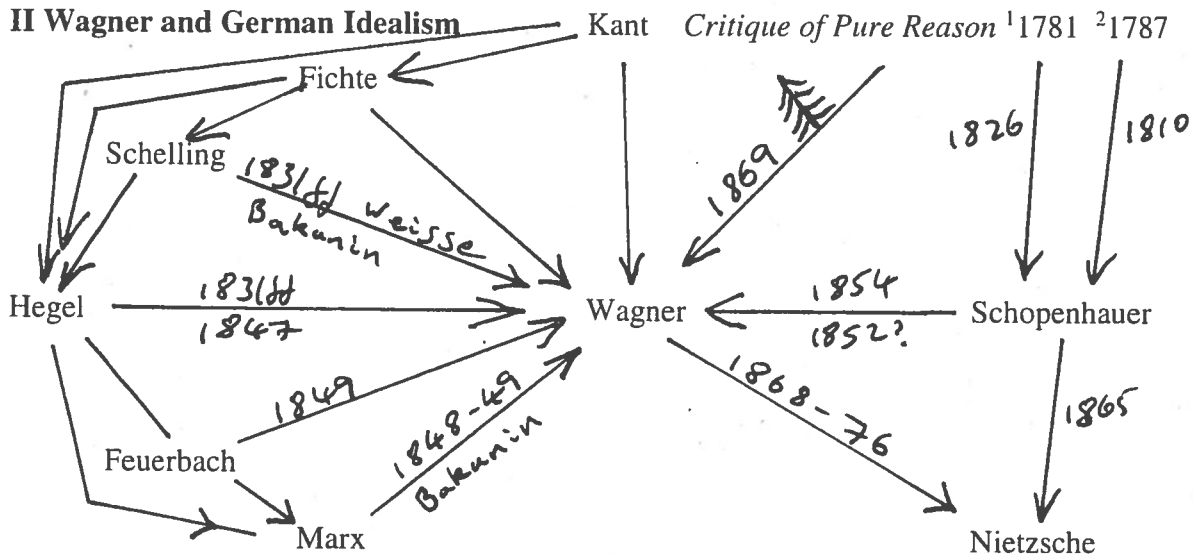


Teleology, Providence and the 'Death of God' in Wagner's Ring cycle. A Study of the Composer's Debt to G.W.F. Hegel. Richard H Bell, 19 October 2016

I Introduction. Heinrich Heine

II Wagner and German Idealism



III Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung

The Rhinegold, The Valkyrie, Siegfried, Twilight of the Gods (Götterdämmerung)

To Liszt (11 February 1853): "Mark my new poem – it contains the world's beginning and its end!"

IV Hegel/Wagner link

Phenomenology of Spirit (1807); *Philosophy of History* (Eduard Gans 1837; Karl Hegel 1840); *Aesthetics*. Christian Hermann Weisse *System der Ästhetik*.

My Life, 430: "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. The revolution interrupted this effort."

Nietzsche: *Case of Wagner (Anti-Christ, 252)*: "Let us remember that Wagner was young at the time when Hegel and Schelling were seducing people's minds; that he achieved, that he grasped in his hands, something only Germans took seriously – 'the Idea', by which he meant

something dark, uncertain, and full of vague presentiments; with German, clarity is an objection, logic is a refutation. . . . Let us keep morality out of this: Hegel is a *taste* . . . And not just a German taste but a European one! – a taste that Wagner understood! – that he felt equal to! that he immortalized! – He just applied to music – he invented a style that ‘meant the infinite’, he became *Hegel’s heir* . . . Music as ‘Idea’.”

Cosima’s entry for 3 April 1870 (quoting her husband): “[Music] is not the representation of an idea (Darstellung einer Idee), but the idea itself (Idee selbst).”

V Teleology.

Prelude to *Rheingold*: evolution Eb major by working through the harmonic series (Eb, Eb octave, Bb, G etc).

Artwork of the Future, 13 (written in late 1849): “The moment we humans became aware of our difference from nature, the very moment we began to develop as human beings and to break away from our unconscious, animal existence as children of nature to wake to conscious life – when we set ourselves apart from nature and, from that first sensation of dependence on nature, thought began to develop within us – this was the moment we went astray, error as the first expression of consciousness. Yet out of error knowledge is born and the history of the birth of knowledge out of error is the history of the human species from primitive myth to the present day.”

