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‘Having-to-be-thus’: On Bonhoeffer’s Reading of Goethe’s *Iphigenia in Tauris*

Abstract

While the intellectual background to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics* is undoubtedly theological and philosophical ethical discourse, this paper argues that the interpretation of an important element of the *Ethics* manuscripts is well-served by being approached through aesthetics, specifically poetics. The element in question is what Bonhoeffer considers a sense of ‘objective necessity’ involved in acting obediently to Christ, and the case that this is best approached through aesthetics is made by exploring Bonhoeffer’s use of Goethe’s *Iphigenia in Tauris* to articulate this ‘objective necessity’. Working from Bonhoeffer’s use of Goethe, the paper explores how poetics can involve a sense of necessity comparable to that which drives the undertaking of certain ethical deeds. This possibility is found in the poetics of the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, who considers this poetic and ethical necessity always to be concrete, and coins a category for it, named ‘having-to-be-thus’. Examining this category promises to contribute to the difficult theological question of how concrete obedience to Christ can be ‘objectively necessary’ at all, but also point more broadly to the aesthetic character of Bonhoeffer’s ethical stipulations.

Introduction

The intellectual background from which Dietrich Bonhoeffer drew orientation and stimulation for his *Ethics* manuscripts is recorded in the critical apparatus of the 6th volume of his *Werke* and various extant, contemporaneous writings.¹ In these records, we see Bonhoeffer engaging with key theological and philosophical luminaries in Western ethical reflection, toward or against whom he occasionally situates himself explicitly in the manuscripts

themselves.² Nonetheless, the impression arises at certain moments, that Bonhoeffer cannot commit himself to the classic *loci* of either theological or philosophical ethical discourse available to him, and appears actually to be straining against the parameters of standardly-conceived ethical discourse itself. Two examples make this particularly clear. Firstly, much of the discussion in *Ethics* is focussed on Bonhoeffer's abandoning of the 'notion, largely dominant in ethical thought', of an 'individual' having 'an absolute criterion by which to choose' between good and evil.³ This takes issue with what today would be classified as deontological ethics (usually the Kantian variety) in the Anglophone world. However Bonhoeffer also condemns practical reasoning based on the consequences of actions (which today would be termed 'consequentialist'/'teleological' ethics), as exhibiting 'myopic pragmatism' and a 'servile attitude to the facts'.⁴ In his refusal to accept either of the main routes of ethical inquiry available to him, the impression thus arises that existing ethical categories are not enabling Bonhoeffer to iterate what he is grasping at.

A second example can be seen in a lengthy discussion of the Genesis Fall which we shall revisit shortly, where Bonhoeffer seems to be striving toward something belonging to prelapsarian humanity which cannot be contained by the oppositions in which he considers ethical discourse to be inevitably conducted. After the Fall, he says, 'everything splits apart - is and ought, life and law, knowing and doing, idea and reality, reason and instinct, duty and inclination, intention and benefit, necessity and freedom', and the 'universal and the concrete'.⁵ This apparent straining on Bonhoeffer's part is also, albeit less explicitly, apparent at other moments in the manuscripts which seem rather opaque and difficult to interpret. Here, the standard interpretation of ethical concepts seem unable to render Bonhoeffer's stipulations fully lucid. One such instance is his remarks on 'objective necessity'. He writes that, in following Christ, 'the task is' to do what is objectively necessary', to take 'the next necessary step', and elsewhere, 'to discern what is necessary [...] in a given situation'.⁶ The

most obvious place in Bonhoeffer's own intellectual tradition to look for the use of objectivity and necessity as concepts at work in ethical discourse is the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. But, as shall be shown shortly, Bonhoeffer's work is deeply critical of the Kantian practical enterprise, and particularly the approaches to ethical objectivity and necessity therein, due to their groundedness on 'pure practical reason' as something inherently decontextualized and ego-centred.

As the dominant Kantian and post-Kantian approaches to objectivity and necessity cannot be applied to Bonhoefferian 'objective necessity', the question of how obedient action to the commands of Christ can appear as necessary remains unanswered. This problem is intensified by Bonhoeffer's express forbidding of a background framework of good and evil as a source of orientation for ethical dilemmas. He holds that, in deciding how we must necessarily respond to Jesus, we can have no intellectually transparent criteria; beyond what he terms the 'form of Christ'. But how can a course of obedient action can be deemed as necessary (which Bonhoeffer says it must), if we have no criteria with which to evaluate it (which Bonhoeffer says we must not)? All we can do, he claims, is discern what is necessary in terms of forming (*Gestaltung*) the world according to the form (*Gestalt*) of Christ.

