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G. W. F. Hegel and Richard Wagner on the Death of Jesus Christ

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Abstract

Hegel's early work *The Life of Jesus (Das Leben Jesu)* of 1795 presents Jesus as a teacher of Kantian morality and ends abruptly with his death, anointing of his body, and burial, such that Jesus could appear to be merely a figure of the remote past. However, within a few years Hegel's view of the death of Jesus was to change radically. Writing of his death in terms of the 'death of God', this individual is transformed into the universality of Spirit who dwells in the community. This paper examines how this fundamental change in Hegel's thought came about, how Hegel's mature understanding of the death of Jesus was appropriated by Richard Wagner in his proposed opera Jesus of Nazareth, and how this 'death of God' became the model for the death of Brünnhilde in the Ring cycle. For both Hegel and Wagner, the death of Christ can only be understood as a self-involving enterprise, the bringing together of the 'objective' and 'subjective'. Further, Wagner largely shares Hegel's immanent understanding of God, although under other influences he can affirm the idea of a transcendent God or a transcendent world.

I. Introduction

Just as much of Western philosophy and theology over the last 200 years can be understood in terms of responses to Hegel, so much of Western music since the middle of the nineteenth century can be understood as a response to Wagner. Further, it has been widely acknowledged that Wagner's art and thought have had repercussions in areas such as literature, theatre and film. Not so widely recognized is that although he was primarily a consummate composer, dramatist, and poet, he was also a theologian and a philosopher in his own right (Bell 2020; Zöller 2018: 61). And whereas the secondary literature on Wagner rightly stresses his debt to Schopenhauer,¹ the abiding inspiration of Hegel on the composer throughout his adult life has not always received the attention it deserves.



Hegel and Wagner were both fascinated by history, and specifically the philosophy of history, and the death of Jesus of Nazareth and how this should be interpreted, especially regarding reconciliation and the question of 'God', was one of their central concerns. In this article I will examine how Hegel's understanding of the death of Jesus developed and how his views influenced Wagner, focussing on his proposed opera *Jesus of Nazareth* and the *Ring* cycle.

II. Hegel's early theological development

In October 1788 at the age of 18 Hegel entered the Evangelisches Stift, the protestant seminary in Tübingen. In the first two years he took the Magister in Philosophy (Harris 1972: 72–88) as well as studying theology (Harris 1972: 84) and this was followed by three years of theology (Harris 1972: 88–96). In September 1793 he passed the church exam but rather than being ordained in the Lutheran Church he took up a post as a private tutor to a family in Berne (1793–97), the sort of work in which many young academics were engaged. In his private study time Hegel between 9 May and 24 July 1795 produced one of his first works, *The Life of Jesus*. This runs to seventy-one pages in the critical edition (*GW* 1: 207–78).² In bringing together elements from the four gospels, he accepts some matters uncritically. For example, he accepts that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (*TE*: 104; *GW* 1: 207), whereas many would now suggest Nazareth as being the more likely place for his birth. But other things he excludes, most notably the miracles,³ including the virginal conception. Further, any ideas of Jesus's death being sacrificial are absent (Brown 1985: 86);⁴ so, for example, the last supper narrative has a distinctly moralistic tone (*TE*: 153–57; *GW* 1: 264–67; Brown 1985: 85). One of the most striking aspects of Hegel's reconstruction is the abrupt ending: he writes of Jesus's death, the anointing of his body, and burial, but nothing more (*TE*: 165; *GW* 1: 278), suggesting that Jesus is simply a figure of the remote past.

But Jesus is at least presented as an effective teacher, although he tends to be simply a mouthpiece for promoting Kantian ethics. So, Jesus addresses Nicodemus (compare John 3.3–15): 'how can I expect you to believe [...] my word when you don't even hear the inner testimony of your own spirit, of the divine voice?' (*TE*: 108; *GW* 1: 212). Hegel's Jesus was setting out Kant's categorical imperative: 'To act only on principles that you can will to become universal laws among men, laws no less binding on you than on them—this is the fundamental law of morality, the sum and substance of all moral legislation and the sacred books of all peoples' (*TE*: 115–16 (modified); *GW* 1: 221).⁵ It is therefore

understandable that he omitted the ‘golden rule’ (Matthew 7: 12) when drawing on the material from Matthew 7 (*TE*: 115; cf. 115–16 n.; *GW* 1: 220).⁶ It can be said that Hegel presents a life of Jesus that coheres with Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason* (Pinkard 2000: 60).⁷

That Hegel took such an approach is understandable from his letters. Here we learn that he had again taken up the study of Kantian philosophy and was critical of the ‘theological-Kantian’ approach of G. C. Storr,⁸ who had argued for an orthodoxy based on Kant, who ‘had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith’ (*CPR*: Bxxx). However, in the isolation of Berne, Hegel was beginning to learn something of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* through Hölderlin, who, as well as reading Fichte (as early as August 1794), was attending his lectures in Jena.⁹ In a letter to Schelling, Hegel writes that ‘[f]rom the Kantian system and its highest completion I expect a revolution in Germany’ and that part of this will be ‘the idea of God as the Absolute Self. He clearly felt that he was out of touch with the latest developments and writes that he is resolved to undertake a study of the *Wissenschaftslehre* ‘during the summer’.¹⁰ Therefore although Hegel was aware of the way Kant could be further developed, in his *Life of Jesus* he remained firmly within a Kantian framework.¹¹ In short he was holding to Kant’s critical philosophy that included these three elements: first, there is a gulf between ‘what is’ and all thought about it;¹² second, an abstract view of God; third, there can be no bridge or transition between what we call the finite and the infinite.

In January 1797 Hegel moved to Frankfurt to take up again a private tutor’s role, and soon he was to write very differently about the life and death of Jesus, and the Christian religion generally. This change can be seen in sections of the work popularly known as *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate* and in *Fragment of a System* (1800). The former is a collection of around 20 fragments written between 1797 and 1800 (Harris 1972: 521–23; Jaschke 2016: 77–84). The title *Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal* was given by the editor, Herman Nohl (1907), and modelled on Herder’s *Vom Geist des Christentums. Nebst einigen Abhandlungen verwandten Inhalts* (1798). The changes that can be discerned between *The Life of Jesus* (1795) and the fragments now found in *Spirit of Christianity* correspond to Hegel’s switch from the world of Mendelssohn, Lessing and Kant to the nascent Romanticism of Schleiermacher, Hölderlin, Fichte and Schelling (Kroner 1948: 8; cf. Reardon 1977: 12). Of these early romantics, the influence of Hölderlin was particularly important and he can be said to have ‘completely re-orientated Hegel’s intellectual direction’ (Pinkard 2000: 80). Such early romantics influenced Hegel in his approach to mythology and epistemology, and this was ultimately to transform his understanding of the very nature of being, which in turn had a bearing on his new interpretation of the death of Jesus.

