from Bonhoeffer’s musical metaphors, we could say that love of Christ is the *cantus firmus* grounding the polyphony of mature aesthetic existence in Christological reality. To explore this more fully we need to turn to Bonhoeffer’s engagement with music and the way in which this influenced his own personal and theological formation.

⁸⁰ This is not to say that aesthetic existence does not have purpose or utility. To the contrary, the coming chapters will argue that this is an unavoidable by-product (whether intentional or not) and is an important reason for taking aesthetic existence seriously.

⁸¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, ed. John de Gruchy, vol. 3, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 63.

⁸² Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:501.

⁸³ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 2003, 4:140.

3.5 Spotlight on Music: Sensory immediacy generates “living” metaphors

Bonhoeffer’s love for music provides fertile ground for an investigation into the relationship between music, as the archetypal aesthetic experience of sensory immediacy, and Christian living. There are two particular aspects we will explore here, again as we did in the last chapter, using a focus on music to crystallise and substantiate key points in the argument presented.⁸⁴ Firstly, based on his musical experience, Bonhoeffer draws on musical metaphors, which elucidate his argument, thereby offering further clarity on his embrace of mature aesthetic existence. Not only are these metaphors insightful, but they imply that the realm of free play, being in the moment musically, contributed to his explicit theology. Secondly, therefore, we need to consider the nature of this aesthetic contribution to his theology. The suggestion here is that the metaphors which Bonhoeffer employs may not merely be the consequence of theological reflection on aesthetic existence (music, here), but the inverse, that his theology may be, at least partially, the consequence of formative paradigms created through his musical experience.

3.5.1 *Bonhoeffer’s Personal Embrace of Music*

Here we should recall that Bonhoeffer was a proficient musician. As already noted, music was a constant presence in the Bonhoeffer home throughout his formative years and at one stage it appeared to both him and his parents that he may pursue a career as a concert pianist. By the age of ten he was performing Mozart sonatas, and not long after, began composing cantatas and trios. Saturday evenings were spent accompanying his mother and sister in “songs by Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and Hugo Wolf.” At seventeen, he was accompanying his sister on the lute as they performed at parties.⁸⁵ This musically saturated existence continued throughout his life, references to music appearing regularly in his work. His time in Harlem expanded his musical appreciation, where he collected gramophone recordings of “spirituals,” which he would later use to introduce students at Finkenwalde to the musical genre.⁸⁶ Bethge notes that at Finkenwalde, the “two Bechstein grand pianos ... were in constant use,”⁸⁷ while

⁸⁴ The “spotlight” on music in this chapter is lengthier than other chapters since Bonhoeffer’s engagement with music makes a significant contribution to the argument itself.

⁸⁵ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 25.

⁸⁶ Bethge, 150.

⁸⁷ The designation of a “music room” in itself is significant, since the underground seminary at Finkenwalde represents Bonhoeffer’s practical template of what discipleship looks like as “life together.” Pangritz notes, “On Finkenwalde see also Bonhoeffer’s Report for 1936 sent

Bonhoeffer's extensive "collection of gramophone records, remarkable for those days, was at everyone's disposal," often playing the little-known spirituals.⁸⁸ Both the Bechstein piano, as well as the gramophone collection had previously travelled with him to England, for his time there as a parish minister. Again, England was a new cultural context in which Bonhoeffer did not hesitate to expand his musical appreciation, adding to his gramophone collection, prompted by his enthusiasm for "the quality of the English choirs."⁸⁹ His rooms, here too, were bustling with musical activity, "playing trios and quartets" or listening to music.⁹⁰ On occasion, notably, it was through music that he developed friendships here (recall Bonhoeffer's alliance of music and friendship as modes of aesthetic existence).⁹¹

Even in prison, deprived of these instruments and recordings, music continued to pervade Bonhoeffer's existence. His letters are scattered with musical notation as he imaginatively re-experienced these pieces "inwardly." Hearing music "from within," gave him "an existential appreciation of Beethoven's music from when he was deaf," and helped him to more clearly attune himself to the beauty of a piece.⁹² One particular instance of such an imaginative re-experiencing points to the impact of music as aesthetic existence in his life. It is a portrait that exemplifies the experience of music as sensory immediacy. Bonhoeffer recalls leaving a seminar, in which the highly respected Adolf von Harnack lauded his work. He admits to still being "full with this" as he entered the Philharmonic Hall for a performance of Bach's Mass in B minor. "Then the great 'Kyrie eleison' began, and *at that moment everything else sank away completely*. It was an indescribable impression. Today I am moving through it by memory, section by section... [It] is for me Bach's most beautiful music."⁹³ [Italics added] It is here, in prison, that Bonhoeffer begins to think about music and aesthetic existence

to his students and friends where he writes: 'Now as before, we spend a great deal of time and derive great joy from our music making ... In general, I can hardly imagine our life together here without our daily music making. We have driven out many an evil spirit in this way.'" As quoted in the forthcoming English translation by Robert Steiner of Andreas Pangritz, *Polyphonie des Lebens: Zu Dietrich Bonhoeffers 'Theologie der Musik'* (Berlin: Alektor-Verlag, 1994), 3. In reference to DBWE 14:278-9

⁸⁸ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 427.

⁸⁹ Bethge, 328.

⁹⁰ Bethge, 328.

⁹¹ Bethge, 328.

⁹² Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:332.

⁹³ Bonhoeffer, 8:177.

explicitly, in theological terms, but it is a reflection built on a lifetime of implicit existential embrace; as Robert Smith notes, “for Bonhoeffer, music was essential to the ‘good life.’”⁹⁴

3.5.2 *Bonhoeffer’s Musical Metaphors*

Bonhoeffer’s explicit reflection on music produces a handful of overlapping musical metaphors which he uses theologically in his prison letters. The way in which Bonhoeffer employs these metaphors – fugue, *Grundton*, polyphony and the related notions of *cantus firmus* and counterpoint – resonates with Kierkegaard’s description of poetic living, or mature aesthetic existence in terms of “harmony” with Christ as divine poet.⁹⁵

3.5.2.1 The Metaphor of Fugue in Response to Fragmentation

Both Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer lament the fragmentary nature of existence. For Kierkegaard, as we have seen, Romantic existential aesthetics merely accentuates the fragmentary nature of life by locating the self in discreet and disconnected sensory moments. His call to “be one thing” is ultimately only to be actualised in Christ, as manifestation of both the finite and infinite. For Bonhoeffer, it is particularly the context of war – and the intensification of human finitude, mortality and corruption which war brings – which provokes his concern. In a reflection, which mirrors Kierkegaard’s observation on the radical vacillation of Romantic “moods,” Bonhoeffer laments the behaviour of his fellow prisoners in a letter to Bethge, noting that, “When bombers come, they are nothing but fear itself; when there’s something good to eat, nothing but greed itself... They are missing out on the fullness of life and on the wholeness of their own existence. Everything... disintegrates into fragments.”⁹⁶ In a letter to his parents, he mourns the brokenness that war brings “both professionally and personally” and the feeling this arouses of “how unfinished and fragmentary our lives are.”⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Robert O. Smith, ‘Bonhoeffer and Musical Metaphor’, *Word and World* 26, no. 2 (2006): 197. Evidence of Bonhoeffer’s connection of music with the good life can be found in a letter to Eberhard and Renate Bethge (referencing their son, Bonhoeffer’s godson, “Dietrich”), wherein he writes, “I wish you fine weather, much pleasure with little Dietrich, and many nice and quiet hours and good music!” Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:401.

⁹⁵ Apart from the work of Pangritz, de Gruchy, Begbie (see also *Resounding Truth* 156-162), Smith and Moseley, which are referenced in the following section, the reading here is also informed by the chapter “Polyphonic living” in David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). 241-265

⁹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:405.

⁹⁷ Bonhoeffer, 8:301.

However, further in the same letter, he adds a pivotal reflection which emanates from his Christology, “But precisely that which is fragmentary may point to a higher fulfilment, which can no longer be achieved by human effort.”⁹⁸ In a letter written just two days later, with these thoughts obviously still in his mind, he turns to his love of Bach’s music to convey the sentiment to Bethge. Again, he bemoans that “we experience... our professional and personal lives... as fragmented,” but here he notes that it is not merely the consequence of the war, but extends the experience of fragmentation to the demise of the polymath and concomitant rise of the “specialist” in intellectual life, producing mere siloed “technicians,” even in the arts.⁹⁹

What matters, it seems to me, is whether one still sees, in this fragment of life that we have, what the whole was intended and designed to be ... After all, there are such things as fragments that are only fit for the garbage ... and others which remain meaningful for hundreds of years, because only God could perfect them, so they must remain fragments – I’m thinking, for example, of the *Art of the Fugue*. If our life is only the most remote reflection of such a fragment, in which, even for a short time, the various themes gradually accumulate and harmonize with one another and in which the great counterpoint is sustained from beginning to end – so that finally, when they cease, all one can do is sing the chorale “Vor Deinem Thron tret’ ich allhier” [*I come before thy throne*]¹⁰⁰ – then it is not for us, either, to complain about this fragmentary life of ours, but rather even to be glad of it.¹⁰¹

Bonhoeffer is here using the musical concept of fugue, and in particular Bach’s *Art of Fugue*, in an attempt to capture the theological assertion that the fragmentary nature of human finitude only has meaning within the larger divine composition of life. It is not only that a fugue, which weaves multiple voices into a musical tapestry, is a metaphor which captures this integration well, but this is particularly so in the famed fugues of Bach, and here, significantly, the *Art of Fugue*, which remained unfinished at the time of Bach’s death, and therefore, fragmentary.¹⁰² Even here, amidst the limitations of human finitude, in de Gruchy’s

⁹⁸ Bonhoeffer, 8:301.

⁹⁹ Bonhoeffer, 8:305.

¹⁰⁰ “This chorale is traditionally handed down with Bach’s *Art of Fugue*.” Bonhoeffer, 8:306, footnote 22.

¹⁰¹ Bonhoeffer, 8:306.

¹⁰² It is worth noting here that Bonhoeffer also likened the resistance movement, and the Hitler assassination plot in particular, to a performance of the *Art of Fugue*. It proved to be a prescient metaphor, not only because of the unfinished, and therefore fragmentary nature of the plot, but also because this alludes to the selfsame theological point regarding the fragments of finite human endeavour not being sufficient in and of themselves, but taken up and ordered by God. See Andreas Pangritz, ‘Point and Counterpoint - Resistance and Submission: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Theology and Music in Times of War and Social Crisis’, in *Theology in Dialogue: The Impact of the Arts, Humanities, and Science on Contemporary Religious Thought*, ed. Ralf K. Wustenbergh and Lyn Holness (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 40.

words, “The fragments do not fly apart but find their coherence in Christ, in whom the broken themes of praise are restored.”¹⁰³ In contrast to those overcome by the fragmented immediacy of fear, greed, or desperation amidst the bombing raids Bonhoeffer observed above, he goes on in that letter to assert that, “Christianity, on the other hand, puts us into many different dimensions of life at the same time; in a way we accommodate God and the whole world within us.”¹⁰⁴ To try to capture what he means by this, he refers to another musical metaphor, describing it as multidimensional polyphony.

3.5.2.2 Polyphony, *Cantus Firmus* and Counterpoint

Bonhoeffer introduces his well-known metaphor of polyphony in a letter concerning the rightful place of erotic love. Amidst his own loneliness in prison, and in response to Eberhard Bethge’s longing and love for his wife, Renate (particularly when separated due to military service), Bonhoeffer considers the right orientation of these worldly desires. In the previous section it was posited that, for Bonhoeffer, being founded in love of Christ distinguishes mature aesthetic existence from Romantic aestheticism. This proposal is best explicated through his framing of Christian living as polyphony, which applies equally to the fragmentation of life amidst war, silo-ization of intellectual pursuit, and the fragmentation that emanates from absolute sensory immediacy.

Mature aesthetic existence, marked by a commitment to loving relationships (with creation, God and humankind), could be described as a polyphonous celebration of Christological reality. There is perhaps no more powerful aesthetic experience than sensual love. As Bonhoeffer considers how to respond well to earthly, erotic love, he describes the polyphony of life, anchored in the *cantus firmus* of love for God.

What I mean is that God, the Eternal, wants to be loved with our whole heart, not to the detriment of earthly love or to diminish it, but as a sort of *cantus firmus* to which the other voices of life resound in counterpoint ... Even in the Bible there is the Song of Solomon, and you really can’t imagine a hotter, more sensual, and glowing love than the one spoken of here (cf. 7:6!). It’s really good that this is in the Bible, contradicting all those who think being Christian is about tempering one’s passions ... Where the *cantus firmus* is clear and distinct, a counterpoint can develop as mightily as it wants.¹⁰⁵

“God, the Eternal” is the *cantus firmus*, and love of God does not negate, or obliterate the earthly sensory-erotic (to use a term from Kierkegaard). Recall Kierkegaard’s challenge of an

¹⁰³ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 167.

¹⁰⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:405.

¹⁰⁵ Bonhoeffer, 8:394.

outing to the amusements of Deer Park. Climacus could not conceive how one could be consumed by “God, the Eternal” and at the same time be present in the “trivial” of this-worldly existence. Bonhoeffer’s response here is that God-given, earthly aesthetic existence does not need to be controlled by the “necessitas” of obedience (Kierkegaard’s ethical sphere of permissibility), but can freely flourish “as mightily as it wants” in counterpoint to the *cantus firmus* of love of God. Bonhoeffer reads these two – the divine *cantus firmus* and the earthly counterpoint – as reflecting the nature of Christ.¹⁰⁶

The two are “undivided and yet distinct,” as the Definition of Chalcedon says, like the divine and human natures in Christ. Is that perhaps why we are so at home with polyphony in music, why it is important to us, because it is the musical image of this christological fact and thus also our *vita christiana*?¹⁰⁷

As disciples of Christ then, in “following-after,” the Christian life too embraces these “undivided and yet distinct” aspects of *cantus firmus* and counterpoint. As such, the disciple should not draw back from engagement with earthly reality, but as the *cantus firmus* is given whole-hearted expression, the counterpoint of this-worldly existence is not only validated, but maintains its own identity and integrity, thereby providing the existential unity to which Kierkegaard aspired in his call “to be one thing.” Bonhoeffer continues,

I wanted to ask you to let the cantus firmus be heard clearly in your being together; only then will it sound complete and full, and the counterpoint will always know that it is being carried and can’t get out of tune or be cut adrift, while remaining itself and complete in itself. Only this polyphony gives your life wholeness.¹⁰⁸

In a sense then, we could say that Bonhoeffer is here building upon and expanding Kierkegaard’s notion of poetic living as harmonious co-creation with Christ. For Bonhoeffer, a mature approach to aesthetic existence would be one anchored, first and foremost, in love for God, as the *cantus firmus*, which would enable celebration of the realm of freedom, within the bounds of harmony and resonance. Such an exploration of aesthetic existence could be described as an embrace of all that is good and human in the penultimate, preparing the way for the ultimate.

3.5.3 Music as Paradigm-Forming

While the *Art of Fugue* and polyphony elucidate Bonhoeffer’s argument for this-worldly Christian existence, a third musical metaphor, *Grundton*, speaks to the paradigmatic nature of

¹⁰⁶ Jeremy Begbie, *Music, Modernity, and God: Essays in Listening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 209.

¹⁰⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:394.

¹⁰⁸ Bonhoeffer, 8:394.

these metaphors. In other words, up until this point we have been considering the illustrative value of these metaphors; helpful linguistic tools to clarify the point. However, while this is valid, the question we need to engage at this point is whether these metaphors function solely as ornamental tropes – useful for painting a vivid mental picture, but not fundamentally a necessary aspect of the argument – or whether these musical experiences shaped Bonhoeffer’s imagination, being paradigmatically formative, and thereby contributing to his perception of reality.¹⁰⁹

3.5.3.1 *Grundton* and Formation through Music

In a letter to Eberhard and Renate Bethge, Bonhoeffer offers thoughts for the day of the baptism of their son (his godson). Amidst his reflections, prayers and blessings, he affirms that, “Music, as your parents understand and practice it, will bring you back from confusion to your clearest and purest self and perceptions, and from cares and sorrows to the underlying note [*Grundton*] of joy.”¹¹⁰ There are three observations we can make here: Firstly, Bonhoeffer ties music to self-formation and perception. The suggestion here is that music, as archetypal sensory immediacy, has the ability to influence the way we see reality and our sense of self therein. Secondly, Bonhoeffer carefully qualifies that it is specifically music, “as your parents understand and practice it,” which offers this positive influence. This appears to be an allusion, once again, to the fact that it is *mature* aesthetic existence that offers a positive formative influence, as a celebration of aesthetic this-worldliness in polyphonous counterpoint to the divine *cantus firmus*. Thirdly, Bonhoeffer refers to the musical metaphor of a “*Grundton*” of joy. Translated here as “the underlying note,” it refers to the English “tonic” (or “key note ... the ‘first degree of a major or minor scale’ or ‘the main note of a key ... after which a key is named’”).¹¹¹ While this metaphor resonates with Bonhoeffer’s description of the *cantus firmus* in polyphony, the significant point to note here is that the existential “*Grundton* of joy” is experienced by way of music itself.

Bonhoeffer’s use of *Grundton*, therefore, points to the fact that he is not merely using these musical metaphors as illustrative cognitive concepts, distinct from sensory experience, but that aesthetic experience shapes his conceptualisation. A clue to this can be seen in his attempt to draw from these living metaphors in an effort to capture implicit truth, and his

¹⁰⁹ The living and formative nature of metaphor will be discussed more fully in the following two chapters.

¹¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:385.

¹¹¹ Smith, ‘Bonhoeffer and Musical Metaphor’, 199.

consequent struggle to capture their meaning in the abstraction of language. Both here in this letter (“It hasn’t turned out the way it should have”)¹¹² and in the polyphony letter (“Do you understand what I mean?” and “I don’t know whether I have said this clearly”),¹¹³ he appears to be drawing on these metaphors in an effort to express a lived truth that lies beyond the limitations of language.

3.5.3.2 The Formative Impact of Music on Bonhoeffer’s Theology

As Andreas Pangritz shows, Bonhoeffer’s experience of music, and his subsequent reflection on music while in prison, prepares the way for his theological thinking in this period.¹¹⁴ The chronology here is particularly worth noting; most of his allusions to music in his letters appear prior to his pivotal theological question of what Christianity really is, “or who is Christ actually for us today?”¹¹⁵ Many of these musical references relate to Heinrich Schütz, “the ‘father of German music’ in the seventeenth century.”¹¹⁶ Bonhoeffer’s love of Schütz stemmed from the latter’s ability to unite music and word in the liturgical settings of the Psalms, for example. While Bonhoeffer’s love of music in the romantic tradition remained constant throughout his life, initially he rejected the place of such romantic music, Beethoven in particular, in the church.¹¹⁷ As he notes, some ten years prior for instance, Beethoven’s music “seems to be nothing but the eternal expression of human suffering and passion,” thus not suited for church use.¹¹⁸ In other words, it appears that Bonhoeffer initially had reservations regarding the place of musical sensory immediacy in becoming Christian, like Kierkegaard, limiting this to a “second immediacy,” or the immediacy after reflection, wherein word and music unite. Yet, ironically, as de Gruchy notes, it is precisely through Schütz that Bonhoeffer finds himself grappling with the unity of this-worldly desire and

¹¹² Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:382.

¹¹³ Bonhoeffer, 8:395.

¹¹⁴ Pangritz, *Polyphonie des Lebens*.

¹¹⁵ Pangritz, ‘Point and Counterpoint’, 29; Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:362.

¹¹⁶ Pangritz, *Polyphonie des Lebens*, 30.

¹¹⁷ During the time at Finkenwalde, Bethge notes that “[Bonhoeffer’s] romantic heritage was strongly evident in his playing of Chopin, Brahms, and excerpts from the delightfully stylish *Rosenkavalier*.” Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 429.

¹¹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: London, 1933-1935*, ed. Keith Clements, vol. 13, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 356.

divine reality.¹¹⁹ Months before engaging the question of who Christ is for us today, Bonhoeffer writes a letter to Bethge in which he reflects on a composition by Schütz, the Augustinian “O bone Jesu.”¹²⁰ In particular, he imaginatively re-experiences the music of the line, “o how my soul longs for you,” writing out the musical notation of the seven notes for the singing of the “o.” This is significant, because, as Pangritz explains, “In Schütz’s setting the melismatic figure on ‘o’ is repeated four times, each time a fifth higher (e flat-b flat, b flat-f, f-c, c-g) so that the musical expression is intensified in an extraordinary measure. Moser underscores the fact that by means of transposed repetition of the melismatic motif, the ‘ecstatic cry of longing’ forms the ‘center and climax’ of the composition.”¹²¹ Bonhoeffer then comments, “Doesn’t this passage in its ecstatic longing combined with pure devotion, suggest the ‘bringing back’ of all earthly desire?”¹²² Is this an example of Bonhoeffer’s sensory-erotic experience of music shaping his theology?¹²³ Pangritz suggests that it is, pre-empting Bonhoeffer’s later Christological this-worldliness.¹²⁴ Bonhoeffer’s “fresh appreciation” for Beethoven during this period may well point toward a fuller understanding

¹¹⁹ John de Gruchy, ‘The Search for Transcendence in an Age of Barbarism: Bonhoeffer, Beethoven, Mann’s *Dr Faustus* and the Spiritual Crisis of the Present Time’ (Unpublished article, due in press 2019), 10.

¹²⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:30–31.

¹²¹ Pangritz, ‘Point and Counterpoint’, 32. Pangritz elaborates further on the hymn as “colored by erotic associations.”

¹²² Pangritz’s own translation. Pangritz, 33.

¹²³ It is worth noting that in the same letter, in fact, in the very next paragraph, Bonhoeffer offers an example of the impotence of music which is *not* “polyphonous,” in contrast to the formative musical experience of Schütz’s “O bone Jesu.” Bonhoeffer describes how “a sweet old man” comes to the prison on Christmas Eve to play carols on his trumpet. Clearly, he has good intentions, but the effect on the prisoners is only “demoralising” and they try to drown out his playing with whistles and noise. Bonhoeffer notes that in “*this misery*” [his italics] of prison life, such music is only “playfully sentimental” and therefore unhelpful. Bonhoeffer appears to be suggesting through these contrasting examples that music, as mature aesthetic existence, should be in harmony with both the ultimate hope of God (the *cantus firmus*) as well as a sober acknowledgement of the penultimate temporal context (whether that be prison or a more joyful context). Failure to account for both of these in aesthetic expression simply produces sensory stimuli that titillate, while being disconnected from the Christological vitality of life incarnate and life divine.

¹²⁴ Thereby initiating a Christological trajectory that would ultimately lead Bonhoeffer to affirm that, “Our relationship to God is no ‘religious’ relationship to some highest, most powerful, and best being imaginable – that is no genuine transcendence. Instead, our relationship to God is a new life in ‘being there for others,’ through participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendent is not the infinite, unattainable tasks, but the neighbor within reach in any given situation. God in human form!” Consequently, Bonhoeffer’s this-worldly aesthetics, as his embrace of mature aesthetic existence, proves distinctive from theological aesthetics that harnesses the aesthetic as a means of engaging the (other-worldly) transcendent. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:501.

of mature aesthetic existence in the life of this-worldly Christianity.¹²⁵ He appears to “overcome the divisions between the various musical traditions (Reformation, classical, Romantic) which he had hitherto always kept in separate compartments.”¹²⁶

If this holds true, then Bonhoeffer’s embrace of mature aesthetic existence is not merely a consequence of his this-worldly Christology (which it is), but his Christological this-worldliness is equally a consequence of his mature aesthetic existence.¹²⁷ His experience of music, and his consequent reflection on music while in prison, at the very least, operated “in tandem” with his theological reflection, but may well also have provided categories of thought which he would not otherwise have had access to.¹²⁸ As Begbie puts it, it is “conceptuality arising from music [which] enables him to elucidate critical fields of doctrine.”¹²⁹ It is a conceptuality that does not draw from music as an illustrative tool, but music is the very constitutive means through which the concepts are formed. Bonhoeffer is not drawing on music, he is thinking musically. “Bonhoeffer’s musical experience, specifically his aural experience of simultaneously sounding and mutually resonating tones ... extended in time and woven around a cantus firmus ... is ‘made available’ to the theological conceptuality and language concerned with the multidimensionality of the Christian life.”¹³⁰ Begbie is here rejecting the understanding of concepts as “isolated mental units” that provide a bridge between words and “things-in-the-world.”¹³¹ Rather than three discreet elements – words, concepts and things-in-the-world – Begbie draws on Kathleen Callow in describing concepts as “‘habitual events’, habits of thought that order human experience in various configurations. Concepts are ‘thought-in-action’. We do not attend thoughtfully *to* them; we attend *with* them, by means of them.”¹³² There is “every reason to believe” that this

¹²⁵ De Gruchy, ‘The Search for Transcendence in an Age of Barbarism’, 10.

¹²⁶ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 146.

¹²⁷ Schleiermacher affirms this fundamentally formational aspect of aesthetic existence when he states that, “Music is one great whole; it is a special, self-contained revelation of the world.” He argues that even though a multitude of cultural and individual musical expressions are possible, great music is akin to a religious a priori, moving musicians and hearers beyond the particular, beyond the systems of music (or religion), toward a common essential reality. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 51.

¹²⁸ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 145.

¹²⁹ Begbie, *Music, Modernity, and God*, 208.

¹³⁰ Begbie, 210.

¹³¹ Begbie, 206.

¹³² An example clarifies Begbie’s point: The “concept evoked by the word ‘vacation’ is formed out of a huge variety of direct sensory experiences of holidays, as well as a complex of associations garnered from elsewhere – sun, time to read, family reunions, and so on. There

paradigmatic conceptual formation is happening through our sensory experience of music.¹³³ Consequently, theology is not merely limited to the realm of “mental units,” but is “inseparably bound up with ... the communal life of the Church ... [and] its manifold embodied ‘forms of life,’” including our everyday aesthetic experiences.¹³⁴

3.5.4 Summary

Bonhoeffer’s engagement with music and the metaphors that ensue, therefore, elucidate two important contributions that he makes to this project. Firstly, the metaphors themselves, particularly polyphony, point toward a helpful model for distinguishing between self-centred aestheticism (an impediment to discipleship) and mature aesthetic existence (as integral to becoming Christian). Mature aesthetic existence operates in the realm of free play, not in the Kierkegaardian sphere of ethical obedience. A counterpoint can “develop as mightily as it wants” if grounded in the existential *cantus firmus* of love for God.¹³⁵ Sensory immediacy only becomes problematic when it is pursued as a means to the absolute, rejecting the *cantus firmus*. Whether such absolute aesthetic existence is approached via the aestheticism of Kierkegaard’s Don Juan, the reflection of his Seducer (or, Nietzsche’s Dionysian movement

may be something like a firm, central ‘core’ to the concept; however, the concept is not a mental picture of a tidily bounded object but pertains to the world-as-experienced ...” Begbie, 206.

¹³³ Begbie, 207.

¹³⁴ Begbie, 207.

¹³⁵ As both Pangritz and David Moseley show, Bonhoeffer’s point is affirmed by Karl Barth’s perception of Mozart’s music, the essence of which he described as “playing.” Barth’s description is significant in light of Kierkegaard’s choice of Mozart to illustrate that music is fundamentally sensory immediacy. Barth, however, suggests that such play is integral to Christian life, “Our daily bread must also include playing. I hear Mozart ... at play. But play is something so lofty and demanding that it requires mastery. And in Mozart I hear an art of playing as I hear it in no one else. Beautiful playing presupposes an intuitive, childlike awareness of the essence or center – as also the beginning and the end – of all things. It is from this center, from this beginning and end, that I hear Mozart create his music.” (Barth, *Mozart*, 16) Rather than binding word to music, Mozart’s music is a playful expression, a “free counterpart” to the word. (Barth, *Mozart*, 38) As such, Barth perceives “Mozart’s music as ‘parables of the kingdom’ ... as ‘theology’ ... ‘mediating’ the praise of the cosmos ... witness[ing] to the theonomous *perichoresis* of the triune life.” (Moseley, 264) For Barth, this mastered playfulness carries significant theological weight, “the golden sounds and melodies of Mozart’s music have from early times spoken to me not as gospel but as parables of the realm of God’s free grace as revealed in the gospel – and they do so again and again with great spontaneity and directness.” (Moseley, 264) See Pangritz, ‘Point and Counterpoint’, 41. David J.R.S. Moseley, “‘Parables’ and ‘Polyphony’”, in *Resonant Witness: Conversations Between Music and Theology*, ed. Jeremy Begbie and Steven Guthrie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). Karl Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, trans. Clarence K. Pott (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003).

“beyond good and evil” for that matter, which we will turn to in the next chapter), the common deficiency here is the attempt to turn fragmentary finitude into the infinite absolute. By contrast, as de Gruchy puts it, in mature aesthetic existence, “the mystery of the ultimate is glimpsed not grasped, for it is always mediated in the penultimate polyphony of life.”¹³⁶ The fragmentary nature of human finitude, therefore, is not to be rejected but embraced, as it offers grounding bounds and limits to mature aesthetic existence amidst the “restlessness for the ultimate,” which drives powerful aesthetic expression. Within the frame of this Christological polyphony, aesthetic existence can, and should, freely flourish in the Christian life.

Secondly, Bonhoeffer’s musical metaphors are not merely illustrative, but his very aesthetic experience of music appears to play a formative role in his theological conceptualisation. If this is accurate, then it challenges Kierkegaard’s distinction between a first and second immediacy. Kierkegaard distinguishes a second immediacy as being “after reflection,” thus an engagement with the aesthetic consequent to conceptualisation. However, if conceptualisation is organically and symbiotically in relation to sensory experience in the world, then such a distinction is not valid. To explore this further we will need to move beyond Bonhoeffer.

3.6 Conclusion

Bonhoeffer then, leaves us with both a theological affirmation of everyday aesthetic existence, grounded in his Christology, as well as questions we need to further explore around the relationship of aesthetics, ethics and faith. What relationship does aesthetic existence have to the shaping of the imagination, and consequently the way we see reality, even when these aesthetic experiences are not engaged for utilitarian purposes? Do everyday aesthetic experiences – celebrations of the realm of freedom such as play, friendship, music, a crafted meal, etc. – affect the way we see the world, and consequently how we act in it? If they do, then everyday aesthetic existence is not only something to be celebrated in the penultimate as

¹³⁶ De Gruchy, ‘The Search for Transcendence in an Age of Barbarism’, 10. De Gruchy notes that, “As deafness increased and death approached, Beethoven delved deeper into his subconscious, not just for his own sake, but also for the sake of universal harmony. But as he is about to experience transcendence – towards the end of his final piano sonata (Op. 111) – there is a moment of pregnant silence. He has entered holy ground and, overtaken by awe, he draws back from grasping the infinite to remain in the penultimate.” The question Beethoven poses here for us is whether silence has an important role to play in mature aesthetic existence, not only in music, but amidst the frenetic consumerism and grasping materialism which marks contemporary aesthetic experience.

an expression of goodness in fully-human, this-worldly existence, it is also fundamental to meaning and action, ethics and faith.

At the beginning of this chapter, we noted Bonhoeffer's association of aesthetic existence with art, play, friendship and *Bildung*. As relatively obvious expressions of aesthetic existence, it is not difficult to understand why he connected art and play with the sensory immediacy of Christian living. "Friendship" here is interesting, since it affirms the contention above that aesthetic existence is best understood and lived out in the context of relationality. Friendship is, at times, an expression of sensory immediacy, but there is more to it than that, and including it here, within the category of aesthetic existence, is illustrative of the guiding *cantus firmus* of love for mature aesthetic existence. However, it is "*Bildung*" to which we need to pay particular attention. As noted, this resonates with Kierkegaard's description of poetic living, *Bildung* being the outworking of mature aesthetic existence. We should recall that Bonhoeffer too was exposed to the German Romantic thinkers, his understanding of *Bildung* entailing far more than the term "education" captures. Difficult to translate into a single English word, if we understand *Bildung* as cultural formation, the process (engaging all the faculties) whereby a person is educated to maturity, then what is the role of everyday aesthetic existence in the formation of a person? It seems clear that Bonhoeffer was suggesting such a connection, but he does not explicitly expand on the nature and mechanics of this relationship. The work of Iain McGilchrist offers insight into this query, and it is to his research that we now turn.

CHAPTER 4: MCGILCHRIST & AESTHETIC EXISTENCE AS FUNDAMENTAL TO BEING HUMAN

Introduction

Is aesthetic existence fundamental to being human, and therefore to being a Christian, bodily engaged in the life of the world? This is the research question guiding this project. We have seen that Bonhoeffer would answer this in the affirmative, based on his embrace of the Christological nature of reality. Firstly, and most clearly seen in Bonhoeffer's late work, the celebration of everyday aesthetic existence is a necessary expression of living incarnational lives in the penultimate. Secondly, a close reading of Bonhoeffer and the trajectory of his work seems to point to a connection between aesthetic existence and formation [*Bildung*]. If such a connection is valid, then the implications for the role of aesthetic existence apply to being *human* in the world, not only to being a *Christian* in the world. In other words, an exploration of the relationship between everyday aesthetic existence and formation is an engagement with the first and fundamental aspect of the research question framed above: Is aesthetic existence fundamental to being human? Here we turn to the work of Iain McGilchrist.

McGilchrist is not a theologian. While anchoring his work in neuropsychology, McGilchrist also draws from a range of other disciplines, including his work as a literary scholar to inform a broader philosophical, perhaps fundamentally anthropological, project. It is the interdisciplinary nature of his approach which makes his work so well suited to the questions we have at hand.

Both Bonhoeffer and McGilchrist endorse aesthetic existence on the basis of our relationship to reality. In this regard, perhaps we could suggest that Bonhoeffer's contribution to our exploration is primarily ontological while McGilchrist's is essentially epistemological. Bonhoeffer embraces aesthetic existence because the nature of reality is Christological, thereby validating the penultimate as incarnational, embodied existence. McGilchrist's focus is not on the nature of reality, but on how we know it. He suggests that if we look closely at this process, we cannot but acknowledge that a ratiocentric approach to reality provides a distorted view of the world. Drawing from McGilchrist's research, this chapter argues that aesthetic existence can play a pivotal role in our perception of the world, and thereby our self-understanding in relation to reality. Consequently, the nature of our everyday aesthetic existence affects our formation as human beings.

4.1 Apollonian and Dionysian Perception of Reality

Although Bonhoeffer and McGilchrist may seem worlds apart, a mutual catalyst for their work is Nietzsche's insightful critique of the modern world in relation to aesthetics. For our purposes here, this is best explained through Nietzsche's exploration of the classical tension between an Apollonian and Dionysian approach to life.

4.1.1 *Apollo and Dionysus*

Much has been written in western thought on the archetypal pair of ancient Greek gods, Apollo and Dionysus (the Greek Bacchus), largely because they capture so well two fundamental, seemingly contradictory, ways of being human in the world. As John de Gruchy succinctly explains,

Apollo ... was the god of wisdom whose prophetic oracle at Delphi encouraged the virtues of civilised living, harmony, self-knowledge, rhetoric, and moral earnestness, amongst all who sought counsel ... Apollo represented human rationality and denigrated the world of passion ... If Apollo represented "masculine" virtues of rationality and order, the Dionysian cult had its roots in the more ancient cult of the Divine Mother with its emphasis on the power of nature, the instincts and the non-rational. Dionysian worship or bacchanalia, as the dramatist Euripides described it, was characterised by its devotees "in ecstasy flinging back the head in the dewy air." Induced by wine and usually sexually promiscuous, it gained an enthusiastic following even if only on the fringes of decent society, the society of Apollo. Such was its attraction that the Roman senate passed a decree against bacchanalia as a serious threat to the well being of society. Yet Euripides discerned that inspired religious emotion cannot be ignored, for while it may menace the good order of the *polis* and dissolve the bonds of society, it is an elemental force that has to be taken into account.¹

The relevance to this project should be immediately apparent. Certainly on face value Kierkegaard's perception of aesthetic existence was largely, if not completely Dionysian, as existence purely in the moment, revelling in the "play of unending freedom."² The critical question, which we are engaging, is whether the Dionysian is to be equated with a superficial reading of Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage of life, and therefore to be discarded as soon as one has matured sufficiently to embrace the Apollonian. Or, is the Dionysian an important aspect of being human, just as important as the Apollonian, and could it possibly play a role, perhaps

¹ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 14.

