

Richard Wagner's *Jesus of Nazareth* and the *Ring of the Nibelung* II
Law and Freedom: Wagner's Contribution to Sexual Ethics

1. Introduction

Yesterday I introduced you to Wagner's portrayal of Jesus in his proposed opera *Jesus of Nazareth*. Today we dig deeper by looking at how Wagner presents Jesus as a critic of the law and a champion of freedom, and then see how this has worked its way into the *Ring* cycle.

The focus of Jesus' attack on the law is not the Roman law (indeed, as we saw yesterday, he supports paying taxes to Caesar). Rather his focus is on the law of the Jews. And he considers that it is through this law that the Pharisees have oppressed the people. Wagner then develops this in some detail in the commentary on the sketches.

2. Fundamental ideas on Law and Freedom in the Sketches' Commentary.

As we saw yesterday, in preparing his sketches for *Jesus of Nazareth* Wagner had read systematically through the whole New Testament and in the commentary it is clear that he had been struck by some radical texts concerning the law. First he reflects a view of law which may be related to Paul although what he presents is often a development of Paul. So Wagner (in the commentary section of the sketches) puts these Pauline words into Jesus' mouth where law and spirit are set against each other (I have added in square brackets the allusions to Paul's letters): **(HANDOUT)** 'I redeem you from Sin by proclaiming to you the everlasting law of the Spirit, which [i.e. the law] is its [the Spirit's] being, but not its limitation (beschränkung). The Law, as given you heretofore, was the limitation (beschränkung) of your being in the flesh: without that law ye had no sin, but hearkened to the law of Nature: but the Letter (buchstabe) was set up over your flesh [Rom. 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:6], and the Law, which taught you to regard the nature of the flesh as sinful, brought you to

death [Rom. 7:9-10]; for now ye sinned in doing what, according to the law, ye should not. But I release you from the Law which slew you [Rom. 7:6a], inasmuch as I bring unto you the law of the Spirit [Rom. 8:3-4], which giveth life [. . .] now I slay this law, and thereby root up sin: from sin I thus redeem you, inasmuch as I give you Love'.¹ As indicated there are numerous allusions to Paul's letters,² the very last phrase indicating how central love was for Wagner.

But as well as presenting Pauline ideas sometimes, as I have suggested, he goes beyond Paul and the question is whether this is a legitimate development. Consider these words **(not put into the mouth of Jesus)**. (**NOT ON HANDOUT**) First he writes of the 'fall': 'God was one with the world from the beginning: the earliest races (Adam and Eve) lived and moved in this oneness [Act 17:28], innocent, unknowing it: the first step in knowledge was the distinguishing between the helpful and the harmful [Gen. 2:17]; in the human heart the notion of the Harmful developed into that of the Wicked'.³ Then he goes on to speak of the entrance of the law by which he must mean the Mosaic law. I offer this extended quotation as an example of his interweaving of aspects of biblical thought with that of figures such as Hegel and Feuerbach. Wagner had many gifts but clear prose in his theoretical reflections in essays etc was not one of them. But it is worth persevering. And if it is any comfort this is the hardest section of the sketches.

(HANDOUT) 'Human society next sought deliverance through the *Law*: it fastened the notion of Good to the Law, as to something intelligible and perceptible by us all: but what was bound fast to the Law was only a moment [aspect/impulse] of the Good, and since God is eternally generative, fluent and mobile, the Law thus turned against God's self; for, as man can live and move

¹ PW 8:300; DTB 249.

² In addition to those given see also 2 Cor. 3:6. Note that in Luther's translation the Greek *gramma* is rendered 'Buchstabe'.

³ PW 8:310; DTB 254.

[Acts 17:28] by none save the ur-law of Motion itself (nach dem urgesetze der bewegung selbst) [Acts 17:28],⁴ in pursuance of his nature he needs must clash against the Law, i.e. the binding, standing,—thus grow sinful. This is man's suffering, the suffering of God himself, who has not come as yet to consciousness in men (Dies ist das menschliche leiden, das leiden gottes selbst, der sich in den menschen noch nicht zum bewusstsein gekommen ist). That consciousness we finally attain through taking the essence of Man himself for immediate Godhood,⁵ through recognising the eternal law whereby the whole creation moves as the positive and ineluctable, and abolishing the distinction between the helpful and the harmful (den unterschied des nützlichen und schädlichen dadurch aufheben) through our recognition that (Ellis: **sub specie aeterni**) (RHB: under the aspect of eternity) (im Betracht des Ewigen) the two are the selfsame utterance of creative force: the original oneness of God and the World thus is gained anew to our consciousness, and Sin, therefore Suffering, abolished by our abolition (aufgehoben [...] aufheben) of the clumsy human law – which opposed itself as State to Nature – through recognition that the *only* God indwells in us and in our unity with Nature – the which, again, we recognise itself as undivided. Jesus removed this conflict (hat diesen zwiespalt aufgehoben), and established the oneness of God, by his proclamation of *Love*.⁶

The idea I extract from this is one which coheres with views expressed at several points throughout the sketches that the principle of love and spirit must be followed and not that of law. Love (which for Wagner often takes the role of Hegel's spirit) is flexible and responsive but law is static and inflexible. But at the same time Wagner can speak positively about law as the law of love:⁷ (**NOT ON HANDOUT**) 'but God is the law of Love, and when once we know it and

⁴ Acts 17:23b-29 is quoted in section II.2 (PW 8:335-36; DTB 264-65).