III. Hegel on mythology and epistemology

Regarding Hegel's new appreciation of mythology and with it a new approach to epistemology, Hölderlin, and to a lesser extent Schelling, was a decisive influence. Already in the late Berne period Hegel's new interest in mythology can be discerned, for in August 1796 he had composed a poem 'Eleusis' (dedicated to Hölderlin), the work referring to the Eleusinian mysteries of ancient Greece (*Werke* 1: 230–33; *GW* 1: 399–402).¹³ Harris asks: 'One is left wondering just how soon the parallel between the mysteries of Eleusis and the miracle of Easter struck him' (1972: 248). Then there is the intriguing reference to 'a new mythology' in the so-called 'Oldest System Programme of German Idealism'. This was written in Hegel's hand, but perhaps composed by Schelling or Hölderlin rather than Hegel himself,¹⁴ and has been given a date of 1796 or 1797: 'First of all I shall speak here of an Idea which, as far as I know, has never occurred to anyone—we must have a new mythology, but this mythology must be in the service of the Ideas, it must become a mythology of reason' (Bowie 2003: 335).¹⁵ The influence of Hölderlin intensified from January 1797 when both were living in Frankfurt. Schiller's poem *Die Götter Griechenland* (1788)¹⁶ had earlier forced Hölderlin to deal with the question of a demystified nature (Safranski 2019: 72), and over the next few years he developed ideas that poetry ran on two levels: *Schein* and *Grundton* ('appearance' and 'fundamental sense').¹⁷ One way of viewing Hegel's development is that he came to see that his *Life of Jesus* was inadequate in failing to perceive the *Grundton*.

With this appreciation of myth also came an appreciation of mysticism, and again the early romantics were a decisive influence. But this was not the mysticism of the *via moderna* that influenced Luther and Calvin, and the later Hamann and Jacobi; such mysticism had to look *beyond* reason to discern deeper truths. Rather the mysticism that influenced the early romantics and subsequently Hegel was the hyper-rationalism of Platonic mysticism (Beiser 2003: 63–64).¹⁸

One fundamental consequence of this new appreciation of mythology and mysticism was an epistemological change. In *The Life of Jesus* Hegel could be said to adopt a Cartesian subject-object dichotomy, an approach to the study is the life of Jesus that had been developed during the Enlightenment and continues to this day. But with the influence of Hölderlin and others, Hegel now engaged in a self-involving approach and the key term he employed for this was 'spirit' (*Geist*). One of the earliest hints of this is in 'Man kan den Zustand ...' ('The state of Jewish culture ...') now found in *Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, this fragment having been written sometime between the summer of 1799 and early 1800 (Harris 1972: 522–23): 'The hill and the eye which sees it are object and subject, but between the human and God, between spirit and spirit, there is no such cleft of objectivity and subjectivity; one is to the other an other only in that

one recognizes the other; both are one' (*ETW*: 265 (modified); *Werke* 1: 381; *GW* 2: 267). And so Hegel asks in 'Das Wesen des Jesus ...' ('The essence of Jesus ...'): 'How could anything but a spirit know a spirit?' (*ETW*: 266 (modified); *Werke* 1: 382; *GW* 2: 269). This is immediately after quoting John 4.24 ('God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth').¹⁹

IV. Hegel on thought and being

Hegel's change in attitude regarding the death of Jesus cannot simply be accounted for by this new appreciation of myth, mysticism and 'spirit'. Something more profound was going on and it comes down to his understanding of 'being'. Whereas Kant had radically separated thought and being (note the gulf between 'what is' and all thought about it mentioned above), Hegel wished to bring them together. Spinoza had brought thought and being together and Hegel in his *Differenzschrift* (1801) assumed with Schelling and Hölderlin that, with Spinoza, one could presuppose their unity (Houlgate 2006: 131). However, Hegel came to the view that although it may be right to bring together thought and being, one should not simply presuppose this connection. And so Hegel developed presuppositionless thought and one consequence of this was that the category of being harbours within itself the moment of negation (Houlgate 2006: 44). The significant person who earlier brought together thought and being was Parmenides: 'Thought and being are the same' (Diels 1951: 231). However, as opposed to Hegel, Parmenides denies the negative when he declares: 'what is there to be said and thought must needs be: for it is there for being, but nothing is not' (Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1983: 247; Diels 1951: 232). As Houlgate writes of Parmenides's view: 'True being is thus purely affirmative with no trace of negation or indeed change in it; it is "uncreated and imperishable"' (2006: 43, quoting Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1983: 248). Houlgate points out that the legacy of Parmenides can be found in Descartes's view of God as the supremely perfect being or Kant's view of God as the *ens realissimum*.²⁰ Hegel opposes this and, if he is right that being requires the negative, then when it comes to God's being, Godself must be human and must die. And so we come to Hegel's view of the death of God.

V. Hegel on the death of God

It is at the very end of his 1802 work *Faith and Knowledge* that Hegel first explicitly writes of the death of God. In this work Hegel discusses the philosophies of

Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte, all of whom have ‘recast the dogmatism of being into the dogmatism of thinking, the metaphysic of objectivity into the metaphysic of subjectivity’ (FK: 189; *Werke* 2: 430) and finds them wanting. The key problem in their work is that the finite and infinite are opposed: ‘They make infinity into an absolute principle, so that it becomes infected by its opposition to finitude’ (FK: 190; *Werke* 2: 431). So, for example, Kant ‘always and everywhere recognizes that Reason, as the dimensionless activity, as pure concept of infinitude is held fast in its opposition to the finite’ (FK: 81; *Werke* 2: 318). Hegel’s way forward is that ‘[i]n [truly philosophical] cognition, infinity as this negative significance of the Absolute is conditioned by the positive Idea that being is strictly nothing outside of the infinite, or apart from the Ego and thought. Both being and thought are one’ (FK: 190; *Werke* 2: 431). Hegel then engages in a word play on ‘infinite’ in the final paragraph of the work. He writes that ‘pure concept or infinity as the abyss of nothingness in which all being is engulfed, must signify the infinite grief [...] purely as a moment of the supreme Idea, and no more than a moment’ (FK: 190; *Werke* 2: 432). This is the ‘speculative Good Friday’, which has come about since the appearance of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Jaeschke 1990: 131). ‘Formerly, the infinite grief only existed historically in the formative process of culture. It existed as the feeling that “God himself is dead (Gott selbst ist tot)”, upon which the religion of more recent times rests’ (FK: 190; *Werke* 2: 432). Hegel here quotes the Lutheran hymn of Johann Rist ‘O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid’ (‘O Great Woe, O Heart’s Pain’):²¹ ‘Gott selbst liegt tot’ (‘God Himself lies dead’). The nature of this ‘infinite grief’ is not entirely clear. According to Beiser, ‘the death of Christ fills the Christian with “infinite grief” because God has withdrawn from the world by forsaking his only begotten son’ (2005: 138). This may be reading too much into Hegel’s text. The only clue Hegel offers is by quoting Pascal, who expressed the ‘same feeling [...] in so to speak sheerly empirical form: “la nature est telle qu’elle *marque* partout un Dieu *perdu* et dans l’homme et hors de l’homme” [Nature is such that it signifies everywhere a lost God both within and outside man]’ (FK: 190; *Werke* 2: 432).²² The opposition between finitude and infinitude is then overcome by reestablishing the ‘speculative Good Friday’:

[It is necessary to] re-establish for philosophy the Idea of absolute freedom and along with it the absolute Passion, the speculative Good Friday in place of the historic (*historisch*) Good Friday. Good Friday must be speculatively re-established in the whole truth and harshness of its God-forsakenness. (FK: 191; *Werke* 2: 432)

The next time Hegel discusses the ‘death of God’ is in the *Phenomenology* (1807). This will prove important when we turn to Wagner, since there is some evidence that he read the work. In the third part of Chapter 7 Hegel writes of ‘manifest

religion' and in ¶784, where he discusses the death of Christ, there is a word play on 'Begriffen'/'Ergreifen' which, as I will later suggest, is reflected in a significant letter of Wagner letter to Ludwig II of Bavaria. Hegel writes:

Comprehension (*Begriffen*) is, therefore, for that self-consciousness not a grasping of this [concept] which knows superseded natural existence to be universal and therefore reconciled with itself; but rather a grasping (*Ergreifen*) of the imaginative idea, that by bringing to pass its own externalisation, in its historical incarnation and death, the divine Being has been reconciled with its [natural] existence. The grasping (*Ergreifen*) of this idea now expresses more definitely what was previously called the spiritual resurrection in this same context, i.e. the coming into existence of God's individual self-consciousness as a universal self-consciousness, or as the religious community. The *death* of the divine [Human], *as death*, is *abstract* negativity, the immediate result of the movement which ends only in *natural* universality. Death loses its natural meaning in spiritual self-consciousness, i.e. it comes to be its just stated [concept]; death becomes transfigured from its immediate meaning, viz. the non-being of this *particular* individual, into the *universality* of the Spirit who dwells in His community, dies in it every day, and is daily resurrected. (*PhSM*: 475, ¶784; *GW* 9: 418; *Werke* 3: 570–71)²³

In the next section (¶785) Hegel then takes up an idea he had earlier introduced of the death of God (¶¶753, 763) and quotes again that line from Johann Rist's passion hymn. We shall later see how Hegel's logic is taken up by Wagner in that with the death of God as the death of Christ (or Brünnhilde) there is a 'resurrection as Spirit' (*PhSM*: 471, ¶779; *GW* 9: 415; *Werke* 3: 566), such Spirit being at work within human hearts and within the community.

The hymn of Rist is quoted again in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1827) and expresses more clearly how he understands the death of God:

'God himself is dead', it says in a Lutheran hymn, expressing an awareness that the human, the finite, the fragile, the weak, the negative are themselves a moment of the divine, that they are within God himself, that finitude, negativity, otherness are not outside of God and do not, as otherness, hinder unity with God. Otherness, the negative, is known to be a moment of the divine nature itself. This involves the highest idea of spirit. (*LPbR*: 3: 326; *VPbR* 3: 249–50)

Sometimes Hegel suggests that Christ is the revealer rather than the accomplisher of reconciliation and redemption (cf. Hodgson 2005, 172):

The ground of redemption [...] is not a capricious accident, or merely a particular deed and happening, but rather is true and consummating. [...] It is not the history of a single individual; rather it is God who accomplishes it—i.e., it is the intuition that is the universal history which has being in and for itself. (*LPbR* 3: 128; *VPbR* 3: 64)

However, Hegel's intention in emphasizing the revealing aspect of Christ's work may be simply to avoid the traditional idea of 'satisfaction' which he elsewhere rejects or reinterprets. He rejects the idea that Christ's sacrificial death 'offers occasion for representing God as a tyrant who demands sacrifice' (*LPbR* 3: 220; *VPbR* 3: 151). Instead, 'God cannot be satisfied by something else, only by himself' (*LPbR* 3: 219; *VPbR* 3: 150). The death of Christ is the death of God and as such *does* achieve reconciliation.

There are other occasions when Hegel affirms that Christ accomplishes reconciliation such as in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, where he declares that Christ as human 'suffered, sacrificed himself, and in him

this conversion of His other-being [natural finitude] into spirit, and the necessity of the pain in the renunciation of naturalness is witnessed; but this pain, the pain of feeling that God Himself is dead, is the starting point of holiness and of elevation to God. Thus what must come to pass in the subject—this progress, this conversion of the finite—is known as implicitly accomplished (*vollbracht*) in Christ. (*LHPb* 3: 5; *VGPb* 3: 89)²⁴

Therefore without Christ's death there would be no 'conversion of the finite' and so his death *does* accomplish something.

The final work I consider where Hegel expresses his understanding of the death of Christ and its consequences is the *Philosophy of History* (and again there is the idea that the death of Christ does accomplish reconciliation). This is a work that Wagner read and two passages are important for understanding how Hegel's understanding of the death of Christ may have influenced Wagner:

Christ dies; only as dead, is he exalted to Heaven and sits at the right hand of God; only thus is he Spirit. He himself says: 'When I am no longer with you, the Spirit will guide you into all truth.' [John 16:13] Not till the Feast of Pentecost were the apostles filled with the Holy Ghost. (*LPbH*: 325; *Werke* 12: 393)

Then a couple of pages later he writes:

[O]nly after the death of Christ could the Spirit come upon his friends; that only then were they able to conceive the true idea of God, namely, that in Christ the human is redeemed and reconciled: for in him the idea of eternal truth is recognised, the essence of the human acknowledged to be Spirit, and the fact proclaimed that only by stripping himself of his finiteness (*Endlichkeit entäußert*) and surrendering himself to pure self-consciousness, does he attain the truth. (*LPbH*: 328; *Werke* 12: 397)

Hegel does not mention the resurrection here probably because he does not consider it a material event like the crucifixion, as Hodgson explains:

The resurrection of Christ is as essential to Christian faith as the crucifixion, Hegel avers. But it is not a material event like the crucifixion. It is more like an interpretive perspective on the crucifixion, indeed on the whole of the life of Christ, a perspective that arises with the community of faith and is based on the spiritual experience of the community rather than on historical evidence or proofs. (2005: 175)

A similar understanding of the resurrection can be found in two artworks of Wagner, where he is strongly influenced by Hegel: his proposed opera *Jesus of Nazareth* and the *Ring* cycle.

VI. Hegel's influence on Richard Wagner

Like Hegel, Richard Wagner (1813–83) was fascinated with history and historical works are well represented in his private libraries in Dresden and Bayreuth. He also had a fascination for philosophy, and this was probably first nurtured through his uncle, Adolf Wagner (1774–1835). Adolf had studied at the Leipzig Thomana and then in 1792 registered in the theology faculty of the University, although his interests focussed on classics and philosophy, especially German philosophy. In 1798 he went to Jena for a year of study where he attended Fichte's lectures, but we do not know whether he attended Schelling's (in Jena 1798–1803).²⁵ Although he left before Hegel's arrival in Jena in January 1801, one can say that he was nevertheless 'influenced above all by Hegel'.²⁶ Richard Wagner may also have received Hegelian ideas from his uncle's friend, Christian Hermann Weisse. This much neglected philosopher and theologian

had studied under Hegel and in 1829 two books appeared, one concerning the current state of philosophy in relation to Hegel's system and the other a translation of Aristotle 'on the soul' (*de anima*) and 'on the world' (*de mundo*, wrongly attributed to Aristotle).²⁷ Then in 1830 his *System of Aesthetics* appeared which, although holding to a Hegelian method, did not entirely hold to the Hegelian teaching.²⁸ Wagner was enthralled with Weisse when he met him at his uncle's home and, no doubt, this encouraged him later to study Hegel: 'I had listened to a conversation between these two men about philosophy and philosophers, which impressed me very deeply' (*My Life*: 54; *Mein Leben* 1: 62).

Wagner attended Weisse's lectures on aesthetics when he was a student at the University of Leipzig but gives the impression of having had little interest in them. In his autobiography he writes: 'Two or three times [...] I attended lectures on aesthetics given by one of the younger professors, a man named Weiss' (*My Life*: 54; *Mein Leben* 1: 62). One wonders whether Wagner is underplaying the role of Weisse in his intellectual development by saying that he attended only two or three lectures and I even wonder whether the misspelling of his name is deliberate! Wagner was in the habit of minimizing the influence of his teachers, wishing to present himself as self-taught, like Siegfried of the *Ring* cycle. The same pattern is found regarding his musical education and shortly after discussing Weisse there is a further misspelling, and again one wonders whether this is deliberate, this time his teacher in musical composition: 'Weinlich' (*My Life*: 54; *Mein Leben* 1: 62).²⁹ Later in his autobiography Wagner writes that his first attempts with philosophy 'had been a complete failure'. 'None of the Leipzig professors had been able to hold my attention with their lectures on basic philosophy and logic' (*My Life*: 429; *Mein Leben* 1: 442).