In Bonhoeffer's grasping at a sense of 'objective necessity', the only interlocutor who helps him articulate his thoughts is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, of whom he says, '[i]t is astounding how close [he] comes to these thoughts from a purely profane knowledge of reality'.⁷ While Bonhoeffer strains against ethical discourse, a passage of Goethe's poetry serves his aims better than more expected theological and philosophical sources of orientation. Bonhoeffer's literary sensitivity is undeniable, but few have inquired critically into how his life-long appreciation of the literary arts may have affected his theology, nor indeed how it might offer some resources for discerning how best to articulate passages like the one currently under discussion.⁸ But the fact Goethe enables Bonhoeffer to articulate his theological goals

more effectively than he could otherwise, combined with Bonhoeffer's struggling with the conceptual frameworks of available ethical discourse, suggests that the most helpful categories with which to interpret key elements of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* could actually be aesthetic.

In order to unpick how Goethe's *Iphigenia in Tauris* enables Bonhoeffer to iterate his particular understanding of 'objective necessity', this paper draws on the poetics of the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey employs a category which is highly promising for this paper, for it is intended to capture a sense of 'objective necessity' without being grounded on Kantian 'pure practical reason': 'having-to-be-thus' (*Sosein-Müssen*). This category is also highly appropriate for this inquiry insofar as Dilthey considers it to appertain not only to aesthetic phenomena (particularly poetry), but also to moments of ethical intensity. That is, for Dilthey, the constituent elements of an effective poem, and the circumstances which interplay in ethically significant actions, 'have-to-be-thus'; they carry a sense that things must necessarily proceed in a certain way. Moreover, Dilthey's 'having-to-be-thus' is not grounded by him on any intellectually transparent criteria, but on his understanding of the human 'form' or *Gestalt*, which is itself a key conceptuality for Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*. So examining Dilthey's category promises not only to answer to the difficult question of how concrete obedience can be 'objectively necessary' at all, but also points more broadly to the aesthetic character of Bonhoeffer's ethical stipulations.

1. The 'Objectively Necessary'

1.1 Kant's Practical Philosophy

The first step in responding to the challenge presented by Bonhoeffer's comments on 'objective necessity', is to distinguish whatever it is Bonhoeffer is grasping at from his inheritance of Kantian practical philosophy. Kant's categorical imperative, by definition,

outlines a framework for understanding human morality precisely in terms of objective necessity; that is, what Bonhoeffer is claiming for the commands of Christ. Kant's categorical imperative is of course defined most famously with the formula: 'I ought never to act except in such a way that *I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law*'.⁹ H. J. Paton paraphrases this by saying 'a [person] is morally good...as seeking to obey a law valid for *all* [people] and to follow an objective standard not determined by his [or her] own desires'.¹⁰ Following this objective standard is thus, for Kant, a matter of duty (*Pflicht*). The word 'categorical' indicates that this imperative derives from the realm of 'pure reason', meaning here the classifying activity of the human intellect, or *Verstand*. Kant's favourite example is the 'lying promise'. If one is thinking of making a promise one does not intend to keep, he sees that person asking him or herself what the world would be like if the maxim of this action were universalised; if promises became indistinguishable from lies.¹¹ The rational activity of the understanding should conclude that this is not permissible, and in this way the categorical imperative offers a standard for measuring right action. The key point for my purposes, is that Kant maintains that the categorical imperative dictates how 'every rational agent *would necessarily act* if reason had full control' over him or her. That is, with a 'wholly rational agent' objective principles would *necessarily* delineate that agent's behaviour.¹²

Those familiar with Bonhoeffer's theology will be able to see why he reacts strongly against Kant's practical philosophy. The important objection for this paper is that the categorical imperative offers an autonomously transparent criterion for discerning the good: namely, 'I ought never to act except in such a way that *I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law*'. Bonhoeffer dismisses the bearing of such a criterion within oneself on the grounds that it inhibits properly attentive, responsible action in the contextual reality of human life. There might be times when radically self-sacrificial generosity, say, is called-for

by one's circumstances in a way that could never become a sustainable and humane universal law. But the issue doesn't end here, because, for Bonhoeffer, Kant's categorical imperative is dangerously seductive on deeper, theological grounds, arising from his reading of the Genesis Fall. That is, it offers what Bonhoeffer considers to be a paradigmatic example of what it is to know good and evil; to make oneself the ground and measure of God's commandments.