⁵ Feuerbach's thought?

⁶ PW 8:311; DTB 254 (Wagner's emphasis).

⁷ As he can concerning the 'law of the Spirit' (see above).

walk thereby, as every creature walketh without knowing it, we are God himself: for God is the knowledge of self'.⁸ This divinisation of human beings may well have been inspired by Jn 10:31-33 and 10:34-38 both of which were marked in his New Testament. This idea also occurs a little earlier in the commentary: **(NOT ON HANDOUT)** 'Jesus knows and practises God's-love through his teaching of it: in the consciousness of Cause and Effect he accordingly is God and Son of God; but every man is capable of like knowledge and like practice,—and if he attain thereto, he is like unto God and Jesus'.⁹

The law of love of which Wagner speaks is not a law which commands love. Towards the end of the commentary (II.1) he writes: **(HANDOUT)** 'The Law is lovelessness; and even should it command me to love, in keeping it I should not practice love, for Love deals only after itself, not after a commandment'.¹⁰ Wagner's views bear a certain similarity to those of ancient Judaism whereby 'the law would be most appropriately fulfilled if one were to do what corresponds to it *before* the law itself were given'.¹¹ See *Numbers Rabbah* 14:2: **(HANDOUT)** 'Joseph, you observed the Sabbath before the Torah was given. By your life! I shall repay your grandson by allowing him to present his offering on the Sabbath, an offering which an individual is otherwise not permitted to bring, and I undertake to accept his offering with favour'.¹² A little earlier, Job 41:3 is applied to Joseph: **(HANDOUT)** "'Whoso hath anticipated Me, I will repay him"' speaks of Joseph who early observed the Sabbath before it was given [. . .]'.¹³ Hence Eberhard Jüngel argues that **(HANDOUT)** '[t]he law [. . .] is the representative of that obviousness of force

⁸ PW 8:312; DTB 254.

⁹ PW 8:301; DTB 249.

¹⁰ PW 8:322; DTB 259.

¹¹ Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* (trans. Darrell L. Guder; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), p. 358 n. 35, who appeals to a private conversation with his Tübingen colleague H.P. Rüger.

¹² Judah J. Slotki (ed.), *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers, Volume Two* (London/New York: Soncino, 1983), p. 570. This grandson is taken to be 'Elishama, son of Ammihud, the leader of the Ephraimites' (Num 7:48) who made various offerings on "the seventh day" (Num 7:48) the details of which are given in Num 7:49-53.

¹³ Slotki, *Numbers*, p. 570. Reference is then given to Gen 43:16, focussing on wehaken (and prepare).

(Selbstverständlichkeit des Zwanges) to which human exertion and human achievement correspond'.¹⁴ To love God and one's neighbour 'is the very epitome of the law's demands' (Mk 12:29-34) '[b]ut this demand is fulfilled by one's *exertions*'.¹⁵ Hence Paul has the negative view of 'works of law' and seeking to establish one's own righteousness (Rom. 10:3). The human being under the law is 'chained to himself'.¹⁶ Jesus by contrast (**HANDOUT**) 'anticipated the law out of the obviousness of love (Selbstverständlichkeit der Liebe), and thus more than satisfied the law with a great although new obviousness. And he thereby made plain that one could fulfil the law only by *preceding* it, anticipating it in its fulfilment. That is the only way in which man can show himself to be absolutely *free*'.¹⁷ (**END QUOTE**) These ideas of anticipating what the law requires found in ancient Jewish texts and developed by Jüngel do elucidate Wagner's view of law and love but we are faced with a historical problem in that Jesus was brought up by his family in the knowledge of the law.

A correlate of Wagner's view of the law is his view of freedom. One of the striking aspects of Jesus' teaching in the sketches is precisely his idea of freedom, not so much freedom from the law of the state but rather freedom from the law of the Jews. But his view of freedom is sophisticated and in many respects resembles Hegel's view. For Hegel, (**HANDOUT**) '[t]rue freedom [...] lies not merely in doing or choosing what one wishes, but in being a "free will which wills the free will"'.¹⁸ The free will therefore derives obligations from itself; it is 'a self-legislating and self-determining will'.¹⁹ Obligations therefore do not come from some alien authority.

¹⁴ Jüngel, *Mystery*, p. 358 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt: Zur Begründung der Theologie des Gekreuzigten im Streit zwischen Theismus und Atheismus* Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 5th edn, 1986), p. 491).

¹⁵ Jüngel, *Mystery*, p. 358 (*Geheimnis*, p. 491), Jüngel's emphasis.