As far as we know it was about fifteen years later that Wagner started to read Hegel. According to the painter Friedrich Pecht, Wagner was reading the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) sometime in the period 1846–47, and he relates this story:

One day when I called on him I found him burning with passion for Hegel's *Phenomenology*, which he was just studying, and which, he told me with typical extravagance, was the best book ever printed. To prove it he read me a passage which had particularly impressed him. Since I did not entirely follow it, I asked him to read it again, upon which neither of us could understand it. He read it a third time and a fourth, until in the end we both looked at one another and burst out laughing. And that was the end of phenomenology. (Pecht 1894: 1: 294; Otto 1990: 90)³⁰

But it was *not* the ‘end of *Phenomenology*’ for Wagner and later I point to one of his possible allusions to the work. Around the same time he read a much more accessible work, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. Wagner used the second edition of 1840, the only work of modern philosophy in Wagner’s personal library in Dresden, and he dates the first reading to 1847 (*Brown Book*: 94; *Braunes Buch*: 111). He writes:

For my introduction to the philosophy of Hegel I chose his *Philosophy of History*. Much of this impressed me, and it appeared as if I would gain admittance to the inner sanctum by this route. The more incomprehensible I found many of the most sweeping and speculative sentences of this tremendously famous intellect, who had been commended to me as the keystone of philosophic understanding, the more I felt impelled to get to the bottom of what was termed ‘the absolute’ and everything connected with it. (*My Life*: 429–30; *Mein Leben* 1: 442)

Although Wagner’s autobiography is not always entirely accurate, I have consulted his copy Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* and am convinced it was read, although there are only two markings. (But Wagner rarely marked his books and I will come to a striking exception shortly.) In addition to the *Phenomenology* and *Philosophy of History* he may also have read the *Aesthetics*, and if he did not he must have learned about Hegel’s ideas through some other means³¹ since the essays he wrote in his exile in Zürich so clearly reflect Hegel’s *Aesthetics* (Bujčić 1988: 51–52) not to mention the close correspondence between the two thinkers on Greek literature (Foster 2010). Wagner would be naturally drawn to Hegel on account of the exalted place he gives art³² but he clearly appropriates Hegel to suit his own artistic agenda.³³ In addition to all this, one should add that even if Wagner never read a single word of the philosopher, Hegel was in the very air he breathed. I am not claiming that Wagner understood all the subtleties of Hegel’s philosophy but there is sufficient evidence that he had a feel for all the essentials of his thought.

VII. Wagner’s interest in theology

As well as these philosophical interests, Wagner was fascinated with theology. In addition to Hegel, Luther was one of his abiding passions and a vast range of literature was to inform his theological outlook—whether that be Greek tragedy, Goethe, medieval literature or the essays of Lessing. His theological interests can be perceived in all his stage works of the so-called ‘Wagnerian canon’.

For example, the first three operas concern the hope of redemption of a man through the love of a woman. In the first two of these operas (*Flying Dutchman* and *Tannhäuser*) the man is redeemed; in the third, a heavenly figure, Lohengrin, a knight of the holy grail, longs to become fully human through the love of a woman (Elsa), but she fails to redeem him.

After completing *Lohengrin* Wagner worked on his next proposed opera *Siegfried's Death* that, after some significant changes, eventually became the *Twilight of the Gods* (the fourth opera of the *Ring* cycle). Wagner completed the libretto of *Siegfried's Death* in the Autumn of 1848. In this original version the hero Siegfried dies to atone for the sins of the Gods. Then in early 1849 he turned his attention to an opera *Jesus of Nazareth* in five acts. The fact that the opera was to be in five acts may speak for Wagner's sense that he was dealing with 'history' (his only other five-act opera was *Rienzi*, based on events in fourteenth-century Rome). To prepare for the opera he read with some care through his New Testament in Luther's translation, marking it extensively; it is in fact the most heavily marked of all his books that I have consulted. And among the markings are Roman numerals placed in the margin, these indicating for which of the five acts of his proposed opera these verses were relevant.

Then in April 1849 he produced prose sketches for the opera that come in three parts, and the order of composition was probably as follows (Bell 2017: 263–64). First, he wrote out verses from the New Testament, which he considered important for the opera, using a separate sheet for each act. Secondly, he wrote the outline of the opera. Thirdly, he composed a sophisticated theological commentary, reflecting the thought of several theologians, but principally Hegel. I offer one example:

So Jesus brushed aside the House of David: through Adam had he sprung from God, and therefore all human beings were his brothers: not through an earthly kingship could he ransom them from misery, but only through fulfilment of the supreme divine vocation he had recognised, in which God changed himself to a human being to bring himself to the consciousness of all through this one human who first had recognised Him in himself: the wretchedest, the greatest sufferers, must be his earliest chosen; through them must knowledge pass into the world. (*PW* 8: 298 (modified); *SSD* 11: 285)

Wagner's ideas here reflect what is found, for example, in the *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God* (cf. Borchmeyer 1983: 247):

That humanity knows God implies, in accord with the essence of community, a communal knowledge; that is to say, humanity

knows God only insofar as God knows godself in humanity. This knowledge is God's self-consciousness, but it is at the same time a knowledge of God on the part of humanity; and this knowledge of God by humanity is the knowledge of humanity by God. The spirit of humanity—to know God—is simply God's spirit itself. (*LPEG*: 126; *Werke* 17: 480)

A series of dramatic events prevented Wagner from making progress on the opera. In May 1849 he was one of the leaders of the revolution in Dresden. The revolution failed and he was lucky to escape Dresden and avoid being arrested. Others were not so lucky such as the conductor and fellow revolutionary August Röckel. He was sentenced to death, but this was commuted to imprisonment. Röckel was not released until 1862, so spent thirteen years in prison, two of them in solitary confinement. On fleeing Dresden, Wagner may have taken with him the *Jesus* sketches (cf. *SB* 21: 455). He managed to reach Weimar (via Chemnitz and Altenburg) where he was given invaluable help by Franz Liszt (Walker 1989: 113–19), and, according to his autobiography, discussed with him and Liszt's partner, Princess Carolyne von Sayn Wittgenstein, the proposed opera *Jesus of Nazareth* (*My Life*: 413; *Mein Leben* 1: 425). Both Liszt and his partner had a keen interest in theology and Carolyne was to become a prolific writer on matters of Church and theology; however, both had reservations about Wagner's planned opera, as he explains:

[O]ne afternoon there was a lively discussion resulting from my description of the draft for a tragedy to be entitled *Jesus von Nazareth*, during which I saw Liszt lapse into doubtful silence, while the Princess protested vigorously against any plan to bring such material onto the stage. (*My Life*: 413; *Mein Leben* 1: 425)

We know that at some point Wagner lent the sketches to Carolyne and it may even have been on this occasion. Unfortunately, Wagner never saw the sketches again. Considering herself a devout and fervent Roman Catholic³⁴ (although she was not entirely orthodox)³⁵ Carolyne thoroughly disapproved of the idea of an opera on Jesus of Nazareth. Repeated attempts were made to recover the sketches. In 1865 Ludwig II, having become Wagner's patron the previous year and now being anxious that the manuscript should be recovered, wrote twice to composer (*KB* 1:108, 206) and then turned to Cosima von Bülow, daughter of Liszt and future wife of Wagner, telling her that he longed to see the sketches (letter of 26 January 1866 in Schad 1996: 133). Later that year Cosima summed up the situation for Ludwig (letter of 11 September 1866):

Jesus of Nazareth is locked up in the Altenburg in Weimar, belongs to Princess [Carolyne von] Wittgenstein, and she intends to return from Rome to Germany, to sort out her papers, so she can pass on the manuscript to me for you my treasured friend; but she has not yet done this! (Schad 1996: 259)

In January 1869 Wagner himself tried to recover the sketches³⁶ but his efforts also proved to be in vain. He died in 1883, and then Caroline in 1887; and it was in that year that the sketches saw the light of day as Wagner's son Siegfried arranged for their publication (the sketches run to fifty-six pages in the English translation). The only music we know he composed for the opera was a short passage of just eleven bars of music, these being discovered on the back of a sheet from a *Lohengrin* score,³⁷ and the link to this opera may be significant. *Jesus of Nazareth*, if it ever materialized, would probably have the style of *Lohengrin* with large choruses, often offering a commentary on the events unfolding (cf. the role of the chorales in Bach's *St Matthew* and *St John Passions*).