² Ultimately, even such a reading of Kierkegaard's aesthetics must acknowledge that the "indeterminacy" of such a Dionysian sensory immediacy has a fundamental relationship to the "determinacy" of the imagination. See Smyth's discussion of Kierkegaard's "eros aesthetics" in John Vignaux Smyth, *A Question of Eros: Irony in Sterne, Kierkegaard and Barthes* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1986).

even a crucial role, in our personal formation? These are the questions we are exploring in this chapter. Nietzsche's critique of modernity and Christianity, through this mythological lens, is a helpful starting point.

4.1.2 Nietzsche's Modern Cult of Dionysus

To Nietzsche, the modern western world, largely at the behest of centuries of Christian dominance, suffered from Apollonian hegemony. As Stephen Williams rightly points out, while we may ascribe some of Nietzsche's critique to his limited and particular experience of Lutheran Christianity, it would be a mistake to therefore dismiss his observations out of hand.³ There is indeed truth to the fact that, from its early history, Christianity has tended to align itself with the Apollonian, rather than Dionysian. As de Gruchy notes, perhaps "an inbred Christian sensing of the risk of releasing uncontrollable, even demonic, energies has generally preferred the values of Apollo to those of Dionysus."⁴ Much of this tone was set early on, through the likes of the asceticism of the Desert Fathers, with their renunciation of the body and this-worldliness, and Augustine's suspicion of the senses and their ability to rouse fleshly passions.⁵ For Nietzsche, this rejection of the Dionysian is a rejection of life itself, and Augustine therefore epitomises all that is problematic about Christianity; Nietzsche naming him a "monster of morality,"⁶ whose filth you could "smell" by reading him.⁷ By contrast, Nietzsche himself has no desire to be a "saint," but rather a "disciple of the philosopher Dionysus."⁸

Duncan Forrester echoes the evaluation that the root of this early Christian Apollonian emphasis was a consequence of the need for control over "dangerous" feelings and emotions,

³ Stephen N. Williams, *The Shadow of the Antichrist: Nietzsche's Critique of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 104.

⁴ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 16.

⁵ On Augustine, de Gruchy notes, "See his discussion of the delights and snares of the various senses in Book x of the *Confessions*. Saint Augustine, *Confessions and Enchiridion*. The Library of Christian Classics, vii (London, SCM, 1955), 225ff. See also Margaret R. Miles, *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's 'Confessions'* (New York: Crossroads, 1992)." De Gruchy, 16.

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 224.

⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Anti-Christ', in *Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 63.

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Ecce Homo', in *Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 71.

particularly with regard to sexuality. He quotes from Gregory of Nyssa to illustrate the point, “Any action, thought or word which involves passion is out of harmony with Christ and bears the mark of the devil, who makes muddy the pearl of the soul with passions and mars that precious jewel.”⁹ The irony is that for a religion built upon the bedrock of the doctrine of creation and with the incarnation at its core, celebration of the material, of the body and the senses is notable by its absence, or at least as a somewhat muted presence, in the history of Christianity. As the faith aligned itself with the Roman ideals of a harmonious, moral and orderly society (indeed, Nietzsche called Christianity “the last Roman construction”),¹⁰ a trajectory was established which owes more to a classical heritage than it does the biblical text.¹¹

Nietzsche offered a scathing critique of what he saw to be the Christian rejection of the Dionysian. To Nietzsche, Christian “slave morality” simply represents the rationalisation of weakness by justifying and making noble the state of inescapable inferiority.¹² He saw this type of moralising as a mere coping mechanism, which inhibits engagement with fullness of life. Nietzsche proposes that “art – and *not* morality – is the true *metaphysical* activity of man ... the existence of the world is *justified* only as an aesthetic phenomenon.”¹³ By contrast, Christianity leaves no space for the aesthetic, condemning it as illusory in contradistinction to the absolutes of morality. To which Nietzsche responds,

Behind this mode of thought and valuation, which must be hostile to art if it is at all genuine, I have never failed to sense a hostility to life – a furious, vengeful antipathy to life itself: for all of life is based on semblance, art, deception, points of view ... Christianity was from the beginning, essentially and fundamentally, life’s nausea and disgust with life, merely concealed behind, masked by, dressed up as, faith in “another” or “better” life. Hatred of “the world,” condemnation of the passions, fear of beauty and sensuality, a beyond invented the better to slander this life, at bottom a craving for the nothing, for the end ...¹⁴

⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Christian Perfection*, PG 46.283-6, as quoted in Duncan B. Forrester, *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 11.

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 221.

¹¹ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 16–17.

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 151ff. He expands further in his essay ‘On the Genealogy of Morality’ in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche: ‘On the Genealogy of Morality’ and Other Writings*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘The Birth of Tragedy’, in *Nietzsche: The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 8.

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (New York: Vintage, 1967), 22–24.

Nietzsche concludes that for the Christian, “The body is an object of hatred, hygiene is rejected as sensuousness ... [on the Christian closure of public baths] ... It is Christian to hate spirit ... it is Christian to hate the senses, to hate enjoyment of the senses, to hate joy in general ...”¹⁵ Thus his call to reject this insipid morality, to move “beyond good and evil,” severing aesthetics from ethics, a vision impelled by the momentum of Romanticism and shared with the composer Richard Wagner and the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer.¹⁶

Nietzsche’s insightful critique provoked reaction from Bonhoeffer and McGilchrist alike, whose responses we will turn to in a moment. But before we do so, it is important to take a moment to acknowledge that, as Bruce Benson has shown, at the heart of Nietzsche’s argument is a significant warning about the dangers of modern idolatry: making God in our own image.¹⁷ While a safe, controlled faith that fits neatly within the bounds of an ordered life may seem appealing, the question needs to be asked as to whether such a faith is fundamentally able to allow for genuine otherness, and thus whether such a Christian faith is indeed biblical? Do the bounds of an exclusively-rational faith not necessarily limit it to the finite? Is the aesthetic not a gateway, perhaps even the sole gateway, to the mystery that is an inevitable consequence of engaging the divine? Does the Christian rejection of the Dionysian usher in Apollonian idolatry – Jesus made in Apollo’s image? These are some of the important questions that Nietzsche raises, and they have direct bearing on our project at hand. We will return to them at the end of the chapter, but they lie in the background throughout. As we work towards resolving them, we would do well to note that the unhinging of the aesthetic from ethics is clearly not the solution, as Nietzsche’s role in the rise of Nazism, and even South Africa’s apartheid, makes evident. In the words of de Gruchy, “Nietzsche’s Romanticism remains a constant reminder of the inevitably horrendous and tragic political consequences of placing the mythologically inspired interests of ‘blood and soil’ over the constraints of reason and morality.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Nietzsche, ‘The Anti-Christ’, 18.

¹⁶ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 15, 65–66. De Gruchy expounds the danger of such a Romantic aesthetic in, De Gruchy, ‘The Search for Transcendence in an Age of Barbarism’.

¹⁷ Bruce Ellis Benson, *Graven Ideologies: Nietzsche, Derrida & Marion on Modern Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002).

¹⁸ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 66.

4.1.3 *Bonhoeffer's Response to Nietzsche*

While it should be apparent that our exploration of Bonhoeffer's work in the previous chapter is directly applicable here, a few brief comments are in order, which highlight his specific reaction to Nietzsche, providing a helpful platform for McGilchrist's response.

In a sense, the whole corpus of Bonhoeffer's work is a reaction to Nietzsche's critique, since at the core of Bonhoeffer's theology is an incarnational Christology. Or, as de Gruchy puts it, "his response to Nietzsche, with whom he shared a 'lust for life', was to show how life in its fullness was to be found in Jesus Christ."¹⁹ Bonhoeffer acknowledges that Lutheranism's rejection of the natural is cause for valid Nietzschean critique. But through the themes that pervade his work, he clearly shows Christianity's this-worldliness: "Hence his affirmation of the body and the earth; his 'theology of the cross' in which joy is only discovered through struggle and suffering; and his celebration of human freedom and life."²⁰ Bonhoeffer challenges Nietzsche's claim that Christianity rejects the Dionysian celebration of life by showing that aesthetic existence is fundamentally a part of living incarnationally in the penultimate as a Christian.

As we have seen, Bonhoeffer's direct reflections on aesthetic existence take place toward the end of his life, in his letters from prison. It is here too that he responds to the duality of Nietzsche's mythological lens,

We go along too easily with Nietzsche's primitive alternatives, as if the "Apollonian" concept of beauty, and the "Dionysian," the one we call demonic nowadays, are the only ones. But that isn't the case at all. Take, for example, Brueghel or Velázquez, or even Hans Thoma, Leopold Kalckreuth, or the French Impressionists. They have a beauty that is neither classic nor demonic, but simply earthly in its own right; and I must say that this is the only sort of beauty that speaks to me personally.²¹

Bonhoeffer is making a significant point here, one that is central to our project, which we will further explore as we move forward. The "primitive alternatives" of Apollo and Dionysus represent two typical, contrasting approaches to the aesthetic. The Apolline represents the other-worldly pursuit of the platonic ideal of beauty. This is marked by an emphasis on form, harmony and unity, attributes that are, if not quantifiable, at the very least, rationally comprehensible and are worthy of the reasonable ideal. While the appeal of such an ordered aesthetic lies in escape from the pain and brokenness of life, ultimately such a perfect ideal

¹⁹ De Gruchy, 165.

²⁰ De Gruchy, 152.

²¹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:331.

can seem disconnected from tangible, earthly existence and consequently prove impotent, as Bonhoeffer himself personally expressed,

Presumably we are made in such a way that perfection is boring to us; I do not know whether that was always the case. But I have no other way to explain the fact that Raphael remains as distant and indifferent to me as Dante's paradise. Likewise, neither eternal ice nor eternal blue sky appeals to me. I seek "perfection" in what is human, living, earthly, that is, neither in the Apollonian nor in the Dionysian or Faustian.²²

In contrast to the Apolline, the Dionysiac represents earthy celebration of the sensory, that which is out of control, visceral, in the moment, which can be transcendental in its own right, but through ecstatic experience rather than ordered form. At worst, approaching aesthetics through the lens of this "primitive alternative" creates a binary wherein the one is pitted against the other, with a single approach preeminent. At best, it offers a duality to be navigated by holding these two approaches to life in healthy tension. Bonhoeffer is suggesting that we reject the polarity in favour of an incarnational approach to life, which is integrative in its own right. In fact, this is the very reason which allows him to call for a recovery of aesthetic existence, even from a prison cell amidst Hitler's atrocities. What he is presenting is not a Dionysian hedonism, nor an Apollonian escape from this world to an otherworldly, utopian ideal of beauty, but rather a celebration of this-worldly, Christological reality; "a 'worldly Christianity' rooted in God's revelation in Christ yet able to celebrate the polyphony of life amidst the tragedies of our time."²³

The challenge that lies before us is to articulate what this incarnational approach to everyday aesthetic existence could look like. Everyday aesthetic existence is largely dismissed by an Apollonian approach as insignificant. Play, or revelling in an aesthetically pleasing moment, for example, only has value to the extent to which it is rationally comprehensible as a pointer to an otherworldly, platonic ideal. By contrast, a Dionysian approach makes the aesthetic experience absolute, resulting in an aestheticism, which, while seemingly validating everyday aesthetic existence, ironically devalues it by disconnecting it from ethics and personal formation. The question lying before us, which Bonhoeffer raises in response to Nietzsche, is whether an incarnational approach to aesthetic existence is fundamentally integrative,

²² Bonhoeffer, 8:494–95. On the relationship of the Faustian to the Romantic sense of idealistic transcendence, again see, De Gruchy, 'The Search for Transcendence in an Age of Barbarism'.

²³ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 137.

encapsulating both an Apollonian and Dionysian approach to life, while also superseding the polarity.

Bonhoeffer could only take us to a certain point in this exploration, both because his life and work were cut short, but also because of the milieu within which he thought and wrote. We have to remember that although Bonhoeffer had a profound intuitive appreciation for the aesthetic, his *explicit* approach was fundamentally scientific. With his father being a nationally renowned psychiatrist, both his familial and formal education embedded him in a scientific approach to engaging the world. Little wonder then that as his brother became a leading chemist, Bonhoeffer would go on to grapple with Christ amidst the modern progress of “a world come of age.” In other words, even while acknowledging the revelatory role music played, alongside his criticism of an Apollonian approach to life, in many respects the modern, ratiocentric “tools” with which Bonhoeffer worked could only take him so far in his attempt to validate the role of aesthetic existence in the Christian life.

If Bonhoeffer’s claim regarding the this-worldly nature of incarnational reality is accurate, thereby validating the senses and the body, then the human body itself should offer insight into the nature and workings of formation. In other words, if the task that lies before us in this chapter is to explore the relationship between aesthetic existence and formation, the connection between embodiment and the formation of meaning is an important link to probe. Or, to put it in mythological terms, western society has long valued a largely Apollonian approach to the formation of moral citizens of the *polis*, built on the ancient Greek embrace of *paideia*. Over the centuries this approach became increasingly ratiocentric, which led to Nietzsche challenging this artificial perception of reality and the subsequent insipid morality that ensues. Here, Iain McGilchrist picks up the baton, his research offering a fundamentally embodied response to Nietzsche’s critique. Through his work we can ask what the human body, and the brain in particular, tells us about the formation of meaning, and what role, if any, the Dionysian plays.

4.1.4 McGilchrist: The human brain is inherently both Apollonian and Dionysian

While Bonhoeffer suggests that the Christian life not only brings together a Dionysian and Apollonian approach to life, but supersedes them, McGilchrist argues for a more universal and foundational anthropological truth: The Dionysian and the Apollonian are both indispensable aspects of a human being. Consequently, aesthetic existence is fundamental to being human in the world, to the creation of meaning and personal formation. If Bonhoeffer

wants to reject the “primitive alternative” of Apollo and Dionysus in favour of an incarnational approach to reality, McGilchrist endeavours to show that this mythological dichotomy is actually a helpful tool for understanding human perception, even if ultimately the ideal is to overcome the dichotomy and cultivate integration. He bases his argument on research from the field of neuroscience, and particularly neuropsychology, concerning the lateralisation of the human brain.²⁴

Valid research into the hemispheric differences of brain function is clouded by popular misconceptions that need to be rejected. It is neither helpful nor accurate to suggest that “the left hemisphere is ... gritty, rational, realistic but dull, and the right hemisphere airy-fairy and impressionistic, but creative and exciting.” Or even worse, “that the left hemisphere, hard-nosed and logical, is somehow male, and the right hemisphere, dreamy and sensitive, is somehow female.”²⁵ Hemispheric difference is a lot more complex than these crude, stereotypical generalisations. However, McGilchrist’s argues that there *are* indeed important distinctions between the hemispheres, which have significant implications for how humans

²⁴ It should be noted at this point that it is obviously beyond the scope of this project to engage and evaluate the science that lies behind McGilchrist’s findings. A brief note is therefore in order regarding the credibility of his research. While not without critics, McGilchrist’s work is widely seen to be grounded in robust scientific observation and his argument has been met with engaged interest from the neuroscientific community. Leading neuroscientists have endorsed his work, including “the Marco Polo of neuroscience,” V.S. Ramachandran, Jaak Panksepp (who defined the field of affective neuroscience), Colwyn Trevarthen, James Wright (both Trevarthen and Wright worked alongside the famed brain lateralization expert and Nobel laureate, Roger Sperry), Michael Trimble, Alwyn Lishman, Jurg Kesselring and Todd Feinberg. McGilchrist’s position on brain lateralization is meticulously researched, drawing from around 2 500 papers. Critics, such as long-time brain lateralization opponent, Michael Corballis, point not so much to McGilchrist’s work in particular, but to our limited, fluid, and ever-developing understanding of the human brain, and the modalities of brain function in particular. As such, for our purposes at hand, we are working from the assumption that his scientific conclusions are valid.

For a detailed interrogation and defense of his argument, see Jonathan Rowson and Iain McGilchrist, ‘Divided Brain, Divided World’ (London: RSA Action and Research Centre, 2013), 27ff. See also McGilchrist, ‘Split Brain, Split Views – Debating Iain McGilchrist’, <https://kenanmalik.com/2013/02/24/split-brain-split-views-debating-ian-mcgilchrist/>, accessed 10 September 2018; ‘Comments: Some Responses To The Master And His Emissary’, <http://ianmcgilchrist.com/comments/>, accessed 10 September 2018; Michael Trimble, ‘The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World’, *Cognitive Neuropsychiatry* 16, no. 3 (1 May 2011): 284–88; Michael C. Corballis, ‘Left Brain, Right Brain: Facts and Fantasies’, *PLoS Biology* 12, no. 1 (21 January 2014); Michael C. Corballis and Isabelle S. Häberling, ‘The Many Sides of Hemispheric Asymmetry: A Selective Review and Outlook’, *Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society* 23, no. 9–10 (October 2017): 710–18.

²⁵ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 2.

attend to the world, and we should not lose sight of these valid differences amidst the inaccurate oversimplifications.²⁶ In fact, echoing Nietzsche's mythological dichotomy, he argues that "there are two fundamentally opposed realities, two different modes of experience; that each is of ultimate importance in bringing about the recognisably human world; and that their difference is rooted in the bihemispheric structure of the brain."²⁷

McGilchrist suggests that the hemispheric differences are best understood through noting the distinctive attention each give to the world. "The right hemisphere underwrites breadth and flexibility of attention, where the left hemisphere brings to bear focussed attention. This has the related consequence that the right hemisphere sees things whole, and in their context, where the left hemisphere sees things abstracted from context, and broken into parts, from which it then reconstructs a 'whole': something very different."²⁸ The key point to note here is that both hemispheres have a role to play in an accurate perception of reality, subsequent creation of meaning and then action in the world.

We will take a closer look at these hemispheric differences in a moment, since this has clear implications for the role of aesthetic existence. But first, it is worth pointing out that McGilchrist is responding to Nietzsche by suggesting that the left hemisphere offers a largely

²⁶ Much critique of McGilchrist's argument stems from not reading his work closely enough to observe the careful nuances and complexities he highlights regarding a robust understanding of the lateralisation of brain function. He is careful to show that all research on brain modularity can become reductionist if it does not firstly acknowledge the variability and plasticity in brain function. As such, he acknowledges that it is clear (and has been clear for some time) that there are other brain modularities in operation (not merely right/left hemisphere modularity). In responding to Kosslyn and Miller's *Top Brain, Bottom Brain*, he asserts that, "The existence of one doesn't in any way suggest the absence of the others: they are not independent, but interconnected in such a way that each is, in fact, implied in the others." Ellis and Solms argue that these modularities are more complex and variable than previously allowed for, some being "hard-wired" while others are "soft-wired" as determined through environmental factors. The key point to note here (apart from the observation that neuroscience has hardly reached consensus on these matters, and that it remains a rapidly developing field) is to heed McGilchrist's encouragement not to be reductionist in our application of the hemispheric lateralisation of brain function. Stephen Kosslyn and G. Wayne Miller, *Top Brain, Bottom Brain: Harnessing the Power of the Four Cognitive Modes* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015); Iain McGilchrist, 'Exchange Of Views. Top Brain, Bottom Brain: A Reply To Stephen Kosslyn & Wayne Miller', accessed 10 September 2018, <http://iainmcgilchrist.com/exchange-of-views/>; George Ellis and Mark Solms, *Beyond Evolutionary Psychology: How and Why Neuropsychological Modules Arise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

²⁷ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 3.

²⁸ McGilchrist, 27.

Apollonian perception of reality, while the right presents a Dionysian.²⁹ The very title of his book, *The Master and His Emissary*, is taken from a Nietzschean parable.³⁰ The essential idea being that the human mind functions best when the left hemisphere, the emissary, with its attention to detail, serves the right hemisphere, the master, which offers context and a sense of the whole. McGilchrist's central thesis, following Nietzsche, is that in recent history the emissary has assumed the role of master, with dire consequences.

We have now reached a point where ... the balance has swung too far – perhaps irretrievably far – towards the Apollonian left hemisphere, which now appears to believe that it can do anything, make anything, on its own. Like the emissary in the fable, it has grown tired of its subservience to the Master, and as a result the survival of the domain they share is, in my view, in the balance.³¹

Contrary to the popular perception that “the right hemisphere may add a bit of colour to life [but] the left hemisphere ... does the *serious* business,” McGilchrist argues that the right hemisphere, and the Dionysian tendencies associated with it, is vital to an accurate perception of reality, and our subsequent formation as human beings.³² In order to understand the implications of this for aesthetic existence, we need to take a closer look at the distinctive types of hemispheric attention.

4.2 Brain Lateralisation and the Hemispheric Differences in Attention

As already noted, McGilchrist is careful to point out that brain lateralisation is complex, so the danger of a brief summary here is reductionism, reflecting an inaccurate representation of brain function.³³ In order to mitigate this danger, right at the outset, it is important to point out

²⁹ Although his argument draws from robust neuropsychological research, McGilchrist makes it clear that the science is simply a means to an end. His core purpose is to argue that there are two ways of being in the world, following in the footsteps of Goethe's *Faust*, Schopenhauer, Henri Bergson, Max Scheler (*Die Formen des Wissens und die Bildung*) and others. In this sense, his scientific exploration serves a dual purpose, being both literally evidential while also the means for articulating a metaphor of two ways of attending to the world, represented by the two hemispheres. It is the latter which is his (and our) primary concern. As such, McGilchrist's ultimate conclusion is that even if the neuroscience which he draws from is ultimately shown to be flawed, and that brain lateralisation does not neatly fit these two ways of being in the world, he would still hold to the truth of the fact that human attention can be understood in these two ways, “it seems like a metaphor that might have some literal truth. But if it turns out to be ‘just’ a metaphor, I will be content. I have a high regard for metaphor. It is how we come to understand the world.” McGilchrist, 462.

³⁰ McGilchrist, 14.

³¹ McGilchrist, 240.

³² McGilchrist, 92.

³³ Further, it is important to note here what is *not* being argued in this chapter: there is no implication that lateralisation of the brain is the *cause* of these two ways of attending to the

that aesthetic existence is not only to be associated with the right hemisphere; it is more nuanced than that. While many aspects of aesthetic existence are related predominantly to right hemispheric brain function, there are aspects also related to the left hemisphere. A healthy approach to aesthetic existence should necessarily involve both hemispheres. In fact, it appears that aesthetic existence becomes unhinged from ethics and faith precisely when it is dominated by the *left* hemisphere, as self-seeking titillation in a closed system of sensory stimulation. As we shall see, this is the type of immature aesthetic existence that Kierkegaard sought to discard, and is contrary to the aesthetic existence Bonhoeffer embraced.

McGilchrist describes a vast range of hemispheric distinctives, based on the respective roles that the two hemispheres play in our engagement with the world. These binary roles, even though they often seem contradictory, ideally function as complementary, held in tension with each other. While the right hemisphere's attention is *broad and flexible* (as in a bird scanning the environment, predominantly with their left eye, for a mate or a predator), the left is *focussed and grasping* (as in a bird identifying and pecking at seed, predominantly using their right eye).³⁴ The left largely deals with what is *already known*, while the right deals with the *new*. Significantly, "it follows that in almost every case what is new must first be present in the right hemisphere, before it can come into focus for the left."³⁵ Thus, the right is stronger in dealing with *possibility* (hence its connection with creativity, being more capable of a "frame shift"), while the left deals largely with *predictability*.³⁶ While the left is responsible for *division*, unpacking sensory data into meaningful information, the right brings *integration*, synthesising experience with broader reality.³⁷ Consequently, the left deals primarily with the *abstract*, while the right connects this with *context*.³⁸ The left then, *organises and categorises*, while the right allows for *individuality*.³⁹ Hence, the right "sees individual entities ... as belonging in a contextual whole ... from which they are not divided. By contrast the left sees parts" as belonging to a category.⁴⁰ Little wonder then that McGilchrist describes the left as

world. Following McGilchrist, the argument here is not for a causal connection, or an attempt to explore the mind-body problem. Regardless of whether brain lateralisation is the cause or the effect of two ways of attending to reality, the brain offers a helpful lens for understanding these two types of attention we can give the world.

³⁴ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 37.

³⁵ McGilchrist, 40.

³⁶ McGilchrist, 40.

³⁷ McGilchrist, 42.

³⁸ McGilchrist, 49.

³⁹ McGilchrist, 51.

⁴⁰ McGilchrist, 54.

impersonal versus the right as *personal*;⁴¹ the strength of the left dealing with the *non-living*, versus the *living* of the right.⁴² Although the left is also involved in emotion, it is the right that deals with emotional recognition and expression, and consequently empathy.⁴³ It should already be apparent that aesthetic existence, as embodied and emotive engagement with reality, draws heavily on the nature of the often-preconscious attention that the right hemisphere offers the world.

Before we look at the implications for everyday aesthetic existence, we need to further explore this right hemisphere connection by taking a closer look at three specific hemispheric distinctives, with direct connection to aesthetic existence: the temporal hierarchy of attention; explicit certainty versus implicit fluidity; and embodiment versus abstraction.

4.2.1 *The (Temporal) Hierarchy of Attention*

At the core of McGilchrist's argument, as well as the relevance of his work for this project, is the temporal, and thus ontological hierarchy of attention between the two hemispheres of the brain. He shows how that which is new is first presented in the right hemisphere of the brain, before being passed over to the left hemisphere for processing, following which it returns to the right again for contextual application, "the right → left → right progression."⁴⁴ The implication of this is that the right hemisphere does not only have temporal primacy, but also "ontological supremacy. Whatever the left hemisphere may add – and it adds enormously much – it needs to return what it sees to the world that is grounded by the right hemisphere."⁴⁵ In other words, the left hemisphere takes what is presented by the right, organises and categorises it, making sense of it, before re-presenting it to the right for integration with the world. This vital process enables the brain to cope with the changing, fluid nature of reality. McGilchrist articulately describes the ideal interaction between the hemispheres, which has significant implications for the formative role of aesthetic existence,

One can never step into the same river twice – Heraclitus's phrase is, I believe, a brilliant evocation of the core reality of the right hemisphere's world – one will always be taken unawares by experience, since nothing being ever repeated, nothing can ever be known. We have to find a way of fixing it as it flies, stepping back from the immediacy of experience, stepping outside the flow. Hence the brain has to attend to

⁴¹ McGilchrist, 54.

⁴² McGilchrist, 55.

⁴³ McGilchrist, 66.

⁴⁴ McGilchrist, 46. It is for this reason that "conscious awareness lags behind unconscious apprehension by nearly half a second." McGilchrist, 164.

⁴⁵ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 195.

the world in two completely different ways, and in so doing to bring two different worlds into being. In the one, we experience – the live, complex, embodied, world of individual, always unique beings, forever in flux, a net of interdependencies, forming and reforming wholes, a world with which we are deeply connected. In the other we “experience” our experience in a special way: a “re-presented” version of it, containing now static, separable, bounded, but essentially fragmented entities, grouped into classes, on which predictions can be based. This kind of attention isolates, fixes and makes each thing explicit by bringing it under the spotlight of attention. In doing so it renders things inert, mechanical, lifeless. But it also enables us for the first time to know, and consequently to learn and to make things. This gives us power.⁴⁶

To the extent that the ontological primacy of the right hemisphere is maintained, this power is subject to the context of a person’s lived reality, their existence in the world. In other words, the right hemisphere offers the critical sense of “betweenness,” or relationality, which both enables the power and control that the attention of the left hemisphere offers, but also limits it, as it is tested in the context of the Other. Initially, in the right hemisphere “we experience the world pre-reflectively, before we have had a chance to ‘view’ it at all, or divide it up into bits,” thus offering a sense of “togetherness,” which precedes even the left-hemisphere awareness of subject and object.⁴⁷ This provides a vital context for the abstract, analytical work of the left hemisphere.

The right hemisphere needs the left hemisphere in order to be able to “unpack” experience. Without its distance and structure, certainly, there could be, for example, no art, only experience ... But, just as importantly, if the process ends with the left hemisphere, one has only concepts – abstractions and conceptions, not art at all. Similarly the immediate pre-conceptual sense of awe can evolve into religion only with the help of the left hemisphere: though, if the process stops there, all one has is theology, or sociology, or empty ritual: something else. It seems that, the work of division having been done by the left hemisphere, a new union must be sought, and for this to happen the process needs to be returned to the right hemisphere, so that it can live.⁴⁸

The respective roles of the hemispheres point toward the vital connections between: pre-reflective, embodied, sensory, lived experience (right hemisphere); which is then consciously processed and systematised (left hemisphere); before being applied to contextual reality (right hemisphere). It is too reductionist to suggest that this right → left → right progression equates to aesthetic existence → rational reflection (belief) → action in the world (ethics), for it is more complex and nuanced than such a neat formula allows.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, based on

⁴⁶ McGilchrist, 30–31.

⁴⁷ McGilchrist, 31.

⁴⁸ McGilchrist, 199.

⁴⁹ Here, we can recall Kierkegaard’s distinction between a first and second immediacy, his articulation of a first immediacy lacking left-hemispheric processing.

McGilchrist's work, it is difficult to deny the pivotal formative role of aesthetic existence in this process.⁵⁰

If this progression is the ideal, then along the same lines as Nietzsche's Apollonian critique of modernity, McGilchrist suggests that the modern orientation to the world is decidedly imbalanced, originating not in right-hemisphere concretion, but left-hemisphere abstraction.

What if the left hemisphere were able to externalise and make concrete its own workings – so that the realm of actually existing things apart from the mind consisted to a large extent of its own projections? Then the ontological primacy of right-hemisphere experience would be outflanked, since it would be delivering – not 'the Other', but what was already the world as processed by the left hemisphere. It would make it hard, and perhaps in time impossible, for the right hemisphere to escape from the hall of mirrors, to reach out to something that truly was 'Other' than, beyond, the human mind. In essence this was the achievement of the Industrial Revolution.⁵¹

McGilchrist contends that the evidence of this externalisation of the left hemisphere's artificial categories is evident in our "rectilinear urban environments"; our mechanistic, grasping engagement with the natural world (and consequent "despoliation, exploitation and pollution"); the isolation of individuals and the increasing virtualisation of all of life, including leisure, often enjoyed by an immersion into "a largely insubstantial replica of life" through TV, the internet, gaming, etc.⁵² (The latter point is again a reminder that all aesthetic existence is not equal.) Thus the danger of such an over-reliance on left hemisphere attention to the world is that it becomes entirely self-referential.

It has long been acknowledged in the field of theological aesthetics that this is exactly why engagement with the aesthetic is vital to comprehension of reality: the aesthetic draws one beyond oneself (outside the left hemisphere's self-referential system of signs) into wonder, mystery, awe and the acknowledgement of the divine Other. While McGilchrist's research confirms such an argument as neuropsychologically valid, it goes beyond this, pointing to significant implications for *everyday* aesthetic existence. It is not only aesthetic experiences marked by wonder and awe which offer a sense of contextual reality. *All* everyday sensory

⁵⁰ For the remainder of this project, we will at times refer back to this right → left → right hemispheric progression. The point here is not the hemispheric progression itself, but the principle that underlies it. Other neuroscientists have argued for the same point, without referring to hemispheric progression. Panksepp, for instance, has shown that affect is primal, while Ellis and Solms draw from the latest research to argue that the cognitive is "soft-wired," built upon the sensory which is "hard-wired" in neurological development. See Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*. Ellis and Solms, *Beyond Evolutionary Psychology*.

⁵¹ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 386.

⁵² McGilchrist, 387.

existence is presented initially to the right hemisphere, offering a paradigmatic sense of the whole. In other words, while it is accurate to say that the role of the right hemisphere is to draw one outside of oneself into relationship with the Other, this is a fundamentally incarnational process. It is not merely a divine “Other” which one occasionally encounters through wondrous aesthetic experience, but the this-worldly “Other” of neighbour and nature, Creator and created world encountered through everyday aesthetic existence.⁵³ This echoes Bonhoeffer’s incarnational rejection of the binary between the real and ideal, which in turn is a response to Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity’s rejection of this-worldly life.

4.2.2 *Explicit Certainty Versus Implicit Fluidity*

Ultimately, what McGilchrist is exploring is the process of how we know reality, and the question we are considering is whether everyday aesthetic existence is involved. As we have seen, both hemispheres have a role to play in this epistemological process, which is compromised if undue reliance is placed on one of the modes of attention. While the right hemisphere engages directly with the fluidity and changing nature of everyday life, sensitive to all that is implicit in this experience, the left seeks to make this explicit through abstract conceptualisation which can be linguistically expressed as certainty. While the system of signs that is language (the domain of the left hemisphere) is crucial for expressing meaning, not all meaning is reducible to explicit language. McGilchrist points out that the right hemisphere, responding to implicit meaning, governs many of our unconscious responses. It deals with non-verbal communication, for example, responding unconsciously to facial expressions and body language, at the level of milliseconds.⁵⁴ While the right hemisphere reads the whole, which is implicit, the left builds towards meaning by piecing together explicit parts.

Using the familiar information-processing terminology, the left hemisphere favours analytic, sequential ‘processing’ [incrementally constructing “certainty”], where the right hemisphere favours parallel ‘processing’ of different streams of ‘information’ simultaneously ... there is an ‘aha!’ moment when the whole suddenly breaks free and comes to life before us. For it, though, knowledge comes through a relationship, a

⁵³ While considering Bonhoeffer’s description of transcendence as connected with the everyday (“The transcendent is not the infinite, unattainable tasks, but the neighbor within reach in any given situation”), it is intriguing to place alongside it the work of neuroanatomist, Raymond Tallis, who expounds the embodied nature of transcendence, our use of a forefinger for pointing being one such example, illustrating “everyday transcendence.” Raymond Tallis, *Michelangelo’s Finger: An Exploration of Everyday Transcendence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

⁵⁴ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 71.

betweenness, a back and forth reverberative process between itself and the Other, and is therefore never finished, never certain.⁵⁵

As helpful as the right-hemisphere process may be for perceiving a holistic sense of reality (including the divine, and all that is bound to remain implicit), the challenge is that this way of knowing the world can never be transferred to another via explicit language, hence the reticence of the modern, left-hemisphere dominated world to acknowledge it.

To make matters worse, the left hemisphere will claim certainty, even if the information available from the right is inconclusive or absent altogether. McGilchrist references remarkable research to illustrate the point. In split-brain patients (where the two hemispheres are not connected as they should be, via the corpus callosum), if visual stimuli is presented solely to the right hemisphere, which subsequently prompts reaction from the subject, the left “without batting an eye” offers an explanation, with certainty, as to the cause of the reaction “as a statement of fact,” even though it clearly could not know the (implicit) reasoning involved by the right hemisphere.⁵⁶ While the left hemisphere’s ability to extract explicit meaning is crucial to human understanding and communication, it is merely an intermediate step; it should neither be the starting point nor the end point in healthy engagement with reality, and subsequent formation of knowledge.