Bonhoeffer highlights that the knowledge of good and evil is something to which humanity is originally tempted through the desire to be *sicut deus* ('like God'). He associates being *sicut deus* with acting according to 'an absolute criterion of what is good in and of itself' without regard for circumstances. This measuring stick for good and evil constitutes disunion from God and other human beings, because insofar as one possesses such a yardstick one is cut-off from genuine solidarity with others. More deeply, insofar as one carries an 'absolute criterion' within oneself, one is *sicut deus* - in the sense of bearing an absolute self-sufficiently - and not in an appropriately humble posture of reverence before the only absolute that is God the Creator.¹³ Alternatively, to act on the basis of an attentiveness to concrete circumstances is, for Bonhoeffer, a question of responsibility for others. He writes, 'a human being [...] lives in encounter with other human beings' and 'this encounter entails being charged, in ever so many ways, with responsibility for the other human being'.¹⁴ If one sees ethical orientation as adhering to an 'absolute criterion of what is good in and of itself', then the chances of acting responsibly are thus seen by Bonhoeffer as intrinsically undermined.

He fleshes this out with an example from one of the most well-known ethical discussions in Western philosophy, Kant's example of someone sheltering a friend from a murderer. If the murderer comes to the door and asks after the friend, in Bonhoeffer's presentation of Kant, it is right to tell the truth and let the murderer know the potential victim

is inside (thus placing the friend in danger). This is because the maxim of the act of lying could not be made a universal law, and is thus not absolute. Bonhoeffer calls this a ‘grotesque conclusion’,¹⁵ and considers it outright irresponsibility toward to the welfare of another in the hope of maximising one’s own goodness; wanting to be *sicut deus*. Because this ‘absolute criterion’ lies in the human understanding, or *Verstand*, we can see why Bonhoeffer considers it to be inherently decontextualised. The Kantian categories of the understanding lie in the abstract realm of ‘pure reason’, so for Bonhoeffer the categorical imperative cannot present actions which are attentive and responsive to contextual demands arising in concrete situatedness. It is a criterion which, aligning to the intellectual apparatus of human thinking, can be separated out and borne within oneself and then *applied* to reality or ‘wielded’, at the fallen hands of human beings.

1.2 Iphegenia in Tauris

Bonhoeffer’s alternative to knowing an absolute good like the categorical imperative, is to know the will of Christ. On the one hand, he is confident that knowing the will of Christ must be different to knowing an ‘absolute good’. On the other hand however, there are numerous instances where he describes the knowledge of Christ’s will in ways which seem markedly similar to precisely the sort of ‘absolute good’ he is criticising. That is, Bonhoeffer discusses his unabashedly Christocentric approach to ethics using language which, *prima facie* at least, appears to be tangled-up with the Kantian legacy. This is demonstrated by Bonhoeffer’s afore-mentioned use of the terms ‘necessary’ and ‘necessity’ to describe Christ’s will. This cannot be the necessity provided by a principle of the ‘good in itself’, but he does not outline precisely what constitutes it *as* necessary. He states that, in obedience to Christ, the ‘point is not to apply a principle’ but ‘to discern what is necessary [...] in a given situation’.¹⁶

So we are dealing with a ‘sense’ of necessity – a *having* to act – in response to a demand arising from specific circumstances; the need for a particular, responsible action, which is ‘necessary’ for the sake of other human beings in light of those circumstances. But the variety of actions which could be classified as ‘necessary’ in this sense is very broad indeed, and this necessity is difficult to grasp as something not irredeemably subjective, rather than a critically robust notion for ethical discussion, let alone what Bonhoeffer terms the ‘objectively necessary’.