VIII. Wagner's essays on opera and drama

Although *Jesus of Nazareth* was never completed, the ideas in the sketches did not go to waste and ended up in an unexpected place: on the stage of the *Ring* cycle. The *Ring* cycle came into being because Wagner realized *Siegfried's Death* needed to be prefaced by three other operas and the work was eventually completed in 1874. Other than composing some musical sketches for *Siegfried's Death* in 1850, Wagner did not work on the *Ring* until May 1851. Instead he wrote essays, thrashing out his thoughts on what an 'artwork of the future' should be. In these essays the death of Jesus does occasionally feature. *Art of Revolution* (1849) closes by praising 'the two sublimest teachers of humankind: Jesus, who suffered for all human beings; and Apollo, who raised them to their joyous dignity' (PW 1: 65 (modified); GSD 3: 41). His essay of 1850–51 (*Opera and Drama*) is critical of Christianity for its 'rigid dogma' (*starren Dogma*) (PW 2: 166; GSD 4:4 2) but concerning the essence of the Christian myth itself, he is generally more positive as in these comments: 'The enthralling power of the Christian myth consists in its portrayal of a *transfiguration* (*Verklärung*) through Death' (PW 2: 159; GSD 4: 36). However, in another essay (*A Communication to my Friends*, 1851–52), he explains why he had to give up on the *Jesus* opera. Although Jesus offered 'a wondrous appearance (*Erscheinung*)', Wagner had to distinguish between 'the symbolic Christ' and the one 'existing at a certain time and amid definite surroundings' (PW 1: 378; GSD 4: 331). This distinction explains what he writes a

couple of pages later about ‘the contradictory nature of the subject matter’, this being one reason why he gave up on the *Jesus* project (the other one being the ‘impossibility of bringing this work [...] to a public hearing’) (*PW* 1: 380; *GSD* 4: 332).

Wagner here touches a fundamental issue that Hegel addresses. Knowing Jesus historically is knowing him only as he ‘appears’ to the ‘understanding’ (*Verstand*). True knowledge of Jesus can only come with ‘reason’ (*Vernunft*). ‘*Vernunft* knows the dialectical inner truth of objects, whereas *Verstand* knows objects in the form of differences which present themselves empirically as one-after-another characteristics connected in outward space and time by a mere “also”’ (Yerkes 1983: 145).³⁸ Hence presenting Jesus of Nazareth in a historical five Act opera fails to penetrate the meaning of the Christ event as a revelation of God who is spirit.

Wagner’s way forward was to present in the *Ring* cycle a redeemer who belongs to the world of myth *alone* and *not* history. Already in *Siegfried’s Death* the death of Siegfried was to atone for the sins of the Gods; but in the final *Ring* the key redeemer figure is Brünnhilde. Although Wagner knew of the historical roots of these figures (Sigibert and Brunichild), his Siegfried and Brünnhilde were mythical figures forged by a bringing together of a vast range of sources (Bell 2020). To some extent Brünnhilde’s death is modelled on that of the Jesus of the proposed opera, which in turn is modelled on Hegel’s understanding of the death of Christ. This is just one instance of how material from the *Jesus* sketches fed into the *Ring* cycle.

IX. The death of Christ and the death of Brünnhilde.

It was noted earlier how Hegel in his mature thought presents the death of Christ: this is the death of God that results in the giving of spirit. The same pattern is found in Wagner’s *Jesus* sketches. He wisely places the death of Jesus off-stage, and this is what he notes in the outline for the close of the drama:

[Peter] teaches [Judas] to understand the sacrificial death of Jesus now being suffered: this death is his apotheosis, and not the signs and marvels which Judas had expected of him.—Darkening of the heavens—thunder and lightning.—Judas’ despair—the Disciples’ loathing of him: Pharisees appear, seeking Judas: he casts away the money he had had from them, and rushes out as if demented. Earthquake. Tales of horror—women and folk bewailing:—Priests: The veil of the temple is rent in twain.

Interpretation of this event by Peter. *Peter*: ‘Fear not the terrors of this storm, we know they are a witness unto love!’—John and the two Marys return from the crucifixion: ‘He hath fulfilled’.—Peter feels himself inspired with the Holy Spirit: in high enthusiasm he proclaims the fulfilment of Jesus’ promise: his words give strength and inspiration to all; he addresses the people,—whoever hears him, presses forward to demand baptism (reception into the community).—The end.— (*PW* 8: 297; *SSD* 11: 284)

Reflecting Hegel’s understanding of the death of Jesus we have here the crucifixion followed immediately by the giving of the spirit. Both Hegel and Wagner telescope Good Friday (the death of Christ) and Pentecost (the giving of the spirit). Although in the work of Luke-Acts these events are separated by fifty days, John’s Gospel brings them closer together, and Hegel and Wagner may well be influenced by John, not only in this point but in many others.³⁹ So John 19:30 tells of Jesus’s last words ‘It is finished’ (cf. ‘He hath fulfilled’ from the close of the *Jesus* sketches) followed by the words ‘Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit’. Exegetes are divided as to whether John is here referring to the giving of the spirit and to my knowledge neither Hegel nor Wagner make any explicit appeal to John 19:30 to establish a connection between his death and the immediate giving of the spirit.⁴⁰ But Hegel does write of the significance of Pentecost, as we have seen in *Philosophy of History*, and likewise Wagner alludes to the day of Pentecost in the close of the *Jesus* sketches, referring to Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 14–36), and the baptisms that followed on that day (Acts 2: 38–41).

So how is this ending of the *Jesus* sketches developed in the *Ring* cycle? The figure of Christ is represented by the Valkyrie, Brünnhilde. Being the daughter of two gods, Wotan and Erda, she is divine. But at the end of the second opera in the *Ring* cycle, *The Valkyrie*, she is emptied of her divinity and can be said to become fully human. A case could possibly be made that this ‘incarnation’, this emptying, is, as Hegel writes, ‘a divestment (*Entäußerung*) of itself such that it still is in this divestment’ (*LPhR* 3: 124; *VPhR* 3: 59).⁴¹ However, the way the drama develops suggests that she does in fact lose her divinity, but recovers it towards the end of *Siegfried’s Death*,⁴² and offers her life as a redemptive sacrifice. As Wagner revised this opera the focus of the redemptive death moved from Siegfried to Brünnhilde and the opera was renamed *Twilight of the Gods* (*Götterdämmerung*), and the Gods that experience this ‘twilight’ are those of the Pantheon, namely Wotan, Fricka, Freia, Donner and Froh.

