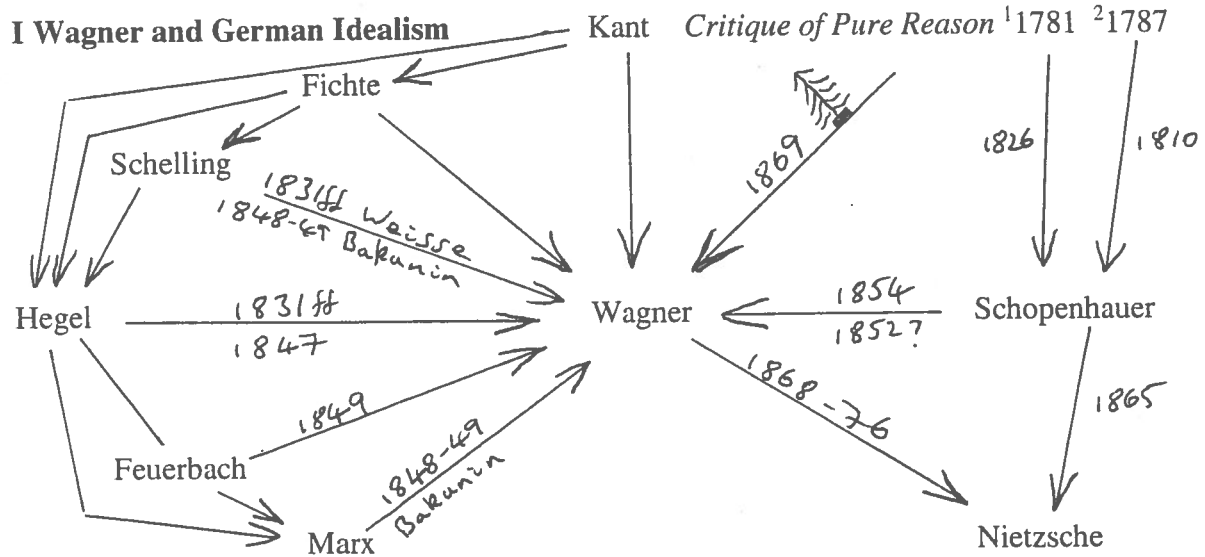


The humanization of God in Wagner's *Ring Cycle*: The composer's appropriation of the theology and philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach.

Richard H Bell. 1 December 2016



II Wagner/Feuerbach relationship

Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-72): *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* (1830), *Essence of Christianity* (1841, 1843, 1849), *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1843), *The Essence of Faith according to Luther* (1844) and *Essence of Religion* (1846).

Richard Wagner (1813-83): *Siegfried's Death* (1848). *Ring: Das Rheingold; Die Walküre; Siegfried; Götterdämmerung*. Libretto completed late 1852 (but small changes later made).

III Feuerbach's Humanization of God

The Essence of Christianity, tr. G. Eliot (New York, 1957 (¹1854)), xxxviii: "I by no means say . . . God is nothing, the Trinity is nothing, the Word of God is nothing, &c. I only show that they are not that which the illusions of theology make them, – not foreign, but native mysteries, the mysteries of human nature. . . . The reproach that according to my book religion is an absurdity, a nullity, a pure illusion, would be well founded only if, according to it, that into which I resolve religion, *man, – anthropology*, were an absurdity, a nullity, a pure illusion. But so far from giving a trivial or even a subordinate significance to anthropology, – a significance which is assigned to it only just so long as a theology stands above it and in opposition to it, – I, on the contrary, while reducing theology to anthropology, exalt anthropology into theology, very much as Christianity, while lowering God into man, made man into God".

'Projektion'/'vergegenständlichen'.

Principles of the Philosophy of the Future, tr. M. Vogel (New York, 1966), 5 (§2): "The task of the modern era was the realization and humanization of God – the transformation and dissolution of theology into anthropology. The religious or practical form of this humanization was Protestantism. The God who is man, the human God, namely, Christ – only this is the God of Protestantism".