This interpretive difficulty is made more curious by the fact that, to articulate this sense of contextual necessity, Bonhoeffer embarks on an extended recourse to poetry: something highly exceptional in his published works. Bonhoeffer reproduces a dialogue from the poetic drama *Iphigenia in Tauris*, in which Pylades insists on Iphigenia acting in a way Bonhoeffer considers responsible, and in violation of rational law. He quotes fourteen lines of Goethe’s dialogue, in which Iphigenia is urged that, ‘life teaches us and you will learn it too / to be less rigorous with ourselves and others’ and that ‘keeping pure [*rein*] and disentangled / within ourselves or with regard to others / is far beyond a human being’s grasp’, that ‘Nor are we meant to judge ourselves; / our first duty [*Pflicht*] is to walk and watch our path, / for we can seldom rightly judge what we have done, / and still less judge what we are doing’.¹⁷

These verses give Bonhoeffer a glimpse of a deeply contextual necessity which cannot be conceptually pinned down in terms of principle. That is, Pylades touches on what it is not to be subject to the sin of Adam, not bound-up with the need to measure oneself against an absolute good, or keep ‘pure and disentangled’. This is also linked with deep involvement in situational reality; for ‘our first duty is to walk and watch our path / we can seldom rightly judge what we have done, / and still less what we are doing’. While *Iphigenia in Tauris* certainly deepens our impression of what Bonhoeffer is grasping at, it presents a further

challenge. This is, namely, the question of why, in seeking to categorise actions that are not answerable to any criteria of the good, poetry can help, or rather, how poetry might enable us to respond to the difficulty of not rendering Bonhoefferian objective necessity as something merely subjective. In order to explore this challenge, let us turn to the philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey, where he uses poetics to inform ethical reflection in a way which promises to be fruitful for this paper.¹⁸

2: Wilhem Dilthey's 'Having-to-be-thus'

2.1 The Practical and Aesthetic in Kant

Before turning our attention to Dilthey's work, it is necessary to examine a salient aspect of its immediate background in Kant's aesthetic philosophy. That is, notwithstanding the issues with Kant's practical philosophy outlined above, in asking how reflection on the practical sphere might be helpfully informed by aesthetic categories, some pointers are given in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (1790). Kant outlines his understanding of three 'faculties' in the first introduction to the third *Critique*, and it is there that he remarks on a certain interrelation of the second (practical) 'faculty of 'desire' [*Begehrungsvermögen*] with the third (aesthetic) 'faculty of feeling of pleasure and displeasure (or taste)'. Kant differentiates his faculties on the basis of their 'objects'. The practical faculty is distinctive, he claims, partly because its objects are desired ends. He states that here the subject is 'considered as at the same time the cause of the reality of [an] object'. As regards aesthetics however, objects are very different, being beheld passively (not performed), and judged to be either pleasing or displeasing.¹⁹

A crucial consequence of this object-differentiation, is that Kant considers a judgement of ‘taste’, or an aesthetic judgement, to be ‘without any interest’. He defines interest in terms of wanting bring an object (a desired end) about ‘through our own causality’, so ‘interest’ is therefore something pertaining to the objects of the faculty of desire. In the judgement of a thing’s beauty, however, Kant states that we ‘judge it in mere contemplation’, further differentiating the practical and the aesthetic spheres.²⁰

However, there is a passing remark in a footnote to this discussion which serves to bind together practical ends with aesthetic objects more closely than we might expect. There, Kant states that one can make a practical judgement which ‘can be entirely disinterested yet still very interesting’.²¹ This peculiar phrase means that there are circumstances in which a particular desired end is deeply compelling (is very ‘interesting’), but yet does not satisfy any personal inclination (is ‘entirely disinterested’). Interestingly, the judgements Kant has in mind are actually those previously discussed judgements of ‘pure practical reason’. He considers that a ‘pure moral judgement’ is ‘entirely disinterested’ insofar as its compellingness is not driven by personal inclination but by what we might term a purely rational ‘fittingness’. In this sense, we can see that (notwithstanding Bonhoeffer’s critique), Kantian ethics is not intended to present an ego-centred or autonomous approach, but quite the contrary. Moreover, in that Kant interrelates the realms of ethics and aesthetics by arguing that ‘pure’ morality is disinterested, in a way analogous to the contemplation involved in beholding pleasing aesthetic objects, it is precisely the non-autonomous character of the categorical which links the practical with the aesthetic. Pointing briefly to our concern with Bonhoefferian objective necessity, there seems some promise in this insight of Kant’s. That is, if a groundedness on pure practical reason is intrinsically bound-up with being *sicut deus* for Bonhoeffer, but Kant holds that certain actions are compelling or ‘fitting’, in a way which is analogous to the pleasing quality of effective

aesthetic objects, there appear to be good grounds in exploring aesthetic categories to articulate the compellingness or fittingness which he describes in terms of ‘objective necessity’.