¹⁶ Jüngel, *Mystery*, p. 359 (*Geheimnis*, p. 492).

¹⁷ Jüngel, *Mystery*, p. 359 (*Geheimnis*, pp. 492-93).

¹⁸ Stephen Houlgate, *Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edn, 2005), p. 184, quoting *Philosophy of Right* §27 (*Philosophy of Right*, tr. Knox (Oxford: OUP, repr. 1979), p. 32).

¹⁹ Houlgate, *Introduction to Hegel*, p. 185.

Hegel seems to find that this view coheres with the teaching of Jesus. He writes: ‘This spirit of Jesus, a spirit raised above morality [Kant’s view of reason dominating inclination], is visible, directly attacking laws, in the Sermon on the Mount, which is an attempt, elaborated in numerous examples, to strip the laws of legality, of their legal form’.²⁰ Against Kant, Hegel argued that ‘in love all thought of duties vanishes’.²¹ (QUOTE ‘The opposition of duty to inclination has found its unification in the modifications of love, i.e., in the virtues. Since law was opposed to love, not in its content but in its form, it could be taken up into love, though in this process it lost its shape’.²² This is precisely Wagner’s understanding of freedom in his sketches. (Freedom is a key idea in the Ring, and it is one he discusses in his letter to Rockel of 25/26 January 1854. Wagner speaks of freedom being ‘integrity’ (Wahrhaftigkeit) (SL 301) and it is clear that the person who demonstrates this more than anyone is Brünnhilde²³ (just as in the sketches it is Jesus above everyone who exercises freedom). Contrast Wotan’s who has bound himself in his own fetters (WagRS 148); his bonds hold him ‘in thrall’ and he is ‘a slave to those treaties’ (WagRS 152).)

3 Law and Freedom in relation to marriage and sexual ethics

One of the most arresting ways in which Wagner applies his views of law and freedom is in the area of marriage and sexual ethics.

So when law comes into the realm of marriage, when one speaks of “possession,” then love is shackled. We find this in a key passage of section II.1²⁴ (HANDOUT) “[I]f Man made a law to shackle love, to reach a goal that

²⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings* (trans. T.M. Knox; Gloucester MA: Peter Smith, 1970), p. 212.

²¹ Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, p. 213.

²² Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, p. 225.

²³ With the exception of her behaviour in GD Act II.

²⁴ Zegowitz, *Opern*, 188.

lies outside of human nature (—namely, power, dominion—above all: the *protection of property*:) he sinned against the law of his own existence, and therewith slew himself.”²⁵ In speaking of “property” Wagner is alluding to Proudhon who famously declared “Property is theft”.²⁶ No works of Proudhon were in Wagner’s Dresden library (indeed there were no political books) but he most likely knew of his thought from his friend and colleague, the revolutionary August Röckel.²⁷

A little later Wagner writes: **(HANDOUT)** “If a woman was wed by a man for whom she had not love, and he fulfilled the letter of the marriage-law to her, through that law she became his property: the woman’s struggle for freedom through love thereby became a sin, actual contentment of her love she could only attain by adultery.”²⁸ This will shortly become relevant for the *Ring* cycle. Then he puts into the mouth of Jesus these words (for Act IV):

(HANDOUT) ‘Through my death there perisheth the Law, inasmuch as I shew you that Love is greater than the Law.’²⁹ Then for Act I he puts these words into Jesus mouth: **(HANDOUT)** ‘The commandment saith: Thou shalt not commit adultery! But I say unto you: Ye shall not marry without love. A marriage without love is broken as soon as entered into, and whoso hath wooed without love, already hath broken the wedding.’³⁰

4 Marriage and sexual ethics in the Ring

All these ideas I’ve presented on sexual ethics from the Jesus sketches are directly relevant for the situation we find in the unhappy marriage of Sieglinde

²⁵ PW 8:301. These do not appear to be words ascribed to Jesus by Wagner but the composer’s own commentary.

²⁶ See Proudhon, Vol 1 344. Zegowitz, *Opern*, 189, argues that Wagner’s Jesus does not demand the total abolition of property but simply a just distribution of it. Such a view is unlike Marx (who stood for abolition in the Communist Manifesto of 1848) but close to Proudhon. Power over things was positive as opposed to power over human beings. Krekel, 1986, 104ff.

²⁷ Zegowitz, *Opern*, 188 n. 31.

²⁸ PW 8:302; DTB 250.

²⁹ PW 8:303; DTB 250.