Artwork of the Future, 20: “If the spirit (Geist) created nature, if thought (der Gedanke) made reality (das Wirkliche), if the philosopher precedes the human then nature, reality (Wirklichkeit) and human beings are no longer necessary (nothwendig), their existence (ihr Dasein) is superfluous, harmful even; most superfluous of all however is the imperfect (das Unvollkommene) once the perfect has come into being (nach dem Vorhandensein des Vollkommenen) [cf 1 Cor 13.9]. Then nature, reality and human beings only gain meaning, their existence is only justified when the spirit (Geist) – that unconditional spirit (der unbedingte), which is cause, effect and law unto itself – uses them according to its own absolute, sovereign pleasure. If the spirit in itself is necessity (Nothwendigkeit) then it is life that is arbitrary (das Willkürliche), a fantastic masquerade, an idle distraction, a frivolous whim, a ‘car tel est notre plaisir’ [for such is our pleasure] of the spirit.”

Nietzsche. *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth (Untimely Meditations, 236-37)*: “The poetic element in Wagner is disclosed by the fact that he thinks in visible and palpable events, not in concepts; that is to say, he thinks mythically, as the folk has always thought. The myth is not founded on a thought, as the children of an artificial culture believe, it is itself a mode of

thinking; it communicates an idea of the world, but as a succession of events, actions and sufferings. *Der Ring des Nibelungen* is a tremendous system of thought without the conceptual form of thought. Perhaps a philosopher could set beside it something exactly corresponding to it but lacking all image or action and speaking to us merely in concepts: one would then have presented the same thing in two disparate spheres, once for the folk and once for the antithesis of the folk, the theoretical man. Thus Wagner does not address himself to the latter; for the theoretical man understands of the poetical, of the myth, precisely as much as a deaf man does of music, that is to say both behold a movement which seems to them meaningless.”

VI Providence

Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 477: “That the History of the World, with all the changing scenes which its annals present, is this process of development and the realization of Spirit, - this is the true *Theodicaea*, the justification of God in History. Only *this* insight can reconcile Spirit with the History of the World – viz., that what has happened, and is happening every day, is not only not ‘without God,’ but is essentially His Work.”

Brünnhilde: “Alles, alles, / Alles weiß ich: / alles ward mir nun frei!” “All things, all things, all things I know, I became (ward) free in respect of all things!”

Wagner’s letter to Röckel (25/26 January 1854): “One thing counts above all else: freedom! But what is ‘freedom’? is it – as our politicians believe – ‘licence?’ – of course not! Freedom is: *integrity*. He who is true to himself, i.e. who acts in accord with his own being, and in perfect harmony with his own nature, is *free*.”

VII Death of God

Jesus of Nazareth, 297: “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.”

The Philosophy of History, 340: “It has been already remarked that only 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, viz., that in Christ man is redeemed and reconciled.”

Johann Rist “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid” (1641):

O grosse Not!	O Great woe!
God selbst liegt tot.	God himself lies dead.
Am Kreuz ist er gestorben;	On the cross he has died;
hat dadurch das Himmelreich	And thus he has gained for us
uns aus Lieb' erworben.	By love the kingdom of heaven.

Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 191: "Good Friday must be speculatively re-established in the whole truth and harshness of its God-forsakenness."

Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 190: "the pure concept or infinity as the abyss of nothingness in which all being is engulfed, must signify the infinite grief . . . purely as a moment (factor, impulse) of the supreme Idea, and no more than a moment."

Jüngel, *Mystery*, 74: "The idea of absolute freedom and absolute passion (Leiden) are linked together here because God gives himself up to destruction, and thus chooses suffering (Leiden) in absolute freedom."

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 476: "The death of the Mediator is the death not only of his *natural* aspect or of his particular being-for-self, not only of the already dead husk stripped of its essential Being, but also of the *abstraction* of the divine Being. . . The death of this –picture thought (Vorstellung) contains, therefore, at the same time the death of the *abstraction of the divine Being* which is not posited as Self. That death is the painful feeling of the Unhappy Consciousness that *God himself is dead*."

Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 475: ". . . 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."

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