2:1 ‘Having-to-be-thus’ and Poetics

In seeking to a more extensive understanding of the link between ethics and aesthetics, the philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey is particularly apposite. Dilthey’s *raison d’être* was to formulate an epistemology for the arts and humanities as an alternative to Kantian epistemology, which he saw as appropriate for the natural sciences. A key aspect of this involves articulating forms of generality or overarching characteristics and patterns of human experience, which do not ‘stand-alone’ as laws – as abstract criteria which can be separated out and *applied to* concrete reality - but which are embedded in life itself. The lawfulness of natural scientific thinking is something Dilthey considers to be articulated most quintessentially by Kantian ‘pure reason’, whereas he argues that the human sciences set out to describe and articulate lived experience in a way whereby the specificity and uniqueness of human phenomena cannot be convincingly captured by these ‘pure’ lawful structures. This means not distilling intellectual activity as something separable from the experience of reality, but outlining generalities which inhere inseparably *in* the contextual circumstances which instantiate them. For Dilthey, disciplines like literature, history, sociology, art, music and jurisprudence cannot be rightly understood through delineating abstract laws which then apply to different phenomena regardless of the particularity of those phenomena themselves.

One of these generalities is promising for this discussion, because Dilthey sees it as an alternative form to the lawful necessity of natural science and Kantian pure reason, and thus the necessity of the categorical imperative. Dilthey calls this category ‘having-to-be-thus’

(*Sosein-Müssen*). Like Kant, Dilthey differentiates three faculties in human experience, and like Kant he differentiates their respective objects in terms of interest and disinterest. Nonetheless, Dilthey points out that the representation of both types of objects is dependent on the creative imagination, which allows him to maintain that ethical attentiveness and poetic creativity can bear a marked similarity, mentioning in one text ‘the moral ideal’ and ‘the poetic technique’ together as standing together at the summit of human achievement.²² Moreover, he fleshes out Kant’s insight about the link between ethics and aesthetics by discussing the ‘enhancement and expansion of one’s existence’ in aesthetic experience as something ‘akin to the delight that arises from the mode of volitional activity involved’ in ‘courageous actions’.²³ Dilthey considers moments of ethical significance to be deeply indicative of human freedom because he regards ‘courageous actions’ to occur when the ‘psyche’ assumes ‘superiority’ over the ‘satisfaction of impulses’.²⁴ This is, again, a juncture very like that in the afore mentioned footnote to Kant’s third *Critique*, where our freedom over personal inclination is linked to the ‘disinterestedness’ of aesthetic contemplation.²⁵

But Dilthey brings us to new territory, in that he articulates this juncture in keeping with his own epistemological commitments: by not separating out intellectual activity (pure reason) from the experience of reality, but outlining generalities which inhere inseparably *in* the contextual circumstances which instantiate them. That is, his category of ‘Having-to-be-thus’ seeks to capture a sense of necessity shared by aesthetic and ethical experience but which is not grounded on Kantian pure practical reason, and so is not something abstract but must always remain concretely-situated.

Dilthey introduces his category with a musical example, stating that on hearing the first notes of, say, Beethoven’s Fifth, an audience member could not predict the rest of the

composition, and ‘yet we have a feeling once it has ended that this is the way it should have ended’.²⁶ This experience is the feeling that something ‘has-to-be-thus’, that precisely *this* is the trajectory something should take. Dilthey states that ‘having-to-be-thus’ arises particularly perceptibly in poetry. He maintains that the impression of reading an effective poem is such that one feels it could not have been written any other way without negating the impression of the whole. This means that to alter any constituent element would deeply undermine the poem’s effectiveness, for the poem reads as if it ‘has-to-be-thus’: that every image, syllable, pentameter or item of punctuation is intrinsically bound-up with the entirety of its cohesive impression. This sense of ‘having-to-be-thus’ cannot be conceptually distilled apart from the phenomena which instantiate it; unique in each case. He says his ‘categories are not applied to life *a priori*’ but ‘lie in the very nature of life’.²⁷ That is, there is no separable criterion for discerning that an element of a poem ‘has-to-be-thus’, but the sense of ‘having-to-be-thus’ nevertheless belongs inalienably to the impression one gets from reading it. There is no distillable maxim by which one can ensure that something would ‘have-to-be-thus’, but nonetheless certain impressions carry with them a sense of necessity which, for Dilthey, cannot be denied.