For Hegel, Christ’s death, viewed *historically*, ‘is consistent with his life and teaching in the sense that it is the consequence of his religious radicalism and

revolutionary attitude towards the established orders' (Hodgson 2005: 170). A similar view is found also in Wagner's *Jesus of Nazareth* sketches, where Jesus challenges the religious authorities, and preaches the centrality of love over law. Likewise in the *Ring* cycle, Brünnhilde's death is the natural consequence of her placing the highest value on love rather than law.⁴³ Viewed *religiously*, the death of Christ for both Hegel and Wagner is the 'death of God'. And just as Christ voluntarily gave his life to atone for the sins of the world, so Brünnhilde in the *Ring* cycle works 'the deed that redeems the world' (Spencer 2000: 258; *GSD* 6: 156).

Wagner clearly thought he was making a theological step forward in the *Ring*, based on his views on gender. Wagner sent his *Ring* libretto to his fellow revolutionary August Röckel in prison. Röckel had various questions about the libretto and Wagner answered them in a long letter to him on 25/26 January 1854.⁴⁴ One of the points Wagner makes is this:

Not even Siegfried (man alone) is the complete 'human being': he is merely the half, only with *Brünnhilde* does he become the redeemer; *one* alone cannot do everything; many are needed, and a suffering self-immolating woman finally becomes the true, conscious redeemer: for it is love which is really 'the eternal feminine' itself. (*SL*: 307 (modified); *SB* 6: 68)⁴⁵

So only with the death of man and women can there be atonement. As I understand it, in the final version of the *Ring* Brünnhilde encompasses Siegfried in her personhood and dies as God. Her death is the death of God of which Hegel writes. And just as Jesus's spirit is given to the community after his death, so Brünnhilde's spirit fills the cosmos, represented by the musical theme 'the glorification of Brünnhilde', the very final leitmotif heard in the opera.⁴⁶

X. Understanding the death of Christ as a self-involving enterprise

Wagner and Hegel have different emphases when discussing the death of Christ but in many ways they share the view that the death of Christ cannot be understood simply as an event in history and that its significance can only be grasped by a self-involving enterprise, the bringing together of the 'objective' and 'subjective'. Hegel's way of analysing this is to see the inadequacy of the 'understanding' (*Verstand*) in relation to the 'representation' of the death of the Christ. When representation coincides (*zusammentrifft*) with *Verstand*, properties are placed side by side (*Enz I*: 50, §20; *Werke* 8: 73) such as 'the rose is red, and *also* odorous, and *also* prickly' (Yerkes 1983: 81; cf. *Enz I*: 58, §24Z1; *Werke* 8: 83). The rose is only

known ‘in-and-for-itself’ in its ‘concept’ (*Begriff*) by *Vernunft* (Yerkes 1983: 80). This can be related to ‘faith’ by holding that genuine faith is spiritual and exists in the spirit: ‘the faith of the community rests solely on reason itself, on the Spirit’ (*LPbR* 3: 150; *VPbR* 3: 85). Such genuine faith ‘is not merely a question of faith as belief in [what happened at this] time and in this external history, but rather of faith that this man was the Son of God’ (*LPbR* 3: 226–27; *VPbR* 3: 157). The ‘sensible content’ becomes something quite different: ‘The object has been completely transformed from something that exists sensibly and empirically into something divine, into what is essentially the highest moment of God himself’ (*LPbR* 3: 227; *VPbR* 3: 157).

In coming to appreciate the significance of Christ’s death, Wagner is not as systematic as Hegel but much of what he writes coheres with Hegel. In his 1880 essay *Religion and Art*, he argues that describing Christ crucified as a ‘symbol’ does not do justice to the enormity of the event. Instead, it must be seen as a ‘direct copy’ (*wirkliches Abbild*) of the divine (*PW* 6: 217; *GSD* 10: 215). The self-involving nature of Christ’s death is expressed in his 1879 open letter against vivisection (many of these ideas are found in the libretto of *Parsifal*):

The monstrous guilt of all this life a divine and sinless being took upon himself, and expiated with his agony and death. Through this atonement (*Sühnungstod*) all that breathes and lives should know itself redeemed, so soon as it was grasped (*begriffen wurde*) as pattern and example to be followed. (*PW* 6: 203; *GSD* 10: 202)

This bringing together of the ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ is also found in his letter to Ludwig of 14 April 1865. Just as Hegel has a word play on ‘Begriffen’ (‘comprehension’) and ‘Ergreifen’ (‘grasping’) in the section on the death of Christ in the *Phenomenology*, so Wagner plays on the verbs ‘begriffen’ (‘to understand’) and ‘ergreifen’ (‘to take hold of’) in this letter, and this could offer some fresh confirmation that Wagner had read this work. So he tells Ludwig:

Today is Good Friday again!—O, blessed day! Most deeply portentous day in the world! Day of redemption! God’s suffering!! Who can grasp the enormity of it? And yet, this same ineffable mystery—is it not the most familiar of humankind’s secrets? God, the Creator,—he must remain totally unintelligible to the world:—God, the loving teacher, is dearly beloved, but not understood:—but the God who suffers (*Gott der Leidende*), His name is inscribed in our hearts in letters of fire; all the obstinacy of existence is washed away by our immense pain (*ungeheure Schmerz*) at seeing God suffering (*Gott im Leiden*)

zu sehen! The teaching which we could not take in (*Die Lehre, die wir nicht begreifen*), it now takes hold of us (*sie ergreift jetzt uns*): God within us,—the world has been overcome (*überwunden*)! Who created it? An idle question! Who overcame it? God within our hearts,—God whom we comprehend in the deepest anguish of fellow-suffering (*der im tiefsten Schmerz des Mitgeföhles begriffene Gott*)! (SL: 641–42 (modified); KB: 1: 82)

XI. Hegel and Wagner on the question of ‘God’

One of the consequences of the ‘death of God’ for Hegel is that God is no longer remote and transcendent but rather is near and immanent God, and dwells in human hearts. This goes against much of what is presented in the bible, where God is so often presented as a monarch and an absolute monarch at that. Macquarrie writes that according to Hegel,

from the beginning, that is to say, from all eternity, spirit, in accordance with its nature, has been going forth into the other, has been manifesting itself in the realm of the finite. So if we conceive of God as the absolute Monarch containing in himself all power and being, then such a God has never existed. In Hegel’s words, ‘The absolute being must from the start have implicitly sacrificed itself.’ (1992: 220)⁴⁷

Wagner largely shares Hegel’s understanding of God as immanent, although he does not always exclude the idea of a transcendent God⁴⁸ or a transcendent world.⁴⁹ Some have labelled Wagner an ‘atheist’ (e.g. Gregor-Dellin 2005: 743; Köhler 2003: 560). One could possibly come to this conclusion based on Cosima’s diary entry (CD: 20 September 1879): ‘R[ichard] says, “I do not believe in God, but in the divine, which is revealed in Jesus without sin”’. But since Wagner on other occasions affirmed his belief in the God who suffers (as in the letter to Ludwig), his statement is unlikely to indicate a simple atheism; it is more likely that he is questioning the ‘creator God’ or the God of the Old Testament. With his predominantly immanent view of God, Wagner would probably endorse Hegel’s view that Christian faith is the self-consciousness of God in humanity.⁵⁰ For both Hegel and Wagner this is rooted in the ‘death of God’, which has revolutionized the understanding of God’s very nature. Hegel says: ‘Death is love itself; in it absolute love is envisaged. The identity of the divine and the human means that God is at home with himself in humanity, in the finite, and in [its] death this finitude is itself a determination of God’

(LPbR 3: 220; VPbR 3: 150). And this is a message that is not only found in Wagner's *Jesus of Nazareth* sketches but also one that resounds at the close of *Twilight of the Gods*.⁵¹

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Notes

¹ Schopenhauer's influence is particularly evident in *Tristan and Isolde*, *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*, and *Parsifal*; his influence can also be discerned in the *Ring* cycle.