³⁰ PW 8:303; DTB 250. This final sentence is a marginal addition.

and Hunding in the second opera of the Ring cycle, *The Valkyrie*. In Act I Scene 1 Sieglinde tells Siegmund that she is the property of her husband (WagRS 123). **(HANDOUT)**

This house and this wife are Hunding's own	Dieß Haus und dieß Weib sind Hunding's Eigen
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Sieglinde had been forced into a marriage with Hunding and according to the law she is his property (a view one finds in the Old Testament law). Her only way to find true love is to commit adultery (compare the Jesus sketches), and this is precisely what she does. So as to make it absolutely clear that true love has to defy law Wagner not only has her commit adultery but also incest. Siegmund and Sieglinde are twins separated at birth and their meeting many years later is engineered by their father, the god Wotan. When they first meet they are not aware that they are brother and sister but towards the end of the Act they realise that they are and as the curtain falls at the end of the Act they consummate their love for one another. Siegmund's final words of the Act are: **(HANDOUT)**

Bride and sister you are to your brother – so let the blood of the Wälsungs blossom!	Braut und Schwester bist du dem Bruder – so blühe den Wälsungen-Blut!
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(See Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*).

Some of Wagner's contemporaries were shocked by this. One was Max Kalbeck, an admirer of Brahms' and eventually his biographer. He witnessed

Valkyrie at Bayreuth in August 1876 and wrote this of the first act: ‘Once the fleeting intoxication of the senses subsides, moral scruples start assembling in a long queue to claim their rights. In terms of its effect, the whole first act can be put beside the most sublime creations the human mind and art are capable of producing. Beautiful and moving as it is, however, its ethical anarchy is outrageous and provocative, a slap in the face for all religious feelings.’³¹

Another who objected to Act I of *Valkyrie* was the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, but he only knew the work from the libretto for the Ring cycle, which Wagner had sent as a gift. Schopenhauer was appalled by the action of the twins Siegmund and Sieglinde and their treatment of Hunding. However, virtually everyone I know who experiences the music and drama (and does not just read the libretto) sympathises with Siegmund and Sieglinde, this pointing to the way Wagner is an expert manipulator of our emotions.

Text about Sieg and Sieglinde bound together in mother’s womb????

So Siegmund and Sieglinde consummate their love as the curtain falls and on the following days the “adulterer” Siegmund and the “wronged husband”, Hunding, engage in mortal combat. And at the beginning of the second Act we witness an altercation between Wotan and his wife Fricka concerning Siegmund’s fate. And I need to explain here that their marriage is childless: Wotan fathered Siegmund and Sieglinde through a mortal woman (we don’t know her name) and fathered Brunnhilde through the earth goddess Erda.

³¹ Susanna Großmann-Vendrey, *Bayreuth in der deutschen Presse: Dokumentenband 1: Die Grundsteinlegung und die ersten Festspiele (1872-1876)* (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse, 1977), 193 (quoted in Deathridge, *Beyond*, 56-57).

(This has no parallel in Norse mythology although there are some arguments between Odin and Frigg on minor matters.³² (Frigg also unfaithful?)³³) (Role as goddess of marriage – see Oberkogler, 130-31 – probably wrong!)

Before Fricka comes on the scene Wotan tells his Valkyrie daughter Brünnhilde to ensure that Siegmund wins the battle. Brünnhilde sees Fricka approach on her chariot drawn by a team of rams which she beats with her golden whip. She is wrathful (*zornig*) and, as we shall see, she represents for Wagner the law of the Old Testament. The altercation between this married couple begins with Fricka telling her husband that Hunding has called on her for vengeance and that she as “Wedlock’s guardian” answered his prayer and “promised to punish /severely the deed / of that brazenly impious pair”.

Wotan (as Wagner’s mouthpiece) responds (*WagRS* 141):

What was so wrong that was done by the couple that Spring united in love? Love’s enchantment had cast upon them its magic spell: Who’ll make me amends for the power of love?	Was so Schlimmes schuf das Paar, das liebend einte der Lenz? Der Minne Zauber entzückte sie: wer büßt mir der Minne Macht?
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³². Cooke, *End*, 324, points to an argument about the merits of two human heroes.

³³. Check D. McCoy, *Frigg in Norse mythology for Smart People* – O. Flynn.

Wotan asks what was so wrong in what they did. Was it not “Love’s enchantment (Der Minne Zauber) that had cast its magic spell”³⁴ (How to translate; “Who’ll make me amends for the power of love?” (Spencer). Cf Mann 32 : ‘Who will atone to me for love’s power?’) Thus Wagner puts forward his “new morality.” (WagRS 141):

Fricka then speaks of a “holy vow” which has been broken, but Wotan (again as Wagner’s mouthpiece) explains that he considers a vow which binds unloving hearts to be unholy, precisely the view we find in the Jesus of Nazareth sketches (WagRS 142, modified):

Unholy	Unheilig
I deem the vow	acht’ ich den Eid,
that binds unloving hearts;	der Unliebende eint;
and, in truth, you cannot	und mir wahrlich
expect me now	muthe nicht zu,
to bind by force	daß mit Zwang ich halte
what does not adhere to you:	was dir nicht haftet:

³⁴. Cf. *Tristan* Act II Scene 1: “Know you not the goddess of love / and the power of her magic” (“Frau Minne kenntest du nicht? / Nicht ihres Zaubers Macht?” (Bernstein, 106, Salter translation). *GSD* 7:34 has “Miracles power” (“Wunders macht”). Check SW score.