Importantly, Dilthey also considers this category to arise in moments of acute ethical attentiveness. When a human being embarks on a significant response to their circumstances, Dilthey claims that this deed can exhibit the sense of ‘having-to-be-thus’, a sense that it *should* take place, but the criterion of the ought cannot always be distilled conceptually and then applied to other contexts. In exploring how and why this is the case, we need to examine Dilthey’s use of the term *Gestalt*, which will also bring Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics* back into view.

2.2 ‘Having-to-be-thus’ and *Gestalt*

For Dilthey, poetics and ethical attentiveness both exhibit the category of ‘having-to-be-thus’ precisely because they are activities deeply bound-up with the human ‘form’ or *Gestalt*. Dilthey sees the *Gestalt* as the fullness of a developed human character. The word derives primarily from the German past-participle of *stellen*, which would mean ‘to be stood’, and has been commonly used to translate the latin *forma*, referring to the ‘intuitable’ and spatial appearance of a thing.²⁸ Crucially, a *Gestalt* is also a whole, meaning a ‘characteristic unity’²⁹ and not merely a sum of parts. It cannot be divided into components, and then understood intellectually by being reconstructed from constituent elements. Overall, for Dilthey, the *Gestalt* is a cohesively distinctive structure of developed tendencies, habits of will, viewpoints and conclusions which are deeply embedded and coordinated in consciousness, providing an overall sense of a person’s character, created by the interplay between the psychological structure of an individual and the ‘conditions under which we live’. The *Gestalt* is thus described as embodying ‘our overall response or attitude to reality’; the full ‘articulation’ of the self.³⁰

Dilthey claims that ‘having-to-be-thus’ arises in phenomena which are most deeply intertwined and intermingled with the human *Gestalt*. This means phenomena which allow us to glimpse the whole of a person’s character, things which belong uniquely to that person. With poetics, the key issue is that the artistic medium of poetry gives an unparalleled depth of aesthetic impression, which can bring someone into the subjectivity (or *Gestalt*) of another in an unsurpassable way. Dilthey considers the reading of poetry to instigate and cultivate manifold resonances and interconnections in human consciousness, many of which structure the overall impression of a poem without being brought fully into explicit awareness. In this way, the depth of poetry mirrors the depth and inscrutability of human consciousness itself. This inscrutability points to the *Gestalt*, for just as one cannot claim to have grasped another

person in their fullness through listing their attributes and experiences, an effective poem offers a fullness of impression which similarly evades being taxonomically captured through collating its elements and constituents.

The depth of the link between *Gestalt* and poetic creativity is shown in a discussion of what Dilthey terms in the ‘the making whole’ [*Ergänzung*] of poetic images.³¹ This is an attempt to discern the process which enables particular images to become whole, in the sense of bringing a poem to completion. Dilthey sees such images to exhibit a process of development in poetic composition, which mirrors the singular response to reality of the poet him or herself. That is, the image develops and grows on a unique path, which in the impression transposed into the understanding of the reader gives a glimpse of reality *through* the subjectivity of the poet; where the poet is *gestellt*, his or her spatial and intuitable appearance in the world. He claims images unfold in the poet’s imagination, leading to other related images, incorporating new components through their development, and directing the syntactical and cadential course of the language. The image therefore iterates its own *telos* or directedness, which is the central pivot of the unified whole of the poem. In great poetry, every item of component imagery, and each linguistic syllable, stand in a relationship of complex interdependence with every other element. It is this type of complex interrelationship which Dilthey claims is supremely indicative of the human *Gestalt*. Poetry, for Dilthey, is a transposition of complex subjectivity onto the raw material of images and words, which transposes the interwoven elements into an edifice which mirrors the subjectivity of the poet in the reader’s own subjectivity. A poem is thus seen to mirror the wholeness of *Gestalt*. ‘Having to be thus’ enables Dilthey to describe the inner *telos* of a poetic image which functions microcosmically in reflecting the unique *telos* of an individual’s life-trajectory.