² Abbreviations used:

Aesth = Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. 2 vols, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 2010).

Braunes Buch = Wagner, *Das Braunes Buch: Tagebuchaufzeichnungen 1865-1882*, ed. J. Bergfeld, Joachim (Zurich/Freiburg.: Atlantis, 1975).

Brown Book = Wagner, *The Diary of Richard Wagner 1865-1882: The Brown Book*, ed. J. Bergfeld, trans. G. Bird (London: Victor Gollanz, 1980).

CD = Wagner, *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, 2 vols., ed. M. Gregor-Dellin and D. Mack, trans. G. Skelton (London: Harcourt Brace, 1978–80).

CPR = Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. P. Guyer and A. W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Enz I = Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusatz*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis IN: Hackett, 1991).

Enz III = Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller, revised with introduction and commentary by M. Inwood (Oxford: Clarendon, 2017).

GSD = Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen von Richard Wagner*, 10 vols., 3rd ed. (Leipzig: E. W. Fritsch, 1897).

ETW = Hegel, *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961).

FHSWB = Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*. 3 vols., ed. M. Knaupp (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998).

FK = Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge: An English translation of G.W.F. Hegel's Glauben und Wissen*, trans. H.S. Harris (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1977).

FSSW = Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke*. 5 vols., ed. G. Fricke and H. G. Göpfert (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980).

GW = Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, 21 vols. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968–).

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KB = Wagner, *König Ludwig II. und Richard Wagner: Briefwechsel*, 5 vols., ed. O. Strobel (Karlsruhe: G. Braun, 1936).

LHPb = Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 3 vols., trans. by E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974).

LPEG = Hegel, *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*, ed. and trans. P. C. Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007).

LPhH = Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, preface by C. Hegel, trans. J. Sibree (Mineola NY: Dover 1956).

LPhR = Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 3 vols., ed. P. C. Hodgson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011–12).

Mein Leben = Wagner, *Mein Leben*, 2 vols., ed. M. Gregor-Dellin (Munich: Paul List, 1969).

My Life = Wagner, *My Life*, ed. M. Whittall, trans. A. Gray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

PbSB = Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 2nd ed., ed. J. B. Baillie (New York: Humanities Press, 1949).

PbSM = Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

PW = Wagner, *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, 8 vols., trans. W. A. Ellis. 8 vols. (New York: Broude Brothers, 1966).

PWD = Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols., ed. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

SB = Wagner, *Richard Wagner: Sämtliche Briefe*, 25 vols., ed. G. Strobel et al. (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik (vols. 1–9); Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel (vols. 10–25), 1967–2017).

SL = Wagner, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, ed. and trans. S. Spencer and B. Millington (London: W. W. Norton, 1987).

SSD = Wagner, *Richard Wagner: Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, 16 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel and C. F. W. Siegel (R. Linnemann), 1911 (vols. 1–12); 1914 (vols. 13–16)).

TE = Hegel, *Three Essays, 1793-95: The Tübingen Essay, Berne Fragments, the Life of Jesus*, ed. and trans. P. Fuss and J. Dobbins (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

VGPb = Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, 3 vols., 2nd ed., ed. C. L. Michelet (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1840–44).

VPhR = Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 3 vols., ed. W. Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1993–95).

Werke = Hegel, *Werke*, 20 vols., 3rd ed., ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994).

WWV = Wagner *Werk-Verzeichnis: Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke Richard Wagners und ihrer Quellen*, ed. J. Deathridge, M. Geck and E. Voss (Mainz: Schott, 1985).

³ The closest to a miracle is his re-writing of John 5, where Jesus ‘performed an act of kindness for a poor and sick person on the Sabbath’ (*GW* 1: 223; *TE*: 117; cf. *TE*: 13).

⁴ ‘The sacrificial overtones of the New Testament are eliminated’ (Brown 1985: 86).

⁵ Cf. Kant 1996: 73; *AA* 4: 421: ‘act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law’.

⁶ See Kant’s objection to the golden rule (Kant 1996: 80; *AA* 4: 430).

⁷ *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*. Note that Jesus has a very limited role in this work of Kant.

⁸ Hegel’s letter to Schelling at the end of January 1795 (Butler and Seiler 1984: 30–31).

⁹ Hölderlin’s letter to Hegel, 26 January 1795 (Butler and Seiler 1984: 33–34; *FHSWB* 2: 567–69).

¹⁰ Letter of 16 April 1795 (Butler and Seiler 1984: 35–36).

¹¹ Perhaps Harris (1972: 248) is therefore correct to suggest that Hegel ‘deliberately adopts in the most flatfooted prosaic style that he can manage, avoiding the subtleties of the intellect, represented for him by the Fichte-Schelling theory of the Absolute Ego, and the ambiguities of metaphor which appeal strongly to the imagination, but are the commonest source of misunderstanding among ordinary men’.

¹² Cf. Harris 1977: 7.

¹³ For the English translation see Butler and Seiler (1984: 46–47).

¹⁴ To give some examples of scholarly assessments of authorship: Harris (1972: 249–57) argues for it being Hegel’s own composition; Tilliette (1975: 193–211) argues for Schelling being the author; Pinkard (2000: 136) thinks the author is most likely Hölderlin.

¹⁵ I do not know if Hegel ever picked up on this, but a ‘mythology of reason’ is precisely what is found in the prologue to John’s gospel (John 1:1–18; see Weder 1988: 44–74) and it could be said to describe exactly what Hegel is attempting in sections of the *Phenomenology* (Crites 1998: 303–53).

¹⁶ See *FSSW* 1: 163–69, 169–73. On this poem see Brokoff 2005: 262–65.

¹⁷ See *Die Empfindung spricht* (*FHSWB* 2: 101–2); *Das lyrische dem Schein nach idealische Gedicht ...* (*FHSWB* 2:102–7).

¹⁸ Beiser even goes to the point of arguing that Hegel’s idealism ‘was indeed only the most obscure and cumbrous expression of absolute idealism that had already been worked out by Novalis, Schlegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling’ (2003: 66).

¹⁹ This fragment was also written sometime between the summer of 1799 and early 1800 (Harris 1972: 522–23).

²⁰ Houlgate 2006: 44, points to *PWD* 1: 130 (*Discourse* 4.38–39 and *CPR* 555–58 (B603–8)).

²¹ The first verse was composed by Friedrich von Spee (1628) and verses 2–8 added by Johann Rist (1641).

²² See the edition of Brunschvicg (441) in Pascal 1964: 187–88.

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²³ Note that *GW* 9: 418 employs the older spelling ‘Ergreifen’/‘Begreifen’. Newer editions (e.g. *Werke* 3: 570) offer a modern spelling ‘Ergreifen’/‘Begreifen’.

²⁴ Quoted in Yerkes 1983: 137.

²⁵ Glasenapp 1977: 1: 21.

²⁶ Köhler 2003: 10, 638 n.10. He rightly points to his ‘Hegelian German’; note, however, that the example he gives is taken from a point in Glasenapp (1977: 1: 490), where he is offering a free rendition. The original can be found in Wagner (1805: 15).