As previously noted, both hemispheres have a role to play in aesthetic existence, but unquestionably, engaging the world through everyday aesthetic existence is, at the very least, significantly pre-reflective, intuitively engaging the implicit. Aesthetic existence then, with its Dionysian tendencies, plays a role in formation since it offers a way of knowing the world that the Apollonian does not have access too. Further, if an attempt is made to reduce its implicit knowledge of the world to the explicit certainty of the left hemisphere, much of its value is lost.

Many important aspects of experience, those that the right hemisphere is particularly well equipped to deal with – our passions, our sense of humour, all metaphoric and symbolic understanding (and with it the metaphoric and symbolic nature of art), all religious sense, all imaginative and intuitive processes – are denatured by becoming the object of focussed attention, which renders them explicit, therefore mechanical, lifeless.⁵⁷

Ideally, “the implicit grounds the explicit,” which has the interesting implication that feelings are not the consequence of cognitive assessment, rather affect comes first and thinking

⁵⁵ McGilchrist, 228.

⁵⁶ McGilchrist, 81.

⁵⁷ McGilchrist, 209.

follows, as research shows.⁵⁸ The question then, is how the formative value of right-hemisphere attention influences conscious knowledge. In essence, the answer to this is found in the connections between embodied, aesthetic engagement with reality, the formation of living metaphors and the subsequent paradigmatic shaping of the imagination, a process we shall explore shortly. In order to do so, we need to look briefly at the connection between embodiment and the right hemisphere.

4.2.3 *Embodiment Versus Disembodied Abstraction*

Aesthetic existence is fundamentally sensory and embodied. For the abstract processing of the left hemisphere, this is marginal to knowing reality; sensory experience is processed as data for systematic categorisation, explicit certainty being the goal. That which does not contribute to this goal is discarded. By contrast, for the right hemisphere, the body is inextricably bound up in a sense of self and our existence in the world; our body is “something we ‘live’.”⁵⁹ Of course, it is true that each hemisphere is connected to the contralateral half of the body when it comes to motor and sensory function, but it is only the right hemisphere which has a sense of the whole body in relation to self. The left hemisphere knows only of the existence of the right side of the body. If the right hemisphere does not function, the left side of the body ceases to exist to the individual involved.⁶⁰ While the right hemisphere perceives the body to be that through which we live, a part of our identity, the left is detached from the body, seeing it as a thing among other things, “devitalised, a corpse.”⁶¹ “If the right hemisphere is not functioning properly, the left hemisphere may actually deny having anything to do with a body part that does not seem to be working according to the left hemisphere's instructions. Patients will report that the hand ‘doesn't belong to me’ or even that it belongs to the person in the next bed, or speak of it as if made of plastic.”⁶² Further, since the right hemisphere is attuned to the body it makes sense that it also “is far more closely linked to the physiological changes that occur in the body when we experience emotion,” thereby contributing to the superiority of the right regarding affect.⁶³

Again, if the hemispheres work harmoniously, complementing one another, these respective strengths allow for: bodily engagement with lived reality (as temporally and ontologically

⁵⁸ McGilchrist, 184.

⁵⁹ McGilchrist, 67.

⁶⁰ McGilchrist, 66.

⁶¹ McGilchrist, 67.

⁶² McGilchrist, 67.

⁶³ McGilchrist, 69.

primal); as well as subsequent disinterested contemplation; which ideally then converges in wise action in the world. However, if the left hemisphere rejects the ontological primacy of the right, thereby rejecting embodiment as foundational to knowing reality, meaning is locked within hermetic abstraction, the body simply being a means through which this meaning is imposed on the world. Nevertheless, it is difficult to argue with the fact that we are fundamentally connected to reality through our body, which the mediated awareness of the left hemisphere is utterly reliant on for engagement with the world (whether the left hemisphere acknowledges this or not cannot change this necessary connection). Existence is rooted in the body and senses. Consequently, this is the nexus of a primal awareness of the world, which both temporally and ontologically precedes conscious engagement, contributing to a way of knowing reality that cannot be reduced to the explicit certainty of the left hemisphere. McGilchrist draws from Heidegger to articulate this point,

We do not inhabit the body like some alien Cartesian piece of machine wizardry, but live it ... In trying to convey the “otherness” of a particular building, its sheer existence or *essent* prior to any one act of cognition by which it is partially apprehended, Heidegger speaks of the primal fact of its existence being made present to us in the very smell of it, more immediately communicated in this way than by any description or inspection. The senses are crucial to the “presence” of being, “to our apprehension of an *is* in things that no analytic dissection or verbal account can isolate.”⁶⁴

As fundamental as this embodied sense of being is, and despite its temporal and ontological primacy, the fact that it remains largely implicit means that it can be undervalued since it is a somewhat “transparent” contribution. “It is the most essential characteristic of the body that it disappears as an independent thing the more it fulfils its service ... In this the body performs like a work of art. Just as Merleau-Ponty says that we do not see works of art, but see according to them, so that although they are vital for what we see, it is equally vital that they become transparent in the process, we live in the world according to the body, which needs its transparency, too, if it is to allow us to be fully alive.”⁶⁵ If the left hemisphere predominates, treating the body merely as an assemblage of parts, the body loses this transparency, becoming explicit, and thus functioning merely as a tool for utilitarian purposes. In the realm of sexuality, for example, pornography is a manifestation of this left-hemisphere explicitness.⁶⁶ (This once again highlights the fact that aesthetic existence can become hijacked by the left hemisphere, which is arguably no less formative, although it merely

⁶⁴ McGilchrist, 153.

⁶⁵ McGilchrist, 439.

⁶⁶ McGilchrist, 439.

reinforces, through embodiment, the closed system of signs which the left hemisphere has labelled reality.)

In summary then, the right hemisphere offers an ontologically primal account of reality, grounded in embodied, affective and implicit knowledge of the world. It should be apparent from this brief survey that aesthetic existence plays a role in this paradigmatic attention that the right hemisphere gives to the world. Brain lateralisation, therefore, offers us important clues to understanding how we come to know reality, and the dangers of acknowledging only the Apollonian in the epistemological process. While these complementary ways of attending to the world both offer vital components of the epistemological process, when either one dominates, the net result is a distorted apprehension of reality, if not a completely artificial one. McGilchrist's concern is ultimately to show that a left-hemisphere, self-referential, hyper-self-conscious manner of attending to the world marks modernity. McGilchrist suggests that there are "points of weakness" to break out of this "hall of mirrors," which has become a culturally engrained mode of being in the world:

the body, the soul and art (which relies on body and soul coming together) ... the "lived" body, the spiritual sense, and the experience of emotional resonance and aesthetic appreciation are all principally right-hemisphere-mediated. What is more *they each have an immediacy which bypasses the rational* and the explicitness of language, and therefore leads directly to territory potentially outside of the left hemisphere's sphere of control.⁶⁷ [Italics added]

This nexus of body, soul and the aesthetic is precisely the realm of aesthetic existence. In order to elucidate the formative role of everyday aesthetic existence we need to take a closer look at the epistemological implications of this right-hemispheric manner of attending to the world.

4.3 Implications for the Formative Nature of Aesthetic Existence

To recap: Nietzsche critiques modernity for its artificial construction of Apollonian reality and the rejection of a Dionysian embrace of life itself. To Nietzsche, Christianity is at the heart of this distortion, which is consequently seen to dismiss, or at the very least undermine, the value of aesthetic existence. In response, Bonhoeffer argues that Christianity is fundamentally incarnational, thereby calling for a celebration of aesthetic existence, as a penultimate expression of faith, amidst the goodness of this-worldly life. In the process, Bonhoeffer briefly draws a connection between formation (*Bildung*) and aesthetic existence, although he does not explore this further. Thus our turn to McGilchrist, who in sharing

⁶⁷ McGilchrist, 438.

Nietzsche's critique of modernity, shows that the Dionysian tendencies of right-hemisphere attention are vital to human formation and perception of the world. McGilchrist does this by showing that within the process of apprehending reality, there are unconscious, implicit, affective, embodied elements, all of which are aspects of aesthetic existence. Both Bonhoeffer and McGilchrist, therefore, are responding to Nietzsche's critique of Apollonian modernity by suggesting that reality is fundamentally embodied, and thus of the senses. Bonhoeffer suggests that to reject this is to reject Christological life itself, while McGilchrist shows that devaluing the Dionysian tendencies of the right hemisphere creates a circular, self-referential and artificial knowledge of the world. The way out of this "hall of mirrors" is to recover the value of body and soul and their engagement with the aesthetic, in which everyday aesthetic existence plays a significant part. Doing so will demand an appreciation of the formative role of metaphor and the imagination. Everyday aesthetic existence is bound up with the implicit and unconscious formation of meaning-making metaphors and the shaping of the paradigmatic imagination. Before we take a closer look at the significance of metaphor and the imagination to this project, a few introductory comments regarding the apprehension of reality are in order.

4.3.1 Knowing Reality through Everyday Aesthetic Existence

Even though the epistemological process is undeniably conscious, rational and explicit, as we have seen, it would be erroneous to assert that it is *exclusively* so. Brain lateralisation and the nature of right-hemisphere attention clearly shows that unconscious, implicit, affective and embodied engagement with the world also plays a role. In fact, as McGilchrist argues, it is a pivotal role, a grounding one, which provides the context within which the abstract rationality of the left hemisphere can flourish. If knowing reality were merely a question of systematic arrangement of abstract concepts, the organisation of information, then aesthetic existence would be irrelevant. It would merely be a bit of fun on the side, the insular and frivolous excitement of the senses, entertainment that has no bearing on knowledge of the world and self. However, if reality is fundamentally relational, as Bonhoeffer asserts, it follows that our embodied experience of being in the world, of engaging the other, is the basis for meaning.

McGilchrist suggests that the abstract, conceptual knowing of facts is a left-hemisphere endeavour, while the right knows through experience as a living being in relationship. The former is fixed and certain, while the latter is individual and relies on personal engagement with the Other. The former can be commodified, and transferred via propositional language,

the latter can only be known through experience.⁶⁸ “In many languages other than English [these two ways of knowing] are referred to by different words: the first by, for example, Latin *cognoscere*, French *connaître*, German *kennen*; the second by Latin *sapere*, French *savoir*, German *wissen*.”⁶⁹ McGilchrist’s critique is that the way in which we attend to the world leans far too heavily toward the information-harvesting, disembodied *kennen* of the left-hemisphere, encroaching even on the way in which we engage living beings as utilitarian commodities. Rather than *kennen* encroaching on the realm of *wissen*, McGilchrist suggests that *kennen* should be grounded in the context of *wissen*. Or, in the words of philosopher Martha Nussbaum, we should embrace a fundamentally relational approach to knowing – “love’s knowledge.”⁷⁰

In fact, to illustrate the problem of apprehension dominated by *kennen*, McGilchrist considers the extreme, in which knowledge of reality is gained exclusively via a left-hemisphere mode of attention, and notes that the symptoms are identical to schizophrenia “in all its major predilections – divorce from the body, detachment from human feeling, the separation of thought from action in the world, concern with clarity and fixity, the triumph of representation over what is present to sensory experience, in its reduction of time to a succession of atomistic moments, and in its tendency to reduce the living to the devitalised and mechanical.”⁷¹ It is thus important to emphasize that these two ways of attending to the world do *not* merely represent an inconsequential choice of two modes of knowing, as though either will do, the choice simply being a matter of personal preference.

To be clear then, there are two senses in which aesthetic existence is significant for our perception of the world. Firstly, since the right hemisphere’s sensory and affective engagement with the world is largely unconscious and implicit, it is possible, and highly likely, that we are unaware of the extent to which aesthetic existence shapes our apprehension

⁶⁸ McGilchrist, 95.

⁶⁹ McGilchrist, 96.

⁷⁰ Nussbaum asserts that at its core, knowledge “might be a complex form of life ... Knowledge cannot be gained through intellectual *grasping* – through the greedy, controlling, manipulative employment of intellectual force ... Knowledge cannot be *merely* intellectual. Intelligence cannot ‘know’ apart from feeling and commitment and ways of being that are consistent with what is known.” As quoted in Craig R. Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 142.

⁷¹ Schizophrenia itself “as John Cutting has shown, appears to be a state in which the sufferer relies excessively on (an abnormally functioning) left hemisphere.” McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 335.

of reality, regardless of whether we embrace an Apollonian or Dionysian approach to life. In this sense, aesthetic existence is formative for all, whether it is acknowledged as such or not. But secondly, conscious affirmation of the aesthetic creates an avenue to break out of the self-referential system of signs by acknowledging the value of that which cannot be reduced to the explicit, thereby including the Other (and all that cannot be reduced to the explicit) in apprehension of reality. To expand on both of these points we need to look more closely at the meaning-shaping nature of metaphor and the imagination.

4.3.2 *Meaning-Making Metaphor*

McGilchrist argues that metaphor is closely related to reason,⁷² which only seems paradoxical because we have inherited an enlightenment view of reason as rationality.⁷³ Clearly, he is not referring here merely to the use of metaphor as a flowery figure of speech. The enlightenment perspective of metaphor holds that, at best, it is a helpful linguistic tool to convey emotion; at worst, it is an unnecessary ornament, easily discarded should one choose to express the same concept literally. Either way, “metaphor can have nothing directly to do with truth.”⁷⁴ But the power, and necessity, of metaphor is that it is a connection to embodied reality, a means of connecting abstract conceptualisation with the material world. There is thus a sense in which *all* language is metaphorical.

Every word, in and of itself, eventually has to lead us out of the web of language, to the lived world, ultimately to something that can only be pointed to, something that relates to our embodied existence. Even words such as ‘virtual’ or ‘immaterial’ take us back in their Latin derivation – sometimes by a very circuitous path – to the earthy realities of a man's strength (*vir-tus*), or the feel of a piece of wood (*materia*). Everything has to be expressed in terms of something else, and those something elses eventually have to come back to the body.⁷⁵

In other words, the metaphorical nature of language is evidence of the “betweenness,” or relationality, which pervades a right hemisphere apprehension of the world. However, the vast majority of the “metaphors” that we use as part of daily language are dead metaphors, their connection to embodied existence in the world lost amidst the abstraction of language. But this does not deny the primacy of embodiment in the very formation of these metaphors, and thus language itself. In fact, McGilchrist suggests that poetic use of language (hearkening

⁷² McGilchrist, 332.

⁷³ While explicit, abstract, linear and sequential argument is the realm of rationality; McGilchrist suggests that valid, deductive problem-solving incorporates a broader range of mental processing, which involves both hemispheres. See McGilchrist, 65.

⁷⁴ McGilchrist, 332.

⁷⁵ McGilchrist, 116.

back to the origin of language in music) is an attempt to recover the living, right-hemisphere connection with reality, which abstract language has lost. Here we can turn once again, with McGilchrist, to music, to substantiate his point and illustrate that aesthetic existence is primal in engaging reality.

4.3.3 *Spotlight on Music: Metaphor and the musical origins of language*

Kierkegaard helped us to frame music as archetypal sensory immediacy. We then saw, through Bonhoeffer's life and work, that music, as a form of aesthetic existence, is not merely ornamental to life, but formative. His musical metaphors were not simply helpful illustrations, but theological concepts formed through his musical experience. McGilchrist argues that this is because music is a primal means of capturing the affective relationality that pervades human life. Music is not peripheral to the serious business of life, but can implicitly capture reality in a fuller sense than words can ever do.

This must be what Mendelssohn meant by his otherwise paradoxical pronouncement that “the thoughts that are expressed to me by music I love are not too indefinite to be put into words, but on the contrary too definite.” Language returns us inevitably to the worn currency of re-presentation, in which the unique qualities of everything that exists are reduced to the same set of terms. As Nietzsche put it: ‘Compared with music all communication by words is shameless; words dilute and brutalise; words depersonalise; words make the uncommon common.’⁷⁶

Further toward capturing the fullness of reality, McGilchrist suggests that, contrary to Kierkegaard, musical sensory immediacy is not the aesthetic moment, temporally isolated from other moments, but rather a moment saturated with eternity. It is a moment which paradoxically

partakes of eternity ... it does not so much use the physical to transcend physicality, or use particularity to transcend the particular, as bring out the spirituality latent in what we conceive as physical existence, and uncover the universality that is, as Goethe spent a lifetime trying to express, always latent in the particular. It is also a feature of music in every known culture that it is used to communicate with the supernatural, with whatever is by definition above, beyond, ‘Other than’, our selves.⁷⁷

When considering this participatory, affective and intuitive engagement with reality which music offers, it is hardly surprising that the right hemisphere is crucial for musical

⁷⁶ McGilchrist, 74.

⁷⁷ McGilchrist, 77. McGilchrist appears here to be struggling toward an analogical and participatory account of sacramental reality, which Graham Ward will help us articulate in the next chapter.

engagement.⁷⁸ Amusia, the condition of being unable to understand, perform or appreciate music, is associated with damage to the right hemisphere of the brain.⁷⁹ Music then, rather than being peripheral to life, is a manifestation of right-hemisphere relationality, an affective and implicit engagement with the “betweenness” of reality.

In fact, McGilchrist’s contention is that language itself has its genesis in music.⁸⁰ Here he follows the lead not only of contemporary theories of language, such as put forward by Steven Mithen, but points out that the theory has been explored by “Rousseau in the eighteenth century, von Humboldt in the nineteenth century and Jespersen in the twentieth.”⁸¹

Archaeological evidence appears to indicate that early humans made music before language existed.⁸² Further, as Salomon Henschen points out, “The musical faculty is phylogenetically older than language; some animals have a musical faculty – birds in a high degree. It is also ontogenetically older, for the child begins to sing earlier than to speak.”⁸³ As human infants learn language, “Intonation, phrasing and rhythm develop first; syntax and vocabulary come only later.”⁸⁴ Hence the parenting phenomenon of “‘baby talk’ – which emphasises what is

⁷⁸ While both hemispheres of the brain are involved in musical performance, in amateur musicians it is associated predominantly with right hemispheric brain activity. Unsurprisingly, but interestingly, this is not the case with professional musicians wherein the “play” of music demands disciplined abstraction. However, professional musicians playing Bach’s polyphonic music produce strong right-hemisphere activity, perhaps pointing to the heightened somatic and affective awareness of the “other” in contrapuntal music.

McGilchrist, 75.

⁷⁹ McGilchrist, 74.

⁸⁰ McGilchrist is less concerned here with the precise nature or chronology of language development, as he is to show that language had a musical and perhaps also gestural origin. Thus, whether language developed from music, or if both developed independently from what has been called “musilanguage” matters little. Likewise, if gesture played a significant role in this development it would only further affirm the embodied nature of language, music being “deeply gestural in nature: dance and the body are everywhere implied in it.” McGilchrist, 102, 119.

⁸¹ Steven Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind, and Body* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 104.

⁸² Archaeological research shows that the anterior condylar canal at the base of the skull, as well as the thoracic vertebral canal are essentially the same size in modern humans as the earliest human skeletons discovered. These canal sizes point to articulatory and respiratory nerve control associated with speech long before humans used language. “The explanation of this sophisticated control and modulation of the production of sound, in the absence of language as we know it, has to be that it was for a sort of non-verbal language, one in which there was intonation and phrasing, but no actual words: and what is that, if not music?”

McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 102.

⁸³ McGilchrist, 103.

⁸⁴ McGilchrist, 103.

called prosody, the music of speech.”⁸⁵ As McGilchrist notes, “Perhaps the most striking evidence, though, is that there are extant tribes in the Amazon basin, such as the Pirahã, a hunter-gatherer tribe in Brazil, whose language is effectively a kind of song, possessing such a complex array of tones, stresses, and syllable lengths that its speakers can dispense with their vowels and consonants altogether and sing, hum or whistle conversations.”⁸⁶

These musical origins of language point to the ability of music to facilitate aesthetic attunement to the relational nature of reality.⁸⁷ While the left-hemisphere construction of abstract language can become disconnected from embodied life, the somatic and affective nature of music opens the possibility of engaging the fullness of lived reality.⁸⁸ Our affinity for music then, is not merely a craving for insignificant and disposable entertainment, or a tickling of the senses like “auditory cheesecake,” as Steven Pinker claims.⁸⁹ Rather, it is deeply embedded in what it means to be human. “Neurological research strongly supports the assumption that ‘our love of music reflects the ancestral ability of our mammalian brain to transmit and receive basic emotional sounds’, the prosody and rhythmic motion that emerge

⁸⁵ McGilchrist, 103.

⁸⁶ McGilchrist, 106. The Pirahã are indeed striking, not only because of the musical nature of their language, but also because their language contains no numbers or colours. Daniel Everett, a linguist who has spent much of his life studying the tribe, suggests that since they are “committed to an existence in which only observable experience is real, the Pirahã do not think, or speak, in abstractions.” Intriguingly, in resonance with what appears to be a life dominated by sensory immediacy, he names this the “immediacy of experience principle.” The cognitive anthropologist, Brent Berlin, suggest that Everett’s work points to the fact that the “Pirahã may provide a snapshot of language at an earlier stage of syntactic development.” Or, to put it in McGilchrist’s terms, are the Pirahã an example of a reliance, or even overreliance on right-hemisphere attention, just as modernity subscribes to an overreliance on left-hemisphere attention? Daniel L. Everett, ‘What Does Pirahã Grammar Have to Teach Us about Human Language and the Mind?’, *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 3, no. 6 (1 November 2012): 555–63; Daniel L. Everett, *How Language Began: The Story of Humanity’s Greatest Invention* (New York: Liveright, 2017); John Colapinto, ‘The Interpreter’, *The New Yorker*, 9 April 2007, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/04/16/the-interpreter-2>.

⁸⁷ We will discuss the importance of attunement and fittingness more fully in the next two chapters. In anticipation of that discussion, here we can simply note, as Nicholas Wolterstorff describes it, that aesthetic attunement is related to a universal sense of mild synesthesia. This is true of *fitting* music, and traces of it can still be found in language as McGilchrist notes, “in what has become known as the ‘kiki/bouba’ effect (‘kiki’ suggesting a spiky-shaped object, where ‘bouba’ suggests a softly rounded object).” McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 119.

⁸⁸ This is not to say that *all* music, by default, attunes one to reality, for this is not the case. As we shall see, right-hemisphere affective and embodied engagement with the world, if dominated by left-hemisphere grasping, merely becomes sensationalism.

⁸⁹ Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2009), 534.

intuitively from entrainment of the body in emotional expression: ‘music was built upon the prosodic mechanisms of the right hemisphere that allow us affective emotional communications through vocal intonations.’⁹⁰

The perspective that music is central to being human may seem novel and somewhat foreign, yet this is only so due to the removal of music from communal life in the western world.⁹¹ Thus, even though music “has a vital way of binding people together, helping them to be aware of shared humanity, shared feelings and experiences, and actively drawing them together,” the specialisation, compartmentalisation and competition characterising modern life, as dominated by left-hemisphere engagement with the world, has shifted communal experience of music to the periphery of everyday life.⁹² As the neurologist Oliver Sacks notes, today we have a “special class of composers and performers, and the rest of us are often reduced to passive listening. One has to go to a concert, or a church or a musical festival, to recapture the collective excitement and bonding of music. In such a situation, there seems to be an actual binding of nervous systems ...”⁹³

The key point here is that this primal relating happens at a neurological level; it is a sensory engagement with reality prior to critical evaluation. In other words, it is implicit. “The origins of language in music and the body could be seen as part of a bigger picture, part of a primacy of the implicit. Metaphor (subserved by the right hemisphere) comes before denotation (subserved by the left). This is both a historical and an epistemological truth. Metaphorical meaning is in every sense prior to abstraction and explicitness.”⁹⁴ For language to remain vital, for it to remain connected to lived reality in the sense that music is, its metaphorical nature needs to be nurtured and embraced. Failure to do so inevitably results in the virtuality of explicit, symbolic abstraction wherein the depth of implicit meaning is lost. Rowan Williams draws from McGilchrist to sum it up well, “Language itself as a whole system proceeds to ‘compensate’ for the losses in perception involved in this virtual depiction by reinstating something of the musical origin of speech through metaphor; that is, by speaking

⁹⁰ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 103.

⁹¹ McGilchrist, 104.

⁹² McGilchrist, 104.

⁹³ As quoted in McGilchrist, 104. For a contemporary account expositing the power of communal singing, see Stacy Horn, *Imperfect Harmony: Finding Happiness Singing with Others* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2013).

⁹⁴ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 179.

out of a more empathic and more consciously embodied attitude, drawing on right-brain capacity ...”⁹⁵

4.3.3.1 Metaphor as Rooted in Embodiment

However, this metaphorical nature of language points to a more fundamental truth. As Lakoff and Johnson have shown, not only is all language essentially metaphorical, but metaphor, rooted in bodily experience, is the basis for all meaning.⁹⁶ The representation of reality within the mind is essentially metaphorical. Research in the field of embodied cognition points to the fact that bodily engagement with the world forms unconscious categories of cognition that guide our conscious thought processes, providing “metaphors we live by.”⁹⁷ Through our bodily experience of reality from a very early age (even prior to using language), we develop schemata which order our understanding, the paradigms of *in* versus *out*, or *up* versus *down*, for example. “These patterns emerge as meaningful structures for us chiefly at the level of our bodily movements through space, our manipulation of objects, and our perceptual interactions.”⁹⁸ These schemata are unconsciously formed. Everyday aesthetic existence, therefore, can contribute to the formation of schemata, or metaphors by which we live, since, “The very basis of abstract thought, both in its concepts and in the manipulation of those concepts, lies in metaphors drawn from the body.”⁹⁹

If this connection between aesthetic engagement → creation of metaphor → shaping of perception holds true, there are significant implications for the relationship between everyday aesthetic existence, faith and ethics. This connection exists whether one embraces an Apollonian or a Dionysian approach to life. But McGilchrist’s core argument is that the former, dominated by the left hemisphere, imposes predefined (concrete, certain, fixed, already-known) categories on aesthetic engagement, thereby simply entrenching the abstract, dead metaphors of conception that allow for the protection of a closed, circular system of

⁹⁵ Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2014), 28.

⁹⁶ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*; George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind & Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*.

⁹⁷ On embodied cognition, see for instance Lawrence Shapiro, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Embodied Cognition* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

⁹⁸ Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, 29.

⁹⁹ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 334.

artificial reality.¹⁰⁰ This process is dominated by a sense of self-consciousness, and concomitant individualism, utilitarianism and pursuit of self-preservation. By contrast, attending to the material world through a right-hemisphere openness to living metaphor breaks out of self-referential abstraction, engaging the Other, and subsequently nurtures an empathic engagement with the world, which is foundational for belief and ethics.

McGilchrist suggests that aspects of the Reformation reflect the dangers of a left-hemisphere-dominated approach to the world, which rejects living metaphor. While the movement was broad, with diverse and complex manifestations, he nevertheless argues that there are

common elements, and when we see them we are, in my view, witnessing the slide into the territory of the left hemisphere. These include the preference for what is clear and certain over what is ambiguous or undecided; the preference for what is single, fixed, static and systematised, over what is multiple, fluid, moving and contingent; the emphasis on the word over the image, on literal meaning in language over metaphorical meaning, and the tendency for language to refer to other written texts or explicit meanings, rather than, through the cracks in language, if one can put it that way, to something Other beyond; the tendency towards abstraction, coupled with a downgrading of the realm of the physical; a concern with re-presentation rather than with presentation ... In essence the cardinal tenet of Christianity – the Word is made Flesh – becomes reversed, and the Flesh is made Word.¹⁰¹

According to McGilchrist's account, the Reformation replaced metaphor and the aesthetic with theory and concept. However, "The problem, as Luther realized, lay not in the statues, the icons, and the rituals themselves, but in the way they were understood. They had lost their transparency as metaphors, which are always incarnate and therefore must be left to act on us intuitively – neither just material or just immaterial, but bridges between the two realms."¹⁰² The support for this bridge between the realms of the material and immaterial is the human faculty of imagination, which enables a living metaphor to have meaning. Again, however, since the ambiguity of the imagination is antithetical to the fixed, certain and "safe" world of abstract conceptualisation, its epistemological role is not acknowledged by a left-hemisphere approach to reality. "As Schleiermacher put it, the Reformation and the Enlightenment have

¹⁰⁰ C. S. Lewis describes such metaphors as "fossilized," referring to language which has lost its connection with existential reality and is thus mere abstraction. See C. S. Lewis, 'Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare,' in *Selected Literary Essays* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 258.

¹⁰¹ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 323.

¹⁰² McGilchrist, 444.

this in common, that ‘everything mysterious and marvellous is proscribed. Imagination is not to be filled with (what are now thought of as) airy images.’¹⁰³

4.3.4 *The Paradigmatic Imagination*

Although McGilchrist is critical of a world dominated by left-hemisphere attention, he is careful to point out that the left-hemisphere is, of course, vital to functioning well in the world. As we have seen, it is merely focussed, left-hemisphere attention, unhinged from the grounding and context of holistic, right-hemisphere perspective, which becomes problematic. McGilchrist responds to Nietzsche by suggesting that the ideal is harmony between the Apollonian and Dionysian. Further, that it is the faculty of the imagination that “comes into being between the two hemispheres, which enables us to take things back from the world of the left hemisphere and make them live again in the right.”¹⁰⁴ While the dominance of left-hemisphere attention turns living metaphors into abstract concepts, thereby disconnecting them from embodied reality, the imagination not only returns abstract conceptualisation to lived reality, but also thereby offers a Gestaltian sense of integration between the explicit and implicit. This is what we will be referring to here, with Garret Green, as the paradigmatic nature of the imagination.¹⁰⁵ Since the imagination cultivates a broad, receptive perspective of reality, guided by the right hemisphere, open to the fluidity and ambiguity of life, it creates space not only for engagement of the Other, but the concomitant integration of the transcendent with embodied, lived reality. In other words, the imagination allows for a paradigmatic perspective of reality which offers a means of perceiving the whole, not merely the parts. Thus, the parts are not perceived in isolation, but transformed as they are seen according to the whole. Hence, with David Bryant we could simply describe the imagination in terms of “seeing as.”¹⁰⁶

Echoing McGilchrist, James Smith describes the imagination as,

A quasi-faculty whereby we construe the world on a precognitive level, on a register that is fundamentally *aesthetic* precisely because it is so closely tied to the *body*. As embodied creatures, our orientation to the world begins from, and lives off of, the fuel of our bodies, including the “images” of the world that are absorbed by our bodies.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ McGilchrist, 315.

¹⁰⁴ McGilchrist, 199.

¹⁰⁵ Green, *Imagining God*, 61–74.

¹⁰⁶ Bryant, *Faith and the Play of Imagination: On the Role of Imagination in Religion*, 89.

¹⁰⁷ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 17.

These “images” are not therefore merely ocular; the “imagery” that feeds the imagination emanates from a full-bodied experience of reality. The imagination is thus a powerful epistemological faculty that has the potential to alter perception of reality. Yet, because it is shaped by embodied, affective and implicit reality, it does not fit the narrow, abstract fact-finding of left-hemisphere processing, hence its rejection by enlightenment epistemology. But this rejection has two implications. Firstly, as many have shown, the imagination is critical for perception of the divine (extending to all transcendence and everything that remains implicit), which, by definition, cannot be comprehended within the confines of explicit, finite rationality.¹⁰⁸ Secondly, due to its paradigmatic nature, the imagination plays a role in the formation of *all* meaning. In other words, the formative significance of the imagination applies not only to embracing wonder and mystery, but also to our perception and engagement of material, this-worldly reality; the imagination allows for both apprehension of right-hemisphere openness, while also providing a foundation for left-hemisphere concrete thought and action.

The nature of everyday aesthetic existence is diverse and varied, the broad categories of play, friendship and art, for example, being easily subdivided into many further subcategories. It would hardly therefore be helpful, or accurate, to assert that everyday aesthetic existence, as a whole, opens one to the infinite, or provides an imaginative paradigm for engaging reality. In fact, this is not the case in every instance, as we shall momentarily discuss. However, it should be clear that everyday aesthetic existence, to the extent that it is embodied, affective and engages the implicit, has the potential to both open one to the Other, as well as shape the paradigmatic imagination, with implications for this-worldly thought and action.

Formation is a fundamentally imaginative process. If discipleship is the call to imitate Christ, there is an important connection here to the embodied shaping of the imagination as McGilchrist shows,

We already know from the discovery of the existence of mirror neurones that when we imitate something that we can see, it is as if we are experiencing it. But it goes further than this. Mental representation, in the absence of direct visual or other stimulus – in other words, imagining – brings into play some of the same neurones that are involved in direct perception. It is clear from this that, even when we so much as imagine doing something, never mind actually imitate it, it is, at some level which is far from negligible, as if we are actually doing it ourselves. Imagining something, watching

¹⁰⁸ Apart from the examples of Bryant, Green, Avis and Smith already mentioned (and Ward, which we will engage in the next chapter), see also Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

someone else do something, and doing it ourselves share important neural foundations. Imagination, then, is not a neutral projection of images on a screen. We need to be careful of our imagination, since what we imagine is in a sense what we are and who we become.¹⁰⁹

The implication here is that “discipleship” is a universal human experience. The question is merely what, or who, is doing the “discipling,” and to what end? The nature of our attention changes what we find and determines who we become.¹¹⁰ As the imagination is engaged through friendship, art and play, for instance, paradigms are created and neural pathways formed which offer a context for understanding reality. The imagination, “seeing as,” provides the context for belief, acting “as if” (a point we shall explore more fully in the next chapter).¹¹¹

4.3.5 *Left-Hemisphere “Dionysian” Sensationalism*

While everyday aesthetic existence has the potential to draw on right-hemisphere processing, engaging the implicit, shaping the imagination and opening one to the Other, there is also an expression of aesthetic existence which we could term post-modern aestheticism. If bodily engagement with the world becomes disconnected from a contextual perspective of the whole of reality, which the right hemisphere provides, the body becomes simply a tool to be used for the satisfaction of the left-hemisphere’s artificial system of signs. Sensation does not cease to exist, but it is interpreted through this hyper-self-conscious, insular rubric. Rather than the senses being jettisoned, the post-modern rejection of Apollonian ideals leaves only the senses to be explored for some feeling of being alive. “The left hemisphere senses that something is wrong, something lacking – nothing less than life, in fact. It tries to make its productions live again by appealing to what it sees as the attributes of a living thing: novelty, excitement, stimulation.”¹¹² In an ironic reconfiguration of aestheticism, it is the senses that absolutely matter, but never with the hope of offering meaning. Disconnected from the whole, all that remains is stimulation and sensation. While the “Dionysian” is celebrated, it is never towards an end outside of the self, always subservient to the abstract and artificial rules of the game determined by the left hemisphere. “The left hemisphere ‘creates’ newness by recombining in a novel fashion what is already known, not as imagination does, [but] by allowing something that we thought we knew to be truly revealed for the first time. It is like those children’s

¹⁰⁹ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 250.

¹¹⁰ McGilchrist, 28.

¹¹¹ McGilchrist, 170.