Dilthey's contention that 'having to be thus' arises also in ethical conduct is indicated firstly by his observation that the human life-course, like the trajectory of Beethoven's Fifth, cannot have been predicted but carries with it a strong sense that it 'had-to-be-thus'. Examples of this kind of outworking of a life-course apply particularly to people with what he terms a historical 'destiny'. The *locus classicus* of this in Dilthey's writing is the life of Goethe, whose character seems intrinsically and inseparably linked with his context, with intellectual movements like the German Renaissance and the early Romanticism of *Sturm und Drang*. Indeed, one could say the same for Dilthey's other favoured examples of Luther, Kant, or the Frederick the Great, and their respective situatedness in the Reformation or the European Enlightenment.³² To think of the reciprocity between self and milieu we see in figures like Kant, or Goethe, as 'having-to-be-thus', is to see the lives of these historical subjects exhibiting a peculiarly marked appropriateness to their milieu, seen in the actions by which they contribute to their context. That is, we cannot rightly understand the German Renaissance without knowing something of Goethe, nor know much about Goethe without understanding the German Renaissance: specific contextualities are thus inextricably linked with the generalities by which they are understood; the interior and the exterior cannot be separated, and are joined into a unified whole, or what Dilthey terms: life.

Although, as very much a 19th Century thinker, Dilthey concentrates on what he calls 'great men'; 'having-to-be-thus' also applies to the lived-experience of more pedestrian creatures than Kant and Goethe.³³ He seems to consider that particularly significant deeds, or moments of focussed ethical attentiveness, cause us to be inextricably intertwined with our situatedness in life, such that who we are cannot be separated from where we are stood at that moment, that we become intractably embedded to the circumstances in which we are existing. This involves a point where our *Gestalt* is surrendered inalienably to that moment; when a

course of action seems uniquely demanded of *oneself specifically*, as if from now on one cannot understand oneself apart from that demand, and that to walk away would critically undermine the deepest sense one has of one's self. In short, that something 'has-to-be-thus'.

3 'Having-to-be-thus' and Bonhoefferian Necessity

'Having-to-be-thus' clearly resonates with the contextual necessity that Bonhoeffer alludes to; a sense that something seems necessary – in the sense one *has* to act – in light of specific circumstances. Moreover, the key point for Bonhoeffer is that genuinely responsible action is not grounded on any criteria which can 'stand-alone' and be abstracted out or conceptually distilled as absolute criteria borne autonomously. Again, Dilthey's category is apposite here, for Dilthey maintains that 'having-to-be-thus' cannot be separated from the phenomena which instantiate it. But in order to discern if we can take 'having-to-be-thus' to the point of offering a framework for discerning precisely what Bonhoeffer terms the 'objectively necessary', we need to see how it might apply not only to the human *Gestalt per se*, but to the *Gestalt* of Jesus Christ.

To understand Christ's *Gestalt* as being instantiated by human action, would mean to consider certain deeds to give a glimpse of Christ in his fullness, to exhibit something uniquely Christ's; the *telos* of Christ's own life. For Bonhoeffer, where Christ 'is stood', and his 'intuitable' appearance, are unavoidable characteristics of his being fully human – we cannot glimpse Christ's *Gestalt* unless we behold that which is *human*, meaning personally incarnate in concrete space and time – and this means that unless we ourselves act in the world, Christ's *Gestalt* is closed-off from the outset. This combines to present a view of discerning how best to proceed, in a way whereby the complex intertwining of all the myriad of elements by which

we know Christ, combine and crystallise into a specific point where a certain action of ours is *his* becoming human in the world, where a certain deed is necessary as the only possible expression of his person. That is, as Bonhoeffer states, where we acknowledge that ‘Jesus knows only one option’.³⁴ A conceptual grounding of this moment cannot be arrived at however, for this is something like the complex interdependence from reciprocal resonances and associations that come with poetic understanding.

This does not only elucidate the necessary, but also Bonhoeffer’s construal of the ‘objective’, for it points to that which is genuinely exterior to ourselves; Christ’s *Gestalt*. But the key point for this paper is that such moments would not be only an encounter with Christ, but something belonging uniquely to ourselves as well. That is, in reflectively discerning how best to proceed by poetically inhabiting Christ’s *Gestalt*, we are presented with actions which are still uniquely ours. In Dilthey’s understanding, the most significant deeds arise where one feels one can no longer know oneself apart from this deed, when that we are from this moment inseparably embedded to certain circumstances. Applied to Bonhoeffer’s thinking, discernment of Christ’s *Gestalt* could deeply reconfigure the occurrence of such moments. In this sense we gain some insight into Bonhoeffer’s statement that (quote) Christ is ‘precisely *my* life’ - ‘my life is another, a stranger, Jesus Christ’.³⁵ That is, the point where we no longer ground our action on our own knowledge of the good, is precisely the point where Christ comes to meet us in that which ‘has-to-be-thus’. The myriad of elements by which we glimpse the life of Christ, crystallise at a point depending precisely on *our* very own specificity and uniqueness, and we are thus at that moment no longer *sicut deus*. Or, as put in Bonhoeffer’s quoting of Goethe, when we realise that ‘This human breed is formed in such astounding fashion/so variously linked up and interwoven/that keeping pure and disentangled/within ourselves or with regard to others/is far beyond a human being’s grasp’.³⁶