wherever forces are boldly stirring, I openly counsel war.	den so kühn Kräfte sich regen, da rath' ich offen zum Krieg.
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Fricka says that if he deems the “breach of wedlock” to be worthy of praise then why not say their incest is also holy (*WagRS* 142):

My heart is quaking, my brain is reeling: as bride a sister embraced her brother!	Mir schaudert das Herz, es schwindelt mein Hirn: bräutlich umfing die Schwester den Bruder!
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An interesting text critical issue is raised by this last line. What I have presented on the handout would suggest Sieglinde has taken the initiative, the reading “den Bruder,” making Siegmund the object (this is found in the scores of Schott³⁵ and Peters). However, *GSD*³⁶ and the Breitkopf & Härtel scores read “der Bruder” thus making Siegmund the subject. Unfortunately the fair copy is not available (it came into Hitler’s possession in 1939 which he took to his Berlin Bunker in 1945

³⁵ *SW* 11.2:39 (mm. 227-28).

³⁶ *GSD* 6:27 (see also *JA* 3:98).

and this score together with others was consumed in the conflagration)³⁷ although we have the “Partiturerstschrift.”³⁸ **(WHICH READING??)** The “rejected” version of the scene also has Siegmund as the subject. On balance making Sieglinde the subject is probably correct since this would cohere with Wagner’s view of women in the early 1850s.³⁹ Kitcher and Schacht comment: “Siegmund’s passion reaches its white heat in response to hers; she leads the way, opening the doors to it, and then releasing the floodgates for it.”⁴⁰

See Song of Songs and E. Elliot Mark of a Man!

(But note Wagner’s comment on passivity of women.)

Wotan then tells his wife that something new may be happening which she should bless. Wotan expands on his view of the new morality

(HANDOUT):

Today you have witnessed it happen: learn thus that a thing might befall of itself	Heut’ – hast du’s erlebt: erfahre so, was von selbst sich fügt,
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³⁷ The assumption is that it was destroyed in the conflagration in Hitler’s bunker (together with the fair copy of *Das Rheingold* and the autograph scores of *Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot* and *Rienzi*). As Darcy, “Autograph Manuscripts,” 221, points out: “Although rumours of their survival continue to circulate, the whole incident must be judged as Hitler’s final contribution to the cause of Wagner scholarship.”

³⁸ *WWV* 367.

³⁹ See *WagRS* 366 n. 52, who point to Wagner’s letter to Röckel of 24 August 1851: “we shall not become what we can and must be until such time as – womankind has been wakened” (*SL* 228; *SB* 4:95).

⁴⁰ Kitcher and Schacht, *Ending*, 142.

though it never happened before.	sei zuvor auch noch nie es gescheh'n.
That those two are in love	Daß jene sich lieben,
is as plain as the day:	leuchtet dir hell:
so hear my honest advice!	drum höre redlichen Rath!
If sweet delight	Soll süße Lust
shall reward your blessing,	deinen Segen dir lohnen,
then, smiling on love, bestow that	so seg'ne lachend der Liebe,
blessing	
on Siegmund's and Sieglinde's bond.	Siegmund's und Sieglinde's Bund!

It is worth pausing here to reflect that if Wagner were here today I am sure he would support the blessing of gay couples. (Even in his own day he was remarkably tolerant of gay people. One of his closest associates was Paul Joukowsky, a practising homosexual. Wagner's own son, Siegfried was gay – but he was only 13 when Wagner died).

If Wagner represents the new morality, or One Body One Faith, Fricka represents Gafcon/Christian Concern/Reform. After Wotan has asked Fricka to bless the love of the Volsung the stage direction tells us that Fricka “break[s] out in the most violent indignation” and she warns of the end of the gods. It will come about because Wotan has defied his own laws (made clearer in the rejected version – see below). And this is Wotan's Achilles' heel. For Wotan, in

order to create order in the world, established laws and treatises which are engraved on his spear.

Fricka says that he was the first to infringe them, and she speaks of his adultery. Wotan responds saying Fricka's problem is that she is concerned with "Age-old Custom" (WagRS 144). (Is she concerned more with Custom (Wagner often use the term *Sitte*, here *Gewohntes*) than with sexual ethics properly understood?))

Then Wotan puts forward his argument that he needs a hero to accomplish his purposes, a hero who lacks godly protection. Someone who 'breaks loose from the law of the gods'. Such a hero is Siegmund who, he hopes, will recover the Ring (Wotan himself cannot since he is constrained by his treatises).