²⁷ Wagner appears to conflate these two works when he writes that Weisse ‘had just translated Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and had dedicated it, with a polemical intent, to Hegel, if I remember correctly’ (*My Life*: 54; *Mein Leben* 1: 62).

²⁸ Seydel, in the foreword to the 1872 edition of *System der Ästhetik*, IV, writes that Weisse did in fact lecture on aesthetics in the Winter Semester of 1831–32, hence corroborating Wagner’s account I mentioned earlier about his attending Weisse’s lectures.

²⁹ Elsewhere Wagner correctly spells ‘Weinlig’ as in the *Autobiographical Sketch* (*PW* 1: 7–8; *GSD* 1: 8–9) and letters (*SB* 1: 126–27, 150–51). The misspelling cannot be blamed on Cosima (the autobiography was dictated) since she correctly spells his name elsewhere (*CD*: 20 December 1878; 1, 3, January 1879; 4, 20 February 1879). On the other hand, there are several occasions when names in *My Life* are misspelt or confused with others.

³⁰ This is found in the chapter 10 ‘Dresden 1846–47’ of Pecht’s work (279–303).

³¹ The celebrated music theorist and critic A. B. Marx, editor of the Berlin *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, whom Wagner knew, was a Hegelian (*Brown Book*: 94; *Braunes Buch*: 112, records his having dinner with him in 1847, Wagner having read Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* earlier that year), and Schumann’s influential *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* devoted the greater part of ten successive issues (22 July to 23 August 1842, the journal appeared twice weekly) to a critique by Eduard Krüger of Hegel’s ideas on aesthetics (extracts in English translation are given by le Huray and Day 1981: 530–36).

³² See, e.g., *Aesth* 1: 101 (*Werke* 13: 139): ‘Now, owing to its preoccupation with truth as the absolute object of consciousness, art too belongs to the absolute sphere of the spirit, and therefore, in its content, art stands on one and the same ground with religion (in the stricter sense of the word) and philosophy. For, after all, philosophy has no other object but God and so is essentially rational theology and, as the servant of truth, a continual divine service’.

³³ See Allen 2014: 10–11, who quotes Bujic 1988: 52: ‘Instead of Hegel’s closed categories Wagner presents a fluctuating world in which the arts transform themselves. It is not a world of conceptual clarity, but one of dynamic change, supported by the instinct and sensibility of an artist rather than the analytical thought of a philosopher’.

³⁴ Many commentators have tended to view her piety negatively (see the vitriolic comments of Wallace (1927: 187–88) and Newman (1934: 21–22)).

³⁵ Volumes III and V of her twenty-four volume work *Causes intérieures de la faiblesse extérieure de l’Église en 1870* were placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* of the Catholic Church.

³⁶ See his letter to Jessie Laussot of 24 January 1869 (*SB* 21: 47), referred to in *CD*: 24 January 1869. Wagner’s motivation to recover the sketches would appear to be his desire to see them

published in his collected writings. According to his letter to Ludwig of 6 January 1865 (*KB* 1: 48), *Jesus of Nazareth* was to be in volume 4. However, he made a second plan (26 April 1868), including it in volume one in a section headed ‘*Entwürfe*’ (‘sketches’) (*Brown Book*: 131; *Braunes Buch*: 156).

³⁷ The musical sketch is given in *WWV*: 339.

³⁸ Cf. *Enz I*: 50, §20Z; *Werke* 8: 73.

³⁹ Hegel was deeply influenced by John’s Gospel (see, e.g., Viviano 1996) as was Wagner (Bell 2020: 259–60).

⁴⁰ An unambiguous reference to the giving of the spirit is in John 20:22: ‘Jesus breathed on [the disciples] and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit”’.

⁴¹ Hegel’s comments have relevance for Philippians 2:7a: ‘but emptied himself’. If Hegel is correct then theologians do not need to worry about the pre-incarnate Christ ‘losing’ his divinity.

⁴² The stage direction indicates that Brünnhilde enters ‘firmly and solemnly’ (*fest und feierlich*) (Spencer 2000: 347; *GSD* 6: 250) and then later ‘her features grow increasingly transfigured’ (Spencer 2000: 348; cf. *GSD* 6: 250).

⁴³ Ultimately her death comes about because she opposes the law represented by Fricka (and to which her father submits) and because of her active love for the Volsung twins, Siegmund and Sieglinde. In this connection it is worth adding that Brünnhilde has similarities to Sophocles’s *Antigone*. Both Wagner and Hegel took a special interest in the play, but they understood it in quite different ways. Hegel argues that ‘contrary to A. W. Schlegel, *Antigone* presents a clash not between a tyrant and a heroine of “the purest femininity”, but between two equally one-sided and blinkered tragic figures’ (Houlgate 2007: 154). Wagner is clearly on the side of Schlegel: whereas Creon is the ‘State personified’ (*PW* 2: 190; *GSD* 4: 63), in *Antigone* we see ‘the fullest flower of pure Human-love’ (*PW* 2: 189; *GSD* 4: 63).

⁴⁴ In the critical edition this runs to sixteen pages.

⁴⁵ Note the allusion to the close of the second part of Goethe’s *Faust*.

⁴⁶ The theme is often wrongly called the ‘redemption’ or ‘redemption through love’. The correct name can be found in Cosima Wagner’s response to Edward von Lippmann of the Vienna Wagner Society in 1875. On the authority of her husband, she explained: ‘the motive sung to Brünnhilde by Sieglinde [in *Die Walküre*] is the glorification of Brünnhilde which at the end of the work [*Götterdämmerung*] is taken up, so to speak, by the entirety (*das Motiv, welches Sieglinde der Brünnhildes zu-singt, die Verherrlichung Brünnhildens ist, welche am Schluss des Werkes gleichsam von der Gesamtheit aufgenommen wird*)’. See Deathridge 1981²⁰¹³:82: 84. In a lecture at the University of Nottingham (24 October 2023) I gave a dramatic reading of the close of the *Jesus* sketches (from ‘He is led forth’ (*PW* 8: 296; *GSD* 11: 284)) to the music in the closing minutes of *Twilight of the Gods* (from ‘Zurück vom Ring’) and the music matches the drama almost perfectly.

⁴⁷ The quotation is from *PhSB*: 722, §718; *Werke* 3: 523; *GW* 9: 384; cf. *PhSM*: 434.

⁴⁸ In his programme notes for the 1846 performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony there is a positive appropriation of the creator God of Schiller’s ‘Ode to Joy’ (*PW* 7: 254; *GSD*

2: 64). However, in 1880 he distances himself from the God ‘above the starry tent’ (*‘über’m Sternenzelt’*) of Schiller’s poem and writes of the ‘god within the human breast’ who needs no heavenly home (*PW* 6: 34; *GSD* 10: 30).

⁴⁹ Wagner has a transcendent world in *Tristan and Isolde* and *Parsifal*. It is significant that these works are heavily influenced by Schopenhauer, who held to the distinction between the ‘phenomena’ (world as ‘representation’) and the ‘thing in itself’ (world as ‘will’).

⁵⁰ See, e.g., *Enz III*: §564: ‘God is God only insofar as he knows his own self; his self-knowledge is, moreover, a self-consciousness in man and man’s knowledge of God, which proceeds to man’s self-knowledge in God’ (Inwood 2017: 263–64; *Werke* 10: 374).

⁵¹ This paper is a substantial expansion of a seminar I gave at the School of Divinity, New College, University of Edinburgh (10 November 2023). I thank Matthew Novenson and Philippa Townsend for the invitation and hospitality, and all those who contributed to the discussion. I am also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers who made suggestions for improvement of the original submission to the *Hegel Bulletin*.

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