¹¹² McGilchrist, 199.

books with pages split into three, in which you can invent a new animal by putting together the head of a camel, the body of a seal and the legs of a goat.”¹¹³ Just like the aesthetes’ “art for art’s” sake, while seemingly a noble elevation of the aesthetic, it is ultimately a devaluation, since it disconnects it from life, so the “betweenness” is lost here amidst self-reflexive fulfilment.¹¹⁴

In other words, “Devitalisation leads to boredom, and boredom, in turn, to sensationalism.”¹¹⁵ The end result is a “high stimulus society” which is “represented through advertising as full of vibrancy and vitality,” and the concomitant rise of consumerism, all toward the end of “fresh experience and novel excitement.”¹¹⁶ The consequence is sensation disconnected from right-hemisphere context and the subsequent severance from reality, as “the left hemisphere interposes a simulacrum between reality and our consciousness” leading to the “increasing virtuality” of life.¹¹⁷

It follows then that everyday aesthetic existence, while potentially a life-giving, meaning-shaping embrace of embodied, implicit reality, can become co-opted by left hemisphere processing, thereby simply providing novel excitement within the safe confines of what is already “known.” In the realm of friendship, for example, the rise of social media provides the opportunity for a virtual, disembodied, re-representation, which is ultimately not relational, but merely a means of stimulation, safely controlled as a consumerist utility by the click of a button.¹¹⁸ The rise of gamification in the realm of education provides another example. Gamification provides parameters (rules, objectives, rewards), which are concrete and explicit, celebrating success with novel excitement. The creation of this virtual world, limited to the rational, precludes the formative influence of the implicit. Art, in both the extreme of being highly conceptual, as well as the other extreme of excessively sentimental, becomes mere stimulation of the left hemisphere without fundamental connection to lived reality.¹¹⁹ In fact, sentimentality is merely a different expression of the same issue we explored regarding pornography. Both stimulate the left hemisphere, offering a placebo of the real, while ultimately disconnected from life, as the writer Flannery O’Connor articulates well,

¹¹³ McGilchrist, 408.

¹¹⁴ McGilchrist, 409.

¹¹⁵ McGilchrist, 400.

¹¹⁶ McGilchrist, 400.

¹¹⁷ McGilchrist, 402, 407.

¹¹⁸ This is not to say that *all* interaction with social media is marked by such virtual existence, simply that it provides the opportunity for it.

¹¹⁹ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 410.

“Pornography ... is essentially sentimental, for it leaves out the connection of sex with its hard purpose, and so far disconnects it from its meaning in life as to make it simply an experience for its own sake.”¹²⁰ Significantly, O’Connor suggests that both are an attempt to short-circuit a sense of redemption, a return to innocence, but cannot do so, since they are neither ultimately embedded in embodied, Christological reality, nor therefore redemptive in any sense.

4.3.6 *The Dionysian and Apollonian Revisited*

Such a left-hemisphere approach to aesthetic existence (perhaps we could call it Apollonian aesthetic existence) is ultimately self-referential. While it never breaks out of its self-contained system, it offers a virtual experience of the Other. Or, as Nietzsche warned us, we create reality, our perception of the world, including “god,” in our own image.

Philosophically and theologically, to sustain this system, a left-hemisphere binary is created (the categorizing strength of left hemisphere attention) between the real and ideal, consequently devaluing the material as merely a manifestation of the abstract, a symbol. As McGilchrist notes, quoting Nietzsche’s insightful comment, “‘The symbolic replaces that which exists’: surely the perfect expression of the triumph of theory and abstraction over experience and incarnation, of re-presentation over ‘presencing’ ...”¹²¹

The problem with binaries such as real-ideal and subject-object, McGilchrist suggests, are that they are a construction of left hemisphere attention, but are ontologically non-existent, and thus absent in preconscious, aesthetic engagement with reality.¹²² While we cannot deny that they aid our processing and communication about the world, they also challenge what McGilchrist argues is at the core of right-hemisphere perception of the world: relationality.

In this context, it is best to understand the dichotomy of Apollonian vs. Dionysian as exactly that, a mythological binary helpful for our processing and articulation as to the nature of our engagement with reality, as we have done with McGilchrist in this chapter. Having done so, we need to acknowledge that fundamentally, reality, and our engagement thereof, is not to be found in harmony within the dichotomy as Nietzsche suggested, but in their ontological unity in Christ, as Bonhoeffer showed. This is important because there are not two ways of

¹²⁰ Flannery O’Connor, ‘The Church and the Fiction Writer’, in *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), 148.

¹²¹ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 418.

¹²² McGilchrist, 31, 136–37.

attending to Reality. There are two types of attending, but only one provides access to Reality, the other to an artificial system of signs.

4.4 Conclusion

Everyday aesthetic existence can therefore serve either the self-enclosed, virtual world created by unhinged, left-hemisphere-dominated attention, or it can contribute to the role right-hemisphere-dominated attention plays in formation, through embodied, implicit engagement with reality. As our study of both Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer has suggested, this should come as no surprise, since there seems to be a clear distinction between, what we have termed, a mature or immature embrace of aesthetic existence. The key question of course, which we posed at the end of the last chapter, is how we distinguish the two. At the time, we suggested that Bonhoeffer may be inferring that mature aesthetic existence would be guided by love, a polyphonous celebration of Christological reality. McGilchrist's conclusion regarding the formative nature of aesthetic existence resonates with this. "What ultimately unites the three realms of escape from the left hemisphere's world ... the body, the spirit and art – is that they are all vehicles of love ... for love is the attractive power of the Other, which the right hemisphere experiences, but which the left hemisphere does not understand and sees as an impediment to its authority."¹²³ We shall explore this connection between aesthetic existence and service of the other further in the following two chapters, as we consider the implications for ethics and faith.

¹²³ McGilchrist, 445.

CHAPTER 5: GRAHAM WARD & AESTHETIC EXISTENCE AS FUNDAMENTAL TO BECOMING CHRISTIAN

Introduction

The first part of the research question guiding this project asks whether aesthetic existence is fundamental to being human. A superficial reading of Kierkegaard would seem to suggest that it is not; aesthetic existence is merely an immature stage through which one should progress, leaving it behind as one moves to ethical and ultimately religious existence. However, a closer reading of Kierkegaard shows that mature aesthetic existence plays a part in every stage of life. Bonhoeffer builds on this by arguing that an incarnational approach to reality demands an embrace of this-worldly aesthetic existence as an expression of Christian living in the penultimate. Bonhoeffer is responding to Nietzsche's critique of Christianity, which Nietzsche sees as complicit in modern Apollonian hegemony. For Nietzsche, the devaluation of the Dionysian is not merely neglect of a peripheral aspect of experience; it is a failure to embrace the most fundamental aspect of human existence. In the last chapter, McGilchrist showed why Nietzsche's critique has valid grounds. There are indeed two ways of attending to the world, which accord with the lateralisation of the brain, and McGilchrist has illustrated how *both* are important for engagement with reality. Everyday aesthetic existence is fundamental to being human since it plays a preconscious, formative role in the apprehension of reality. It does so through the embodied and affective shaping of the paradigmatic imagination, which determines how we *see as*.

In this chapter we will explore the consequences for the second part of the research question: what are the implications then for how aesthetic existence is fundamental to being a Christian, bodily engaged in the life of the world? As noted in the introduction, this question gives rise to two further sub-questions. Firstly, what are the implications for the formation of being Christian (discipleship)? Secondly, what are the implications for being Christian, embodied in the world? The former deals with the life of faith and the latter with the life of the world, or ethics. We will begin to explore both of these sub-questions in this chapter. At the heart of these questions is the relationship between aesthetics, faith and ethics. As we have already noted in response to Nietzsche, a recovery of aesthetic existence cannot come at the expense of divorcing aesthetics from ethics, a schism that has historically carried disastrous consequences, as seen in the rise of Nazism for example. McGilchrist's work intimates that

aesthetic existence, faith and ethics are inextricably connected. In order to understand the nature of this relationship we now turn to the work of Graham Ward.

In contrast to McGilchrist, Ward is a theologian. His work is particularly well suited to the project at hand due to the interdisciplinary nature of his research, which draws from a number of fields, including philosophy, the human sciences and aesthetics. Ward undertakes what he calls an exploration into the “archaeology and architecture” of belief, thereby pointing not only to the universality of human belief but also to the nature of its relationship to faith.¹ In response to McGilchrist, Ward argues that the connection between belief and aesthetic existence is even more fundamental than McGilchrist suggests, and ultimately that aesthetics, belief and ethics cannot be separated. Beliefs operate as dispositions toward the world, which inform our actions, dispositions which are shaped and formed by our embodied and affective engagement with the world. Consequently, he puts forward an “embedded” and thus “engaged” theology, which articulates how the nexus of belief and analogical aesthetic engagement with the world is necessarily linked to ethical life.²

5.1 Understanding Belief in Relation to Aesthetic Existence

In order to understand the relationship between aesthetic existence and belief we need to take a closer look at the nature of belief, and the distinction between faith and belief. We will begin by considering belief in general (as opposed to *religious* belief), before turning to the implications for a life of faith. In order to approach Ward’s response to McGilchrist, a more detailed articulation of McGilchrist’s anthropology of belief is required.

5.1.1 McGilchrist’s Anthropology of Belief as Sensory, Imaginative Existence

McGilchrist suggests that the nature of belief is misunderstood due to the dominance of left-hemisphere attention that characterises life in the modern world. The left hemisphere deals with abstraction and categorisation, certainty and fixity being the goal, which is to be achieved through ratiocination. This is considered the highest form of knowledge.

Consequently, belief is seen to be merely a “feeble form of knowing.”³ According to this way of thinking, if one does not know something with certainty, but one suspects it might be the case, one is said to “believe” something. For instance, one may say, “I believe that the train

¹ Ward, *Unbelievable*.

² Graham Ward, *How the Light Gets In: Ethical Life I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 170.

leaves at 6.13', where 'I believe that' simply means that 'I think (but am not certain) that?.' Belief here is merely "absence of certainty."⁴

However, as we have seen, while the left hemisphere indeed has an important role to play in the formation, and particularly communication of knowledge, if it is not submitted to the contextual hierarchy of the right hemisphere → left hemisphere → right hemisphere progression, the result is simulated "knowledge," disconnected from embodied, material reality. It may well be certain and fixed, but it is a knowledge of *virtual* reality. Embodied and affective engagements with the world, the dominant modes of aesthetic existence, are grounded in the right hemisphere. In other words, while aesthetic existence may have no clear role to play in an epistemological process dominated by abstract ratiocination, the end result of such knowledge is a simulated, and ironically therefore, somewhat "feeble" form of knowing.

In light of the significance of the right hemisphere → left hemisphere → right hemisphere hierarchy, which necessarily points to the formative and epistemological value of aesthetic existence, we need to reconsider the nature of belief. For McGilchrist, right-hemisphere attention has immense and vital (in the full sense of the word) importance. Left-hemisphere certainty, disconnected from right-hemisphere context, is not the pinnacle of knowledge. Rationality is, therefore, not more dominant than embodied and affective experience in the epistemological process. Consequently, belief is not a weaker form of knowing. Rather, the intuitive, implicit, preconscious, embodied and affective knowing of right hemisphere attention plays an important, perhaps even dominant role in our apprehension of the world and personal formation. Thus, for McGilchrist,

Belief is a matter of care: it describes a *relationship*, where there is a calling and an answering, the root concept of "responsibility." Thus if I say that "I believe in you," it does not mean that I think that such-and-such things are the case about you, but can't be certain that I am right. It means that I stand in a certain sort of relation of care towards you, that entails me in certain kinds of ways of behaving (acting and being) towards you, and entails on you the responsibility of certain ways of acting and being as well.⁵

Two important points emanate from McGilchrist's stance on belief. Firstly, the description of belief as a relationship has implications for the formative nature of aesthetic existence. If aesthetic existence, through embodied and affective relationship to the world, has the ability to open oneself up to the Other, aesthetic existence is at the heart of the formation of belief,

⁴ McGilchrist, 170.

⁵ McGilchrist, 170.

through the creation and sustenance of relationship. It is a gateway to partaking in an ontological reality: the relational nature of the world, or what McGilchrist describes as “betweenness,” to which the right hemisphere is receptive. The relationship between the believed and the believer is more complex (even unconscious to a degree), organic and dynamic than reduction to rational proposition would allow.

Secondly, McGilchrist suggests that the very nature of this relationship entails response-ability; belief is a relation of care. In other words, it is a relation that affects behaviour and cannot but do so. This perspective of belief inextricably binds it to ethics. Action then, an ethical response, is not merely measured ratiocination based on conscious processing of abstract concepts, but the partly preconscious, organic and necessary response to an existential reality.

Notably, belief, as a relation of care, foregrounds desire, just as the left-hemisphere perspective of belief, as a weak form of knowledge, foregrounds the will. If left-hemisphere attention is marked by volitional control, the right is marked by a relational “desire or *longing* towards something, something that lies beyond itself, towards the Other.”⁶ Once again, this has significant implications for our project. Aesthetic existence is a realm of affective experience, both appealing to and shaping desire, which holds true whether one considers friendship, art or play, for example. In other words, McGilchrist is arguing that belief is intimately connected with desire. Desire, not the will, functions as the fundamental impetus behind belief. This raises a number of questions: Do we choose our beliefs? To what extent do everyday aesthetic experiences influence our desires, and thus our beliefs? And, if belief is inextricably tied to ethics, what are the implications for the connection between desire and ethical life? Graham Ward explores these questions in greater detail, and we shall return to them shortly.

McGilchrist’s argument for the integration of aesthetic existence, faith and ethics rests on his connection between the formation of the imagination (as the faculty that allows us to “see *as*”), and the consequent choice to believe (act “as if”). As we saw in the last chapter, McGilchrist suggests that the imagination is the faculty that bridges left and right hemisphere attention. Right-hemisphere attention, encompassing preconscious sensory engagement with the world, creates unconscious paradigmatic metaphors, shaping the imagination, which allows us to see the world “*as*” through left hemisphere processing. Drawing from Heidegger,

⁶ McGilchrist, 171.

and in reference to Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit, McGilchrist affirms that, "We see things by seeing them *as* something. In this sense ... we create the world by attending to it in a particular way."⁷ In sum, the imagination (the way we see *as*) is shaped by our embodied and affective relationship with the world, thereby grounding our apprehension of reality.

Based on this embodied and affective relationship with reality, belief is a relational choice, a matter of where one places one's *trust*, despite the impossibility of certainty. The choosing "involves an act of faith, and it involves being faithful to one's intuitions."⁸ As one perceives reality through the right hemisphere → left hemisphere → right hemisphere progression, a reality grounded in embodiment and the imagination, one acts on the basis of this reality. One acts *as if*. Belief, therefore, is not optional. Everyone *sees as*, and consequently *acts as if*. Belief is not merely a cognitive endorsement of uncertain information, but a holistic relational attitude, a commitment of trust, "a disposition towards the world."⁹

The important question here, which is central to Ward's critique as we shall see, is how the move is made from *seeing as* to *acting as if*? If this is a cognitive choice, are we not simply back where we started with left-hemisphere volition controlling belief?

5.1.2 Ward Affirms McGilchrist: Belief as an embodied, relational disposition

Graham Ward affirms and builds upon McGilchrist's findings regarding belief, particularly that belief is not merely a weak form of knowledge but a relational category.¹⁰ "As such *credo* is not necessarily and immediately linked to a calculus of probabilities and 'causal thinking' (Wolpert), but rather to relational categories like trust, loyalty and empathy."¹¹ This orientation of "care" is both affective and ultimately leads to concrete action. Ward confirms that embodiment, the imagination and belief are inextricably bound together, thereby acknowledging the role of aesthetic existence in faith formation. But as already noted, Ward has one particularly significant critique of McGilchrist's description of belief, which has implications for this project. Ward argues that McGilchrist's articulation of belief in terms of "acting as if" returns it to the realm of a cognitive choice. If this is so, then the impact of aesthetic existence on belief is peripheral, a secondary influence at best, subservient to

⁷ McGilchrist, 151.

⁸ McGilchrist, 151.

⁹ McGilchrist, 170.

¹⁰ Ward, *Unbelievable*, 75–83.

¹¹ Ward, 77.

conscious choice. But Ward argues that this is not accurate since belief is a disposition (involving both conscious and preconscious processes), rather than simply a conscious choice. Ward suggests that our misunderstanding of belief stems from assessing knowledge through Cartesian and Lockean lenses. Reconsidering Plato may be helpful, which he does through three tropes in “Plato’s *Republic*: the simile of the sun, the analogy of the line and the allegory of the cave.”¹² The question raised through Plato’s exploration of the degrees of knowledge is whether belief (*pistis*) is merely a stepping-stone towards true knowledge, to be jettisoned as inferior as soon as a higher form is attained. But this may be something of a Cartesian reading, the journey towards certainty having no utility once certainty itself is achieved. Ward reflects upon the fact that it may be worth taking a closer look at what is going on here. Do the primal moves, saturated by desire, intention and belief, not have a teleological impact on the ultimate destination of clarified, abstract knowledge? A more attentive reading of these tropes seems to indicate that the various levels of knowledge

both refer back to previous levels and ahead to the levels that follow, blurring where the boundaries lie ... we might say: we come to know that which we believe, trust and are assured to be true. Or even: we believe that we may understand – which seems to be the way Augustine read the Platonic thought available to him in the fourth century CE.¹³

By contrast, the modern perspective of belief as a weak form of knowledge is the consequence of the approach taken by philosophers such as John Locke. Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* explores the nature of knowledge and its relationship to belief, in Book IV, Chapter XV, defining belief as:

Being that which makes us presume things to be true, before we know them to be so ... And herein lies the difference between probability and certainty, faith and knowledge, that ... each immediate idea, each step has its visible and certain connexion; in belief, not so. That which makes me believe, is something extraneous to the thing I believe ...¹⁴

This essentially remains the modern stance on “the epistemology of belief and believing. All cognitive activity takes place in the receiving and receptive mind.”¹⁵ A dualism is formed between world and subject, a rift that is only overcome by “certain knowledge.” Belief is relegated to speculation about the nature of reality. Thus, “with the association of belief with

¹² Ward, 23–29.

¹³ Ward, 25.

¹⁴ As quoted in Ward, 127.

¹⁵ Ward, 127.

opinion, fancy and guessing ... at best faith becomes a Pascalian wager, a leap beyond reason.”¹⁶

We shall return to the connection between belief and faith shortly. But the natural consequence of this epistemological perspective is that, “we should aspire to knowledge ‘altogether clear and bright’ – certainty, transparency, daylight forever; a realised eschatology (without God and without judgement) in which there is no shadow of belief or opinion.”¹⁷ The irony is that such “certainty” is only achieved by prioritising left-hemisphere abstraction over right-hemisphere embodied and affective engagement with the world, thereby entrenching the dualism rather than overcoming it.

Ward picks up on McGilchrist’s observations of this world-subject dualism, which has interesting implications for the relationship between aesthetic existence and belief. As we have already seen, Lockean epistemology and the dominance of left-hemisphere abstraction has one of two consequences for aesthetic existence. The first possibility is that an I-Thou relationship is encountered through aesthetic experience which challenges the sufficiency of the left-hemisphere closed system of meaning. By encountering the Other through affective and embodied means, the self-sufficient system of signs is breached, demanding the exploration of reality undiscovered. Belief here, as a relational category, is intertwined with the discovery of the world.

The second possibility is that an immature and self-seeking engagement with aesthetic existence cultivates a sensationalism which merely serves to entrench a simulated reality. Belief here, as a weak form of knowledge, has a potent relationship with aesthetic existence. Since beliefs, in this instance, are the consequence of a simulated abstraction of meaning, these virtual beliefs can be endorsed by self-seeking aesthetic experience, creating a delusional and therefore dangerous malformation of the left-hemisphere/right-hemisphere symbiosis. We shall more fully explore the nature of this simulated belief shortly. Here we need simply note two manifestations of such virtuality: a modern, Lockean naming of such “certainty” as “reality”, and the post-modern, Baudrillardian acknowledgement of it as simulacrum, accompanied by pseudo-vital sensationalism. *The similarity here between the modern and post-modern perspectives is in the role immature aesthetic existence plays in validating the virtuality*, whether it is named simulacrum in the latter, or named “reality” in the former.

¹⁶ Ward, 128.

¹⁷ Ward, 130.

To highlight the role of mature aesthetic existence in a dispositional understanding of belief and its relationship to reality, we need to move beyond the Lockean perspective, delve deeper, and turn to Ward's "architecture of belief."

5.1.3 *Dispositional Belief: Aesthetic existence informs "anticipation" and "projection"*

As already noted, Ward suggests that belief is a universal human condition, not only to be confined to the realm of *religious* belief.¹⁸ His enquiry leads him to a "biology and neuropsychology of believing," plotting an "architecture" of belief.¹⁹ Like McGilchrist, Ward suggests that an anthropological fallacy – humans are volitional agents prioritising the rational above the affective and imaginative – lies at the root of our misunderstanding of the place of belief, the imagination and desire.²⁰

In challenging this ratiocentric anthropology, Ward shows that "beliefs inform perception, interpretation and action prior to rationalisation."²¹ The important point here, at the heart of Ward's argument, is the preconscious, dispositional nature of belief. While there may be flaws in Plato's articulation, what he does rightly point toward is the interrelated and dynamic nature of the levels of knowing, and ultimate action. Action at times even preceding conscious volition, which implies that "we are examining not a linear process but a complex set of feedback and feedforward loops in which believing is deeply implicated."²²

Ward explores the relationship between belief and "what lies beneath" – that which "is prior to interpretation and the impact it has on the way we think and behave."²³ In 1987, cognitive scientist, John F. Kihlstrom, published a seminal article, "The Cognitive Unconscious," in which he argues that we arrive at "judgements and impressions prior to conscious attentiveness."²⁴ Since the publication of Kihlstrom's article, neuroscientists have probed each aspect of nonconscious activity which he proposed, among other findings, confirming the

¹⁸ Ward, 14.

¹⁹ Ward, 14.

²⁰ Ward, 122.

²¹ Ward, 12.

²² Ward, 13.

²³ Ward, 11.

²⁴ "Kihlstrom recognises ... three forms of nonconscious activity: automatic responses, where we have learnt something by practice such that it requires little conscious attention ... subliminal perception, where stimuli too weak to be consciously detected ... impact on our impressions, judgements and actions... and implicit memory, where events that cannot be consciously remembered have a palpable effect upon our experience, thought and action." Ward, 11.

“time lag” which resonates with McGilchrist’s RH → LH → RH progression.²⁵ “There is a mode of liminal processing, related to embodiment and affectivity, which ‘thinks’ more quickly and reacts more instinctively than our conscious rational deliberation.”²⁶ Social anthropologists, such as Pierre Bourdieu, have picked up on this, pointing out that the way in which we make sense of the world is tightly bound up with a partly preconscious “‘habitus’ – encultured dispositions, socialised mindsets and biases.”²⁷ We shall return to Bourdieu and ‘habitus’ in the next chapter, since this has important implications for everyday aesthetic existence; the embodied and affective seemingly “meaningless” and “fun” activities which are in fact deeply formative, and the consequent relationship to discipleship and ethics. But here it is important to note that for Ward it is precisely these “dispositions” and “biases” which constitute belief.²⁸

If it is true that belief operates on this dispositional level, then it follows, as Ward suggests, that “belief is unavoidable.”²⁹ Belief not only undergirds knowing, and subsequent response, it is inextricably bound up within the (non-linear) cognitive, affective and embodied processes which yield both preconscious and conscious apprehension. Ward maps out this processing through the economy of “anticipation–projection–reception–recognition–response.”³⁰ It is a common and rather obvious claim that sentient reception plays a role in knowing, but the critical point is that reception is always preceded by intentional anticipation and projection. “Sentience means that the body is continually receiving an input of information, but anticipation is directing and focusing that information in specific ways ... only a small percentage of what is being received is adequately lit by our consciousness.”³¹ This is necessary in order to make meaning of the world, amidst the mass of stimuli presented through dynamic sensory experience, creating representation (left hemisphere) from fluid presentation (right hemisphere) by “generating associative narratives.”³²

²⁵ In an alternative to McGilchrist’s RH → LH → RH progression, Ward describes the same principle by arguing that the imagination “fills the gaps” in this time lag between sensation and consciousness. Graham Ward, *Unimaginable: What We Imagine and What We Can’t* (London: IB Tauris, 2018), 93.

²⁶ Ward, *Unbelievable*, 12.

²⁷ Ward, 12.

²⁸ Ward, 12.

²⁹ Ward, 77.

³⁰ Ward, 47–77.

³¹ Ward, 46.

³² Ward, 48.

Anticipation then, the ability to “*see as*,” offers an imaginative narrative through which stimuli are selectively processed. Based on this narrative, we *project* meaning. This is the intention which drives perception, the “going out of oneself” in order to read meaning into experience.³³ “As phenomenologists from Edmund Husserl onwards have recognised, human beings perceive intentionally. They see meaning.”³⁴ The operation of anticipation and projection, to draw connections between one phenomenon and another (whether an experiential memory, or an abstract rule), requires the creation of an inferential connection, which can be a conscious process but can also be unconscious, thereby forming a disposition. The implication is that we may not be fully aware, or even aware at all, of how we arrived at the disposition.³⁵ In order for meaning to be shared, these dispositions are then subject to the human trait of *recognition*.³⁶ This is most obvious in the articulation of belief as common symbolic language, but Ward suggests that even recognition cannot be reduced to left-hemisphere abstraction, but includes emotional and implicit knowledge, essentially being “an understanding of the other, myself *and* the relation of meaning binding both other and self.”³⁷ For our purposes, the most significant aspect of Ward’s economy of human interaction with the world and formation of meaning (anticipation–projection–reception–recognition–response) is the pervasive, integrated and fundamental role of both belief and aesthetic engagement. Belief is the lens through which we interact with the world, central to anticipation (*seeing as*), and the subsequent projection of possibilities.

Belief is evident not only in these projected possibilities – the belief of their possibility based on previous occurrences which are not simply recalled in order to predict. It also determines how what is seen is seen. Furthermore, belief also resides in the abstraction process itself – the construction of how things work in the world. More fundamentally, belief is evident throughout the cognitive processes in ways that inform both the disposition to anticipate and the projection of possibilities.³⁸

³³ Ward, 54.

³⁴ Ward, 51.

³⁵ Ward, 49.

³⁶ Ward uses the term “recognition” as “expounded by the nineteenth-century German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel in his groundbreaking *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Himself something of an early anthropologist, the word he used was *Anerkennung*. The German word is subtle. *Erkennung* is ‘knowledge’, but the prefix *an* lends that word an incompleteness. It is ‘almost’ knowledge or ‘on the way to’ knowledge, pre-knowing, intuitive, in ways that bear some similarities with what many neuroscientists refer to as ‘emotional knowledge’. Nevertheless it announces a cognition regarding what is outside the ego, the one perceiving. It is as if from an external stimulus the self provokes a knowledge that is not quite knowledge within itself: a *déjà vu*. Hence the translation ‘recognition’.” Ward, 53.

³⁷ Ward, 53.

³⁸ Ward, 48.

Critically for our project, the influence of belief at this fundamental cognitive level is often preconscious, operating in the aesthetic realm of the embodied and affective. Not only McGilchrist's research, but also findings from the field of embodied cognition confirm this, as we saw in the previous chapter.³⁹ Further, while cognition is embodied, it is also embodied on a social and cultural level, not solely on a personal level. The implications of this are that personal and communal, embodied and affective experiences affect belief, shaping the ways we see, our anticipation, and our projection of possibilities.⁴⁰ Everyday aesthetic experiences, as embodied and affective, therefore influence not only our beliefs but consequently our formation as a whole.

This does not mean that we can, or should, fall into the trap of attempting a neat, propositional equation, quantifying the role that everyday aesthetic experiences play in the formation of belief. On the one hand, the problem here would be that we attempt to use left-hemisphere abstraction to quantify right-hemisphere embodied and affective formation.⁴¹ Any attempt to do so will be inevitably reductionist.⁴² But perhaps the greater concern here would be that this would represent a misunderstanding of the process, and ultimately a misunderstanding of the nature of meaning in relation to being itself. As we have seen, belief is not merely to be equated with ratiocination (this holds true for ethics too, as Bonhoeffer pointed out in chapter three). Belief is indeed a pivotal component in the human creation of meaning, but it is a perspective of understanding which is primarily relational, not propositional.⁴³ Along the lines

³⁹ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 257.

⁴⁰ Ward, 118.

⁴¹ As already noted, much of this dynamic is preconscious, beyond rational, empirical reach, just as our understanding of consciousness itself is limited. While neuroscience can offer important clues to our understanding of belief, we should also acknowledge the limitations of this approach. "The irreducibility of belief to the physics and chemistry of the brain draws our attention to a lacuna that cannot be disassociated from the lacuna of consciousness itself. We cannot account fully for belief, and belief cannot fully account for itself. We don't always (possibly most of the time) know believing's secret operations, its secret selections among our memories, emotions and understandings." Ward, *Unbelievable*, 112.

⁴² Admittedly, this may seem to be precisely the task of this project. However, there is a difference between, on the one hand, neatly *quantifying* the role of aesthetic existence in the formation of belief, thereby suggesting that the process has been captured in its entirety, with scientific certainty, while on the other hand, pointing toward undeniable evidence for the significant role that everyday aesthetic existence plays in the formation of belief. The latter points to important implications, even while not offering the neat, illusory certainty of the former.

⁴³ Propositional abstraction does indeed have a role to play in the clarification and communication of belief, but it is not the genesis of belief, nor can it offer comprehensive, or even adequate articulation of the complex nature of belief.

of “Heidegger’s analysis of ‘being there’, or *Dasein*,” understanding is “not simply a cognitive act in our coming to know something, but ... a mode of being in itself. As a mode of being, understanding enables us to relate to the world, make sense of the world and our exchanges with it, and give shape to that world. It is in this way that understanding is existential.”⁴⁴ But as Ward notes, Heidegger “did not pay enough attention to the way understanding as a mode of knowing passes into understanding as a mode of being.”⁴⁵ Belief operates at this nexus of knowing and being; it is lived, the one organically shaping the other in embodied, affective and sometimes preconscious ways. Consequently, belief, as a living, enacted, relational commitment of trust creates a *seeing as*, not while disconnected from the world in abstract contemplation, but amidst existential reality. “For beliefs are (and have) lived conditions for the possibility or impossibility of certain imaginative experiences of the world.”⁴⁶ These “lived conditions” are embodied, creating a dynamic, symbiotic and complex relationship between consciousness, aesthetic existence and belief. One that is not driven only by conscious volition, but by affective desire embedded in embodiment. Belief “motivates and energizes as it issues from the swirl within embodiment itself in relation to and in response to all that is given to it.”⁴⁷

5.1.4 Ward’s Critique of McGilchrist: The existential “seeing as” of belief

The preceding exploration of Ward’s architecture of belief is important because it supports his critique of McGilchrist’s perspective on belief, a point which is pivotal for this project. Ward’s primary concern with McGilchrist’s description of belief is that, in an effort to be stylistically neat, McGilchrist (whether advertently or inadvertently) returns belief to the left-hemisphere realm of cognitive choice, thereby eliminating the preconscious aspects of belief. This, we have noted, would severely limit the impact that aesthetic existence has upon belief. But as we have seen, Ward argues for the dispositional nature of belief, which does not have a linear relationship with cognition and action, but functions within a “complex set of feedback and feedforward loops.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Ward, *Unbelievable*, 7.

⁴⁵ Ward, 8.

⁴⁶ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 134.

⁴⁷ Ward, 257.

⁴⁸ Ward, *Unbelievable*, 13. This is not to say that belief is disconnected from conscious volition. It is simply to point out that volition itself is more complicated and multifaceted than the Lockean perspective allows. In this regard, it may be helpful to consider Ward’s description of belief, wherein he employs the inclusive term of a “mental state”: “At base,

For the most part, Ward finds McGilchrist's perspective on belief helpful. Both agree that belief is essentially relational, and thus concerns "recognition" (in the sense of Ward's use of the term). Further, that this disposition of "care" necessarily entails response-ability (it comes with ethical implications). They also concur that preconscious, implicit and embodied experience of the world affects belief and thereby has implications for concrete action. Commenting on McGilchrist's findings, Ward notes that, "Working together, the left and right hemispheres of the brain make believing a mode of cognition associated with imagination, motivation, desire, intuition and feeling."⁴⁹

Nevertheless, Ward suggests that McGilchrist's description of belief in terms of "acting as if" situates it firmly within "left-hemisphere ratiocination."⁵⁰ It is indeed a curious description that McGilchrist employs, for example, "Some people *choose* to believe in materialism; they *act 'as if'* such a philosophy were true."⁵¹ [Italics added] Ward's observation that this phrasing provides stylistic neatness may well be McGilchrist's motivation here, for it seems to allow for a clear articulation of the operation of belief.⁵² But not only is this description inconsistent with McGilchrist's own work, it does not do justice to the complex and integrated nature of belief as further articulated by Ward. McGilchrist himself suggests that preconscious "seeing as" fundamentally shapes conscious choice, challenging the fallacy of independent ratiocination in a disembodied vacuum.⁵³ However, as Ward notes, not only can "acting as if" be construed as a somewhat condescending phrase (acting on fantastical "wishful thinking" and associated with untruth), the notion of "choice here is far too locked into the assumption of a Cartesian, monadic ego who does the choosing."⁵⁴ "I can choose to believe that, rationally calculated, materialism or Marxism best fit the facts as we have them. But this form of believing is much more akin to Locke's account of knowledge ... it is believing very much in service to the probability calculus of left-hemisphere thinking. It

belief is a mental state (where 'state' can cover 'thought', 'perception' and 'experience', all of which are dynamic, not static conditions), but not all mental states are brought to consciousness. That does not mean that mental states are disassociated from sensory perception – our beliefs have arisen from somewhere – though there is a continuing debate about the extent to which sensing itself has – technical term coming up – intentional content." See Ward, 91.

⁴⁹ Ward, *Unbelievable*, 77.

⁵⁰ Ward, 81.

⁵¹ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 170.

⁵² Ward, *Unbelievable*, 78.

⁵³ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 162.

⁵⁴ Ward, *Unbelievable*, 79–80.

cannot be equated, as McGilchrist does, with faith.”⁵⁵ We shall shortly be turning to the relationship between faith and belief in general, but here we can note the problematic nature of describing religious belief as “acting as if.” Christianity bears

witness to an experience not of choosing God but being chosen by God. Such a recognition is based in something familiar, something half-known, known intuitively, known in the very substructures of our being human ... In seeing as there is always a moment of what is given in seeing ... In McGilchrist’s characterisation of believing, choosing and the ‘as if’, neither does justice to the rich complexity of belief in a creator God nor fully describes the disclosive nature of what comes with such a belief.⁵⁶

What Ward is describing here is the givenness, or even the Otherness, that is always present in a relational understanding of belief. Receptivity to this givenness, or Otherness, is often intuitive and implicit. It is receptivity within the realm of the aesthetic. This is not a two-stage process, wherein we firstly, intuitively and implicitly *see as*, shaped by embodied and affective, preconscious engagement with the world, but then, secondly, go on to consciously *act as if*. It is a complex unity of “feedback and feedforward” loops wherein preconscious *seeing as* informs conscious *seeing as*, thereby initiating a relational commitment (belief) and subsequent action on the basis of this (both implicit and explicit) knowledge of reality. The implication is that everyday aesthetic existence is not a separate realm of existence, distinct from ethical or religious existence governed by ratiocination. Aesthetic existence, being in the moment bodily and affectively, generates an *as if* that informs ethical and religious being and doing, believing and acting.

To illustrate this we can return to neuroscientific research on mirror neurons. As McGilchrist pointed out in the last chapter, our imitative and empathic ability stem from our brains’ capacity to vicariously live out, in our very nervous system, an experience external to our body, merely by perceiving it. Ward suggests that research on mirror neurons has significant implications for understanding the deeply integrated relationship between belief, embodiment and the imagination.

[Mirror neurons] write the ‘as if’ of belief into our physiologies because they evoke the “simulation, in the brain’s body maps, of a body state that is not actually taking place in the organism,” amplifying the “functional resemblance” (Damasio). In this way, and with the help of what ... neuroscientist, Antonio Damasio, terms CDZs (convergence-divergence zones at the microscopic level that assemble neurons within feedforward–feedback loops of information) and CDRs (convergence-divergence regions located at strategic areas in association cortices where major pathways for

⁵⁵ Ward, 80.