However, Fricka manages to show that his argument simply does not work since Siegmund is nevertheless under Wotan's control and we have here an interesting case of divine and human agency. Wotan sees that his argument is baseless. Essentially Fricka wins the argument and Wotan is forced to give in to her demand that Siegmund should die (see below on law). As Cooke comments: "Perhaps it is because she is *so* right that she receives such little sympathy."⁴¹

Before Fricka leaves the stage Brünnhilde (her step-daughter) arrives, not knowing the terrible decision that has been made. Fricka emphasizes twice the

⁴¹. Cooke, *End*, 325.

issue of her “honour” (“Ehre”) by means of an inclusion (*WagRS* 147)

(HANDOUT):

Your eternal spouse's sacred honour her [Brunnhilde's] shield must defend today. The Wälsung falls for my honour's sake: - will Wotan give me his oath?	Deiner ew'gen Gattin heilige Ehre beschirme heut' ihr Schild! Der Wälsung fällt meinr Ehre: - empfah' ich von Wotan den Eid?
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The stage direction tells us that Wotan ‘throw[s] himself on a rocky seat in terrible dejection’ and simply utters ‘Nimm den Eid!’ (‘Take my oath!’).

Fricka then strides towards the back of the stage and there meets Brunnhilde.

She pauses and utters these words of appalling irony (note especially “Lord of Battles”):

The Lord of Battles awaits you: let him explain the fate he has chosen!	Heervater harret dein: lass' ihn dir künden wie das Loos er gekies't!
--	--

Watch scene Walk II scene 1. 6m.

1.19.45 – 1. 25. 48

((Fricka, argues Berry, is custom bound like Feuerbach's view of faith: "Faith knows no other distinction than that between the service of God and the service of idols. Faith alone gives honour to God; unbelief is an injury to God, religious high treason."⁴² Does this apply though to faith in Luther??

Note that the Frigg of Nordic mythology had loose morals! Fricka based more on Hera? Check Magee.

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⁴² Essence, 256.

and human agency. Wotan sees that his argument is baseless. Wotan is eventually forced to agree to his wife's demand.

(Could not Wotan have said that nevertheless Siegmund should live!

OK gods will come to an end because law are broken – but they are coming to an end anyway. (But if lives still problem – he acts according to Wotan's wishes.)

Wotan has hardly "chosen." He has been pushed into this position.

[A]New Morality

Fricka is shocked by Wotan's attitude. Has not a vow of wedlock been broken? Wotan avers that a vow which binds unloving hearts is "unholy". This has a clear parallel in Jesus of Nazareth.

This would appear to confirm the view that Sieglinde does take the initiative. The reading "den Bruder," making Siegmund the object is found in the scores of Schott⁴³ and Peters. However, *GSD*⁴⁴ and the Breitkopf & Härtel scores read "der Bruder" thus making Siegmund the subject. Unfortunately the fair copy

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is not available⁴⁵ although we have the “Partiturerstschrift.”⁴⁶ The “rejected” version of the scene also has Siegmund as the subject. On balance making Sieglinde the subject is probably correct since this would cohere with Wagner’s view of women in the early 1850s.⁴⁷ Kitcher and Schacht comment: “Siegmund’s passion reaches its white heat in response to hers; she leads the way, opening the doors to it, and then releasing the floodgates for it.”⁴⁸

See Song of Songs and E. Elliot Mark of a Man!

He then asks Fricka to bless their bond.⁴⁹ As Magee argues we see here Wagner’s “Young German” and “anarchist” views of sexual relations. The opposite extreme is the idea of the woman as the property of the man. As Sieglinde explains to Siegmund in Act I, “This house and this wife are Hunding’s own.”⁵⁰ It is highly significant that as he started work on the Ring he was influenced not only by radical views on sexual ethics but also by

⁴⁵ The assumption is that it was destroyed in the conflagration in Hitler’s bunker (together with the fair copy of *Das Rheingold* and the autograph scores of *Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot* and *Rienzi*). As Darcy, “Autograph Manuscripts,” 221, points out: “Although rumours of their survival continue to circulate, the whole incident must be judged as Hitler’s final contribution to the cause of Wagner scholarship.”

⁴⁶ *WWV* 367.

⁴⁷ See *WagRS* 366 n. 52, who point to Wagner’s letter to Röckel of 24 August 1851: “we shall not become what we can and must be until such time as – *womankind* has been *wakened*” (*SL* 228; *SB* 4:95).

⁴⁸ Kitcher and Schacht, *Ending*, 142.

⁴⁹ *WagRS* 142.

⁵⁰ *WagRS* 123.

Proudhon's radical views on property⁵¹ and this was then related to the issue of marriage.⁵²

Fricka is hardly seen as Wotan's property and indeed she is assertive both in *Rheingold* and in *Walküre*. But it is clearly a loveless marriage. Wagner's letter to Röckel stresses the evil of the union of Wotan and Fricka. He makes the point that "Alberich and his ring could not have harmed the gods unless the latter had already been susceptible to evil." He then asks: "Where, then, is the germ of this evil (Keim dieses Unheils)".⁵³ The answer, perhaps rather surprisingly, is in "the first scene between Wodan and Fricka" (*Rheingold* Scene 2) "which leads ultimately to the scene in the 2nd act of the *Valkyrie*." He continues: "The firm bond which binds them both, sprung from the involuntary error of a love that seeks to prolong itself beyond the stage of necessary change and to obtain mutual guarantees in contravention of what is eternally new and subject to change in the phenomenal world – this bond constrains them both to the mutual torment of a loveless union."⁵⁴

⁵¹ See Proudhon: "What is property; Property is theft." Proudhon seems to have influenced him to the end of his life. On seeing the unoccupied palaces in Venice, he comments: "That is property! The root of all evil. Proudhon took a far too material view of it, for property brings about marriages for its sake, and in consequence causes the degeneration of the race" (See *CD* 5 February 1883).