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, Herausgegeben von Ilse Tödt, Heinz Eduard Tödt, Ernst Feil, and Clifford Green, (München : Chr. Kaiser , 1992); for contemporaneous writings, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works in English Volume 16: *Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940-1945*, translated by Lisa E. Dahill (Minneapolis: Fortress 2006), particularly pp. 77-78; 540-550; 601-609;

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works in English Volume 6: *Ethics*, edited by Clifford J. Green; translated by Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), see for example the comment on Kant and Fichte on p. 383, Nietzsche on p. 222, and Luther and the Classical tradition on p. 265

³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p.219

⁴ Ibid., p. 260; p. 222

⁵ Ibid., p. 308.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 224-5; 221-2

⁷ Ibid., p. 280

⁸ See Jacob Phillips, 'The Cup of Suffering: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Discipleship and German Expressionism' in *Modernism, Christianity, and Apocalypse*, edited by Erik Tønning, Matthew Feldman, and David Addyman, Leiden: Brill Publications, 2014), pp. 53-66

⁹ Immanuel Kant, 'Critique of Practical Reason', in *Practical Philosophy*, translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 164

¹⁰ H. J. Paton in Immanuel Kant, *The Moral Law: Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated and analysed by H. J. Paton, (London: Hutchinson University Press, 1948), p. 22

¹¹ Kant, *Groundwork*, pp. 67–8

¹² cf. Ibid. p. 26: 'Kant does not in practice distinguish sharply between a command and an imperative'

¹³ This is of course Bonhoeffer's understanding of the 'knowledge of good and evil', discussed at length in Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works in English Volume 3: *Creation and Fall*, translated by Martin Rüter and Ilse Tödt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) pp. 103-114. See also Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works in English Volume 4: *Discipleship*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), pp. 277-280

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 220

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 278

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 221–2

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 280-281; cf. Goethe, ‚Iphigenie auf Tauris‘ in *Sämtliche Werke Bd V: Dramen 1776-1790*, (Frankfurt-am-Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1988), pp. 185-186

¹⁸ This paper is not making the stronger claim that Bonhoeffer is drawing directly on Dilthey’s writing about Having-to-be-thus, nor indeed other salient moments in the latter’s *oeuvre*. Rather, this paper works from the conviction that Dilthey and Bonhoeffer exhibit a marked shared *concern*, namely, to articulate or describe what Dilthey calls the ‘original togetherness’ of ‘the psychophysical life unit’ (*Lebenseinheit*) [Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Works III*, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi, (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 108], and Bonhoeffer, the ἄνθρωπος τέλειος (whole human being) [Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works in English Volume 8: *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Isabel Best et al, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010 p. 278].

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, edited by Paul Guyer, translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 11

²⁰ Ibid., p. 90

²¹ Ibid.

²² Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Works II*, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi, (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 227.

²³ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Works V: Poetry and Experience*, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 206.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 244.

²⁶ Dilthey, *Selected Works II*, p. 392

²⁷ Dilthey, *Selected Works III*, p. 252

²⁸ Arnim Regenbogen and Uwe Meyer, ‘Gestalt’, in *Wörterbuch Der Philosophischen Begriffe*, (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 2013), p. 260–1

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Dilthey, *Selected Works II*, p. 190 and Makkreel and Rodi in Dilthey, *Selected Works V*, p. 8.

³¹ Rudolph Makkreel, *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies*, (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 95–108 (Makkreel translates *Ergänzung* as ‘completion’, but translation altered here because it is not ‘finality’ at stake in this term, and a sense of ‘openness’ should be preserved)

³² See Dilthey, *Selected Works II*, 154.

³³ Ibid., p. 191

³⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 93

³⁵ Ibid., p. 250

³⁶ Ibid., p. 280-281