⁵⁶ Ward, 80–81.

information come together), *belief is not only embodied but inseparable from the capacity to imagine.*⁵⁷ [Italics added]

Further, Ward's exposition of this "biology of belief," which neuroscientific research offers, shows that a dispositional understanding of belief is not only a conceptual construct but a neurological reality. Damasio himself describes a "dispositional space" in brain function, the brain encoding previous perceptions and representations as dispositions. These dispositions function at a lower level of consciousness (similar to the body's autonomic system), thereby not requiring conscious memory, and freeing up brain-space in a sense.⁵⁸

While the contents of images can be accessed by consciousness, we can never have direct access to the contents of our dispositions. They are encrypted and dormant. Nevertheless, *this dispositional space is the source of images in the process of imagination and reasoning* and is also used to generate movement. It is located in the cerebral cortices that are not otherwise occupied by the image [mapping] space (the higher-order cortices and parts of the limbic cortices) and in numerous subcortical nuclei. The point of all this for an architecture of belief is that the foundations for the very edifice of believing itself lie in a knowledge base that is implicit, encrypted and unconscious.⁵⁹ [Italics added]

In other words, not only is believing fundamentally and inextricably connected to embodiment, the human faculty of imagination (*seeing as*, which feeds belief) is shaped at a preconscious level. It is therefore unhelpful to talk of two separate processes – *seeing as* and *acting as if* – as McGilchrist does. Clearly, acting is related to *seeing as*, and conscious volition plays an important role both in *seeing as*, as well as acting, but the two-step process which McGilchrist's description intimates is too simplistic, not accounting for the complex and organic nature of the process. Rather, as Ward notes above, an intricate web of "imagination, motivation, desire, intuition and feeling" affects belief and its consequent abstract articulation, in a non-linear and multi-directional manner.⁶⁰ The implication here is a fundamental link between everyday aesthetic existence and belief. While a Lockean perspective of belief centres on conscious volition, based on (weak) knowledge, "the aesthetic appreciation of the act of believing introduces aspects of the structure of belief hitherto concealed: most explicitly, the work of the imagination."⁶¹

⁵⁷ Ward, 95.

⁵⁸ Ward, 98.

⁵⁹ Ward, 98.

⁶⁰ Ward, 77.

⁶¹ Ward, 17.

5.1.5 *Spotlight on Music: Aesthetic existence as propulsive, mythic sensibility*

It is worth pausing at this point to illustrate the power of aesthetic existence in belief formation by looking, once again, at the case of musical sensory immediacy. If belief is not merely a weak form of knowledge, but stems from embodied and affective, often preconscious engagement with the world, then sensory immediacy is not merely an obstacle to be overcome in the development of belief, but rather shapes the imagination, thereby playing a role in the very trajectory of belief formation. A brief look with Ward at two musical examples, illustrates, firstly, the visceral, propulsive force of musical sensory immediacy, and secondly the imaginative myth-formation which ensues.

Ward points out that before we can speak of sensing and imaginative “making sense,” we need to consider sentience itself, which neuroscientists consider to be “‘core’ or ‘primal’ consciousness.”⁶² Ward’s concern is that discussion of the human faculty of imagination can easily become cerebral, when in fact it is deeply biological, rooted in the “the body at the border of the instinctive and the intuitive.”⁶³ Sentience provides “primal awareness” from which consciousness arises.⁶⁴ It is the birthplace of “elemental passion.” Simply, “Bodies feel, that is their nature, and feeling is ‘propulsive’.”⁶⁵ Between sentience and conscious articulation there is a “formed response.”⁶⁶ Formed response is not merely animal reflex but “an intentional propulsion prior to agency, prior to the will of a commanding ego.”⁶⁷ This is the realm of aesthetic existence, expressed, for example, in the arts such as dance, music and film, or even in everyday play. “These propulsive intentions have no single aim or directedness. As in play, they have no instrumental end other than to display themselves.”⁶⁸

To illustrate the propulsive power of musical sensory immediacy, Ward turns to a performance by singer, James Arthur, in *The X Factor* 2012, and in particular his rendition of Shontelle’s ‘Impossible’. The song mourns a broken relationship and Shontelle’s version, while being at times “angry, regretful, even hurt,” ends neatly in resignation, “the singing ... beautifully in tune, the words clearly enunciated.”⁶⁹ By contrast, Arthur brings all of his “complex biography” and existential brokenness to the performance. Beginning with “a series

⁶² Ward, *Unimaginable*, 84.

⁶³ Ward, 29.

⁶⁴ Ward, 85.

⁶⁵ Ward, 87.

⁶⁶ Ward, 87.

⁶⁷ Ward, 87.

⁶⁸ Ward, 87.

⁶⁹ Ward, 88.

of soft moans,” by the second verse his “breathing begins to rasp,” then “anger erupts, which is accompanied by him hitting his chest on ‘empty promises [...] I know, I know.’”⁷⁰ In repetition beyond Shontelle’s version, he sings a “reiteration of the opening, his breathing becomes unregulated, the lines of the lyrics break, and their articulation is half-formed ... then launches into a third iteration of the chorus. The notes, shouted, invoke the disturbing as he carves into himself ... Arthur just wails and howls that brokenness while a backing chorus repeats ‘Impossible. Impossible.’ When he picks up their words, ‘Impossible’ is dark with sunken depths of despair.”⁷¹ Ward notes that it is not Arthur’s musical performance that is compelling as much as it is his expression of pain, “both visceral and immediate.”⁷²

It is the sheer affective propulsion of this “formed response” which we need note here, since it cannot simply be discarded as insignificant emotion in the quest for a Lockean development of belief. Arthur has been existentially moved through this aesthetic expression, but significantly, so have the audience. By listening to, or perhaps better, by *partaking in* his performance, “we are forced to hear an elemental passion that is prior to language. It leaves us breathing, but breathless; and not a little frightened for him.”⁷³ In resonance with our conversation on mirror neurons above, not only is imagining “profoundly affective and somatic,” but “the imagination, as a dynamic process of affects in the body’s immersion in the world, emerges in this coming-to-form that is prior to and beneath all public communication.”⁷⁴

Further, this affective propulsion is a potent force in the creation and sustenance of presiding myths, thereby shaping belief.⁷⁵ It can provide an attunement of the senses to ultimate reality in what Ward describes as “mythic sensibility.”⁷⁶ The imagination and mythic sensibility go hand in hand as we “make” sense of sensation.⁷⁷ Here, Ward turns to the composer Gerard Finzi’s *Dies Natalis* to illustrate the point. *Dies Natalis* is a five-movement cantata featuring settings of Thomas Traherne’s poetry. The theological nature of Traherne’s writing stem from

⁷⁰ Ward, 88.

⁷¹ Ward, 89.

⁷² Ward, 89.

⁷³ Ward, 89.

⁷⁴ Ward, 89–90.

⁷⁵ “The mythological digs deep into the biological where the instinctive becomes the intuited and intuitive.” Ward, 59.

⁷⁶ Ward, 156.

⁷⁷ Ward, 157.

his own experience of mythic sensibility, of “epiphanic quality.”⁷⁸ Finzi draws from Traherne in an effort to produce a composition of “emotional force that eschews the darkneses of late Beethoven and Wagner as much as it eschews the sentimentalities and coyness of the Romantic child.”⁷⁹ It is music which tests the range of any soloist and “demands superhuman breathing discipline.”⁸⁰ The result defies articulation; it is a “metamorphosis of the everyday.”⁸¹ Finzi, drawing from Traherne, and inspired by Botticelli’s *Mystic Nativity*, works with everyday sensation, and through “an orchestration of the sensed” evokes an elemental response in the hearer.⁸²

Our response to what is elemental here feebly gropes for names. ‘Sublime’ won’t help. It’s dogged down now in philosophical niceties. But Traherne’s ‘ravishment’ is suggestive – for it has the immediacy of the unimaginable; capturing that moment as it excites the imagination. Sensing (*aesthesis*) opens into aesthetics, and immediately the effect is a transformation not just of perspective but also of the way existence is experienced: gusto, ravishment, wonder, delight are the affective registers of beauty.⁸³

Propulsive sensory immediacy in service of mythic awareness here produces a new way of seeing reality, and consequently a change in disposition toward the world. In short, it shifts the imagination, which affects belief. However, it is important to note at this point that such a shift is not, by default, a shift in a positive direction, toward apprehending reality more accurately.⁸⁴ As already noted in the last chapter, the imagination can be harnessed both toward the cultivation of virtuality as well as toward the apprehension of reality. In order to distinguish the difference, we need to turn to the relationship between aesthetic existence and faith formation.

⁷⁸ Ward, 159.

⁷⁹ “The pauses, the vibrancy of the strings, the crafted mood-changes from the allegro of ‘The Rhapsody’ and the dancing energies of ‘The Rapture’ to the introspection of ‘Wonder’, enables *Dies Natalis* to avoid indulgence and strip back any possible nostalgia. What is left is the sheer beholding of creation, being created and being creative (‘my new made tongue’). Wonder sings out as pure perception of what is imperceptible: the divinely giftedness of all things straining to express itself.” Ward, 160.

⁸⁰ Ward, 160.

⁸¹ Ward, 160.

⁸² Ward, 160.

⁸³ Ward, 161.

⁸⁴ Just as mythic sensibility can lead to wonder and transcendence, it is the selfsame human faculty which produces horror. Ward cautions that we cannot discuss the formative power of the imagination without acknowledging its pathologies. Ward, 162ff.

5.2 Relating Dispositional Belief to the Formation of Faith

The human ability, then, to *see as*, the faculty of the imagination, lies at the heart of belief. This is a point we need to look at more closely in order to understand the implications for aesthetic existence. But before we do so, we need to clarify the relationship between belief and faith. This project, after all, is asking the question of the interaction between everyday aesthetic existence and faith, but up until this point we have been considering belief in general, as a universal human disposition, not specifically *religious* belief, and the consequent relationship between faith and belief.

5.2.1 *This-Worldly Existence and Faith: Projecting the invisible as (religious) belief*

Religious belief is an acknowledgement that reality contains hiddenness, that which is obscured from view, beyond the realm of left-hemisphere certainty. However, as Ward shows, hiddenness is not only an attribute of divine transcendence, but is equally immanent, this-worldly. Here he turns to phenomenology to clarify his point.⁸⁵ In his last essay, ‘The Visible and the Invisible,’ Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that he is dealing with the “‘invisible of *this* world,’ underscoring the immanence of his project.”⁸⁶ To illustrate this, Ward uses an example which Merleau-Ponty works with, but which stems from Edmund Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*: a cube. When we perceive a cube, we can actually only see two or three sides, and yet we know it to be a cube. We *believe* the other sides to be there. In order to make sense of it, we *project* all six sides of the cube. Along with the visual perception of the object, Merleau-Ponty suggests that this projection is co-present, allowing us to see a cube, and the hiddenness involved, in an act of (this-worldly) intentional transcendence (as opposed to absolute transcendence). We *see as*, seeing the two or three sides present to us as a six-sided cube, in what Husserl describes as “apperceptive transcendentalism.”⁸⁷ Merleau-Ponty develops this notion as “perceptual faith.”⁸⁸ “It is a ‘faith’ that is co-positing with perception

⁸⁵ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 226–33.

⁸⁶ Ward, 228.

⁸⁷ Ward, *Unbelievable*, 195.

⁸⁸ Ward notes the “theological or quasi-theological language” used in Merleau-Ponty’s work here, and highlights the inconsistency of Merleau-Ponty’s insistence that this does not have religious implications, a consequence of the “cultural politics” (“securing phenomenology as a secular philosophical science”) from which Merleau-Ponty is speaking. See Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 229–30.

itself.”⁸⁹ “‘Perceptual faith’ is the seeing of meaningful form (what has been referred to as Merleau-Ponty’s ‘gestalt ontology’) through intentional expectation and projection.”⁹⁰

Using the work of Jean-Louis Chrétien and Dominique Janicaud, Ward questions whether there is indeed grounds for Merleau-Ponty to make a distinction between this-worldly “intentional transcendence” and divine “absolute transcendence.”⁹¹ Does the process of “perceptual faith” not apply equally to the operation of religious faith? This is an important question for our project, since it probes the relationship of belief, as a fundamentally embodied and affective disposition, to faith. On the one hand, it would be a theological error to conflate God and this-worldly reality, to do so would simply be pantheism. Yet, as the incarnation makes clear, there is an undeniable connection between divine transcendence and embodied, this-worldly immanence. While projecting the sides of a physical cube (intentional transcendence), and projecting the divine from material reality (absolute transcendence) may not operate on the same continuum, it would be equally erroneous to suggest that there is no relationship between the two. The created world carries a necessary connection to the uncreated creator, as distinct as these two entities are. Merleau-Ponty’s “radical and unbridgeable difference” rests on the irrational assumption of “an hermetically sealed realm named the immanent.”⁹² As Ward points out, while the exercise of “perceptual faith” in relation to a cube offers a neat, immanent conclusion, an attempt to apply the same process to the human body, for example, offers “much more complex and irreducible invisibilities.”⁹³ How then do we understand the relationship between everyday hiddenness and divine hiddenness? If everyday aesthetic existence shapes our beliefs about everyday hiddenness, how does this relate to divine hiddenness? This question has direct implications for our understanding of the role of aesthetic existence in faith formation.

5.2.2 *Connecting Embodiment with Transcendence: The analogical worldview*

Ward’s answer to this question is analogy.⁹⁴ As with McGilchrist’s use of metaphor we explored in the previous chapter, by “analogy” Ward means something quite different from the modern, left-hemisphere perception of analogy as a mere figure of speech – a decorative

⁸⁹ Ward, *Unbelievable*, 196.

⁹⁰ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 229.

⁹¹ Ward, 231–33.

⁹² Ward, 233.

⁹³ Ward, 231.

⁹⁴ Although undergirding much of his work, Ward deals with the analogical worldview at length in Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2001).

addition solely for the purpose of making a propositional statement more colourful – a helpful addition, at best, but not ultimately necessary. Such an understanding of analogy would be of no help in relating the uncreated divine to this-worldly reality. Analogy, from this left-hemisphere perspective, is in service of, and therefore bound within, a closed system of signs, producing self-referential “certainty.” Rather, Ward is arguing from the theological concept of *Analogia Entis*: participation in created being offering an analogous participation in divine hiddenness.⁹⁵ In other words, for analogy to break out of modern, left-hemisphere virtuality, it needs to be *lived*. It needs an embodied and affective engagement, a *participation* in the created world, which allows for right-hemisphere, implicit and intuitive openness to the hiddenness which lies beyond.

Ward embraces the analogical as a bridging worldview.⁹⁶ However, it is a bridge that needs to be carefully understood. As McGilchrist suggested regarding metaphor, this bridging capacity is only functional to the extent that right-hemisphere, meaning-making aesthetic engagement with reality is embraced. The metaphorical, to which McGilchrist refers, and the analogical for Ward, are not merely theoretical tools, the product of abstraction. They are formative modes of engaging reality, or perhaps better articulated, *living* reality. As McGilchrist notes, co-opting embodied and affective experience into the hegemonic economy of left-hemisphere abstraction and then, for example, approaching ritual and icon as representations of explicit theory means that they lose their “transparency as metaphors.” Instead, a right hemisphere approach demands that they “are always incarnate and therefore must be left to act on us intuitively – neither just material or just immaterial, but bridges between the two realms.”⁹⁷ Both McGilchrist and Ward point here to the Eucharist as an example. McGilchrist showing that through the Reformation living metaphor, as presence, was substituted with simile, “this

⁹⁵ The concept has a long, complex and controversial history, the articulation of which is well beyond the scope of our focus. While acknowledging this (Barth called it an invention of antichrist), we will work exclusively with the concept as Ward develops it, since it offers an important contribution to understanding the role of aesthetic existence in faith formation. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I, The Doctrine of the Word of God*, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), xiii.

⁹⁶ Ward is in the company of a number of other contemporary theologians who share this view, most notably those that have come to be associated with “Radical Orthodoxy.” But as Ward himself has pointed out, many of the themes of Radical Orthodoxy, including an analogical worldview, stem from, and have resonance across broad ecumenical lines. In particular it is worth noting the contribution by theologians of *Nouvelle Théologie*. See Graham Ward, ‘Radical Orthodoxy: Its Ecumenical Vision’, *Acta Theologica*, no. 25 (21 November 2017): 29–42.

⁹⁷ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 444.

is my body' becomes 'this *signifies* (is like) my body.'"⁹⁸ Ward, likewise, contrasting Aquinas and Calvin's notions of "presence" in the Eucharist, and the consequent movement from the analogical to the univocal.⁹⁹

The analogical therefore lies at the heart of the sacraments, and further, a sacramental understanding of all of life, including everyday aesthetic existence, to which we shall shortly return. But before we can do so, we need to clarify the nature of this analogical relation. Theologically, it is founded in the "analogy that pertains between the uncreated God and creation, Christ and human beings. It is an analogy that can pertain because we are made in the image of God and therefore, as Jean-Louis Chrétien understands, '[i]t is the transcendence in us that knows the transcendent'."¹⁰⁰ The analogical worldview thus stems from the foundational theological truth that there is a necessary (and from a Christian perspective, mutually participatory) connection between a creating, active God and his creation. A connection that is both logically necessary, yet also supersedes logic in its mysterious operation.

Analogy as *ana*-logical is theologically freighted. It bears the weight of a profound cosmological significance. It is profound because creation is related to an uncreated creator, who not only inaugurates but maintains a world-order within which *analogy is an index of participation* ... It is cosmological because analogy traces an order that is dependent upon a creating God, an active God.¹⁰¹ [Italics added]

It is precisely in the mystery of this participation that the power of the analogical worldview lies. It is therefore hardly surprising that the perspective largely collapsed (at least in Protestant circles) following the rejection of the medieval enchantment of the world, amidst subsequent theological abstraction dominated by left-hemisphere attention. In the binary categorization and controversy that followed, the analogical worldview has been at times understood to locate God and creation within the same category of being. But as David Bentley Hart succinctly clarifies,

The analogy of being does not analogize God and creatures under the more general category of being, but is the analogization of being in the difference between God and creatures; it is as subversive of the notion of a general and univocal category of being as of the equally "totalizing" notion of ontological equivocality, and thus belongs to neither pole of the dialectic intrinsic to metaphysical totality: the savage equivalence

⁹⁸ McGilchrist, 319.

⁹⁹ Ward, *Cities of God*, 157ff.

¹⁰⁰ Ward, *Christ and Culture*, 17.

¹⁰¹ Ward, *Cities of God*, ix.

of univocity and equivocity, Apollo and Dionysus, pure identity and pure difference (neither of which can open a vantage upon being in its transcendence).¹⁰²

Ward affirms that an analogical understanding needs to be prefaced by emphasizing the dissimilarity of Creator and created being, lest the two become conflated, through a distorted understanding of analogy.¹⁰³ Further, that in navigating the relationship between embodied this-worldliness and divine transcendence, it is all too easy to slip into univocity, equivocity or dualism.¹⁰⁴ But are these pitfalls not the consequence of navigating this-worldliness, God and the analogical from the perspective of left-hemisphere abstraction, rather than right-hemisphere participation?

While the dangers are noted, the point remains that a necessary analogical connection exists between God and creation, which is affirmed by the incarnation, with further implications for this project. As with Bonhoeffer, Ward concurs that Christology lies at the centre of understanding reality, and consequently the relation between aesthetic existence (as a fundamentally embodied mode of existence) and reality.¹⁰⁵ Ward writes at length on the “displaced body of Christ,” his argument being that not only does the incarnation itself unite divine and embodied reality in the person of Jesus, but that this incarnational relation continues following the ascension through the “mapping” or displacement of Christ’s own body on to other bodies.¹⁰⁶

When I say all bodies are “in some sense” incarnational they are not identical repetitions of Christ’s body, but nevertheless participate in that incarnation in their own creaturely way. Embodiment therefore is analogically related to incarnation, and it is, as such, that Paul’s *soma* can refer both to (a) the historical and physical body each possesses, even Christ and (b) the transhistorical, spiritual body that is Christ’s alone but which is made of several members constituting the Church. This rich,

¹⁰² David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 241.

¹⁰³ Ward, *Unbelievable*, 191.

¹⁰⁴ Ward, *Cities of God*, 254.

¹⁰⁵ Ward, *Christ and Culture*, 5. This is because Christ is the essence of all relationality – or the “betweenness” of the world, as McGilchrist would name it – which is at the core of mature aesthetic existence, the presencing of the Other. “Christ, as second person of the Trinity, is the archetype of all relation. All relations, that is, participate in and aspire to their perfection in the Christological relation. Not only in him is all relation perfected, but the work and economy he is implicated in is relation: that is, the reconciliation of the world to God, summed up in the consummation of the covenant. Christology is concerned, then, with solidarity, mutuality and reciprocity; aspects of relationality.” Ward, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Graham Ward, ‘The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ’, in *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2001), 97–116.

analogical understanding of *corpus* is detailed in Henri de Lubac's study of medieval sacramentality, *Corpus Mysticum*.¹⁰⁷

Articulating the precise nature of this relation is not our concern here. For our task at hand the important point to note is that such a relation necessarily exists.¹⁰⁸ There are significant implications for our project: Firstly, this relation is bound up within our very bodies (as opposed to our minds, souls, spirits or any other disembodied aspect of being human one could argue for). Secondly, this embodied relation holds true across all spatial and temporal boundaries since "all places and times are sustained by God's Being," as Anselm affirms.¹⁰⁹ In other words, this embodied relation transgresses any "sacred" and "secular" boundaries we may artificially impose. Everyday aesthetic experiences are all within the realm of the "sacred" in this sense. Thirdly, this relation is not something to be grasped as an abstract concept, but one to be lived, to be participated in; this is how it is known.¹¹⁰

In sum, this-worldly hiddenness or everyday invisibilities are an accepted part of navigating material reality. We continuously project to make meaning of these invisibilities through the operation of our imagination, *seeing as* being a fundamental aspect not only of belief, but also subsequently of all human being and understanding. The way we *see as* is shaped by the embodied, affective, often preconscious attention we offer the world. In other words, everyday aesthetic existence affects belief, playing a significant role in the meaning we project into the invisibilities of this world. However, the impact of aesthetic existence is not limited to this-worldly believing. Even though divine invisibility cannot be conflated with material invisibility, a necessary relation exists between uncreated Creator and creation, a relation underscored by the incarnation. As a consequence of this relation, embodied existence and everyday aesthetic experiences not only shape this-worldly belief, but also thereby have the potential to analogically participate in transcendent reality, thus shaping religious belief, and ultimately faith formation. In other words, if embodied participation in the created world is analogically related to transcendent reality – that which is invisible – then

¹⁰⁷ Ward, *Christ and Culture*, 157.

¹⁰⁸ However, if the argument thus far holds true, then the precise nature of this relation is beyond the realm of abstract, propositional articulation in any case. Something of its living nature will inevitably be lost in such a reduction.

¹⁰⁹ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 205.

¹¹⁰ This resonates not only with McGilchrist's neuropsychological explanation of how we know reality, but also the biblical, and particularly ancient Hebrew, perspective of knowing. "Knowing God in the Hebrew sense arises from lived experience." Rudolf Bultmann observes that in the Old Testament, "knowledge is not thought of in terms of a possession of information. It is possessed only in its exercise or actualization." See Bultmann, "γινώσκω, κτλ," TDNT, 1:698.

it follows that embodied and affective practices, as experienced in everyday aesthetic existence, are not only formative from a neurological perspective, but also from a theological one. Here it should be noted that, just as McGilchrist argues regarding the perception of living metaphor, it is particularly right-hemisphere attention that allows for awareness of, and participation in this analogical relation. It is necessarily an embodied and affective mode, an aesthetic mode of engaging reality. Yet, while all belief is inherently connected to aesthetic existence, not all belief culminates in faith formation. To understand why, we need to revisit, with Ward, McGilchrist's findings on the two types of attention we offer the world, and the consequences for the relationship of aesthetic existence to faith formation, or lack thereof.

5.2.3 *Two Forms of Belief: Faith & Virtuality*¹¹¹

Historically and etymologically, the epistemological relation of belief to faith is a close one.¹¹² However, the Lockean secularization of belief uncoupled it from faith, hermeneutically situating it within a “different semantic field.”¹¹³ Belief thus, as we have seen, came to be seen as a weak form of knowledge, while faith became largely “associated with religious piety.”¹¹⁴ This same epistemological shift lies at the core of McGilchrist's concern regarding the dominance of left-hemisphere, disembodied abstraction in modernity. As we saw at the end of the last chapter, McGilchrist's work indicates that aesthetic existence does not, by default, aid an accurate understanding of reality. Potentially, it can serve left-hemisphere sensationalism, thereby endorsing and validating a virtual perception of reality. By contrast, mature aesthetic existence, as a manifestation of the RH → LH → RH progression, has the potential to break out of the self-referential system of left-hemisphere abstraction, to transcend this insularity, and thereby cultivate a healthy understanding of Reality. Ward takes this further to show the implications for belief. In the former, belief simply fuels pervading virtuality. In the latter we find a form of believing conducive to faith, which we shall briefly consider, before returning to virtuality.

¹¹¹ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 263–85.

¹¹² “*Fides* is both a mode of knowing *and* the content or object of that knowing, but the emergence of two separate terms from the twelfth century introduced new epistemological possibilities. The two separate words arose from the mix of languages. ‘Belief’ comes from the Old English term for belief or faith, *geleafa*, which in turn arose from the old Saxon word *ga-lauben*. *Ga* is a prefix intensifying the verb *lauben* meaning to desire or to love. So *ga-lauben* was to greatly desire or esteem. It was not necessarily associated with God or Christian faith. *Geleafa* was a vernacular term; *fides* was used only by those speaking Latin.” Ward, 248.

¹¹³ Ward, 253.

¹¹⁴ Ward, 250.

5.2.3.1 Faith: A commitment to relational belief

Essentially, this form of belief is an acknowledgement of reality as a mode of belonging, constituting more than the atomised individual. It is embedded in right-hemisphere relationality. It is “a believing *in* – there is an object, a relation, and an active commitment.”¹¹⁵ “Faith is a response to that which constitutes a relation with; response and engagement enable participation in an economy that is shared.”¹¹⁶ Ward highlights three points which clarify both the distinctiveness of faith and belief, but also how they work together. Firstly, “religious faith is a specific commitment to belief, to the invisible that pertains to and subtends the visible.”¹¹⁷ By acknowledging the fundamental role belief plays in understanding reality (both visible and invisible), faith is simply an acknowledgement of the way things are: we always *see as*, all knowledge being built on the foundation of belief.

Consequently and secondly, faith is not the embrace a specific type of belief – *religious* belief; it is a commitment to the “primordial disposition to believe. It is not a different type of believing. It is the same disposition framed by and exercised within specific religious practices.”¹¹⁸ Here we need to point out two consequences for this project. The first is that faith is a manifestation of the RH → LH → RH progression. While faith acknowledges and values the aesthetic as it works on our beliefs through embodied, implicit and preconscious means (right hemisphere), it also requires explicit articulation (left hemisphere) and a return to embodied practice (right hemisphere) in order to be communicated. “Religious faith, Christian or otherwise, is a practice of belief ... Belief could not be articulated, would have no content, and therefore remain highly amorphous, if it were not communicated through gestures, images, concepts, narratives etc.: in a word ‘discourse’.”¹¹⁹ Our definition of “religious practices” is highly significant for the relationship between everyday aesthetic existence, faith formation and ethical action. We will return to this in the next chapter as we discuss aesthetic existence in relation to liturgy. Here we simply need note the integral connection between faith and practice. Aesthetic practices provide both the primal orientation of faith (through the process of belief formation) as well as expressing the outworking of faith, which again provides faith orientation in a circular (but not closed, and not necessarily

¹¹⁵ Ward, 264.

¹¹⁶ Ward, *Christ and Culture*, 8.

¹¹⁷ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 264.

¹¹⁸ Ward, 265.

¹¹⁹ Ward, 124.

linear) fashion. “Praxis is both the acting that issues from a believing and the acting that issues in coming to believe.”¹²⁰

Thirdly, “if believing is constitutive of knowing *as* and seeing *as*, then religious believing is a mode of perception.”¹²¹ Just as with all *seeing as*, there is interpretation involved. Faith is then the acknowledgement that Reality lies beyond the realm of certainty. This does not mean that faith is an endorsement of a postmodern epistemological vacuum. “Faith is not ... some intellectual suicide leaping into the void, but an intellectual and affective, somatic engagement with the invisible in the visible.”¹²² As both a relational commitment to the Other, and the concomitant mystery which this entails, “religious believing is a way of responding to the world that recognizes and valorizes the invisible operative within what is materially visible of that world.”¹²³ But comprehending this invisibility demands interpretation. Religious believing, as a mode of perception, demands a “reading” of the world, which functions on both a conscious and unconscious level. It is a “reading” that is less about comprehensive and systematic control of abstract epistemology, and more to do with a relational orientation, a commitment to believing *in*, fuelled by implicit and intuitive perception of the visible. It is a “reading” which is inextricably bound up within aesthetic experience, to which we shall shortly return.

5.2.3.2 Virtuality: “Belief” fuelled by aesthetic sensationalism

We have already discussed the problem of virtuality, through the work of McGilchrist, as the manifestation of left-hemisphere hegemony of aesthetic existence in the form of sensationalism. We have also seen how this applies to belief, through the work of Ward – a contemporary recovery of the visceral and aesthetic nature of belief, but disconnected from meaning, devoid of any connection to reality. In contrast to faith, virtuality is the condition of Lockean belief once the illusion of certainty has been destroyed, as is the case in postmodern epistemology. Rather than faith as relational commitment to belief *in*, it is an artefact of Lockean belief *that*, adrift amidst simulacra. It “lacks an object, relation, or commitment. It is a passive residual state when the gods have fled and in their place is a profound distrust in what one is told to be certain.”¹²⁴ The embodied and affective nature of belief is co-opted in

¹²⁰ Ward, 276.

¹²¹ Ward, 265.

¹²² Ward, 226.

¹²³ Ward, 266.

¹²⁴ Ward, 264.

service of a visceral commitment to a “brand.” “Nominalism becomes rampant as signs and logos, image and icon are increasingly detached from material entities and take on an independent life.”¹²⁵ The loss of a necessary connection to the real creates a pervading confusion about what to believe, amidst the plethora of sensationalist, aesthetic stimuli bombarding our imagination. It is a “mediatization of the real” creating a confusion around

what to believe – in Christ, the saviour of the world, or the anti-ageing properties of a new cosmetic mousse – because although believing is an embodied cognitive process, an anthropological *a priori*, in cultures that prize high levels of self-consciousness and therefore awareness of embodied cognitive processes, believing can be manufactured, consciously so. Advertising is only one of the blatant forms of making a belief believable. Ours is an age of galloping dematerialization. Virtual realities proliferate. They are not just on our desktops, our TV screens, our movie DVDs, and our theme-parks, demanding our interactive involvement. They populate our high streets where company logos (Starbucks, Nike, Virgin, etc.) float free of the goods they brand.¹²⁶

Belief is hijacked by a commoditised world, subject to the market forces of consumerism. In a powerful distortion of Lockean belief as a weak form of knowledge, our world is saturated by these “aestheticized knowledges,” all working on our imaginations; sensory rhetoric persuading our “belief.”¹²⁷

Here, in the context of faith, and with particular relevance to the project at hand, we can note two particular implications: Firstly, this distinction between faith and virtuality as two forms of belief does *not* mirror the practice of belief in “sacred” versus “secular” environments. In other words, “religious” belief, or at least that which is perceived as religious belief, is not immune to a nominalist worldview, and the consequent commodification of belief amidst virtuality. In fact, quite the reverse holds true. It is precisely in religious contexts, and distorted manifestations of Christendom, where this virtuality can be most potent, since it operates in subtle, implicit and preconscious means under the guise of religion, albeit an

¹²⁵ While offering a detailed account of the rise of nominalism, Ward suggests that the main point here is not plotting the rise and history of the concept (as has become popular recently), but the implications it has for our understanding of reality. Ward shows that it has become “intellectually fashionable to examine the genealogy of this nominalism as a causal force in a narrative of the decline in Christian orthodoxy,” and that, “Frequently, critics of these narratives of decline, this eclipse of sacramental realism where signs participate in their materialities they signify and God’s communicative relations, argue that they are exercises in nostalgia; haunted by a theological desire to return to and re-establish the pre-Ockhamite ontology upon the basis of which theological knowledge and ethics can once more flourish.” But through the work of De Certeau, Ward shows that the origin of this decline stems right back to the ascension, to the loss of the “historical body of Jesus,” and the subsequent *mediated* “dissemination of the *Logos*.” Ward, 267.

¹²⁶ Ward, 281.

¹²⁷ Ward, 282.

artificial, self-serving distortion of it. If “religious” practice becomes less about acknowledging the Other, and more about the creation of a left-hemisphere, self-referential system of signs, which produces certainty – a virtual reality – then the “religious other,” or the god made in one’s own image, becomes as much a commodity, a simulacrum floating free from reality as the god, or brand of Nike. The question then follows as to whether aesthetic experience in this “religious” context (manifest as “liturgy,” for example), should be understood as virtual sensationalism rather than an expression of faith. Secondly, and consequent to this, we need to probe the inverse: if virtuality is not by default excluded from institutional religion, faith too, can, and will be both formed and expressed outside the walls of a church and the overt “sacred” practices contained therein. In short, everyday aesthetic existence can serve either virtuality or faith formation.

5.3 Implications: Everyday Aesthetic Existence as Discipleship

“Believing matters; right believing matters even more. And both the access to and the formation of that right believing for Christians is discipleship.”¹²⁸ It is this “access to” and “formation of” belief which we have been exploring in an effort to clarify the role of everyday aesthetic existence in discipleship. We have found that at the heart of this is the imagination, the human ability to *see as*, which is impacted by embodied and affective experience through implicit and intuitive means.

5.3.1 *Imagination: the bridge between aesthetic existence and faith*

The world as we make sense of it, the way we *see as*, is imaginatively mediated to us through sensory engagement with reality.¹²⁹ Arguably then, the aesthetic is the most potent force in this formation, working on our imaginations consciously and unconsciously, implicitly and explicitly.¹³⁰ “We exist ... individually and collectively within streams of presentations that are somatic as well as psychic and so also inseparable from affects, intentions, drives and desires. Individually and collectively we create and transform our worlds out of the operations of this imaginary.”¹³¹

¹²⁸ Ward, 284.

¹²⁹ For a compelling and thorough treatment of the visceral power of the imagination in human formation, see Ward, *Unimaginable*.

¹³⁰ Ward, 114.

¹³¹ Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 144. Ward draws on the work of Benedict Anderson, Cornelius Castoriades, Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor, among others, to show that the imagination is

Not only is the imagination fundamentally connected to the sensory, but it is integral to belief, as we have seen. “Imagination is belief in action, projecting and anticipating, receiving and responding.”¹³² Faith cultivates the imagination such that a relational commitment to the Other is nurtured through embodied and affective practices. This is at times consciously intentional, but the intentionality carried within embodied and affective experience does not need to be consciously processed to be effective, as we have seen. Herein lies the power of the imagination, since it provides a bridge between affect and cognition, the visible and invisible, performing a crucial role in formation and sanctification, to the extent that it provides a *seeing* and concomitant *participation* in Christological reality.¹³³

In other words, there is a symbiotic, multidirectional relationship between aesthetic existence, the imagination and faith formation. We noted earlier that aesthetic practices are both the outworking of faith (or virtuality) as well as orienting influences in the formation of faith (or virtuality). Another way to put this would be to say that the way we *see as*, individually and collectively, is both shaped by our aesthetic experience and shapes our aesthetic engagement with the world. This is what Kierkegaard described as the “poeticising” nature of mature aesthetic existence.