Essence of Christianity, 45, quotes from the *Formula of Concord*: a God who is not human “would be a miserable Christ to me, who . . . should be nothing but a purely separate God, and divine person . . . without humanity. No, my friend; where thou givest me God, thou must give me humanity too”.

The Essence of Faith according to Luther, tr. M. Cherny (New York, 1967), 43: “Luther is inhuman towards man only because he has a humane God and because the humanity of God takes away man’s own humanity from him”.

44: “Go away, you loathsome Devil! You want to encourage me *to care for myself*, although God says everywhere, ‘I will care for him Myself . . .’”

65-66: “Only a sensuous being favours and satisfies man and can be a *beneficent* being. And without certainty there is no beneficence”.

IV Wagner’s Humanization of God

Wagner makes Brünnhilde daughter of two gods, Wotan and Erda (contrast Prünhilt of *Nibelungenlied*) and Brynhild of Norse sources (daughter of Budli).

Carl Emil Doepler’s costume design for Erda.

Proposed opera *Jesus of Nazareth* (sketches composed early 1849).

Wotan: “So he kisses your godhead away” (*Walküre* III.3). Involves losing fellowship with her father; losing her immortality; vulnerable to the love of a man. Love remains. Cf Wesley hymn “Emptied himself of all but love”.

Wagner to Röckel (25/26.1.54): “Did you not feel that Brünnhilde has cut herself off from Wotan and all the other gods for the sake of – *love*, because – where Wodan clung to plans – she only – *loved*? . . . she had renounced her divinity for the sake of love”.

And so – the god
turns away from you:
so he kisses your godhead away.

Denn so – kehrt
der Gott sich dir ab:
so küßt er die Gottheit von dir.

Renunciation: (1) ^{1 2 3 4} G Eb D C G Ab /

Siegfried ^{1 2 3 4} G C Eb D C . . .

Woman’s worth: ⁽²⁾ G Eb D C Ab Bb
Eb D C Bb Ab G

renunciation (2)

Exc. 1

Zurückhaltend. Etwas langsam. Ritenuto. Un poco lento. renunciation (1)

WOGLINDE.

Nur wer der Min-ne Macht ver - sagt, nur wer der Lie - be Lust ver-jagt
He who the power of love for-swears, from all de - lights of love for-bears

- gönnt?
ring?

p pü p pp pp

Pos. u. Tuben.

The musical score shows a vocal line for Woglinde and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has German and English lyrics. The piano part includes dynamics like *p*, *pü*, *p*, *pp*, and *pp*. There are handwritten annotations including 'Exc. 1', 'renunciation (1)', 'renunciation (2)', and '620'. Chord diagrams are provided for the vocal line, showing chords like G Eb D C G Ab / and G C Eb D C . . .

Loze
Meingold 2

Lento molto largamente. *etwas bewegt*
più animato,

L. *più p* *Str.* *ped.*

Wei - bes Won - ne und Wert!
wom - an's won - drous de - light!

Exc. 2
Wotan Walküre III. 3

(Er fasst ihr Haupt in beide Hände.)
(He clasps her head in his hands.)

schlies - sen.
e - - ver.

renunciation (1)

Denn so kehrt der Gott sich dir
For so turns the god now from

più p *p* *pp espress.*

women's
worth

(Er küsst sie lange auf die Augen.)
(He kisses her long on the eyes.)

ab, so küsst er die Gott - heit von dir!
thee, so kis - ses thy god - hood a - way!

pp *ppp* *dolcissimo* *sempre arpegg.*

(Sie sinkt mit geschlossenen Augen, sanft ermattend, in seine Arme zurück. Er geleitet sie zart auf einen niedrigen Mooshaufen.)
(She sinks back with closed eyes unconscious in his arms. He gently bears her to a low mossy mound, which is overshadowed)

sempre pp *pp*

Vaballa (3) zu liegen, über den sich eine breitästige Tanne ausstreckt.)
(by a wide-spreading fir tree, and lays her upon it.)

(Er betrachtet sie und schaut sie an.)
(He looks upon her and gazes at her.)
la melodia molto cantabile.
l'accompagnamento sempre legatissimo e dolcissimo.

più p *pp* *poco cre*

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