⁵². In *My Life* 373 (*Mein Leben* 1:387) Wagner explains the implication of Proudhon on property as developed by his friend Röckel: "he wanted to do away completely with the institution of marriage as he knew it."

⁵³. *SL* 307; *SB* 6:67.

⁵⁴. *SL* 307; *SB* 6:67-68. Note Wagner's use of "phenomenal world" before his "discovery" of Schopenhauer.

5 Final reflections on Law

This scene, like a number of others in the Ring cycle, raises the issue of Wagner's understanding of "law." This is then in turn related to a number of issues such as 'society,' 'the state,' ethics, and morality and, as you will have noticed already there are a number of striking parallels to themes in *Jesus of Nazareth*.

One of the complex issues in Walk Act II is the relation of Wotan's law to what one can call Fricka's law. She clearly does represent law, something George Bernard Shaw recognized 100 years ago.⁵⁵ But of course the person who is meant to uphold the law is Wotan. In the rejected version (which gives us more detail of what Wagner was thinking) Fricka says (WagRS 355): **(HANDOUT)**

Where are you heading, you headstrong god, destroying the world you created, a world whose law you made yourself?	Wohin renn'st du, rasender Gott, reißest die Schöpfung du ein, der selbst das Gesetz du gab'st?
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But the question is which law is Wotan actually making and keeping.

Wotan responds to Fricka's charge by emphasising that the law he is concerned

⁵⁵ He describes her as "the Law" (Perfect Wagnerite, 452; cf 440).

with is the primal law, the ur-law ('Urgesetz'), a term which is used in the *Jesus of Nazareth* commentary. So to remind you he speaks of the 'ur-law of Motion itself (nach dem urgesetze der bewegung selbst) [Acts 17:28]' which clashes against the law in the sense of the 'binding'. And this clashing leads to sin. A similar idea is also presented in the sketches when he discusses 'the woman'.

(HANDOUT) 'But Love is mightier than the Law, for it is the Ur-law of life,— yet its utterance must seem a sin, i.e. a breach of the law, so long as the primitive state, in which the law of Love alone prevailed, had not been re-established' (PW 8:321; DTB 259). We here encounter the 'law of love', not the law which commands love, for love cannot be commanded, but the principle of love. In the rejected version therefore Wotan speaks of this Urgesetz (WagRS 355): **(HANDOUT)**

One primal law	Des urgesetzes
I obey above all others:	walt' ich vor Allem:
wherever forces stir and strive,	wo Kräfte zeugen und kreisen,
I circumscribe my sphere of action;	zieh' ich meines Wirkens Kreis;
I guide the flood	wohin er läuft
wherever it flows	leit' ich den Strom,
and guard the well-spring	den Quell hüt' ich
from which it wells:	aus dem er quillt:
	wo Leibes- und Liebeskraft,

<p>where strength of limb and of love is found, I've exercised power over life. That power the twin-born pair has felt: love nurtured them within their mother's womb; unwittingly, they lay there once, unwittingly, they love each other now.</p>	<p>da wahr, ich mir Lebensmacht: Das Zwillingsspaar zwang meine Macht: Minne nährt' es im Mutterschooß; unbewußt lag es einst dort, unbewußt liebt' es sich jetzt.</p>
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So the law which Wotan obeys is the positive law, the 'ur-law'. This is the positive law we find in the Jesus sketches. But this law will clash with the law which is to do with 'binding'.

The term 'Urgesetz' is used in Wagner's essay *Art and revolution* where he speaks of Apollo's priestess at Delphi telling of the 'fundamental laws of the Grecian spirit (Ellis: race) and nation'! ('Urgesetz griechischen Geistes und Wesens' (GSD 3:10; PW 1:32)) It is also used in *Siegfried's Death*. The "Waterwomen" ("Wasserfrauen") warn Siegfried of the ring's curse:⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Note the parallel in Rheingold Scene 4 where Erda warns Wotan: "Weiche, Wotan, weiche! / Flieh' des Ringes Fluch!" ("Yield, Wotan! Yield! Flee the curse on the ring!") (WagRS 112).

Siegfried! Siegfried! What we foretell is true!	Siegfried! Siegfried! Wir weisen dich wahr!
Avoid it! Avoid the curse!	Weich' aus! Weich' aus dem Fluche!
It was woven by weaving Norns	Ihm flochten webende Nornen
Into the rope of eternal law.	in des Urgesetzes Seil.