5.3.2 *Poiesis as Faithful (Ethical) Practice*

The paradigmatic power of the imagination points not only to the significance of poetic living in faith formation, but also to its manifestation as ethical action. Drawing on the work of Ricoeur, Ward shows the inherent connection between the imagination and *poiesis*.¹³⁴ Since social imaginaries are constructions, having no ontological basis in and of themselves, they “are ways of *making* sense, they are forms of *poiesis*.”¹³⁵ The implications of this are profound, as Ward shows. Admittedly, aesthetic existence as mere sensationalism is effectively only “formative” in the generation of virtuality (the work of “fancy”, in Coleridge’s taxonomy of the imagination). However, poetic living, as a mature form of aesthetic existence, not only plays a significant role in faith formation, but consequently has

foundational not only to individual formation but to common societal understanding and practices through a social imaginary, a point we will return to in the next chapter. Ward, 119ff. Ward, *Unimaginable*, 153ff.

¹³² Ward, *Unbelievable*, 150.

¹³³ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 141.

¹³⁴ Admittedly, *poiesis* is a theologically loaded term used in quite diverse ways. Here we employ it as Ward expounds it in what follows.

¹³⁵ Ward, *Christ and Culture*, 129–30.

an ethical *telos*. This is because Ward is here arguing for a connection between *poiesis* and *praxis*, thereby acknowledging the role of the imagination in personal and cultural formation and transformation.¹³⁶ It is helpful to quote Ward at length to clarify his argument, where he returns to

Aristotle's understanding of *poiesis*, for *poiesis* is the name he gives to "making" as in "creating." The noun relates to the verb *poieo* – to produce, perform, execute, compose or, more generally, be active. *Poiesis* is an historically specific operation concerned with creative action. As such, it would constitute one aspect of a theory of action – cultural and moral action – and in this way it is associated with *praxis*, from the Greek *prasso*, meaning to act, manage, do or accomplish. For Aristotle there appears to have been a distinction between a specific form of making (*poiesis*) and the more general notion of doing and being involved in an activity (*praxis* or *pragma*). *Praxis* would be associated with ethics, politics, and the formation of character. But the distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis* cannot hold strictly; not if we accept what I have outlined about the psychobiology of believing and desiring. So I wish to take *poiesis* in a *complex sense that would not isolate aesthetic production from political and ethical activity*.¹³⁷ [Italics added]

It is mature everyday aesthetic existence, as *poiesis*, which draws one outside of the virtuality of the atomised individual, into relationship with the Other, thereby cultivating a participation in reality and consequent ethical action. It is poetic faith, as Coleridge notes, as "transcendence that ... has both theological and ethical significance; we will be shaken from our 'selfish solitude'. The constitution of this poetic faith is transformative. Belief is not only given expression, it is created."¹³⁸

As we have previously noted, the ability of the arts to draw us outside of ourselves, to transcend our own virtual realities and point towards the divine, are commonly noted contributions to faith formation within the field of theological aesthetics. But our focus here is *everyday* aesthetic existence. This includes the profound sensory encounters with the Other through awe inspiring music, dance or visual art, for example, but a particular focus here is also the aesthetic (as we have broadly defined it) experiences of play, friendship, and daily engagement with the popular arts, among others. While the formative nature of the latter may be less explicit, as we have already seen, the implicit is also operative as *poiesis*, *making* sense, building belief. An experience of playing with one's children, or sharing a walk with a friend, for example, may not be explicitly or consciously an experience of "absolute transcendence," but these experiences of "everyday transcendence" nevertheless have the

¹³⁶ Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*, 141.

¹³⁷ Ward, *Unbelievable*, 146; Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*, 6–8.

¹³⁸ Ward, *Unbelievable*, 136.

potential to draw us out of ourselves and into relation with the other, *making* sense of the world implicitly and intuitively, through our embodied participation in this-worldly reality. These everyday moments of aesthetic existence are then both productive in the formation of belief, but also themselves the very outworking of that belief.

5.3.3 *Mature Aesthetic Existence as Lived: Sacramental participation*

The organic, non-linear, “feedback-and-feedforward-looping” nature of this belief formation and expression speaks to a key point in understanding the role of aesthetic existence in discipleship. It is formation through *living*, through everyday aesthetic *existence*. It is precisely in this embodied, analogical *participation* in this-worldly reality that faith formation occurs. It is not primarily the product of an abstract, linear process dominated by ratiocination.¹³⁹ If Bonhoeffer helped us to appreciate the Christological validity of celebrating aesthetic existence, Ward makes it clear that the *living* of aesthetic existence is not only a right response theologically, it is also a significant component of the formation of faith. In other words, as we have noted, the embrace of aesthetic existence is not only the consequence *of* faith, it is formative *for* faith. Mature aesthetic existence as *poiesis* is the creation not only of art, play, friendship, etc., but of a world, an embodied way of being *in* the world, of *seeing* the world, which celebrates and analogically participates in Christological reality. Such existence is a mode of discipleship, a Christological *mimesis*, which sacramentally participates in the divine through embodied reality.

One can see the form of God not only in the works of human beings – the music of Mozart, the paintings of Christ-clowns by Rouault – but in the style of the lives of those who have given themselves over to imitating him. The life of Elizabeth of Dijon ‘became a sacrament’ ... The track of her becoming, her vocation, announces a doctrine, a teaching, carved out in, through and upon her body.¹⁴⁰

Ward draws attention to the “complex character of *mimesis*” through the work of Aristotle, for whom art “does not strictly mirror what is but imitates what should be or will be,” therefore mediating “between presentation, representation and absence.”¹⁴¹ By extension then, we could say that aesthetic existence has the potential to engage one in a way of being and

¹³⁹ Again, this is not to deny the crucial role that abstract theorisation plays in faith formation, as in systematic theology for example. But as Ward shows, such abstraction needs to always occur within the context of embodied existence, as an “embedded” and “engaged” theology, which is at the heart of *How the Light Gets In*.

¹⁴⁰ Ward, *Christ and Culture*, 203.

¹⁴¹ Ward, 32–33.

relating that offers a window onto the way things should be, thereby reframing reality and forming faith.

5.3.4 *Discerning Mature Aesthetic Existence: Embodied attunement*

The vital question, which we have been following as a thread throughout this project thus far, is how we distinguish between “mature” aesthetic existence (forming faith) and sensationalist aesthetic existence (forming virtuality). Ward contributes to this through his description of discernment and its connection to an embodied “reading” of the world. Ward points out that the process of coming to believe is itself a process of discernment, as the verb *credo* historically would have been understood (the way in which Anselm used it, for example, as in *credo ut intelligam*).¹⁴² This discernment process of coming to believe takes place amidst what Charles Taylor describes as “the ‘immanent frame’, [which is] ‘the sensed context in which we develop our beliefs.’”¹⁴³ “For beliefs are (and have) lived conditions for the possibility or impossibility of certain imaginative experiences of the world. ‘[A]ll beliefs are held within a context or framework of the taken-for-granted.’”¹⁴⁴

Because this framework operates in the preconscious world of the taken-for-granted, carefully evaluating one’s belief solely through logical analysis is not sufficient for discerning right belief. Rather, for Ward, discernment is a matter of “reading,” specifically learning how to “read well.”¹⁴⁵ All creatures having consciousness (from plants to human beings) must “read” their environment, reading the “signs, signals and communicative relations” that surround them and respond, or adapt appropriately in order to live.¹⁴⁶ This reading is “not simply a matter of consciousness; the reading goes on at emotional and somatic levels not lit by consciousness.”¹⁴⁷ Embodied reading as discerning is then a fundamental aspect of being human, a prerequisite for mental and physical well-being. Discernment “is an aspect of what neuroscientists call the ‘cognitive imperative’: the demand made by the brain to make order, to search for causes, and to question.”¹⁴⁸ It is the “seeking” in Anselm’s “faith seeking

¹⁴² Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 242.

¹⁴³ Ward, 124.

¹⁴⁴ Ward, 134.

¹⁴⁵ Ward, 237.

¹⁴⁶ Ward, 237.

¹⁴⁷ Ward, 237.

¹⁴⁸ Ward, 237.

understanding.”¹⁴⁹ In other words, discernment is a process inextricably bound up within embodied living. The truth being

learned as it is lived. That is the beating pulse of Christian discipleship. As it is learned so there must be a deepening of discernment, a continual reading of the world in the light of Christ and by the breath of the Spirit. Prayer is that activity whereby we bring the world to Christ and Christ to the world ... Theology as prayer is an act of faith ... But this act of faith cannot be totally divorced from other human acts because as faith seeks understanding it must necessarily engage all those human faculties which enable any understanding: sensory perception, emotional experience, imagination, intuition, will, memory, reasoning etc. Illumination does not by-pass the nature of being human; it perfects it.¹⁵⁰

Ward explores this relationship of prayer to aesthetic existence in an article comparing radical embodiment in sport and the embrace of “radical incarnation.”¹⁵¹ He describes an athlete’s experience of entering “the zone,” a place of deeply attuned embodiment, “pushing beyond left hemisphere knowledge to right hemisphere instinct,” the consequence not primarily of determination or willpower but disciplined practice.¹⁵² “One enters one’s body more deeply; eased into it such that there is a new level of relaxation and composure.”¹⁵³ It is an experience often described as transcendence.¹⁵⁴ Ward relates this radical embodiment of the sports person or dancer to what he calls “radical incarnation – that immersion into the very depths of the material and the particular, in Christ, in order to ‘hear’, ‘recognise’ (these are both metaphors, you understand) the groaning of all creation for its creator ...”¹⁵⁵ This “radical incarnation” results in a perception of reality which is not merely known, it is lived.

The consequence is that Ward is arguing here that the aesthetic category of “‘fittingness’ or ‘attunement’ of the body is a possible entry into a deeper form of the ethical, which [he calls] ‘ethical life.’”¹⁵⁶ Fundamentally this is so, because as an incarnational expression of faith, such prayerful “attunement” exposes Christological reality for what it is – our participation

¹⁴⁹ Ward, 237.

¹⁵⁰ Ward, 213.

¹⁵¹ Graham Ward, ‘A Question of Sport and Incarnational Theology’, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 25, no. 1 (2012): 49–64.

¹⁵² Ward, 55.

¹⁵³ Ward, 56.

¹⁵⁴ Ward, 56. For a discussion on how an encounter with beauty can parallel this transcendent entry into the “zone,” see Ward, *Unimaginable*, 120.

¹⁵⁵ Ward, ‘A Question of Sport and Incarnational Theology’, 52.

¹⁵⁶ Ward, 51.

and “the immersion of the world in Christ.”¹⁵⁷ “Prayer is not the means of transcending the material but of entering the materiality of our condition more profoundly.”¹⁵⁸

Discerning mature aesthetic existence then, is a matter of embodied attunement to this-worldly, analogical life in Christ. “Attunement is both the source and goal of discipleship.”¹⁵⁹ Reading our environments is not merely a process of ratiocination, but includes intuitively discerning aesthetic “fittingness.”¹⁶⁰ Discerning mature aesthetic existence from sensationalist aesthetic existence cannot be solely a conscious process. It is a prayerful engagement, which incorporates the whole being, in an intuitive concern for fittingness, a resonance, or in Bonhoeffer’s terms, a harmonic polyphony of Christological reality.

5.3.5 *Liturgical Aesthetic Existence: Uniting aesthetics, ethics and faith*

Attuned aesthetic existence, as a celebration of Christological reality, is therefore liturgical, “where liturgy is not just something that goes on in church, but a way of being church beyond buildings, institutions, lectionaries, and orders of service.”¹⁶¹ In this sense, there is no line to be drawn between liturgy and living.¹⁶² However, poetic living, as a form of liturgy for the Christian, is not only an expression of faith. It is also formative *for* faith, as we have seen. In other words, poetic living is a form of *poiesis*, not only *making* films, music, fine art, play, etc., but thereby *making* sense of the world, forming belief.¹⁶³ Further again, this *poiesis*, as living, cannot but have an ethical *telos*. Believing, as a relational disposition, participating in reality, is ethically oriented.¹⁶⁴ If in the living, in the making, the personal imagination and the social imaginary are being shaped and formed, it will have cultural and material effects; it will change the way we act. It is this integration of aesthetic, ethical and religious life which we

¹⁵⁷ Ward, 63.

¹⁵⁸ Ward, 61.

¹⁵⁹ Ward, 63.

¹⁶⁰ Fittingness is a term with rich Christian heritage, one that Anselm uses, “in his work *Cur Deus Homo* ... to describe God’s suitable accommodation to the human and created order. It is a word that announces a theological aesthetics associated with the analogical,” which we will explore further in the next chapter. Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 235.

¹⁶¹ Ward, 120.

¹⁶² Ward, 122. As we shall see in the next chapter, James K. A. Smith extends the understanding of liturgy even further, arguing that “cultural liturgies” capture our imagination and subsequently shape our desire. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*.

¹⁶³ In his theological work, Ward himself often extends “‘poetry’ into *poiesis* ... frequently draw[ing] upon literature, art, architecture, film, and song ... as forms of the proclamation of the communication of the truth in God, as forms of prayer.” Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 193.

¹⁶⁴ Ward, *Unbelievable*, 148.

need to probe further in the next chapter, our understanding of everyday aesthetic existence as liturgy being central to this exploration.

CHAPTER 6: WOLTERSTORFF & THE LITURGICAL ORIENTATION OF MATURE AESTHETIC EXISTENCE

Introduction

Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer introduced us to the notion of *mature* aesthetic existence as a valid expression of being Christian based on an incarnational embrace of this-worldly reality. Firstly, as we saw through Bonhoeffer's call for a recovery of aesthetic existence in the life of the church, this embrace is theologically necessary. It is a polyphonous celebration of discipleship in penultimate reality, a "following after" Christ incarnate. Rightly oriented then, mature aesthetic existence is an act of worship (a notion we will further explore in this chapter), a right response to *being* Christian. Further, secondly and significantly, such an embrace of aesthetic existence is also formative, playing a role in *becoming* Christian. Kierkegaard introduced this view to us through his endorsement of "poetic living," co-creating with Christ in the poeticizing act of self-formation. We built on this through the work of Graham Ward, which suggests that religious belief itself, and consequently faith formation, is inextricably bound up with affective and embodied experience in the world. Bonhoeffer's musical metaphors provide an illuminating example of this, his lived experience of musical sensory immediacy playing a constitutive role in his theology. Aesthetic existence is, therefore, not only fundamental to being human as McGilchrist showed, but plays a significant role in both *being* and *becoming* Christian.

In this chapter we will be exploring the relationship between mature aesthetic existence and ethics, as action in the world. We have already begun to explore this relationship, particularly through the work of Graham Ward. Ward's description of "ethical life" demands a "radical incarnation," an "attunement" of the body embedded in living, in distinction from the imposition of "moral codes, implicit or explicit."¹ In other words, Ward's description of discipleship as incarnational living is, by definition, fundamentally embodied and thus inextricably tied to both aesthetic existence and ethical action. Rather than ethics then being a separate category of human existence, distinct from aesthetics and faith, all three aspects of being human cohere in a holistic understanding of being Christian, one being inseparable from the others.

¹ Ward, 'A Question of Sport and Incarnational Theology', 51.

As we saw at the end of the last chapter, it is particularly in understanding mature aesthetic existence as liturgical that connections between aesthetics, faith and ethics are clarified. Considering aesthetic existence through the lens of liturgy offers two important contributions. Firstly, it elucidates the nature of *mature* aesthetic existence as a fitting expression of Christian living, distinguishing it from potentially deforming modes of aesthetic existence. If, as Ward posits, there is no line to be drawn between liturgy and Christian living (liturgy thus not limited to activity within the walls of a church), then *a liturgical understanding of daily aesthetic engagement becomes a means of ethical discernment*, akin to Bonhoeffer's polyphonic living. The litmus question for right Christian living, whether understood religiously, ethically or aesthetically, is thus fundamentally relational. Mature aesthetic existence has a liturgical orientation, with holistic implications for the direction of desire, service and worship.

Secondly, understanding mature aesthetic existence as everyday liturgy underscores the observation that aesthetic engagement is inextricably bound up with faith formation and ethical action. As noted through Ward's work, the aesthetic category of *poiesis* is not separate and distinct from the ethical category of *praxis*. Rather, a complex, organic and two-way relationship exists between the two. On the one hand, "praxis is both the acting that issues from a believing and the acting that issues in coming to believe."² On the other, as we have seen, *poiesis*, as aesthetic engagement in the world (*making* music, dance, a meal, play, etc.), also, at the same time, plays a role in *making* sense of the world, forming belief. Aesthetic engagement in the world is best understood then as both *praxis* and *poiesis*. In other words, aesthetic practices contribute not only to faith formation, but also to the formation of ethical categories and ultimate action. At the heart of this chapter is the assertion that *aesthetic practices have ethical consequences*. Here, a liturgical understanding of aesthetic existence clarifies this relationship, particularly as we will employ it, by framing it within the relational and ethical context of social practices.³

² Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 276.

³ Although not explicitly engaged, three classic theoretical models undergird this chapter. Firstly, *practice theory*, as delineated by the likes of Pierre Bourdieu, which highlights the formative role of practice, accentuated as *habitus* and the shaping of culture by practice. Secondly, the related theory of *social practice*, as developed by Alasdair MacIntyre, which highlights the normative nature of "socially established cooperative human activity" toward a specific telos. And finally, the interrelated conceptualisation of a *social imaginary*, described by Charles Taylor as, "the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings," which is "not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories, and legends ... making

We will begin by clarifying Ward's articulation of the Christian act as liturgy before turning to the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff. Wolterstorff is particularly well suited to this enquiry because of his theological and philosophical work on liturgy and aesthetics, both of which we will explore through his articulation of social practice. Initially, we will treat these parallel aspects of his work independently. First, we will consider Wolterstorff's understanding of liturgy as embedded in a socially constructed "script." Next, we will turn to his argument for understanding aesthetics too, in the context of social practice, thereby rejecting the modern narrative of aesthetics as disinterested contemplation. Finally, we will bring both these elements together, showing that a liturgical approach to aesthetic existence foregrounds not only its formative contribution, but also the inseparable relationship between aesthetic experience, faith formation and ethical action, which collectively function as a *fitting* expression of *shalom*.

6.1 Christian Action as Liturgy

Building on the work of Ward, the concept of "liturgy," with which we are working in this chapter, is not limited to that which takes place within ecclesial "buildings, institutions, lectionaries, and orders of service."⁴ Rather, Ward posits understanding liturgy as a way of being; it marks the entire gamut of Christian living. Simply, Christian action is liturgical.⁵ We shall delineate a definition of liturgy shortly, through the analysis of Wolterstorff, but before we do so, it will be helpful to outline the essence of Ward's argument for understanding Christian action as liturgy.

Ward turns to Aristotle's use of *leitourgia* (from which we derive "liturgy") as a helpful starting point. Aristotle engages the term in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, wherein he considers the

possible common practices." Collectively, and supported by the likes of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (antepredicative knowing as processed in the body), these theories point toward the formative nature of embodied practice, particularly in relationship to the imagination, a point comprehensively argued in James Smith's "Cultural Liturgies" project. While this chapter will at times stretch the strict boundaries of these models, they offer the foundation for the trajectory of the argument. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 187; Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1976). Smith's "Cultural Liturgies" project: James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the King; Imagining the Kingdom; Awaiting the King*, Cultural Liturgies, v. 1-3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009; 2013; 2017).

⁴ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 120.

⁵ Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 181–220.

ethics of an action (*praxis*). Significantly, here ethics is not divorced from aesthetics, the Greek “*to kalon*” being equally “the Good” and “the Beautiful.”⁶ In this context, and in keeping with the etymology of the term (*litos ergos* literally being the “work of the people,” or “public service”), Aristotle’s use of *leitourgia* is employed in both a narrow sense as “a technical political term for a service rendered to the city or state,” but also more broadly and “nontechnically to refer to any act of service.”⁷ Aristotle’s use of *leitourgia* points then to two significant observations regarding this early use of the term. Firstly, a close relationship exists between action and liturgical practice. Secondly, and consequently, describing *leitourgia* as *to kalon* brings together both ethics and aesthetics in the liturgical act.

Understood through this lens, Christian liturgy, as an act of service, *relationally* orients action, since it is a proclamation of that to which one is committed. Liturgy, so construed, is the embodied and active extension of belief, as a relational disposition, the expression of a commitment of trust.⁸ In this sense, liturgy as a Christian act of service cannot be confined within the walls of a church, but needs to be understood within the relational context of being Christian, *being* in Christ. The Christian act can thus only be understood in light of the church being the body of Christ.⁹ Action cannot be construed outside of this participatory relational ontology, which

is summed up in Christ’s words to his disciples: “he dwells in me, and I in him” (John 6:56 KJV). This statement can be taken as axiomatic for an account of a Christian act. In this act, therefore, we are not dealing with an autonomous subject who, in full knowledge of the facts of a situation, acts consciously in and for himself or herself. In the conception of a Christian *praxis*, there is no room for such a modern notion of self-sufficiency ... In fact, what characterizes this Christian agent is a surrender, a

⁶ Ward, 182.

⁷ Ward, 183.

⁸ The Catholic catechism describes liturgy as God’s people participating in the *work* of God. It is therefore fundamentally active. If, “to swim is a verb [and] swimmer is the noun [then] liturgy is a verb, Church (plural) or Christian (singular) is the noun.” Liturgy is thus simply the active life of the Christian, Aidan Kavanagh describing liturgy as “doing the world as the world was meant to be done.” David W. Fagerberg, ‘Liturgical Theology’, in *T&T Clark Companion to Liturgy*, ed. Alcuin Reid (London: T&T Clark, 2015), 9,10,15.

⁹ Wolterstorff notes that it is specifically through the “enactments of liturgy” that Alexander Schmemmann sees liturgy “actualizing” the church. Importantly, Schmemmann highlights the Christological nature of this actualisation, which is at the core not only of this chapter, but this entire project, describing “worship as the life of the church, the *public act* which eternally actualizes the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ.” [Italics added] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 4; Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1966), 12.

sacrifice, in which he or she is bound by what Augustine calls a “*vinculum caritatis*” [bond of love].¹⁰

Christian action then is not merely the *consequence* of this relational orientation; discipleship is “not simply following the example of Christ; it is formation *within* Christ, so that we become Christlike. And the context of this formation is the church in all its concrete locatedness and eschatological significance.”¹¹ [Italics added] This formation takes place in the concrete everyday; all action, including aesthetic engagement, indicative of a relational commitment. “Interrelationality,” therefore, is fundamental to the becoming of the Christian self, actions an expression of this. “The Christian embodied agent always lives beyond himself or herself in and toward other bodies (the eucharistic body, the ecclesial body, social bodies of various kinds, the civic body, and the body of Christ).”¹² In this sense, action should not be seen, first and foremost, through the lens of utility, but through the relational lens of participation. Rather than the I-It modern transaction of the self with material existence (leading to aestheticism), an I-Thou orientation to embodied existence celebrates mature aesthetic existence as integral to discipleship. Here, Ward reminds us of Augustine’s distinction between “use” and “enjoyment” and his argument that enjoyment has “a higher theological purpose: to enjoy a thing is to participate in the worship of God. God must be enjoyed; he cannot be used.”¹³ Ward proposes that a liturgical understanding of Christian action is thus not oriented by utility, but by enjoyment of “the goodness, beauty, justice and truth of God,” thereby uniting faith, ethics and aesthetics.¹⁴

In other words, rather than create categories of action such as “teaching, commanding, obeying, entertaining,” or aesthetic enjoyment for that matter, “because all Christian action participates in the economy of love, all action becomes liturgical.”¹⁵ All Christian action, oriented by love of God is doxological; it is a proclamation of worship and ultimate allegiance.¹⁶ Resonating with Alexander Schmemmann’s liturgical approach to a sacramental understanding of all of life, Ward suggests that the aesthetic and ethical natures of the

¹⁰ Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, 184.

¹¹ Ward, 184.

¹² Ward, 190.

¹³ Ward, 195.

¹⁴ Ward, 195.

¹⁵ Ward, 190.

¹⁶ Ward, 190. Kevin Vanhoozer affirms that “Doxology [is] much more than a moment in a service of worship; it is, or should be, the Christian’s everyday mode of being-in-time.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ‘Praising in Song: Beauty and the Arts’, in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 118.

Christian act cohere, and are inseparable, when located in the common *telos* of life in Christ.¹⁷ “The object/objective of the Christian act is to articulate what is just, good, beautiful, and true in, with, and beyond whatever is the grammatical object on which the agent works. In such a laboring, the agent is priestly, the act liturgical, and the object sacramental because each participates in the unfolding of God’s grace.”¹⁸

The liturgical nature of the Christian act, thus understood, elucidates the inextricable connection between aesthetic existence and ethical action to which we have thus far been alluding. Firstly, mature aesthetic existence is a right response, a doxological response to being in Christ. To use an aesthetic category, there is a fittingness to such a response.¹⁹ However, as is illustrated through the Greek term, *to kalon*, such fittingness is as much ethical as it is aesthetic. Ethical action is equally a fitting response, and Ward here suggests that the modern notion of severing the two categories points to a failure to understand the relational and participatory nature of discipleship, the liturgical nature of *all* Christian living.

Secondly, a liturgical understanding clarifies that in their mutual coherence, aesthetic existence and ethical action are not only right responses to faith, they are also formative for faith. It is in the midst of Christian action, as liturgy, that faith is formed. The implication here is that the liturgical nature of Christian actions should be understood as practices, along with the social, historical and cultural contexts which inform them. In sum, Christian action as liturgy is not only a fitting doxological expression of discipleship, but can operate as formative practice, thereby itself playing a role in becoming Christian. In order to investigate this claim, further clarifying the relationship between Christian action as liturgy and formative practice, along with the implications for aesthetic existence as discipleship, we turn to the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff.

6.2 Liturgical Existence as Practice

While bringing Ward into dialogue with Wolterstorff may not be an obvious connection to make, since they are operating from distinctly different theological traditions, once again, the

¹⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982).

This liturgical approach to all of life has a rich history in the tradition, going right back to the Church Fathers, as shown by Balthasar’s treatment of Maximus the Confessor, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, 195.

¹⁹ We will explore the concept of fittingness more closely later in this chapter.

focus is neither the work of Ward nor Wolterstorff but the question at hand.²⁰ As such, it is particularly fruitful to engage Wolterstorff at this point, precisely because he approaches liturgy and aesthetics from a different perspective. While he is not working from a sacramental ontology in the sense that Ward is, his philosophical analysis of the mechanics of both liturgy and aesthetics illuminates the connection between liturgical aesthetic existence and praxis.²¹

We also need to briefly acknowledge the foundation from which Wolterstorff is working; his epistemological grounding of belief in “entitlement” (as opposed to rationality) fundamentally

²⁰ The work of both Ward and Wolterstorff is so wide-ranging and interdisciplinary that to pigeonhole them into a specific theological label would be both an unfair reflection of their work, and probably sit somewhat uneasily with each. Nevertheless, for the sake of being succinct, we could locate Ward within the Radical Orthodoxy movement while Wolterstorff is grounded in the Reformed tradition. Both contexts obviously provide distinctive theological foundations, which while informing the arguments presented here, lie beyond the exploratory scope of our project. That being said, however, these traditions are not as disparate as they may seem at first sight, at least for the purposes of their contribution to this project. Epistemologically, for instance, both are responding to the vacuum left by the demise of modern logical positivism, seeking a recovery of the metaphysical. Both acknowledge the limits of enlightenment rationality in this enterprise, “belief” for neither limited to the realm of objective certainty characteristic of “classical foundationalism” (to use Wolterstorff’s phrase). The paths that they have taken in response are clearly different, Wolterstorff and Plantinga’s articulation of Reformed Epistemology certainly distinct from Radical Orthodoxy’s post-modern Augustinian epistemology. Yet, as James Smith notes, while “these different schools of thought are not often associated (indeed, Reformed epistemology remain virulently allergic to ‘postmodernism’)” he suggests “that, in fact, these tensions represent a kind of sibling rivalry.” The intention in this chapter is to bring these “sibling rivals” together to further enrich our understanding of the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and faith. Smith will have something of a role to play in the background, as bridge-builder to bring these positions together. James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 109.

²¹ As already noted, Wolterstorff’s scholarship cannot be reduced to a “Reformed” perspective; to do so would be a grave error, his work on liturgy being a case in point. Indeed, Wolterstorff acknowledges that one of the two theologians who have most impacted his thinking on liturgy is the Orthodox theologian, Alexander Schmemmann (the other being the Swiss Reformed theologian Jean-Jacques von Allen), even if he is not totally comfortable with Schmemmann’s *coalescence* of the worship of God and appreciation of the world as sacrament, a point which we will later engage. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically: Philosophical Reflections on Religious Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 6, footnote 12. See also Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Hearing the Call: Liturgy, Justice, Church, and World*, ed. Mark R. Gornik and Greg Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 32. The point should also be made here that Wolterstorff has no problem, following Calvin, with the world being experienced as a “sacrament” of God (his concern is simply Schmemmann’s liturgical articulation of this response). Wolterstorff, 24.

connecting faith with responsible action.²² Wolterstorff has long argued for the pre-theoretical nature of founding “control beliefs,” which are not consciously and rationally reflected upon.²³ Belief is intimately tied to practice. Specifically, Wolterstorff highlights the significance of “practices of inquiry,” the formation of belief embedded in social practice.²⁴ The full epistemological articulation of such an understanding of belief, which has come to be known as Reformed Epistemology, necessarily then includes an acknowledgement of “immediate beliefs” (or “basic beliefs,” as Plantinga names the concept), those beliefs which are held “immediately,” not on the propositional basis of “reasons for.”²⁵ There is a clear parallel here between Wolterstorff’s description of “immediate beliefs” and Ward’s articulation of belief as a partly preconscious disposition, even if they resolve the observation in different ways.²⁶ For our purposes, the important point to note is the mutual grounding of belief in practice. While we will be limiting our engagement with Wolterstorff to his articulation of liturgy and aesthetics as framed by social practice, it is worth noting the epistemological weight of practice that underlies Wolterstorff’s larger project.

The question that we are putting to Wolterstorff, as informed by Ward, is whether mature aesthetic existence is best understood as liturgical, thereby integrating faith with aesthetics and ethics through a doxological orientation of embodied action. If such a claim is valid, then

²² While Wolterstorff concedes that there is merit in approaching belief from the perspective of both rationality and “warrant” (Alvin Plantinga’s project), he argues that human beings largely do not subscribe to a belief on the basis of a rational decision, and yet we hold people responsible for what they believe. The reason people are held responsible for their beliefs is founded not in the rational, volitional basis of the particular belief (as one might expect), but rather in the belief’s genesis being located in social practice. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Practices of Belief: Volume 2, Selected Essays*, ed. Terence Cuneo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 6–7, 62–117.

²³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

²⁴ Wolterstorff, *Practices of Belief*, 7.

²⁵ Reformed Epistemology is quick to point out that even though “immediate beliefs” are not held on the basis of ratiocination, this does not make such belief irrational. In fact, the possibility exists that immediate beliefs, including religious belief, can be explored rationally and be shown to be cogent. Wolterstorff, 338–41.

²⁶ There are also interesting connections to be made here, on multiple levels, between “immediate beliefs” and Kierkegaard’s understanding of aesthetic existence as “sensory immediacy.” For instance, just as “immediate beliefs” are not by default either sound or fallacious, so too, one can argue that Kierkegaard’s portrayal of the problematic nature of sensory immediacy does not allow for the fact that sensory immediacy can either contribute to the construction of a virtual reality or the affirmation of Reality. Or, perhaps more significantly, both concepts point to the extent of preconscious human engagement with the world and the way in which preconscious aesthetic experience, belief and practice interact before we even become aware of it.

the implications are that mature aesthetic existence has a circular relationship with faith formation and ethical action. Mature aesthetic existence is both an *expression* of worship (it is a fitting celebration of being Christian, a polyphonic embrace of this-worldly, Christological reality) and also *formative for* becoming Christian. Approaching aesthetic existence through the lens of this liturgical cycle (expression-formation-expression-formation-etc.) highlights not only the formative and celebratory aspects of mature aesthetic existence, but consequently, the point at the heart of this chapter: Faithful aesthetic practices have ethical consequences.

6.2.1 Wolterstorff's Model: Liturgy as performative

Wolterstorff's unique analysis of liturgy stems from his pioneering philosophical dissection of the performative nature of liturgy.²⁷ While much theological work has been done over the centuries regarding both the expressive and formative aspects of liturgy, liturgy has not been explored through the lens of analytic philosophy, particularly as a performative act.²⁸ Wolterstorff's focus is on the enactment itself, on "what is done," his argument being that by looking closely at this performative dimension light will be shed on both the expressive and formative aspects of liturgy.²⁹ His approach is thus particularly relevant to this project because it is not ratiocentric; he is exploring what is going on in the liturgical action itself, rather than that which can be distilled from it to rational proposition.³⁰

²⁷ We need to note at the outset that Wolterstorff understands "liturgy" in the strict sense, as the doxological actions performed by a community of Christians gathered to worship on a Sunday. While he is not closed to extending the term "analogically" to actions in the broader life of the world, his treatment is in the context of this narrow sense. By contrast, for our purposes, we are approaching liturgy in the extended sense, understanding mature everyday aesthetic existence as liturgical. However, despite these differing parameters, the argument here is that the principles of Wolterstorff's analysis remain valid for an extended understanding of liturgy, a point that will be clarified as Wolterstorff's argument is articulated. Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, 11.

²⁸ Wolterstorff, 5.

Wolterstorff notes that since 2007 he has been collaborating with a small group of liturgical theologians and philosophers to "'jumpstart' the subfield of philosophy of liturgy." Here, Wolterstorff acknowledges James K. A. Smith's contribution, and it is Smith's work that is particularly helpful for integrating Wolterstorff's strict sense of liturgy to the extended sense, as we shall see. Wolterstorff, ix.

²⁹ Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, 5.

³⁰ It is for this reason that Wolterstorff specifically chooses to focus on Orthodox liturgy for his analysis, since, "unlike the liturgies of the West, the Orthodox liturgy has never been subjected to what one might call 'rationalization.' In Western liturgies the thought has been simplified, the language clarified, complexity reduced, hyperbole diminished, metaphors

6.2.1.1 Liturgy is “Scripted” Activity

At the heart of Wolterstorff’s dissection of liturgical enactment is his observation that liturgy is a form of “scripted” activity. He argues this by firstly noting that there is a distinction between types of acts and instances of acts. Or, in philosophical terminology, there are act-types and act-tokens.³¹ Act-types can recur; they are universals.³² Wolterstorff suggests that liturgy is best understood as a sequence of act-types. In other words, liturgy is not the random expression of worship. Rather, an instance of worship is liturgical when it conforms to the sequence of act-types prescribed as universal. Wolterstorff names this the “script,” scripted activity being a type “of activity for which there are prescriptions in force.”³³

To clarify what this means, it is helpful to consider other types of scripted activity. Liturgy is only one “species” within the “genus” of scripted activity.³⁴ Wolterstorff considers two examples, American football and music.³⁵ In American football, plays are conducted according to a playbook. If a quarterback calls Play #9 there is a script prescribed for the sequence of actions to be accordingly followed. Play #9 can be executed correctly or incorrectly. However, this does not mean that every instance of Play #9 is identical. There are instances of Play #9 which are better and worse, but which are not necessarily correct or incorrect. Likewise, a musical performance follows a script. The most obvious manifestation of the script is the score.

However, the key point of relevance for our project is that the script is not *merely* the score, or the playbook. Wolterstorff is stretching the term “script” beyond “instructions written down in words,” or diagrams or musical notations for that matter.³⁶ In fact, as we shall see, the most determinative aspects of the script are exactly those which cannot be so articulated. The playbook cannot possibly articulate every aspect of every action that is to be performed in the play within the diagrams or words that constitute it. In addition to the rational articulation of the playbook, *a history of practice* contributes to the script. All of the athletic components –

eliminated. The Orthodox liturgy is prolix, poetic, excessive, wild, hyperbolic, highly metaphorical, complex, often obscure, much of it clearly the production of poets rather than theologians.” Wolterstorff, 9.

³¹ Wolterstorff, 13.

³² Strictly, it is not accurate to say that *all* act-types are universals, as Wolterstorff explains, but for our purposes, as the concept applies to liturgy, it is sufficient to treat them as such. Wolterstorff, 13.

³³ Wolterstorff, 14.

³⁴ Wolterstorff, 18.

³⁵ Wolterstorff, 14–18.

³⁶ Wolterstorff, 17.

running, catching, tackling, throwing, etc. – have a history of embodied practice through which appropriate action is prescribed. Partly this can be (and is) articulated through technique (hence, coaching), but partly this transcends cognitive expression and is learned via embodied practice, immediate sensory fittingness, attunement or experiences of “being in the zone,” manifest in terms such as “muscle memory.”³⁷ We could say then, that apart from the prescriptions specified in the playbook, the script for the particular play also draws upon prescriptions specified through embodied practice, and further, as Wolterstorff highlights, the meaning communally attributed through social practice. In music, for instance, “The script for a musical performance is the total set of prescriptions holding for that performance, both those specified in the score and those embedded within the relevant social practice.”³⁸ Beyond the score, the social practice of violin-playing, or conducting, etc., emerge from the social practice of the particular society. This holds true also for organically composed music, such as jazz, which may not be operating from a score, but nevertheless submits to the script of what constitutes a jazz performance.

Since social practices contribute to the scripting, the script that informs liturgical action is not simply shaped by explicit and direct means, but also through the implicit and indirect.³⁹ Liturgy, even understood in the narrow sense of congregational enactment in a worship service, is therefore formed not only by the dynamics of the specific congregation and its religious tradition, but also by society more generally.⁴⁰ Here we should recall that it is in *living*, through embodied, aesthetic, relational interaction with the world that imaginative paradigms are formed through which we see the world. Again, we should recall that these imaginative paradigms do not operate solely, or even primarily, on an individual level, but they are communal, they are social imaginaries. These social imaginaries inform the nature of social practices which become normative for scripted action. The implication of this progression is that aesthetic engagement is not only an aspect of liturgical enactment itself, but also contributes to the script that determines liturgical action.

³⁷ Smith draws on the research of John Barth and Tanya Chartrand to show that embodied practices can lead to such “automaticities.” Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 80–82.

³⁸ Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, 17.

³⁹ Wolterstorff notes that no liturgy is explicitly composed from scratch. Rather, since the birth of the early church, liturgy emerges from, and contains implicit belief. A significant aim of his liturgical theology is the attempt to “make the implicit explicit.” Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 12–13.

⁴⁰ Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, 20.

6.2.1.2 Liturgical Activity has “*Count As Significance*”

If liturgical enactment belongs to the genus of scripted activity (along with many other scripted activities), it is specifically to be identified within this genus with those activities which have *count as significance*.⁴¹ In other words, it is an activity performed not for the sake of itself, like an American football game, but for the significance it holds beyond the act itself. Speech-act theory has illuminated the reality that in human life one act can *count as* another. For instance, raising one’s hand at an auction *counts as* making a bid. Within the liturgical script of a worship service, being sprinkled with water, or immersed in water, or raising one’s hands, or eating bread and wine, are not merely acts in themselves, they have *count as* significance. The critical question for this project is whether it is possible for this *count as* significance to extend to actions beyond the context of a worship service, into the actions of every life. This depends on the “script” which informs those actions (assuming a script does inform those actions, not all action, of course, is scripted). We will return to this momentarily, but we first need note a second specific attribute of liturgical enactment.

6.2.1.3 Liturgical Activity is *for* Direct Engagement with God

If liturgical enactment falls within the genus of scripted activity, and is further, specifically categorised by actions of *count as significance*, then the particular species of liturgy is uniquely marked by being *for* direct engagement with God.⁴²

When we orient ourselves toward God by enacting a liturgy we engage God directly and explicitly. When we kneel, there is no creature before whom we are kneeling; we are kneeling before God. When we stand with hands upraised, there is no creature before whom we are standing with hands upraised; we are standing with hands upraised before God.⁴³

Wolterstorff suggests that by understanding liturgy according to these criteria, staring in awe at the “starry heavens” is not a liturgical act, since it is mediated. The object of attention here is the stars, not God, the potential worship of God being indirect and implicit in this act.

Similarly, in relating to fellow human beings as bearers of God’s image, while these interactions may point toward the wonder of God, the engagement here, again, is indirect and implicit; directly and explicitly, the object of action is one’s fellow human being.⁴⁴ In sum, Wolterstorff identifies liturgy as a sequence of act-types which conform to a script, but

⁴¹ Wolterstorff, 24.

⁴² Wolterstorff, 26.

⁴³ Wolterstorff, 27.

⁴⁴ Wolterstorff, 27.

specifically scripted activity that has *count as significance* and which is for direct engagement with God.

6.2.2 *Applying the Model: Liturgy as lived in the everyday*

Wolterstorff's articulation of liturgical action is not only helpful for understanding the fundamentally embodied nature of a strict sense of liturgy, but also is insightful for understanding mature, everyday aesthetic existence as liturgical. However, the applicability of extending Wolterstorff's model to action in all of life rests on two criteria: firstly, whether such action can carry *count as significance*, and secondly, whether such action can be construed as direct engagement with God. On both counts, particularly the second, Wolterstorff suggests that extending a liturgical understanding to action in all of life is untenable. Nevertheless, by taking a closer look at these criteria it is evident that the exclusion of everyday aesthetic existence from liturgical enactment is not only an unnecessary move, but to the contrary, these qualifications are useful for defining the boundaries within which *mature* aesthetic existence *can* be understood as liturgical.

6.2.2.1 Aesthetic Existence as Direct Engagement with God

While delineating liturgy as being *for* direct engagement with God is a helpful contribution to our project, Wolterstorff's application of the notion is reductionist, thereby unnecessarily eliminating everyday aesthetic enactment from the realm of the liturgical. We need to qualify Wolterstorff's criteria here by noting that "direct" engagement with God is: firstly, always mediated; secondly, never purely direct and explicit; and consequently, thirdly, best understood not as a binary, but on a continuum. Simply, in an effort to articulate an argument which is analytically neat (which is helpful for a project such as this) care needs to be taken to allow for the complex and organic nature of human existence, lest artificial dichotomies are created which do not accurately reflect an embodied life of faith.

In fairness, by "direct" engagement with God, Wolterstorff is not suggesting that liturgical engagement with God is *not* mediated through our sensory engagement with material reality, only that God is here the primary object of our attention. Nevertheless, it is important to note that since all engagement with God is mediated due to our finite nature, in a strict sense, engagement with God cannot be purely "direct." As de Gruchy succinctly put it earlier, "the mystery of the ultimate is glimpsed not grasped, for it is always mediated in the penultimate

polyphony of life.”⁴⁵ Hence, we need note the fundamentally sensory nature of a strict sense of liturgy, mediated through material engagement with the bread and wine, vocal cords and sound waves, water and oil. Wolterstorff’s point is that the object of attention here is not the oil, or the water, or the wine, but God. Or, to put it differently, this is not a mode of immature aesthetic existence, or sensory immediacy, being lost in the moment of aesthetic experience, purely for the moment, but *for* direct engagement with God. Yet, is this not a reductionist view of what is going on here? It is precisely the embodied nature of this engagement that makes it meaningful, being present in the moment of *tasting* the wine, *feeling* the water, *smelling* the oil. As we have seen, Kierkegaard describes this as immediacy which is characteristic of faith, a second immediacy, or an immediacy after reflection; being present in the moment, but the sensory moment carrying significance beyond itself. The implication here is that in speaking of “direct” engagement with God, we need to acknowledge the necessarily mediated nature of that process, since we are embodied, finite beings.

Acknowledging the fundamentally embodied, and thus mediated, nature of all “direct” engagement with God points to a second clarification we need to make: all such liturgical enactment will always be a complex, symbiotic combination of being direct and explicit while also being indirect and implicit. Engagement with God can only be direct and explicit to the extent that it is a conscious process, as a function of left-hemisphere attention. However, as we have learned, the implicit and indirect embodied cognition of right-hemisphere attention is not comprehensively articulated in consciousness. Aspects of paradigmatic formation remain largely unconscious. In other words, by engaging the whole being in liturgy, the significance and meaning of a particular act is only partially accessible through the abstraction of direct and explicit propositional thought and language. The power of liturgy lies precisely in unifying the cognitive, affective and embodied aspects of being human, thereby engaging both the explicit and implicit, the right and left hemisphere in worship of God. While this accounts for the richness of liturgy in Christian living, it makes left-hemisphere analysis of what is going on here challenging.⁴⁶ For our purposes, the key point to elucidate here is that in speaking of liturgical enactment as *for* “direct” engagement with God, it is helpful to clarify

⁴⁵ De Gruchy, ‘The Search for Transcendence in an Age of Barbarism’, 10.

⁴⁶ In concluding his analysis of a performative understanding of liturgy, Wolterstorff notes that work needs to be done on better understanding the relationship between liturgy and life-meaning. While Wolterstorff is correct, his comment points to the complex nature of liturgy in relation to existence. Analysis can only partially explain the total and holistic “life-meaning” of what is going on here. Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, 293–94.

that Wolterstorff is essentially describing a focus of attention or orientation.⁴⁷ Rather than speak of “direct engagement with God,” we could therefore say that liturgical enactment *orients one’s whole being in focus on God*.

By affirming that “direct” engagement with God is actually mediated, and that what we are essentially describing here is a holistic *orientation*, we have clarified that this delineation of liturgy is best understood not as a binary distinction, but on a continuum. Not all action is equally liturgical, taking Holy Communion is not liturgical in the same sense as gazing at the stars, to use Wolterstorff’s example. However, this is not to say that enjoying the stars is *not* liturgy, as a binary application of Wolterstorff’s model would assert. Rather, the suggestion here is that some liturgical enactments orient one’s whole being more completely and comprehensively in worship of God than others. Or, to return to the recurrent Bonhoefferian theme throughout this project, if liturgy in the strict sense (such as celebrating the Eucharist or baptism) is the fundamental and required liturgical *cantus firmus* affirming the ultimate, then gazing at the stars or enjoying the sunset are the penultimate, liturgical counterpoints, offering all of human existence as polyphonic worship. At the heart of such a stance is a Christological understanding of all of reality, as we have seen.⁴⁸ Schmemmann is helpful in articulating this point.⁴⁹ Liturgical enactments, strictly understood, or the “instituted acts called ‘sacraments’” are not magical in and of themselves, but pivotal for allowing one “to see” the world “and to ‘live’ it *in Christ*.”⁵⁰ Is this not Wolterstorff’s point, that liturgical enactment is orientation of one’s whole being in Christ? But Schmemmann further clarifies that the implication of this orientation in Christ affects *all* perception and engagement in the life of the world.

A Christian is the one who, wherever he looks, finds Christ and rejoices in Him. And his joy *transforms* all his human plans and programs, decisions and actions, making all his mission the sacrament of the world’s return to Him who is the life of the world.⁵¹

The institutional sacraments may then be the pinnacle of liturgy, representing the one end of the continuum, embodied participation in the Eucharist, for example, a manifestation of life in Christ. However, rather than a binary perspective which locates “secular” aesthetic experience outside of this liturgical enactment, the Eucharist is an “entrance into a fourth dimension

⁴⁷ Wolterstorff, 26.

⁴⁸ Jean Corbon notes that liturgy infusing all of life is the unavoidable implication of a fully developed Christology, “The liturgy, which is celebrated at certain moments but lived at every moment, is the one mystery of the Christ who gives life to human beings” Jean Corbon, *The Wellspring of Worship* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 141.

⁴⁹ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 76.

⁵⁰ Schmemmann, 113.

⁵¹ Schmemmann, 113.

which allows us to see the ultimate reality of life. It is not an escape from the world, rather it is the arrival at a vantage point from which we can see more deeply into the reality of the world.”⁵² The Eucharist, along with other liturgical practices of the institutional church, are not *the* expressions of liturgy as distinct from secular life in the world. This is not what makes them pivotal. Rather they are crucial because they are the entryway, the “vantage point,” the paradigm from which *all* Christian action in the world can be understood as liturgical.

While we then need to necessarily expand Wolterstorff’s strict delineation of liturgy, we can affirm that not all liturgical enactments are “*for* direct engagement with God” in the same way. Or, to reformulate it as discussed above, not all liturgical enactments orient one’s whole being in focus on God to the same degree. Wolterstorff himself points out that some liturgical enactments (even in his strict delineation of liturgy – passing the peace, for example) are “ancillary and subordinate” to being “directly” engaged with God.⁵³ By his own admission, their ancillary and subordinate status does not eliminate these actions from being considered liturgical. Here, we are acknowledging that mature aesthetic existence in the everyday, in the life of the world, is indeed “ancillary and subordinate.” It is not the *cantus firmus*, but this does not exclude it from being considered liturgical. However, it is critical that we not confuse this “ancillary and subordinate” status for peripheral and insignificant. Such a misunderstanding stems from underestimating the impact of the indirect and implicit in human existence. As we have seen, through the work of McGilchrist and Ward, everyday aesthetic existence is formative in ways which are most often precisely indirect and implicit. In other words, ancillary and subordinate liturgical enactments in everyday life can impact not only faith-formation but also further action in the world. To expand on this, we need to turn to Wolterstorff’s second criteria for understanding scripted action as liturgical, its *count as significance*.

6.2.2.2 Aesthetic Existence Can *Count As* Worship

In Wolterstorff’s model, while liturgical enactment orients one’s whole being in focus on God, it also has *count as significance*, as informed by a script. It would seem then that everyday aesthetic existence, strictly understood, cannot be considered liturgical since it is engaged for itself, not for significance beyond itself. However, a closer look at both what qualifies as *count as significance*, as well as the nature and role of the script, shows that by

⁵² Schmemmann, 27.

⁵³ Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, 27.

rejecting a reductionist view of this dynamic, everyday aesthetic engagement can indeed carry an element of *count as significance* as informed by (and in turn contributing to) a socially constructed “script.”

While certain actions, such as raising one’s hand at an auction, are enacted solely for their *count as significance*, it does not follow that actions outside of this set do *not* carry any *count as significance*. In other words, in the context of our discussion of liturgy here, it is possible for an action to be enacted for its own sake *and* to also carry *count as significance*.⁵⁴ To use Wolterstorff’s example, playing in the football game may well be solely for the pleasure of the game itself (aesthetic existence), in accordance with the script as operative for the game itself. However, it is too simplistic not to acknowledge that there may well be multiple scripts in operation here. A father may join his son in playing the game specifically because he desires to build a relationship with his son. The father may enjoy the game, he may at times be entirely in the moment, but this does not mean that the game has no significance beyond itself. In fact, the father’s primary motivation for playing the game is the *count as significance*: the message of love thereby communicated.

Gazing at the stars in wonder may not orient one’s whole being in focus on God to the same degree as explicit liturgy enacted in a church on Sunday morning. It may not carry the same intensity of *count as significance*, but to say that it neither orients one toward God, nor *counts as* a worshipful act (a fitting response to the shared beauty of incarnational reality) would be reductionist and inaccurate. Granted, the nature of the *count as significance* may be more implicit than explicit (although more than likely both), but as we have seen, this implicitness does not indicate that it is irrelevant. The pivotal question is what determines *count as significance*? Intention clearly plays a role, but as Wolterstorff shows, even intention is not a prerequisite for a particular liturgical act to be meaningful.⁵⁵ Rather, it is the relation between intention and adherence to the broader script that proves insightful.

⁵⁴ In parallel to this question of whether an act can carry both *count as significance*, while at the same time being engaged for itself, one can consider whether, according to Alasdair MacIntyre’s model, it is possible for practices to produce both internal *and* external goods. Wolterstorff’s argument is that the goods gained by a practice can at times be *both* internal and external, or even defy such categorisation. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 92–96.

⁵⁵ Wolterstorff deals extensively with the question of what is going on when firstly, a person does not understand the particular liturgical enactment they participate in, and secondly, when a person without faith participates in liturgy; on both counts he does not find the liturgy invalid. Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, 42, 97ff.

6.2.2.3 The Implicit “Scripting” of Liturgical Aesthetic Existence

The presiding script is the key element in determining the *count as significance* of liturgical enactments. As we have seen, Wolterstorff shows that the script carries both explicit instruction (in the form of words or diagrams, such as lectionaries or orders of service) and implicit prescription (in the form of ecclesial and broader cultural social practices). In a strict understanding of liturgy, a congregation collectively submits to such a script when they gather on a Sunday morning to worship. However, a broader understanding of liturgy acknowledges that humans, as essentially beings-in-relation, are necessarily always participating in one or other form of communally “scripted” activity in everyday life.⁵⁶ Such scripts always carry implicit elements, although at times they also contain explicit prescription, such as in an auction, football game, musical performance, court of law, etc. Scripts also define whether prescribed actions carry *count as significance* or not, such as raising one’s hand in an auction, a classroom, or a church. For our purposes, the main point here is that the church’s liturgical script (and consequent enactment which has *count as significance*) does not only operate in the more “direct” and explicit setting of a Sunday morning as Christians physically gather in community, but the “script” continues to operate in every time and place as prescribed to the body of Christ in the everyday.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ This claim is building on the work of narrative theory in cognitive science (sometimes referred to as “cognitive narratology,” by Smith, for example) and narrative theology, in conjunction with the notions of social imaginaries and social practices that inform this chapter. As such, it is acknowledged that if Wolterstorff has already stretched the meaning of the term “script,” we are here stretching it even further by equating it with a presiding cultural narrative, or social imaginary. However, for the purposes of articulating the formative and expressive nature of a liturgical understanding of aesthetic existence, we will continue to use the term “script” since it highlights the communally (*ekklesia* in the fullest sense of the term) prescribed nature and significance of mature aesthetic existence. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 130ff.

⁵⁷ In the background of this chapter is the tension between liturgy as communal versus individual enactment. While Wolterstorff’s focus is on liturgy as communal enactment, he does not mean that each enactment is uniformly enacted by every individual; there is indeed space for individual roles in such communal enactment. Liturgy encapsulates the interplay between individual and communal identity. Wolterstorff describes this as “joint action.” The suggestion in this chapter is that we simply extend Wolterstorff’s articulation of joint action more broadly to individual Christians in the everyday, acting “jointly” in the world as the collective body of Christ, Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, 63.

For more on the individual enactment of liturgy, see Bruce E. Harbert, ‘Liturgies within the Liturgy’, in *The Liturgical Subject: Subject, Subjectivity, and the Human Person in Contemporary Liturgical Discussion and Critique*. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2008), 114–31.

As such, gazing at the stars *does* have *count as* significance in accordance with a broader liturgical script. This broader script is informed both by explicit and implicit elements. Explicitly, for example, there is a biblical injunction connecting engagement with the beauty of creation and worship of the Creator (Psalm 8:3-5; 19:1, in relation to the stars, for instance, are obvious examples among many others). Further, a theological tradition may make an explicit doctrinal prescription (as in the Catholic Catechesis On Creation). Implicitly, through the social practices of a particular theological tradition or local church community, the importance of worshipping God through celebration of the beauty of creation may be affirmed. In such a case, the Christian person living within this script cannot help but worship God when encountering the starry sky. It is a moment of sensory immediacy, a moment of aesthetic existence informed by a larger liturgical script, offering *count as significance* to the moment.

6.2.2.4 Liturgical Aesthetic Existence Vis-À-Vis Competing Cultural Liturgies

However, as we have noted, this broader Christian liturgical script is not the only script at play in the everyday. In fact, we could say that it is not even the only broader “liturgical” script at play. Multiple “liturgical” scripts are operative in everyday life as informed by the largely implicit prescriptions of social practice. In this sense we can talk, as Smith does, of “cultural liturgies”; not all holistic orientation, or “worship” is directed at Christ, or even at a religious deity.⁵⁸ As Smith notes, there are rival “kingdoms” vying for our desire and enacted worship.⁵⁹ Each of these “kingdoms” is driven by a set of social practices which prescribes their respective operative liturgy.⁶⁰

Bonhoeffer’s call for a recovery of aesthetic existence in the life of the church, amidst the horrors and atrocities of Nazi Germany, is a counter-cultural, explicit naming of a liturgical script he had implicitly embraced up until that point. He is not here suggesting an aesthetic escapism from reality into a moment of sensory immediacy *for* itself. Rather, as informed by a broader Christological script, he suggests it is fitting to celebrate aesthetic existence as a

⁵⁸ See Smith’s “Cultural Liturgies” project, James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the King; Imagining the Kingdom; Awaiting the King*, Cultural Liturgies, v. 1-3 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2009; 2013; 2017).

⁵⁹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*.

⁶⁰ Smith offers a vivid description of the “temple” of the contemporary shopping mall along with the “worship” of iconography (brands), and communal enactments that a “pilgrimage” to the mall entails. He notes that the same liturgical mode is operative in the modern sports stadium. The “script” here, while it can be explicitly deduced, as Smith shows, is largely operative on the level of implicit social practices. Smith, 17–27.

manifestation of faithful Christian living. While having music constantly playing at the Finkenwalde seminary may not be liturgical in Wolterstorff's strict sense (it is not explicitly *for* direct engagement with God, and does not obviously have *count as significance* as operative within an overt and explicit liturgical script, such as an order of service), in the broader sense being argued for here, it is indeed a liturgical enactment. To use the broadened criteria we have drawn from Wolterstorff, there is no doubt that the Finkenwalde seminarians: 1.) Oriented their lives holistically in focus on God (as grounded in the practice of institutional sacraments; belief manifest here as a life disposition, not a weak form of knowledge); 2.) Subscribed to a liturgical script which proclaimed all of their "life together" as worship to God; 3.) Consequently, the enjoyment of music functioned not only as a *moment* of rich aesthetic existence, but also *counted as* a worshipful celebration of incarnational living, in polyphonic harmony with their explicit affirmation of this truth.⁶¹

Further, by considering this *performative* manifestation of mature aesthetic existence as a liturgical enactment (to continue the example of the Finkenwalde seminarians playing music), it points not only to the *expressive* nature of their everyday liturgy here (a polyphonic celebration of Christological this-worldliness), but to the *formative* nature of such everyday liturgy. This formative nature is easily underestimated due to its indirect and implicit operation. It does not lend itself to being measurable by means of rational abstraction, as it is non-linear, organic and complex. However, as we have seen through the example of Bonhoeffer's musical metaphors, the formation of his theological categories through his musical experience is an insightful example of the formative impact of aesthetic existence as everyday liturgy.

Thus far in this project, we have noted that in order to understand why everyday aesthetic enactments such as these are formative, we need to reject the modern epistemological narrative, as expressed through the likes of Locke, in favour of models which acknowledge the impact of embodied and affective interaction with the world on human understanding. There is another modern narrative – the aesthetic narrative – that we now need to confront,

⁶¹ An important point in this example is that the seminarians may not themselves have explicitly named their playing of music as "worship." In Wolterstorff's strict understanding of liturgy, this disqualifies the act from being categorized as liturgical enactment. However, at the heart of this chapter (and this project as a whole) is the suggestion that the implicit and indirect are not dissociated from the explicit and direct. Implicitly, Bonhoeffer and the seminarians embraced the playing of music as congruent with their holistic "liturgical" project of "life together," thereby affirming a sense of polyphonic resonance.

through the work of Wolterstorff, in order to appreciate that aesthetic existence as everyday liturgy is fundamentally connected to action in the world.

6.3 Aesthetic Engagement as Practice

Wolterstorff has helped us to articulate mature aesthetic existence as liturgical: as anchored in life oriented by focus on God, thereby conforming to a broad liturgical script wherein aesthetic existence is not for its own sake, but for the significance it carries beyond the aesthetic act itself as polyphonic worship of the Creator. But according to the modern narrative of aesthetics this is a contradiction in terms. Art exists for its own sake, not for significance and responsibility beyond itself.

6.3.1 *Severing Aesthetics from Action: Modern disinterested contemplation*

Wolterstorff names this the “grand narrative of art” – the pinnacle of the aesthetic in modern life being disinterested contemplation, as manifest in the rise of art institutions, such as museums and galleries.⁶² On the same continuum, everyday aesthetic enjoyment is for itself. As Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Climacus observed regarding an outing to Deer Park, according to this narrative, aesthetic frivolity is distinct from ethical life. Such aesthetic experience is peripheral to the serious business of life. The narrative separates aesthetics from action, poiesis from praxis. Consequently, aesthetic engagement is distinct from ethics. Wolterstorff challenges this narrative by suggesting that aesthetic engagement is best understood as action.⁶³ Artistic creation and presentation are best seen as social practice.⁶⁴

Wolterstorff suggests that while aestheticians and philosophers no longer support the veracity of this modern, grand narrative on art, it continues to influence our thinking in contemporary life, as is evident in our everyday engagement with aesthetics and the privileged place of high art.⁶⁵ The narrative emerged due to the rise of “a middle class with considerable leisure time ... [alongside] a secular civil society” and rests on two theses.⁶⁶ The first is the progressivist idea that in this modern conception of disinterested contemplation, as the pinnacle of aesthetic

⁶² Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 5–82.

⁶³ This is comprehensively argued in Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

⁶⁴ While Wolterstorff’s focus is on art rather than aesthetics more broadly, the suggestion here is that the principles from his focus on the subset of art apply to the broader category of aesthetics as here discussed.

⁶⁵ Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, ix–x; 1–16.

⁶⁶ Wolterstorff, 7.

engagement, art had finally come into its own; it had reached its ultimate *telos*.⁶⁷ The second is that the arts offered an escape from the “causal instrumental rationality” that dominated modern life, “The arts are liberated from service to extraneous values and freed to come into their own,” as such they are “socially other and transcendent.”⁶⁸ Hence, as we have seen with Kierkegaard’s interaction with Romanticism and Bonhoeffer’s response to Nietzsche, the aesthetic was seen as a means to escape the fragmentary everyday and recover the ideal whole.⁶⁹ Consequently, the highest form of the aesthetic, as socially other and transcendent, is venerated, seen as distinct from the finitude and utility of everyday action, cementing a distinction between true art and that which is merely craft.⁷⁰

Wolterstorff rejects both theses as untenable. On the former – that the aesthetic has reached its *telos* in disinterested contemplation – he argues that this is not only impossible to prove, but it is highly dubious when one considers the state of modern art. Fundamentally too, it is fallacious on the basis that reaching a *telos* requires *stasis*, which is clearly not the case as seen over the last 300 years, where notions and expressions of “art” continue to evolve.⁷¹ But it is specifically Wolterstorff’s response to the second thesis – that at its pinnacle, the aesthetic is socially other and transcendent – which is of interest to us here, since he suggests that rather than “socially other and transcendent,” art (and by implication, the aesthetic more broadly) is always socially embedded in practices.

Wolterstorff shows that the argument for the socially other and transcendent nature of art rests on the fallacy that art is clearly and distinctly concerned with “internal finality in place of external causal finality; unity in place of fragmentation.”⁷² Internal finality is here understood

⁶⁷ Strictly, Wolterstorff identifies three theses, not two, underlying this narrative, but for our purposes it is sufficient to conflate his first two theses into one. Wolterstorff, 27.

⁶⁸ Wolterstorff, 32.

⁶⁹ Max Weber insightfully points out why this narrative causes friction between faith and modern aesthetics, why Kierkegaard, for example, felt impelled to critique immature aesthetic existence in this sense. “For [in this modern narrative], art becomes a cosmos of more and more consciously grasped independent values which exist in their own right. Art takes over the function of a this-worldly salvation, no matter how this may be interpreted. It provides a salvation from the routines of everyday life, and especially from the increasing pressures of theoretical and practical rationalism. With this claim to a redemptory function, art begins to compete directly with salvation religion.” Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 342.

⁷⁰ Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 17.

⁷¹ Wolterstorff, 70–73.

⁷² Wolterstorff, 76. Although Wolterstorff is drawing from a range of aestheticians, he engages the account of internal finality particularly as articulated by Philipp Moritz (a friend

as the sole internal concern for “unity of the parts with parts and parts with the whole,” rather than concern for any external causation.⁷³ Wolterstorff bases his rejection of the binary basis of this thesis on three points: Firstly, even works of fine art are created for both disinterested attention *and* causal effect (remuneration, appreciation, etc.). While such causal effects may in some cases not be immediately apparent, they inevitably exist on closer inspection. Secondly, a work can be socially other and transcendent even though it is not made for disinterested contemplation (Orthodox icons, for example). Thirdly, the distinction between external and internal finality is blurred even in the process of artistic creation. Every artistic action, every compositional technique contains an element of means-end rationality. Applying paint *so that* it is seen to be a tree, for instance, is a process necessarily driven by external causation.⁷⁴ “To eliminate all ‘servitude’ from the artist’s compositional choices, all means-end rationality, one’s work has to be purely abstract.”⁷⁵

6.3.2 *Uniting Aesthetics and Action as Social Practice*

By rejecting this grand narrative of art, Wolterstorff is suggesting that rather than understand the aesthetic as socially other, thereby disconnecting it from action, it is, by contrast, more accurate to acknowledge that it is fundamentally grounded in social practice. Wolterstorff is not alone in this assessment, “In recent years ... [writers about the arts] have brought to light the many ways in which art is enmeshed in the social dynamics of our societies rather than transcending those dynamics.”⁷⁶ Wolterstorff articulates this social embeddedness through the

of Goethe), which he suggests is representative of the larger perception that art has “*intrinsic* and not just instrumental worth,” this intrinsic worth being “socially transcendent, even god-like.” Wolterstorff, 35.

⁷³ Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 80.

⁷⁴ Wolterstorff, 73–82.

⁷⁵ Wolterstorff, 79.

⁷⁶ Wolterstorff, 84. Lagging behind, the field of theological aesthetics remains dominated by the “transcendent and socially other” value of the aesthetic in faith life. Unfortunately, Wolterstorff’s frustration that theological sub-disciplines tend simply to follow philosophical trends seems to be realised in this case. Wolterstorff notes that, “it’s because they accept the narrative without question that [Clive] Bell, [Gerardus] Vander Leeuw, [Paul] Tillich, and their cohorts focus exclusively on the contemplative mode of engagement with art in their discussion of art and religion ...” The intention of this project is to contribute to understanding the faith implications of the aesthetic as socially embedded. Nicholas Wolterstorff, ‘The Religious Dimension’, in *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*, ed. Peter Kivy (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 334. Wolterstorff, *Hearing the Call*, 432.

lens of social practices.⁷⁷ He suggests that if we pay close attention to the inherent connection between aesthetics and human action, we will see that we engage the aesthetic in different ways. By “ways” he means act-types or sequences of act-types (just as with liturgy above).⁷⁸ There are “ways” of violin-playing, to use the same example again. As we have seen, these “ways” are informed by shared societal practices. Violin-playing is both the product of, and for that particular social practice. Because of this shared practice, violin-playing has social-practice meaning.⁷⁹ If one were to play the violin in a way discordant with its social practice, it would be meaningless, if not cacophonous, to the hearers.⁸⁰ Social practices not only inform the making and presenting or performing of art, but also engagement with such works.⁸¹ For instance, composing, performing and appreciating classical music as presented in an opera house requires familiarity with the respective social practices involved.

However, this does not mean that the social practices of art, as disinterested contemplation (or absorbed attention, in Wolterstorff’s phrasing), have a monopoly on “ways” of engaging the aesthetic more broadly, or even the arts, more narrowly. Wolterstorff highlights a few of the many other social practices which inform aesthetic making, presenting and engaging, such as memorial art (a manifestation being the mural art of Belfast), art for veneration (Orthodox icons), protest art (*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*), etc.⁸² We will turn to one of these examples, work songs, shortly. The point here is that the vast majority of our everyday aesthetic engagement in the world is governed by a constellation of social practices, and the social-practice meanings that accompany them. Further, that while such aesthetic engagements may well (and indeed do) offer experiences of transcendence at times, this is not the function of them being socially other, disconnected from action in the world, or even being disconnected from means-end rationality for that matter. In resonance with the incarnational understanding of being Christian we have outlined thus far, transcendence and action in the world are not mutually exclusive. To the contrary, the formative potency of aesthetic practice is underscored by acknowledging that aesthetic engagement, as everyday action, has the ability to offer experiences of transcendence.

⁷⁷ Wolterstorff is not the first to acknowledge this link. Both Julius Moravcsik and Noël Carroll have written about approaching the arts as social practices. Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 85.

⁷⁸ Wolterstorff, 86.

⁷⁹ Wolterstorff, 112–13.

⁸⁰ Wolterstorff, 87.

⁸¹ Wolterstorff, 96–97.

⁸² Wolterstorff, 123–303.

6.4 Aesthetic Practices Sustain a Vision of the Good Life

6.4.1 Aesthetic Engagement Towards a *Telos*

Understanding aesthetic engagement through the lens of social practice highlights that all aesthetic engagement contains means-end rationality. This statement is only problematic if we equate means-end rationality with “causal instrumental rationality.” However, while many aesthetic practices are not engaged in this latter sense – “to *cause* some event” – they have a more implicit sense of means-end rationality in the form of *counting as*.⁸³ Thus, on the one hand, there are clearly certain actions that carry more explicit means-end rationality, enacted *for* causal instrumental rationality. We describe such actions as utilitarian. However, on the other hand, the suggestion here is that rather than locating the aesthetic in a separate and distinct set (that of “transcendent and socially other”) entirely disconnected from utility, approaching aesthetic enactment through the lens of social practice highlights the pervasive implicit sense of means-end rationality. Social practices have a *telos* and the *count as* significance implicit in aesthetic action is ordered by the presiding *telos*. Even though much aesthetic enactment is not considered overtly *for* utility – it is considered *for* itself – on closer inspection it becomes apparent that such enactment nevertheless plays a role in affirming an orientation to a certain *telos*. Acts of aesthetic existence, such as walking on the beach, playing football or listening to music, may explicitly be labelled by the participant as being *for* the moment, expressions of pure non-utilitarian sensory immediacy. However, such actions perform a role in a larger life-narrative. Walking on the beach may be predominantly simply *for* itself, for the pure pleasure of it, but even here it can also *count as* a liturgical celebration of incarnational existence. There may be other narratives at play too. It may *count as* exercise, even if not performed *for* exercise. Listening to music may be simply seen as an experience of sensory immediacy, but even as such, it can potentially *count as* a polyphonic embrace of created goodness. Or, in relation to other ordering life-narratives at play, it may also *count as* rest, for example.