Siegfried then offers his *own* definition of “Urgesetz”:⁵⁷

Whatever my courage tells me Is eternal law to me.	Wozu mein Muth mich mahnt, das ist mir Urgesetz.
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Hence for Siegfried the ‘Urgesetz’ is the law related to ‘nature’ and is a vibrant dynamic law, not a fossilised law of the Old Testament. Wagner, it would appear, agrees with Siegfried, not with the definition offered by the “Waterwomen.”

However, Wotan slipped into this negative use of law in making various treatises. Although there may have been some good motive for doing this, i.e. to establish some sort of order on the world, Wotan also had a bad motive, namely power. Although there are hints of this in *Rheingold*, it is only in the second

⁵⁷ Haymes, 156-57 (this is also in the *Nibelung Myth*, Haymes 54-55). This is missing in GD although the Norns use of Urgesetz remains: ‘Ihm flochten webende Nornen / in des Urgesetzes Seil’ (Haymes, 154-55; WagRS 336). Siegfried’s response in GD is not to offer a redefinition of “Urgesetz” but rather to say he will destroy it: “Mein Schwert zerschwang einen Speer: – / des Urgesetzes / ewiges Seil, /flochten sie wilde / Flüche hinein, Nothung zerhaut es den Nornen!’ (WagRS 336). On the Norns’ Urgesetz see also Brunnhilde’s final words in Haymes, *Nibelung Myth*, 58-59.

opera, *Walküre*, that we learn of this is any detail. In Act II Scene 2, after this devastating confrontation with Fricka, he confides in Brünnhilde which, as he explains, is a way of communing with himself (Wag RS 148-49).

When youthful love's delights had faded, I longed in my heart for power: impelled by the rage of impulsive desires, I won for myself the world. Unwittingly false I acted unfairly, binding by treatises what boded ill	Als! Junger Liebe Lust mir verblich, verlangte nach Macht mein Muth: von jäher Wünsche Wüthen gejagt, gewann ich mri die Welt. Unwissend trugvoll Untreue übt' ich, band durch Verträge was Unheil barg
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Wotan's treatises then have a certain parallel to Fricka's law. With his 'project Siegmund' he is trying to circumvent both these laws and this leads him to terrible frustration, and there is even a musical motif called 'Wotan's frustration'. ((Cooke argues that although Wotan does not realise it, this old side is far stronger than the new, progressive side ((“since this new side has as yet no

real appreciation of the value of love” CONSIDER).⁵⁸) So when Fricka points out that his new law will result in destruction of the world of the gods ((and that he is battling against himself since Sigmund is his own pawn ?? NOT CLear)) he has to give in.))

In Walkure Act II Wotan faces an appalling dilemma. He has grown to love his son, Siegmund. But at the same time there are laws which he is forced to accept. There are his own treatises related to “Frickia’s law”. It is an alien law, which may be compared to the law mediated by angels (Gal 3:19)!⁵⁹ The only way out for Wotan is to allow his only son to die. He tells Brünnhilde: ‘In my own fetters / I find myself caught’ (WagRS 148). And in despair he says: ‘what I love I must relinquish, murder him whom I cherish / and foully betray / him who trusts me!’ (WagRS 153). So we have a God who has to be true to his laws but which entails that his only son has to die. The parallels to a Christian view of the atonement are obvious and a case can be made that this is a point in the Ring cycle where the composer has sprung allegory on us. The Ring, like all great allegories, is not a consistent allegory (Shaw) and Wagner’s genius partly lies in the fact that he can surprise us with allegory (Benjamin’s “gathering”).

⁵⁸ Cooke, End, 324.

⁵⁹ This is just one reading of Gal 3:19. For another see H.-J. Eckstein who writes that this is still Gods’ law.

Brünnhilde is appalled at what her father says and accuses him of being ‘two-faced’ (WagRS 155). And as the second opera of the Ring cycles comes to a close we discover how the moral high ground does lie with Brünnhilde and not with Wotan. But she pays a very high price for this as we will discover tomorrow.

END

Although as far as the old law is concerned Wotan is concerned primarily with establishing some sort of state law whereas Fricka is upholding some view of sexual ethics, in particular that concerning marriage, their laws correspond.

Wagner sees the problem in society with the foundation of the ‘state.’ The original state of nature was ‘good’ both in the sense of Genesis 1-2 and in the sense of Rousseau.⁶⁰ However, it was also possible that an anarchism could emerge.⁶¹ Wotan attempted to halt this through his treatises but this was tainted by his love of power; reference to these has been seen in *Rheingold* Scene 2 but the significance of such treatises is not really developed until *Walküre* Act II

⁶⁰ *Schriften Bd 1, 1981, 195ff. ILL*

⁶¹ Zegowitz, *Opern*, 196, points to the concerns of Fasolt and Fafner as to how Alberich, in possession of the gold, will “think up new ways to harm [them]” (WagRS 81).

Scene 2 and further in the prologue to *Götterdämmerung* (*WagRS* 281); there is also a brief reference in *Siegfried* Act I Scene 2 (*WagRS* 211).⁶²

⁶². *WagRS* 211.