To put it differently and return to our earlier discussion on scripts, multiple life-narratives, or “scripts,” are operative, whether implicit or explicit, with multiple *teloi*, including the ultimate *telos* of the good life (however construed), which order the *count as* significance of aesthetic practices therein. Or, as Smith describes it in Augustinian terms, what one worships is betrayed by the “liturgies” of one’s everyday practices, disclosing how one’s desires are

⁸³ Wolterstorff, 78.

ordered in orientation toward respective “kingdoms.”⁸⁴ Just as liturgical enactment on a Sunday, strictly understood, orients one toward the kingdom of God, so cultural liturgies, such as the deeply aesthetic practice of a consumer’s outing to the mall, may orient one toward a different “kingdom.” The key point to note here is that since the *count as* significance of aesthetic practices is often implicit, it is possible to participate in, and thereby subscribe to a particular “liturgical” script, and its accompanying social-practice meaning, without being fully cognisant of this subscription.

6.4.2 *Mature Aesthetic Existence as Fitting Shalom*

Mature aesthetic existence requires an embrace of a broad liturgical script which guides all of life’s actions as aesthetic-ethico-religious practices. This is not to say that such action is always permeated with conscious and explicit liturgical intention. Inevitably, by definition, this cannot be the case if we understand aesthetic enactment as being marked by sensory immediacy.⁸⁵ Rather, aesthetico-ethico-religious practices are recognised as liturgically oriented by their *fittingness* to the *telos* of shalom. Fittingness is usually understood to be an aesthetic category, but as we briefly explored earlier, if we are to take the relationship of embodiment to meaning seriously, then fittingness has not only aesthetic, but ethical and religious implications too. At the end of the last chapter we noted through Ward’s work that embodied attunement or fittingness is an entryway into a deeper actualisation of ethical life. This is so because it offers a holistic perception of Christological reality; thus Ward’s assertion that “attunement is both the source and goal of discipleship.”⁸⁶

If mature aesthetic existence is liturgically oriented, so discerned by the fittingness of aesthetico-ethico-religious practices to the *telos* of shalom, then it is important to clarify our definition of shalom, and consequently the significance of fittingness for not only aesthetics but ethics. Wolterstorff’s articulation of shalom is holistically relational:

Shalom is flourishing in all one’s relationships: to God, one’s fellow [human beings], to oneself, to the natural world, to society and culture. It has both a normative

⁸⁴ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*.

⁸⁵ However, as should be apparent by now, a neat distinction between immediacy and reflective intentionality only exists in theoretical abstraction. Immediacy and explicit intentionality have a complex, multi-directional relationship, as Ward shows, thereby challenging a rigid binary between a Kierkegaardian first and second immediacy.

⁸⁶ Ward, ‘A Question of Sport and Incarnational Theology’, 63.

component, being *rightly* related, and an affective component, finding *joy* in being so related.⁸⁷

It is clear that orienting one's life by such a relational and affective understanding of shalom demands not only abstract left-hemisphere attention, but the embodied and affective "betweenness" contributed by right-hemisphere attention. Note that Wolterstorff is not suggesting that there are two types of shalom: normative, or ethical shalom, and affective, or aesthetic shalom. Rather these two components, this dual understanding of the good life, of the "*kalos*" life, cohere in this aesthetico-ethico-religious understanding of shalom. The embodied and affective nature of shalom demands a measure such as fittingness to adequately discern appropriate action.

The strength of fittingness as a means of discernment is its integration of embodiment, affect and reason in everyday evaluation. While Wolterstorff has articulated a detailed theory of fittingness, our concern here is largely limited to its application in the everyday.⁸⁸ For instance, a jagged line *fits* better with restlessness and a smooth line *fits* better with tranquillity.⁸⁹ Light *fits* better with "ping," and heavy *fits* better with "pong."⁹⁰ In a sense, we could describe fittingness as "expanded synaesthesia" which is common to all.⁹¹ Technically, we can define it as "cross-modal similarity."⁹² It is the human ability to intuitively associate one modality with another, drawing from the fullness of the right → left → right-hemisphere-attention progression. As such, it is the same faculty that allows us to understand metaphor, the association of one modality with another.⁹³ "Metaphors are often (if not always) renditions of perceived fittingness."⁹⁴ Here we should recall our discussion on the analogical participation of everyday action in Christological reality. Hence, the human ability to discern

⁸⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Human Flourishing and Art That Enhances the Ordinary', in *Envisioning the Good Life: Essays on God, Christ, and Human Flourishing in Honor of Miroslav Volf*, ed. Matthew Croasmun, Zoran Grozdanov, and Ryan McAnnally-Linz (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 164.

Elsewhere, Wolterstorff emphasises this affective component in resonance with an Augustinian "enjoyment" of God, "Shalom at its highest is *enjoyment* in one's relationships ... To dwell in shalom is to *enjoy* living before God, to *enjoy* living in one's physical surroundings, to *enjoy* living with one's fellows, to *enjoy* life with oneself." Wolterstorff, *Hearing the Call*, 110.

⁸⁸ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 96–121.

⁸⁹ Wolterstorff, 97.

⁹⁰ Wolterstorff, 97.

⁹¹ Wolterstorff, 101.

⁹² Wolterstorff, 99.

⁹³ Wolterstorff, 102.

⁹⁴ Wolterstorff, 116.

fittingness is the same faculty that allows one to perceive an embodied action as having liturgical *count as* significance. There is a fittingness to such action.

This is so due to the appropriateness or fittingness of particular actions to a presiding script or narrative. For instance, planting a tree serves as a fitting memorial to a student who has passed away, while vandalising the classroom wherein he learned is not a fitting memorial.⁹⁵ In liturgically orienting one's life toward shalom certain actions may instrumentally further shalom, while others may *count as* affirming shalom – both will *fit* the script. Here, fittingness should be understood not only in an aesthetic sense, but as a measure of appropriate aesthetico-ethico-religious action.⁹⁶ In other words, fittingness is also a means of ethical discernment.⁹⁷ An ethic informed by fittingness brings to the fore the strengths of right-hemisphere relational attention to the world.⁹⁸ The implication is an enhancement of Wolterstorff's ethic of care, including creation-care, founded in love.⁹⁹

However, to consider fittingness as an ethical versus aesthetic qualifier is to miss the point, for the significance of fittingness is precisely in pointing to the integration of mature aesthetic

⁹⁵ Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 139.

⁹⁶ An example of such an approach would be appropriating Geoffrey Cupit's argument for understanding justice through the lens of fittingness, in conjunction with the concept shalom. "An unjust act is an unfitting act; it is an act which fails to accord with the status of the person treated." Geoffrey Cupit, *Justice As Fittingness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 2.

⁹⁷ Much has been written on approaching ethics through fittingness, a conversation revived in recent years. The contemporary philosophical dialogue on "fitting attitude theories of value" is one such example. See for instance (as part of an ongoing dialogue in *Ethics*), Conor McHugh and Jonathan Way, 'Fittingness First', *Ethics* 126, no. 3 (18 March 2016): 575–606. For an overview of the state of the debate, see Christopher Howard, 'Fittingness', *Philosophy Compass* Early View: Online Version of Record before inclusion in an issue (29 July 2018): e12542, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12542>. From a theological perspective, H. Richard Niebuhr, and then James Gustafson building on Niebuhr, provide a foundation for ethics seen as appropriate or fitting human action. See, James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). See also, R. Melvin Keiser, *Roots of Relational Ethics: Responsibility in Origin and Maturity in H. Richard Niebuhr* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

⁹⁸ Fittingness is fundamentally about relational sensitivity, with ethical implications on multiple fronts. In the words of the Niebuhr scholar, Charles S. McCoy, "In one sense fittingness underscores the importance of particularity – responding to particular persons, situations and issues. In a larger sense, fittingness requires taking account of the encompassing context of the social and natural environment, so that what is done fits with everything else that is happening and avoids causing more problems than it solves." As quoted in Dieter T. Hessel, "Now That Animals Can Be Genetically Engineered: Biotechnology in Theological-Ethical Perspective", in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, ed. David G. Hallman (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 288.

⁹⁹ Which Wolterstorff articulates as "care-agapism," see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

existence and ethical action in a life oriented toward shalom. Kevin Vanhoozer rightly argues for the integrative nature of fittingness as discernment by associating it with wisdom.

Wisdom – the virtue that orders all other virtues – is intrinsically linked to the imagination, and to beauty, via the theme of fittingness. The wise person perceives and participates fittingly in the ordered beauty of creation. Wisdom thus integrates the true, the good, and the beautiful ... Right perception, the capacity to discern, is therefore the connecting link between aesthetics and ethics.¹⁰⁰

In other words, “the wise person perceives and participates fittingly” in shalom. Such participation, such action, cannot be merely described as “ethical.” While it is “right” action and there is a normativity to such action, it is also affective, as Wolterstorff pointed out in his definition of shalom. Vanhoozer affirms here that the affective sense of shalom as the good life is not the giddy heights and agonizing lows of Romantic or Nietzschean aestheticizing self-creation, but the joy of co-poeticising with Christ in the Kierkegaardian sense of poetic living.¹⁰¹ “Joy is the perception of, and the participation in, a larger ‘fittingness’ that satisfies our longing for ultimate meaning. Joy is not a passing feeling so much as a perduring mood or orientation to the whole of life. Christian joy is *being-toward-resurrection*.”¹⁰²

To recap: Fitting aesthetic action participates in the liturgical script of shalom. It is a performative act which is both formative and expressive. On the one hand, it is expressive of shalom as a function of right-relationship, of being-in-Christ, of being-for-others. Such an incarnational understanding of being human orients play, friendship, art and all manner of everyday aesthetic existence as liturgical celebration. At the same time, and on the other hand, it is formative *for* shalom. Participation in such practice not only shapes the individual imagination, but if enacted collectively, the social imaginary. The *count as* significance of such action consciously and unconsciously underscores the script and its *telos*. In other words, if one were to ask, with Wolterstorff, from a performative perspective, what is happening in everyday aesthetic action as liturgy, what does it *do*? We could answer with him, simply, it enhances. Liturgy “serves our life in the world” by directing and nourishing it.¹⁰³ Mature aesthetic existence, manifest as liturgical action, polyphonically *enhances* everyday experience of shalom. To elucidate this summation, and by way of conclusion, we can turn once again to the example of music as aesthetic existence.

¹⁰⁰ Vanhoozer, ‘Praising in Song: Beauty and the Arts’, 115.

¹⁰¹ Vanhoozer, 121–22.

¹⁰² Vanhoozer, 118.

¹⁰³ Wolterstorff, *Hearing the Call*, 23.

6.5 Spotlight on Music: Sung work as enhancement towards shalom

Wolterstorff's analysis of the social practice of work songs not only provides a case study of aesthetic engagement understood as action, but clarifies how everyday aesthetic action enhances through a liturgical orientation toward shalom. Work songs are typically understood to be songs that are sung to accompany work. However, such a fragmented perspective stems from a separation of aesthetics from action, poiesis from praxis. Wolterstorff argues that rather than two distinct entities – songs and work – it is more accurate to speak of the single entity of sung work, “the singing and the working ‘coinhere’ – to borrow a term from theology of the trinity.”¹⁰⁴ The singing is not merely an insignificant accompaniment to the work, it modifies the work; it changes its nature.¹⁰⁵ Drawing from an interview with a prisoner engaging in sung work, Wolterstorff highlights the sentiment that “singing makes the work ‘go so better.’”¹⁰⁶ In other words, work songs *enhance* one's experience of work. The question is why; why does sung work “go so better”?

It is fundamentally because manifestations of sung work can function as “signs” of shalom, “samples of shalom that [point] to a shalom beyond themselves.”¹⁰⁷ Prisoners attest to singing while working to “uplift themselves ... as a manifestation of the ‘will of the human spirit.’”¹⁰⁸ Conversely, prison overseers may disallow singing in order to crush workers' spirit.¹⁰⁹ Even in the face of denigrating labour, “by singing, the worker manifests an indomitable sense of his or her ineradicable dignity.”¹¹⁰ Pragmatically, sung work may “go so better” because it sustains working rhythm, or energises, or cultivates solidarity, etc.¹¹¹ However, these utilities only partially explain how singing enhances work. “Singing enhances not only the work itself but the workers' experience of the work. The creative excess of the singing blurs the distinction between work and play by introducing a dimension of play into the work; this enhances their experience of the work.”¹¹² In other words, the introduction of play, an expression of aesthetic existence, modifies the work, allowing it to *count as* an expression of human flourishing.

¹⁰⁴ Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 259.

¹⁰⁵ Wolterstorff, 270.

¹⁰⁶ Wolterstorff, 262.

¹⁰⁷ Wolterstorff, ‘Human Flourishing and Art That Enhances the Ordinary’, 169.

¹⁰⁸ Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 259.

¹⁰⁹ Wolterstorff, 259.

¹¹⁰ Wolterstorff, 259.

¹¹¹ Wolterstorff, ‘Human Flourishing and Art That Enhances the Ordinary’, 169.

¹¹² Wolterstorff, 169.

Drawing from music historian, Ted Gioia, and his research on work songs, Wolterstorff suggests that workers experience the creativity of singing while working as an intrinsic good. The workers sing “for the joy of creating sung work.”¹¹³ Sung work then, as the fusion of poiesis and praxis, functions as a sign of shalom. Or, to put it in the language we have used thus far, sung work may implicitly *count as* an affirmation of shalom, flourishing in the joy of being human.¹¹⁴

However, it does not follow that singing while working automatically validates *any* labour as harmonious with human flourishing. Here we need to return to fittingness as a means of holistic discernment. Wolterstorff points out that certain songs fit certain work due to rhythm, tempo and “expressive character.”¹¹⁵ To use the wrong song would not enhance the work but make it more challenging. To use a musical metaphor, there needs to be harmony between the work and the song. It needs to fit. We can take this further; for sung work to be fully expressive of flourishing, it needs to fit a liturgical life-script of shalom. Such fittingness is neither merely aesthetic, nor ethical, but a measure of goodness in which both cohere.¹¹⁶

Mature aesthetic existence, as liturgically integrated with both ethical and religious life, thus “contributes to flourishing by enhancing our ordinary activities.”¹¹⁷ With Wolterstorff, we can therefore conclude by asking, “Might it be that, in general, human flourishing is best advanced by enhancing the ordinary rather than by trying to deny it or in some way to transcend it?”¹¹⁸ Mature aesthetic existence as discipleship, embraces the immediacy of the ordinary, orienting such action toward God in a liturgical disposition, thereby *counting as* worship, which not only celebrates being Christian, but formatively orients becoming Christian.

¹¹³ Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 265.

¹¹⁴ The objection may be raised that action is here obviously connected to aesthetics simply due to the example chosen, work (action) + songs (aesthetics) = sung work. However, the example merely serves to neatly portray Wolterstorff’s point that *all* aesthetic engagement is action. We could also consider Wolterstorff’s articulation of hymns as sung work, or “sung praise,” the singing of the action of praise making it “go so better.” Or even the exercise of absorbed attention *for* listening to classical music will “go so better” when *fitting* shalom, the relational flourishing of *kalos* in its fullest sense, incorporating faith, aesthetics and ethics. Wolterstorff, ‘Human Flourishing and Art That Enhances the Ordinary’, 174ff.

¹¹⁵ Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 261.

¹¹⁶ This is the necessary consequence of integrating Christian worship and everyday life, as Vanhoozer notes, “To worship well is to live well, and vice versa. Aesthetics and ethics alike cultivate sensibilities that enable one to make judgements concerning fittingness.” Vanhoozer, ‘Praising in Song: Beauty and the Arts’, 118.

¹¹⁷ Wolterstorff, ‘Human Flourishing and Art That Enhances the Ordinary’, 179.

¹¹⁸ Wolterstorff, 179.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Summation of Findings

The aim of this project has been to provide a theological foundation for the practice of discipleship, as life in the world, through the lens of aesthetic existence. As such it serves as something of a theological prolegomenon to practical theology. The research objective determined at the outset was to explore whether aesthetic existence is fundamental to being human, and therefore to being Christian, bodily engaged in the life of the world. An affirmation of this fundamental role has implications for both discipleship (the life of faith) and the way this is lived out in the world (ethics). This concluding chapter will offer a summation of the key findings, before turning to the implications, highlighting areas for further research and the potential trajectories such a practical theology could take.

Initially, Kierkegaard helped us to articulate the nature of aesthetic existence as sensory immediacy. Immediately, a trajectory emerged that was followed throughout the project and lies at the core of the ultimate findings: *There are two modes of aesthetic existence in relation to discipleship*, one leading to Christian formation, the other to self-created “formation,” or the creation of virtuality. In Kierkegaard’s terminology, he described the former through the concept of “poetic living” and the latter as the *life stage* of aesthetic existence. The life stage, or sphere of aesthetic existence is a mode of aesthetic existence wherein the aesthetic becomes absolute. In other words, it is an expression of aestheticism. By contrast, Kierkegaard suggests that the Christian attitude toward, or mode of aesthetic existence, rejects sensory immediacy as absolute and the Romantic self-creation associated with it. Rather than poeticising one’s own life, one co-poeticises with Christ in a mode of poetic living as discipleship. It is this mode which we then termed *mature* aesthetic existence for the remainder of the project.¹

Kierkegaard’s focus is on the immature mode of aesthetic existence, highlighting the deformative danger of such existence, particularly when coupled with Christendom, thereby

¹ Stemming from Bonhoeffer’s discussion of “mature worldliness,” as summarised by de Gruchy, “‘Mature worldliness’ is a way of being *Christian* in the world that is *fully human, truly of the earth*; one that involves not only living responsibly in the world but also living what Bonhoeffer described as a genuinely “aesthetic existence” of creativity, playfulness, freedom and friendship, something that he felt should characterize the life of the church.” John de Gruchy, *A Theological Odyssey: My Life in Writing* (Stellenbosch: Sun Media, 2014), 60.

creating a comfortable and apathetic virtuality, disconnected from being a “witness” to the reality of Christ. His prophetic critique is arguably more relevant than ever. Not only do we face manifestations of Christendom today in dissonance with costly disciplined living, but the post-modern tendency toward self-creation, further enabled by the “aestheticization of everyday life” and ubiquitous sensory technology supporting such self-creation provides fertile ground for the proliferation of virtual realities, both individually and collectively.²

Consequently, a pivotal question for this project is how one distinguishes between these two modes of aesthetic existence. Kierkegaard gives comparatively little attention to the mode of *mature* aesthetic existence, since the rhetorical urgency of his “attack on Christendom” dominates his work. However, he does point to the centrality of the imagination in discipleship and the notion that a “second immediacy” or “immediacy after reflection” may be vital to the Christian life. For Kierkegaard, it appears then that reflection and consequent intention are the necessary precursor to mature aesthetic existence as an aspect of discipleship. We shall return to this point shortly.

Kierkegaard’s limited and qualified endorsement of aesthetic existence stands in vivid contrast to Bonhoeffer’s enthusiastic call for a recovery of aesthetic existence in the life of the church. His affirmation of this-worldly immediacy, as manifest in the freedom of art, play, friendship and *Bildung*, stems from his Christology and the importance of an incarnational approach to imitating Christ. Christological reality is not merely other-worldly. The penultimate celebration of aesthetic existence has value precisely due to the “worldliness” of Christian reality. In other words, while Kierkegaard’s focus is exposing the Romantic illusion of poeticising a life which unites the finite and infinite, Bonhoeffer shows that participation in finite reality, even in its fragmentary state, has meaning as it is unified *in Christ*. It is the *cantus firmus* of Christ, as one is anchored in love for God, which makes the fragments, the moments of aesthetic existence, cohere in polyphonic counterpoint.

Bonhoeffer, then, continues the theme of distinguishing between two modes of aesthetic existence. In fact, for Bonhoeffer, there are different ways of seeing reality, and discipleship is precisely the ability to make the distinction, the ability to *see* reality in light of Christ. Bonhoeffer was all too aware of the consequences of the aesthetic gone awry, severed from ethics, amidst the rise of Nazi Germany and his own experience of distorted Christendom.

² Thiessen, *Theological Aesthetics*, 1.

See Walsh’s observations regarding the applicability of Kierkegaard’s analysis to post-modern life. Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 245.

Mature aesthetic existence is neither the untethered free play of the imagination, nor distinct from costly discipleship, but its polyphonic counterpoint. Herein lies the key to discerning mature aesthetic existence, “Where the cantus firmus is clear and distinct, a counterpoint can develop as mightily as it wants.”³

Two core findings lie at the heart of this project, which can be traced throughout. The first we have just noted, that there are two modes of aesthetic existence in relation to discipleship: formative and deformative, and discerning the distinction is important. The second core finding is that *mature aesthetic existence plays a dual role in being Christian*. If Kierkegaard introduced us to the *formative* nature of mature aesthetic existence as co-poeticising with Christ, Bonhoeffer highlights its *expressive* nature, as a celebration of this-worldly, Christological reality in the penultimate. Yet, Bonhoeffer also points to the formative, not explicitly, but in an implicit sense, through the formative role his own experience of music played in his theological development. The contribution of musical metaphors to the formation of Bonhoeffer’s late theology points toward the role sensory immediacy can play, collaborating with the imagination, in the formation of paradigms, ways of seeing. To further explore this formative role, we turned to the work of McGilchrist and his neuropsychological research.

McGilchrist showed that aesthetic existence is indeed fundamental to being human as an embodied, affective, often preconscious mode of attention that humans universally employ in relating to the world and making meaning. The classic notion that there are two ways of engaging the world – the Dionysian and Apollonian – is grounded in our very physiologies, having resonance with the two types of attention dominant in the lateralisation of brain function. However, and this is an important concluding point, it is not an either/or, *both* are vital. Along with McGilchrist, it is critical to be clear that although the significant role of aesthetic existence (or, for McGilchrist, right-hemisphere attention) in human consciousness needs to be highlighted, as is the task of this project, this does not in any way deny the indispensable role of abstract rationality and critical thinking (left-hemisphere attention) in being human and becoming Christian. One does not come at the expense of the other, but both should work together in a symbiotic relationship, feeding off, challenging and directing one another. The point, for both McGilchrist and this project, is simply that the tendency of modernity is to prioritise the latter at the expense of the former, which is not only an error, but leads to an illusory sense of reality.

³ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:394.

It is illusory since it is precisely the embodied and affective immediacy of right-hemisphere attention that offers context and breadth, along with an implicit and intuitive sense of how the specifics of left-hemisphere abstraction fit in relationship to the whole. As we have seen, emerging fields such as embodied cognition, affective neuropsychology and everyday aesthetics testify to this necessary relationship. The reality is that it is impossible for human beings *not* to exist aesthetically. Sensory immediacy is the necessary consequence of embodiment, a fundamental aspect of daily human life. Illusory notions of reality are created when the primal role of such sensory immediacy is denied, which is exactly why the advertising industry's ideal subjects are those who claim advertising has no effect on them, since they make choices solely on a "rational" basis. The aesthetic works largely on our formation through *preconscious and implicit* means, shaping our paradigmatic imagination, with the consequence that the significance of this influence can be disregarded if subject to ratiocentric hegemony. Immature aesthetic existence is dominated by the hyper-self-consciousness of left-hemisphere attention, thereby simply offering pseudo-vital experiences of sensationalism which serve simulacra rather than breaking out of the self-contained "hall of mirrors" to encounter the Other. This is most apparent in the rise of sensory technologies to support such sensationalism, all while situating the subject at the centre of "reality" (as manifest in personal devices, digital gaming, virtual reality, even aspects of "social media," etc.).⁴ But it is also present in the less obvious social constructions of a prosperity gospel, or distorted Christendom, for instance. This is immature aesthetic existence in service of an I-It approach to the world, rather than embracing the power of aesthetic existence as a means of everyday transcendence, serving an I-Thou interaction with relational reality. The latter is fundamental to understanding the essentially metaphorical nature of all abstraction and language, as it functions analogically, pointing towards ultimate Reality, as Ward showed. Ward elucidated the role of aesthetic existence in becoming Christian by challenging the boundaries between aesthetics, ethics and religion. Belief is not simply a religious category, but plays a role in everyday life. Modern epistemology ranks belief below rational certainty, as a weak form of knowledge. Both McGilchrist and Ward challenged this perspective, pointing to the dispositional nature of belief as a relational commitment of trust. Such an articulation of belief integrates it with action, McGilchrist describing it in terms of "acting as if," in response to the way in which reality is imagined (seen as). But Ward showed that the

⁴ Smith describes this as the "iPhone-ization of our world." "The world as 'available' to me and at my disposal — to constitute the world as 'at-hand' for me, to be selected, scaled, scanned, tapped, and enjoyed." Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 143.

interaction between sensation, action and belief is even more integrated, primal and preconscious than this. It is impossible to distil these spheres of being human from one another. Rather, the propulsive nature of aesthetic existence, as it shapes the imagination, plays a significant role in seeing, acting and believing. Instead of a neat, linear progression (sensory experience → ratiocination → belief → action), Ward showed that anticipation and projection can precede conscious ratiocination, affecting one's disposition toward the world at a preconscious level in a complex, multidirectional interaction between action, belief, ratiocination and sensory experience. Not only does aesthetic existence shape the imagination, but we *live into* these paradigms as embodied beings, our desires moulded by these “mythic sensibilities.”

Aesthetic existence is indeed then a form of poiesis, as Kierkegaard introduced to us, but the way in which it is involved in “*making sense*” is not distinct from action in the world, or praxis. The end result of immature aesthetic existence is the *making* of simulacra and the celebration of self-referential sensationalism. By contrast, the poiesis of mature aesthetic existence is the creation not only of art, play, friendship, etc., but thereby, of a way of seeing the world, an embodied way of being in the world, which celebrates and analogically participates in Christological reality. Such existence is a relational commitment, a mode of discipleship, a Christological mimesis, which sacramentally participates in the divine through embodied reality, thereby integrating aesthetics, ethics and faith.

The way of discerning such mature aesthetic existence is through the measure of *fittingness* to the liturgical “script” of shalom-making. Wolterstorff affirmed that aesthetic engagement is a form of action, refuting the modern “grand narrative of art,” which seeks to locate it within a separate sphere of disinterested contemplation, having no utilitarian purpose, but being for itself and thereby locating it as socially other, the pathway to transcendence. Rather, aesthetic engagement is embedded in social practices, carrying normative value toward a specific *telos*. Or, as James Smith described it, practices are oriented toward a specific “kingdom” or vision of the good life. While aesthetic engagement may not be explicitly utilitarian, it can contain means-end rationality in a number of ways, notably by carrying *count as significance*. Even sensory immediacy, being in the moment, can carry *count as significance*, through embodied and imaginative participation in a larger narrative toward a specific *telos*. These larger life-narratives, informed by a social imaginary and embodied as social practices function as “scripts,” offering meaning to action. But drawing on all we discovered regarding the preconscious and implicit significance of aesthetic existence, the key point here is that such

sensory participation is not only *expressive* of a particular “script” but also *formative* for that “script.” To identify aesthetic existence as “harmless fun” is thus illusory. There is a reinforcing circularity about such participation, or a “discipleship,” oriented by the relevant *telos*. The question is then not *whether* one worships, but *whom* or *what* one worships. By understanding all Christian action in the world as liturgy, and consequently embracing a holistic orientation of a liturgical “script” for all of life, aesthetic existence functions as both expressive of being Christian in the world, and formative for becoming Christian. Within this “script” distinctions between sacred and secular are non-existent, the everyday and the ordinary are significant and *enhanced* through mature aesthetic existence as signs of shalom.

7.2 Implications and Fruitful Trajectories for Practical Theology to Take

7.2.1 *The Feral Nature of Aesthetic Existence*

Aesthetic existence is not easily domesticated. This is precisely the nature of sensory immediacy; it “lies beneath” ratiocination, as Ward points out, engaging the imagination as “mythic sensibility.”⁵ We have explored at length the dynamic, propulsive nature of aesthetic existence, but again, it needs to be clear that the “mythic sensibility” it cultivates can lead to either wonder or horror.⁶ There are indeed “hidden pathologies” of the imagination, as Ward reminds us, and the expression of this can be horrific, as evidenced by Nazism.⁷ This is why a recovery of aesthetic existence cannot be a Nietzschean abandonment to the Dionysian, beyond good and evil, but rather needs to be the cultivation of *mature* aesthetic existence. However, herein lies the challenge, precisely because aesthetic existence “lies beneath.” This is why any discernment of mature aesthetic existence needs to be holistic, going beyond conscious ratiocination to the attunement, or *fittingness* discerned by one’s whole being, in polyphonic resonance to a broader life-narrative.

Two points need to be made in regard to this feral nature of aesthetic existence. Firstly, a project such as this, relying solely on tools of rational analysis, can only intimate at abstract approximations as to its nature, always losing something of the essence of this aspect of being human by such reduction to propositional language. As a result, it should be clear that a project such as this cannot comprehensively articulate the nature and function of aesthetic existence in being human, even while it aims to offer a greater degree of understanding in this

⁵ Ward, *Unimaginable*, 115.

⁶ Ward, 156ff.

⁷ Ward, 119.

regard. Neat encapsulations of aesthetic existence will always elude our grasp, for precisely the same reason that it remains valuable as a window to (everyday) transcendence, wonder and mystery. As noted earlier, however, while it is impossible to quantify the role of aesthetic existence in human formation with scientific certainty, this does not mean we cannot point to its fundamental significance; such has been the task of this project.

Secondly, this slippery nature of aesthetic existence is precisely why the church has often been reluctant to embrace it. If it cannot be controlled, who knows where it will lead? A mature aesthetic existence cannot be programmatised, ordered or dictated solely by explicit means. In many senses it is easier then to simply reject it. But such a rejection comes at a high price as we have seen; this formative aspect of being human continues to operate, either for good or ill, even if not explicitly embraced. What might the solutions be?

7.2.2 *A Second Immediacy Revisited*

Possibly, a helpful starting point would be to return to Kierkegaard's "second immediacy." On the one hand, we need to reject a linear account of Kierkegaard's notion of a second immediacy, or immediacy after reflection. The relationship between immediacy and explicit reflection is simply more complex than the sequential progression implied here. However, on the other hand, we should acknowledge the important role of reflection and intention in mature aesthetic existence. Sensory immediacy plays a role in discipleship precisely when it is integrated with reflection, intention and self-control, just as "playing" a musical instrument cannot be separated from disciplined practice. The crucial point here is the complex, multi-directional, symbiotic relationship between these aspects of human existence. In this sense, we could say that *all* immediacy is a "second" immediacy. Being in the moment is always informed by paradigms already formed through amalgamation of previous sensory experience, reflection, intention, action, etc. In another sense, we could suggest that *all* immediacy is a "first" immediacy, being viscerally in the moment will always "lie beneath" conscious intention and reflection to some degree at least. Intention shapes immediacy and immediacy intention. Reflection, intention and volitional action therefore *do* have an important role to play, but due to the complexity of this relationship, the question is how to best engage these aspects of being human to cultivate mature aesthetic existence in the everyday?

7.2.3 *An Ecclesial Embrace of Everyday Aesthetic Existence*

As noted at the beginning of chapter four, this feral nature, the “uncontrollable, even demonic, energies” associated with aesthetic existence has led to a suspicious response from the church.⁸ In many ways this is valid. As noted in this project, there is indeed a deformative component to aesthetic existence.⁹ It is therefore clear that the church should not simply offer an unqualified endorsement of aesthetic existence.

However, the church also cannot afford to ignore the formative power of aesthetic existence. In other words, banishing it from the Christian life is not the solution, particularly amidst an aestheticized, technologically saturated society with a plethora of consumerist and political agendas calling for “worship.” Rather the church needs to cultivate ways of being attuned to a liturgical life toward shalom in the everyday. What does this look like?

7.2.3.1 Cultivating a “Script”: Everyday liturgical practices for the 21st century

A starting point is to acknowledge the power of aesthetic practice, intentionally nurturing and cultivating spaces for individual and communal everyday liturgical practices for the 21st century. In a post-modern society re-discovering the spiritual power of aesthetic engagement and embodiment,¹⁰ the church can offer both explicit and implicit affirmation of a “script” which embraces everyday aesthetic existence. The Christological nature of this-worldly reality, and consequently, the liturgical significance of the everyday should be didactically affirmed. In addition to this explicit affirmation, the church (as Christians in the life of the world) could be both endorsing and creating spaces which celebrate communal play, music, dance, hiking and feasting, etc., alongside practices of costly discipleship. Again, these two realms – explicit and implicit “scripting” – are ideally not separate and distinct; explicit and

⁸ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 16.

⁹ The irony, however, is that church traditions most careful to avoid aesthetic existence are often precisely those exposed to its deformative nature. By excluding aesthetic existence from their portrayal of the Christian life, they simply abdicate any responsibility to this formative aspect of human existence, handing it over to the “cultural liturgies” of everyday life for a secular “discipleship.”

¹⁰ For instance, apart from Horn’s popular work on the power of communal singing, see also Bronwyn Tarr’s recent research on “synchrony,” and the relational connectedness fostered by shared music and dance, for example, Jacques Launay, Bronwyn Tarr, and Robin Dunbar, ‘Synchrony as an Adaptive Mechanism for Large-Scale Human Social Bonding’, *Ethology* 122, no. 10 (2016): 779–789; Horn, *Imperfect Harmony*.

intentional reflection both feeding into and learning from the embodiment of liturgical, everyday aesthetic existence.¹¹

7.2.3.2 Attunement to the Moment in Relation to the Existential Whole

Nevertheless, again, the nature of aesthetic existence means that such intentional affirmation will form only part of a Christian embrace. Moments present themselves unexpectedly in the everyday, amidst the apparently disjointed fragments of life. As Bonhoeffer pointed out, discipleship is the ability to *see*, to be attuned to these moments as the formative experiences that they are. The fragments can here function as lenses through which to perceive the polyphony in greater mysterious fullness. In this sense, there is resonance between Kierkegaard's second immediacy and Paul Ricoeur's second naïveté.¹² Mature aesthetic existence requires first-hand experience of costly discipleship. It requires confrontation with the jarring fragmentation of a fallen world, not theoretically but existentially, to move beyond the critical to a second naïveté, or a second immediacy.¹³ Such an embrace of mature aesthetic existence can never be programmed. However, an attunement is required, a sensitivity, both personally and pastorally (for others), to identify the fragments, the moments, leaning into them as a polyphonic living in counterpoint to the *cantus firmus* of love for Christ. A mature aesthetic existence is therefore integrated with an understanding and mindful practice of spiritual formation.

7.2.4 A Liturgical Embrace Guided by Love

Finally, any practical articulation of mature aesthetic existence will need to have love at its core (a theme which has been subtly present throughout our study). Kierkegaard oriented this project by noting that aesthetic existence is not an ethical category, in the sense that it is not a question of permissibility, but as Bonhoeffer added, a question of freedom. Further, we could conclude by saying that it is a relational question of formation (*Bildung*), of becoming, in relation to. This is why it is core to discipleship; it orients, and manifests an orientation of

¹¹ For an excellent example of this, see Tish Harrison Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016).

¹² Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 349ff.

¹³ Bonhoeffer, Kierkegaard, de Gruchy and Wolterstorff's lives all attest to the fundamental, existential shift which intimate pain and death brings, both Wolterstorff and de Gruchy losing sons, Wolterstorff describing his life as forever being "divided into before and after." Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 46. See also John de Gruchy, *Led into Mystery: Faith Seeking Answers in Life and Death* (London: SCM Press, 2013).

one's love. Here we can recall Kierkegaard's description of a first immediacy as sensory-erotic immediacy to be taken up within marriage, alongside Bonhoeffer's suggestion that the passion of Song of Solomon can "develop as mightily as it wants" in counterpoint to the *cantus firmus*.¹⁴ Mature aesthetic existence therefore reflects the paradox of the gospel; it is kenotic while being pleromatic. It is being-for-others even through existential immersion in the sensory moment. It is not the rejection of earthly love, but an orientation of passion, desire and immediacy as liturgical "service of the other" in polyphonic resonance with God's love for us.

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 8:394.

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